

Ideas, Attitudes and Beliefs about Language in  
Italy from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Century

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I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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## Abstract

Peter Burke has described the early modern period in Europe as the age of the 'discovery of language'. The aim of my dissertation is to trace the linguistic and cultural phenomena which prepared the way for this discovery by studying how ideas, attitudes and beliefs about language were formed and developed in Italy from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. In particular, I analyse the contemporary perception of the shifting relationship between Latin and the vernaculars in light of two highly significant events in the social history of language: on the one hand, the collapse of the medieval language system of functional compartmentalization of Latin and vernaculars, which is usually referred to as diglossia; on the other hand, the process of the formation of national languages known as standardization.

I examine the concept of 'historical language' and construct a theoretical framework to analyse how it was formed and developed within communities of speakers. From this perspective, I discuss how specific varieties of the vernacular came to acquire recognition; and I interpret in sociological and historical terms the progressive emancipation of the vernaculars from Latin and their acquisition of autonomous existence in the minds of speakers. Finally, I advance an interpretation of the language ideas and choices of Italian humanists and the role they played in changing the image of Latin in early modern Italy and making it a prototype of European standardized national languages.

## Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction	8
I: <i>Genus, Stilus</i> and <i>Ydioma</i> : Petrarch and the Linguistic Thought of Humanism	16
II: Shibboleth	29
III: Speaking in Tongues	44
IV: The Prehistory of Standardization	73
V: Dante and the Division of Linguistic Labour	157
VI: The Use and Abuse of Latin	219
Conclusion	286
Bibliography	292

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This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother, Maria Concetta.

## Editorial Principles

All translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own.

In transcribing Latin I have preserved the original orthography. I have amended any obvious typographical mistakes and expanded standard abbreviations.

I have given full bibliographical references on the first occasion a work is cited in each chapter. For subsequent citations, I have given only the name of the author/s and a short title. Full bibliographical references for all works cited can be found in the Bibliography.

## Introduction

If we were looking for an early critique of comparative philology – the nineteenth-century progenitor of modern linguistics – we might find it in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. On the eve of the battle of Borodino, Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Andrei overhear a conversation between two German generals, Wolzogen and no less than Carl von Clausewitz:

‘Der Krieg muss in Raum verlegt werden. Der Ansicht kann ich nicht genug Preis geben’, said one of them.

‘The war must be extended widely. I cannot sufficiently commend that view.’

‘Oh, ja’, said the other, ‘der Zweck ist nur den Feind zu schwachen, so kann man gewiss nicht den Verlust der Privat-Personen in Achtung nehmen.’

‘Oh, yes, the only aim is to weaken the enemy, so of course one cannot take into account the loss of private individuals.’

‘Oh, no’, agreed the other.

‘Extend widely!’ said Prince Andrei with an angry snort, when they had ridden past. ‘In that “extend” were my father, son, and sister, at Bald Hills. That's all the same to him! ...’<sup>1</sup>

A few pages before, Tolstoy had already poked fun at German war strategists, in the person of general Pfuel:

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<sup>1</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, transl. L. and A. Maude, Chicago etc., 1952, p. 442 (with slight modifications).



The German's self-assurance is worst of all ... because he imagines that he knows the truth – science – which he himself has invented but which is for him the absolute truth.

Pfuel was evidently of that sort. He had a science ... and all he came across in the history of more recent warfare seemed to him absurd and barbarous – monstrous collisions in which so many blunders were committed by both sides that these wars could not be called wars, they did not accord with the theory, and therefore could not serve as material for science.<sup>2</sup>

Comparing war theory to philology is less odd than it may at first sound.<sup>3</sup> Educated in the same universities as the generals taunted by Tolstoy, German philologists shared an analogous proclivity for finding necessary laws in human activities – in this case, languages – and an equal carelessness towards the part played in them by ‘private individuals’. ‘Languages are organisms of nature’, wrote August Schleicher ‘they have never been directed by the will of man; they rose, and developed themselves according to definite laws; they grew old, and died out ... . The science of language is consequently a natural science; its method is generally altogether the same as that of any other natural science. In this respect, the “Origin of Species”, which you urged me to read, could not be said to lie so very far beyond my own department.’<sup>4</sup> With the final reference to Darwin’s classic work, the

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> In 1835 Lerminier, a professor of jurisprudence at the Collège de France, wrote: ‘On a dit de la Prusse que c’était une caserne; c’est une caserne, mais c’est aussi une école ... . Tel est l’emblème de la Prusse: l’université et l’arsenal, les canons et les études, les étudiants et les soldats.’ Quoted by C. Dionisotti, ‘A Year’s Work in the Seventies. The Presidential Address of the Modern Humanistic Research Association delivered at University College’, *The Modern Language Review*, LVII, 1972, pp. xlx-xxviii (xxii).

<sup>4</sup> A. Schleicher, *Darwinism Tested by the Science of Language*, transl. A. W. B. Bickers, London, 1869, pp. 20-1.

circle is closed: not only are languages natural organisms, independent of the will of man and developed according to definite laws, but some languages are more evolved than others. The idea that languages are entities, the existence of which is independent from their users – that is, individuals – is not an invention of comparative philologists. It is thanks to them, however, that the axiom that languages are natural objects, which must be studied with methods inherited from natural sciences, has been passed down almost unquestioned to modern linguistics. Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, like Noam Chomsky's between *competence* and *performance* – dichotomies in which only the first item of the pair is regarded as susceptible to scientific investigation – stem from the same anxiety to detach a supposedly autonomous object of analysis from the unpredictable whims of the subjects using it.<sup>5</sup>

This approach to historical languages has not only informed the practice of theoretical and applied linguistics: it has also constituted the central assumption on which histories of European languages have been written for more than a century. In this last context, it has been merged with another central tenet of Western language ideology: the idea that 'real', natural languages are also national languages.<sup>6</sup> When we open a classic like Bruno Migliorini's *Storia dell'italiano*, we encounter the story of a national language which, for the most part, is supposed to have existed even before any nation was in sight. Rather than a community of individuals engaged in linguistic practices, it describes the victorious path of a speech variety which deserves to be traced, teleologically and almost providentially, because its existence is an undisputable and necessary axiom. Usually, histories such as this show a remarkable lack of interest in what it means for a language to

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<sup>5</sup> See R. B. Le Page, 'Problems of Description in Multilingual Communities', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 1968, pp. 189-212 (196).

<sup>6</sup> See A. Varvaro, 'Storia della lingua: passato e prospettive di una categoria controversa', *Romance Philology*, XXVI, 1972-3, pp. 16-51 and 509-31.

be national; and this is simply because they consider that the only sort of languages worthy of attention are national ones.

The anthropologist Benedict Anderson, in his *Imagined Communities*, gave due weight to the role played by language issues in the history of nationalism, singling out, in particular, the replacement of Latin by national languages as a fundamental step in the construction of national communities. In his account, however, there are two instructive pitfalls. In the first place, he argued that once the use of Latin started to decline in favour of national languages, the latter were already full-blown, autonomous entities, ready for nations to be built on them: in other words, they were already standardized languages.<sup>7</sup> Paradoxically, however, at the same time that he demonstrated that national identities were, in fact, cultural artefacts, he also provided them with an essentialist element by which they shaped themselves: their languages. As Judith Irvine and Susan Gal have observed: 'Missing from Anderson's perspective ... is the insight that homogeneous language is as much imagined as is community. That is, Anderson naturalizes the process of linguistic standardization.'<sup>8</sup>

It is precisely this process of standardization that I shall be examining. But here emerges a second element of Anderson's study that, in my view, is debatable: among the factors favouring the rise of vernaculars, he claimed, was one which he called 'the esotericization of Latin' – in other words, the classicizing reform of Latin which began to take place in Italy around mid-fourteenth century and was brought to completion in the next century,

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<sup>7</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edition, London, 2006, p. 43: 'the fatality of human linguistic diversity'; and *ibid.*, p. 38: 'Then [in the sixteenth century] as now the bulk of mankind was monoglot.'

<sup>8</sup> J. T. Irvine and S. Gal, 'Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation', in *Regimes of Language, Ideologies, Politics and Identities*, ed. P. V. Kroskrity, Santa Fe, 2000, pp. 35-84 (76).

under the auspices of humanism.<sup>9</sup> He dismissed this factor, however, as substantially irrelevant – as a phenomenon which merely helped the rise of vernaculars by hastening the premature death of Latin.<sup>10</sup> This idea is not uncommon. The classicist Eduard Norden expressed a similar opinion many years ago: whereas in the Middle Ages, he maintained, Latin had been an animated and vigorous language, it was precisely those humanists who thought they were rescuing it who struck the final blow by turning it into a scholarly discipline.<sup>11</sup> The appeal of this idea is understandable: if we consider the humanist revival of classical Latin in strictly linguistic terms, it seems odd that the cultural avant-garde of Italy, and later the rest of Europe, after a long period of steady growth of the vernaculars, suddenly turned to Latin, extolling a form of the language which was more than thousand years old as alone worthy of imitation. The notions that national languages are natural entities and that Latin died in the hands of its humanist reformers both stem from the same assumption: if language diversity, and therefore the shape of national languages, is a natural inevitability, then the deliberate superposition of a supposedly dead language can be dismissed as a minor historical oddity.

A less biased and more relativistic approach to language variation – an approach which does not regard the supposed homogeneity of national standardized languages as normal, natural and necessary – derives from the

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<sup>9</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 42

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa vom VI. Jahrhundert vor Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*, 2 vols, Leipzig, 1898, II, p. 767: 'Der lateinischen Sprache, die im Mittelalter nie ganz aufgehört hatte zu leben und demgemäß Veränderungen aller Art unterworfen gewesen war, wurde von denselben Männern, die sich einbildeten, sie zu neuem dauernden Leben zu erwecken, sie zu einer internationalen Kultursprache zu machen, der Todesstoß gegeben. Die Geschichte der lateinischen Sprache hört damit endgültig auf, an die Stelle tritt die Geschichte ihres Studiums.'

work carried out by sociolinguistics over the past fifty years. For the period covered by this dissertation, the concept of standardization has normally been applied in two ways: firstly, as a general tendency (and often a development from a supposedly previous inferior state) which any language, if properly directed and stimulated, may undergo; and, secondly, as a phenomenon characteristic of vernaculars, which started in the late Middle Ages and reached full maturity in the sixteenth century. It is my aim to challenge these two views. I shall argue, firstly, that standardization is a historical phenomenon, which arises for specific reasons and is linked to specific historical circumstances. The model of standard language now common in the Western tradition is neither natural nor necessary: it is not shared by many cultures around the globe, and in the past it was not structured as it is now. Its evolution is entangled with a precise set of cultural and social conditions which need to be recognized and evaluated from a linguistic point of view. Secondly, I shall argue that, rather than a natural, or functional, linguistic development, standardization was the result of the deliberate cultural programme pursued by humanists – invested, first and foremost, in the Latin language – and of the way they began to conceive and use Latin. For some time now, language historians have recognized that they have much to learn from sociolinguistics; perhaps sociolinguistics – and, in particular, the study of standardization – also has something to learn from language history.

This dissertation will examine the study of the formation and development of language ideas, attitudes and beliefs in Italy during the pre-history of language standardization. I shall set the history of these ideas in their social and cultural context, trying to assess how they relate to the establishment and maintenance of language diversity. Rather than the history of linguistics, I am interested in those ideas which were embedded in the language behaviour of speakers and which, in turn, were capable of

influencing that behaviour, thus determining concrete language choices and shaping the organization of linguistic practices in a given community of speakers. In the heyday of linguistics, Leonard Bloomfield wrote amusing papers recounting the cleavage between his scientific, impartial approach to language and the biased, ideological outlook of the common man.<sup>12</sup> Recent developments in anthropological linguistics have revealed that not only was Bloomfield's detached attitude as ideological as that of his interlocutors, but it also prevented professional linguists from recognizing how deeply the organization and development of language variation depends on the common man's perception and use of it.<sup>13</sup> Language ideas cannot simply be dismissed as irrational, nor isolated from the specific position of the individuals who held them within the organization of the communities in which they lived.

The contribution of sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology to the social history of languages are assessed in chapter 2, where I propose a methodological framework to study language variation, in order to achieve a theoretical understanding of the relationship between language behaviour and language ideas, and a way to employ the results obtained to the history of standardization. I analyse the concept of 'language' as a historical construct and produce a theoretical framework to analyse how such a concept is formed and developed in communities of speakers. This also serves to introduce a hypothetical picture of what the language state preceding standardization might have looked like, and its reflection in speakers' linguistic consciousness. This pre-standardized state – that is, the functional relationship between Latin and vernaculars in the Middle Ages – is then explored with reference to the model of diglossia: chapter 3 analyses

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., L. Bloomfield, 'Secondary and Tertiary Responses to Language', *Language*, 20.2, 1944, pp. 25-55.

<sup>13</sup> Irvine and Gal, 'Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation', p. 75.

this model and its implications for the attitudes of speakers to language variation. Chapters 4-6 trace the conditions which determined the progressive breakdown of the diglossic system. Chapter 4 is devoted to the so-called rise of vernaculars up to the beginning of the fourteenth century, and chapter 5 treats this development as it was assessed by Dante, who also produced the first self-conscious attempt to devise a programme of vernacular language reform. Chapter 6 focuses on the emergence of humanist Latin and the role it played in the history of standardization.

Chapter 1 is an attempt to discuss and interpret the ideas held by Petrarch concerning the difference between Latin and vernaculars. On the one hand, it assesses the theories put forward by modern scholars concerning Petrarch's linguistic thought; on the other, it serves as an introduction and an exemplification of the sort of methodological problems which will be encountered in the following chapters.

## Chapter 1. *Genus, stilus* and *ydioma*: Petrarch and the Linguistic Thought of Humanism

‘Obviously we cannot say: everywhere else is ideology; we alone stand on  
the rock of absolute truth.’

J. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*

### I

Letter XXI.15 of Petrarch’s *Rerum familiarium liber*, ‘Ad Iohannem de Certaldo, Purgatio ab invidis obiectae calumniae’ (‘To Giovanni Boccaccio, Purgation from the Unjust Accusation of Envy’), is one of the best known of the collection. Its fame is due to the fact that, in this letter of 1359, Petrarch for the first time dealt overtly with the legacy of his greatest predecessor, Dante Alighieri. Disguised as a defence of himself against those who considered his obstinate silence about Dante to be a sign of envy, it contains Petrarch’s definition of his own role as an intellectual, based on a comparison of his own activity as a writer with that of Dante. Vernacular poetry is the obvious touchstone for this comparison:

I have at times said only one thing to those who wished to know my exact thoughts: his style was unequal, for he rises to nobler and loftier heights in the vernacular than in Latin poetry or prose ... . Forgetting the present age inasmuch as eloquence has long since vanished and been buried, and speaking only of the age when it flourished, who, I



ask, excelled in all its branches? ... It suffices to have excelled in one genre.

[Unum est quod scrupolosius inquiringentibus aliquando respondi, fuisse illum (i.e., Dante) sibi imparem, quod in vulgari eloquio quam carminibus aut prosa clarior atque altior assurgit ... . Quis enim, non dicam nunc, extincta complorataque iam pridem eloquentia, sed dum maxime floruit, in omni eius parte summus fuit? ... uno in genere excelluisse satis est.]<sup>1</sup>

Petrarch's reference to 'the vernacular', 'Latin poetry' and 'prose' introduces a tripartite division of what he calls the branches, or parts, of eloquence: vernacular poetry, Latin poetry and Latin prose. The three parts, furthermore, are all described as genres ('in one genre', 'uno in genere').

The same three genres reappear again a few years later, in *Seniles* V.2, composed between 1364 and 1366, which was also addressed to Boccaccio:

... at times I had also the self-contradictory idea to devote all my time to vernacular pursuits since the loftier Latin style – both prose and poetry – had been so highly polished by ancient talents that now my resources, or anyone else's, can add very little. On the other hand, this vernacular writing, just invented, still new, showed itself capable of great improvement and development after having been ravaged by many and cultivated by very few husbandmen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Petrarch, *Familiars*, XXI.15.24-5; and Petrarch, *Letters on Familiar Matters*, transl. A. S. Bernardo, 2 vols, Baltimore, 1982, II, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> Translation from Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age*, transl. by A. S. Bernardo, S. Levin and R. A. Bernardo, 2 vols, Baltimore, 1992, I, p. 162.

[cum eidem michi ... aliquando contraria mens fuisset, totum huic vulgari studio tempus dare, quod uterque stilus altius latinus eo usque priscis ingeniis cultus addi posset, at hic, modo inventus, adhuc recens, vastatoribus crebris ac raro squalidus colono, magni se vel ornamenti capacem ostenderet vel augmenti.]

Here 'genre' (*genus*) is replaced by the equivalent term 'style' (*stilus*), which is applied to Latin 'prose and poetry', while vernacular poetry is said to have been 'just invented, still new'. Again, the three parts – whether they are called genres or styles – form a triangle, as different sides of the same *eloquentia*. Silvia Rizzo and Mirko Tavoni have inferred from this that Petrarch considered Latin and the vernacular to be two different registers of the same language, and not two different languages: Petrarch, they argue, was not conscious of being bilingual.<sup>3</sup>

This view, however, immediately raises a difficulty. In all the examples cited above, Petrarch is not referring to the relationship between Latin and the vernacular as languages. Instead, he is talking about literature; and, in this context, he defines vernacular *poetry*, not the vernacular itself, as a genre or a style: his treatment, when speaking about poetry, of the vernacular as *a* literary instrument does not necessarily imply that he thought it was merely a stylistic level. Considering Rizzo and Tavoni's hypothesis in this light, some questions arise. What did Petrarch make of

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<sup>3</sup> Silvia Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, I, Rome, 2002, p. 62, quotes Mirko Tavoni, 'Latino e volgare', in *Storia d'Italia*, ed. R. Romano, V.1, Milan, 1990, p. 222: 'il problema (che tale non era per Petrarca) del rapporto fra quelle che per noi sono due lingue è dunque trattato, o meglio toccato, sempre e solo sotto specie del rapporto fra due possibili strumenti di espressione letteraria, nei termini desunti dalla retorica classica della gradazione degli stili: cioè Petrarca (anche qui con le parole di Contini) "radicalmente ... ignorava ... di essere bilingue.'" See also P. Manni, *Il Trecento toscano: La lingua di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio*, Bologna, 2003, p. 189.

uses of the vernacular apart from poetry? What would he call his own vernacular, and how did he conceive of its relationship to other vernaculars?

While he speaks about Latin prose *and* verse, for example, the third part of the scheme is vernacular verse on its own, with no mention of vernacular prose. The reason for this is obvious: except for one brief letter, none of Petrarch's works was written in vernacular prose. Yet it is impossible to believe that he did not acknowledge the existence of prose writings in vernacular. There is, indeed, at least one instance in which he refers to a work in vernacular prose: *Seniles*, XVII.3, addressed, once again, to Boccaccio. The letter is well known because it contains Petrarch's Latin translation of a novella from his friend's *Decameron*, the story of Griselda. The translation is introduced by a passage in which he tells Boccaccio how he had accidentally come across his masterpiece: 'The book you produced in our mother tongue long ago, I believe, as a young man' ('*Librum tuum, quem nostro materno eloquio, ut oppinor, olim iuvenis edidisti*'). Despite several reservations, Petrarch says that he found it to be a good read:

I did enjoy leafing through it; and if anything met my eye that was so frankly lewd, your age at the very time of writing excused it – also the style, the idiom, the very levity of the subject matter and of those who seem likely to read such things. It matters a great deal for whom you are writing, and variety in morals excuses variety in style.<sup>4</sup>

[*Delectatus sum ipso in transitu; et si quid lascivie liberioris occurreret, excusabat etas tunc tua dum id scriberes, stilus, ydioma, ipsa quoque rerum levitas et eorum qui lecturi talia videbantur. Refert*

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<sup>4</sup> Petrarch, *Letters of Old Age*, transl. A. Bernardo, Levi, R. Bernardo, II, p. 655.

enim largiter quibus scribas, morumque varietate stili varietas excusatur.]

It should be observed that Petrarch here uses the terms 'style' (*stilus*) and 'idiom' (*ydioma*) to refer to two different things, and that the latter denotes the language in which the *Decameron* was written.

At the beginning of the letter, this language received a further specification: as we have seen, Petrarch called it 'our mother tongue' ('*nostrum maternum eloquium*'). This expression conveys two important pieces of information: 1) it is not Latin, but a mother tongue, that is, a vernacular; 2) it is a specific vernacular: 'our vernacular' logically excludes other vernaculars (but obviously postulates their existence), which presumably are not 'ours' – that is, not that of Boccaccio and Petrarch. The expression, furthermore, echoes the well-known definition of Dante as the 'leader of *our* vernacular eloquence' ('*ille nostri eloquii dux vulgaris*', my emphasis), from *Seniles* V.2.3. The vernacular in question, shared by Dante, Boccaccio and Petrarch himself, was very likely that of Florence.<sup>5</sup> This is not without significance; for, if this vernacular is shared by the *Commedia*, the *Decameron* and, supposedly, Petrarch's lyrics, it is definitely not a specific literary style since the three works are stylistically diverse. It does refer to a

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<sup>5</sup> These words of Petrarch largely depend on the programmatic introduction to the fourth day of the *Decameron*, which is Boccaccio's self-defence against his detractors: 'Per ciò che, fuggendo io e sempre essendomi di fuggire ingegnato il fiero impeto di questo rabbioso spirito [i.e., the envy of those who have criticized the *Decameron*], non solamente pe' piani, ma ancora per le profondissime valli tacito e nascoso mi sono ingegnato d'andare. Il che assai manifesto può apparire a chi le presenti novelle riguarda, le quali, non solamente in fiorentin volgare e in prosa scritte per me sono e senza titolo, ma ancora in istilo umilissimo e rimesso quanto il più possono.' Note, in particular, the correspondence of criteria employed to define the rhetorical position of the *Decameron* in Boccaccio and in Petrarch's letter: language ('fiorentin volgare': 'ydioma'), medium ('prosa') and style ('istilo umilissimo e rimesso': 'stylus'). Note also that Boccaccio explicitly defines the language in which his *Decameron* is written as 'fiorentin volgare': it is probable that Petrarch's phrase ('*nostrum maternum eloquium*') had the same meaning.

literary tradition, but what that tradition shares as a common denominator is a basis in the language of the Florentines, that is, ultimately, the language spoken in Florence and its written form. This is also implied by the other instance in which that vernacular is mentioned later in this letter when, evoking his wish to retell the novella to his friends, Petrarch points out that some may not understand it: 'others ... who were unacquainted with our tongue' ('nostri ... sermonis ignaros'). Furthermore, we must take into account that his version of *Griselda* is a translation: the topic, the matter, the medium (i.e., prose) and – in line with the rhetorical principles to which he subscribes – the stylistic level of his text are equivalent, if not identical, to Boccaccio's *novella*. What changes, obviously, is the language.<sup>6</sup>

Even more significant is the absence of the French vernaculars from Petrarch's classification; for if his own vernacular was merely a register of Latin, what was the position of other vernaculars? As usual, Petrarch's references to this matter are scarce and scattered throughout his writings. Perhaps, however, we can glean some interesting information from them by reading between the lines.

A potentially helpful piece of evidence can be found in the *Triumph*. In *Triumphus cupidinis* IV, Petrarch lists a series of poets who have treated the theme of love. This 'amorous herd' ('amorosa greggia', l. 9) is made up of poets both from antiquity and from the modern age ('o per antiche o per

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<sup>6</sup> That it is a proper translation, thus postulating an equality, at least in principle, of the two languages, is demonstrated not only by the use of the classical terminology of translation – usually applied to Latin translations from Greek – such as *interpres* for 'translator' and *explicare* for 'to translate' (Ibid., XVII.3: 'historiam ipsam tuam scribere sum aggressus, te haud dubie gavisurum sperans, ultro rerum *interpretem* me tuarum fore ... Historiam tuam meis verbis *explicui*...', my emphasis), but also by the quotation of the famous dictum of Horace: 'Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere fidus / interpres'. See G. Folena, "'Volgarizzare" e "tradurre": idea e terminologia della traduzione dal Medioevo italiano e romanzo all'Umanesimo europeo', in *La traduzione, saggi e studi*, Trieste, 1973, pp. 57-120 (pp. 61-3).

moderne carte', l. 12). At ll. 28-30, he introduces the Italian vernacular tradition:

Così, or quinci or quindi rimirando  
Vidi gente ir per una verde piaggia  
Pur d'amor volgarmente ragionando ...

[And looking then now this way and now that  
I saw folk coming over a green sward,  
Speaking of love, but in the common tongue ...]<sup>7</sup>

After a brief catalogue of these poets, he turns his attention to a parallel list of poets from Provence and France (ll. 38-9):

... e poi v'era un drappello  
di portamenti e di volgari strani ...

[... Then came a company  
foreign in dress, and foreign in their speech ... ]<sup>8</sup>

The phrase 'di volgari strani' ('foreign in their speech') shows that Petrarch recognized the existence of a poetic tradition written in a language which was different from but also comparable – as a *volgare* – to the Italian vernacular.<sup>9</sup>

A similar comparison can be found in another of his letters. In *Miscellanea* III, sent to the troubadour Malitia, Petrarch asks his

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<sup>7</sup> Petrarch, *The Triumphs*, transl. E. H. Wilkins, Chicago, 1962, p. 28.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>9</sup> Petrarch's use of the plural ('di volgari strani') suggests that he was aware of the difference between the two French vernaculars: *langue d'oïl* and *langue d'oc*.

correspondent to transmit a message on his behalf to the poet Gano del Colle; in the last part of the letter he directly addresses the troubadour: 'You will deliver this message with your brash eloquence ... ; and finally, please, not in a barbarian language, but in Italian' ('super his secundum tuam illam prerapidam eloquentiam disputabis ... ; denique non barbarice, queso, sed italice').<sup>10</sup> What does he mean by this contrast between 'barbarian' (*barbarice*) and 'Italian' (*italice*)? It is unlikely that he is referring to the opposition between the vernacular and Latin. Most probably, since we are dealing with a troubadour, Malitia had recited his verses in a French vernacular, perhaps in *langue d'oc*.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Petrarch was calling a French vernacular 'barbarian', presumably in contrast to the Italian vernacular. Here, too, as in all the examples discussed so far, his main concern is poetics, not linguistics.

Yet Petrarch does make at least one linguistic observation about French. It occurs in the *Collatio brevis*, an oration which he gave in Latin, in his capacity as an ambassador of the Milanese duke, Bernabò Visconti, in 1361, 'in the presence of the illustrious lord John, King of France' ('coram illustri domino Iohanne, Francorum Rege'). Petrarch begins with an apology for not being able to deliver his oration in French:

I certainly know that, when speaking in front of a such a king, I should, if possible, use the language which is better known and more familiar to you. I gather, in fact, from our histories that it was the custom of ancient Roman leaders, in order to increase the dignity and honour of the Latin language, not to listen to any foreigner unless he

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<sup>10</sup> 'Ad Malitiam', ed. in E. H. Wilkins and G. Billanovich, 'The Miscellaneous Letters of Petrarch', *Speculum*, 37, 1962, pp. 226-4 (229).

<sup>11</sup> The letter begins: 'Quidam eloquens Ganus de Colle vulgarem sonettum misit Francisco Petrarche per linguam cuiusdam lusoris nomine Malicia commode vulgaria recitantis ...': Petrarch, 'The Miscellaneous Letters', ed. Wilkins and Billanovich, p. 206.

spoke Latin. Nor do I forget that when the Athenian Themistocles, a most famous man and renowned among the Greeks, was about to have dealings with the Persian king, before appearing in his presence, he learned for a brief time the Persian language, so as not to offend the king's ears with a foreign idiom – a clever and prudent tactic. And I would willingly do the same myself, if I could; but I am not so talented: I do not know the French language, nor can I easily know it.

[Scio quidem quod, coram tanto rege locuturus, deberem, si possibilitas afforet, eo sermone uti, qui vobis esset acceptior ac notior. Recolo enim ex historiis nostris quod antiquissimi Romanorum duces nullum alienigenam audire soliti erant nisi qui latine loqueretur, ea scilicet ratione ut decus et gloria latini sermonis augetur. Nec sum oblitus ut Atheniensis ille Themistocles, vir famosissimus atque clarissimus apud Grecos, acturus aliquid cum rege Persarum, antequam conspectum eius accederet, linguam persicam brevi tempore didicit, ne forte peregrinum ydioma aures regis offenderet; ingeniose id quidem prudenterque. Et certe libenter idem et ipse facerem, si possem; sed non sum tanti ingenii: linguam gallicam nec scio, nec facile possum scire.]<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Carlo Godi, 'L'orazione del Petrarca per Giovanni il Buono', *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 8, 1965, pp. 45-83 (73). Petrarch's source for the Themistocles anecdote is probably Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, VIII.7.16: 'Themistocles ... per summamque iniquitatem patria pulsus et ad Xerxem, quem paulo ante devicerat, confugere coactus, prius quam in conspectum eius veniret, Persico sermone se adsuefecit, ut labore parta commendatione regiis auribus familiarem et adsuetum sonum vocis adhiberet.' Boccaccio, in his commentary on Dante's *Commedia*, defends in like manner Beatrice's decision to address Virgil in Florentine (*Inf*, II.57): 'in sua favella, cioè in fiorentino volgare, non ostante che Virgilio fosse mantovano. Ed in ciò n'ammaestra alcuno non dovere la sua original favella lasciare per alcun'altra, dove necessità a ciò nol costringesse. La qual cosa fu tanto all'animo de' Romani, che essi, dove che s'andassero, o ambasciadori o in altri uffici, mai in altro idioma che romano non parlavano; e già ordinarono che alcuno, di che che nazione



In this passage, French (*linguam gallicam*) is evidently considered to be a language, just like Latin (*latinus sermo*) and Persian (*lingua persica*). All of these languages are grouped together under the term idiom 'idiom' (*ydioma*), the same word we have already come across in *Seniles* XVII.3 to describe the language of the *Decameron*. It is worth pointing out, *en passant*, that, since it is improbable that Petrarch, despite what he claims, did not know French, given that he had lived in France for some years, his apology, according to Dionisotti, might have served a rhetorical purpose: to assert the superiority of his own Latinity over the king's French culture.<sup>13</sup>

What, then, did Petrarch consider to be the relationship between the Italian and the French vernaculars, and between these vernaculars and Latin? It is difficult to say, since, as I have indicated, he did not make any theoretical statements on this matter in his writings. Nevertheless, the examples treated above imply that, firstly, he regarded the French vernacular as a language which was equivalent to Latin, even if inferior in prestige; and, secondly, that he regarded the French vernaculars as equivalent to the Florentine vernacular, even if, for reasons of what we might call language loyalty or pride, inferior in prestige. From these two premises, we can deduce that he also regarded the Florentine vernacular as a language in its own right, and not simply a register of Latin.

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si fosse, in Senato non parlasse altra lingua che la romana. Per la qual cosa assai nazioni mandaron già de' lor giovani ad imprendere quello linguaggio, acciò che intendesser quello e in quello sapessero e proporre e rispondere.' (Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, ed. G. Padoan, in Boccaccio, *Opere*, ed. by V. Branca, 12 vols, Milan, 1965, VI, p. 113). We must conclude that, for Boccaccio, Florentine was a language just like Latin.

<sup>13</sup> For a discussion of this passage, analysing all its cultural implications, see C. Dionisotti, 'Tradizione classica e volgarizzamenti', in Id., *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana*, Turin, 1967, pp. 103-44 (117-9).

## II

Yet, having said all this, it is still not clear what it meant for Petrarch to conceive of entities such as Latin, French or Florentine as ‘languages in their own right’, or – apart from what I have referred to as ‘prestige’ – on what basis he understood the mutual relationships and differences between these entities. The questions raised by the hypothesis of Rizzo and Tavoni are sufficiently broad and deep that they cannot be answered merely by drawing inferences from textual evidence; moreover, they have a bearing on the very essence of how an intellectual history of language can be practised. First of all, by claiming that Petrarch thought that Latin and Florentine were two varieties of the same language, Rizzo and Tavoni imply that, even if he did not recognize the two *varieties* in the way that we do, he nevertheless shared our conception of language *variation*. Are we so sure, however, that his definition of what a language is, and his notion of what it means for something to be a variety *of* a language, were the same as ours? What were his criteria for distinguishing between a language and a variety, if indeed he had any?

The second question is clearly exemplified by Gianfranco Contini’s dictum, to which both Rizzo and Tavoni subscribe: ‘Petrarch was not conscious of being bilingual.’<sup>14</sup> This statement implies that Petrarch failed to recognize, or to interpret correctly, the fact that Latin and vernaculars were different languages. This judgement assumes some sort of intellectual failing on Petrarch’s part in not acknowledging an objective, empirical fact.<sup>15</sup> As I

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<sup>14</sup> G. Contini, *Letteratura italiana delle origini*, Milan, 1994, p. 577.

<sup>15</sup> M. Tavoni, ‘Storia della lingua e storia della coscienza linguistica: appunti medievali e rinascimentali’, *Studi di grammatica italiana*, XVII, 1999, pp. 205-31 (207), approaches the entire period, stretching from the late thirteenth to the early sixteenth century, in this way: ‘l’obiettivo esistenza del volgare con autonome strutture morfologiche, sintattiche ecc. è, pur con diverse graduazioni, comunque un dato di fatto, e tuttavia il suo riconoscimento non è ovvio, perchè un qualche condizionamento ideologico fa velo sull’evidenza del fatto.’

shall argue in the next chapter, however, there are no objective criteria enabling us – or Petrarch – to distinguish a language from a variety of a language, since language variation is a social, not a natural, phenomenon; and historical languages – as well as any language variety, for that matter – are not natural objects, but cultural artefacts. What is at stake, then, is not whether Petrarch was correct or incorrect in his appreciation of language differentiation. Rather than attempting to determine whether this or that speech variety identified by him conforms to our own notion of what a language is or should be, we need to investigate how he and his contemporaries construed this notion. This entails examining how he interpreted and rationalized the social fact of language variation as he practised it and as he observed it in the speech behaviour of those around him. This is not to say that there was no room for ideologically fuelled representations – his view that one language was more prestigious than another obviously betrays an ideological perspective. What I am suggesting, instead, is that those very ideologies form an important component, not only of the cultural meaning attributed to language differences, but also of the linguistic behaviour of speakers; their ideological nature does not make them any less real or effective.

In order to analyse how Petrarch and others in his era rationalized language variation, why they perceived some speech varieties as autonomous entities, how they understood their mutual relationships and the cultural meaning they attached to them, we have to describe as carefully as possible the historical language situation in which they lived and spoke. The role of Latin in the Renaissance as a highly formalized, functionally distinguished variety, learnt solely through formal education by a narrow section of society, underscores the great distance which separates their language situation from ours. In order to get to grips with their linguistic ideas and to comprehend the motivations for their language choices, we

have to postulate the existence of a fully structured linguistic system in the background, a system against which their words and their choices can be tested. Since our ultimate goal is to understand how linguistic conceptions were formed, and how they influenced language change, we first need to establish where these came from. Before asking whether Petrarch was conscious or not of being bilingual, therefore, we have to analyse the nature of the bilingualism of his age, how it was structured and how he and contemporaries conceived of it. This will enable us to explore the boundaries of that system and the type of linguistic consciousness which it sustained.

## Chapter 2. Shibboleth

And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.  
The Book of Judges 12:5-6

When writing the article 'Beau' for the *Encyclopédie*, Denis Diderot introduced his discussion with this note of caution:

Before undertaking the difficult search for the origin of *beauty*, I shall indicate in advance, with all the authors who have treated it, that, by a sort of twist of fate, the things which we speak about more frequently are also usually those which we know less; and such is the nature of, among many other things, *beauty*.<sup>1</sup>

Such, too, is the nature of language. If I were to walk down the street and ask the first ten people I encountered about the nature of language, I would probably provoke confusion and receive ten wildly different replies. If,

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<sup>1</sup> Denis Diderot, 'Beau', in *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, II, Paris, 1752, pp. 169–81: 'Avant que d'entrer dans la recherche difficile de l'origine du *beau*, je remarquerai d'abord, avec tous les auteurs qui en ont écrit, que par une sorte de fatalité, les choses dont on parle le plus parmi les hommes, sont assez ordinairement celles qu'on connoît le moins; et que telle est, entre beaucoup d'autres, la nature du *beau*.'

however, I then asked them ‘what language are you speaking?’, I would, no doubt, get ten simple and straightforward answers. Clearly, not everyone is a philosopher of language, but everyone does speak; and, what is more important here, everyone is convinced that s/he speaks a *specific* language. No two people, however, speak in exactly the same way. In everyday life, we are all familiar with linguistic variation: we associate some ways of speaking – which we might call accents, dialects or even languages – with a particular geographical area, with certain groups of people or with specific contexts, such as formal and informal ones. Yet, in our own day, for example in London, despite the radical difference between speech varieties, no one would seriously challenge the idea that they are all varieties of English.

‘Language itself poses varied and complex problems’, wrote Hugh Lloyd-Jones: ‘It is dependent on human physiology, and its existence is in time.’<sup>2</sup> I concluded the previous chapter by putting forward the hypothesis that Petrarch and his age conceived of the nature of language and linguistic variation differently from how we think of it nowadays – a hypothesis which calls for an historical analysis of these concepts. To say that ideas of language and language diversity change over time may seem an obvious observation; however, it has far-reaching, and by no means obvious, consequences. It implies, first of all, that the notion of ‘a language’ – for example, ‘English’ – is a cultural and historically determined artefact. We not only change the way we speak, but also what we think we speak and, perhaps, how we think we speak. In this chapter, I shall attempt to make sense of the relationship between the way people behave linguistically and how they conceive of such behaviour.

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<sup>2</sup> H. Lloyd-Jones, *Classical Survivals: The Classics in the Modern World*, London, 1982, p. 127.

## I

The first issue to be addressed is how and why linguistic variation comes into being, that is, its nature. E. H. Gombrich recalled a remark of D. P. Walker to the effect that ‘the history of the witch-craze would have to be written in different terms, if it turned out that witches could indeed perform the ghastly deeds for which they were punished’.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, if it turned out that language diversity really was due to God’s punishment of humankind for building the Tower of Babel, we would have to rethink the history of linguistic varieties. Since, however, this does not seem to be the case, in order to reach an understanding of past ideas of linguistic diversity, we need an adequate theoretical grasp of the phenomenon. Because I shall be drawing on theories borrowed from disciplines such as sociolinguistics and linguistic anthropology, which may be unfamiliar to readers of this dissertation, I have quoted at length from the secondary literature, especially in the footnotes, in order to provide a solid grounding for the views which I discuss.

Two of the fundamental insights we owe to the discipline known as sociolinguistics can be roughly summed up as follows: people differ in the way they speak, and the same people speak in different ways in different contexts. Even though we think of languages as uniform, discrete and homogeneous entities, variation, in reality, is the norm. Furthermore, different speech varieties are neither idiosyncrasies of individual speakers, nor mistaken deviations from a supposedly ‘proper’ language: their use is meaningful, and it is meaningful because it is systematic. As Aristotle stated, language is the form of social interaction *par excellence*.<sup>4</sup> Its use, however, is

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<sup>3</sup> E. H. Gombrich, ‘Relativism in the History of Ideas’, in *Topics of Our Time: Twentieth-Century Issues in Learning and in Art*, London, 1991, pp. 47-55 (47).

<sup>4</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* I, 1253a7-18; and Aristotle, *The Complete Works*, ed. J. Barnes, 2 vols, Princeton, 1984, II, p. 1988.

not just referential; and this is demonstrated precisely by the existence of language diversity. A speech variety exists because speakers recognize it as such, insofar as they confer a meaning on it by distinguishing it from other varieties.<sup>5</sup> As grammatical rules are signs which convey denotational meaning, variation rules are signs which convey a social meaning.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the primary objective of this inquiry is to understand the meaning of these functions; and such an investigation must start by providing a coherent methodological framework for studying how people actually speak in a given society and why they speak in this way.

## II

'We should constantly remind ourselves', wrote Robert Le Page and André Tabouret-Keller, 'that languages do not do things; people do things, languages are abstractions from what people do.'<sup>7</sup> Linguistic anthropologists have repeatedly suggested that the starting point for linguistic description should not be a language, but communities of speakers studied according to their multifarious means of expression.<sup>8</sup> This was a reaction against the idea of linguistic competence formulated by Noam Chomsky, with his 'ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community'<sup>9</sup> – an uncontaminated picture invalidated by our experience of language use in everyday life, in which no such thing as a 'completely homogeneous speech

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<sup>5</sup> An important feature of the attribution of meaning to varieties is that the process of identification implies a parallel process of exclusion: there would be no perception of variety *x* if there was not also a perception of variety *y*.

<sup>6</sup> See D. Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics: An Ethnographic Approach*, Philadelphia, 1974, p. 146: 'whereas linguists usually treat language in terms of just one broad type of elementary function, called here "referential", language is in fact constituted in terms of a second broad type of elementary function as well, called here "stylistic". Languages have conventional features, elements, and relations serving referential ("propositional", "ideational", etc.) meaning, and they have conventional features, elements and relations that are stylistic, serving social meaning.'



community' exists. Dell Hymes and John Gumperz proposed a reformulation of Chomsky's ideal by defining a language community *not* as a group united by the knowledge of a shared code – which determines the equation of a speech community and a language, and which isolates language as the only abstract object of study – but instead by the shared *interpretation* of the social meaning of speech varieties,<sup>10</sup> which is expressed by adherence to specific rules of linguistic behaviour, determined by the contexts in which communicative events take place.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> R. B. Le Page and A. Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity: Creole-Based Approaches to Language and Ethnicity*, Cambridge, 1985, p. 188.

<sup>8</sup> See D. Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*, p. 120: 'linguistics falls short until it is able to deal with ways of speaking in relation to social meanings and situations, until, in short, the starting point of description is not a sentence or a text, but a speech event, not a language, but a repertoire of ways of speaking; not a speech community defined in equivalence to a language, but a speech community defined through the concurrence of rules of grammar and rules of use.' Hymes and his followers called this kind of linguistic description 'ethnography of speaking'; see *ibid.*, p. 89: 'by an ethnography of speaking I shall understand a description that is a theory – a theory of speech as a system of cultural behaviour'. See also J. Gumperz, 'The Speech Community', in *Linguistic Anthropology: A Reader*, ed. A. Duranti, Malden MA, 2009, pp. 66-73.

<sup>9</sup> N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Cambridge MA, 1965, p. 3. For an interesting critique of Chomsky's assumptions from a philosophical point of view, see S. Timpanaro, *Sul materialismo*, Pisa, 1970, pp. 197-210.

<sup>10</sup> J. Gumperz, 'Types of Linguistic Communities', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 4, 1962, pp. 28-40 (28): 'While the anthropologist's description refers to specific communities, the universe of linguistic analysis is a single language or dialect, a body of verbal signs abstracted from the totality of communicative behaviour on the basis of structural or genetic similarities.' Gumperz's polemical target here is obviously structural linguistics; the isolation of the linguistic system, abstracted from its concrete use, as the only legitimate object of scientific, autonomous (that is, specific to linguistics and to no other discipline) study was the focus of Saussure's theoretical approach: see F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, transl. W. Baskin, New York, 1959, see esp. pp. 9-23. For a description of the problems which structuralism poses for historical work in general, and specifically for historical linguistics, see P. Burke, *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy: Essays on Perception and Communication*, Cambridge, 1987, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> See J. Irvine, 'When Talk Isn't Cheap: Language and Political Economy', *American Ethnologist*, 16, 1989, pp. 248-67 (251).

The linguistic competence of individuals pertains to the verbal repertoire which they share, in total or in part, with the speech community to which they belong.<sup>12</sup> The conscious or unconscious act of choosing a language variety in a communicative event is based on the representation of that variety in the mind of speakers; and this representation depends on its being appropriate to a specific communicative situation.<sup>13</sup> We would never greet the Queen by saying: 'hey love, how ya doin'?' If we were to evaluate each component of this greeting in light of its appropriateness, the only one which would pass muster is 'how'. For the greeting to be appropriate, it would have to be entirely recast in a different 'language'. This speech variety – the so-called 'Queen's English' – is what is popularly known as 'proper' English. It is sometimes also referred to as 'Received Pronunciation', a name which indicates that its existence and status have been explained and rationalized as denoting merely a way of pronouncing words – and not a different speech variety altogether. Yet, no matter how you pronounce, for example, 'ain't', it will be located outside the boundaries of this variety. Even the supposedly objective criterion of intelligibility does not play a

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<sup>12</sup> For the concept of verbal repertoire, see J. Gumperz, 'The Speech Community', p. 72: 'The totality of dialectal and superposed varieties regularly employed within a community make up the *verbal repertoire* of that community. Whereas the bounds of a language, as this term is ordinarily understood, may or may not coincide with that of a social group, verbal repertoires are always specific to particular populations. As an analytical concept the verbal repertoire allows us to establish direct relationships between its constituents and the socioeconomic complexity of the community' (Gumperz's emphasis). The relative competence of individual speakers in *all* the varieties which compose the speech community's repertoire does not need to be homogeneous, provided that there is a recognition of the role and functions of the previously mentioned varieties. See S. Romaine, 'What is a Speech Community?', in *Sociolinguistic Variation in Speech Communities*, ed. S. Romaine, London, 1982, pp. 13-24.

<sup>13</sup> On the 'representation' of speech varieties, see J. N. Green, 'Representations of Romance: Contact, Bilingualism and Diglossia', in *Trends in Romance Linguistics and Philology*, ed. R. Posner and J. N. Green, 5 vols, Berlin and New York, 1993, V, pp. 3-27 (25): 'Linguists of very different persuasions use the term 'representation' in connection with the mental image that speakers form of their language etc.'

significant part here: the Queen, no doubt, understands the meaning of 'ain't', despite the fact that few would dare to use it in her presence.<sup>14</sup>

My point here is that when it comes to defining the Queen's speech as 'English', what really matters is that she and other speakers *consider* it to be English. Varieties owe their existence – their function in a community – to the need of speakers to express social relationships by denoting types of people, situations or even topics. The relationship between a form of speech and its social meaning is, in principle, arbitrary, since it does not depend on the inherent quality of linguistic features: 'I ain't' is no less English than 'I am not'. Accordingly, the same variety can express different social meanings: for instance, Cockney may be a social class marker if identified by a Londoner and a geographical one if perceived by a Glaswegian. The existence and nature of speech varieties are interpreted in different ways within the speech community, often relying on cultural models and ideological motivations which do not necessarily reflect the objective nature

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<sup>14</sup> Much more controversial would be to state that at times the Queen does not understand the 'Queen's English', even if it is certainly not impossible. See H. Wolff, 'Intelligibility and Inter-Ethnic Attitudes', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 1, 1959, pp. 34-41, a seminal work which seriously contests the employment of mutual intelligibility as an objective criterion for measuring linguistic proximity and distance. On one hand, the capacity of individuals to understand a code is often impaired by their (personal or social) attitude towards their interlocutors or towards the code itself; in cases of economic or political disparity between two groups, it often happens that the disadvantaged claim to understand the speech of the privileged, but not conversely: communication is itself a social practice, one which unfolds through social statements such as refusing to understand someone perceived to be inferior. On the other hand, people who do not understand each other may still claim that they speak the same language: for example, a Canadian and an Indian may have serious problems of mutual intelligibility, while still maintaining that they both speak English. To argue that if they *both* spoke 'proper English' – let us say 'standard English' – they would understand each other is merely to highlight a possible *function* of the standard language (its role as a *lingua franca*), not a linguistic feature: for that matter, the same function could equally well be performed if they *both* spoke, say, Classical Arabic or Latin.

of linguistic data – as in the case of ‘Received Pronunciation’ – but which, in turn, may end up influencing language use.<sup>15</sup>

### III

Speech communities differ significantly in the way they organize and interpret language diversity. The central issue which needs to be clarified is the relationship between the nature of speech varieties and the kinds of functions they are asked to perform. This relationship is not mechanical, precisely because it relies on individual interpretations: it is based, on one hand, on the relative importance, for different societies, of specific functions; and, on the other, on the relative importance of the varieties employed. The inferiority or superiority of functions is established by social consensus and depends on the socio-economic and cultural configuration of a given society. The relative status of different speech varieties is determined by the number and value, or prestige, of the functions they perform among the communicative aims of that society. Although the function of varieties is, as I have argued, virtually independent from their linguistic form, a fundamental discriminating factor seems to be their degree of reciprocal autonomy within a speech community:<sup>16</sup> some varieties, usually irrespective

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<sup>15</sup> A relatively new field of studies has developed in relation to issues such as linguistic ideologies, which were defined, in an essay by Michael Silverstein, ‘Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology’, in *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, ed. P. R. Clyne et al., Chicago, 1979, pp. 192-247 (192), as ‘any set of beliefs about language articulated by the users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use’. See now P. V. Kroskrity, ‘Language Ideologies’, in *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology*, ed. A. Duranti, Malden MA, 2004, pp. 496-517 (496): ‘These conceptions, whether explicitly articulated or embodied in communicative practice, represent incomplete, or “partially successful”, attempts to rationalize language usage; such rationalizations are typically multiple, context-bound, and necessarily constructed from the sociocultural experience of the speaker.’

<sup>16</sup> Irvine, ‘When Talk Isn’t Cheap’, pp. 252-3.

of their linguistic structure, start to be regarded as discrete, autonomous entities, while others do not.<sup>17</sup> This fact demands an explanation.

As a working hypothesis, Hymes defined a variety of this kind as a 'significant speech style', proposing as a criterion for its identification that 'it can be recognized, and used, outside its defining context, that is, by persons or in places other than those with which its typical meaning is associated'.<sup>18</sup> While Hymes's definition shows how a variety of this kind can be identified, it still does not explain why only *some* varieties are perceived as such. Since it cannot depend directly on their inherent linguistic structure, it has to be traced back to a historical process which they have undergone, a process in virtue of which speakers come to feel that they are allowed to use them independently from their original context. This brings us to go back to where we started: the history of the notion of language and its meaning in late Middle Ages.

At this point, it will be helpful to quote a lengthy passage by J. N. Green:

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<sup>17</sup> On the notion that differences between status and function of linguistic varieties do not depend on their inherent linguistic features, but rather on the way people use and perceive them according to their assumptions, attitudes and values, see J. A. Fishman, 'Bilingualism With and Without Diglossia, Diglossia With and Without Bilingualism', *Journal of Social Issues*, 23, 1967, pp. 29-38; I quote from the reprint in *The Bilingualism Reader*, pp. 81-8, (88 n. 4): 'A theory which tends to minimize the distinction between languages and varieties is desirable for several reasons. It implies that *social* consensus (rather than inherently linguistic desiderata) differentiates between the two and that separate varieties can become (and have become) separate languages given certain social encouragement to do so, just as purportedly separate languages have been fused into one, on the ground that they were merely different varieties of the same language' (Fishman's emphasis). See also Gumperz, 'The Speech Community', p. 67: 'regardless of the linguistic differences among them, the speech varieties employed within a speech community form a system because they are related to a shared set of social norms ... They become indices of social patterns of interaction in the speech community'. Cf. with the observations on the difference between 'languages' and 'dialects' in E. Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation', *American Anthropologist*, 68, 1966, pp. 922-35.

<sup>18</sup> D. Hymes, 'Ways of Speaking', in *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, ed. R. Bauman et al., Cambridge, 1989, pp. 433-51 (440).

It seems likely that the existence of representations of 'a language' ... , as opposed to the mere awareness of variable linguistic behaviour, is a fairly recent phenomenon, connected with widespread literacy, standardization, and the acceptance of prescriptive authority over language ... . Standardization implies the elaboration of something that already exists, on which the standardizing process confers the stability and prestige that result in eloquence and power ... . But the precondition must be the ability to identify the variety to be singled out for standardization, and identification involves both naming and reification ... . Indeed, an important contributory factor may be metalinguistic: the *expectation* that speakers should perceive the distinctness of, and be able to name, the language or lect they profess to control.<sup>19</sup>

Leaving aside for the moment the question of standardization, we can see that Green goes further than Hymes by indicating the connection between how speakers use linguistic resources and what they think of their linguistic behaviour: the employment of a speech variety outside its defining context occurs together with the ability to identify it as an autonomous entity. *Why* this happens, however, remains unexplained. What both Green and Hymes have overlooked is that – in the selection of relevant forms of speech as discrete and autonomous entities – a central role must be played by the association of specific speech varieties with groups of people, an hypothesis which deserves some further discussion.

Significantly, the concept of group identity perfectly subsumes all the relevant factors at stake: autonomy, discreteness and distinction. A crucial

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<sup>19</sup> Green, 'Representations of Romance', p. 27.

point which Green fails to mention is that in Western Europe standard languages are, first and foremost, national languages. According to a seminal article of Einar Haugen, what constitutes a nation as a unit is the longing for internal cohesion and, at the same time, for external distinction: these needs are aptly performed by standard languages, which are conceived as homogeneous entities in themselves and as distinct from other linguistic forms.<sup>20</sup> The abstract goal towards which standardization aspires can be described as a minimum formal variation with a maximum number of functions: in other words, one speech variety = one speech community. Although such a pure abstraction can never be achieved, as was discussed above, it nevertheless coincides with our common understanding of what 'a language' is.<sup>21</sup> Human beings can think in abstractions, but they cannot speak an abstraction. Consequently, a concrete speech form has to be selected as a model for the whole community. Since this is usually a variety which is already prestigious – one spoken by the ruling class or represented in a select literary corpus – the abstract ideal of uniformity characteristic of standardization conceals a form of social dominance. It is in this way that standards of linguistic behaviour come into existence: the standard is declared to be the only correct form – and often the only 'real language' – while all the other varieties, which obviously continue to exist, are degraded to the status of deviations.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation', pp. 927-8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 931. Ernest Renan defined the essence of a nation as follows: 'Or l'essence d'une nation est que tous les individus aient beaucoup de choses en commun, et aussi que tous aient oublié bien des choses', quoted by Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6. Something similar can be said about the idea of speaking the same language. See also J. Milroy, 'Language Ideologies and the Consequences of Standardization', *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 5, 2001, pp. 530-55.

<sup>22</sup> See Kroskrity, 'Language Ideologies', p. 502. The equation 'one variety = one speech community' recalls the notions of languages and speech communities put forward by Chomsky as linguistics' proper objects of study (see n. 9 above). This indicates that Chomsky's stance was determined by a typical 'post-standardization'

Isaiah Berlin wrote that: 'The history of ideas ... has its surprises and rewards. Among them is the discovery that some of the most familiar values of our own culture are more recent than might at first be supposed.'<sup>23</sup> The succinct description of standard languages I have attempted to present here hints at an explanation of the notion of language before standardization, at least *e negativo*. What certainly did *not* exist was the idea of a language as a distinctive trait of a nation, theoretically aspiring to perform *every* function that *every* inhabitant of that nation needed to perform. Indeed, if we were to construe the idea of 'a language' in this way, we would have to conclude that at the time of Petrarch neither the vernaculars nor Latin were conceived as 'languages'.<sup>24</sup> That said, we still have to determine what speakers in Petrarch's day did perceive and identify as 'languages', and why they did so. This will entail considering the place of origin of linguistic varieties, that is, the mind of speakers in the act of language choice.

#### IV

Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller have defined language choices as 'acts of identity', since 'the individual creates his system of verbal behaviour so as to resemble those common to the group or groups with

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conception of language and language use: his ideal speaker-listener was, in effect, an educated middle-class speaker-listener.

<sup>23</sup> I. Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, London, 1997, p. 581.

<sup>24</sup> Green's remark, in his 'Representations of Romance', p. 30 n. 18, on the Latin-vernacular dichotomy is dubious: 'The precise nature of medieval competence in Latin remains obscure. It is noticeable that scholars do not usually speak of "bilingualism". Can one, indeed, be bilingual in one living and one dead language?' To which I would reply: can a language be dead if someone is still speaking and writing it? As D. R. Langslow observed, 'language death often yields not a dead language but no language at all': D. R. Langslow, 'Approaching Bilingualism in Corpus Languages', in *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text*, ed. J. N. Adams et al., Oxford, 2002, pp. 23-51 (23). As for the precise nature of medieval competence in Latin, I shall try to show in chapters 3 and 6 that it is not as 'obscure' as Green claims.



which he wishes from time to time to be identified'.<sup>25</sup> Speakers employ their linguistic resources according to their perception of groups, to the extent that they have endowed such groups with some specific linguistic characteristics. Neither the systems nor the groups are entities with objective properties: they exist as perceptions of the speaker, or rather, as abstractions of these perceptions. Accordingly, Le Page and Tabouret-Keller attempted to reconstruct the process of reification of speech varieties by dividing it into five stages:<sup>26</sup>

1. A group is defined and named.
2. The group's linguistic behaviour is denoted by an adjective referring to the group, accompanied by the word for 'speech' or 'language'.
3. Adjectives start to be used as nouns, which at the same time denote the linguistic system felt to be the property of the group and connote the social values attached to the group.

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<sup>25</sup> Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity*, p. 115. They have identified four main constraints on language choice: a) the speaker's ability to identify the groups; b) powerful motivations to desire to be identified with a group; c) adequate opportunities for learning; d) ability to learn – that is, to change one's habits when necessary; these constraints are discussed further at p. 182. According to Le Page, most crucial are the speaker's motivations, that is, a factor determined by social and cultural considerations. However, as far as point (d) is concerned – the speaker's ability to adapt or accommodate to different varieties – the empirical linguistic distance between such varieties plays obviously a fundamental part. See *ibid.*, p. 186: 'we perceive fresh linguistic data in terms of the models we have already constructed – the units are either "the same as" or "different from" what we can already handle. Frequently we cannot simply hear the differences or contrasts in another language which are not contrastive in our own ... . If the fresh data can be assimilated to an existing model we do so; if the differences are too great or the cultural associations too important to us, we construct a new model.' For a classic study of the phenomenology connected to this factor, known as language interference, and its outcomes, see U. Weinreich, *Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems*, New York, 1953.

<sup>26</sup> Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity*, pp. 235-6.

4. The system gets detached from the group and acquires a certain degree of autonomy as a linguistic system.
5. The system becomes reified and totemized.

In this model, a fundamental role is played by the question of identity, an issue which will need to be confronted in this dissertation in order to establish which groups were defined and named, how such identities were conceived and the general position of identity in the cultural tradition of the late medieval Italy. Since, ultimately, my goal is to understand how linguistic conceptions are formed, I need, first of all, to give a credible account of the basis from which they emerge; and the scheme of Le Page and Tabouret-Keller provides a taxonomy which can, I believe, serve as a helpful tool for the analysis of the medieval context. To make use of it, however, it has to be tested against historical data, and the relevant speech varieties and their functions in fourteenth century Italy have to be reconstructed. Such a reconstruction must be based on a correct appreciation of the relationship between language use and linguistic consciousness in the mind of speakers.

I hope that I have shown in this chapter that historical languages are not natural entities such as gold or flowers, which can be worn like ornaments or studied in a laboratory; instead, the linguistic consciousness of human beings is inseparable from the fact that they speak and that speaking is a social activity. As for the way in which this consciousness can be investigated and understood, let me end this chapter by quoting a passage from John Locke:

‘Tis of great use to the Sailor to know the length of his Line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the Ocean. ‘Tis well he knows, that it is long enough to reach the bottom, at such Places as

are necessary to direct his Voyage, and caution him against Shoals, that may ruin him. Our Business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our Conduct. If we can find out those Measures, whereby a rational Creature put in that State, which man is in, in this World, may, and ought to govern his Opinions, and Actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our Knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch, Oxford, 1975, p. 46 (I.1.6).

### Chapter 3. Speaking in Tongues

*'Bezuchov est ridicule, but he is so kind and good-natured. What pleasure is there to be so caustique?'*

*'A forfeit!' cried a young man in militia uniform, whom Julie called 'mon chevalier', and who was going with her to Nizhny.*

*In Julie's set, as in many other circles in Moscow, it had been agreed that they would speak nothing but Russian, and that those who made a slip and spoke French should pay fines to the Committee of Voluntary Contributions.*

*'Another forfeit for a Gallicism', said a Russian writer who was present. "What a pleasure is there to be" is not Russian!*

*'You spare no one', continued Julie to the young man without heeding the author's remark.*

*'For caustique – I am guilty and I will pay, and I am prepared to pay again for the pleasure of telling you the truth. For Gallicisms I won't be responsible', she remarked, turning to the author: 'I have neither the money nor the time, like Prince Galitsin, to engage a master to teach me Russian!'*

...

*'Another romance', said the militia officer. 'Really this general flight has been arranged to get all the old maids married off. Catiche is one and Princess Bolkonskaya another.'*

*'Do you know, I really believe she is un petit peu amoureuse du jeune homme?'*

*'Forfeit, forfeit, forfeit!'*

*'But how could one say that in Russian?'*

Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*

#### I

In discussions of medieval linguistic systems, one often encounters the notion of 'diglossia'. This technical term was first introduced into the

discipline of sociolinguistics by Charles Ferguson, in his seminal study of 1959.<sup>1</sup> His definition of diglossia is:

a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation.<sup>2</sup>

Ferguson defined the superposed variety as H(igh) and the inferior one as L(ow). He then selected nine fundamental criteria which determine diglossia:<sup>3</sup> 1) *Function*: the functions of H and L are strictly, and hierarchically, compartmentalized into specific domains: one variety is specialized for particular situations, where using the other would be considered inappropriate, and vice-versa; 2) *Prestige*: the H variety is perceived by speakers as more prestigious than the L variety; 3) *Literary heritage*: the speech community boasts a corpus of literary works in H which is celebrated, and even contemporary works written in H are considered part of that literary heritage; 4) *Acquisition*: the L variety is learned

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson's 'Diglossia' has been reprinted in several anthologies and collections of essays; I quote from C. A. Ferguson, 'Diglossia', in *The Bilingualism Reader*, ed. Li Wei, London, 2000, pp. 65-80. He wrote again on the same topic in 'Diglossia Revised', *Southwest Journal of Linguistic*, 10, 1991, pp. 214-34; I quote from the reprint: 'Epilogue: Diglossia Revisited', in *Understanding Arabic*, ed. A. Elgibali, Cairo, 1996, pp. 49-68.

<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, 'Diglossia', p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-72.

‘naturally’ by children conversing with their parents and among each other, while the H variety is acquired by means of formal education, with the result that ‘the speaker is at home in L to a degree he almost never achieves in H’;<sup>4</sup> 5) *Standardization*: the H variety is standardized, the L variety is not: H has a long-standing tradition of prescriptive and descriptive grammatical studies, while L does not; 6) *Stability*: the diglossic system is generally a stable one, which may last for centuries. The final three criteria Ferguson identified refer to the internal structure of the speech varieties – 7) *Grammar*, 8) *Lexicon* and 9) *Phonology* – and, for our purposes, can be left aside.

The defining cases used by Ferguson to describe diglossia were Arabic, Modern Greek, Haitian Creole and Swiss German: all contemporary (at least to him) language situations. Ferguson himself, however, hinted at the possibility of applying the term – and, therefore, its taxonomy – to the relationship between Latin and the vernaculars before the definitive triumph of national languages in Europe;<sup>5</sup> and his model has indeed been applied by several scholars to the medieval linguistic landscape.<sup>6</sup> The question here is not whether the label diglossia matches the relationship between Latin and vernaculars as a mathematical equation which, once applied, would provide *motu proprio* an exhaustive description of the medieval language situation. What we need to establish instead is whether or not Ferguson’s taxonomy is a valuable tool for the analysis of the specific case which we are investigating. The conditions which he singled out as the criteria for diglossia are, in fact, the synthesis of a complex system of historical forces,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 70-1.

<sup>5</sup> Ferguson, ‘Diglossia’, pp. 76-7.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., W. J. Ong, ‘Orality, Literacy and Medieval Textualization’, *New Literary History*, 16, 1984, pp. 1-12; J. Ziolkowski, ‘Cultural Diglossia and the Nature of Medieval Latin Literature’, in *The Ballad and Oral Literature*, ed. J. Harris, Cambridge MA, 1991, pp. 193-213; B. Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Modes of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*, Princeton, 1983, esp. p. 24. Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, p. 15, n. 1, refers explicitly to Ferguson’s original formulation.

resulting from communicative and cultural practices, and determined by the linguistic behaviour and attitudes of speakers.<sup>7</sup> What we have to determine, then, is how these practices emerged as the outcome of concrete historical conditions.

Per Nykrog, in a 1957 article on the influence of Latin syntax on the development of French, sketched a hypothetical description of the speech varieties employed in medieval Europe. He identified four broad forms of speech:

There must have existed, in the pre-literary era, a range of stylistic levels just as in the age of Cicero: the vernacular speech of the illiterate masses and a Romance speech of the élite, with strong reminiscences, at least in the lexicon, of the idiom learnt at school; on the other hand, the Latin used in conversation by a – more or less educated – clergy, undoubtedly with a marked influence of their linguistic habits in their mother tongue and, finally, the Latin of the great scholars. The internal borders within such a stylistic range must undoubtedly have been blurred.<sup>8</sup>

The typological nature of this description was intended to suggest that the same pattern could be applied throughout Europe. Even if the vernaculars varied in different geographical areas, Latin was the constant: as the

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<sup>7</sup> See Ferguson, 'Diglossia Revisited', p. 54.

<sup>8</sup> P. Nykrog, 'L'influence latine savante sur la syntaxe du français', in *Acta Congressus Madovigiani*, Copenhagen, 1957, pp. 89-114 (94-5): 'Il a dû exister, dans l'époque pré-littéraire, une gamme de niveaux stylistiques tout comme au temps de Cicéron: le parler vulgaire de la foule illettrée et un parler roman des gents distingués, avec de fortes reminiscences, au moins pour le vocabulaire, de l'idiome des écoles. D'un autre côté le latin de conversation entre les clercs plus ou moins savants, sans doute avec de fortes concessions à leurs habitudes linguistiques dans la langue maternelle, et enfin le latin pur des grandes savantes. Les limites intérieures dans cette gamme stylistique ont sans doute été flottantes.'

relationship between Latin and the vernacular was more or less the same throughout Europe, it defined a specific and relatively homogeneous linguistic landscape.<sup>9</sup> Nykrog points out that the rigid opposition between H and L as two discrete varieties should not be taken too literally, but rather is best envisioned as a continuum. Furthermore, both ends of the continuum – the ends we are intuitively more likely to consider real linguistic entities – have to be regarded as cultural constructs rather than empirical realities: the ‘vernacular speech of the illiterate masses’, a supposedly pure form of the vernacular, was still the language learned by everyone at home; the ‘Latin of the great scholars’, instead, was presumably never spoken and, even its written form, was far from stable and uniform throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>10</sup>

The repeated insistence of Nykrog on school and education highlights another notably social element which was implicit in Ferguson’s analysis and which deserves to be made explicit: the degree of accessibility to H which members of the speech community had. This raises another key issue, connected to the actual functioning of communication within the community – and therefore to the structure of the language(s) and varieties involved: the extent and degree of mutual intelligibility among individuals. If H is *solely* learned through formal education – so that it is no one’s native

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<sup>9</sup> A comparison with the contemporary Arabic setting is instructive. Consider, e.g., a study, L. El-Dash and R. G. Tucker, ‘Subjective Reactions to Various Speech Styles in Egypt’, *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 1975, 6, pp. 33-54 (35), quoted by R. Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society*, Oxford and New York, 1984, p. 165, in which Arabic diglossia is described as follows: ‘The distinction between Classical and Colloquial Arabic is not completely clear, however, as various gradations exist between the Arabic of the *Koran* and the speech used by the man in the street to discuss daily affairs. Moreover, Classical Arabic ... is not a spoken language, but rather a written form used throughout the Arabic-speaking world. This form may be read orally, but is seldom spoken extemporaneously. It is reported that very few individuals can actually speak Classical Arabic fluently.’ In the light of this comparison, Nykrog’s hypothesis seems generally correct.

<sup>10</sup> See B. Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, Florence, 1960, pp. 116-19.



language – competence in it will be limited to those who have access to formal education, which means that diglossia is a linguistic counterpart of a specific form of social organization.<sup>11</sup> This fact marks a radical difference between diglossia and the language situation known as standard-with-dialects. Since this situation is the most common type of linguistic organization in present-day Europe, a personal example may help to clarify the issue.

When I was a child, I used to spend my summer holidays in Carcoforo, a mountain village in Piedmont. Like most children born and raised in Milan, I was monolingual: I spoke standard Italian, but of the Milanese variety, which, together with the majority of those around me, I considered to be proper Italian. The children I met in the village, who grew up there, were all bilingual: they spoke standard Italian and the local dialect. As often happens with bilingual people, their speech was affected by interference, that is, some dialectal forms often got mixed up with their Italian utterances – and probably also vice versa, though this was lost on me since I did not understand their dialect. When dialect forms crept into their Italian, they would be reproached by their parents, the priest or the football coach for speaking ‘incorrect’ or ‘bad’ Italian. My handicap and their language skills – I was monolingual, they were bilingual – were turned upside down when it came to language evaluation: I was considered a ‘proper’ Italian speaker, and they were considered to be ‘bad’ Italian speakers. Knowing only the standard language not only made me monolingual, but became an advantage, saving me from the risk of interference. This story is common to any situation of language standardization: the standard language and the prestige norm coincide. In

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<sup>11</sup> See also Ferguson, ‘Diglossia’, p. 77, where limitation of literacy to a small élite is indicated as a condition determining diglossia: so, in a diglossic system, H would be the second language of an educated élite. Ferguson went back to this point in ‘Diglossia Revisited’, pp. 60-1.

diglossia, unlike my own childhood experience, the speakers who master the standard language *cannot* be monolingual. This has two fundamental consequences: the first concerns the status of H within the speech community; the second concerns the way in which H and L are related to groups of people.

Starting with the first consequence, regarding status and function, we have seen that, according to Ferguson, in a diglossic community H is the standard *and* the prestige variety. Yet, this may well not be the case; and the reason is the intrinsic ambiguity of the notion of standard language. As Versteegh pointed out, it can be used in two different senses: 1) 'the codified norm of the language'; and 2) 'the target of the speakers in a speech community'.<sup>12</sup> There are, however, parallel linguistic situations in contemporary societies which can help us to understand how these two functions may not, in practice, coincide. Studying the configuration of diglossia in Arabic, M. H. Ibrahim observed that women did not seem to use the most prestigious variety – Classical Arabic – consistently.<sup>13</sup> This was hardly surprising: Classical Arabic is learnt only through formal education, and education in most Arabic countries was reserved, at the time of the study, to males. What was surprising was that this contradicted the evidence found in the vast majority of speech communities, according to which, as Peter Trudgill put it, 'the single most consistent finding to emerge from sociolinguistic studies over the past twenty years' is that 'women produce on average linguistic forms which more closely approach those of the

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<sup>12</sup> K. Versteegh, 'Dead or Alive? The Status of the Standard Language', in *Bilingualism in Ancient Society*, ed. J. N. Adams et al., Oxford, 2002, pp. 52-74, (55). See also *ibid.*, p. 57: 'The point to keep in mind here is that we should not automatically assume that when a language is regarded as standard it always performs the same functions as other languages that are called standard. This is particularly relevant when we are dealing with the attitudes speakers have towards linguistic variation in their speech community ...'

<sup>13</sup> M. H. Ibrahim, 'Standard and Prestige Language: A Problem in Arabic Sociolinguistics', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 28, 1986, pp. 115-26.

standard language or have higher prestige than those produced by men'.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, Ibrahim contended, there was another way to look at the evidence. He argued that the controversial datum was due to the incorrect assumption that the standard language – Classical Arabic – coincided with the prestige speech variety.

Given that H is learned only through education, Ibrahim maintains, 'to assume that H is the only standard and prestigious variety would entail that all speakers of Arabic who have no functional knowledge of H are sociolinguistically unstratified in regard to these characteristics of H'.<sup>15</sup> Since this is very unlikely, sociolinguistic stratification must be expressed in another variety, that is, L: in other words, socioeconomic registers are varieties of L, not of H. But if socioeconomic functions are reserved to L, it follows that H does not express them. This is the central fact: in a diglossic community, H's range of variation is not interpreted in a socioeconomic sense. H is linked to education, and its functional value depends on the relative value and function of education in a given society and on the role of

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<sup>14</sup> P. Trudgill, *On Dialect: Social and Geographical Perspectives*, Oxford, 1983, pp. 161-2. Obviously this does not depend on some sort of innate characteristic of women, but rather on their role in society and its linguistic consequences in terms of perception, evaluation, consciousness etc. This also demonstrates that speech varieties are not a simple reflection of the social order, but rather an active interpretation, and sometimes a reaction, to it. See P. M. Smith, 'Sex Markers in Speech', in *Social Markers in Speech*, ed. K. R. Scherer and H. Giles, Cambridge, 1979, pp. 109-46; see also E. Gordon, 'Sex, Speech and Stereotypes: Why Women Use Prestige Forms More than Men', *Language in Society*, 26, 1997, pp. 47-63. Cicero, in *De oratore* III.12.45, imagines Crassus describing his mother-in-law Laelia's speech in these terms: 'equidem cum audio socrum meam Laeliam – facilius enim mulieres incorruptam antiquitatem conservant, quod multorum sermonis expertes ea tenent semper, quae prima didicerunt – sed eam sic audio, ut Plautum mihi aut Naevium videar audire ...': Cicero, *De oratore*, ed. A. S. Wilkins, Oxford, 1892, p. 432.

<sup>15</sup> Ibrahim, 'Standard and Prestige Language', p. 118. See also *ibid.*, pp. 118-19: 'Since any Arabic-speaking society must be as sociolinguistically stratified as any other human society, and since H is not the crucial factor in this stratification, L must be credited with the power behind it ... the conclusion is inevitable that the L varieties of Arabic must have their own hierarchical order of prestige independently of H and any of the latter's features.'

educated speakers within the community; however, it does not directly express socioeconomic functions.<sup>16</sup> It may well be the case that those who master the standard language – the educated class – are also the ruling class; but this fact is not expressed *in* H. We cannot, of course, assume that the medieval language situation in Southern Europe was identical to the one described by Ibrahim for Arabic. The role and status of H in both communities – of Latin, on the one hand, and Classical Arabic, on the other – is, however, similar enough to suggest analogous conclusions. Even in this case, Nykrog's hypothesis squares with the comparison, in that it assumes the existence of a Romance speech of the *élite*, which we can now identify as the prestige variety – or varieties – of L. Nykrog also points out that, if stratification existed at all in Latin – that is, in H – this depended on the level of education of individuals, not directly on their social class: it was based on technical and cultural criteria, and their relative functions, not on socioeconomic ones.

Moving now to the second consequence, all this does not mean that the two broad speech varieties – H and L – are not related to groups of people. On the contrary, as I have argued in the previous chapter, speech varieties are perceived as discrete entities precisely when they are conceived as the attributes of specific groups. But how does this translate into the Latin-vernacular dichotomy? Let us imagine for the moment, without specifying which group or groups we are talking about, that there are two groups within the same society, one represented by Latin and the other by the vernacular. As we have seen, those who mastered Latin learnt it later in life, through formal education. Therefore *all* the members of this group were

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 124: '[H] has a certain degree of prestige and its religious, ideological, and educational values are undeniable, but its social evaluative connotations are much weaker than those of locally prestigious varieties of L. It is these varieties of L, not H, which carry most of the important connotations that matter to most individuals in life such as socioeconomic class.'

formerly part of the vernacular group, and, in a sense, they still were: we have enough evidence to state confidently that even Latin speakers employed a vernacular in ordinary conversation. These bilingual speakers developed a sort of 'dual membership'.<sup>17</sup> Their ability to switch from one variety to the other transcended the mere practical need of being understood and came to represent their loyalty – their choice to affiliate, at different times and in different situations – to one group or the other, and to the values they respectively embodied.<sup>18</sup>

Such dual loyalty is demonstrated by the fact that both varieties were maintained distinct and alive for generations.<sup>19</sup> As a counter-example, immigrants often abandon their native language within one or two generations by teaching their children, at home, the language spoken in their adopted country. None of this seems to have happened with Latin: with the well-known exception of Montaigne, no Renaissance speaker learnt Latin as their first language, and no one was taught it at home. This does not mean that it *could not* have happened – the case of Hebrew in Israel is a counter-example of a language artificially imposed and then successfully employed as a standard variety. The reason why Latin was not learnt as a native language was because its status reflected a specific social and linguistic pattern, not because of some intrinsic linguistic characteristics which prevented it from being learnt naturally. In other words, the fact that Latin was learnt solely as a secondary language was due to its social role, not to its

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<sup>17</sup> See Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society*, pp. 193-4.

<sup>18</sup> J. Irvine, 'When Talk Isn't Cheap', p. 253: 'indexical correlations between realms of linguistic differentiation and social differentiation are not wholly arbitrary. They bear some relationship to a cultural system of ideas about the history of persons and groups. I do not mean that linguistic variation is simply a diagram of some aspects of social differentiation ... but that there is a dialectic relationship mediated by a culture of language (and of society).'

<sup>19</sup> Cf. J.-P. Blom and J. J. Gumperz, 'Social Meaning in Linguistic Structure: Code-Switching in Norway', in *Directions in Sociolinguistics*, ed. J. J. Gumperz and D. Hymes, New York, 1986, pp. 407-34, esp. p. 417.

inherent nature. That said, we still need to understand what kind of identity was expressed through the use of the two speech varieties, how such usage was regulated and its relationship to the actual configuration of society.

## II

I have suggested that H is a cultural construct, one which unfolds through a series of practices which go from the selection of a literary corpus, to the codification of a standard linguistic form, its acquisition in institutional contexts such as formal education and its use in specific cultural domains. These practices are conscious and are determined by historical reasons which have to be analysed. I say 'conscious' to challenge the tendency of many linguists to define linguistic behaviour as an unconscious force, which – according to them – speaks through the individual. We should avoid the temptation of making people fall short in some capacity when it comes to linguistic behaviour. Clearly, languages have to be learnt, and this requires effort and opportunities: learning Latin demanded years of difficult training, which were reserved to a small and privileged sector of society. Furthermore, the reasons which determined the status and nature of Latin are historical and therefore transcend the contingent choices of individual speakers.<sup>20</sup> Yet, at the same time, they need the individual's assent – that is, his or her language choice – to hold sway: Latin as a cultural institution was produced in and through the actions of its speakers; the creation of Latin as a classical language was itself a conscious cultural process. The production and expression of identity through language is a creative endeavour of individuals: language choice is the individual's act of interpretation of his or

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<sup>20</sup> N. Heari, *Sacred Languages, Ordinary People: Dilemmas of Culture and Politics in Egypt*, New York, 2003, p. 16: 'just as we cannot all create our own individual grammars, so we cannot easily alter what a language comes to represent, evoke and signify'.

her role in society, of that of his or her interlocutor(s), of the code itself and what it has come to represent. The study of the medieval language system has, therefore, to start by devising a strategy to interpret individual language choices, their motivations and their cultural consequences.

In his *De regimine principum*, Giles of Rome (d. 1316), maintained that Latin had been invented by philosophers who realized that the vernaculars were unfit for dealing with subjects like natural philosophy, ethics and astronomy.<sup>21</sup> We know now that he was wrong, and we can also offer a tentative explanation for his misconception. We know that Giles himself had been educated in these subjects in Latin; and we are reasonably certain that, in the vernacular he had learnt from his mother, he had never heard words such as 'substance' and 'accident'. In brief, since he – and everyone around him – was accustomed to dealing with these topics in Latin, Giles convinced himself not only that Latin was intrinsically better at handling them, but even that it was impossible to discuss similar issues aptly in the vernacular.

This sort of beliefs is still quite common in our own day, and so, too, is the process which triggers them. Generally speaking, as Fishman pointed out, this is due to the fact that 'certain socioculturally recognized spheres of activity are, at least temporarily, under the sway of one language or variety ... rather than others'.<sup>22</sup> He supposed the existence of some sort of regularity in the connection between speech varieties and such recognized spheres of

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<sup>21</sup> Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum libri III*, ed. F. Hieronymus Samaritanus, Rome, 1607, p. 304 (II.ii.7): 'Videntes philosophi nullum idioma vulgare esse completum et perfectum per quod perfecte exprimere possent naturas rerum et mores hominum et cursus astrorum ... invenerunt sibi quasi proprio idioma, quod dicitur latinum, vel idioma literale, quod constituerunt adeo latum et copiosum ut per ipsum possent omnes suos conceptus sufficienter exprimere.' For 'idioma literale' as a synonym of Latin, see n. 45 below and Ch. 4, n. 20.

<sup>22</sup> J. A., Fishman, 'Domains and the Relationship between Micro- and Macrosociolinguistics', in *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, ed. J. J. Gumperz et al., New York and Oxford, 1972, pp. 435-53 (440).

activity, a regularity observed both at an individual and at a societal level, which would explain the kind of attitude found in Giles of Rome. Fishman then went on to formulate the general assumption that societies tend to develop some more or less flexible rules of linguistic behaviour which supposedly prescribe a regular pattern of language use for specific social situations; and he defined such situations as 'domains of language use'. These domains were based chiefly on the conjunction of three elements: the roles of the interlocutors vis-à-vis each other; the topic discussed; and the situation in which the conversation takes place.<sup>23</sup>

The normative aspect of this concept is fundamental: as I have indicated, the employment of a speech variety in specific domains is governed by rules of social behaviour; and these rules are, at least in theory, familiar to every member of the speech community, which implies that the recognition of domains is the factor governing language choice both at a personal and at a societal level. This does not mean that every speaker necessarily masters all the speech varieties recognized by the community. Indeed, this is almost certainly not the case.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, every member is, in principle, conscious of the norms governing their use. Domains are relevant – that is, they exist – only insofar as they are recognized as such by speakers: they are in a symbiotic relationship with the perception speakers

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 442: '[A domain is] a social nexus which normally brings certain kinds of people together *primarily* for a certain *cluster of purposes*. Furthermore, it brings them together *primarily* for a certain set of *role relations* ... and in a delimited *environment*. Thus, domain is a sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationship between communicators, and locales of communication, in accord with the institutions of a society and the spheres of activity of a speech community, in such a way that *individual behaviour and social patterns can be distinguished from each other and yet related to each other*' (author's italics).

<sup>24</sup> See Gumperz, 'The Speech Community', p. 70: 'not all the individuals within a speech community have equal control of the entire set of superposed variants current there. Control of communicative resources varies sharply with the individual's position within the social system.'



have of their mutual role-relationships, of the topic they intend to discuss and of the institutional places (for example, the home, the school, the church) in which they operate. Therefore, they are related to historical and cultural patterns.

Since domains govern language variation, they have a central role in determining how speakers perceive language varieties – as the case of Giles of Rome exemplifies. In other words, we may say that domains are the battlefields of language wars. As such, they are a valuable tool for the analysis of ideas about language: not just because they allow us to reconstruct the consequences which the use of a certain speech variety for specific domains has on the attitudes of speakers towards that variety, but also because, through a rigorous empirical definition of domains, we can avoid confusion between a discussion about languages and one about the appropriate language choice for a specific – for example, literary – domain. A common mistake encountered in the scholarship examined so far is that of taking the attitude of speakers towards a particular speech domain (in most cases, the one which we would call the ‘literary domain’) for a global evaluation of the speech variety *per se*. In many instances, this may well be a correct interpretation. We should always, however, bear in mind that: a) one speech variety can be employed for different domains; and b) speech varieties are often reified and abstracted from their use. The correct understanding of the significance of employing a speech variety in a specific domain has to start from the comprehension of the entire system to which it belongs.

In his original formulation, Fishman warned against the temptation of considering speech domains either as inherent functional necessities of social systems or as universals,<sup>25</sup> which are two sides of the same coin: it is

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<sup>25</sup> Fishman, ‘Domains’, n. 4, p. 441.

the idea that a society has some fundamental necessities which leads to speculation about supposedly universal functions.<sup>26</sup> In what follows, I shall instead accept that it is possible: a) that not every society necessarily recognizes and performs the same functions; and b) that not every society necessarily expresses specific functions linguistically. This does not, however, exclude the possibility that different societies may show significant similarities – starting from the obvious fact that we all speak, and we all speak in different manners in different contexts. As we have seen, comparing Arabic diglossia with the Latin Middle Ages can be a fruitful method of investigation. But the point I was attempting to make with this example is that a standard as we know it nowadays in most European language systems may well not exist – or not in the same manner – in

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<sup>26</sup> For a convincing critique of functionalism in social theory, see A. Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Berkeley, 1981, p. 18. Fasold, *The Sociolinguistics of Society*, pp. 51-2, explicitly linked functional variation to the idea of formality – or lack thereof – and argued for the universal nature of this criterion: ‘It appears that people have a universal tendency to reflect their perception of the intimacy or formality of a situation in their speech.’ Even if such a universal tendency was proved to exist, it cannot, however, be taken to mean that every speaker perceives it exactly in the same manner and that every society expresses it identically. This tendency to presuppose the existence of sociolinguistic universals can be detected in scholars working in the field of ‘discourse traditions’, which, as we shall see in the next chapter, are a development of the notion of domain applied to the study of medieval written texts. See, e.g., B. Frank-Job, ‘Traditions discursives et élaboration écrite des langues romanes au Moyen Âge’, *Aemilianense*, 2, 2010, pp. 13-36 (17): ‘Au niveau universel du langage, nous distinguons ... des types fondamentaux de conditions communicatives qui président au choix des techniques et stratégies linguistiques dans les actes communicatifs. Parmi ces paramètres on trouve par exemple le caractère plus ou moins officiel de l’énonciation, le degré de familiarité entre les participants à la communication ou encore le degré d’engagement émotionnel des participants.’ Parameters of this kind present two types of problem. On the one hand, is the ‘official character’ of an utterance really a universal type? Is there a transcendental category of ‘official’ ingrained in humans qua humans? On the other hand, how can we possibly *measure* the degree of ‘familiarity’ or ‘emotional engagement’ between interlocutors – and, in particular, between dead interlocutors? The only objective criterion we are left with is linguistic variation, so that what we sought to explain (*explanandum*) ends up turning into the explanation (*explanans*).

different systems. A further example is provided by the relative status of literary languages: as Ernst Curtius pointed out, the prominent role assumed by what we call 'literature' and its connection to education in ancient Greece – which he believed we inherited – 'could quite well have been otherwise'.<sup>27</sup> Language behaviour depends on cultural patterns: to understand it properly, we need to describe it empirically and try to figure out how it has come into historical existence.

### III

Some deductions can be drawn from a rather unusual piece of evidence. At the beginning of chapter 14 of Thomas Aquinas's commentary on Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he discusses the gift of tongues (in the Greek original, λαλεῖν γλώσσαις; translated in the Vulgate as *linguis loqui*).<sup>28</sup> Paul was reproaching the Corinthians for their abuse of this gift, which, in his opinion, was undermining the unity of the church:

[1) Follow after charity, be zealous for spiritual gifts; but rather that you may prophesy. 2) For he that speaketh in a tongue, speaketh not

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<sup>27</sup> E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, transl. W. J. Trask, London, 1979, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> The commentary has a complicated editorial history. It was probably originally completed in Rome, around 1259-65 or 1265-8. Later in his life, in Paris (1271-2) or in Naples (1272-3), Thomas seems to have gone back to it, but he did not finish the revision, which was left incomplete (it probably reached only to 1 Corinthians 10); moreover, an entire portion (1 Cor. 7.15-10.33) went missing and was subsequently replaced in the manuscript tradition by a commentary written by Peter of Tarentaise. Two redactions have survived: an *expositio* of 1 Corinthians 1.1-7.14, which probably reflects Thomas's later revision; and a *reportatio* of the commentary on 1 Corinthians 11.1-2, which seems to belong to an earlier stage in his career. See D. A. Keating, 'Aquinas on 1 and 2 Corinthians: The Sacraments and their Ministers', in *Aquinas on Scripture: An Introduction to his Biblical Commentaries*, ed. T. G. Weinandy et al., pp. 127-48 (see esp. pp. 127-8 and n. 1, for bibliography on the textual problems). The difference between *reportatio* and *expositio* is discussed by B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, Notre Dame, 1964, pp. 200-8.

unto men, but unto God: for no man heareth. Yet by the Spirit he speaketh mysteries. 3) But he that prophesieth, speaketh to men unto edification, and exhortation, and comfort. 4) He that speaketh in a tongue, edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth, edifieth the church. 5) And I would have you all to speak with tongues, but rather to prophesy. For greater is he that prophesieth, than he that speaketh with tongues: unless perhaps he interpret, that the church may receive edification.

[1) Sectamini caritatem, aemulamini spiritualia: magis autem ut prophetetis. 2) Qui enim loquitur lingua, non hominibus loquitur, sed Deo: nemo enim audit. Spiritu autem loquitur mysteria. 3) Nam qui prophetat, hominibus loquitur ad aedificationem, et exhortationem, et consolationem. 4) Qui loquitur lingua, semetipsum aedificat: qui autem prophetat, ecclesiam Dei aedificat. 5) Volo autem omnes vos loqui linguis: magis autem prophetare. Nam major est qui prophetat, quam qui loquitur linguis; nisi forte interpretetur ut ecclesia aedificationem accipiat.]<sup>29</sup>

Commentators are not agreed on the interpretation of this passage, which is usually associated with the miracle of the Pentecost, as recounted by Luke in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>30</sup> The bone of contention is whether the

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<sup>29</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:1-5. The translation is from *The Holy Bible: Translated from the Latin Vulgate, diligently compared with the Hebrew, Greek, and other editions in divers languages. The Old Testament first published by the English College at Douay, A.D. 1609, and the New Testament first published by the English College at Rheims, A.D.: 1582*, New York, 1914, p. 198. I use the Douai English version because it is a translation of the Vulgate, the text of the Bible read by Thomas Aquinas.

<sup>30</sup> Acts, 2:4-8: 'Et repleti sunt omnes Spiritu Sancto, et coeperunt loqui aliis linguis, prout spiritus sanctus dabat eloqui illis. Erant autem in Hierusalem habitantes Iudaei viri religiosi ex omni natione qua sub coelo sunt. Facta autem hac voce, convenit multitudo et mente confusa est quoniam audiebat unusquisque lingua

tongues received as a gift are human languages or incomprehensible ‘spiritual’ tongues. Most modern scholars regard the episodes in Acts and in Corinthians as referring to two different phenomena. In Acts, they maintain, the gift of tongues is an example of *xenoglossia*, the ability to master human languages previously unknown. In the Pauline passage, however, *loqui linguis* seems to stand for ‘speaking in tongues’, or *glossolalia*, when certain people, in religious ecstasy, start speaking in unintelligible languages.<sup>31</sup> Early Christian interpreters, however, for the most part appear to have understood both episodes as referring to human languages.<sup>32</sup> It is not entirely clear whether Thomas agreed with this interpretation. He explains the expression *loqui linguis* in relation to Pentecost, which he clearly regards as involving the miraculous ability to speak the language of one’s listeners.<sup>33</sup> Later on, however, he points out that what Paul had in mind were

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sua. Illos loquentes stupebant autem omnes, et mirabantur dicentes: “nonne omnes ecce isti qui loquuntur Galilaei sunt et quomodo nos audivimus unusquisque lingua nostra in qua nati sumus?””. See also Acts, 2:9-21, 10: 44-6 and 19:6.

<sup>31</sup> See C. F. Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues: Women’s Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages*, University Park PA, 2010, pp. 6-9. See also B. Zerhusen, ‘The Problem Tongues in 1 Cor 14: A Reexamination’, *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 27, 1997, pp. 139-52. The ‘gift of tongues’ is still practised in Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. See Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues*, pp. 5-6. The first attempt to study the phenomenon scientifically was C. Richet, ‘Xenoglossie: L’Écriture automatique en langues étrangères’, *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 19, 1905-1907, pp. 162-94.

<sup>32</sup> See E. Glenn Hinson, ‘The Significance of Glossolalia in the History of Christianity’, in *Speaking in Tongues: A Guide to Research in Glossolalia*, ed. W. E. Mills, Grand Rapids, 1986, pp. 181-203. See also E. Lombard, *De la glossolalie chez les premiers Chrétiens et des phénomènes similaires*, Paris, 1910.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Super I ad Corinthios*, 14. 1, § 814: ‘Circa secundum sciendum est, quod quia in Ecclesia primitiva pauci erant quibus imminebat fidem Christi praedicare per mundum, ideo dominus, ut commodius et pluribus verbum Dei annuntiarent, dedit eis donum linguarum, quibus omnibus praedicarent. Non quod una lingua loquentes ab omnibus intelligerentur, ut quidam dicunt, sed, ad litteram, quod linguis diversarum gentium, imo omnium loquerentur. Unde dicit apostolus “gratias ago Deo, quod omnium vestrum lingua loquor”. Et Act. II, 4 dicitur: “loquebantur variis linguis”, et cetera. Et hoc donum multi adepti sunt a Deo in Ecclesia primitiva. Corinthii autem, quia curiosi erant, ideo libentius volebant illud donum, quam donum prophetiae.’

incomprehensible utterances – incomprehensible even to the speaker – pronounced in the sway of mystical fervour, the meaning of which God alone can interpret.<sup>34</sup> Thomas’s understanding of speaking in tongues seems to entail chiefly speaking unintelligibly in mysteries, whether or not they actually coincided with some identifiable language. This is why, he argues, following Paul, that speaking in tongues profits only the speaker in his communion with God, and not the community: the inability to understand a speaker’s utterances prevents communication between believers and is therefore harmful to the unity of the church. But even on an individual level, it seems preferable to understand what one is saying in prayers:

First, in private prayer, if someone ignorant of Latin (*idiota*), makes his prayer, saying a Psalm or the ‘Our Father’, and does not understand what he is saying, he is praying in tongues, and it does not matter whether he is reciting words suggested to him by the Holy Ghost or the words of others; and if another person prays and understands what he is saying, he indeed prays and prophesies. It is evident that a person who prays and understands gains more than one who merely prays in tongues – that is, who does not understand what he is saying.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.: ‘Quod ergo dicitur hic loqui lingua, vult apostolus intelligi lingua ignota, et non explanata, sicut si lingua Theutonica loquatur quis alicui Gallico, et non exponat, hic loquitur lingua. Vel etiam si loquatur visiones tantum, et non exponat, loquitur lingua. Unde omnis locutio non intellecta, nec explanata, quaecumque sit illa, est proprie loqui lingua.’ And below: ‘Et hoc est quod dicit “qui loquitur lingua”, scilicet ignota, “non loquitur hominibus”, id est, ad intellectum hominum, “sed Deo”, id est, ad honorem Dei tantum. Vel “Deo”, quia ipse Deus solus intelligit.’ So far, what Thomas has in mind are clearly human languages. Then, however, he specifies: ‘aliquando aliqui moventur a spiritu sancto loqui aliquid mysticum, quod ipsi non intelligunt; unde isti habent donum linguarum’.

[Et primo in oratione privata, dicens, quod si sit aliquis idiota, qui faciat orationem suam, dicens *Psalmum*, vel *Pater Noster*, et non intelligat ea quae dicit, iste orat lingua, et non refert utrum oret verbis sibi a spiritu sancto concessis, sive verbis aliorum; et si sit alius qui orat, et intelligit quae dicit, hic quidem orat et prophetat. Constat quod plus lucratur qui orat et intelligit, quam qui tantum lingua orat, qui scilicet non intelligit quae dicit.].<sup>35</sup>

Thomas's solution is that, even if someone cannot follow the meaning of his own prayers, his intention will still be rewarded.<sup>36</sup> The proof he gives to support this view displays not only ingenuity but also a realistic awareness of the limited attention span of the faithful: 'because otherwise many prayers would be without reward, since one can hardly say the "Our Father" without one's mind wandering to other things.'<sup>37</sup>

This, however, is not the end of the story. Thomas does not seem to have been as troubled by the problem as Paul and the converts of Corinth were – probably because he had never observed the phenomenon of speaking in tongues. For him, the question of speaking and understanding languages in church involved something different from the apparent gibberish of aspiring mystics; and this is because he had different concerns. The key word in the passage above is *idiota*, which indicates someone who,

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 3, § 837. See 1 Corinthians 14:13-5: 'Et ideo qui loquitur lingua, oret ut interpretetur. Nam si orem lingua, spiritus meus orat, mens autem mea sine fructu est. Quid ergo est? Orabo spiritu, orabo et mente: psallam spiritu, psallam et mente.'

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., § 839: 'Sed numquid quaecumque quis orat, et non intelligit quae dicit, sit sine fructu orationis? Dicendum quod duplex est fructus orationis. Unus fructus est meritum quod homini provenit; alius fructus est spiritualis consolatio et devotio concepta ex oratione. Et quantum ad fructum devotionis spiritualis privatur qui non attendit ad ea quae orat, seu non intelligit; sed quantum ad fructum meriti, non est dicendum quod privetur.'

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.: 'quia sic multae orationes essent sine merito, cum vix unum *Pater Noster* potest homo dicere, quin mens ad alia feratur.'

pronouncing the 'Our Father', does not understand its meaning. A borrowing from the original Greek, *idiota* in the Vulgate Latin of Paul's letter, refers to an outsider, someone who is uninitiated.<sup>38</sup> Thomas, however, interprets it in a very technical sense, as referring to language competence: '*Idiota* properly speaking is a person who knows only the language in which he is born.'<sup>39</sup> This meaning of *idiota* had become current in medieval Latin;<sup>40</sup> and it seemed to fit perfectly with the context of Paul's letter. Therefore, commenting on the formulas used in blessings, Thomas asks:

But why are blessings not given in the vernacular, so that they might be understood by the people, so that they conform better with them? It has to be said that perhaps this was the case in the primitive church; but after the faithful have been instructed, and know what they hear in the common office, blessings take place in Latin.

[Sed quare non dantur benedictiones in vulgari, ut intelligantur a populo, et conforment se magis eis? Dicendum est quod hoc forte fuit

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<sup>38</sup> See, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, III, Grand Rapids, 1965, p. 217.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Ad Corinthios*, 14.3, § 843: '*Idiota* proprie dicitur qui scit tantum linguam in qua natus est.' Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In octo libri Politicorum Aristotelis expositio*, ed. R. M. Spiazzi, Turin, 1966, p. 8 (I.22): 'Quibusdam autem videtur illos barbaros dici, qui non habent literalem locutionem in suo vulgari idiomate. Unde et Beda dicitur in linguam Anglicam liberales artes transtulisse, ne Anglici barbari reputarentur.' He is perhaps referring to the Venerable Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, in *Opera historica*, ed. C. Plummer, 2 vols, Oxford, 1946, p. 408: 'Omnes, qui latinam linguam lectionis usu didicerunt, etiam haec optime didicisse certissimum est; set idiotas, hoc est eos, qui propriae tantum linguae notitiam habent, haec ipsa sua lingua discere ac sedulo decantare facito ... . Propter quod et ipse multis saepe sacerdotibus idiotis haec utraque, et symbolum videlicet et dominicam orationem, in linguam Anglorum translatam optuli.'

<sup>40</sup> See Stock, *The Implications of Literacy*, pp. 28-30.



in Ecclesia primitiva, sed postquam fideles instructi sunt et sciunt quae audiunt in communi officio, fiunt benedictiones in Latino.]<sup>41</sup>

Similar considerations apply to the ritual of the mass:

It is the same thing to speak in tongues and to speak Latin as far as those ignorant of Latin are concerned; and since everyone speaks Latin in church, because everything there is said in Latin, it seems that this is equally foolish. The answer to this must be that it was foolish in the primitive church, because the faithful were unused to the ecclesiastical rite, so that they did not know what was happening in it, nor was it explained to them. Now, instead, everyone is instructed; so even if everything is said in Latin, they nevertheless know what happens in church.

[Idem est loqui linguis et loqui litteraliter quantum ad idiotas; cum ergo omnes loquantur litteraliter in Ecclesia, quia omnia dicuntur in Latino, videtur quod similiter sit insania. Dicendum est ad hoc, quod ideo erat insania in primitiva Ecclesia, quia erant rudes in ritu ecclesiastico, unde nesciebant quae fiebant ibi, nisi exponeretur eis. Modo vero omnes sunt instructi; unde licet in Latino omnia dicantur, sciunt tamen illud quod fit in Ecclesia.]<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Ad Corinthios*, 14.3, § 845. This the Pauline passage: 1 Corinthians 14:16-7: 'Ceterum si benedixeris spiritu, qui supplet locum idiotae, quomodo dicit: Amen, super tuam benedictionem? Quoniam quid dicas, nescit. Nam tu quidem bene gratia agis, sed alter non aedificatur.'

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, § 861. This the Pauline passage: 1 Cor. 14:21-3: 'In lege scriptum est: Quoniam in aliis linguis et labiis aliis loquar populo huic: et nec sic exaudient me, dicit Dominus. Itaque linguae in signum sunt non fidelibus, sed infidelibus: prophetiae autem non infidelibus, sed fidelibus. Si ergo conveniat universa ecclesia in unum, et omnes linguis loquantur, intrent autem idiotae, aut infideles: nonne dicent quod insanitis?'

This subtle misinterpretation of the Pauline text is due, in the first place, to the fact that in Thomas's time – as he makes clear – there was no one who, properly speaking, was uninitiated.<sup>43</sup> Secondly, the words of Paul's letter reminded Thomas of a present-day problem concerning the accessibility of ritual practices to a flock largely ignorant of Latin. The logic of the text he was commenting on led him to consider this problem; but it is also possible that Thomas was putting forward his personal view of an issue which current circumstances had made inescapable.

The problem stemmed from two parallel sets of considerations, pastoral and linguistic. The edification of the church was based, as Paul had written, on understanding the liturgy; but the liturgy was in Latin, a language which the majority of believers did not understand. Thomas seems to have had a clear idea of an 'historical language', defined according to the criterion of mutual intelligibility and embracing Latin, German and French.<sup>44</sup> The status of what he calls 'the vernacular' is admittedly more dubious – especially since Thomas provides no further specification. The definition, however, of the term *idiota* ('Idiota properly speaking is a person who knows

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<sup>43</sup> St. Augustine had already noticed that, by his day, the gift of tongues had deserted human beings. This, he argued, was because the church itself now possessed this gift: 'Why is it that no man speaks in the tongues of all nations? Because the Church itself now speaks in the tongues of all nations.' (quoted by Cooper-Rompato, *The Gift of Tongues*, n. 27 p. 9). Similarly, a medicine-man, interrogated by Carl Jung about his prophetic dreams, confessed that 'he no longer had any dreams, for they [the medicine-man's tribe] had the District Commissioner now instead ... he said "The D.C. knows everything about wars and diseases, and about where we have to go to live"' (quoted by E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkley, 1951, pp. 121-2, n. 4). Sometimes the pragmatism of portents can be quite striking.

<sup>44</sup> German is mentioned explicitly, while French can be logically deduced from the context: 'Quod ergo dicitur hic loqui lingua, vult apostolus intelligi lingua ignota, et non explanata, sicut si lingua Theutonica loquatur quis alicui Gallico, et non exponat, hic loquitur lingua'.

only the *language* in which he is born', my emphasis), allows us to be confident that any vernacular, in his eyes, was a language in its own right.

We have here a clear example of how speech domains can be deduced from the evidence. In line with the definition of Fishman, the domain in question – which we may broadly term the 'religious domain' – is clearly recognizable as a conjunction of: 1) institutional space: the church; 2) role relationship: priest-believers; and 3) topic: liturgical discourse. These passages also indicate the centrality of domains, not just for individual language choices, but also for more general societal questions of language maintenance and shifts. Thomas is not discussing whether Latin is better than the vernacular, but whether *in the religious domain* it is better to *use* Latin or the vernacular. There were three possible solutions to this problem: a) to teach Latin to the multitude; b) to use the vernacular in the religious domain; and c) to keep things as they were.

The first option did not even cross his mind. It should be borne in mind that knowledge of Latin was linked to formal education. The role of Latin has been described as 'serving both as an élite lingua franca and as something of a cryptolect among the educated classes'.<sup>45</sup> Both parts of this description are correct. As I have said in the previous chapter, intelligibility has usually proven to be an imprecise criterion for objectively measuring language distance. This is because it is often determined by sociolinguistic – rather than purely linguistic – motives.<sup>46</sup> Thomas's stance allows us to look at this situation from a different angle: intelligibility – or lack thereof – may

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<sup>45</sup> C. J. Pountain, 'Latin and the Structure of Written Romance', in *The Cambridge History of the Romance Languages, I: Structures*, ed. M. Maiden, J. C. Smith and A. Ledgeway, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 606-59 (611). Giles of Rome used this cryptolectic feature as an argument to convince rulers to learn Latin: see Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, p. 310 (II.ii.8): 'Imo si nunquam grammatica deserviret negocio morali, decet Reges et Principes scire idioma literale, ut possint secreta sua alii scribere et legere absque aliorum scitu.'

<sup>46</sup> Gumperz, 'The Speech Community', p. 71.

be an ideological goal, and the practical configuration of language use can be a means to achieve it. In this sense, the passages from Thomas which I have quoted bear witness to a social structure where the distribution of linguistic resources is not merely uneven, but deliberately preserved as such.<sup>47</sup> Teaching Latin to the multitude would have meant questioning the very foundations of this structure, and Thomas was certainly not willing to go that far. He was no revolutionary, and his typically conciliatory attitude clearly emerges from this discussion. Nevertheless, his willingness to consider the possibility of making the liturgy somehow accessible to all believers indicates that he at least acknowledged that there was a problem. After all, he was a Dominican – a member of a mendicant order which regarded preaching and vanquishing heresy as its main tasks.

So we come to the second option, that of using the vernacular in the religious domain. In contemplating this solution, Thomas had probably taken inspiration not only from the Pauline text, but also from his observation that, in this period, the vernaculars were gaining ground in other domains, while at the same time the clergy was gradually losing its monopoly on Latin.<sup>48</sup> I shall discuss this question, and its broad social

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 68: commenting on the ‘classical administrative and liturgical languages’ such as Latin, Sanskrit and Arabic, Gumperz writes: ‘knowledge of these languages in the traditional societies where they are used is limited to relatively small elites, who tend to maintain control of their linguistic skills in somewhat the same way that craft guilds strive for exclusive control of their craft skills’.

<sup>48</sup> For the traditional association of the clergy (i.e., those ordained for religious duties) with Latin, see M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 226-7: ‘The axiom that laymen are illiterate and its converse [i.e. that clerics are literate] had originated by combining two distinct antitheses: *clericus: laicus* | *litteratus: illitteratus*. The latter antithesis derived from classical Latin, where *litteratus* meant “literate” in something like its modern sense and also ... described a person with *scientia litterarum* ... . The former antithesis derived from the Greek *kleros*, meaning a “selection by lot” and hence subsequently the “elect” of God in terms of Christian salvation, whereas *laos* meant the “people” or crowd. Gradually in the process of Christian conversion those who were specially consecrated to the service of God, the *clerici* or “clergy”, became distinct from the

implications, at length in the next chapters. Here I shall limit myself to pointing out that what I have called the religious domain has a formidable *vis inertiae* – due both to its ritual use and to the attitude of speakers, who tend not to distinguish the domain itself from the speech variety traditionally associated with it. The totemization, as Le Page and Tabouret-Keller would call it,<sup>49</sup> of Latin as the language of the church could not be disregarded simply because some people did not understand the ‘Our Father’.

There was, however, an even stronger force at work, as we can see in the third option, the one which Thomas actually chose. He insisted that everyone, even those who did not understand Latin, must use it while praying during the mass and that they must also receive their blessings in Latin. Versteegh has pointed out that ‘the speech of the illiterates themselves was regarded by almost everybody as totally irrelevant’.<sup>50</sup> He meant that

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mass of the people, the *laici* or “laity” ... . In the half millennium 500-1000 AD the reduction in the number of learned men in the west coincided with the expansion of Christianity by the conversion of the barbarians. As a consequence *clerici* began to be associated with *litterati*, although the two concepts had originally nothing in common. This association of ideas reflected the fact that outside the Mediterranean area nearly all Latinists were churchmen and most were monks.’

<sup>49</sup> Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, *Acts of Identity*, pp. 235-6.

<sup>50</sup> Versteegh, ‘The Status of the Standard Language’, p. 69. Cf. M. Alinei, ‘Dialetto: un concetto rinascimentale fiorentino. Storia e analisi’, *Quaderni di semantica*, 2, 1981, pp. 147-173 (163): ‘Il fatto è che la *conditio sine qua non* per qualunque osservazione sociolinguistica – sia pure elementare – è che il fenomeno sia “sociale”. Ora, è proprio questo che mancava nelle società antiche, schiavistiche e feudali: gli schiavi non erano un fenomeno “sociale”. Non potevano esserlo perché non erano “uomini”. Per questo, la dialettologia come tale non può che cominciare con l’inizio della borghesia, cioè della democrazia borghese, quando tutti gli “individui” vengono considerati “eguali” in principio, ma non abbastanza eguali ancora per eliminare differenze di classe.’ This is not the place to discuss ancient society; however, it is worth pointing out that this interpretation is too simplistic for at least one reason: slavery in antiquity was not, as Bernard Williams put it, a ‘necessary identity’ (see B. Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, Berkeley California, 1993, pp. 103-29): anyone could *become* a slave, and I do not think that the language of someone who suddenly fell into this condition automatically lost its social value – we know that for Greek slaves in Rome, it certainly did not.

grammarians did not consider the speech of the illiterate as a worthy object of study, which is doubtless true. Yet Thomas insists that in certain circumstances the illiterate must speak in a specific way, that is, in Latin. Indeed, everyone had to do so. This was because in the medieval Christian *Weltanschauung* the most important event was the celebration of the sacrifice of Christ, and everyone had to participate in it. In other words, everyone had to speak Latin because they were Christians.

Although, as I have said above, Latin was both an élite lingua franca and a cryptolect of the educated class, these descriptions, by focusing solely on communication, do not take into account another fundamental feature of Latin: it was the language of Christendom, and, in this sense, it was the language of everyone.<sup>51</sup> How could such a view coexist with a linguistic reality in which Latin competence was limited to an extremely narrow segment of society? We need to remember that Latin was neither a sociolect nor a native language: it was not the essence of any individual nor an accident of anyone's birth. Since an act of faith was enough to be admitted into the Christian community, no more than minimal competence in Latin was demanded in order to belong to it. In this context, mastering Latin was not perceived as an essential attribute of a person, but rather as a skill indicating the division of religious labour within the society: as pointed out by Lester Little, 'the notion of the religious life was technical, limited to those special people – set apart from anyone else – who fulfilled the

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<sup>51</sup> Obviously this was the result of historical circumstances; but such circumstances, and the historical process which determined them, were not much more of a concern to Thomas than they were to an illiterate peasant who had to recite the 'Our Father' in Latin. Thomas does not seem to have any philological interest in the linguistic context of the primitive church: no mention is made of the fact that they probably spoke Greek. He considers Paul's letters as an eternal pattern (exemplary or prescriptive) and his own reality as the only concrete context to which this pattern is to be applied.

religious function for all society'.<sup>52</sup> This division was structured along a vertical continuum, hierarchically graded according to degrees of religious insight.<sup>53</sup> So, too, was the language of the Christian community: a few mastered it as a technical function, but no one was, in principle, excluded from it.

This allows us also to see the relationship between Latin and the vernacular in a different light. The conception of ecclesiastical history developed by Christianity may serve as a model. Arnaldo Momigliano has written that, within this tradition, 'the notion of Universal Church informed the telling of local events. Indeed', he continued, 'the notion of a Universal Church implies a paradox. Being universal, Church history tended to embrace all the events of mankind and was therefore permanently in danger of losing its distinctive character.'<sup>54</sup> It was precisely this paradoxical dialectic between local and universal which was articulated by the dichotomy between Latin and the vernacular. We have seen that the principle of language loyalty implied the survival of the vernacular, even among those who learnt Latin and became bilingual. Here, instead, we have a glimpse of the same principle applied to the Latin side. Latin did not survive simply because a certain class of individuals wanted to preserve its monopoly of the language – if that had been their intention, they would have turned it into a native language. Nor did it survive merely because it became synonymous with the religious domain – the example of Thomas Aquinas shows that it was possible to contemplate a replacement language in this domain. Everyone considered it his or her duty as a Christian to observe specific patterns of language behaviour in specific circumstances. Full technical

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<sup>52</sup> L. K. Little, 'Pride Goes Before Avarice: Social Change and the Vices in Latin Christendom', *The American Historical Review*, 76, 1971, pp. 16-49 (39).

<sup>53</sup> See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 12-15.

<sup>54</sup> A. Momigliano, *The Classical Foundations of Modern Historiography*, Berkeley, 1990, p. 149.

knowledge, control and ultimately preservation of the language itself was entrusted to a small portion of society – the *clerici* or *litterati*; nevertheless, every Christian was required to adhere to a minimum standard of language behaviour. Latin survived because it represented the linguistic community to which everyone belonged, whatever their level of proficiency.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> When I visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, in order to gain access to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, I was asked by a guard to recite the first Sura of the Koran – obviously in Classical Arabic. Had I known it, I would have been allowed to enter the mosque. As this example illustrates, the requirements for membership of a linguistic community do not necessarily include having the capacity to converse in the language in question; instead, it is enough to be able to recite those phrases (whether prayers or verses of the Koran) which the community has designated as signs of membership.



## Chapter 4. The Prehistory of Standardization

Mais l'embarras était d'autant plus grand, qu'il y avait plus d'arbitraire. Et combien ne devait-il pas y en avoir? La nature ne nous offre que des choses particulières, infinies en nombre, et sans aucune division fixe et déterminée. Tout s'y succède par des nuances insensibles. Et sur cette mer d'objets qui nous environnent, s'il en paraît quelques-uns, comme des pointes de rochers qui semblent percer la surface et dominer les autres, ils ne doivent cet avantage qu'à des systèmes particuliers, qu'à des conventions vagues, et qu'à certains événements étrangers à l'arrangement physique des êtres, et aux vraies institutions de la philosophie.

Denis Diderot, *Prospectus de l'Encyclopédie*

### I

Most historians of Italian culture agree that the period stretching from the first decade of the fourteenth century to the early decades of the fifteenth was characterized by two linguistic developments: the progressive emancipation of the vernaculars and the growing practice of imitating classical Latin – which, as far as language was concerned, was the central aim of the movement traditionally called humanism. The two processes are parallel and, at the same time, in conflict: while the vernacular seemed to hold sway in the early Trecento, its fortune began to decline in the following years, while humanist Latin came to dominate Italian learning in the fifteenth century. It is not my intention here to write a history of the Italian language nor to study the origins and development of Renaissance humanism. My aim instead is to ask two questions: 1) whether such linguistic changes were linked to some – possibly new – ideas concerning the nature of languages and language variation; and 2) whether these events

determined some significant changes in the ideas and attitudes of Italians at the time towards languages.

To answer these questions, we obviously need to look carefully at the events themselves, although from a particular angle, one which is different from the perspective of literary and cultural historians. First of all, the picture I have just presented is incomplete: the developments I described are undeniable, but the perspective is élitist – or, as sociolinguists would say, limited to ‘changes from above’. If, however, these developments are to be considered as significant expressions of a society’s language use, it is necessary to determine what their relationship is to the overall linguistic practices of that society: in other words, whether and, if so, how they can be interpreted as modifications in the structure of the medieval language system. In the previous chapter I sketched a description of this system by appealing to the model which Charles Ferguson termed ‘diglossia’. Referring to his earlier account, Ferguson wrote: ‘In the 1959 article, I talked about Arabic “having diglossia”, almost as though diglossia were a special talent or a disease or some other unusual property of a language. But in what sense does a language have this characteristic? It is clear that I was not describing languages, but rather linguistic communities of some sort.’<sup>1</sup> This is the question which I now want to address: do the changes I mentioned above indicate a modification in the language behaviour of medieval Italian society? And if so, as seems to be the case, does this mean that diglossia was beginning to break down in the fourteenth century and giving rise to a different language system?

A posthumous perspective might be a good start: if we look around us, at Europe nowadays, Latin – where it still exists – is exclusively a scholarly subject, and the national languages spoken and written by

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson, ‘Diglossia Revisited’, p. 54.

Europeans are generally, in one way or another, the heirs of medieval vernaculars. Rather than diglossia, the best model to describe these language systems is the one which in the previous chapter I called ‘standard-with-dialects’<sup>2</sup> and which is probably a good thread to follow: if contemporary standard languages are the heirs of medieval vernaculars, we must suppose that what we need to describe is the process by which some vernaculars, which were Low varieties in the medieval diglossic system, became standard languages – a process linguists call standardization. Most linguists, indeed, share the view that the later Middle Ages, at least in Italy, should be considered an early stage in the process of standardization of the language we now call Italian.<sup>3</sup>

It is this process which I shall discuss in the present chapter. I must, however, issue a warning: our privileged position as posthumous observers

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to say, however, that the contemporary situation is thoroughly stable and non-conflictual. On the one hand, several so-called dialects or minority languages are still fighting to achieve language status, e.g., Occitan and Catalan. For some observations on these issues in the European context, see P. Trudgill, ‘Ausbau Sociolinguistics and the Perception of Language Status in Contemporary Europe’, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 22, 1992, pp. 167-77. For the American case, with specific reference to Ebonics, see R. W. Fasold, ‘Making Languages’, *Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism*, ed. J. Cohen et al., Somerville MA, 2005, pp. 697-702. On the other hand, the increasing prestige of English in many non-English speaking countries – that is, countries where English is not the first language – bears a striking resemblance to the situation I have described as diglossia. An interesting discussion of this phenomenon in contemporary Japan is M. Mizumura, *Nihongo ga Horobiru Toki: Eigo Seiki no Nakade*, Tokyo, 2008, transl. *The Fall of Language in the Age of English*, New York, 2015; on p. ix, it is explained that the original title literally means: ‘When the Japanese language falls: in the age of English’, which suggests a serious argument against ‘progressivist’ and evolutionary theories of language change: standardization, in other words, might be reversible.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Ž. Muljačić, ‘Standardization in Romance’, in *Bilingualism and Linguistic Conflict in Romance*, ed. R. Posner et al., Berlin-New York, 1993, pp. 77-116. See also J. E. Joseph, *Eloquence and Power. The Rise of Language Standards and Standard Languages*, London, 1987; and E. Haugen, ‘The Implementation of Corpus Planning: Theory and Practice’, in *Progress in Language Planning: International Perspectives*, ed. J. Cobarrubias et al., Berlin, New York and Amsterdam, 1983, pp. 269-89.

may engender a sort of teleological perspective, one which, by imposing a plot on language history, privileges the victorious variety – Florentine – over the defeated ones – Latin and other Italian vernaculars. This is particularly relevant for the language historically associated with the humanist movement – classical Latin: was humanism a diglossic backlash and merely a temporary diversion from the secure path which led from Florentine to Italian? Or were the two phenomena – the imitation of classical Latin and the standardization of Florentine – different expressions of the same tendency? If it is true that the period we are studying marks a decisive step in the progressive breakdown of diglossia towards the formation of a standard system, a framework for the study of standardization can provide us with a method to examine the changes we need to explain and to understand not only the motivations behind them but also how these were interpreted and rationalized by the historical actors in question.

## II

The formula ‘standard-with-dialects’ denotes a model of a speech community’s linguistic behaviour and, as such, it is a social construction. It outlines the way in which the members of the community practise and interpret their language choices and the varieties they employ to communicate with each other. As the name suggests, the linguistic landscape it denotes is articulated by a specific relationship between speech varieties with different statuses, one of which – the standard – is conceived as an autonomous, independent entity, while the other varieties, often regardless of their empirical linguistic affinity with the standard, are in a relation of subordinate dependence to it: they are ‘dialects of’ the

superposed language to which they 'belong'.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, the inequality of the hierarchical status of language and dialects rests on the fact that the standard variety is the one employed in the most prestigious domains and mostly used by the hegemonic social group(s) within the speech community. This, as we shall see, is a central factor in the process of standardization.

What we need to establish is how and why, historically, a society develops its linguistic behaviour in the specific manner which we call standardization. The relationship between standard and dialects which I have just described is the result of a historical process, thanks to which one variety reaches the status of a standard language – or, in common parlance, of language *tout court*. Heinz Kloss, in order to designate those varieties which have been promoted to the rank of language, coined the term *Ausbau* – or 'language by development'.<sup>5</sup> The classic model of standardization was moved forward in 1968 by Einar Haugen.<sup>6</sup> He identified four main criteria to describe the process and represented them using the following scheme:

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<sup>4</sup> See Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation', p. 923: "'Language" as the superordinate term can be used without reference to dialects, but "dialect" is meaningless unless it is implied that there are other dialects and a language to which they can be said to "belong".' See also Trudgill, 'Ausbau Sociolinguistics', p. 169: 'A reasonable definition of an *Ausbau* language is thus that it consists of an autonomous standard variety together with all the nonstandard varieties from the dialect continuum which are heteronomous with respect to it.' *Ausbau* is a term introduced by Heinz Kloss to define standard varieties: see n. 5 below.

<sup>5</sup> H. Kloss, "'Abstand Languages" and "Ausbau Languages"', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 9.7, 1967, pp. 29-41: 'The term *Ausbausprache* may be defined as "language by development". Languages belonging to this category are recognized as such because they have been shaped or reshaped, molded or remolded ... in order to become a standardized tool of literary expression.' On the last sentence, cf. Fasold, 'Making Languages', pp. 697-8: 'My own view is that elaboration for purposes of literary expression and the like is too strong a criterion. A language is a language if it has been so **socially constructed**. If there is a social group that believes and acts as if a linguistic system is a language then it is one' (author's emphasis).

<sup>6</sup> Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation'.

	<i>Form</i>	<i>Function</i>
<i>Society</i>	Selection	Acceptance
<i>Language</i>	Codification	Elaboration

Here ‘form’ indicates the structural (that is, purely linguistic) characteristics of a speech variety and ‘function’ the social uses – or domains – in which it is employed. The four conditions a linguistic variety has to fulfil in order to aspire to the standard status are:

1. Its structure, or form, has to be codified – that is, organized into a series of prescriptive norms.
2. This codification has to be based on the selection of a model form from which the norm can be derived. The choice can sometimes be problematic, since giving preference to one variety means privileging the group of people who use it. Since the variety can be diatopic (that is, spoken in a particular geographical region) or diastratic (that is, linked to the social status of the group who uses it), the choice of a given variety can be challenged: on the one hand, by other social groups, and, on the other, by speakers living in other geographical regions.<sup>7</sup>
3. It must have achieved a significant degree of elaboration. This refers to the range of domains for which a language is used. We may assume that the number and nature of domains for which a linguistic variety is employed, together with the power of the group who promotes it, determine its prestige.
4. The model must be accepted by the community. This acceptance, generally conditioned by the prestige of the chosen variety, also implies assent to the whole standardized system in its articulation of language and dialects. As Kloss noted with reference to varieties such as Occitan, Low

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<sup>7</sup> This terminology was introduced by E. Coseriu, *Sistema, norma y habla*, Montevideo, 1952.

Saxon and Sardinian: 'except for a small minority among the elite ... the speakers of these languages are willing to put up with their present status [i.e., that of being a 'dialect of' a language]. They feel and think and speak about these languages in terms of dialects of the victorious tongues rather than in terms of autonomous systems. To some extent these two features – acceptance of the social status of the mother tongue and underrating of its linguistic status – may be interdependent.'<sup>8</sup>

To sum up, a standard language is a supposedly unitary norm, imposed by a segment of society, accepted by the rest and employed chiefly in specific domains. In this respect, Haugen observed that there is a discrepancy between the ideal goal of standardization and its actual functioning: 'as the ideal goals of standardization, codification may be defined as *minimal variation in form*, elaboration as *maximal variation in function*'.<sup>9</sup> In other words, the ideal 'language' in standardized speech communities is: one variety / every function / the entire speech community. This theoretical aspiration to uniformity is, as experience teaches us, practically unattainable.<sup>10</sup> In practice, the standard is not the only form used in every domain by all speakers, but rather a prestigious variety, promoted by a powerful social group and employed in specific domains. Nevertheless, what Haugen calls the ideal goal, and what researchers refer to as 'standard language ideology', remains a core element to be investigated: it is both the force driving standardization and the crucial factor shaping the ideas held

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<sup>8</sup> Kloss, "'Abstand Languages'", p. 36.

<sup>9</sup> Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation', p. 931 (author's emphasis).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. Milroy, 'Language Ideologies', p. 534, who observes that, in fact, 'there cannot be in practical use any such thing as a wholly standardized variety, as total uniformity of usage is never achieved in practice. Uniformity in the structural parts of language, however, can be seen as an immediate linguistic *goal* of standardization as a process.' (author's emphasis). See also p. 540: 'standardization of a language, at all levels and in both channels of transmission [i.e., written and oral], is never fully achieved, and the standard is always in a process of being maintained.'

about the nature of languages and linguistic variation in standardized speech communities. This is particularly evident if one considers the opposition between language and dialects which I discussed above: one 'real', proper, uniform language is contrasted to inferior, deviant varieties.<sup>11</sup> I shall explore the implications of this conceptual pattern for the formation of ideas about what 'a language' is – or should be – in due course. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that a defining feature of standard language ideology is the inherent tension between an aspiration to convergence and unification and the hegemonic role exerted by a select variety over the entire speech community. John Joseph, in order to describe this type of dominance, has used the term 'synecdoche': a part for the whole.<sup>12</sup>

### III

As Alberto Varvaro has suggested, the coexistence of Latin and vernaculars in medieval society necessitates a sociological consideration of the phenomenon.<sup>13</sup> This is certainly true; but it is also necessary to examine how the fact that some social functions were performed in one language and others in another was reflected in the consciousness of speakers. Such an interpretation will, in turn, allow us to gain a better understanding of language change as a social phenomenon. The assumption behind an important study on the birth of the concept of dialect in Florentine

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<sup>11</sup> This is also why variation within the standard is generally interpreted in terms of 'registers' and 'styles'. The difference between styles, registers, dialects and languages, as I have repeatedly observed, is more often the result of social conventions rather than representing an empirical fact.

<sup>12</sup> See J. E. Joseph, 'Dialect, Language and "Synecdoche"', *Linguistics*, 20, 1982, pp. 473-91.

<sup>13</sup> A. Varvaro, 'The Sociology of the Romance Languages', in *The Cambridge History of the Romance Languages*, II: *Contexts*, ed. M. Maiden, J. C. Smith and A. Ledgeway, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 335-60 (336).



Renaissance by Mario Alinei is that Latin and vernaculars were perceived and defined by the social class of their speakers, that they were interpreted as 'sociolects'. I shall first discuss his interpretation at some length, then go on to refute it.

Alinei maintains that the concept of dialect was a Renaissance re-interpretation of the original Greek term, which had disappeared in the Latin West in late antiquity and remained unknown throughout the Middle Ages. This re-interpretation occurred in sixteenth-century Florence, in the context of the so-called 'questione della lingua'. According to Alinei, while a dialect for the Greeks denoted a geographical variety, in the Renaissance it came to define a social stratification of linguistic varieties. This was due, in Alinei's view, to the pre-eminent position attained by the Florentine dialect at the expense, not only of Latin, but also of the other Italian vernaculars – their less prestigious status was accounted for, or interpreted, by recourse to the ancient Greek notion of dialect.

Alinei wonders whether any conception of linguistic variety existed in the Middle Ages, that is, before the introduction of the word dialect as an explanatory term. Since he thinks that there was such a conception,<sup>14</sup> he explains how the notion of linguistic variety may have been construed. Even in this case, he argues, the opposition between Latin and vernacular was premised on a dichotomy of sociolects: Latin was the sociolect of the feudal nobility, and the vernacular that of the bourgeoisie – that is, the emerging mercantile class of the city-states, the *comuni*.<sup>15</sup> With the growth of the

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<sup>14</sup> Alinei, 'Dialetto', p. 158.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.: 'Non appena appare la borghesia, come nuova classe sociale che si oppone alla nobiltà feudale dominante (che include e in una certa misura coincide con la Chiesa), l'opposizione linguistica che esprime la nuova situazione è la seguente: da un lato abbiamo il Latino, come lingua della cultura e del potere, dall'altro la lingua parlata dalla nuova classe. Così come la nuova classe viene chiamata, anzi si autodefinisce *volgo* (accanto a *popolo*, *plebe* ecc.), la sua lingua è detta volgare.'

bourgeoisie and its consequent internal differentiation, a terminology was needed to account for the different social varieties of the vernacular: Dante developed the notion of *volgare illustre* to identify the most prestigious variety, paving the way for considering other vernaculars as dialects.

I shall leave aside for the time being the historical picture drawn by Alinei, limiting myself to pointing out that the term *volgare illustre* was used by Dante, and Dante alone, since his *De vulgari eloquentia* was virtually unknown until Gian Giorgio Trissino translated and published it in 1529. Nor do I want to rehearse here the legitimate reservations which have been raised about Alinei's dubious account of the disappearance of Latin after a 'last glorious battle' – as he puts it – in the fifteenth century,<sup>16</sup> with humanism treated simply as a reactionary expression of the feudal nobility.<sup>17</sup>

What I shall consider, instead, is his interpretation of Latin and vernacular as sociolects.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, I shall attempt to show that Latin was not the language of the feudal nobility. If anything, it was the language of the clergy, which Alinei surprisingly includes within, and almost equates with, the feudal nobility.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, I shall argue that the vernacular was not solely the language of the bourgeoisie – however we might choose to construe this group – for the simple reason that *everyone*, from the pope to the peasantry, spoke a vernacular. The reason must be sought in the very nature of diglossia, which is precisely where Alinei's account is flawed. In

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L'opposizione è quindi sociale, ed il termine volgare è quello "marcato" della dicotomia.'

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 160: 'Prima di tutto, l'opposizione dominante – quella fra Latino e volgare – deve cadere come un ramo secco [so that the concept of 'dialetto' can affirm itself]. E infatti il Latino scompare dalla scena, non senza un'ultima gloriosa battaglia nel corso del Quattrocento.'

<sup>17</sup> See P. Trovato, "'Dialetto" e sinonimi ("idioma", "proprietà", "lingua") nella terminologia linguistica Quattro- e Cinquecentesca', *Rivista di letteratura italiana*, 2, 1984, pp. 227-36, esp. p. 225 n. 53.

<sup>18</sup> Alinei, 'Dialetto', p. 159, describes the opposition between Latin and vernacular as 'il riflesso linguistico dell'opposizione sociale fra nobiltà feudale e borghesia'.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

diglossia, the choice between H and L is regulated by the context of use, not by the social identity of the speaker. In fact, there was no social group, no matter how prestigious, which employed Latin in private, informal conversations. This does not mean that there was no diastratic variation, but instead that this type of variation was expressed in the vernacular, not in Latin.

Even the terminology employed metaphorically to denote Latin did not indicate class stratification, but rather domains of use and means of acquisition. As P. O. Kristeller observed: 'The medieval term *per littera* or *litterariter* for Latin as opposed to *volgare* or *vulgariter* reflects the earlier stage in which Latin was the written language in contrast to the spoken vernacular. The term *grammatica* for Latin reflects the later situation in which the vernacular, although used for writing, had no book of rules.'<sup>20</sup> According to Littré, the French *grimoire* (the sorcerer's book of spells) derives from the Latin *grammatica* – perhaps a glimpse of how the illiterate (or even students) perceived Latin: as an arcane ritual, not an upper-class manner of speaking.<sup>21</sup>

This does not mean that the dichotomy between Latin and the vernacular was independent from the configuration of society. The relationship between social structure and language use, however, has to be sought, not in the codes themselves as symbols of social classes, but instead in the norms which regulated their use. Such norms established who was admitted to formal domains, as well as the criteria determining the sharp cleavage between textual traditions which could be considered formal, and therefore worthy of public attention, and the rest of language uses. Latin acquisition and, along with it, language competence and both access to and

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<sup>20</sup> P. O. Kristeller, 'The Origin and Development of the Language of Italian Prose', in his *Renaissance Thought and the Arts*, Princeton, 1980, pp. 119-41 (120 n. 3). *Literatus*, however, never came to mean simply literate: it meant instead 'educated', that is, in Latin.

<sup>21</sup> E. Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue Française*, 4 vols, Paris, 1863-72, II, p. 1937.

control of elevated domains were restricted to a group of people – for centuries coinciding with the clergy – who maintained a strict monopoly on the production of textual traditions considered worthy of preservation, cultivation and dissemination. The church had a virtual monopoly of public discourse.

As Judith Irvine has written: ‘Formality ... has to do with what can be focused upon publicly; and it is in this sense that formality can often connote a social order, or forms of social action, that is publicly recognised and considered legitimate.’<sup>22</sup> The expression *vulgo*, used to introduce the vernacular equivalent of Latin terms, was perhaps originally intended as a diastatic indication: at least since the sixth century it meant, in most cases, simply ‘in common parlance’.<sup>23</sup> The formula, however, is the sign of an extreme reluctance to admit ordinary language into written texts. Helmut Lüdke has aptly described this phenomenon as a form of taboo.<sup>24</sup> Literate people never meant to eradicate the vernaculars – not even from their own lives; what they resisted was the contamination of elevated domains by ordinary speech.<sup>25</sup> It is appropriate to envision such domains as rituals:

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<sup>22</sup> J. T. Irvine, ‘Formality and Informality in Communicative Events’, *American Anthropologist*, 81, 1979, pp. 773-90 (782).

<sup>23</sup> See P. Koch, ‘Le latin – langue diglossique?’, in *Zwischen Babel und Pfingsten. Sprachdifferenzen und Gesprächsverständnis in der Vormoderne (8.-16.Jh.)*, ed. P. von Moos, Zurich, 2008, pp. 287-316 (310): ‘Dans ce contexte, il faut absolument se méfier des termes métalinguistiques du type lat. *vulgo*, *vulgaris*, fr. *populaire*, it. *volgare*, *popolare*, etc. Ils semblent exprimer une qualification diastatique. Quand on regarde de plus près les phénomènes linguistiques auxquels ils sont appliqués et leur statut dans l’espace variationnel respectif, on constate souvent – pas toujours – qu’il s’agit, en réalité, de phénomènes typiques du domaine de l’immédiat partagés par les illettrés aussi bien que les lettrés, par les couches inférieures aussi bien que les supérieures.’

<sup>24</sup> H. Lüdke, *Der Ursprung der Romanischen Sprachen. Eine Geschichte des sprachlichen Kommunikation*, Kiel, 2005, p. 562.

<sup>25</sup> In this sense, it is instructive to compare the image and practice of Latin in diglossia with the conception of the ‘sacred’ in the High Middle Ages, as described by P. Brown, ‘Society and the Supernatural: A Medieval Change’, *Daedalus*, 104, 1975, pp. 133-51 (141): ‘The sacred ... was intimately connected with the life of the

social practices designed to celebrate and cultivate a certain body of knowledge and to support a certain image of society. As rituals, they were officiated by a caste.

No one learnt Latin as a native language. No one sought to imitate it in ordinary speech, for example to achieve social promotion, as commonly happens with prestige languages. Lack of knowledge of Latin prevented access to specific domains, not to society at large – as instead happens nowadays, for instance, to immigrants who are unfamiliar with the host country's language. It is not surprising that the varieties employed for ordinary conversation, despite changing continuously over time, remained relatively stable in their mutual relationships: as Mirko Tavoni has noted, 'the dialects observed in the field in modern times essentially correspond to the spoken vernaculars of Dante's time'.<sup>26</sup> This is also why it is difficult to find contemporary metalinguistic comments concerning ordinary spoken language use – no one had any doubt that the variety of choice for this purpose was the vernacular.

'As long as you can find some group in the speech community that uses the putative H in normal conversation', wrote Ralph Fasold, 'even though there are other groups which do not, we do not have a case of diglossia, but rather a standard-with-dialects.'<sup>27</sup> This observation allows us to perceive how diglossia might evolve into standard-with-dialects: it is change in H domains which causes the breakdown of diglossia. To be more precise, what is to be expected is a shift in the relationship between H and a specific L variety: a segment of society pushes for the adoption of its own

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group on every level. At the same time, however, it was operative because it was thought of as radically different from the human world into which it penetrated. It was all that the human community was not.'

<sup>26</sup> M. Tavoni, 'Linguistic Italy', in *Dante in Context*, ed. Z. Barański et al., Cambridge, 2015, pp. 243-59 (244).

<sup>27</sup> Fasold, *Sociolinguistics of Society*, p. 43.

informal speech variety in formal uses. In this sense, it is appropriate to speak of social determinants of language change, since the hypothetical segment of society in question might well be a social class striving for public recognition. According to Irvine, 'the process of formalization forces the recognition of conflicting ideas and in so doing may impel their change'.<sup>28</sup> Dante understood this principle perfectly when he advocated the use of his vernacular in the philosophical poetry of the *Convivio*. He indicated a specific social class as his ideal audience and therefore as the propulsive agent promoting the vernacular. The class he selected, however, was not the bourgeoisie: it was the aristocracy. To understand this choice, it will be expedient to investigate the vicissitudes of Latin and vernaculars in the early fourteenth century.

#### IV

An appreciation of how written varieties of the vernacular were used and conceived of at the beginning of the fourteenth century can be discerned from a passage of *De vulgari eloquentia*, where Dante compares the respective merits of the three 'Romance' languages – the *langue d'oïl*, *d'oc* and *del sì*:

Indeed each of the three parts could call significant evidence in its own favour. Thus the language of *oïl* adduces on its own behalf the fact that, because of the greater facility and pleasing quality of its vernacular essence, everything that is recorded or invented in vernacular prose belongs to it: such as compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome, and the beautiful tales of King Arthur, and many other works of history and doctrine. The second part, the language of *oc*, argues in its own favour that eloquent writers

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<sup>28</sup> Irvine, 'Formality and Informality', p. 785.

in the vernacular first composed poems in this sweeter and more perfect language: they include Peire d'Alvernha and other ancient masters. Finally, the third part, which belongs to the Italians, declares itself to be superior because it enjoys a twofold privilege: first, because those who have written vernacular poetry more sweetly and subtly, such as Cino da Pistoia and his friend [*scil.* Dante], have been its intimates and its faithful servants; and second, because they seem to be in the closest contact with the *grammatica* which is shared by all – and this, to those who consider the matter rationally, will appear a very weighty argument.<sup>29</sup>

[Quelibet enim partium largo testimonio se tuetur. Allegat ergo pro se lingua *oïl* quod propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem vulgaritatem quicquid redactum est, sive inventum, ad vulgare prosaicum, suum est: videlicet Biblia cum Troianorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata ad Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime et quamplures alie ystorie ac doctrine. Pro se vero argumentantur alia, scilicet *oc*, quod vulgares eloquentes in ea primitus poetati sunt tanquam in perfectiori dulciorique loquela, ut puta Petrus de Alvernia et alii antiquiores doctores. Tertia quoque, <que> Latinorum est, se duobus privilegiis actestatur preesse: primo quidem quod qui dulcius subtiliusque poetati vulgariter sunt, hii familiares et domestici sui sunt, puta Cynus Pistoriensis (*scil.* Dante); secundo quia magis videtur initi gramatice que comunis est, quod rationabiliter inspicientibus videtur gravissimum argumentum.]<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Translation from Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. and transl. S. Botterill, Cambridge, 1996, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.x.2.

The three vernaculars are discussed and evaluated in terms of their literary traditions – and weighted according to aesthetic criteria which are closely connected to those very traditions and domains. The nature of this relationship is apparent from the choice of terminology and related critical notions. The terms Dante uses to describe the *langue d'oïl* are *facilis* and *delectabilis*.<sup>31</sup> *Delectabilis* might refer to the entertainment associated with the vernacular genres, especially French ones, such as the chivalric poems Dante evokes here ('Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime').<sup>32</sup> *Facilis*, according to Mirko Tavoni, might simply be a synonym of *delectabilis* or might indicate that something is 'more accessible, intelligible', in which case it could also mean 'common' or 'widespread', although with the derogatory connotation of 'mainstream'.<sup>33</sup> As we shall see, Dante reserves the adjective *comunis* – with the connotation of universality – for Latin and Italian.

Dante proceeds by identifying prose as the medium in which the *langue d'oïl* exercises its hegemony and specifies the kinds of prose genre he has in mind – compilations and original works – and their thematic range: *volgarizzamenti* of biblical and classical sources, chivalric literature and, in

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<sup>31</sup> For the rare (and unique in Dante) concept of *vulgaritas* as 'vernacular essence' ('propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem *vulgaritatem*', my emphasis), see S. Pellegrini, 'De vulgari eloquentia, libro I, capp. 10-19', *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, 8, 1960, pp. 155-63.

<sup>32</sup> In the famous episode of Paolo and Francesca, the cause of the two youths' adultery is located by Francesca in a book of romances; see Dante, *Inferno*, V, vv. 127-8: 'noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto / di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse'.

<sup>33</sup> See Tavoni, comm. ad Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. M. Tavoni, in *Opere*, ed. M. Santagata, 2 vols, Milan, 2011-14, I, pp. 1234-5. *Facile* and *utile* are coupled in a popular anonymous compilation of questions in the vernacular; see *Questioni filosofiche in volgare mediano dei primi del Trecento*, ed. F. Geymonat, Pisa, 2000, p. 5: 'uno breve tractato e utile innel nome de Dio incomençarò dividendo e distinguendo el libro per parti et capituli acìò ke più utile e facile sia questa doctrina'. Note that the didactic scope of this treatise matches one of the genres Dante associates with the *langue d'oïl* ('quamplures ... doctrine').



general, historical and didactic prose ('ystorie ac doctrine').<sup>34</sup> The picture which emerges is pretty clear. Dante identifies the *langue d'oïl* with prose and, in particular, with three genres: historical and legendary narrative, chivalric romances and didactic literature. He rejects the idea that it had any universal or 'common' character: its essential domains are fantastic literature, popular anthologies and educational works for readers who do not know Latin. Furthermore, it is often associated with recreational uses, forms of entertainment: none of these genres could compete with the universality of Latin.

The picture changes when he moves on to the second language, *langue d'oc*. It is described as *dulcior* and *perfectior*. Even in this case, the linguistic description corresponds to a particular domain and its thematic field: *dulcis* indicates poetry, and specifically love lyric – that is, in Dante's view, high lyric.<sup>35</sup> While he admits the excellence of Provençal love poetry, Dante also states that its pre-eminence is due, in truth, solely to its historical precedence: 'antiquiores doctores'.<sup>36</sup> This may be a back-handed

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<sup>34</sup> Tavoni, (Ibid., pp. 1236-7) argues that *ystorie* should not be taken in the strict sense of histories, but instead means narrative, historical and legendary works in general. See also P. Damian-Grint, 'Estoire as Word and Genre: Meaning and Literary Usage in the Twelfth Century', *Medium Aevum*, 66, 1997, pp. 189-206.

<sup>35</sup> See Tavoni, comm. ad Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1237. A similar comparison of the two languages was made by the Catalan troubadour Raimon Vidal at the beginning of the thirteenth century; see J. H. Marshall, *The Razos de Trobar of Raimon Vidal and Associated Texts*, London, 1972, p. 6: 'la parladura francesca val mais et es plus avinens a far romanz, rentronsas et pasturellas, mas cella de Lemosin val mais per far vers et cansons et sirventes'. Unlike Dante, Vidal opposes different types of poetic genre (rather than prose and poetry); however, while the French genres Vidal lists are narrative, the Occitan ones are lyrical, an opposition which may prefigure the one advanced by Dante.

<sup>36</sup> See Dante, *Vita nova*, 16.3. See also Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam*, ed. J. P. Lacaïta, 5 vols, Florence, 1887, IV, p. 75: 'Et hic nota, quod olim fuit solummodo dictamen literale tam in prosa quam in metro: postea forte a ducentis annis citra inventum est dictamen vulgare; et fuit e principio inventum pro materia amori; sed hic poeta ipsum mirabiliter traxit ad materiam honestissimam, qualis est in suo poemate.' See also ibid., p. 134: 'nota quod quamvis lingua provincialis [i.e., Occitan] non sit pulcra, tamen est difficilis'.

compliment, suggesting that, by Dante's day, the civilization of Provence was almost exhausted: crushed by the Albigensian crusade and the diaspora of intellectuals.

Dante then opposes the Italian tradition, *del sì*, to the two French ones – *langue d'oc* and *d'oïl*. The argument is carried out strategically. The motives adduced for the primacy of *langue d'oc* and *d'oïl* were literary and linguistic; so, Dante proceeds to demonstrate the superiority of Italian in both fields. In terms of the literary field, Italian is the language used by Cino da Pistoia and by Dante himself. Moreover, it is the language in closest contact with Latin. By mentioning himself and Cino, Dante covers two specific domains: love lyric and ethical poetry<sup>37</sup> – as indicated by the two adjectives he uses, *dulcis* and *subtilis*.<sup>38</sup> With regard to linguistic field, earlier in the treatise, Dante had pointed out that, while the three vernaculars he discusses were natural languages, that is, they were learned by children naturally rather than by means of formal education, Latin was an artificial language, devised for the purpose of mutual communication between the inhabitants of the lands where the three vernaculars were spoken;<sup>39</sup> and he insinuates that Italian was the main source for those who had artificially devised Latin, which is why it was the closest to Latin.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cf. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.ii.8: 'Cynum Pistoriensem amorem, amicus eius rectitudinem'.

<sup>38</sup> For *dulcis*, see above. For *subtilis*, see F. Bruni, 'Semantica della sottigliezza', in his *Testi e chierici del medioevo*, Genoa, 1991, pp. 91-133.

<sup>39</sup> I shall discuss this theory at length in chapter 5.

<sup>40</sup> See Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.x.1: 'Triphario nunc existente nostro ydiomate ... in comparatione sui ipsius, secundum quod trisonum factum est, cum tanta timiditate cunctarum librantes quod hanc vel istam vel illam partem in comparando preponere non audemus, nisi eo quo gramatice positores inveniuntur accepisse *sic* adverbium affirmandi quod quandam anterioritatem erogare videtur Ytalis, qui sì dicunt.'

The proximity of Italian vernaculars to Latin was not an entirely original idea of Dante's.<sup>41</sup> He, however, employs it with a precise, double-edged intent: firstly, to argue for the 'Italianness' of Latin;<sup>42</sup> and secondly, to maintain that, even though Italian still lacked a unitary tradition, given its present fragmentation into many different varieties, and therefore a specific domain, its fundamental linguistic nature allowed it to aspire to the highest domains, those dominated by Latin. Dante's argument runs as follows: the domains of French (*langue d'oïl* and *d'oc*) are not truly 'common' or universal; the only true universal domains are those now occupied by Latin; Italian is similar to Latin; therefore, Italian, unlike the French languages, can aspire to be employed, like Latin, in the highest universal domains and attain the status of a common language.<sup>43</sup> For Dante, writing *De vulgari eloquentia* sometime between 1304 and 1306, the universal domain *par excellence*, the prestige of which determined that of the Italian language, was the grand style of moral lyric exemplified by the songs he had composed for

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<sup>41</sup> In 965, a certain Gunzo of Novara, while visiting Emperor Otto I, was reproached by the monks of St Gallen because, when speaking Latin, he had used an accusative instead of an ablative. In a letter he recounted the episode and accused the ignorant – in his view – monks of being pedants, but he added a telling excuse; see Gunzo of Novara, *Epistola ad Augienses Fratres*, in Migne, *PL*, CXXXVI, cols 1283-1302 (1288B): 'licet aliquando retarder usu nostrae vulgaris linguae quae latinitati vicina est'. The episode is recounted by F. Novati, *L'influsso del pensiero latino sopra la civiltà italiana del medioevo*, Milan, 1899, pp. 34-7.

<sup>42</sup> See Tavoni, comm. ad Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, pp. 1230-1: 'l'idea di artificialità del latino, che non va attenuata, può coesistere coerentemente in Dante con un forte senso di italianità del latino: tipicamente espressa nelle parole di Sordello per Virgilio: "mostrò ciò che potea la lingua nostra" (Pg, vii.17)' (Tavoni's emphasis).

<sup>43</sup> See P. V. Mengaldo, 'Oïl', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, Rome, 1973, IV, pp. 130-3; and 'Oc', *ibid.*, pp. 111-16 (113): 'Cino, Dante stesso e gli altri maggiori italiani hanno, rispetto ai provenzali (e ai francesi) una superiore capacità di addentellarsi nell'alta tradizione della letteratura regolata e delle lingue latine. Tale giudizio comparativo ... ci appare nella sua intera portata solo se consideriamo il valore insostituibile di modello per la prassi e la retorica volgari che Dante attribuisce in tutto il trattato al *sermo* e all'*ars* dei latini.'

his philosophical treatise, the *Convivio*: the kind of poetry he calls here *subtilis*.

The linguistic, political and cultural programme which Dante presented in *De vulgari eloquentia* can be considered the first conscious plan for language standardization in Italian – and, perhaps, European – history. I shall return in the next chapter to the reasons why Dante, at this stage, could envision such a plan, and why he saw poetry, and especially philosophical lyric, as the leading domain within it. One point, however, needs to be made immediately: this standardization project, whatever its implications, was chiefly in Dante's mind – and there, for the most part, it remained. Not only did he leave both the *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia* unfinished, but, more importantly, the history of the standardization of the Italian language had to wait until the early sixteenth century for its proper beginning, with the so-called *questione della lingua*. We must therefore take a step backwards, leaving aside for the moment Dante's project, and focus instead on what we can discern from the picture he draws of the uses of the written vernacular in the actual language situation of his time.

In this period, communication within the Romance area took place in Latin and, at the same time, in that group of speech varieties which linguists call a dialect continuum.<sup>44</sup> A classic description of a dialect continuum was formulated by Leonard Bloomfield:

every village, or, at most, every group of three villages, has its own local dialect. The differences between neighbouring local dialects are usually small but recognizable. The villagers are ready to tell in what their neighbors' speech differs from theirs, and often tease their neighbors about these peculiarities. The difference from place to place

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<sup>44</sup> See J. K. Chambers and P. Trudgill, *Dialectology*, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 5-7.

is small, but, as one travels in any one direction, the differences accumulate, until speakers, say from the opposite ends of the country, cannot understand each other, although there is no sharp line of linguistic demarcation between the places where they live.<sup>45</sup>

Dante's description of the three Romance vernaculars bears witness to the fact that, at least by the fourteenth century: a) several supra-local vernacular varieties had emerged alongside – or rather above – the diverse speech varieties described by Bloomfield; b) these supra-local varieties were connected to specific domains; and c) the phenomenon had a European reach and a European scope.<sup>46</sup>

Peter Burke has described the early modern period as the age of 'discovery of language'.<sup>47</sup> I shall propose two corrections to this statement: firstly, this discovery was prepared in the late Middle Ages; secondly, rather than the age of discovery, it was the age when meaning was attributed to language diversity. Languages, as I have repeatedly emphasized, are cultural artefacts. As Robert Darnton has remarked: 'Unlike the price series of economics, the vital statistics of demography, and the ... professional categories in social history, cultural objects are not manufactured by the

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<sup>45</sup> L. Bloomfield, *Language*, Chicago and London, 1984, p. 51. A description matching Bloomfield's is found in *Le roman de Balain: A Prose Romance of the Thirteenth Century*, ed. M. Dominica Legge, Manchester, 1942, p. 70: 'Ensi chevauchierent entre eus de jour en jour tant que moult orent eslongié la chité de Camalaoth, et li langages lour commença si durement a changier qu'il n'entendirent mais se moult petit non.'

<sup>46</sup> See J. Kabatek, 'Koinés and scriptae', in *The Cambridge History of the Romance Languages*, ed. M. Maiden, J. C. Smith and A. Ledgeway, II: *Contexts*, Cambridge, 2013, pp. 143-86 (160): 'whilst the development of the basic structures of individual Romance languages in contrast to Latin arises from oral communication ... [this] phase is characterized by renewed European discourse traditions, alongside the delimitation of individual Romance language areas'.

<sup>47</sup> P. Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge, 2004, p. 15.

historian but by the people he studies. They give off meaning.’<sup>48</sup> The question, therefore, is to identify as accurately as possible who was responsible for the attribution of meaning, and what exactly this meaning was. When Dante says ‘langue d’oc’, can we be completely sure that he had in mind an idea of language which was identical to what we now mean when we speak of, say, ‘English’? And if we are not sure, how can we then reconstruct his particular idea? If we reconsider his account, we notice that Dante attributes two essential characteristics to the three speech varieties he considers worthy of discussion: 1) they belong to specific groups of people, defined ethnically and geographically: French, Occitans and Italians;<sup>49</sup> and 2) they seem to be identified as literary genres. It is probably best to start from the second characteristic, which is less clear to us.

An important contribution to the study of this phenomenon was made by Peter Koch, who observed that historical actors in the medieval period oriented their linguistic choices chiefly according to the type of text they intended to produce.<sup>50</sup> He proposed that such textual types should be called

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<sup>48</sup> R. Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, New York, 1984, p. 258.

<sup>49</sup> See also Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, ed. Tavoni, pp. 1206-8 (I.viii.5): ‘nam alii oc, alii oïl, alii sì affirmando locuntur, ut puta Yspani, Franci et Latini.’ On the reason why Dante calls Occitans ‘Yspani’, see Tavoni’s comment as loc. I shall come back to Dante’s conception of ethnic and linguistic identity in chapter 5.

<sup>50</sup> P. Koch, ‘Pour une typologie conceptionnelle et mediale des plus anciens documents/monuments des langues romanes’, in *Le passage à l’écrit des langues romanes*, ed. M. Selig et al., Tübingen, 1993, pp. 38-82: ‘nous retrouvons, dans toute la Romania, les mêmes types des textes, les mêmes genres littéraires ou ... les mêmes traditions discursives qui accompagnent pour ainsi dire le passage à l’écrit ... . [P]our expliquer le processus de passage à l’écrit, il faut se baser sur la conscience linguistique des personnes mêmes qui ont écrit ou bien rédigé les premiers textes romans. Celles-ci concevaient leur texte en premier lieu comme l’exemplaire d’une tradition discursive donnée – le sermon, le testament, la poésie des troubadours etc. –, et ce n’est que par rapport à cette tradition discursive qu’elles choisissaient, en second lieu, leurs idiome à caractère plus ou moins local ou même hybride.’

'discourse traditions'.<sup>51</sup> To explain this notion, we need to understand that a fundamental element in discourse production and reception – as well as the pragmatic context where the act of communication takes place and knowledge of the message's code – is that a text must respect some conventional, historically determined discursive norms. When such norms recur in systematic patterns, this constitutes a discourse tradition. Johannes Kabatek provides the following example, which will help to clarify the matter:

The fact that in Spain, people say *Buenas días* to each other in the morning might be explained by the universal pragmatic need for greeting, or by facts of the Spanish language (which contains the two words, their morphology and syntax). But neither universality nor the Spanish grammar explain why they greet each other exactly like that rather than in a different way.<sup>52</sup>

What is true for brief texts such as salutation formulas applies equally to the complex historical patterns of discourse which we call literary genres. These conventional practices are often attached to specific languages: most ancient ethnological history was first written in Greek; operas have been composed in Italian for centuries; Rock music, to this day, is sung in English all over

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<sup>51</sup> See P. Koch, 'Diskurstraditionen: Zu ihrem sprachtheoretischen Status und ihrer Dynamik', in *Gattungen mittelalterlicher Schriftlichkeit*, ed. B. Frank et al., Tübingen, 1997, pp. 43-79. For a good definition of 'discourse tradition', see Frank-Job, 'Traditions discursives', p. 16 n. 6: 'nous entendons par traditions discursives ou traditions de textes les manifestations historiques des conditions communicatives et des techniques correspondantes qui se sont figées dans les pratiques communicatives des communautés linguistiques et qui servent d'orientation commune aux participants à la communication'.

<sup>52</sup> J. Kabatek, 'Wordplay and Discourse Traditions', in *Wordplay and Metalinguistic/Metadiscursive Reflection*, ed by A. Zirker et al., Tübingen, 2015, pp. 213-28 (214-15).

the world. This is because the speech variety itself is, in some cases, one of the norms which regulate the conventional patterns of discourse. In this sense, the unfolding of these traditions as cultural institutions can be regarded as a form of codification,<sup>53</sup> which can contribute to language spread and the establishment of supra-local varieties: from as early as the ninth to eleventh centuries, we have evidence that the written variety of French (so-called *scripta*) developed in the scriptorium of the St-Denis abbey had established itself as a supra-local written norm.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, as we shall see later on in this chapter, the first attested codification of a Romance vernacular – Occitan – served the practical purpose of teaching students how to compose and appreciate poetic genres. For his part, Dante in the *Convivio* pointed out that poetic devices such as rhyme and meter contributed to the stabilization of linguistic forms.<sup>55</sup>

The phenomenology of discourse traditions is central to understanding not only the dynamics of the multilingual landscape described by Dante, but also his attitude towards it: if we imagine this

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<sup>53</sup> Codification by convention, rather than by ‘grammatical rules’: a process ancient grammarians understood perfectly when they distinguished between *ratio* and *consuetudo* (or *usus*).

<sup>54</sup> See L. A. Stanovaïa, ‘La standardization en ancien français’, in *The Dawn of the Written Vernacular in Western Europe*, ed. M. Goyens and W. Verbeke, Leuven, 2003, pp. 241-72. On the concept of *scripta* as a writing tradition, see Kabatek, ‘Koinés and *scriptae*’, pp. 151-4. The normative function exercised by the *scripta* of St-Denis was still explicitly recognized in the thirteenth century by the anonymous Anglo-Norman author of poem published by P. Meyer, ‘Notice du ms. Rawlison Poetry 241’, *Romania*, 29, 1900, pp. 1-84 (80): ‘Jeo ne sai guers romanz faire / Ne de latyn ma sermon traire, / Car jeo ne fu unques a Parys / Ne al abbaye de saint Denys, / Par ceo nul homme ne me doit blamer / Si jeo ne sai mye bien roumauncer.’ Note that in the expressions ‘romanz faire’/‘roumauncer’ three meanings seem to coexist: 1) to know the (French) vernacular; 2) to know how to write in the vernacular, that is, to be trained in the *scripta* of St-Denis; and 3) to write a poem in the vernacular.

<sup>55</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.xiii.6: ‘Ciascuna cosa studia naturalmente alla sua conservazione: onde, se lo volgare per sé studiare potesse, studierebbe a quella; e quella sarebbe aconciare sé a più stabilitate, e più stabilitate non potrebbe avere che [in] legar sé con numero e con rime.’



landscape as a constellation of discursive practices, what Dante pointed out is that some of these practices were traditionally – that is, conventionally – realized in specific speech varieties. This also explains why he tended to conflate language description, functional compartmentalization in domains of use and their evaluation in rhetorical terms: the characteristics of a language were shaped by the traditions which determined its choice and which positioned it within the overall cultural and linguistic system of the time: *langue d'oïl* for prose, *langue d'oc* for lyric.

Referring to the birth of vernacular literatures in France, Christopher Pountain has written: 'the prime movers in the demand for various types of written Romance overall were the secular nobility'.<sup>56</sup> What we should try to understand is the reason for this centrality of the secular nobility, and why it found its expression in specific discourse traditions as those identified by Dante. A telling testimony can be found in the *Speculum caritatis*, a dialogue between a teacher and a novice written by the Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx around 1142:

For when in tragedies or vain poems someone is made out to be injured or oppressed and his lovable beauty, wonderful courage, and graceful affection are described, if a person who hears it sung or sees it recited is moved to tears by a certain affection, is it not absurd to try to form some opinion of the quality of his love from this empty pity – to say, for instance, that he loves this imaginary figure, when in fact he would not be willing to spend a modicum of his wealth to rescue him, even if it were truly happening before his eyes?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Pountain, 'Latin and the Structure of Written Romance', p. 611.

<sup>57</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Speculum caritatis*, in *PL*, ed. J.-P. Migne, CXCIV, Paris, 1855, II.17, cols 505-620 (565): 'Cum enim in tragoediis vanisve carminibus quisquam injuriatus fingitur, vel oppressus, cujus amabilis pulchritudo, fortitudo mirabilis, gratus praedicetur affectus, si quis haec vel cum canuntur audiens, vel cernens si

Most annoying for Aelred is the ‘empty pity’ aroused by ‘vain poems’, which threatens to rival the just concern one should reserve for the Passion of Christ. In fact, as the novice admits:

For I remember being more than once moved to tears by widespread stories made up about a certain Arthur. Hence I am not a little ashamed at my own vainglory, for if I manage to squeeze out a tear over what is piously read or sung or certainly over what is preached about our Lord, I at once applaud myself for being a saint. ... And it is truly a sign of a vain mind to be puffed up in vainglory because of such emotions, when they happen to be aroused by pity, since the same feelings of compunction and sorrow used to be aroused by fables and lies.<sup>58</sup>

Aelred opposes two different kinds of discourse traditions, identified, as in Dante, by their topic and the medium in which they were transmitted: on the one hand, ‘tragedies or vain poems’, which were sung or recited (‘si

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recitentur, usque ad expressionem lacrymarum quodam moveatur affectu, nonne perabsurdum est, ex hac vanissima pietate de amoris ejus qualitate capere conjecturam, ut hinc fabulosum illum noscique affirmetur amare, pro cujus ereptione, etiamsi hec omnia vere prae oculis gererentur, nec modicam quidem substantiae sue portionem pateretur expendi?’ trans., with some corrections, in H. A. Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1993, p. 85.

<sup>58</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Speculum caritatis*, cols 565-6 (II.17): ‘Nam et in fabulis, quae vulgo de nescio quo finguntur Arthuro, memini me nunnunquam usque ad effusionem lacrimarum fuisse permotum. Unde non modicum pudet propriae vanitatis, qui si forte ad ea quae de Domino pie leguntur, vel canuntur, vel certe publico sermone dicuntur, aliquam mihi lacrimam valuero extorquere, ita mihi statim de sanctitate applaudo ... . Et revera vanissimae mentis indicium est pro his affectibus, si forte pro pietate contingant, vana gloria ventilari, quibus in fabulis et mendaciis solebat compungi.’ Transl. in Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy*, p. 86. Note that *vulgus* here does not mean ‘the common people’, but ‘the uneducated.’

quis hec vel cum canuntur audiens, vel cernens si recitentur') – their reception, we infer, must have been essentially oral. On the other hand, biblical stories, which could be read, sung – presumably a reference to hymnody – or heard from preachers ('ea quae de Domino pie leguntur, vel canuntur, vel certe publico sermone dicuntur'). The two opposing traditions are charged with ideological value: commenting on a passage of Peter of Blois which was certainly dependent on Aelred's,<sup>59</sup> Eric Auerbach wrote: 'Tragic compassion with persons involved in earthly tragedies is not compatible with religion, which has concentrated all tragedy in the cardinal point of history, the divine sacrifice of Christ.'<sup>60</sup> The useless pity aroused by worldly tales is made even worse by the fact that these tales are fictional, as both Aelred and the novice observe repeatedly. Finally, Aelred stages a social conflict between two classes, representative of two distinctive worldviews and lifestyles. A focal element of this representation is the figure of the novice, who represents the passage from lay to clerical status. The novice *remembers* that he has been stirred by Arthurian romances, which were a part of his previous secular life. Earlier in the dialogue, he had described this life as one of debauchery and worldly entertainment:<sup>61</sup> Arthurian romances, in short, were the cultural background of a young aristocrat.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> See P. Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and its World*, Rome, 1984, pp. 295-6.

<sup>60</sup> E. Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages*, transl. R. Manheim, New York, 1965, p. 305.

<sup>61</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Speculum caritatis*, col. 562 (II.17): 'Quinimo post illas, quas prefatus sum lacrymas, statim ad cachinnos redibam et fabulas, ac pro impetu animi huc atque illuc mobili discursione ferebar, ac meae voluntatis possidens libertatem, parentum praesentia gratulabar, sociorum confabulationibus arridebam; conviviis apparatis intereram, potationes non abhorrebam.' Note, even in this context, the reference to storytelling ('fabulas').

<sup>62</sup> It was characteristic of the Cistercian order, in contrast to traditional monastic orders, to recruit adult novices from aristocratic circles; see J. Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth Century France. Psycho-Historical Essays*, Oxford, 1979, pp. 8-26.

The hostile reaction from the ranks of the medieval clergy to new literary genres such as Arthurian romances shows that they were perceived as a threat. Literary genres conveyed social meanings: through the relationship they established between the subjects involved in their production, reception and dissemination, they promoted particular images of society. The promotion to public discourse (High domains in Ferguson's model of diglossia) of new vernacular genres was determined by the definition of the feudal knightly class as a distinct group, endowed with a personal set of values. 'The age', wrote Peter Brown, 'that began with the penance of the Emperor Henry IV before Gregory VII at Canossa in 1077 ends in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries with a brittle but unanswerable assertion of purely secular values surrounding a newly formed mystique of chivalry and a code of courtly love.'<sup>63</sup> The Investiture Controversy (1073-85) had played a decisive role in demarcating the cultural spheres of clergy and laity, of sacred and profane.<sup>64</sup> The lay nobility, although in theory the losing party, emerged as a distinct, self-aware group: not only did it progressively develop a distinctive ethos, but it also set to work on consolidating its specific role in society: the function of political authority.<sup>65</sup> The development of vernacular literature should be located within this context and envisioned as the feudal class's struggle to obtain

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<sup>63</sup> Brown, 'Society and the Supernatural', p. 135.

<sup>64</sup> See R. W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, London, 1970, pp. 34-44.

<sup>65</sup> Examples of aristocratic self-definition construed through opposition to the clergy abound in vernacular literature and often focus on unwanted clerical interference in political matters: see, e.g., *La Chanson d'Aspremont: Chanson de geste du XII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. L. Brandin, Paris, 1923, pp. 10-11 (16.302-9): 'Quant nos le roi avons a consellier, / Ne le penst princes qui tiere a a ballier / Que de son clerc face son anparlier / Ne mais d'itant qu'afiert a son mestier./ De ses pechiés li doit il bien aidier. / Mais a tel home se doit bien consellier / Ki al besing li puist avoir mestier / Et son cors voelle por le sien escangier.' For other examples, see A. Barbero, *L'aristocrazia nella società francese del medioevo. Analisi delle fonti letterarie (secoli X-XIII)*, Bologna, 1987, pp. 131-59.

what we might call 'cultural representation': the emergence of autonomous discourse traditions should be ascribed to the deliberate intention of enabling a particular life style – that of the feudal class – to become part of the authorized representation of society.

The hierarchical organization of public discourse was also a question of distribution of linguistic resources. The acquisition of Latin competence was an essential part of the clergy's choice of a religious life; and Latin's monopoly of public discourse was a sign of clerical hegemony in cultural matters. The refusal to admit wordly matters to the public sphere matches perfectly the reluctance to commit ordinary language to writing which we have observed above as characteristic of diglossia.<sup>66</sup> It is in this context that we should interpret the choice of the vernacular for the new literary genres. This choice depended on a new value attributed to the vernacular itself – or, rather, to specific varieties of the vernacular.

Through the development of these new discourse traditions, the vernacular was, in fact, promoted to the public sphere. This was due, firstly, to the fact that nobles perceived it as a symbolic banner of their class, in open competition with the Latin of the clergy; secondly, it was meant to address a broader audience, probably in the hope of widening their authority: in other words, nobles aimed at conferring an autonomous legitimacy on their power (other than that traditionally subjected to the church) by appealing to a larger section of the population.<sup>67</sup> The resurgence

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<sup>66</sup> See n. 24 above.

<sup>67</sup> A suprisingly broad – and probably somewhat rhetorically inflated – audience for Occitan lyric is indicated by Ramon Vidal, see Marshall, *Razos de Trobar*, p. 6: 'Totas genz cristianas, iusieuas et sarazinas, emperador, princeps, rei, duc, conte, vesconte, contor, valvasor, clergue, borgues, vilans, paucs et granz, meton totz iorns lor entendiment en trobar et en chantar, o q'en volon trobar o q'en volon entendre o qu'en volon dire o q'en volon au/zir; qu greu seres en loc negun tan privat ni tant sol, pos gens i a paucas o moutas, qu ades non auias cantar un o autre o tot ensems, qe neis li pastor de la montagna lo maior sollatz qe ill aiant an de chantar. Et tuit li mal e'l ben del mont son mes en remembransa por trobadors. Et ia non trobares

of lay aristocratic class consciousness had a natural counterpart in the political organization of kingdoms: if the aristocracy elected a distinct speech variety as an essential attribute of itself as a class, it also imposed it on the rest of society as an aggregate sign of secular identity, connected to territorial power and thus focusing on geographical boundaries and ethnic identity.<sup>68</sup> This development can be documented most clearly in French: by the second part of the twelfth century, a spoken variety emerged as the most prestigious among northern French parlanges; it was diastatically and diatopically marked, since it was the variety spoken at the royal court, in the region known today as the Île-de-France.<sup>69</sup> Before the mid-thirteenth century, Roger Bacon recognized the increasing prestige which Parisian French was gaining over other speech varieties, and he considered northern French speech varieties to be a unified system of variation – an all embracing category of French language ('lingua gallicana'), divided into local parlanges

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mot [ben] ni mal dig, po[s] trobaires l'a mes en rima, qe tot iorns [non sia] en remembranza, qar trobars et chantars son movemenz de totas galliardias.' On this passage, see E. Poe, *From Poetry to Prose in Old Provençal. The Emergence of the Vidas, the Razos, and the Razos de trobar*, Birmingham, 1984, p. 69: 'Trobar ... acts as a binding force within society ... . No longer strictly a "courtly" phenomenon, troubadour songs have become by Vidal's day a source of entertainment in places far removed from the courts where they originated ... . Not only a unifying agent, trobar also preserves. According to Vidal, all the good and evil of the world have been immortalized by the troubadours. Finally, trobar has a civilizing effect on society; it inspires men to accomplish noble deeds ... .'

<sup>68</sup> See S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe*, New York and Oxford, 1984, pp. 256-302 (260): 'kingdoms and peoples came to seem identical – not invariably, but sufficiently often for the coincidence of the two to seem the norm to contemporaries'.

<sup>69</sup> See Conon de Béthune, *Chansons*, ed. A. Wallensköld, Paris, 1831, p. 5 (III.8-14): 'La Roine n'a pas fait cortoise / Ki me reprist, ele es ses fueis li Rois; / Encoir ne soit ma parole franchoise, / Si la puet on bien comprendre en franchois / Ne chil ne sont nien apriis ne cortois / S'il m'ont repris se j'si dit mos d'Artois, / Car je ne fui pas norris a Pontoise.' Other examples are collected by R. A. Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, London and New York, 1993, pp. 98-102.

according to geographical provenance.<sup>70</sup> While promoting the use of vernaculars in literary works, the aristocracy thus contributed to shaping a new conception of language and language variation, which had been unthinkable as long as Latin was considered the only recognized ‘language’. This was the idea of a language attached to land and blood, the symbolic expression of a shared collective ethnic and political identity, and constituting an essential part of one’s own cultural heritage – an idea embodied by the emergence of a new historical figure: the ‘native speaker’.<sup>71</sup>

The central role played by the aristocracy in this alteration of language consciousness also explains why throughout this period, in the presence of supra-local speech varieties, we cannot properly speak of

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<sup>70</sup> Roger Bacon, *Compendium studii philosophiae*, ed. J. S. Brewer, London, 1859, p. 467 (viii): ‘Nos etiam videmus, quod cum eadem lingua sunt diversa idiomata, id est, modi et proprietates loquendi, ut in Anglico apud boreales, et australes, et orientales, et occidentales; in Francia apud Picardos, et Normannos, et puros Gallicos, et Burgundos, et alios; tamen quod bene sonat et proprie apud homines unius idiomatis, male sonat et improprie apud alios.’ Note the expression ‘puros Gallicos’, which must indicate the natives of the Île-de-France. Similarly, in Roger Bacon, *Opus majus*, ed. J. H. Bridges, 2 vols, Oxford, 1897, I, p. 138 (IV.iv.5), they are called ‘veri Gallici’: ‘Sed locus est principium generationis, quemadmodum et pater, ut dicit Porphyrius. Et nos videmus, quod omnia variantur secundum loca mundi diversa non solum in naturalibus, sed homines in moribus; quoniam alios mores habent Aethiopes, alios Hispani, alios Romani, et alios Gallici. Nam et Picardi, qui sunt veris Gallicis vicini, habent tantam diversitatem in moribus et in lingua ut non sine admiratione possit esse unde sit tanta diversitas locorum propinquorum.’

<sup>71</sup> See Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, *La vie de Saint Thomas le Martyr*, ed. E. Walberg, Lund, 1922, p. 209 (vv. 6161-6165): ‘Ainc mais si bons romanz ne fu faiz ne trovez. / A Cantorbire fu e faiz e amendez; / N’i ad mis un sol mot qui ne seit veritez. / Li vers est d’une rime en cinc clauses cuplez. / Mis languages est bons, car en France fui nez.’ (my emphasis). Cf. Dante, *Convivio*, I.xii.5-6: ‘E così lo volgare è più prossimo quanto è più unito, [e quello che è più unito], che uno e solo è prima nella mente che alcuno altro, e che non solamente per sè è unito, ma per accidente, in quanto è congiunto colle più prossime persone, sì come colli parenti e [colli] propî cittadini e colla propria gente. E questo è lo volgare propio: lo quale è non prossimo, ma massimamente prossimo a ciascuno.’ And *ibid.*, I.xiii: ‘Questo mio volgare fu congiungitore delli miei generanti, che con esso parlavano, sì come ‘l fuoco è disponente del ferro al fabro che fa lo coltello; per che manifesto è lui essere concorso alla mia generazione, e così essere alcuna cagione del mio essere.’

standard languages. As observed by Maria Selig and Barbara Frank-Job, the sociolinguistic system we call standard-with-dialects did not come to full fruition until the sixteenth century:

[T]hroughout the Romance-speaking areas and continuing until at least the sixteenth century, the linguistic situation was marked by the absence of codified standard written languages which were dominant within a stable vernacular diasystem with low local or regional dialects. Thus, the process not only of elaboration and codification, but also of selection and acceptance were far from being completed in the period we are looking at.<sup>72</sup>

This is why I have entitled the present chapter ‘The Prehistory of Standardization’. Following the suggestion of Selig and Frank-Job, it is expedient to analyse the language situation we have been discussing in light of the four criteria – codification, elaboration, selection, acceptance – proposed by Einar Haugen for the study of standardization.<sup>73</sup>

*Codification and elaboration.* Aristocrats, generally speaking, did not receive a formal education: a situation which largely remained stable until the advent of humanism. This had two main linguistic consequences. First, as noticed by Selig and Frank-Job, there were no formally codified standards: no vernacular variety was, in fact, taught in any school until the sixteenth century. Second, it determined the shape and extent of what can be called the elaboration of functions. Elaboration of functions is the process by which a speech variety conquers new domains of use: it is often interpreted in terms of a language’s capacity to treat specific subjects from which it had

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<sup>72</sup> B. Frank-Job and M. Selig, ‘Early Evidence and Sources’, in *Oxford Guide to the Romance Languages*, ed. A. Ledgeway et al., Oxford, 2016, pp. 24-36 (30-2).

<sup>73</sup> See n. 6 above.



previously been excluded. Paul Garvin has used the term 'intellectualization' to describe the structural property of a language which consists in the 'capacity ... to develop increasingly more accurate and detailed means of expression, especially in the domains of modern life, that is to say in the spheres of science and technology, of government and politics, of higher education, of contemporary culture, etc.'<sup>74</sup> In my view, however, focusing on the 'capacity' of a language to do something is misleading: languages do not have capacities, their users do. The point is whether speech variety *x* is or is not employed in certain domains. If it is not, this can mean two things: a) that its speakers use another variety in such domains; b) that its speakers are (socially, economically, politically and so on) excluded from those domains. Typically, as we have seen with diglossic communities, the two conditions coexist. The description of some speech varieties as 'undeveloped' applies a principle of evolutionary growth to historical languages which is essentially deceptive. The division of linguistic labour – and the unequal distribution of linguistic resources – is a social, not a cognitive, factor.

In the paper on *Ausbau* languages quoted above,<sup>75</sup> Kloss sketched a framework for the study of the elaboration of functions in modern standard languages, in which he formulated the following principle: 'in our age it is not so much by means of poetry and fiction that a language is reshaped ... but by means of non-narrative prose. It need not be ... scholarly literature of a high caliber, but at the very least popular prose ... seems indispensable. Achievements in the realm of information, not of imagination, lend lasting prestige in our age to standard languages old and new.'<sup>76</sup> He then moved on

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<sup>74</sup> P. L. Garvin, 'A Conceptual Framework for the Study of Language Standardization', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 100/101, 1991, pp. 37-54 (43).

<sup>75</sup> See n. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Kloss, 'Ausbau', p. 33.

to distinguish three levels of non-narrative prose: 'Popular ... corresponding to primary school level; sophisticated ... corresponding to secondary school level; learned ... corresponding to higher education.'<sup>77</sup> Kloss distinguishes language use in two realms: that of imagination and that of information, with the further assumption that the second is more prestigious than the first. The realm of information is itself articulated in a hierarchy of domains corresponding to levels of institutional education.

Kloss's evaluation of the relative prestige of genres of discourse depends on his own cultural system – a system, that is, where education and social prestige, and therefore standard and prestige speech varieties, coincide. As we shall see in chapter 6, this was a development that took place with the rise of humanism: that is why, as I shall argue, humanism 'invented' modern standardization. In the period we are discussing presently, however, this was not the case: education was virtually monopolized by Latin; and prestige language norms were developed in the vernacular. A second problem with this model is that, by presenting itself as a linear natural process, it does not leave much room for agency and conflict. As we have seen, the value attributed to vernacular discourse traditions was the expression of the aristocracy's growing self-awareness and desire for cultural affirmation; and the choice of the vernacular was a deliberate act.

The cultural background of the aristocracy was essentially oral. This explains why poetry preceded prose in the development of vernacular discourse traditions: the rhythmical verse in which the core vernacular genres were composed – romance and *chanson de geste* in French, lyric in Occitan – betrays their historical origin in oral performance.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-4.

<sup>78</sup> Koch, 'Pour une typologie conceptionnelle et mediale', p. 51: 'les traditions discursives qui ne reposent pas entièrement sur le contact phonique entre l'émetteur et le récepteur s'ouvrent en général nettement plus tard à la langue vulgaire'.

the function of vernacular literature was originally entertainment rather than instruction. As we have seen above with Aelred of Rielvaux, literate – and therefore chiefly clerical – circles systematically criticized vernacular discourse traditions: they were false, which often meant immoral; and they were pleasant and entertaining, as opposed to instructive.<sup>79</sup> This sort of criticism was often levelled at their privileged medium: the rhythmical verse which ‘pleased the ears’ and had no classical antecedent – and was therefore excluded from the school curriculum.<sup>80</sup> These judgements, which are the expression of what we might call a literate ideology, closely resemble the categories proposed by Kloss to establish hierarchies of prestige in speech domains. In contrast, however, to what we might infer from Kloss’s model, this perspective cannot be taken as universal – literacy is not *necessarily* considered more prestigious than orality, prose than poetry, history than fiction: these propositions, typical of fully literate societies, cannot be applied indiscriminately to a context in which the ruling classes are mostly illiterate, and proudly so.<sup>81</sup> When, in the course of the thirteenth century, the development of vernacular prose took place in French, it happened partly in response to this sort of criticism: writers of French historical works often vindicated their choice of prose as a guarantee of truthfulness.<sup>82</sup> It was a

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<sup>79</sup> See nn. 57-8 above.

<sup>80</sup> See, e.g., Alain of Lille, *Summa de arte praedicatoria*, in *PL*, ed. J. P. Migne, CCX, Paris, 1855, cols 109-98 (112): ‘Non debet habere verba scurrilia vel puerilia vel rhythmorum melodias et consonantias metrorum, quae potius fiunt ad aures demulcendas quam ad animum instruendum.’

<sup>81</sup> See the *chanson de geste* quoted by P. A. Throop, ‘Criticism of Papal Crusade Policy in Old French and Provençal’, *Speculum*, 13, 1938, pp. 379-412 (385): ‘Mes alt li clers a s’escripture / e a ses psauemes verseiller, / e lest aler le chevalier / a ses granz batailles champelz, / et il sit devant ses autels!’

<sup>82</sup> E.g., the author of the so-called Pseudo-Turpin Chronicle declared in the prologue, published in *Répertoire des plus anciens textes en prose française depuis 842 jusq’aux premières années du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. B. Woledge et al., Genève, 1964, p. 27: ‘Voil comencier l’estoire si cum li bons enpereire Karlemaines en ala en Espanie por la terra conquerra sor Sarrazins. Maintes genz en ont oï conter et chanter, mes n’est si mensongie non ço qu’il en dient et chantent cil jogleor ne cil conteor. Nus contes

compromise with the standards of literate mentality, which shows that aristocrats were striving to promote an increasingly 'wise' and 'learned' image of themselves.<sup>83</sup> This transformation, however, was far from complete: for example, as we have seen above, Dante still praised poetry over prose and did not seem particularly bothered by the oral consumption or fictional character of vernacular traditions.<sup>84</sup> In short, there was an open and still unresolved conflict, one which was to last until at least the fifteenth century.

*Selection and acceptance.* We have seen that the selection of diastratic and diatopic varieties and their imposition as supra-local prestige norms depended on the aristocracy's social standing and political power. What Haugen called acceptance of the norm, however, is a function of how deeply these norms penetrate into society:<sup>85</sup> this ultimately depends on how strongly a speech community is, or feels, united by a sense of linguistically marked shared culture and identity.<sup>86</sup> The type of ethnic community promoted by aristocratic circles was, as Anthony Smith put it, 'lateral and

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rimés n'est verais. Tot est menssongie ço qu'il en dient, quar il non seivent rien fors par oïr dire. Li bons Baudoins li cuens de Chainau si ama molt Karlemaine, ne ne voc unques croire chose que l'en chantast, ainz fit cercher totes les bones abaies de France e garder par toz les armaires por savoir si l'om i troveroit la veraie estoira, ni onques trover ne l'i porent li cleric.'

<sup>83</sup> C. Croizy-Naquet, 'Écrire l'histoire: le choix du vers ou de la prose aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles', *Médiévales*, 38, 2000, pp. 71-85 (77): 'Au tournant du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles, l'émergence d'une prose écrite, forme poétiquement marquée par rapport au vers qui est alors le mode naturel d'écriture et de lecture, engage une mutation profonde de l'histoire. Réservée à l'origine aux textes sacrés et juridiques, la prose glisse peu à peu vers l'historiographie pour diverses raisons, didactiques en particulier: le public aristocratique est en effet soucieux de s'instruire plutôt que de se divertir et l'acquisition d'une culture doit passer par l'éviction du vers employé dans les chansons de geste et les romans, parce qu'il se voit accusé de mensonge et de déformation du réel, en raison du travail qu'il réclame.'

<sup>84</sup> See nn. 34 and 43 above.

<sup>85</sup> See nn. 6 and 8 above.

<sup>86</sup> This was recognized as early as 1589 by George Puttenham in his *The Arte of English Poesie*, quoted by Haugen, 'Dialect, Language, Nation', p. 925: 'After a speach is fully fashioned to the common understanding, and accepted by consent of a whole country and nation, it is called a language.'

extensive': 'The aristocratic state simply did not have the technical and administrative means to mould its populations into culturally homogenous and subjectively similar, let alone politically unified, units. They did not have the means to create citizens. As a result, ethnic [i.e., ethnic groups] were inevitably class-bound.'<sup>87</sup> This situation, typical of aristocratic-agrarian societies, had two important consequences for the community's organization and self-perception – and for its speech behaviour.

On the one hand, ethnic identity and cultural heritage remained chiefly upper-class concerns.<sup>88</sup> In linguistic terms, this meant that despite the affirmation of supra-local prestige varieties, these did not penetrate far down the social scale: vast areas of the dialect continuum remained virtually untouched.<sup>89</sup> The idea and practice of a supra-local vernacular language as a unifying bond of ethnic identity was restricted to the upper echelons of society, a situation which would be unthinkable in what we nowadays would call a national language. Today all natives of Britain are convinced that they speak English: so, if someone speaks, say, Cockney, she believes Cockney to be a (low) variety *of* English. In a formal situation, she would attempt to accommodate her speech to 'proper' English. We have seen above that, in like manner, Roger Bacon conceived of French as an integrated system of variation: he thought, for example, that Burgundian was a variety of French and that Parisian was 'proper' French.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, we might seriously doubt that a peasant from Burgundy would have held the same opinion, or that he would have had the opportunity, competence and pressure to modify his speech behaviour accordingly: beyond his local

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<sup>87</sup> A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, 1986, p. 77.

<sup>88</sup> See A. V. Murray, 'National Identity, Language and Conflict in the Crusades to the Holy Land, 1096-1192', in *The Crusades and the Near East: Cultural Histories*, ed. C. Kostick, London, 2011, pp. 107-30 (112).

<sup>89</sup> Kabatek, '*Koinés and scriptae*', pp. 160-1.

<sup>90</sup> See n. 70 above.

parlance, the Latin he heard in church would have been much more familiar to him than the 'French' Bacon spoke in Paris.

On the other hand, aristocratic class solidarity could easily transcend ethnic and political boundaries. The feudal nobility was a pan-European class, often united by bonds of marriage and unified by a homogeneous transnational culture. Discourse traditions promoted by French and Occitan nobles spread all over Europe: they were perceived and cultivated as expressions of a common aristocratic cultural heritage. So were the languages to which they were attached: as we shall see presently, for a long time no need was felt to translate them – from an aristocratic perspective, they were not considered significantly 'foreign'. Dante could regard French prose and Occitan lyric as parts of a single European system, because French and Occitan were the European aristocratic languages for prose and lyric.

This last observation is central to understanding the type of penetration of French and Occitan into the Italian peninsula, and the historical actors involved in it. A distinctive feature of their reception in Italy was that Italians did not limit themselves to consuming French material, but also took an active part in the production of original texts, both in Occitan and French.<sup>91</sup> In what follows, I shall try to trace how the linguistic culture developed in France spread throughout Italy and how, in doing so, it radically modified the image of language in society: as Dante saw clearly, the development of vernaculars in Italy was a continuation of a process which had its origins in France. In Section V below I shall trace the spread of French in Italy both as a spoken variety and as a written one. I shall discuss, in particular: the occasions which encouraged contact with and acquisition of competence in French; the specific conditions which made it an

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<sup>91</sup> See L. Morlino, 'La letteratura francese e provenzale nell'Italia medievale', in *Atlante della letteratura italiana*, ed. S. Luzzatto et al., 3 vols, Turin, 2010, I, pp. 27-40 (27).

'international' speech variety; and the role exercised by French discourse traditions in constructing a lay aristocratic and European cultural heritage. Section VI will be devoted to an examination of the Italian reception of the *langue d'oc*, favoured by the diffusion of Occitan lyric: although a rather brief phenomenon, this tradition contributed decisively to modifying attitudes and ideas about vernaculars, since Occitan was the first Romance vernacular subjected to a conscious attempt of codification. Finally, in Sections VII-IX, I shall analyse the language situation of Italian communes, investigating how their specific sociocultural conditions influenced the speech behaviour of these communities and the role played by aristocratic culture in the development of Italian vernacular poetry.

## V

A passage from the *Oculus pastoralis*, a collection of model speeches for the *podestà* written in Bologna around 1220, can serve as a viable introduction to the linguistic and cultural implications of the spread of French language and literature in Italy. The anonymous compiler imagines a young man, thirsty for war and glory, inciting his peers with the following words:

[Ecce illorum quos fama probos predicat armis, post transitum naturalem memoria uiuit, nec deperit nomen ipsorum in secula, sicut poetarum manifestant ystorie, et Francigenarum commentariorum uulgaris ydioma describit in diversa uolumina diucius diffusa per orbem, quibus utriusque sexus gratulantur corda nobilium et aliorum, qui inteligunt a lectoribus uel recitatoribus auribus intentis et animo diligenti, et qui alias quomodolibet literati perlegunt per se ipsos.]

Here is what proclaims the fame of those who excelled in battle. Their memory survives natural death, for centuries their name is not forgotten, as shown in the stories of poets and as described in the vernacular by French compilers, in many volumes long since spread throughout the globe, which bring joy to the hearts of nobles of both sexes (and of other people, too) who hear them, read aloud or recited, with attentive ears and diligent minds, while those who are literate can read them as they please by themselves.<sup>92</sup>

Various aspects concerning the diffusion and reception of French literature in thirteenth century Italy are disclosed in this passage: firstly, its international diffusion: French books are 'spread throughout the world'; and secondly, its distinct channels of reception, chiefly depending on the social standing of the audience – on the one hand, it was recited by readers and singers to an audience of mostly illiterate nobles, both men and women, who found in it a mirror of their chivalric aspirations, and, on the other hand, it was imported through books, which attracted a literate reading public. The texts which the author calls 'poetarum ystorie' are probably Latin poems such as Virgil's *Aeneid* and Lucan's *Pharsalia*, while the French books he mentions might have been works like the *Roman de Thèbes*, the *Roman d'Enéas* or the *Roman de Troie*: fictionalized translations and adaptations of ancient history which flourished in the French courts. As noted by Dionisotti, until the fourteenth century much of what was known in Italy about antiquity came from France.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> T. O. Tunberg, ed., *Speeches from the Oculus pastoralis*, Toronto, 1990, p. 60. (My translation).

<sup>93</sup> Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia*, p. 137.



The spread of French in the Italian peninsula was marked by two significant pan-European phenomena: the rise of universities and the Crusades. The audience of French literature was mainly made up of aristocrats, traders and literate professionals such as notaries, judges and doctors. An early episode of an Italian displaying French competence, however, involves a churchman, though a very unusual one. Writing in the 1170s, the author of the *Roman de Renart* stages a trial for adultery, at which a papal legate to the French court is summoned to offer his legal expertise. In the genre of satirical *fabliaux*, human folly takes animal shapes: the cardinal legate appears in the guise of a camel named Musard.<sup>94</sup> Lucien Foulet saw in this character a satire on a historical figure Peter of Pavia, cardinal of Saint Chrysogone, who was in Paris around 1173-8 to plead for the launch of the Third Crusade (1189-92).<sup>95</sup> As Antony Lodge has pointed out, however, the object of mockery does not need to be so precise: the *Roman* poked fun at a type rather than a specific person.<sup>96</sup> It is the type, and its mode of presentation, that are particularly interesting. The camel is a *Lombart* – that is, an Italian. His characterization is primarily linguistic and addresses two

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<sup>94</sup> For the name Musard, see L. Foulet, *Le Roman de Renart*, Paris, 1914, p. 225: 'Un musard, c'est au moyen âge un étourdi qui agit sans réflexion et perd son temps assez sottement à des choses qui n'en valent pas la peine.' Less clear is the choice of a camel to represent a cardinal papal legate. According to A. Lodge, 'A Comic Papal Legate and its Language', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 96, 1995, pp. 211-21 (213): 'such a beast was grotesque and ungainly (a horse designed by a committee); a rather exotic creature found normally in hot countries which was rather alien to most of the inhabitants of northern France ...' Camels are not included in the *Physiologus*, and even in later bestiaries they are described in plain zoological terms rather than moralized. Pliny the Elder, in his *Naturalis historia*, however, provides an odd tidbit of information concerning the practice of castrating camels: 'Castrandi genus etiam feminas, quae bello praeparentur, inventum est: fortiores ita fiunt coito negato': Pliny, *Natural History*, ed. and transl. H. Rackham, Cambridge MA and London, 10 vols, 1967-71, II, p. 52 (VIII.26). Perhaps the representation of the legate as a camel was meant to be a humorous reference to the cardinal's celibacy and to the bellicose intentions of his call for a new crusade.

<sup>95</sup> Foulet, *Le Roman de Renart*, pp. 225-6.

<sup>96</sup> Lodge, 'A Comic Papal Legate', pp. 215-16.

specific features: his pedantic legalistic verbiage, marked by frequent recourse to Latinisms and the technical jargon of Canon Law; and his inability to speak French properly, with Italian traits constantly creeping into his French delivery.<sup>97</sup> Aristocratic hostility towards clerics and lawyers went hand in hand with a growing sense of linguistic pride and its corollary, linguistic xenophobia. An increasingly focused sense of the 'correctness' of French speech, enhanced by the growing prestige of the Île-de-France's vernacular, lay behind this account of an Italian struggling to cope with 'proper' French. Obviously, making fun of the linguistic incompetence of a non-native speaker served to reinforce the norm by marking its boundaries.<sup>98</sup> The era of the Crusades was a time of war and warriors in all senses: the different varieties of the vernacular, under the banners of language loyalty and prestige, had finally entered the social and cultural battlefield.

As I have indicated, three interconnected phenomena chiefly encouraged the development of vernaculars and their expansion on a European scale as cultural institutions: the formation of linguistically marked proto-national identities; the affirmation of the feudal nobility as a self-conscious class with a distinct ideology; and the development of a pan-European cultural heritage which functioned as an alternative to the one traditionally provided by the church. A central event in this respect was the crusading movement, in which all three conditions came together. The European expansion in the East took two forms: conquest and trade; the system of military power and economic interests which emerged from it can

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<sup>97</sup> For an analysis of both features, see *ibid.*, pp. 217-20. A sample of Musard's oration provides a good illustration of the method employed, *ibid.*, pp. 210-11: 'Quare, mesire, me audite: / nos trovons en Decré escrite, / legem expresse publicate / de matrimoine violate. ... Et en cause fache droit dir: / se tu vels estre bone sir, videte bone favelar.'

<sup>98</sup> See Lodge's explanation at *ibid.*, p. 216.

be described as colonial.<sup>99</sup> People drawn from every part of Europe and from different social classes found themselves in an 'Overseas Europe', dominated by the military rule of feudal nobles and the commercial enterprise of traders.<sup>100</sup> In this context, they were forced to negotiate their mutual relationships and identities, through selection, evaluation and elaboration of cultural features which could alternatively unite or divide them. As Christians, and in opposition to their enemies, they proclaimed to be united by faith; but in this secularized context, dominated by lay dynastic powers, emphasis was given to internal ethnic diversities, marked by differences in language and customs.<sup>101</sup>

While stressing these differences, they were also forced to try to overcome them, largely without the mediation of the church. French had been the dominant language of the crusaders; and it became the common spoken language of a predominantly lay society of colonial settlers.<sup>102</sup> French

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<sup>99</sup> J. Praver, *The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem: European Colonialism in the Middle Ages*, London, 1972.

<sup>100</sup> See Murray, 'National Identity', p. 114.

<sup>101</sup> A situation already noticed during the First Crusade by Fulcher of Chartres, *Historia Hierosolymitana (1095-1127)*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, Heidelberg, 1913, pp. 202-3 (I.13): 'Sed quis unquam audivit tot tribus linguae in uno exercitu, cum ibi adessent Franci, Flandri, Frisi, Galli, Allobroges, Lotharingi, Alemanni, Baioarii, Normanni, Angli, Scoti, Aquitani, Itali, Daci; Apuli, Iberi, Britones, Graeci, Armeni? Quod si vellet me aliquis Britannus vel Teutonicus interrogare, neutro respondere sapere possem. Sed qui linguis diversi eramus, tamquam fratres sub dilectione Dei et proximi unanimes esse videbamus.' These differences were also acknowledged by their enemies. To celebrate the victory of Sultan Al-Kamil, at Damietta (1221), the poet Ibn 'Ulain wrote the following verses: 'On the morning we met before Damietta a mighty host of Byzantines, not to be numbered either for certain or (even) by guesswork. / They agreed as to opinion and resolution and religion, even if they differed in language': quoted by C. Hillenbrand, 'Jihad Poetry in the Age of the Crusades', in *Crusades: Medieval Worlds in Conflict*, ed. T. F. Madden et al., Farnham and Burlington, 2006, pp. 9-24 (15). Note, *ibid.*, that 'Byzantines' here stands for European crusaders: 'this is historically inaccurate, but it echoes a continuous past of adversarial conflict between Christendom and Islam. Yet, clearly, with the specific reference to Damietta, it is the hosts of the Fifth Crusade that are being routed out.'

<sup>102</sup> See Murray, 'National Identity', p. 119.

was also, as we shall see, the language in which the leading military classes celebrated in literature their prominent role in the Crusades and established the ideological basis for the legitimation of their power and the formation of a secular cultural heritage. It was probably here, in this displaced Europe, far away from the church, that French struck the first serious blow against medieval diglossia.<sup>103</sup> It was also in this context that Italian maritime powers such as Venice, Genoa and Pisa came into contact with the French aristocracy and its cultural output: they were probably the first Italian centres where French was picked up as a prestigious supra-local variety.

The thirteenth century began with the Fourth Crusade (1202-4). In an episode of Robert of Clari's *La conquête de Constantinople*, Jehan, leader of the Vlacks, asks a certain Pierre of Bracheux and some notable Venetians why Christians had come to Constantinople: did they not have enough land where they came from? Pierre answers that, since Troy belonged to their ancestors, they were within their rights to conquer it.<sup>104</sup> It must have been difficult to justify the pillage of a Christian city as an act of religious piety. Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie* became a sort of manifesto for the besiegers of Constantinople: sacking the Eastern capital, they had found their Troy.<sup>105</sup> The part played by Venetians in the Fourth Crusade is well

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<sup>103</sup> G. Folena, 'La Romània d'oltremare', in id., *Culture e lingue nel Veneto medievale*, Padua, 1990, pp. 269-83 (275): 'Nella simbiosi linguistica gallo-italiana d'Oriente, mentre il latino conserva il suo valore di lingua cancelleresca ed ecclesiastica, l'uso del volgare anche nei documenti è incrementato dal fatto che coloro che passano il mare sono in grande prevalenza laici, nobili-guerrieri, soldati e marinai-mercanti: i clerici sono in proporzione minima.'

<sup>104</sup> Robert de Clari, *La conquête de Constantinople*, ed. P. Lauer, Paris, 1924, p. 101: "'Sire, nous nous merveillons molt de vo boine chevalerie, et si nois merveillons mout que vous estes quis en chest pais, qui de si loingtaines teres estes, qui chi estes venu pour conquerre terre. De n'avés vous", fisent il, "teres en vos pais don't vous vous puissiés warir?" ... "Ba!" fist mesires Pierres, "Troie fu a nos anchiseurs, et chil qui en escaperent si s'en vinrent manoir la don't nous sommes venu; et pour che que fu a nos anchiseurs, sommes nous chi venu conquerre tere."

<sup>105</sup> E. Baumgartner, 'Romans antiques, histoires anciennes et transmission du savoir aux XII<sup>e</sup> et XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles', in *Medieval Antiquity*, ed. A. Welkenhuysen et al., Leuven,

known: in Venice, manuscripts of the *Roman de Troie* were copied as early as 1205.<sup>106</sup> The European fashion of boasting about the Trojan origins of families, cities and kingdoms can be traced back to this context: it laid the groundwork for the revival of Roman history in the years to come. Heading East, crusaders had fashioned themselves as Christian Paladins;<sup>107</sup> sacking Constantinople, they felt they had vindicated Aeneas. At this stage, historical accuracy was superfluous: what they needed was a 'usable' past.<sup>108</sup> If their exploits as Christian fighters were not so heroic, they could still claim for themselves a different kind of *pietas*, that of Trojan – and therefore Roman – soldiers: it was one fundamental step towards the secularization of Rome, and the formation of a secular European identity promoted by the knightly classes.<sup>109</sup>

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1995, pp. 219-36 (221): 'Troie est la geste héroïque et le poème amoureux de la ville phare, détruite, aux lignages dispersés, mais dont la dispersion même assure la (re)naissance des peuples de l'occident.'

<sup>106</sup> See Folena, 'La Romània d'oltremare', p. 273.

<sup>107</sup> See, e.g., the *Chanson d'Aspremont*: 'probabilmente composto in Sicilia alla fine del dodicesimo secolo per rialzare il morale delle truppe che si preparavano alla terza crociata', quoted in C. Lee, 'Letteratura franco-italiana nella Napoli Angiona?', *Francigena*, 1, 2015, pp. 83-108 (84).

<sup>108</sup> I have borrowed this expression from M. I. Finley, *Politics in the Ancient World*, Cambridge, 1983, p. 133.

<sup>109</sup> As noticed by Smith, *Origins of Nationalism*, p. 74: 'battle myths are even more crucial for maintaining ethnic sentiments in later generations than the initial events.' In France, the Trojan myth was mainly employed to claim the legitimacy of kingdoms and dynasties; see C. Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, Berkeley, 1993, pp. 107-18. It was still used in the same way in the fourteenth century by Robert of Anjou; see Lee, 'Letteratura franco-italiana'. In central and northern Italy, the appointed candidates were chiefly the single city-states, where for obvious reasons the myth took on a markedly Roman accent. For example, Sanzalone's *Gesta Florentinorum* reports some speeches – also delivered to incite troops in battle – which have many points of contact with the one reported in the *Oculus*: 'Gesta predecessorum nostrorum existentia coram nobis per exempla nos instruunt similia opera consummare'; 'opus est igitur patrum vestigia sequi, quam ... tempore nobilis Catiline fuerunt adepti victoriam, expedit recordari'; 'nobilissima civitas Florentia ... patrum est huc usque secuta vestigia, qui frena tenetes orbis, collectabatur excellentioribus privilegiis': quoted by N. Rubinstein, 'The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence. A Study

In the second half of the century, the Fourth Crusade itself became an instance of the usable past: in this case, to claim hegemony in Mediterranean trade. With this purpose in mind, and in open polemic with the Genoese, Martin da Canal wrote, between 1267 and 1275, his *Estoires de Venise*. More practical concerns and a pressing political agenda called for a more subtle kind of discourse: legend gave way to history.<sup>110</sup> Da Canal's patriotic appeal addressed a global readership of secular and religious powers, stretching from East to West: 'all the nations who cross the sea'.<sup>111</sup> Small wonder that he

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in Medieval Historiography', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 5, 1942, pp. 198-227 (212).

<sup>110</sup> The celebration of Venice was inspired by an oligarchical spirit; see Martin da Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise*, ed. A. Limentani, Florence, 1973, p. 4 (I.i): 'Et porce veul je que un et autre sachent a tosjours mais les euvres des Veneciens, et qui il furent et dont il vindrent et qui il sont et coment il firent la noble cité que l'en apele Venise, qui est orendroit la plus bele dou siecle. Et veul que trestos ciaux qui sont orendroit au siecle et qui doivent avenir sachent coment la noble cité est faite et coment ele est plentereuse de tos biens; et coment li sire des Veneciens, li noble dus, est puissant, et la nobilité qui est dedens, et la proesse dou peuple venesiens; et coment trestruit sont parfit a la foi de Jesu Crist et obeissant a sainte Yglise, et que jamés ne trepasserent li comandement de sainte Yglise.' For an interesting description of the function of historical memory – and its preservation in writings and paintings – see *ibid.*, p. 155 (II.i): 'porce que multes gens sont ou siecle que desirent savoir tous, la quel chose ne peut pas estre, car li un sont mort et li autre meurent et li autre naissent, si ne pevent pas conter a toz ce que a lor tens estoit fait, se il ne nos fait a savoir par escrit ou par peintures. Escritures et peintures voient les gens a zeus, que quant l'en voit peinte une estoire ou l'en oit conter une bataille, ou de mer ou de terre, ou l'en lit en un livre ce que ont fait nos ancestre, si nos est avis que nos somes present ou les batailles sont faites.'

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Et si vos en doing tesmoing l'apostolaus siege de Rome et li patriarche de Jerusalem, madame la roine de Chipre et li rois son fis et monseignor Biaumont, li haut prince de Antioche, qu'est sire de Triple, et mesire Gofré de Sardeigne et li Freres des Maisons et la noble chevalerie de la Surie et que Franceis que Pisans et que borgés d'Acre et de Sur, que Gres que Longuebars que Provensaus que Catelans que Anconetans que totes gens que par mer trespasent, que tot ce que je vos conterai en mon livre est parfite veritez.' For an analysis of this impressive list, see A. Limentani, 'Martino da Canal e l'Oriente mediterraneo', in *Venezia e il Levante fino al secolo XV*, ed. A. Pertusi, 2 vols, Florence, 1973-4, II, pp. 229-52.

wrote in French: 'the French language spreads throughout the world, and it is the most pleasant to read and to hear among all others'.<sup>112</sup>

Besides Venice, another trajectory of French penetration into the Italian peninsula was the so-called Pisa-Genoa axis. A considerable number of French manuscripts have been traced to a copying enterprise, sponsored by Dominican friars, established in the jails of Genoa and employing prisoners as scribes.<sup>113</sup> When Rustichello of Pisa was captured by the Genoese, probably at the battle of Meloria (1284), he had already started compiling a collection of Arthurian romances in French prose, the *Compilation arthurienne* (1272-98). In the prologue, he deliberately linked his work to the Eighth Crusade (1270), claiming that Edward I of England, who was crossing the sea 'to conquer the Holy Sepulchre', had donated his original copy to him.<sup>114</sup> In 1298, still in jail, Rustichello was joined by another

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<sup>112</sup> Canal, *Les Estoires de Venise*, p. 3 (Li): 'porce que lengue franceise cort parmi le monde et est la plus delitable a lir et a oïr que nule autre'. Note the typical characterization of French: 1) 'delitable'; 2) international ('cort parmi le monde'); and 3) transmitted via writing and speech ('lir et oïr').

<sup>113</sup> See F. Cigni, 'Manuscrits en français, italien, et latin entre la Toscane et la Ligurie à la fine du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle: implications codicologiques, linguistiques, et évolution des genres narratifs', in *Medieval Multilingualism. The Francophone World and its Neighbours*, ed. C. Kleinhenz, Turnhout, 2010, pp. 187-217. The Dominican milieu of Pisa and Genoa, furthermore, had a central role in the diffusion of the prose traditions – didactic, historical, romance – Dante considered typical of French (see, nn. 33-4); see F. Cigni, 'I testi della prosa letteraria e i contatti col francese e col latino. Considerazioni sui modelli', in *Pisa crocevia di uomini, lingue e culture. L'età medievale*, ed. L. Battaglia Ricci et al., Rome, 2009, pp. 157-181.

<sup>114</sup> Rustichello da Pisa, *Il romanzo arturiano di Rustichello da Pisa*, ed. F. Cigni, Pisa, 1994, p. 233: 'Seingneur enperaor et rois, et princes et dux, et quenz et baronz, civalier et vauvasor et borgiois, et tous le preudome de ce monde que avés talenz de delitier voz en romainz, ci prenés ceste, et le faites lire de chief en chief ... . Et sachiez tot voirement que cestui romainz fu treslaités dou livre monseingneur Odoard, li roi d'Engleterre, a celui tenz qu'il passé houtre la mer en servise nostre Sire Damedeu pour conquerer le saint Sepoucre. Et maistre Rusticiaus de Pise, li quelz est imaginés desovre, conpilé ceste romainz ...' King Edward I, son of Henry III Plantagenet, took part in the Eighth Crusade and travelled across Italy between 1272 and 1274 on his way back to France. Rustichello's claim might well be fictional and intended to lend authority to his text – a possibility which does not, however,

prisoner: Marco Polo, a Venetian who had just returned from a journey to the far East lasting 23 years, before being captured at the battle of Curzola. The two decided to collaborate by writing an account of Polo's travels. The book they produced, *Le divisement dou monde*, written in a Genoese jail by a Venetian and a Pisan, is one of the first masterpieces of vernacular literature written by Italians; but the vernacular in question was French. The kind of narrative text they had decided to write prompted this choice.<sup>115</sup> French did not, however, owe its prestige merely to written discourse traditions; in Genoa, as in Pisa and Venice, it was also a currently spoken variety by this time – indeed, it may have been the language in which Marco and Rustichello communicated with each other.<sup>116</sup>

Aristocrats established the prestige of French in courts, traders spread its use along land and sea routes; Italian city-states picked it up as a supra-regional language and their oligarchies as a literary fashion. Parallel to these

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reduce its ideological relevance. Note the reference to the usage of having books read aloud: 'le faites lire'.

<sup>115</sup> The readership addressed in the prologue is almost identical to that of the *Compilation arthurienne*; see Marco Polo, *Milione – Le divisement dou monde*, ed. G. Ronchi, Milan, 1982, p. 305: 'Seignors enperaor et rois, dux et marquois, cuens, chevaliers et borgiois, et toutes gens que volés savoir les deverses jenerasions des homes et les deversités des deverses region dou monde, si prennés cestui livre et le faites lire. Et qui trouvererés toutes les grandismes mervoilles et les grant diversités de la grande Harminie et de Persie et des Tartars et de Indie, et de maintes autres provinces, sicom nostre livre voç contera por ordre apertemant, sicome meisser Marc Pol, sajes et noble citaiens de Venece, raconte por ce que a seç iaus meisme il le voit. Mes auques hi n'i a qu'il ne vit pas, mes il l'entendi da homes citables et de verité; et por ce metreron les chouse veue por veue et l'entendue por entandue, por ce que nostre livre soit droit et vertables sanç nulle mansonge.' This suggests a certain affinity between the literary genres of the two books. Note, however, that the *Divisament* is never called a 'romainz' and that its authority is not conferred by a written source – such as the manuscript donated by Edward I – but rather by the physical presence of Polo and his sources as eye-witnesses. While the *Compilation Arthurienne* was written to please ('que avés talenz de delitier voz'), the stated aim of the *Divisament* was to instruct ('toutes gens que volés savoir') and to tell the truth ('por ce que nostre livre soit droit et vertables sanç nulle mansonge').

<sup>116</sup> See A. Andreose, 'Marco Polo's *Devisement dou monde* and Franco-Italian tradition', *Francigena*, 1, 2015, pp. 261-91.



channels ran the university. This milieu certainly assisted the spread of French manuscripts: as we have seen, the *Oculus pastoralis* proclaimed the global diffusion of French books; and it is no coincidence that this observation was made in Bologna.<sup>117</sup> The main university centre, however, was Paris. Students and teachers converged from all over Europe to fill the ranks of the university's scholastic community: their culture was essentially Latin, and Latin was their privileged means of communication. We have evidence, nevertheless, that in Paris French soon became a vehicle for ordinary conversation, not just among the lay population, but also for masters and students: whatever their country of origin, scholars acquired a certain degree of proficiency in the Parisian vernacular. Thanks to the research of Serge Lusignan, we know that figures as diverse as the Italian Dominican Thomas Aquinas and the English Franciscan Roger Bacon displayed awareness of the developments undergone by vernacular varieties in France.<sup>118</sup>

This was the situation in Paris when Brunetto Latini, the leading Florentine intellectual of his generation, arrived there in 1260. In Paris, Brunetto combined political activity with intellectual endeavour, for it was there that he conceived and composed the better part of his two major works, the *Rettorica* and *Li livre dou tresor*. The French *Tresor* is the first medieval encyclopedia to be written in the vernacular, designed as a manual for the formation of the political ruler, aptly culminating in rhetoric and politics, with politics exalted as the highest form of human activity. His decision to write the *Tresor* in French is justified with this famous statement:

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<sup>117</sup> See n. 92 above.

<sup>118</sup> Thomas Aquinas, commenting on the denial of Peter in Matthew's Gospel, where a woman recognizes the apostle thanks to his accent, gives the following comparison: 'In eadem lingua saepe diversa locutio fit, sicut patet in Francia, et Picardia, et Burgundia, et tamen una loquela est': quoted by S. Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement. Les intellectuels et la langue Française aux XIII<sup>e</sup> et XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Montreal, 1986, p. 61.

‘And if anyone asked why this book is written in the French vernacular, since I am Italian, I would say that this is for two reasons: first, because I am in France; second, because French is more pleasant and more widespread among the people of all languages.’<sup>119</sup> Brunetto’s model became an immediate success: the anonymous Florentine *volgarizzatore* of Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principis*, writing in 1288, advised nobles and rulers who did not know Latin to read vernacular translations of moral philosophy, and he explicitly recommended French ones.<sup>120</sup>

## VI

The identification of the southern French as a distinctive ethnic group can be dated to the First Crusade. The earliest attestations of Occitan as an autonomous speech variety, however, start appearing much later. ‘Such differentiation became necessary only when the northern conquest of the South in the thirteenth century brought speakers from distant ends of Gallo-Romance into regular contact with each other.’<sup>121</sup> A comparison between the diffusion of Occitan and of French in Italy reveals that the two had much in common: the areas of attraction, and the social position of the actors

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<sup>119</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, ed. P. G. Beltrami et al., Turin, 2007, p. 6 (I.i.7): ‘Et se aucun demandoit por quoi ceste livres est escrit en roman selonc le patois de France, puisque nos somes ytaliens, je diroie que ce est por .ii. raisons: l’une que nos somes en France, et l’autre por ce que la parleure est plus delitable et plus commune a touz languaiges.’

<sup>120</sup> Giles of Rome, *Del reggimento de’ principi: volgarizzamento trascritto nel MCCLXXXVIII*, ed. F. Corazzini, Florence, 1858, pp. 169-70: ‘E sed elli avviene che i figliuoli dei gentili uomini non sapessero grammatica, ellino debbono avere le scienze morali volgarizzate in franciesco o in alcuno altro linguaggio, acciò ch’ellino sieno sufficientemente introdotti a sapere governare loro ed altrui.’ The explicit mention of French is remarkable especially because it does not figure in the original text: see Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, p. 310 (II.ii.8): ‘ut si omnes alias scientias ignorarent, adhuc studere debent, ut eis moralia vulgariter et grossa proportionetur: quia per ea princeps sufficienter instruitur, qualiter debeat principari, et quo se et cives inducere debeat ad virtutes’.

<sup>121</sup> Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, p. 96.

involved, in most cases, were the same – it is no coincidence that, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, Dante considered the two corresponding literatures functionally complementary. As we have seen, however, Dante assumed that they differed in several respects, starting from the medium: prose for French, verse for Occitan.<sup>122</sup> Born in the courts of the Midi, the Occitan tradition was chiefly lyrical: it was in verse and originally was sung to a musical accompaniment – a feature that, at least in principle, required the physical presence of the performer. It was thus exported by poets – or, as they were called, troubadours.

These conditions led to a distinctive type of diffusion: limited to areas in proximity with Provence, such as Catalonia and northern Italy, and initially cultivated in the relatively homogeneous sociocultural environment of aristocratic courts, Occitan was exported as a lofty, literary speech variety: outside the south of France, it was generally not learned as a colloquial register or employed in practical contexts such as commerce or administration. A crusade determined the decline of this literary civilization: after the Albigensian Crusade (1208-28), which crushed the flourishing courts of Provence, the original centre of irradiation lost its momentum. Killed off as a living tradition, Occitan lyric acquired a venerable character, fuelled by the sense of past glory and the spell exercised by its almost mythical origin in time and space.

The first wave of Occitan diffusion in Italy, stretching roughly up to the 1250s, involved chiefly northern Italian courts, both in the west, such as Saluzzo, Malaspina and Monferrato, and in the east, such as the Este of Ferrara and the Da Romano in Treviso. Those who took part in it were firstly troubadours from the Midi, like Peire Vidal and Raimbaud of Vaquerai, gravitating around the orbit of Liguria and Piedmont; in the east, the

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<sup>122</sup> See n. 30 above.

prominent figures were Aimeric de Peguilhan and Uc de Saint-Circ, who from 1220 found patronage in Treviso, at the court of the Da Romano.<sup>123</sup> A considerable number of indigenous poets followed shortly afterwards: the most famous, thanks in part to Dante, was probably Sordello of Goito. Born into a family of the lesser nobility, he left his native Goito, near Mantua, to try his luck as a troubadour in the courts of the Veneto. He led an adventurous life, served under some of the most famous patrons of the time, moved to Spain and later Provence. He was knighted by Charles of Anjou, then count of Provence, and found his way back to Italy in Charles's entourage, in 1265. He died four years later.<sup>124</sup>

In northern Italy the cultural and linguistic initiative moved progressively inside the walls of the city states: characteristic of this development is the central role played by legal professionals such as notaries, judges and *podestà*. Parallel to the trajectory of diffusion of *langue d'oïl*, in *langue d'oc* we also recognize the fundamental role played by Genoa. Most Italian poets writing in Occitan were Genoese: Lanfranco Cigala, Bonifacio Calvo, Simone Doria, all legal professionals; and Luchetto Gattilusio, who was a merchant.<sup>125</sup> Bartolomeo Zorzi, from Venice, had a similar experience to that of Marco Polo some ten years before: he got his training in Occitan between 1266 and 1273, while he was detained in a Genoese jail.<sup>126</sup> If we look to the north-east, the Bologna-Padua axis also contributed to the diffusion of Occitan poetry: the Bolognese Rambertino Buvaelli was connected to the court of the Este – as a *podestà*, he covered the

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<sup>123</sup> See Morlino, 'La letteratura francese e provenzale', pp. 27-9.

<sup>124</sup> See M. Boni, 'Sordello', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, 6 vols, Rome, 1976, V, pp. 328-33.

<sup>125</sup> For a recent description of Occitan poetry in Genoa, see A. Bampa, 'L' "Occitania poetica genovese" tra storia e filologia', *Studi mediolatini e volgari*, LX, 2014, pp. 5-34, and the bibliography cited there.

<sup>126</sup> G. Folena, 'Tradizione e cultura trobadorica nelle corti e nelle città venete', in id., *Culture e lingue nel Veneto medievale*, Padua, 1990, pp. 1-138, esp. 106-34.

entire area of northern communes, from Genoa to Modena.<sup>127</sup> As for Padua, we shall see in Chapter 6 that the Occitan tradition played a significant role in the development of classicizing Latin poetry which goes under the name of pre-humanism – and even Lovato Lovati was a judge and *podestà*.<sup>128</sup>

Occitan lyric was the product of a world, like the courts of the Midi, which unfolded as a complex and competitive game. Games have rules, and everyone who takes part in them is expected to know these rules. Italians needed instruments to orient themselves in the reception and production of the new lyrical genres. Troubadours, for their part, needed to export a social model and to give a coherent representation of the role they played in it.<sup>129</sup> These particular circumstances determined the birth of Occitan philology: biographies of troubadours and commentaries on the poems (the so-called *vidas* and *razos*) were composed to provide a historical and poetic contextualization for the texts.<sup>130</sup> From the second half of the thirteenth century, as the Occitan expatriots themselves died out, books progressively started to replace people: it has been calculated that 80% of the surviving manuscripts of Occitan lyric produced between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries were copied in Italy.<sup>131</sup> The compilation of new manuscripts implied the conscious establishment of a textual canon – that is,

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<sup>127</sup> Morlino, 'La letteratura francese e provenzale', p. 29.

<sup>128</sup> See R. G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Boston and Leiden, 2003, pp. 52-4.

<sup>129</sup> G. Brunetti, *Il frammento inedito 'Resplendente stella de albur' di Giacomino Pugliese e la poesia italiana delle origini*, Tübingen, 2000, pp. 224-5.

<sup>130</sup> M. L. Meneghetti, 'Uc de Saint Circ tra filologia e divulgazione (su data, formazione e fini del *Liber Alberici*)', in *Il Medioevo nella Marca. Trovatori, giullari, letterati a Treviso nei secoli XIII e XIV*, ed. M. L. Meneghetti et al., Treviso, 1991, pp. 115-28.

<sup>131</sup> C. Pulsoni, 'Appunti per una descrizione storico-geografica della tradizione manoscritta trobadorica', *Critica del testo*, VII.1, 2004, pp. 357-89 (359-60). On the Occitan manuscript tradition, see D'A. S. Avalle, *I manoscritti della letteratura in lingua d'oc*, Turin, 1960.

poems were organized by author or by genre – and a precocious form of textual criticism.<sup>132</sup>

Most important for our purposes, however, is the formal definition of rules for composition. Occitan is the first Romance vernacular which underwent a deliberate attempt at formal codification.<sup>133</sup> The earliest Occitan grammar was written by the Catalan troubadour Raimon Vidal between 1190 and 1213. His treatise, the *Razos de trobar*, became a minor classic: in Sardinia, between 1282 and 1296, Terramagnino of Pisa turned it into verse.<sup>134</sup> Towards the end of the century, in Sicily, which by this time was in the hands of the Aragonese, Jaufre de Foixà wrote another grammar indebted to Vidal's, the *Regles de trobar* (1282-91).<sup>135</sup> Independent from this tradition was Uc de Saint Circ's *Donatz proensals*, probably written in Treviso around 1240, at the request of some local notables.<sup>136</sup> Rather than discussing the concrete achievements of these pioneers, however, it is important to assess why they embarked on this enterprise, and what idea of language might have inspired them. All the texts I have mentioned agree on a fundamental principle: that there is a correct Occitan usage; but they differ in the way they construe this notion. Raimon Vidal attempted to produce a precise theory of correct speech, by stating: firstly, that it corresponds to the

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<sup>132</sup> See Folena, 'Tradizione e cultura trobadorica', pp. 4-22.

<sup>133</sup> For a general introduction to Occitan grammarians, see P. Swiggers, 'Les plus anciennes grammaires occitanes', in *Contacts des langues, des civilisations et intertextualité*, ed. G. Gouiran, Montpellier, 1990, pp. 131-48.

<sup>134</sup> For the commercial and political relations between Tuscany and Catalonia in this period, see S. Resconi, 'La lirica trobadorica nella Toscana del Duecento: canali e forme della diffusione', *Carte romanze*, 2/2, 2014, pp. 269-300 (288-91).

<sup>135</sup> For the history and relationship of the three texts, see Marshall, *Razos de Trobar*, pp. lxvi-lxxv.

<sup>136</sup> See P. Swiggers, 'Continuités et discontinuités, tension et synergie: les rapports du latin et des langues vernaculaires, reflétés dans la modélisation grammaticographique', in *The Dawn of the Written Vernacular in Western Europe*, ed. M. Goyens et al., Leuven, 2003, pp. 71-106 (77).

vernacular spoken in a specific geographical area;<sup>137</sup> secondly, that there is such thing as a native Occitan speaker, and his or her speech is the repository of the pure form of the language;<sup>138</sup> and, thirdly, that Occitan can be taught by reference to grammatical norms inherited from Latin grammars, because Occitan is naturally grammatical.<sup>139</sup> Terramagnino of Pisa removed any reference to the geographical boundaries of Occitan and to the authority of native speakers. This is probably because he had no direct contact with the spoken language: for him, Occitan was solely a literary

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 4, ll. 59-64: ‘Totz hom qe vol trobar ni entendre deu primierament saber qe neguna parlatura non es natural ni drecha del nostre langage, mais acella de Franza et de Lemosi et de Proenza et d’Alvergna et de Caersin. Per qe ieu vos dic qe, quant ieu parlerai de “Lemosy”, qe totas estas terras entendas et totas las vezinas et totas cellas qe son entre ellas.’ This idea is reinforced by the recognition that if some words are common to Occitan and other languages, they still should be considered Occitan; *ibid.*, p. 6 (ll. 77-84): ‘Mont home son qe dizon qe *porta* ni *pan* ni *vin* non son paraolas de Lemosin per so car hom las ditz autresi en autras terras com en Lemosin. Et sol non sabon qe dizon; car totas las paraolas qe ditz hom en Lemosin [aisi com en las autras terras autresi son de Lemosin com de las autras terras, mas aquellas que hom ditz en Lemosin] d’autras gisas qe en autras terras, aqellas son propriament de Lemosin. Per q’ieu vos dic qe totz hom qe vuella trobar ni entendre deu aver fort privada la parlatura de Lemosin.’ This observation, which may seem obvious, was probably due to the circumstances in which Vidal composed the *Razos*. He was warning his readers to avoid hypercorrectionism, that is, to refrain from thinking that if a word was used in their own language, then it could not also be an Occitan word. Later in the treatise, Vidal also warns against the use of foreign, and specifically French, words; *ibid.*, p. 24 (ll. 461-4): ‘Et tug aqill qe dizon *amis* per *amics* et *mei* per *me* an fallit, et *maintenir*, *contenir*, *retenir*, tut fallon, qe paraulas son francesas, et no las deu hom mesclar ab lemosinas, aqestas ni negunas paraulas biasas.’ On the linguistic purism of Occitan grammarians, see S. Gutiérrez García, ‘Norme grammaticale, préceptes poétiques et plurilinguisme dans la lyrique médiévale des troubadours’, in *The Poetics of Multilingualism*, ed. P. N. Aziz Hanna et al., Cambridge, 2017, pp. 61-72.

<sup>138</sup> Marshall, *Razos de Trobar*, p. 4 (ll. 64-5): ‘Et tot l’ome qe en aqellas terras son nat ni norit an la parlatura natural et drecha.’

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 6 (ll. 84-9): ‘Et apres deu saber alques de la natura de gramatica, si fort primament vol trobar ni entendre, car tota la parlatura de Lemosyn se parla naturalment et per cas et per nombres et per genres et per temps et per personas et per motz, aisi com poretz auzir aissi si be o escoutas.’ Cf. J. H. Marshall, *The Donatz proensal of Uc Faïdit*, London, 1969, p. 88: ‘Las oit partz que om troba en gramatica troba om en vulgar provençal, zo es: nome, pronome, verbe, adverbe, particip, conjunctios, prepositios et interjectios.’

idiom, its boundaries were marked by texts, not by speakers – a condition which was probably typical in late thirteenth-century central Italy. Jofre of Foixà, by contrast, generally agreed with Vidal's ideas, to which he contributed by attempting to explain grammatical rules to nobles who did not know Latin.<sup>140</sup> In one instance, he openly disagreed with Vidal, stating that sometimes the usage of authors must be preferred to the art of the grammarian: this made him more tolerant than Vidal of alternative pairs of equally admissible forms.<sup>141</sup> His most significant contribution, however, was the treatment of the definite article, which is the first complete discussion of this typically Romance (and notably non-Latin) feature to appear in a grammar manual.

We need to pay attention to the relationship between these texts and contemporary developments in Latin teaching: Uc's *Donatz proensal*, as the title suggests, depends structurally on Donatus's *Ars minor*. Terramagnino's decision to put Vidal's rules in verse form can be explained as an imitation

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<sup>140</sup> Marshall, *Razos de Trobar*, p. 56 (ll. 5-15): 'Mas com aquell libre [i.e., Vidal's *Razos de trobar*] nulls homs no puga perfetament entendre ses saber la art de gramatica, e trobars sia causa que p[er]tanga a l'emperador e a reys, a comtes, a duchs, a marques, a princeps, a barons, a cavallers, a burzeses, encara a altres homens laichs, li plusor dels quels no sabon gramatica ...; per que cells qui nos entenden en gramatica, mas estiers han subtil e clar engyn, pusquen mils conexer e aprendre lo saber de trobar.' Note the comparison between being learned ('sabon gramatica') and being clever ('han subtil e clar engyn'). While different registers of Latin depended on the level of education of the speaker or writer, the elaboration of the higher registers of the vernacular, which were not taught formally, increasingly led to the interpretation of variations in the vernacular as determined by cognitive factors: a good vernacular speaker was seen as a more intelligent person.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82-4 (ll. 532-51): 'E son alguns verbs en los quals En Ramon Vidals dix que li trobador havien errat ... . E eu altrey li que segons art el dix ver e quels deu hom axi pausar; ma no li altrey li que li trobador errason, por ço car us venç art, e longa costuma per dret es haüda tant que venç per us. E con sia us en algunas terres on le lengatges es covinentz e autreyaz a trobar que tuyt cominalment diguen aytant o plus en la primera persona *eu cre* com *eu crey*, e en la terça persona diguen aytant *ausi* com *ausic*, por aquesta raho dic eu que li trobador noy falliron, car ill seguiren lo us del lengatge e la costuma. E pus tuyt li trobador ho han ditz en llurs trobars, es us e confirmamentz de lengatge; mas si us o dos haguessen ditz, assatz pogra dir que fos enrada. Per que dic eu cascus pot dir quals que mes li plasia.'



of verse Latin grammars such as the *Doctrinale* of Alexandre of Villedieu. Finally, Jofre's capacity to handle Latin rules in a logical, explanatory manner – and therefore to make them accessible to a non-Latinate readership – along with his pioneering treatment of definite articles, can be paralleled with contemporary developments in the teaching of Latin grammar during the thirteenth century. It is no coincidence that references to articles start appearing in several Latin grammarians of the time: in response to Priscian's comments on Greek articles, grammarians who did not know Greek resorted to their own vernaculars to supply the absent articles in Latin.<sup>142</sup>

That Vidal's set of assumptions on language correctness – that the pure form of a language corresponds to a specific diatopic variety; that people who acquire this variety as a mother tongue are its native speakers; and that such a variety is an independent rule-governed system with an autonomous existence<sup>143</sup> – has informed the teaching of grammar down to our own day and that many people still subscribe to them, can obscure the fact that their emergence was due, at the time, to very exceptional circumstances. In the first place, as Peter Swiggers has observed, an essential stimulus to grammatical activity was the comparison between different speech varieties due to the exporting of Occitan lyric.<sup>144</sup> All these treatises were composed by authors who learned Occitan as a second language; and

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<sup>142</sup> Among the passages gathered together by S. Lusignan, 'Le français et le latin aux XIII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècles: pratique des langues et pensée linguistique', *Annales*, 42-4, 1987, pp. 955-67 (960-1), the following, by Robert Kilwardby, is particularly interesting (p. 966, n. 18): 'Si enim dicatur "maistre", adhuc confusum est respectu casuum et respectu diversarum ordinum in oratione. Si enim dicitur "li maistres", determinatur ei nominativus et determinatur ei ratio ordinis, ut ab eo potest sic egredi actus, quod patet sic dicendum "li maistres lit". Si autem dicatur "le maistre", determinatur ei accusativus et ratio ordinationis, ut recipiat actum sic: "je voi le maistre".'

<sup>143</sup> See nn. 137-9 above.

<sup>144</sup> Swiggers, 'Continuités et discontinuités', pp. 93-4.

the only Occitan native, Uc de Saint Circ, wrote for Italian patrons. What probably suggested the concept of a native speaker to Raimon Vidal was the realization that he was not one.

Mere awareness of language variation, however, was not sufficient:<sup>145</sup> what was essential was the perception of a gap in prestige between more or less contiguous speech varieties and the social value attributed to language competence in the prestigious variety. Troubadours lived off poetry, and therefore the regulation of language competence had a vital socio-economic value for them. This had been the case since the very beginning of the troubadour movement; as Thomas Field put it: 'the most prestigious singers' pronunciation and lexicon became part and parcel of the songs themselves and were integrated into the genre as a performance pattern'.<sup>146</sup> Vidal's idea of competence is expressed by the phrase 'trobar ni entendre', which literally means 'to compose and to comprehend'. It must be stressed that 'comprehend' does not indicate the mere ability to understand a language but the technical competence of an audience which is expected to grasp the subtleties of poetic language and therefore to be able to distinguish good from bad practitioners.<sup>147</sup>

These particular conditions made Occitan the first Romance vernacular which someone felt the need to isolate, illustrate and, most importantly, teach. The recourse to the only technique (*ars*) then known for

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<sup>145</sup> L. Lazzerini, *Letteratura medievale in lingua d'oc*, Modena, 2010, p. 169: 'la riflessione grammaticale è prerogativa delle aree periferiche, ossia degli ambienti in cui l'occitanico è lingua di cultura, non sorretta dalla competenza del parlante autoctono'. True, but this also happened with French, and no one felt any need to codify it for more than a century.

<sup>146</sup> T. T. Field, 'Troubadours Performance and the Origins of the Occitan *Koiné*', *Tenso*, XXI, 2006, pp. 36-54 (42).

<sup>147</sup> Marshall, *Razos de Trobar*, p. 4 (ll. 37-42): 'Et sil qe [li auzidor] entendon, qant auziran un malvais trobador, per ensegnament li lauzaran son chantar; et si no lo volon lauzar, al menz nol volran blasmar; et en aisi son enganat li trobador, et li auzidor n'an lo blasme. Car una de las maiors valors del mont es qui sap lauzar so qe fa a lauzar et blasmar so qe fai a blasmar.'

language teaching – Latin grammar, or *ars grammatica* – was obligatory: Latin grammar was the sole instrument known, no matter whether appropriate or not, to open an overt discussion of language description and prescription. From the perspective of language ideas, the consequences of Vidal's codification were momentous: language norms perceived as correct and worthy of imitation because of their social value – the 'natural' speech of the native speaker – were justified through resorting to abstract rules of correctness derived from Latin grammar. Furthermore, since the native Occitan speaker did not need to be taught Occitan, and grammar was the way to teach a language, then the native speaker must have naturally spoken a grammatically correct language. The essentialist concept of language developed in aristocratic circles – that is, language as an attribute of a person's nature, linked to ethnic and geographical origins,<sup>148</sup> selected as a normative model to imitate because endowed with social prestige – was granted an autonomous existence as an independent system governed by rules. It was a fundamental step in the history of standardization: a prestigious variety was starting to become a standard.<sup>149</sup>

As I have stressed, the conditions which fostered the codification of Occitan were exceptional: the attempt remained largely isolated. For similar attempts in French, Tuscan or Spanish, we have to wait until the fifteenth

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<sup>148</sup> See n. 71 above.

<sup>149</sup> Vidal, however, was still closer to what I have called the essentialist concept of language. In modern standard languages, where the standard is learnt through formal education, as noted by Milroy, 'Language Ideologies', p. 537: 'The [standard language] ideology requires us to accept that language (or a language) is not the possession of the native speakers: they are not pre-programmed with a language faculty that enables them to acquire (or develop) 'competence' in language without being formally taught ... . In this general context ... grammatical sequences are not the products of the native speaker's mind. They are defined externally – in grammar books, and school is the place where the real language learning takes place. It is common sense that children must be taught the canonical form of their own native language, mainly at school ... by those who know the rules of 'grammar' ... .'

century.<sup>150</sup> The prestige of Occitan, and its status as a literary variety which could be learnt from books, however, enjoyed a certain *fortuna*, particularly in Italy. Occitan poetry was learned and imitated: as recent research has shown, from the 1260s we can reconstruct the movement of manuscripts from the original areas of reception, such as Genoa and the courts of Monferrato and Malaspina, towards Tuscany – thus following that Genoa-Pisa axis which we have already seen for texts in *langue d'oïl*.<sup>151</sup> At the end of the thirteenth century, or at the beginning of the fourteenth, an amanuensis in Gubbio assembled a manuscript, known as P, gathering together Occitan lyrics, Uc de Saint Circ's *Donatz proensal*, Raimon Vidal's *Razos de trobar*, a collection of *vidas* and *razos*, and an Occitan-Tuscan glossary: this manuscript can thus be considered an 'introductory manual in Occitan studies'.<sup>152</sup> By the mid-thirteenth century, the area of cultural development moved to central Italy, in line with a general movement affecting the peninsula in these years. It is time, then, to turn to Tuscany and to trace how the process of emancipation of the vernaculars we have observed in relation to French and Occitan came about in Tuscan linguistic culture.

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<sup>150</sup> Swiggers, 'Continuités et discontinuités', p. 75.

<sup>151</sup> See Resconi, 'La lirica trobadorica'.

<sup>152</sup> S. M. Cingolani, 'Considerazioni sulla tradizione manoscritta delle *vidas* trobadoriche', *Actes du XVII<sup>e</sup> Congrès International de Linguistique et de Philologie Romanes*, ed. D. Kremer, VI, Tübingen, 1988, pp. 108-15 (113): 'manuale d'avviamento agli studi provenzali'. For a description of the manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Plut. 41.42), see G. Noto, "*Intavulare*". *Tavole di canzonieri romanzi, I. Canzonieri provenzali, 4. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana: P (Plut. 41.42)*, Modena, 2003. The language of the glossary has been studied by A. Castellani, 'Le glossaire provençal-italien de la Laurentienne (ms. Plut. 41,42)', in his *Saggi di linguistica italiana e romanza (1946-1976)*, 3 vols, Rome, 1980, III, pp. 90-133.

## VII

Dino Compagni was a contemporary of Dante and belonged to the same *guelfo bianco* faction. A merchant, he was personally involved in the popular party between 1282 and 1300. His political career ended, as did Dante's, in 1301, with the final victory of Corso Donati's *parte nera*; he avoided exile by the skin of his teeth. His most famous work is a *Cronica delle cose occorrenti ne' tempi suoi*, a personal account of the events which occurred in Florence in the years 1280 to 1312.<sup>153</sup>

His scant poetic production includes a gnomic poem, known as *Canzone del pregio*. *Pregio*, a borrowing from the Provençal *pretz*, can be translated as 'prestige' or 'dignity' and indicates the moral duties assigned to every citizen according to his social condition. In the song, Florentine society is divided according to social strata: each stratum is provided with moral and practical instructions, or rules of behaviour, intended to enable the individual to gain the *pregio* of his class – in the context of a civic morality in which social standing is achieved through personal worth and deeds rather than on the basis of rights acquired by birth.<sup>154</sup>

There are eleven social statuses listed in a catalogue of ideal types: emperor, king, baron, rector (*podestà*), knight, *donzello* (young gentleman or aspiring knight), judge (or doctor in law), notary, medical doctor, merchant and goldsmith; and to each of these Compagni dedicates a *stanza*. The first editor, Isidoro del Lungo, believed that the poem was unfinished and

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<sup>153</sup> On his biography, see G. Arnaldi, 'Compagni, Dino', in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, XXVII, Rome, 1982, pp. 629-47.

<sup>154</sup> Dino Compagni, *La Cronica e la canzone morale "Del pregio"*, ed. I. del Lungo, Florence, 1917, pp. 215-16: 'Amor mi sforza e sprona valere / A pro di chi valor pugna valente; / Chè vuol nessun sia vile e negligente / A cui abbella buon pregio seguire. / Chè pregio è un miro di clartà gioconda, / Ove valor s'agenzia e si pulisce; / E chi sé mira ad esso sé nudrisce / Di ricche laude, e di gran pregio abonda. / Ma non s'ha per retaggio / Né antiquo legnaggio, / Né si dona di bada, o vende, o mpegna, / Né tra malvagi regna, / Ma in uom cortese e pro sta per usaggio.'

hypothesized that the original design included, after a selection of the *Arti maggiori*, a list of the *Arti minori*, of which the goldsmith, now abruptly concluding the catalogue, would have been the first instance.<sup>155</sup> The traditional tripartition of social classes – *oratores*, *bellatores* and *laboratores*, that is, clergy, warriors and workers – is re-interpreted in the context of the Italian city-state, resulting in a new social system, still divided into three orders (nobles, merchants and artisans), and notable for its lay character, which entailed the exclusion of the clergy.<sup>156</sup> A *guelfo bianco*, Compagni naturally placed the emperor at the top.<sup>157</sup>

Particular forms of linguistic activity feature among the tasks which specific classes are meant to perform in order to acquire their *pregio*. Nothing in this sense is said about emperors, kings, barons, goldsmiths or about the

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<sup>155</sup> The genre of the song is comparable to that of Provençal *Ensenhaments* and *Serventes*, and it has some significant parallels with other works composed by Florentines around the same time such as the *Documenti d'amore* and *Reggimento e costumi di donna* by Francesco da Barberino. It is precisely a comparison with works of these kinds – together with some inconsistencies between the metrical form of the first stanza and that of the rest of song – which led Del Lungo to conjecture that Dino himself had not completed his poem. If this hypothesis is correct, the song might have been, as Del Lungo suggested, a sort of manifesto of Florentine society resulting from the popular reforms of the period 1282-93; see Compagni, *Cronica e Canzone morale*, p. 214. For the *Arti maggiori* and *minori* in Florence, see *ibid.*, p. 13 n. 13; and Benedetto Varchi, *Storia fiorentina*, 3 vols, ed. L. Arbib, Florence, 1843, I, pp. 221-2, who also explains the role of the *legista*, or *giudice*: 'le quali arti erano queste: giudici, notai (chè giudici si chiamavano anticamente in Firenze i dottori delle leggi), mercanti ...'

<sup>156</sup> See, e.g., C. Frati, 'Dicerie volgari del sec. XIV, aggiunte in fine del *Fior di virtù*', in *Studi letterari e linguistici dedicati a Pio Rajna nel quarantesimo anno del suo insegnamento*, Milan, 1911, pp. 313-37 (330): 'vnde noi possemo dire con tuti veritàe che questo zentile conte, o chualero, o çudexe, o medegho, o notaro ouero altro grande merchadande ...'.

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia* I.xii.5: 'Quid nunc personat tuba novissimi Frederici, quid tintinabulum secundi Karoli, quid cornua Iohannis et Azonis marchionum potentum, quid aliorum magnatum tibie ...'. The vacancy of the imperial seat is here blamed on two kings (Frederick III of Aragona and Charles II of Anjou), two marquises (the *ghibellino* Giovanni I of Monferrato and the *guelfo* Azzo III d'Este) and other nobles (*magnates*): the descending order perfectly corresponds to that described by Compagni. See also *Ibid.*, I.xvii.5: 'reges, marchiones, comites, magnates'.

*podestà*, though he is described as surrounded by a court of administrators – judges and notaries, who are treated separately.<sup>158</sup> The remaining strata can be divided into three categories based on their language use – whether they are speakers or writers or both. The young gentleman or *donzello* was chiefly a speaker:

A *donzello* who hopes to earn courtly dignity (*fin pregio*) first of all has to fall in love, since love enhances the courtly dignity of many. Then, he should invest all his hopes in courtesy. He should be good-natured, stalwart and witty (*bel parlante*); and should wish to honour and serve knights, to learn the profession of arms, to know how to ride elegantly.<sup>159</sup>

We have every reason to suspect, moreover, that the *donzello*, the highest social rank among those classified linguistically, was a vernacular speaker: it seems that in Compagni's Florence, young gentlemen were supposed to be witty conversationalists. I shall come back to this point.

Judges, too, were, in the first instance, speakers, though of a somewhat different kind: 'A judge who wants to pursue his dignity should learn how to judge rightly, practise the art of delivering (*bel proferire*) and speaking (*bel parlare*) well, clarify mistakes, elucidate controversies.'<sup>160</sup> The 'art of delivering and speaking well' was probably forensic rhetoric: the *bel parlare* of young gentlemen was an elegant pastime, but for judges it was a

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<sup>158</sup> Compagni, *Cronica e Canzone morale*, p. 219: 'Tenga masnada a corte e buon legisti / Che chiar conoscan dal falso il diritto, / E buon notar' da non falsar lo scritto, / E notte e giorno sovente i' requisiti ...'

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 220: 'Donzello che fin pregio avere ispera / Primeramente s'apprenda d'amare, / C'amor fa manti in fin pregio avanzare; / Poi metta in cortesia tutta sua spera. / Sia dibonaire, prode e bel parlante; / E'n cavalieri onorare e servire, / Ed arme apprendre, metta suo disire, / Ed in saver cavalcare avenante.'

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., p. 221: 'Legisto che buon pregio vuol seguire / Convien c'apprenda retto iudicare / Ed in bel proferire e 'n bel parlare / Error chiarare, question difinire...'

professional requirement. In contrast to the *donzello*, the judge must also be a reader: 'He will need the Code, the Digest, and many books where he can seek his proofs.'<sup>161</sup> Like the judge, the doctor is also described as a man surrounded by books: 'He should ponder well and read and study what was said by Hippocrates and Galen, and by other sages, and not least by Avicenna, in order to strengthen the human body and keep it healthy.'<sup>162</sup>

Then come Compagni's real cultural heroes, the notaries:

If a notary wants to have dignity, he should seek to be renowned as a loyal man, to record his public acts clearly and to write well, and not to be greedy in abbreviating his writings. He should take great pains with Latin and be skilful ... . He should seek to converse with good judges and to be prudent, sage and prompt in asking them questions. He should know how to compose letters and practise a good vernacular. Reading and translating into the vernacular confer great dignity on him ... .<sup>163</sup>

Finally, we have merchants. Among their duties, Compagni lists: 'writing well and accounting correctly'.<sup>164</sup>

Compagni describes the citizenry of Florence: the individuals or groups which enjoyed political representation within the city-state. Neither the internal divisions nor the democratic inclusiveness of the catalogue

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.: 'E bisognali Codice, Digesta, / E libri manti ove ragion si truovi.'

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 223: 'Assa' provega / E studi e lega / Ciò che disse Ipocrate, e Galieno, / Ed altri savi, Avicena non meno, / Sì che conforti ben li corpi e rega.'

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-2: 'Se buon pregio vuole aver Notaro, / In leal fama procacci sé vivere, / Ed in chiaro rogare e 'n bello scrivere, / E d'imbreviar sue scritte non si' avaro: / In gramatica pugni assai, sia conto, / E 'n porre accezion buon contrattista, / E dilette d'usar fra buon' legista, / E 'n domandare accorto savio e pronto: / Saver dittare / E buon volgare, / Leger, volgarizar, grande i' dan pregio / E di maturità ver brivilegio, / E contra 'l dritto non scritte mutare.'

<sup>164</sup> Ibid., p. 223: 'E scriver bello, e ragion non errare.'



should be exaggerated. On the one hand, the formal divisions between orders should not blind us to the fact that, in reality, internal boundaries were sometimes blurred: merchants figured in the ranks of the aristocracy, aristocrats engaged in financial activities, judges were often nobles and so on. On the other hand, the excluded parties are as telling as those which are represented: women, the clergy, the peasantry. Both considerations, however, allow us to envision Compagni's city-state as an extremely homogeneous social unit. As we shall see, the unity of Italian society was not based on its bourgeois ideology, but instead rested on maintaining the locus of class confrontation within the city walls.

Language competence in Latin and vernacular, rather than linguistic reflection on the social opposition between the feudal nobility and the bourgeoisie, as Alinei maintains,<sup>165</sup> emerges as an attribute, or a skill, linked to the profile of *donzelli*, judges, notaries and merchants, to their education and to the roles they performed in society. At this level of society, the opposition between Latin and vernacular does not seem to have much discriminatory value. From Dino's perspective, what distinguishes these classes linguistically is not whether they speak Latin or vernacular, but rather the different uses they make of language: pleasant conversation, oratory, reading, writing, translating. To use the terms I employed above, these were the public roles of formal speech domains in communal society; and the classes which performed these roles held in their hands the linguistic destiny of late medieval Italy.

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<sup>165</sup> See n. 15 above.

## VIII

In a society such as the one described above, we should expect signs of diastratic variation – and possibly the isolation of prestige forms, or even of prestigious speech varieties – in the vernacular field. While this is true, it is necessary to issue a warning here, which concerns the absence of the vernacular in the main institution which in modern society enforces prestige language forms: formal education.<sup>166</sup> We should therefore expect types of linguistic performance not directly related to any formal system institutionally regulating language behaviour: in other words, rather than autonomous, tightly knit, focused speech varieties – as we find nowadays in standard languages – we should probably look for more generic signs of socially marked speech behaviour, connected to specific domains. In these conditions, the emergence of a distinct prestigious vernacular speech variety rests almost entirely on the formation of a strong sense of class-based group identity. According to Anthony Lodge, this generally happens at the top and at the bottom of the social ladder – while the middle-classes remain generally in a more fluid position, often striving to assimilate their linguistic behaviour to that of the upper strata.<sup>167</sup> We are obviously rather ill-informed about the bottom of the ladder, especially at such an early date: it is interesting, however, that as early as the 1370s Benvenuto da Imola in his commentary on Dante's *Commedia* informs us of the existence of an

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<sup>166</sup> See R. Black, 'Italian Education: Languages, Syllabuses, Methods', in *Language and Cultural Change: Aspects of the Study and Use of Language in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. L. Nauta, Leuven, 2006, pp. 91-112.

<sup>167</sup> Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, pp. 85-6: 'groups whose members interact frequently with one another on a number of levels, who have a strong focal point and feel themselves to be under some sort of outside threat.' I shall argue in chapter 6 that if we want to identify a speech variety in some way representative of the Italian middle classes until the end of the fourteenth century, it would be Latin – as can already be inferred from the poem of Dino Compagni quoted above, where Latin is ascribed to judges, doctors and notaries.

underworld jargon of thieves and beggars, which he called *calmone* and seemed to consider, for all intents and purposes, a language.<sup>168</sup>

When we look at the top of the social ladder, however, we are immediately faced with another problem: in these years, and particularly in Florence, society was in turmoil, and the boundaries delimiting the *élite* were often unclear. The central conflict affecting many urban centres in the peninsula was the opposition between *magnates* and *populares*: ‘an elite of powerful, wealthy families of international bankers, traders, and landowners organized as agnatic lineages; and a larger community of economically more modest local merchants, artisans, and professional groups organized in guilds and called the *popolo*’.<sup>169</sup> It was the *magnates* who occupied the top of the social ladder; this upper class, however, was undergoing a significant ideological and political reconfiguration during these years.

Until the second half of the thirteenth century, Italian communes like Florence were ruled by a military *élite*, called the *militia*: its primary function was, at least in theory, the protection of citizens, especially women and children, and of the city; and its ethos was defined by the rituals of chivalry and knighthood. The rapid economic growth enjoyed by Florence along with many other communes throughout the thirteenth century produced a

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<sup>168</sup> Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, V, p. 385: ‘unde videmus de facto quod orbi in partibus Italiae fecerunt inter se novum idioma, quo intelligunt se invicem, quod *calmonem* appellant’. Note that Benvenuto assumes that this jargon was spread throughout Italy, that he assumes it was a newly invented idiom and that he recognized one of the core functions of jargons: their role as cryptolects. He is less explicit about another function usually found in jargons: the ‘identificatory function reflecting the need for mutual recognition of specific group members, more transitory at the upper ones as more members become integrated into upper echelons of society’: J. Trumper, ‘Slang and Jargons’, in *The Cambridge History of the Romance Languages, I: Structures*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 660-81 (663). For jargons in fifteenth- and sixteenth- century Italy, see P. Burke, ‘Languages and Anti-Languages in Early Modern Italy’, *History Workshop*, 11, 1981, pp. 24-32.

<sup>169</sup> J. M. Najemy, *A History of Florence: 1200-1575*, Oxford, 2006, p. 5.

two-fold change in the *élite*: on the one hand, the group's ranks were enlarged by families of merchants who had swiftly acquired wealth through trade; and, on the other, even the lineages of old *milites* started to engage in commercial and financial activities.<sup>170</sup> Finally, with the advance of the popular party, the *élite*'s tight grip on political representation was weakened by a crisis which reached its peak with the exclusion of magnate lineages from government in the years 1293-5 – the struggle for the hegemonic control of the commune took on an ideological connotation.<sup>171</sup> Nobility had never been a formal institution: knights were not strictly a caste of professional warriors, but rather were defined by their way of life and military ethos.<sup>172</sup> The blurring of economic and political boundaries resulted in a strengthening of the ritual practices which served to identify class membership: 'for Italian urban nobles, chivalry and knighthood were a means of self-definition'.<sup>173</sup> While knighthood progressively lost any precise social and political connotations, it retained a central cultural and symbolic value.<sup>174</sup>

It was in this way that *milites* became *magnates*, a group which was legally defined according to two criteria: the trappings of knighthood and

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<sup>170</sup> See C. Giunta's commentary on Dante, *Rime*, ed. C. Giunta, in *Opere*, ed. Santagata, I, p. 333. See also Compagni, *Cronica*, I.xiii, p. 31: 'I potenti cittadini (i quali non tutti erano nobili di sangue, ma per altri accidenti erano detti Grandi ...)'.  
<sup>171</sup> See A. Zorzi, *La trasformazione di un quadro politico. Ricerche su politica e giustizia a Firenze dal comune allo Stato territoriale*, Florence, 2008, pp. 121-62.

<sup>172</sup> See Najemy, *History of Florence*, pp. 12 and 38: 'the distinction between elite and popolo was never defined by law and was often a grey area. Florence had no legally designated nobility: no institutional boundary between elite and popolo, no noble titles to distinguish the former from the latter.' See also S. Gasparri, *I milites cittadini. Studi sulla cavalleria in Italia*, Rome, 1992, pp. 11-12.

<sup>173</sup> C. Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates: Lineage and Faction in a Medieval Commune*, Princeton, 1991, p. 160.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*: 'Florentine wars were now waged by professionals, and knighthood was becoming a matter of courtly titles and elegant games. In the late thirteenth century, then, knighthood and courtly style were status symbols, and their divorce from military practice had begun.'

public opinion.<sup>175</sup> The role assigned to *publica fama* is a clear sign of the ideological and functional reconfiguration which the élite underwent in this period: magnate lineages were families of knights and plutocrats, whose chief means of self-definition was a type of public behaviour marked by arrogance and violence towards artisans and populars, by ritual practices alluding to a chivalric ethos and by a lack of concern for the common good – all of which popular governments sought to control through legal action.<sup>176</sup> It is in manifestations of such behaviour, which had both ritual and cultural value, that we should look for signs of linguistic practices intended to enforce class distinctions. The prototype of the magnate, in the Florence of late thirteenth century, was Corso Donati, an enemy of the people and of popular government. The portrait Compagni drew of him in his *Cronica* is telling: ‘A knight similar to the Roman Catilina, but crueler than him, of noble blood, with beautiful features, pleasant speaker, well-mannered, with a subtle intelligence, always busy plotting iniquities ...’<sup>177</sup> It is noteworthy that ‘cruel’ has an almost technical sense in Compagni’s *Cronica*, where it

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<sup>175</sup> Quoted by G. Salvemini, *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1292*, Florence, 1899, p. 27: ‘ut de potentibus, Nobilibus vel Magnatibus habeantur, in quorum domibus vel casato miles est vel fuit a XX anni citra, vel quos opinio vulgo appellat et tenet vulgariter potentes, nobiles vel magnates’. Similar norms were drawn up in other communes: see G. Fasoli, ‘Ricerche sulla legislazione antimagnatizia nei comuni dell’alta e media Italia’, *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano*, XII, 1939, pp. 86-133.

<sup>176</sup> Zorzi, *La trasformazione di un quadro politico*, pp. 136-7.

<sup>177</sup> Compagni, *Cronica*, p. 100 (II.xx): ‘Uno cavaliere della somiglianza di Catellina romano, ma più crudele di lui, gentile di sangue, bello di corpo, piacevole parlatore, adorno di belli costumi, sottile d’ingegno, con l’animo sempre intento a malfare ...’ See also the description of Donati’s death, equally balanced between admiration and moral reprobation, at *ibid.*, pp. 170-1 (III.xxi): ‘parlando il vero, la sua vita fu pericolosa, e la morte reprobabile. Fu cavaliere di grande animo e nome, gentile di sangue e di costumi, di corpo bellissimo fino alla sua vecchiezza, di bella forma con delicate fattezze, di pelo bianco; piacevole, savio e ornato parlatore, e a gran cose sempre attendea; pratico e dimestico di gran signori e di nobili uomini, e di grande amistà, e famoso per tutta Italia. Nemico fu di popoli e popolani, amato da’ masnadieri, pieno di maliziosi pensieri, reo e astuto.’

indicates the attitude of those who privileged their (and their family's) own honour and prestige over the common good. More important for us, however, is that in the *Cronica* Corso Donati is repeatedly characterized as 'bel parlante', an expression which Compagni, as we have seen, also employed to describe *donzelli*, or young gentlemen, in his *Canzone del pregio*.<sup>178</sup>

What he meant by this expression, and the social impact of this skill, is well illustrated in his *Cronica*, at the beginning of the famous feud between the Donati and the Cerchi which caused the division of the Guelph party into Blacks and Whites.<sup>179</sup> The Cerchi were merchants, not of noble birth, who had recently become one of the richest families in Florence and therefore had started to behave like nobles: some of their members had been knighted in the 1260s, and by buying the house of the counts Guidi they had completed transformation into the status of magnates.<sup>180</sup> The Donati, as we have seen, were a family of ancient stock and marked chivalric ethos, but less economically successful than the Cerchi. According to Compagni's *Cronica*, it was the envy provoked in the Donati by the Cerchi's sudden increase in fortune which initiated their reciprocal enmity.<sup>181</sup> Driven by the nobility's typical contempt for the upwardly mobile Cerchi, Corso Donati

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<sup>178</sup> See n. 159 above.

<sup>179</sup> On this conflict, see See Zorzi, *La trasformazione di un quadro politico*, pp. 95-120.

<sup>180</sup> Compagni, *Cronica*, p. 43 (I.xx): 'una famiglia che si chiamavano i Cerchi (uomini di basso stato, ma buoni mercatanti e gran ricchi, e vestivano bene, e teneano molti famigli e cavalli, e aveano bella apparenza ... ).' Note, however, that their humble origins were still acknowledged, and despised, by the public opinion; see *ibid.*, p. 63 (I.xxvii): 'E quelli che nol conosceano li teneano ricchi, e potenti, e savi; e per questo stavano in buona speranza. Ma i savi uomini diceano: "E' sono mercatanti, e naturalmente sono vili; e i lor nimici [i.e., the Donati] sono maestri di guerra e crudeli uomini".'

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44 (I.xx): '[i] Donati, i quali erano più antichi di sangue, ma non sì ricchi: onde, veggendo i Cerchi salire in altezza (avendo murato e cresciuto il palazzo, e tenendo gran vita), cominciorono avere i Donati grande odio contra loro'.

had resorted to equally typical strategies to put the upstart family in its place:

And sir Corso regularly mocked sir Vieri [de' Cerchi], calling him the donkey of Porta, because he was a most handsome man, but not very clever, nor well spoken ['di bel parlare']; and so, he would often say: 'Has he been braying today, the donkey of Porta?'; and he had great contempt for him.<sup>182</sup>

It is clear from this passage, as also from Compagni's description of Donati, that the prestige enjoyed by lineages of ancient stock did not merely involve the trappings of knighthood or a propensity to violent behaviour. These were paired with a sense of self-worth, expressing itself in aesthetic beauty, delicacy of manners, but especially in superior intelligence, wit and appropriateness of speech – which Donati used effectively to humiliate his socially inferior opponents. Such highly skilled speech was obviously not employed solely for the negative purpose of social shaming and humiliation. Its positive aim was, then as now, elegant conversation.

The famous collection of tales known as the *Novellino* is introduced by a programmatic prologue:

And since nobles and gentlemen are often, in words and deeds, like a mirror for the lower classes – since their speech is more pleasing, coming from a more delicate instrument – we shall keep a record here of many maxims, beautiful courtesies and beautiful quick-witted replies and beautiful deeds, of beautiful gifts and beautiful loves, as

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 47 (I.xx): 'E messer Corso molto parlava di messer Vieri, chiamandolo l'asino di Porta, perché era uomo bellissimo, ma di poca malizia, né di bel parlare; e però spesso dicea: "Ha raghiato oggi l'asino di Porta?"; e molto lo spregiava.'

many have already done in the past. And those who have a noble heart and a subtle intelligence will be able to imitate them in the future and to expound and deliver and tell them (where appropriate) for the use and pleasure of those who do not know and desire to know.

[Et acciò che li nobili e' gentili sono nel parlare e nell'opere molte volte quasi com'uno specchio appo i minori — acciò che il loro parlare è più gradito però che esce di più dilicato stormento — facciamo qui memoria d'alquanti fiori di parlare, di belle cortesie e di belli risposi e di belle valentie, di belli donari e di belli amori, secondo che per lo tempo passato hanno fatto già molti. E, chi avrà cuore nobile et intelligenza sottile, sì li potrà simigliare per lo tempo che verrà per innanzi et argomentare e dire e raccontare (in quelle parti dove avranno luogo), a prode et a piacere di coloro che non sanno e disiderano di sapere.]<sup>183</sup>

In the *Novellino*, as Franziska Meier has noted, 'the intent to elevate forms of social behavior seems to have brought about linguistic consciousness'.<sup>184</sup> The prologue reflects on the function of a certain type of linguistic behaviour as the distinguishing code of noble and gentlemanly spirits. The theoretical framework owes something to rhetorical models and to the techniques of preachers – notably, the *exemplum* – but engages critically with both these traditions. First of all, the chief function of rhetorical training is not present in the *Novellino*: speaking well is not intended in this work as a tool to discuss and debate policy and matters of

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<sup>183</sup> *Il Novellino*, ed. G. Favati, Genoa, 1970, pp. 118-9.

<sup>184</sup> F. F. Meier, 'The *Novellino* or "How to Do Things with Words": An Early Italian Reflection on a Specific Western Way of Using Language', *MLN*, 125, 2010, p. 1-25.



public interest, but rather as a hedonistic practice and a means to signal or enforce one's social standing. Furthermore, the types of speech behaviour proposed in the *Novellino* – witticisms, quick-witted repartee, verbal cunning, trickery and suchlike – refer exclusively to oral linguistic practices, where orality retains a deliberately informal, immediate character: the colloquial register to which they belong is entirely inscribed in ordinary conversation and is alien to the genres of discourse codified by the rhetorical tradition.<sup>185</sup> As for Christian morality, the examples given in *Novellino* are not put forward as timeless paradigms of moral conduct, but rather as concrete exemplars of an attitude, a way of approaching reality, a code of courteous behaviour:<sup>186</sup> if a moral dimension has to be sought in the *Novellino*, it derives from the hope that society will partake by osmosis of the courtly attitude embodied in its elegant speakers. This attitude, which represents the kind of education which the tales are intended to impart, is not, however, open to everyone; instead, significantly, it is reserved for specific people, defined according to criteria which recall Compagni's portrait of Corso Donati: natural grace and intelligence, which favour an essentialist conception of personal virtue and exclude any sense of the technical or scholastic acquisition of knowledge.

A way of envisioning the practical uses of a collection of tales like the *Novellino* is found in Francesco da Barberino's *Documenta amoris*, a composite didactic work dedicated to Florentine nobles.<sup>187</sup> An entire chapter of this

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<sup>185</sup> See Gasparri, *I milites cittadini*, p. 56: 'tutto il mondo dell'aristocrazia militare appare, nel medio evo, fundamentalmente alieno dal rapporto con la cultura scritta'.

<sup>186</sup> Meier, 'The *Novellino*', p. 12: 'The stories should not be read in a paradigmatic mode; instead, they try to drive readers out of the common, rather passive attitude of *imitatio* and to induce them to reflect upon the social margins the use of language opens and, further, to carry out these principles.'

<sup>187</sup> For the dedicatees, see Francesco da Barberino, *I Documenti d'Amore*, ed. F. Egidi, 4 vols, Rome, 1905, I, pp. 35-6: 'latinum autem quod pluribus est comune voluit

work is devoted to sketching out a brief manual for prospective conversationalists, imagined in concrete situations, with minute instructions given for ordinary speech behaviour: how to speak whether or not you know your interlocutors;<sup>188</sup> how to react to others' speech behaviour and to accommodate your own speech register to theirs;<sup>189</sup> when to speak and when to remain silent; which topics to reserve for different classes of people such as doctors, women and so on. This short treatise, probably indebted to Albertano da Brescia's *Doctrina de loquendi et tacendi*, concludes with a list of instructions concerning how to behave if one is sitting among a group of people of higher status:<sup>190</sup> it can therefore be seen as a prototype of Baldassarre Castiglione's *Cortegiano* – Francesco's aim is to provide instruction for prospective storytellers.<sup>191</sup> The two genres of discourse he recommends – brief tales and witticisms ('novelle' and 'mottetti'), extracted from an unsystematic repository of sources stemming from biblical and classical antiquity, Provençal and contemporary Tuscan poets – square

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omni rationabilitati conformare ... . Rimas autem vulgare ad nobilium utilitatem de patria mea qui latinum non intelligunt scribere volui.'

<sup>188</sup> For an interesting remark concerning the possibility of recognizing someone's worth and status from the way he speaks or acts, see *ibid.*, I, p. 83: 'vere quoniam gestus hominum et loquele cito indicabunt tibi qualitates ipsorum et status. et cuius sint artis vel qualitatis nisi forte aliqui fuerint ibi cauti qui se cognoscere non permittant. quibus astantibus cautum semper eorum similitudine te decet incedere. donec ex habitu vel aliquo actu cognoscas eosdem. quod si finaliter non posses aut taceas quod est securius. aut per secreta et communia transeas.'

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 83-5: 'Tam eorum loquendi modum quam actum, abstinens circumspicias et auscultes. Sicque in modico tractu percipies, quem tuus circulus comprehendit. Sed in gradu qui tibi competit, fac ut sedeas cum eisdem. Et si tales inceperint, fueritque sermo nobilis et honestus illorum, per testum similem quod quod loqueris prosequaris. Alioquin taceas fingens aliqua cogitamina te habere.'

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97-8: 'Sun gran signor vi sie de / o gente tutta maggior che tu sia / dimanderai in pria / di che voglion udir se dicono pria / Esa cosi contarla / non ti senti fornito si aspecta / seguir alchuna detta / ese ti manca il meglio e che tu taccia.'

<sup>191</sup> Storytelling was a highly praised and sought-after skill among aristocratic circles, as testified by Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VI.9: '[Michele Scalza] il più piacevole e il più sollazzevole uomo del mondo e le più nuove novelle aveva per le mani; per la qual cosa i giovani fiorentini avevan molto caro, quando in brigata si trovavano, di poter aver lui.'

perfectly with the picture which emerges from the *Novellino*.<sup>192</sup> It is certainly not popular culture. Nor can it be comfortably labelled bourgeois, as many commentators have done: its ideological world is framed by a courteous, chivalric spirit which betrays a fascination with the aristocratic model embodied by the landed gentry of the Italian communes and its chivalric rituals. Nor, finally, does it have the systematic rigour of what we would call scholarly, or even high, culture. One of its distinctive traits was that, in opposition to the local civic culture of the *popolo*, aristocrats strove to share in a collective identity which transcended regional and, in some cases, national boundaries, which was united by ideals of courtesy and knighthood, and which, finally, was promoting the development of a distinctive and prestigious use of the vernacular.

## IX

In Giovanni Villani's *Nuova cronica*, a brief passage recounts the celebrations organized in Florence for the feast day of the city's patron saint, John the Baptist, in 1283:

In the following year 1283, in June, for the feast day of St John ... in the district of Santa Felicità Oltrarno (which was promoted and hosted by the house of the Rossi together with their neighbourhood), a party and band (*una compagnia e brigata*) was summoned of a

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<sup>192</sup> Francesco da Barberino, *I Documenti d'Amore*, I, pp. 98-9: 'elassa di in meço atue novelle / Ese persone quelle / parlassen di mottetti dalli prima / nela tua mente cima / e poi gli parla apunto e brevi e pochi.' The genres listed in the Latin commentary correspond perfectly to those set out in the prologue to *Novellino*: 'brevibus dictis' (= 'mottetti'); 'illusiones' (= verbal cunning); 'dicta et actus' (= 'nel parlare e nel dire'). On the need for *brevitas* and *novitas*, see *ibid.*, I, p. 97: 'Et nota quod lictera dicit brevia unde intelligas quod loco tali et tempore ac inter tales te referre non decet totum infortunium pollonij vel messaticam sed aliqua que habeant in brevitate dulcedinem et quod ad illum vel illos quibus loqueris si perpendere poteris habeant novitatem.'

thousand men or more, all dressed in white robes, with a lord called 'of Love'. And this band (*brigata*) spent all its time in games and amusements, and in balls for knights and women and of others belonging to the popular classes; and they wandered around with trumpets and different instruments in joy and happiness, eating together for lunch and dinner ... . And in those times Florence had 300 armed knights (*cavalieri di corredo*), and many bands (*brigata*) of knights and young gentlemen (*donzelli*) ... .<sup>193</sup>

These organized feasts were politically and ideologically charged: in contrast to the rising demands for representation advanced by the popular classes and by their ideological framing of the common interests of the commune, the aristocratic houses fashioned their neighbourhoods after feudal castles, put on jousts and tournaments, and organized balls to show off the prowess of their families.<sup>194</sup> The Rossi were one of the most violent clans of the Black Guelphs, and this celebration had various precise

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<sup>193</sup> Giovanni Villani, *Nuova cronica*, ed. G. Porta, 3 vols, Parma, 1990-91, I, pp. 547-8 (VIII.lxxxix): 'Nell'anno appresso MCCLXXXIII, del mese di giugno, per la festa di santo Giovanni ... si fece nella contrada di Santa Felicità Oltrarno, onde furono capo e cominciatori quegli della casa de' Rossi co.loro vicinanze, una compagnia e brigata di M uomini o più, tutti vestiti di robe bianche, con un signore detto dell'Amore. Per la qual brigata non s'intendea se non in giuochi, e in sollazzi, e in balli di donne e di cavalieri e d'altri popolani, andando per la terra con trombe e diversi stromenti in gioia e allegrezza, e stando in conviti insieme, in desinari e in cene ... . E ne' detti tempi avea in Firenze da CCC cavalieri di corredo e molte brigate di cavalieri e di donzelli che sera e mattina metteano tavola con molti uomini di corte, donando per le pasque molte robe vaie; onde di Lombardia e di tutta Italia traeano a Firenze i buffoni e uomini di corte, e erano bene veduti, e non passava per Firenze niuno forestiere, persona nominato o d'onore, che a gara erano fatti invitare dalle dette brigate.'

<sup>194</sup> For a thorough analysis of these types of celebration, their evolution and political meaning, see R. C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Ithaca and London, 1980, pp. 215-78.

intentions: political, to underline the strength of Rossi's faction;<sup>195</sup> social, to disrupt unity within the city by co-opting clients from the popular classes into their faction;<sup>196</sup> and ideological, to stress the supra-local unity of the aristocracy over the local municipalism of popular ideology by inviting nobles from other cities.<sup>197</sup>

Finally, and most importantly for our purposes, these feasts were momentous cultural events. It is worth noting Villani's use of the term *brigata*, which indicated groups of young gentlemen – in other words, *donzelli*.<sup>198</sup> In Compagni's song, the only aristocrat overtly involved in cultural activities was the *donzello*. This was not without significance, for it can be argued that such young gentlemen were the propulsive element of

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<sup>195</sup> With specific reference to the episode narrated by Villani, see F. Cardini, *L'acciar de' cavalieri: studi sulla cavalleria nel mondo toscano e italico (secc. XII-XV)*, Florence, 1997, p. 95: 'bisogna chiederci se non sia il caso di vedere, in queste cortesi "brigade" a capo delle quali troviamo regolarmente dei capifazione, e non certo fra quelli più moderati, quanto meno degli espedienti d'organizzazione politica di forze e consensi.'

<sup>196</sup> Najemy, *History of Florence*, p. 27: 'One purpose of elite efforts to enlist clients and followers was to control the popolo. Paradoxically, fighting amongst themselves helped elite families neutralize the popolo politically by recruiting as many of them as possible into their factions.' See, e.g., Compagni, *Cronica*, p. 58 (L.xxii): 'Divisesi di nuovo la città, negli uomini grandi, mezani e piccolini; e i religiosi non si poterono difendere che con l'animo non si dessono alle dette parti, chi a una chi a un'altra.'

<sup>197</sup> See n. 193 above. The rituals of gathering to eat together, dressing in the same manner and hosting foreigners are documented by Boccaccio, who already regarded them as belonging to the past; see Boccaccio, *Decameron*, VI.9: 'in diversi luoghi per Firenze si ragunavano insieme i gentili uomini delle contrade e facevano lor brigate di certo numero, guardando di mettervi tali che comportare potessono acconciamente le spese, ed oggi l'uno, doman l'altro, e così per ordine, tutti mettevano tavola, ciascuno il suo dì, a tutta la brigata, ed in quella spese volte onoravano e gentili uomini forestieri, quando ve ne capitavano, ed ancora de' cittadini: e similmente si vestivano insieme almeno una volta l'anno, ed insieme i di più notabili cavalcavano per la città, e talora armeggiavano, e massimamente per le feste principali o quando alcuna lieta novella di vittoria o d'altro fosse venuta nella città.'

<sup>198</sup> On *brigade* and their representation in contemporary literature, see T. Barolini, 'Sociology of the Brigata: Gendered Groups in Dante, Forese, Folgore, Boccaccio – From "Guido, i' vorrei" to Griselda', *Italian Studies*, 67, 2012, pp. 4-22.

cultural elaboration within the ranks of the aristocracy.<sup>199</sup> This was probably due to the gerontocracy of the aristocratic patriarchal system, in which sons had to endure social exclusion and political irrelevance until the death of their father.<sup>200</sup> Exclusion from familial and societal responsibilities made male aristocratic youths a constant threat to their families and to society at large: dissipation of the paternal patrimony and violence were their favourite pastimes.<sup>201</sup> Eruptions of violence and potentially disruptive behaviour were, however, channelled: on the one hand, by directing it against rival factions; and, on the other, by ritualizing violence through cultural events: throughout Italy, as early as the twelfth century, the organization of parties and balls, and especially of chivalric contests, was the main task of noble young men.<sup>202</sup>

The ideological focus of youth culture was – as indicated again by Compagni and as clearly represented in the ritual described by Villani –

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<sup>199</sup> Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, p. 163: 'It may be that the characteristic noble culture of the thirteenth-century city was in important ways a youth culture.'

<sup>200</sup> See D. Herlihy, 'Some Psychological and Social Roots of Violence in the Tuscan Cities', in *Violence and Disorder in the Italian Cities*, ed. L. Martines, Berkeley, 1972, pp. 129-54.

<sup>201</sup> See Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*, p. 188: 'groups of idle young men, some of them trained in the military and most of them left with few responsibilities, were breeding grounds for violence'.

<sup>202</sup> For an early testimony of the courtly ethos of youth clubs, see Buoncompagno da Signa, *Cedrus*, in *Briefsteller und Formelbücher des elften bis vierzehnten Jahrhunderts*, ed. L. Rockinger, 2 vols, Munich, 1863, I, pp. 121-74 (122): 'Fiunt etiam in multis partibus Ytalie quedam iuuenum societates. Quarum aliqua falconum, aliqua leonum, aliqua de tabula rotunda societas nominatur. ... et licet ista consuetudo sit per uniuersas partes Ytalie, multo fortius in Tuscia uiget, quia uix reperirentur in aliqua ciuitate iuuenes qui non sint adstricti alicui societati uinculo iuramenti.' For other examples from thirteenth-century Italy, see Gasparri, *I milites cittadini*, pp. 31-36, who concludes: 'Siamo di fronte cioè a un esplicito modello cortese-cavalleresco, inteso come caratteristico a un tempo del ceto dominante aristocratico e di una classe di età.' The 'signore detto dell'Amore' mentioned by Villani probably indicated a youth club leader appointed to organize the games. His role corresponded to the *rex ribaldorum*, or king of the lowest ranks of society, who was appointed for Carnival celebrations: *ibid.*, p. 34; even in this case, the top and the bottom of society show strikingly similar patterns of cultural organization.

love. The cultivation of this emotion, which could assume irreligious, if not anti-religious, connotations, naturally involved the other victims of the patriarchal aristocracy: women. Like young males, they were in an awkward position within the aristocratic system: excluded from any form of economic independence, they retained value solely as a commodity exchange, fundamental in the factional logic of forming lineages and alliances.<sup>203</sup> The control of their honour – and therefore of their marketable value – dramatically limited their freedom, especially for those belonging to the upper classes: in Francesco da Barberino's *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, for example, women's freedom of movement is inversely proportional to the level of their social rank.<sup>204</sup> The daughters of knights, however, seemed to have been allowed a certain degree of agency, which explains the presence of women at the parties described by Villani.<sup>205</sup> So, both women and young

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<sup>203</sup> See Najemy, *History of Florence*, p. 7: 'most elite Florentines feared that property left to daughters would eventually find its way into the patrimonies of the families into which these daughters married ... . In lieu of a share of inheritance, daughters were instead provided with often quite substantial dowries that were essential to negotiating a prestigious marriage.' See also P. Cammarosano, 'Les structures familiales dans les villes de l'Italie comunale (XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles)', in *Famille et parenté dans l'Occident médiévale*, ed. G. Duby et al., Rome, 1977, pp. 181-94.

<sup>204</sup> Francesco da Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, ed. G. E. Sansone, Turin, 1957, p. 15: 'quanto ell'è maggiore cotanto è più obrigata ad alto costumare, come in essa è ciascuna, chè grande saria lo fallo: di tanto maggiore / vendetta e pena degno / quanto ha più onor, ch'a molti è quasi sdegno.' See also pp. 9-10: 's'ella fosse figliuola / d'imperadore o di re coronato, / la sua usanza incontanente sia / colla sua madre e coll'altre maggiori / che son(o) nella magione'; p. 10: 'né mai senza sue balie, over(o) maestre, / o bali, vada tra cavalieri over donzelli'; and p. 15: 'E s'ella sarà figlia di marchese, di duca, conte, o d' uno altro simile barone, porrà tenersi alli detti costumi; ma puote più indugiar a cominciare, e già non far sì alti portamenti, e non bisogna ch'ella cotanto stretti tenga suoi costumi.'

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15: 'S'ella sarà figliuola di cavaliere da scudo o di solenne iudice o di solenne medico o d'altro gentile uomo li cui antichi ed ello usati sono di mantenere onore, nella cui casa sono o sieno usati d'esser cavalieri [note that the last phrase largely corresponds to the definition of magnates quoted above] ... non fia sì tosto tenuta alli costumi come quell'altre che dett'ho di sovra, e porrà ben più ridere e giudicare e più dattorno onestamente andare e anco in balli e canti più allegrezza menare.'

males were allocated marginal, but at the same time fundamental, positions in aristocratic society; and both shared an amount of freedom and agency which carried a disruptive potential and which, therefore, had to be channelled and controlled. Finally, they were united by one of the most dangerous instincts medieval society could conceive of: sexual desire.

The task of ritualizing and sublimating sexual desire was accomplished, above all, by love poetry. As Claudio Giunta has argued, the beginnings of the so-called *Dolce stil novo* can be traced precisely to the celebrations for the feast day of St John the Baptist in 1283 recounted by Villani: the first sonnet of Dante's *Vita nova*, which marks his admission to Florentine poetic society, bears the date of this year and is addressed to a select group defined as 'all the faithful of Love'.<sup>206</sup> Within the fluid social system I have been describing, it is not easy to provide a straightforward assessment of Dante's status. The famous episode of Cacciaguida in the *Commedia* suggests that a family tradition proclaimed him, by birth, a descendant of *milites*.<sup>207</sup> If the Alighieri had ever been *milites*, they certainly did not become *magnates*: in fact, in the 1250s they had joined the popular ranks and embraced popular ideology.<sup>208</sup> Dante never mentions his father, who appears in an ambiguous and rather unflattering context, perhaps as an indebted money-lender, in a sonnet by Forese Donati, which may be spurious.<sup>209</sup> The social and political network in which Dante was immersed

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<sup>206</sup> Giunta, 'Introduzione', in Dante, *Rime*, pp. 5-6; and see Dante, *Vita nova*, 1.20: 'E pensando io a.cciò che m'era apparuto, propuosi di farlo sentire a molti li quali erano famosi trovatori in quel tempo: e con ciò fosse cosa che io avesse già veduto per me medesimo l'arte del dire parole per rima, propuosi di fare uno sonetto, nel quel io salutasse tutti li fedeli d'Amore'.

<sup>207</sup> See Dante, *Paradiso*, XV-XVII.

<sup>208</sup> See E. Faini, 'Ruolo sociale e memoria degli Alighieri prima di Dante', in *Dante attraverso i documenti*, I: *Famiglia e patrimonio (secolo XII-1300 circa)*, ed. G. Milani et al., Florence, 2014, pp. 203-42 (226-31).

<sup>209</sup> Dante, *Rime*, ed. Giunta, pp. 295-9 (25b).



has been described by Silvia Diacciati as one of *popolani grassi*.<sup>210</sup> His friendship with Guido Cavalcanti, however, points to different sorts of ambitions. In his maturity, Dante was forced by anti-magnate legislation to join the *Arte dei medici e speziali* ('guild of physicians and pharmacists');<sup>211</sup> and, as we have seen, he became a political ally of the merchant Compagni. They were certainly not companions, however, in their youth; for Dante did not spend his younger years learning accounting and salesmanship in a merchant's shop – Dante, as a young man, had been in love.

If we wanted to draw a very schematic picture of the aristocratic culture which emerges from the sources analysed here, it would contain the following elements: it was a markedly oral culture, with an international air intended as a sign of participation in a supra-local aristocratic ethos; in some important ways, it was an alternative to Christian morality (and was therefore accused of immorality by its detractors); and it was chiefly engaged in by young men, with the intention of demarcating their aristocratic class identity. All these elements were taken up by the group of Florentine poets we call the *stilnovisti*; and, more importantly, they were addressed in a self-conscious and often critical manner. A well-known passage from Dante's *Vita nova* illustrates this point:

[I]n ancient times there were no vernacular love poets, rather certain poets who wrote in Latin versified of love ... . And not many years have passed since these vernacular poets first appeared ... . To see

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<sup>210</sup> S. Diacciati, 'Dante: relazioni sociali e vita pubblica', in *Dante attraverso i documenti, I: Famiglia e patrimonio (secolo XII-1300 circa)*, ed. G. Milani et al., Florence, 2014, pp. 243-70 (249).

<sup>211</sup> Zorzi, *La trasformazione di un quadro politico*, p. 143: 'Le innovazioni maggiori [of the Ordinamenti di Giustizia, in 1295] riguardarono l'accessibilità al priorato, che non venne più preclusa a chi era iscritto a un'arte ma solo a chi era cavaliere – e per tal via personaggi come Dante Alighieri, i cosiddetti "scioperati" (immatricolati che non esercitavano il mestiere) poterono essere riammessi alla massima magistratura del comune ...'

that it is a short length of time, we need only research the language that uses *oc* and the one that uses *sì*; in neither do we find poems written more than 150 years before the present time ... . And the first one who started to write poetry in the vernacular started to do so because he wanted to make his words comprehensible to women, who found it difficult to follow Latin verses. This is contrary to those who write rhymes on themes other than love, insamuch as this mode of composition was from the very beginning invented for writing about love.

[Anticamente non erano dicitori d'amore in lingua volgare, anzi erano dicitori d'amore certi poete in lingua latina ... . E non è molto numero d'anni passati che apparirono prima questi poete volgari ... . E segno che sia picciolo tempo, è che se volemo cercare in lingua d'oco e in quella di sì, noi non troviamo cose dette anzi lo presente tempo per CL anni ... . E lo primo che cominciò a dire sì come poeta volgare si mosse però che volle fare intendere le sue parole a donna, alla quale era malagevole d'intendere li versi latini. E questo è contra coloro che rimano sopra altra matera che amorosa, con ciò sia cosa che cotale modo di parlare fosse dal principio trovato per dire d'amore.]<sup>212</sup>

Love as the exclusive theme for vernacular poetry was chosen in an open polemic with the kind of poetry which was fashionable at the time, the didactic moralism of Guittone d'Arezzo. This critical stance had clear social and ideological implications: refusing civic commitment, the *stilnovisti* implicitly opposed popular ideology; by choosing love as the sole theme of their poetry, they selected the distinctively aristocratic ritual of love as their

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<sup>212</sup> Dante, *Vita nova*, 16.4-6; translation from Dante, *Vita nova*, transl. A. Frisardi, Evanston Illinois, 2012, p. 37, slightly modified.

primary means of self-definition as a group<sup>213</sup> – their strong sense of group identity stemmed from the ethos of the aristocratic youth *brigata* of their day. At the same time, however, they also challenged the mainstream rituals of the magnates: they openly rejected the violent and dissolute behaviour of noble young men, defining themselves instead as an aristocracy distinguished by an ethical and philosophical system of beliefs, ennobled by intellectual worth rather than by money and blood.<sup>214</sup> This did not imply any sort of revolutionary or progressive concession to popular or bourgeois anti-aristocratic positions: the nobility of the *stilnovisti* did not seek to contest aristocratic pre-eminence, but rather to reaffirm it on a sounder basis.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> The physician Dino del Garbo, commenting on the famous *canzone* of Guido Cavalcanti *Donna me prega*, observed that the passion of love was an exclusive pursuit of ‘nobiles homines ... qui sunt magni et potentes vel ex progenie eorum vel ex divitiis multis vel ex virtute animi’: cited in E. Fenzi, *La canzone morale di Guido Cavalcanti e i suoi antichi commenti*, Genoa, 1999, p. 120. Here again we have an apt definition of magnates, with the important addition of intellectual worth to antiquity of blood and economic wealth. Del Garbo explained this phenomenon as follows, *ibid.*: ‘quia homines alii populares sunt plus dediti cogitationibus que versantur circa opera civilia, que necessaria sunt in vita: nam quidam dant se uni artificio, quidam vero alteri, ut ideo distrahuntur multum a tali cogitatione et sollicitudine que est in hac passione. Homines vero nobiles et potentes, quia circa talia opera artium non vacant, plus sunt apti incurrere tales cogitationes que circa hanc passionem versantur.’

<sup>214</sup> This refinement of the aristocratic ethos in an intellectual sense emerges clearly from the portraits of the *stilnovisti* drawn by contemporary observers; see, e.g., on Dante, Villani, *Nuova cronica*, II, p. 337 (X.cxxxvi): ‘Questo Dante per lo suo sapere fue alquanto presuntuoso e schifo e isdegnoso, e quasi a guisa di filosofo mal grazioso non bene sapea conversare co’ laici’; and on Cavalcanti, Compagni, *Cronica*, p. 46 (I.xx): ‘Uno giovane gentile, figliuolo di messer Cavalcante Cavalcanti, nobile cavalier, chiamato Guido, cortese e ardito ma sdegnoso e solitario e intento allo studio.’

<sup>215</sup> P. Borsa, ‘“Sub nomine nobilitatis”: Dante e Bartolo da Sassoferrato’, in *Studi dedicati a Gennaro Barbarisi*, ed. C. Berra et al. Milan, 2007, pp. 59-121 (74): ‘I suoi versi non contengono alcuna apertura verso una concezione “borghese” della nobiltà; attraverso il riutilizzo dei topoi della tradizione filosofica, religiosa e moralistica, il poeta non mira tanto ad aprire la nozione di gentilezza verso il basso, confutando il principio della *nobilitas generis*, quanto a contrastare la pretesa, assai diffusa nell’aristocrazia militare del tempo, di fare della nobiltà una “degnità” puramente ereditaria, equiparabile a un bene materiale e del tutto indipendente

More important for my argument is that their decision to position themselves as a defined group within society, and the consequent development of this role as embodied in the cultural practice of poetry, prompted Dante and his friends to reflect more generally on the functional implications of language choices. In the passage from the *Vita nova* quoted above, Dante conceives of love poetry as a specific type of linguistic activity, delineated in its essential sociocultural features: first, it represented a specific language choice which modified the diglossic language system by promoting an L variety such as the vernacular to a domain traditionally reserved for H – thus re-interpreting the reciprocal functions of Latin and vernacular in specific speech communities; second, it had been invented for the communicative purpose of including women in public and intellectual discourse, so that linguistic innovation was directly linked to the aristocratic class and its rituals; third, this phenomenon was approached as a historical (and quite recent) development, which involved the entire Romance area: the aristocratic sense of belonging to a superior, international community is articulated by Dante in the idea of belonging to a historical tradition, a tradition which is also envisioned as a linguistic movement; and fourth, in parallel with the critical definition of the development of new functions in the vernacular came a greater focus on a specific vernacular as an autonomous speech variety, attached to a precise community of speakers: Dante's reflections on language use led him to identify an Italian speech variety, perceived as such in emulation of Occitan, but precisely in this sense transcending the narrow limits of municipal society and identified as a pan-Italian linguistic entity.

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dalla virtù individuale, che, secondo la tradizione, era invece all'origine delle distinzioni sociali.' Borsa is referring to Guido Guinizzelli, but the argument is also valid for Florentine *stilnovisti*, who considered Guinizzelli their most important precursor.

## Chapter 5. Dante and the Division of Linguistic Labour

Yet talk we must; and not only because literature, like poverty, is known for taking care of its own kind, but more because of the ancient and perhaps as yet unfounded belief that should the masters of this world be better read, the mismanagement and grief that make millions take to the road could be somewhat reduced.

Joseph Brodsky, *The Condition We Call Exile*

### I

Dante intended his *Convivio* to be a grand treatise of vernacular Aristotelian ethics: in fifteen books, fourteen *canzoni* were to be expounded with extensive philosophical commentaries in prose. It was Dante's first reasoned response to his forced exile. The very alternation between verse and prose dramatized his attempt to come to terms with his past and devise a project for the present: the *canzoni* had mostly been composed in his last years in Florence, when he was engaged in the political struggles of the commune; he probably wrote them around 1295, with the aim of fashioning himself as a communal intellectual, of the type represented by Brunetto Latini, whom he would later call his master.<sup>1</sup> The commentary, instead, was new: it addressed a new audience and was meant to serve a new political vision.

The book opens with an Aristotelian maxim: all humans naturally desire to know.<sup>2</sup> Since not all humans, however, are equally disposed to pursue such knowledge, Dante proceeds by defining who is able to acquire knowledge, and who, in a just and well-ordered society, needs to be

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Santagata, *L'io e il mondo. Un'interpretazione di Dante*, Bologna, 2011, pp. 78-80 and 315-16.

<sup>2</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.i.1: 'Sì come dice lo Filosofo nel principio della Prima Filosofia, tutti li uomini naturalmente desiderano di sapere.' See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I.1 (980a 21).

philosophically trained.<sup>3</sup> The *Convivio* was not just a dispassionate disquisition on moral topics, it was a political manifesto. Dante believed that societies ought to be organized rationally: not only, in his view, did a rational model of society exist, but historical agents needed to be endowed with rationality – that is, knowledge – in order to fulfil their roles within it. According to the theory he developed in these years, the political system which conferred a rational structure on society was the empire – or, as he called it, the universal *monarchia*.<sup>4</sup> Within this system, he identified those who could and should seek ethical training as a very specific social class: the Italian nobility, owing its authority to imperial investiture, and, probably in particular, the aristocracy of the northern Italian courts he had been visiting in his first years of exile.<sup>5</sup>

Dante envisioned the aristocracy as the fulcrum of a future empire, destined to bring peace and stability to Italy and to put an end to factional strife. This imperial aristocracy, in his view, must reverse its present decline by a process of ethical renovation:<sup>6</sup> nobles had to be ‘induced to science and

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<sup>3</sup> On Dante’s conception of human inequality, see I. Rosier-Catach, ‘L’uomo nobile e il volgare illustre’, in *Ortodossia ed eterodossia in Dante Alighieri*, ed. C. Cattermole et al., Madrid, 2012, pp. 165-90, esp. 177-8 and 179-83.

<sup>4</sup> See Dante, *Convivio*, IV.iv-v. See also Dante, *Monarchia*, I.iii.2-8 and III.xi.7.

<sup>5</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.iii.4: ‘Poi che fu piacere delli cittadini della bellissima e famosissima figlia di Roma, Fiorenza, di gittarmi fuori del suo dolce seno ... per le parti quasi tutte alle quali questa lingua si stende, peregrino, quasi mendicando, sono andato, mostrando contra mia voglia la piaga della fortuna ... .’ See M. Tavoni, ‘*Convivio* e *De vulgari eloquentia*: Dante esule, filosofo laico e teorico del volgare’, *Nuova rivista di letteratura italiana*, XVII, 2014, pp. 11-54 (34).

<sup>6</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV.vi.17-19: ‘E non repugna [la filosofica] autoritade alla imperiale; ma quella senza questa è pericolosa, e questa senza quella è quasi debile, non per sé ma per la disordinanza della gente: sì che l’una coll’altra congiunta utilissime e pienissime sono d’ogni vigore. E però si scrive in quello di Sapienza: “Amate lo lume della sapienza, voi tutti che siete dinanzi a’ populi”, cioè a dire: congiungasi la filosofica autoritade colla imperiale, a bene e perfettamente reggere. Oh miseri che al presente reggete! e oh miserissimi che retti siet! ché nulla filosofica autoritade si congiunge colli vostri reggimenti né per proprio studio né per consiglio ... .’

virtue', and a first step in this reform project was provided by his own moral *canzoni*.<sup>7</sup> The main doctrine Dante imparted concerned the true essence of nobility, the topic to which he dedicated the entire fourth book of the *Convivio*:<sup>8</sup> if it was natural for some people to rule over others and for power to be paired with knowledge, it followed that those people were naturally disposed to acquire knowledge.<sup>9</sup> To actualize that natural disposition, however, they had to actively seek it. His point was simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive: on the one hand, he offered nobles a philosophical demonstration of their right of dominion; and, on the other, he provided them with ethical instruments which would not only legitimate their power, but also teach them how to employ it justly for the greater good, thus demonstrating that they deserved to be called nobles.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., I.ix.7: 'Lo dono veramente di questo comento è la sentenza delle canzoni alle quali fatto è, la qual massimamente intende indurre li uomini a scienza e a virtù ...' The necessity for sons of kings and nobles to be trained in ethics and politics had been notably advocated in Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, pp. 308-9 (II.ii.8): 'Adhuc quedam morales scientie, ut Ethica, que est de regimine sui, et Oeconomica, quae est de regimine familie, et Politica quae est de regimine civitatis et regni valde sunt utiles filiis liberorum et nobilium, immo, ut in proseguendo patebit, filii nobilium et maxime filii regum et principum, si velint politice vivere et velint alios regere et gubernare, maxime circa has debent insistere.'

<sup>8</sup> G. Fioravanti, 'Introduzione', in Dante, *Convivio*, ed. G. Fioravanti, in *Opere*, ed. Santagata, II, p. 67: 'Spiegare che cosa sia veramente la nobiltà ad un pubblico di nobili è dunque per Dante il punto di partenza indispensabile per procedere sulla strada di una *restauratio* del giusto ordine civile.' Fioravanti discusses at length Dante's theory at pp. 63-78. On Dante's progressive theoretical re-evaluation of hereditary nobility as the natural repository of virtue, see Santagata, *L'io e il mondo*, pp. 77-88.

<sup>9</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.ix.8: 'Questa sentenza non possono [non] avere in uso quelli nelli quali vera nobiltà è seminata per lo modo che si dirà nel quarto trattato; e questi sono quasi tutti volgari, sì come sono quelli nobili che di sopra in questo capitolo sono nominati.'

<sup>10</sup> Fioravanti, 'Introduzione', p. 77: 'Quello *sulla* nobiltà si rivela dunque un discorso rivolto non a un'astratta nobiltà morale, bensì proprio alla nobiltà sociologicamente e giuridicamente individuabile della lingua del sì, un discorso che ha il compito di condurla a una moralità che non possiede, ma che per natura è adatta a possedere.' See also U. Carpi, *La nobiltà di Dante*, 2 vols, Florence, 2004, I, pp. 84-122.

Grounded on a precise notion of the value of knowledge and of the rationale of its societal distribution, the *Convivio* defined Dante's political project as a battle for cultural hegemony, resulting in an open language conflict. Distribution of knowledge, in the Middle Ages, was marked by language competence: Latin competence – which coincided with education – was guarded as a monopoly by the professional classes, which Dante believed had turned it into a selfish economical enterprise.<sup>11</sup> He opposed to this monopoly an image of philosophical enquiry as the natural, uninterested endeavour of the ruling classes:<sup>12</sup>

... the vernacular will be of service to a very large number. For excellence of mind, which is eager to have this service, is found in those who, through the unfortunate neglect entailed by activities in the world, have left education to men who have turned this lady into a prostitute. These noble people are princes, barons, knights and

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<sup>11</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.ix.2-3: 'Non avrebbe lo latino così servito a molti: ché ... li litterati fuori di lingua italica non avrebbon potuto avere questo servizio, e quelli di questa lingua, se noi volemo bene vedere chi sono, troveremo che de' mille l'uno ragionevolmente non sarebbe stato servito, però che non l'averebbero ricevuto, tanto sono pronti ad avarizia, che da ogni nobilitade d'animo li rimuove, la quale massimamente desidera questo cibo. E a vituperio di loro dico che no si deono chiamare litterati, però che non acquistano la lettera per lo suo uso, ma in quanto per quella guadagnano denari o dignitade ... .' See also *ibid.*, III.xi.10: 'Né si dee chiamare vero filosofo colui che è amico di sapienza per utilitade, sì come sono li legisti, medici e quasi tutti religiosi, che non per sapere studiano ma per acquistare moneta o dignitade; e chi desse loro quello che acquistare intendono, non sovrastarebbero allo studio.'

<sup>12</sup> Among the reasons for writing his commentary in the vernacular, Dante boasts of his liberality ('pronta liberalitade'), which is the opposite of the greed of those literate in Latin. He stresses that his teachings are intended as a free gift. See Dante, *Convivio*, I.viii.16-7: 'La terza cosa, nella quale si può notare la pronta liberalitade, si è dare [dono] non domandato: acciò ch'è domandato è da una parte non vertù ma mercatantia, però che lo ricevitore compera, tutto che'l datore non venda ... . Onde acciò che nel dono sia pronta liberalitade e che essa si possa in esso notare, ancora si conviene essere netto d'ogni atto di mercatantia, [cioè si] conviene essere lo dono non domandato.'



many others of like nobility, women no less than men, a vast number of both sexes, whose language is not that acquired through education, but the vernacular.

[... lo volgare veramente servirà a molti. Ché la bontà dell'animo, la quale questo servizio attende, è in coloro che per malvagia disusanza del mondo hanno lasciata la letteratura a coloro che l'hanno fatta di donna meretrice; e questi nobili sono principi, baroni, cavalieri e molt'altra gente nobile, non solamente maschi ma femmine, che sono molti e molte in questa lingua, volgari, e non litterati.]<sup>13</sup>

Aristocrats were illiterate – that is, they did not know Latin: political commitment and family care ('cura familiare e civile') prevented them from gaining access to Latin studies and philosophical speculation.<sup>14</sup> The necessity of providing a vernacular equivalent to the genres of discourse practised in universities justified the novelty of composing scholarly prose in the vernacular:<sup>15</sup> in this perspective, the *Convivio* should have represented a step

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., I.ix.4-5. For the translation, see Dante, *The Banquet*, transl. C. Ryan, Saratoga CA, 1989, p. 30.

<sup>14</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.i.4: '... la cura familiare e civile, la quale convenevolmente a sé tiene delli uomini lo maggior numero, sì che in ozio di speculazione essere non possono.' This sort of justification was not an original idea of Dante's: Fioravanti, 'Introduzione', pp. 39-41, quotes a few passages from philosophers who discuss the hindrances which distract people from the pursuit of knowledge. There is an explicit reference to the impediments due to political commitment in the Florentine *volgarizzamento* of Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*; see Giles of Rome, *Del reggimento de' principi*, p. 169: 'E perciò che ei figliuoli dei re e dei prenci e dei grand'uomini debbono essere introdotti ed insegnati, acciò ch'ellino sappiano governare loro ed altrui, ellino debbono perfettamente sapere le scienze morali, cioè, per le quali l'uomo è bene costumato: perciò ch'ellino non possono intendere sottilmente nell'altre scienze di filosofia; conciosia cosa ch'abbiano molto affare delle bisogne della città e del reame.' It is notable that this is a personal comment of the translator, since Giles's original is not as explicit.

<sup>15</sup> See Dante, *Convivio*, I.x.12. The novelty of the enterprise is particularly evident in the fourth book, which is structured like a philosophical *quaestio*.

towards a new definition of the function of vernacular literature and of societal discourse in general.

In high medieval diglossia, the choice of Latin or the vernacular marked the division between formal speech domains and any other language use. Latin competence was acquired through formal education, access to which did not necessarily imply, much less determine, social prestige. As noted by Franco Cardini, the equation 'written culture = culture of the ruling class', though applicable to other periods, cannot be applied to this one.<sup>16</sup> The rise of vernacular literatures had supported the cultural emancipation of the laity and favoured the parallel development of two cultures – one Latin and the other vernacular – which were sometimes mutually hostile but, on the whole, functionally complementary.

Even the spread of *volgarizzamenti* did not substantially alter this division: the practice of *volgarizzare* implied the existence of a technical and intellectual border between the two languages that, although temporarily crossed by the translator, was reaffirmed by the very act of translation. Carlo Dionisotti traced the crisis of *volgarizzamenti* back to the intellectual legacy of Petrarch.<sup>17</sup> The position of the mature Dante, however, was already alien to this practice: with the *Convivio*, he did not intend to translate and disseminate Latin teachings; his aim instead was to replace them.<sup>18</sup> The empire Dante dreamed of, along with its ruling class, would be capable of

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<sup>16</sup> F. Cardini, 'Alfabetismo e livelli di cultura nell'età comunale', *Quaderni storici*, 13.38, 1978, pp. 488-522 (494): 'la cultura scritta era patrimonio pressochè esclusivo, in quel periodo, del secondo di questi *ordines* [scil. the *oratores*] ... ed esso a sua volta era lontano dal detenere prestigio e potere incontrastato sugli altri due, e del resto era lontano anche – teoria a parte – dall'essere praticamente distinguibile da essi. Quel che conta è che l'equazione "cultura scritta = cultura del ceto dirigente", proponibile per altri periodi, non lo è per questo.'

<sup>17</sup> Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia*, pp. 116-7.

<sup>18</sup> Fioravanti, 'Introduzione', p. 52, notes: 'Quanto alla divulgazione certamente il *Convivio* si mantiene a un livello culturale "medio", ma se Dante non entra nelle *technicalities* proprie delle aule universitarie è perché le ritiene oggettivamente biasimevoli ... e oggettivamente inutili, anzi dannose per lo scopo che si prefigge.'

developing a moral and political culture autonomous from the intercession of the literate – and therefore virtually independent from Latinate culture. Removing Latin from the picture, Dante could imagine a cultural system in which access to knowledge was not determined by formal education but by a notion of natural intellectual worth essentially coinciding with social rank. If the equation ‘written culture = culture of the ruling class’ was still not applicable in reality, it was so in Dante’s mind and in his hopes for the future.

The *Convivio*’s dramatic movement from past to present allowed Dante to present his own experience as a paradigmatic model for a potentially enlightened gentry. He coloured it with the features of a religious conversion: his declared model was Augustine.<sup>19</sup> The Church Father had been struck while reading Cicero’s *Hortensius*; Dante, the young vernacular poet, was converted to philosophy by Boethius’s *De consolazione philosophiae* and Cicero’s *De amicitia*.<sup>20</sup> In the Middle Ages, the Augustinian

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<sup>19</sup> See Dante, *Convivio*, I.ii.14.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., II.xii.2-4: ‘e misimi a leggere quello non conosciuto da molti libro di Boezio, nel quale, cattivo e discacciato, consolato s’avea. E udendo ancora che Tullio scritto avea un altro libro, nel quale, trattando dell’Amistade, avea toccate parole della consolazione di Lelio ... misimi a leggere quello. E avegna che duro mi fosse nella prima entrare nella loro sentenza, finalmente v’entrai tanto entro, quanto l’arte di gramatica ch’io avea e un poco di mio ingegno potea fare; per lo quale ingegno molte cose, quasi come sognando, già vedea, sì come nella Vita Nova si può vedere.’ Interpreters have been struck by two statements in this passage. Firstly, *De consolazione philosophiae*, a ubiquitous book in the Middle Ages, is said to be ‘non conosciuto da molti’. In thirteenth-century Florence, classical culture was not thriving, but Boethius seems to have been already in use in the school: see R. Black and G. Pomaro, *La Consolazione della filosofia nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento italiano. Libri di scuola e glosse nei manoscritti fiorentini*, Florence, 2000, pp. 3-11. Indeed, as observed by R. Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge, 2001, p. 271 n. 430, Dante here ‘could be referring to lack of philosophical/theological understanding of the work in hands of Italian grammarians’. The context, in my view, supports this interpretation. Dante’s phrasing, furthermore, might have been suggested by Augustine’s *Confessions* I.iii.4: ‘et usitato iam discendi ordine perveneram in librum cuiusdam Ciceronis,

pattern of conversion had often been translated into a matter of style: literary genres represented ways of life, and many writers, from Marbod of Rennes to Peter of Blois, had dramatized their passage from youth to maturity, from love to moral concerns, from laity to clergy, as a change of writing styles.<sup>21</sup> Dante's new path did not imply a complete rejection of the old one: the past had to serve the present.<sup>22</sup> The consistent use of the vernacular permitted such continuity: it also justified the aristocratic way of life as a whole in the polemic with the claims of Latinate professionals to occupy the moral high ground. Countering this group's belief in its own superior virtue and stressing his identity as a vernacular poet and an educator of the nobility, Dante took his stand as the equal of his aristocratic readership. He was not a member of a caste or a guild, selling his knowledge for a price;<sup>23</sup> and now he was freely donating what he had learnt for the betterment of society.

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cuius linguam fere omnes mirantur, pectus non ita' (my emphasis). It is also worth noting that the two didactic works by Brunetto Latini, *Tesoretto* and *Favolello*, were inspired by Boethius's *De consolazione philosophiae* and Cicero's *De amicitia* respectively. Secondly, Dante says that he at first encountered some difficulties in understanding these two works. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, pp. 215-16, takes this to be an indication of Dante's lack of competence in Latin. The reference to the *Vita Nova* – the book in which he had perceived by intuition things which he now knows through study – indicates, however, that his lack of preparation was philosophical rather than linguistic.

<sup>21</sup> R. Antonelli and S. Bianchini, 'Dal clericus al poeta', in *Letteratura italiana*, II: *Produzione e consumo*, ed. A. Asor Rosa, Turin, 1983, pp. 171-227 (183).

<sup>22</sup> See Dante, *Convivio*, I.i.16-7: 'E se nella presente opera, la quale è Convivio nominata e vo' che sia, più virilmente si trattasse che nella Vita Nova, non intendo però a quella in parte alcuna derogare, ma maggiormente giovare per questa quella; veggendo sì come ragionevolmente quella fervida e passionata, questa temperata e virile esser conviene. Ché altro si conviene e dire e operare ad una etade che ad altra; per che certi costumi sono idonei e laudabili ad una etade che sono sconci e biasimevoli ad altra ...'.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, I.i.10: 'E io adunque, che non seggio alla beata mensa, ma, fuggito della pastura del vulgo, a' piedi di coloro che seggiono ricolgo di quello che da loro cade, e conosco la misera vita di quelli che dietro m'ho lasciati, per la dolcezza ch'io sento in quello che a poco a poco ricolgo, misericordievolmente mosso, non me dimenticando, per li miseri alcuna cosa ho riservata ...' For a classic treatment of

## II

If *Convivio* was built on the Aristotelian maxim that everyone naturally desires to know, the fundamental premise of *De vulgari eloquentia* was that everyone naturally speaks. As Dante gathered from Aristotle's *Politics* – via Thomas Aquinas's commentary – humans are political animals: language is the essentially human faculty which, by allowing the exchange of knowledge and the performance of moral actions, enables them to live in

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Dante's role as a 'lay philosopher', see R. Imbach, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs*, Paris and Fribourg, 1996. The 'alimentary' metaphor of knowledge has a distinctive classical pedigree, starting from Plato's *Symposium*. Fioravanti (comm. ad Dante, *Convivio*, p. 102), has shown that the Platonic 'philosophical banquet' tradition was transmitted to the Middle Ages through the *Timaeus* rather than the *Symposium*, which was unknown to medieval scholars. In any case, a passage from Cicero might have been Dante's direct source: Cicero, *De officiis* I.xxxvii.132: 'Et quoniam magna vis orationis est, eaque duplex, altera contentionis, altera sermonis, contentio disceptationibus tribuatur iudiciorum, contionum, senatus, sermo in circulis, disputationibus, congressionibus familiarium versetur, sequatur etiam convivia. Contentionis praecepta rhetorum sunt, nulla sermonis, quamquam haud scio an possint haec quoque esse. Sed discentium studiis inveniuntur magistri, huic autem qui studeant, sunt nulli, rhetorum turba referta omnia; quamquam, quae verborum sententiarumque praecepta sunt, eadem ad sermonem pertinebunt.' The passage is very interesting, not just because it mentions banquets ('convivia'), but also because Cicero draws a line separating rhetorical ('contentio') and ordinary speech ('sermonis'), which could be easily interpreted by Dante as referring to Latin versus the vernacular, since, as is well known, he projected the diglossic system of his time onto antiquity. Compare, for example, Cicero's 'sermo in circulis, disputationibus, congressionibus familiarium versetur' with Dante, *Convivio*, I.xiii.8: 'dal principio della mia vita ho avuta con esso [i.e., his vernacular] benivolenza e conversazione, e usato quello diliberando, interpretando e questionando'. Cicero's remarks – that no precepts had ever been spelled out for ordinary speech, that students went to school just to learn rhetoric and that anyway rhetorical principles were equally applicable to ordinary conversation – could have been a reference point and a stimulus for Dante's emancipation of the vernacular. For a study of Dante's relationship to *De officiis*, see C. Di Fonizio, 'Dal "Convivio" alla "Monarchia" per il tramite del "De officiis" di Cicerone: l'imprecindibile paradigma ciceroniano', *Tenzione*, 14, 2013, pp. 71-122, who does not, however, mention this passage.

society.<sup>24</sup> Every social and political community – which, for Dante as for his contemporaries, were virtually coincided<sup>25</sup> – must necessarily, he concluded, aim to express itself in a distinct language. Italy, deprived of the imperial rule of Frederick II, was a dismembered body, deserted by the pope and plagued by factional strife. Political division was exacerbated by language diversity: ‘the cacophony of the many varieties of Italian speech’.<sup>26</sup> Consequently, Dante set to work in order to devise an ‘Italian’ language.

In *De vulgari eloquentia*, he displayed a lucid perception of the cultural forces operating in his time, as well as very personal ideas about how such forces should be interpreted and directed. In the last chapter we observed that, in the late medieval period, the emergence of supra-local vernacular varieties as autonomous cultural entities was linked to two interconnected phenomena: the formation of proto-national ethnic identities linked to secular powers and the promotion of vernacular discourse traditions to the public domain. In the remainder of this chapter, I shall attempt, firstly, to approach *De vulgari eloquentia* as a critical witness to the language situation in its time and, secondly, to assess the validity of Dante’s insights into the mechanisms governing the progress of language history. In sections III and IV, I shall discuss the relationship between the formation of ethnic identities – and particularly of a supposed Italian one – in the late Middle Ages and

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In octo libri Politicorum*, p. 11 (I.37): ‘Cum ergo hominis datus sit sermo a natura, et sermo ordinetur ad hoc, quod homines sibiinvicem communicent in utili et nocivo, iusto et iniusto, et aliis huiusmodi; sequitur, ex quo natura nihil facit frustra, quod naturaliter hominis in his sibi communicent. Sed communicatio in istis facit domum et civitatem. Igitur homo est naturaliter animal domesticum et civile.’

<sup>25</sup> Fioravanti, comm. ad Dante, *Convivio*, p. 563: ‘Con questo unico termine [i.e., *civilitas*] viene indicato dai commentatori medievali (Alberto, Tommaso, Tolomeo da Lucca) ciò che il pensiero moderno ha distinto: le strutture politiche (lo Stato, la costituzione) e le relazioni interne alla società civile che nel loro rapporto inscindibile caratterizzano la vita umana rispetto a quella degli animali.’

<sup>26</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xi.1: ‘multis varietatibus latio dissonante vulgari’. Transl. Botterill, p. 26.

the changing attitude not only towards the vernaculars and their mutual relationships, but also towards the role of Latin in the evolving linguistic landscape. Section V will address Dante's notion of Italian ethnic identity and his original theory of language variation. Sections VI and VII will analyse his concept of an illustrious vernacular and discuss how he envisioned the distribution of linguistic resources in a prospective Italian speech community. Finally, in section VIII I shall assess the position of Dante's treatise in the history of standardization.

### III

In this section I shall be sketching a profile of the main theories concerning the nature of languages and language variation – as well as the relations and possible kinship between different speech varieties – in the late Middle Ages. Since we will be considering a conceptual world in many respects unfamiliar to us, we need to bear in mind that if differences between modern conceptions and those analysed emerge, it is necessary to distinguish carefully between merely intellectual differences and institutional ones – that is, those stemming from a different system of linguistic organization.

The core intellectual difference is that no one in the period under scrutiny realized that the speech varieties we now call 'Romance' derived historically from Latin. From what I have labelled the institutional point of view, the diglossic system was in crisis; but, as we have seen in the previous chapter, it had not yet been supplanted by standard-with-dialects systems comparable to modern ones and, consequently, there was no firmly established, pervasive and standard language ideology. We thus see a proliferation of often conflicting theories devised to rationalize a fluid linguistic landscape. These theories were chiefly based on the following factors: a) common sense observations such as, for example, that Occitan

was more similar to French than to German; b) traditional language lore, which invested Latin with a totemic status; and c) the particular point of view of observers: their feeling or desire to be part of a network of social or linguistically identified ethnic groups.

All these issues are exemplified in a passage from the Florentine Dominican preacher Jacopo Passavanti, which, although written almost half a century after *De vulgari eloquentia*, has many points of contact with it, as well as some remarkable differences. Passavanti, in his *Specchio di vera penitenza* (c. 1355-1357), discusses the risks which translators all over Europe might run by turning the Scriptures into their own vernaculars:

Some chop it [i.e., the language of Scripture] up with their truncated speech, like the French and the Provençals; some obfuscate it with their obscure language, like the Germans, the Hungarians and the English; some, with their rough and uncouth vernacular, make it coarse, like the Lombards; some, halving it with ambiguous and dubious words, make it disjointed, like the Neapolitans and the southerners; some, with their harsh and rugged accent, make it rusty, like the Romans; many others, with their rustic speech of the Maremma and the Alps, make it boorish. And some, less bad than the others, like the Tuscans, by mistreating it, make it dirty and dark; among whom the Florentines, by stretching it and making it irksome with graceless, agitated words and with their Florentine slang, muddy it and mix it up with expressions like *occi* and *poscia*, *aguale* and *vievocata*, *pudianzi*, *mai pur sie* and *berreggiate* ... .

[Quale col parlare mozzo la tronca, come i Franceschi e Provenzali; quale collo scuro linguaggio l'offusca, come i Tedeschi, Ungari e Inghilesi; quali col volgare bazzesco e croio la 'ncrudiscono, come



sono i Lombardi; quali, con vocaboli ambigui e dubbiosi dimezzandola, la dividono, come' Napoletani e Regnicoli; quali coll'accento aspro e ruvido l'aruginiscono, come sono i Romani; alquanti altri con favella maremmana, rusticana, alpigiana, l'arrozziscono. E alquanti meno male che gli altri, come sono i Toscani, malmenandola, troppo la 'nsudiciano e abruniscono. Tra' quali i Fiorentini, con vocaboli isquarciati e smaniosi e col loro parlare fiorentinesco istendendola e facendola rincreasevole, la 'ntorbidano e rimescolano co' *occi e poscia, aguale e vievocata, pudianzi, mai pur sie, e berreggiate ...*.]<sup>27</sup>

Passavanti's ideas show clearly how deeply social artefacts are constructed by the observing subject: it feels like we are looking at the linguistic world in which Passavanti himself lived, as it unfolded in front of his eyes, and from his own particular perspective. For the closest vernacular to him, Florentine, he could even perceive its internal variations: the slightly derogatory 'Fiorentinesco' seems to indicate a lower, whether diastratic or just informal, Florentine register. This recalls the views on the proverbial scurrility of Florentines held, for example, by the chronicler Salimbene de Adam.<sup>28</sup> The vernaculars spoken by country and mountain folk stand apart, which, as we shall see, was also the case for Dante. Rome has its own vernacular, which is singled out and dismissed because of its asperity.<sup>29</sup> Looking south, Neapolitans are grouped together with southerners and Sicilians; in the north, Lombard is considered a single speech variety. The

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<sup>27</sup> J. Passavanti, *Lo specchio della vera penitenza*, ed. G. Auzzas, Florence, 2014, p. 465.

<sup>28</sup> See F. Bruni, 'Fra Lombardi, Tusci e Apuli: osservazioni sulle aree linguistico-culturali', in *Le Italie del Tardo Medioevo*, ed. S. Gensini, Pisa, 1990, pp. 227-56 (234).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.ix.2: 'Dicimur igitur Romanorum non est vulgare, sed potius trisiloquium, ytalorum omnium esse turpissimum; nec mirum, cum etiam morum habituumque deformitate pre cunctis videtur fetere.'

idea that the French chop up words may have been a commonplace, since a similar opinion was also expressed by Benvenuto da Imola.<sup>30</sup> This may be true as well of the obscurity of German, Hungarian and English, which has parallels both in *De vulgari eloquentia*, where Dante explains it by tracing it back to the language differences deriving from the Tower of Babel, and in the *Convivio*.<sup>31</sup>

There are, however, two important elements in Passavanti's account which should be pointed out: firstly, he does not acknowledge any particular kinship between Romance vernaculars; and, secondly, he does not seem to have any comprehensive notion of 'Italian' speech varieties, grouping them instead into three geographical areas: southern Italy, northern Italy (Lombardy) and Tuscany, with Rome standing apart.<sup>32</sup> Passavanti's perspective reflects, as I indicated above, his particular cultural position. This differs, for example, from that of Thomas Aquinas, which I analysed in chapter 4, because, by this time, vernaculars had gained a distinct status which Passavanti could not ignore. At the same time, however, his point of view was still that of a cleric and a preacher: he was interested in vernaculars as pragmatic means of expression; but, as sociocultural entities, they all carried the same (low) weight, as they all stood on an equal (low) footing in relation to the one proper language in which Scripture was written: Latin.

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<sup>30</sup> Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, II, p. 409: 'Nam cum [Galli] non possint bene proferre *cavaliero*, corrupto vocabulo, dicunt *chevalier*. Similiter cum nesciant dicere *signor*, dicunt *sir*, et ita de caeteris.'

<sup>31</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.viii.3. See also Dante, *Convivio*, I.vi.8.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Salimbene de Adam, *Cronica*, ed. G. Scalia, 2 vols, Bari, 1966, II, p. 864: 'Nam optime [Barnaba da Reggio] loquebatur Gallice, Tuscice et Lombardice et aliis multis modis, scilicet qualiter pueri cum pueris pueriliter locuntur, qualiter mulieres cum mulieribus et cum commatribus suis familiari colloquio mutuo referunt facta sua.' Note, firstly, that Barnaba da Reggio was, like Passavanti, a preacher – the ability to imitate, which required a good ear for language differences, must have been a sought-after skill in preachers; and, secondly, that Salimbene specifically associates two ways of speaking with women and children.

An object of fierce debate since it was discovered and published by Gian Giorgio Trissino, *De vulgari eloquentia* is punctuated by unexpected and controversial views. One of these was Dante's notion of an Italian language: in fact, he did not identify it with any speech variety recognized in his day, nor did he put forward a clear process for its development. Instead, he proved deductively the necessity of its existence. He proceeded by integrating two Aristotelian principles: on the one hand, the metaphysical principle that in every class of things considered as a genus there must be one entity which serves as a rule and a measure of the entire class; and on the other hand, the political principle that every form of community must be guided by a ruler.<sup>33</sup> Applying these principles to a future Italian political entity and to its linguistic behaviour, Dante postulated the necessary existence of a superior Italian vernacular – superior precisely because it was common to all Italians.

This demonstration was based on a premise which Dante made no serious effort to prove, but rather took for granted: the existence of Italians. Throughout the Middle Ages, two terms were chiefly used to denote Italians as a collective identity: 'Latin' and 'Lombard'. Both terms were ambiguous and, as often happens, their meaning depended on the context in which they were used and on the type of entities to which they were opposed. Latin could embrace all the inhabitants of the Latin West when these were compared to Greeks or Arabs.<sup>34</sup> It could indicate the inhabitants of

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<sup>33</sup> See I. Rosier-Catach, 'Man as a Speaking and Political Animal: A Political Reading of Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Vulgarization, Subjectivity*, ed. S. Fortuna et al. Oxford, 2010, pp. 34-53 (40-1).

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., the anonymous *Proverbia que dicuntur super natura feminarum*, in *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. G. Contini, 2 vols, Milan and Naples, 1960, I, pp. 521-55 (534): 'li ogli de la femena del demonio è spleco / no trove hom sì santisemo, né latino ni greco, / se speso entro vardàse, q'elo no faça fleco.' See also Marco Polo, *Milione. Versione toscana del Trecento*, ed. V. Bertolucci Pizzorusso, Milan, 1975, p. 8: 'Adivenne in que' tempi che 'l signore del Levante mandò imbasciatori al Gran Cane, e quando

'Romania' when these were opposed to Germans or English.<sup>35</sup> It often meant Italian, especially when the term of comparison was French.<sup>36</sup> 'Lombard' indicated northern Italians when these were opposed to southerners or Tuscans, as in Passavanti; and it referred to Italians *tout court* when these were opposed to the French – this meaning was mainly found outside of Italy, usually in France.<sup>37</sup>

These ambiguities were partially clarified around the 1250s and 60s, when the armies of Charles of Anjou and those of Manfred of Sicily confronted each other for the dominion of the entire Italian peninsula – which therefore acquired, as in antiquity, a political dimension of its own.<sup>38</sup> This event, for example, helped Brunetto Latini to delineate a concrete image of Italy as a distinct political entity – distinct particularly from France.<sup>39</sup> In

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vidono in questa città i due frategli, fecionsi grande maraviglia perché mai none aveano veduto niuno latino.'

<sup>35</sup> It is probably in this sense that we should interpret the term 'latino' in the *Ritmo Laurenziano*, in *Poeti de Duecento*, I, p. 6: 'Né latino né tedesco / né lombardo né fra[ncesco] / suo mellior re no 'nvenisco'. In this passage, 'latino' vs. 'tedesco' should indicate Romance vs. German; while 'lombardo' vs. 'francesco' would be a sub-division of the Romance peoples: Italian vs. French.

<sup>36</sup> See, e.g., Cecco Angiolieri, in *Poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante*, ed. M. Marti, Milan, 1956, p. 238: 'Li buon parenti ... sono i fiorini ... per cui t'inchinan franceschi e latini.' For 'Latin' in the sense of 'Italian' see the evidence collected by L. Tomasin, *Italiano. Storia di una parola*, Rome, 2011, see esp. pp. 43-8.

<sup>37</sup> As observed by Salimbene, *Cronica*, II, p. 950: 'Superbissimi enim sunt Gallici et stultissimi et homines pessimi et maledicti, et qui omnes nationes de mundo contemnunt, et specialiter Anglicos et Lombardos, et inter Lombardos includunt omnes Italicos et cismontanos, et ipsi revera contemnendi sunt et ab omnibus contemnuntur.'

<sup>38</sup> M. Grimaldi, 'L'identità italiana nella poesia dei trovatori', in *L'espressione dell'identità nella lirica romanza medievale*, ed. F. Saviotti et al., Pavia, 2016, pp. 81-100 (94).

<sup>39</sup> Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, p. 793 (III.lxxiii.4-6): 'Mes de to [ce] se tist lo maistres en cest livre, que il ne dit noiant de la seingnorie des rois des autres, se de ceaus non qui government les villes per annees. Et çaus sont en .ii. manieres: unes qui sont en France et as autres païs, qui sont souzmis a la seingnorie des rois et des autres princes perpatuels, qui vendent les prevostés et les baillent a ceaus qui plus l'achotent, poi gardent ne sa bonté ne le profit des borjois; l'autre est en Ytalie, que li citien et les borjois et les comunitiez des villes eslissent lor poesté et son seingnor

the same years, the chronicler Salimbene recognized the different social configuration which distinguished the Italian aristocracy, living in cities, from that beyond the Alps, who resided in the countryside.<sup>40</sup>

Language names followed similar trajectories: the indeterminacy of ethnic referents was matched by a substantial ambiguity in the entities denoted by glossonyms; and similar difficulties were involved in the recognition of the relationship between vernaculars. Xenophobia and objective language distance certainly played a part in what was a common opinion in Italy: that German was a foreign speech. Peire de la Caravana, an Italian troubadour, probably as early as 1194 compared Germans to frogs, and their speech to a dog's barking.<sup>41</sup> In his appeal to Italians to fight against a Germanic invasion (whether this should be read as an early sign of 'patriotism' or simply as a xenophobic remark – the two obviously do not exclude each other),<sup>42</sup> he wrote in Occitan, implicitly establishing some sense of kinship between Occitan and Italian vernaculars versus German.

According to Lorenzo Tomasin, the kinship between Romance varieties was seldom acknowledged – and the prestige of French, matched by a growing sense of Italian independence from French culture, probably

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tel come il cuident qui soit plus profitable au comun prou de la ville et de toz ses subjés.'

<sup>40</sup> See Salimbene, *Cronica*, II, p. 921: 'milites Bononie propter impetum furentis populi in civitate iam timent et more Gallicorum in villis habitant in possessionibus suis. Et ideo populares, qui in civitate habitant, more Gallicorum decetero bene possunt appellari burgenses.'

<sup>41</sup> G. Bertoni, *I trovatori d'Italia*, Geneva, 1974, pp. 206-10 (vv. 31-5): 'Granoglas resembra / En dir: "broder, guaz?" / Lairan, quant s'asembla, / Cum cans enrabiaz.'

<sup>42</sup> A. Monteverdi, 'Poesia politica e poesia amorosa nel Duecento (1945)', in id., *Studi e saggi sulla poesia italiana dei primi secoli*, Milan and Naples, 1954, pp. 19-32 (23): 'Questa è la prima voce di un italiano che si esprima in versi provenzali. E ad onta della parola straniera, niente ci può parer più nazionale di questo appello, che afferma (o c'illudiamo?) in un'ora solenne gli interessi solidali dei 'Pugliesi' e dei 'Lombardi', cioè di tutti gli italiani del mezzogiorno e del settentrione, contro la mal parlante e mal operante, odiosa 'gente d'Allemagna', e contro un impero che da lei trae origine e forza.' Perhaps Monteverdi, who wrote this piece in 1945, was under the spell of Italy's very recent past in drawing this picture.

contributed to regarding French as increasingly 'foreign'.<sup>43</sup> It is probably not a coincidence that the earliest attestations of a comprehensive notion of 'Italian vernacular' are to be found in the 1260s in a translator like Andrea da Grosseto, who, like Brunetto Latini, lived and worked in France.<sup>44</sup> In the early 1280s, however, Restoro of Arezzo wrote in his *Composizione del mondo*:

And the heavens with their movement and virtue are the most noble and perfect; and so they have to perform varied operations which do not resemble each other, since the nobler the cause, the more – rationally speaking – it has to determine diverse and varied effects. Therefore, in order to obtain maximum effect and diversity, rationally there need to be different languages and different ways of communicating in the world, 'literate' and vernacular; and, therefore, we have Greek letters, Latin letters, Hebrew letters and many others; and among nations there are vernaculars and ways of speaking which are not mutually comprehensible, such as the Greeks, the Armenians, the Germans, the Latins, the Arabs and many others.

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<sup>43</sup> L. Tomasin, 'Sulla percezione medievale dello spazio linguistico romanzo', *Medioevo romanzo*, XXXIX, 2015, pp. 268-92 (288): 'la presenza al centro geografico della Romània di un massiccio linguistico così chiaramente percepito [i.e., that of French] ... come entità unitaria e al tempo stesso distinta dalle varietà circostanti ... sembra contribuire al mancato riconoscimento, nella coscienza dei parlanti, della continuità linguistica che si estende tra Atlantico e Adriatico.'

<sup>44</sup> In 1268 in Paris, Andrea da Grosseto translated the moral treatises of Albertano da Brescia into his own vernacular, which he called 'volgare italico'; see Andrea da Grosseto, *Dei trattati morali di Albertano da Brescia volgarizzamento inedito del 1268*, ed. F. Selmi, Bologna, 1873, p. 223: 'E Tullio disse: la ragione dei cinici è tutta da gittar via; et è addire *cinòs* in lingua greca quanto che in volgare italico è a dire *cane*; et indi sono detti cinici, cioè cani.' It was more common, however, to use the term 'latino' to refer to Italian vernaculars: see, e.g., Bartolomeo da San Concordio, *Ammaestramenti degli antichi latini e toscani raccolti*, ed. V. Nannucci, Florence, 1840, p. 169: 'Io recando questo libro in latino, abbo posto più intendimento per intendimento, che parola per parola.' For other occurrences, see Tomasin, 'Spazio linguistico romanzo', p. 279, n. 32.

[E lo cielo collo suo movimento e colla sua virtude è nobilissimo e perfetto; adonqua dea elli adoparare operazione variata che non s'asomelli l'una coll'altra, emperciò che quanto l'artefice è più nobele, tanto de rascione adopara più diverse e variate cose. Adonqua per magiure operazione e per magiure diversità, de rascione deano èssare ello mondo diverse lingue e diverse operazioni de voci e de parlare per lèttara e per vulgare; e emperciò troviamo lettera greca, e lèttara latina, e lèttara ebraica e molte altre; e de le genti avere vulgare e parlare che non entende l'uno l'altro, come so' Greci, e Ermini, e Tedeschi, e Latini, e Saracini e molti altri.]<sup>45</sup>

In this passage, 'Latini' probably embraces the Romance populations – grouped according to linguistic criteria and thus suggesting the common character of Latin (we would say Romance) vernaculars.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Restoro d'Arezzo, *La composizione del mondo con le sue cascioni*, ed. A. Morino, Florence, 1976, pp. 189-90 (II.vii.4).

<sup>46</sup> A description of Romania as a unitary linguistic area can be found in Bacon, *Opus tertium*, ed. J. S. Brewer, London, 1859, p. 90: 'Et hoc videmus in idiomatibus diversis eiusdem linguae; nam idioma est proprietas alicuius linguae distincta ab alia, ut Picardicum et Gallicum et Provinciale et omnia idiomata a finibus Apuliae usque ad fines Hispaniae. Nam lingua latina est in his omnibus una et eadem secundum substantiam, sed variata secundum idiomata diversa.' Bacon here recognizes a kinship between Romance languages (of France, Spain and Italy) and relates it to the fact that these vernaculars are accidental varieties of Latin; he gives no further explanation here of this relationship. In a controversial passage of his Greek grammar, however, he appears to address another kind of variation in Latin, using the same terminology; see Bacon, *The Greek Grammar*, ed. E. Nolan and S. A. Hirsche, Cambridge, 1902, pp. 26-7: 'In lingua enim latina, que una est, sunt multa idiomata. Substantia enim ipsius lingue consistit in hiis in quibus communicant clerici et literati omnes. Idiomata vero sunt multa secundum multitudinem nacionum utancium hac lingua, quia aliter in multis pronunciant et scribunt Ytali et aliter Hyspani et aliter Gallici et aliter Teutonici et aliter Anglici et ceteri.' At first, it seems that Bacon here considers every European vernacular – including German and English – to be a variety of Latin. I believe that Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement*, p. 72, is right when he states that what Bacon actually meant was that in different regions Latin was spoken and written in different ways – so that in this passage there is no question of vernaculars. Silvia Rizzo, 'Petrarca, il latino e il volgare',

This passage also exemplifies another issue: while vernacular speech varieties attached to local ethnic identities acquired increasing recognition, the role and status of Latin within the system changed and had to be justified accordingly. As I stated above, no one at the time came to the conclusion which we now know to be the historical truth: that Romance vernaculars derived from Latin. Restoro approaches classical languages (where by classical I mean the role of H varieties in diglossia) and vernaculars (L) as two substantially different modes of communication, one marked by literacy and the other by orality.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, he employs two different criteria to classify them: H varieties are distinguished according to their alphabetical systems; L varieties on the basis of their mutual intelligibility – or lack thereof. He does not, however, elaborate on the relationship between what he calls Latin vernaculars and the Latin language.

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*Quaderni petrarcheschi*, VII, 1990, pp. 7-40 (40), objected that ‘poiché Bacone dice che la “substantia” della lingua latina consiste “in hiis in quibus communicant clerici et literati omnes” ... bisognerebbe ammettere che per lui gli “idiomata” fossero varietà “basse” di latino parlate e scritte ... dai laici e dagli “illetterati”. ... bisognerebbe ammettere che Bacone avesse mandato in briciole la distinzione fondamentale per tutto il medioevo fra “clerici” o “litterati” da un lato e “laici” o “illitterati” dall’altro, distinzione che si fonda proprio sul possesso esclusivo del latino da parte dei primi.’ An answer to this objection is given by Bacon himself: see Bacon, *Opus tertium*, pp. 33-4: ‘Multi vero inveniuntur, qui sciunt loqui Graecum, et Arabicum, et Hebraeum, inter Latinos, sed paucissimi sunt qui sciunt rationem grammaticae ipsius, nec sciunt docere eam: tentavi enim permultos. Sicut enim laici loquuntur linguas quas addiscunt, et nesciunt rationem grammaticae, sic est de istis. Vidimus enim multos laicos, qui optime loquebantur Latinum, et tamen nihil sciverunt de regulis grammaticae.’ Difficulties in assessing the Latin competence of medieval speakers arise from the same issues highlighted by scholars of medieval literacy; see Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, p. 232: ‘[a] fundamental difference between medieval and modern approaches to literacy is that medieval assessments concentrate on cases of maximum ability, the skills of the most learned scholars (*litterati*) ... whereas modern assessors measure the diffusion of minimal skills among the masses’.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. M. Polo, *Divisament dou monde*, pp. 317-18 (xvi.1-2): ‘Or avint que Marc, le filz messer Nicolao, enprant si bien le costume de Tartars et lor langajes et lor leteres [que c’estoit mervoille]; car je voç di tout voiremant que, avant gramment de tens puis qu’il vint en la cort dou grant segnor, il soit [quatre] langaiges et de quatre letres et scriture.’



In the following passage, a certain Henri de Crissey, writing at the end of the fourteenth century, takes a similar position to that of Restoro:

Some of the Latins are called laymen and the others clergymen ... . The laymen are said to speak languages made up of names imposed by convention, and these languages are taught to children by their mothers and fathers; so there are many of these languages among the Latins, since the French have one, the Germans another, and the Lombards or Italians another one. Clergymen are said to have a single language for all, and this is taught to children at school by grammarians... . It is known that the first inventors of Latin imposed names on things via Greek ones; and the Greeks imposed their names via Hebrew ones ... . The Hebrews imposed many names via the names given to them by God.

[Latinorum populorum quidam laici dicuntur, et quidam clerici ... . Laici vero dicuntur habere ydiomata vocum impositarum ad placitum, que Ydiomata docentur pueri matribus et a parentibus; et ita ydiomata multiplicia sunt apud Latinos, quia aliud est apud Gallos, aliud apud Germanos, aliud apud Lombardos seu Ytalicos. Clerici vero Latini dicuntur habere ydioma idem apud omnes eos, et istud docentur pueri in scolis a gramaticis ... . Satis constat ... voces latinas ultimo fuisse impositas. Circa quod est sciendum quod impositores primi latini ydiomatis, mediante greco ydiomate, voces latinas imponebant ... Greci vero imposuerunt suas voces, mediante hebreo ydiomate ... . Hebrei vero voces multas imposuerunt, mediantibus vocibus datis a Deo.]<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Quoted by C. Thurot, *Notices et extraits de divers manuscrits latins pour servir à l'histoire des doctrines grammaticales aux moyen âge*, Paris, 1868, p. 131.

Here the division between Latin and the vernaculars is explicitly related to the social status of their users ('clerici ... laici') and to their respective modes of acquisition: Latin is learnt at school from teachers, while vernaculars are learnt by children from their mothers and fathers.<sup>49</sup> Crissey identifies three vernaculars: Italian, French and German. He does not refer to any sort of kinship among them, and nothing is said about the relationship between Latin and the vernaculars, which are kept essentially apart: the fact that all their speakers, clerics and laymen, are called 'Latin' ('Latinorum populorum') refers to the common European, or probably Christian, origin of the three populations and has no linguistic relevance.<sup>50</sup> An interesting element here is the expression 'to impose (names on things)': this phrasing, which suggests that all languages owe their existence to an act of invention, was commonly employed in language theory by grammarians operating in universities, and especially, as I shall discuss below, in Paris. Both vernaculars and classical languages, according to Crissey, had been

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<sup>49</sup> This basic difference in the mode of acquisition had been already pointed out in the twelfth century by Dominicus Guindissalinus, *De divisione philosophiae*, ed. L. Baur, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, IV.2, Münster, 1903, pp. 2-142 (45-6): 'Scientia lingue ... primum in duo dividitur, scilicet scientiam considerandi et observandi quid unaqueque dictio significat apud gentem illam cuius lingua est, et in scientiam observandi regulas illarum dictionum. Illa est scientia intelligendi ad quid significandum singule dictiones sint impositae, ista est scientia ordinandi singulas dictiones in oratione ad significandum conceptiones anime. Illa naturaliter solo auditu addiscitur a parvulis, hec doctrina et studio addiscitur ab adultis. Illa solum usu audiendi, ista regulis magisterii apprehenditur. Illa variatur apud omnes secundum diversitatem linguarum, hec pene eadem est apud omnes secundum similitudinem regularum.'

<sup>50</sup> Commenting on this passage, Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, p. 17, n. 11 observes: 'qui non solo le lingue neolatine, ma anche quelle germaniche sono considerate idiomatiche del latino, cioè tutto l'Occidente è visto come un'unità linguistico-culturale nel segno del latino'. Crissey, however, never says that these vernaculars are varieties of Latin ('idiomatiche del latino'): he merely says that those who are not literate speak different languages ('yidiomatiche'), while those who are literate use one language ('ydioma').

invented: the former by convention ('ad placitum'); the latter from words originating ultimately from God ('mediantibus vocibus datis a Deo').

Since Latin was learnt solely through formal education, its role in the language system was rationalized within a general theory about the function of education in society. In this sense, Latin coincided with one of the seven liberal arts which formed the basis of the educational curriculum in the Middle Ages: grammar. As we have seen, Crissey envisioned a process of linguistic transmission originating directly from God and then passed on from Hebrew to Greek and from Greek to Latin.<sup>51</sup> This idea of linguistic progress, related to the concept of *translatio studii*, belongs to a tradition which placed the birth of the arts in a historical and providential framework, where their origin ultimately rested in God's intervention – a tradition which Ernst Curtius traced back to Clement of Alexandria and described as 'patristic'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> A similar type of transmission, though not explicitly linguistic, is already found in Alcuin, *Carmina*, ed. E. Dümmler, in *MGH. Poetae Latini medii aevi*, I, Berlin, 1881, p. 201, vv. 1436-8: 'Illic invenies veterum vestigia patrum, / quidquid habet pro se Latio Romanus in orbe, / Graecia vel quidquid transmisit clara Latinis, / Hebraicum vel quod populus bibit imbre superno.' Vivien Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians*, Woodbridge, 1982, pp. 81-97, labelled as 'exegetic grammar' a tradition originating in the British Isles and particularly widespread in the ninth century, which was characterized by frequent references to Hebrew and Greek and by the tendency to interpret grammatical phenomena with techniques inherited from biblical exegesis. See, e.g., the following discussion of the eight parts of speech in the *Liber in partibus Donati* by Smargadus, abbot of Saint-Mihiel-Sur-Meuse: 'Multi plures, multi vero pauciores partes esse dixerunt. Modo autem octo universalis tenet ecclesia. Quod divinitus inspiratum esse non dubito. Quia enim per notitiam latinitatis maxime ad cognitionem electi veniunt Trinitatis, et ea duce regia gradientes itinera festinant ad superam tenduntque beatitudinis patriam, necesse fuit ut tali calculo latinitatis compleretur oratio. Octavus etenim numerus frequenter in divinis Scripturis sacratus invenitur': quoted by Thurot, *Notices et extraits*, p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> See Curtius, *European Literature*, pp. 39-41. For the topos of *translatio studii*, see E. Fenzi, 'Translatio studii e imperialismo culturale', in *La fractura historiográfica: las investigaciones de Edad Media y Renacimiento desde el Tercer Milenio*, ed. F. J. Burguillo et al., Salamanca, 2008, pp. 19-121.

The changes which the educational system underwent in the Parisian faculty of the arts established a different tradition.<sup>53</sup> The arts gained an increasing technical, we might say professional, connotation, which also altered the image of grammar: rather than transmitted by God, grammar was thought to have been invented either by philosophers or by grammarians.<sup>54</sup> Grammar could be approached either as a basic technique to learn Latin, which everyone had to master in order to gain access to any form of higher education, or as a university subject – a doctrine which could be subjected to philosophical enquiry. When grammar was considered in the first sense, as a technique to learn a second language, vernaculars did not enter into the discussion: in no case in this period was a vernacular ever taught formally. Petrus Helias, for example, admitted the possibility of

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<sup>53</sup> John of Salisbury, however, had already maintained that the arts have their origin in nature and that therefore even grammar imitates nature. See John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, CXCIX, Paris, 1855, cols 823-946 (840): ‘Caeterum cum haec [scil. grammatica] ad placitum sit, non a natura videtur esse profecta; siquidem naturalia eadem sunt apud omnes, haec autem apud omnes non eadem est. Artium vero matrem superius collectum est, esse naturam; sed, licet haec aliquatenus, imo ex maxima parte ab hominum institutione processerit, naturam tamen imitatur, et pro parte ab ipsa originem ducit ...’

<sup>54</sup> Robert Kilwardby, e.g., thoroughly explained the philosophers’ invention of grammar and its function in his *De ortu scientiarum*, quoted by G. C. Alessio, ‘La grammatica speculativa e Dante’, in id., *Lucidissima dictandi peritia. Studi di grammatica e retorica medievale*, ed. F. Bognini, Venice, 2015, pp. 127-44 (138): ‘Ortus igitur grammaticae ex predictis patere potest. Cum enim sermo in usu fuisset diutius et ab impositione humana inventus natura vel casu regeretur, praeceperunt philosophiae amatores plures deesse loquentibus commoditates, ex hoc quod sermocinabantur sine arte, et hoc tam in communi sermone quam in communicatione scientiae per doctrinam. Minus enim bene communiter loquentes possunt suos conceptus exprimere et minus bene intelliguntur quando casualiter loquuntur et inuniformiter, et quando quilibet pro arbitrio suo sermonem vel modum sermocinandi sibi fingit. Minus etiam bene et tardius tradunt scientias qui eas noverunt quando minus congrue et minus artificialiter loquuntur et minus bene intelliguntur et tardius. Ideoque iuraverunt sapientes tollere istas incommoditates, et videntes quod tollerentur per artificiosum et congruum ac uniformem modum sermonicinandi, et quod sermo posset in artem reduci ad hoc, ut congrue et uniformiter et proprie ac prompte omnia per ipsum significarentur, scientiam super hoc constituerunt, haec est grammatica, sic dicta ab elementis suis primis.’

writing a grammar of French; but he did not go beyond this purely theoretical remark.<sup>55</sup> In the second sense, the nature and origin of grammar was among the interests of logicians in Paris. This type of approach sometimes led them to question the linguistic state preceding the acquisition of grammar – that is, the vernaculars. Something of this sense can be found in a commentary on Priscian attributed to Robert Kilwardby. Observing that Latin and ‘the vernaculars of the Latin language’ (*‘idiomata vulgaria linguae Latinae’*) had a vast amount of vocabulary in common, he came to the conclusion that Latin had been invented by philosophers (*‘sapientes’*) on the basis of these vernaculars.<sup>56</sup>

The general tendency within arts faculties, reaching its peak in the work of the so-called modist grammarians, was to treat grammar as a universal subject, concerned with the ultimate causes and principles governing the functioning of language as a human faculty.<sup>57</sup> So, while Petrus Helias still thought that grammar was a genus, subdivided into species

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<sup>55</sup> Petrus Helias, *Summa super Priscianum*, 2 vols, ed. L. Reilly, Toronto, 1993, I, pp. 63-4: ‘Species cuiuslibet artis sunt qualitates quas artifex per artem attribuit materie. Cum enim species pluribus modis accipiatur, hic pro forma vel pro qualitate ponitur. Sunt ergo species artis grammaticae linguarum genera secundum artem grammaticam. Est autem grammatica composita in lingua greca et latina, hebraea et caldaica. Et possunt huius artis species crescere, hoc est plures esse, ut si grammatica tractaretur in gallica lingua, quod fieri posset, sive in aliqua alia in qua nondum tractata est.’

<sup>56</sup> *The Commentary on ‘Priscianus Maior’ Ascribed to Robert Kilwardby*, ed. K. M. Fredborg et al., 1975, pp. 77-8: ‘Et forte impositiones primae quae fiunt in Latino sermone acceptae sunt iuxta idiomata vulgaria linguae Latinae, sed aliquid differunt in scriptura et in flexionibus, et hoc satis patet intuenti. Nam vocabulum quod est in idiomate vulgare est Latinum apud omnes, ut patet in hiis dictionibus “dona”, “Roma”, quae sunt vulgaria et Latina. Et similiter forte est in aliis, licet ignoretur. Super hoc tamen dicat unusquisque quod magis rationale sibi videbitur. Sed in hoc semper residendum est quod sapientis est imponere voces ad significandum... .’ On this passage, see Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, p. 20, n. 22.

<sup>57</sup> For a general introduction, see A. Maierù, ‘La grammatica speculativa’, in *Aspetti della letteratura latina del secolo XIII*, ed. C. Leonardi et al., Perugia-Florence, 1986, pp. 147-67. For the diffusion of modist theories in Italy, see Alessio, ‘La grammatica speculativa e Dante’, pp. 127-36.

corresponding to the grammars of individual languages, the modists maintained that grammar was, in its substance, one and the same and that the forms and structures of the particular languages were just accidental.<sup>58</sup> The immediate consequence of this approach was the dismissal of individual language differences as accidental phenomena. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it is difficult to find any appreciation of language variation among the modists – and even less of the vernaculars. At a purely theoretical level, however, a text attributed to the Italian modist Gentile da Cignoli distinguished three types of grammatical knowledge: the first, which he called *speculativa*, dealt with the philosophical question of the relations between language, thought and reality; the second, which was purely technical and ‘accidental’, he called *positiva*: it coincided with the doctrine taught to pupils at school and, therefore, generally, with Latin; and the third was the kind of grammar concerned with the vernaculars (‘grammatica lingue maternelle’): this sort of imperfect grammar, governing the use of vernaculars, he called ‘natural’ or ‘founded on usage’ (‘naturalis vel usualis’).<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement*, pp. 31-4.

<sup>59</sup> M. Grabmann, ‘Gentile da Cingoli: ein italienischer Aristotelesklärer aus der Zeit Dantes’, in id., *Gesammelte Akademieabhandlungen*, 2 vols, Munich, 1979, II, pp. 1690-9 (1697): ‘Juxta quod notandum, quod grammatica triplex est. Quedam est de lingua et ista est grammatica lingue maternelle, que alio modo nuncupatur naturalis vel usualis, quod idem est, quam equaliter omnes ydiote communicant. Alia est grammatica positiva, que docet regulas et non ostendit rationes sive causas earundem. Alia est grammatica, que dicitur demonstrans et speculativa, que docet regulas et cum hoc ostendit rationes.’ A very similar picture is drawn by Radulphus Brito, *Quaestiones super Priscianum minorem*, ed. H. W. Enders et al., Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1980, p. 137: ‘distinguendum est de triplici grammatica, scilicet positiva, usualis et regularis. Positiva est quae est de impositione vocum ad significata specialia et docet quid nominis sive vocabulorum. Usualis est qua utuntur communiter loquentes. Et qui in duabus considerationibus grammaticae instructi sunt considerant effectus eius sed nihil sciunt de causis sive principiis. Alia est grammatica regularis sive speculativa quae procedit per causas et principia.’ Note, in both authors, the correspondence between usage and nature.

## IV

Dante placed Italians in a historical and providential framework which conferred on them a defined identity and a political mission. As Nicolai Rubinstein put it: 'The Roman people was elected by divine providence to world-monarchy, without which it is not possible for mankind to reach earthly felicity, and which prepares the ground for the coming of Christ who opens the path to heavenly bliss.'<sup>60</sup> The Christian community united by the Latin language no longer held: Christ, Dante claimed, was born a Roman.<sup>61</sup> This ethnological ethos – comparable to what we would now call nationalism – owed something to the imperial myth (and propaganda) of Frederick II, and something as well to the agonistic attitude towards French culture which we have already seen in Brunetto Latini. What is most significant in Dante, however, is his notion of an Italian stock, a blend of feudal blood myths and Roman imperial pride – no wonder his hero was Virgil rather than Cicero. In Virgil and Roman historians he found the historical and providential justification of Roman universal dominion which he expounded in the *Convivio* and *Monarchia*.<sup>62</sup> From Aristotle he learnt that some humans, and therefore some ethnic groups, were naturally superior to others.<sup>63</sup> The argument he uses to justify the right of Romans to universal

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<sup>60</sup> Rubinstein, 'The Beginnings of Political Thought', p. 217.

<sup>61</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV.v.4: 'E però che nella sua [i.e. of Christ] venuta lo mondo ... convenia essere in ottima disposizione; e la ottima disposizione della terra sia quando ella è monarchia, cioè tutta ad uno principe ... ordinato fu per lo divino provvedimento quello popolo e quella cittade che ciò dovea compiere, cioè la gloriosa Roma.' Later, in the *Commedia*, he purposefully substituted the heavenly Jerusalem of Augustinian memory with a heavenly Rome: Dante, *Purgatorio*, XXXII, vv. 100-2: 'Qui sarai tu poco tempo silvano; / e sarai meco senza fine cive / di quella Roma onde Cristo è romano.'

<sup>62</sup> See also Dante, *Convivio*, IV.iv.5. The entire second book of the *Monarchia* is devoted to this topic.

<sup>63</sup> For Aristotle on slavery, see Williams, *Shame and Necessity*, pp. 113-14: 'Central to Aristotle's thought is a contrast between what is natural and ... that which is produced by constraint or force applied from outside ... . He argues not merely that

dominion, and consequently imperial authority, recalls Aristotle's justification of slavery: Roman authority was not imposed by force, but founded on the Romans' natural superiority and nobility.<sup>64</sup>

Though inheriting his Aeneas from Virgil and Livy, Dante took pains to demonstrate the nobility of the hero's progeny, which served to validate the nobility of Roman blood and, therefore, the right of the Romans to rule over all other peoples.<sup>65</sup> Classical and biblical texts provided a rich source for his arguments; but the ideological backbone of the ethnic ethos I have been describing should perhaps be sought in an oral Florentine tradition which Dante had assimilated since his youth:<sup>66</sup> it was in this traditional lore that a

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it is natural that someone or other should be a slave, but that there are people for whom it is natural that they, rather than someone else, should be slaves.'

<sup>64</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, IV.iv.8-10: 'Veramente potrebbe alcuno gavillare dicendo che, tutto che al mondo officio d'imperio si richeggia, non fa ciò autoritade dello romano principe ragionevolmente somma ...: però che la romana potenza non per ragione né per decreto di convento universale fu acquistata, ma per *forza, che alla ragione pare esser contraria*. A ciò si può lievemente rispondere che la elezione di questo sommo ufficiale convenia primieramente procedere da quello consiglio che per tutti provvede, cioè Dio ... . E però che *più dolce natura [in] signoreggiando*, e più forte in sostenendo, e più sottile in acquistando né fu né fia che quella della gente latina ... e massimamente di quello popolo santo nel quale l'alto sangue troiano era mischiato, cioè Roma, Dio quello elesse a quello officio' (my emphasis).

<sup>65</sup> Dante, *Monarchia*, II.iii.2-7: 'Quod quidem primo sic probatur: nobilissimo populo convenit omnibus aliis preferri; romanus populus fuit nobilissimus; ergo convenit ei omnibus aliis preferri ... . Est enim nobilitas virtus et divitie antique, iuxta Phylosophum in Politicis; et iuxta Juvenalem: "Nobilitas animi sola est atque unica virtus." Que due sententie ad duas nobilitates dantur: propriam scilicet et maiorum. Ergo nobilibus ratione cause premium prelationis conveniens est .... Subassumpta vero testimonia veterum persuadent; nam divinus poeta noster Virgilius per totam *Eneydem* gloriosissimum regem Eneam patrem romani populi fuisse testatur in memoriam sempiternam; quod Titus Livius ... contestatur. Qui quidem invictissimus atque piissimus pater quante nobilitate vir fuerit, non solum sua considerata virtute sed progenitorum suorum atque uxorum, quorum utrorunque nobilitas hereditario iure in ipsum confluit, explicare nequirem, sed "summa sequar vestigia rerum".' It follows a series of passages from the *Aeneid* demonstrating the noble origins of Aeneas: *ibid.*, II.iii.8-17.

<sup>66</sup> On Dante's historical memory, see M. Zabbia, 'Dalla propaganda alla periodizzazione. L'invenzione del "buon tempo antico"', *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo*, 107, 2005, pp. 249-82 (252): 'la memoria storiografica



sense of continuity with the Roman past blended with nationalist and aristocratic myths.<sup>67</sup> A legend about the origins of Florence attributed to the city a double soul: one, civilized, descending from Roman blood; the other, barbarian, descending from Fiesole.<sup>68</sup> It was a story Dante had heard in Florence, probably when still a child, as he suggests in the *Commedia*.<sup>69</sup> It was in this sense that Dante, in exile, exhorted Florentines to be true to their Roman origins by accepting imperial authority,<sup>70</sup> and that he accused them of being Fiesolans when they did not.<sup>71</sup> Broadening his horizons to include the rest of Italy, he applied this mythology to Italians, summoning the whole of Italy to choose its noble Latin and Trojan blood over the barbaric blood

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di Dante [può] essere così descritta: su uno sfondo di nozioni libresche relative principalmente alla storia biblica e antica si inseriscono numerose informazioni di storia contemporanea raccolte prevalentemente da tradizioni orali, mentre per i lunghi secoli intermedi ... aveva solo notizie sporadiche tranne che per le vicende fiorentine dell'inizio del secolo XII.' As we shall see presently, even his interpretation of language history followed this pattern.

<sup>67</sup> Rubinstein, 'The Beginnings of Political Thought', p. 207: 'The fact that the earliest manifestations of political ideas in Florence should be one of 'nationalism' is not in itself surprising ... But at Florence 'nationalism' is intimately connected with another idea ...: that of the Roman origins of Florence.' This sort of nationalism had an aristocratic ascendance, as various noble Florentine families claimed Trojan or Roman origins: see, for example, Ricordano Malaspini, *Storia fiorentina*, ed. V. Follini, Florence, 1816, p. 27: 'E' Lamberti erano già venuti a stare a Fiorenza, e l'antico loro ebbe nome Arpidon, e sono discesi per antico del re Serpidon di Troia, cioè de' sui discendenti'. Ibid., p. 25: 'gli Uberti sono nati e discesi dal nobilissimo Catelina, che fue nato de' nobili scacciati di Troia'.

<sup>68</sup> See Rubinstein, 'The Beginnings of Political Thought', pp. 209-18.

<sup>69</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, XV, vv. 121-6: 'L'una vegghiava a studio della culla, / e, consolando, usava l'idioma / che prima i padri e le madri trastulla; / l'altra, traendo a la rocca la chioma, / favoleggiava con la sua famiglia / d'i Troiani, di Fiesole e di Roma.'

<sup>70</sup> Dante, *Epistole*, ed. C. Villa, in *Opere*, ed. Santagata, II, p. 1456 (VI.2): 'Quid, fatua tali opinione summota, tanquam alteri Babilonii, pium deserentes imperium nova regna temptatis, ut alia sit Florentina civitas, alia sit Romana?'

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 1462 (VI.6): 'O miserrima Fesulanorum propago, et iterum iam punita barbaries!' See also Dante, *Inferno*, XV, 73-8: 'Faccian le bestie fiesolane strame / di lor medesme, e non tocchin la pianta, / s'alcuna surge ancora in lor letame, / in cui riviva la sementa santa / di que' Roman che vi rimaser, quando / fu fatto il nido di malizia tanta.'

inherited from Lombards.<sup>72</sup> It is relevant, in this context, that historical pedigrees, from Dante's perspective, can only go so far: communities have to be built, Italians have to forge an identity for themselves and the potential of their ethnic stock needs to be actively asserted. Latinity was like nobility: Italians might be naturally predisposed to it, but they also had to attain it by their own efforts.

The activation of the potential in the ethnic stock of Italians had a linguistic counterpart in the development of an illustrious vernacular – as we shall see presently, the cultural project of forming an Italian language was envisioned as a moral, political and aesthetic goal. As early as 1290 in his *Vita Nova*, Dante had christened the language in which he was writing his first poems *lingua del sì*, a glottonym – apparently invented and used only by him – which he probably construed by analogy with *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl*.<sup>73</sup> In the *Convivio*, he usually referred to it as 'Italian'.<sup>74</sup> The mature Dante of *De vulgari eloquentia* brought together the fluid cultural entities – ethnic and linguistic – we have seen above, revealing how central this was to his project: Latin and the Italian vernacular, imperial authority and the Italian people, in his view, were substantially related; and if this was not the situation in reality, then it had to become so. The new name he

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<sup>72</sup> Dante, *Epistole*, ed. Villa, p. 1448 (V.4): 'Pone, sanguis Longobardorum, coadductam barbariem; et si quid de Troianorum Latinorumque semine superest, illi cede ...'

<sup>73</sup> Dante, *Vita nova*, 16.4-5. For the origin of the Occitan glossonym, see R. Regis, 'Provenzale e occitano: vicende glottonimiche', *Estudis romànics*, 37, 2015, pp. 115-47. The use of a distinctive feature of the speech variety to be identified as a means to construe ethnonyms and glossonyms seems to be quite common; it is also attested, e.g., among Australian aboriginal tribes: see P. McConvell, 'Shibbolethonyms, Ex-Exonyms and Eco-Ethnonyms in Aboriginal Australia. The Pragmatics of Onymization and Archaism', *Onoma*, 41, pp. 185-214.

<sup>74</sup> Dante, *Convivio*: 'volgare italico' (I.vi-8); 'lingua italica' (I.ix.2); 'italica loquela' (I.x.14); 'parlare italico' (I.ix.14); but 'volgare di sì' (I.x.12).

coined for the Italian vernacular was ‘vulgare latium’, probably another hapax.<sup>75</sup>

Dante was the first to address explicitly the kinship between Romance languages and the birth of Latin within a coherent historical framework. Romance speech varieties were similar because they had a common ancestor: one of the idioms resulting from the Babelian confusion of languages.<sup>76</sup> He approached the difference between vernaculars and what he called ‘secondary languages’, such as Latin and Greek, in two different ways: the first general, the second specifically dedicated to Latin. First, he stated in general:

I say ... that I call ‘vernacular language’ that which infants acquire from those around them when they first begin to distinguish sounds; or, to put it more succinctly, I declare that vernacular language is that which we learn without any formal instruction, by imitating our nurses. There also exists another kind of language, at one remove from us, which the Romans called *grammatica*. The Greeks and some – but not all – other peoples also have this secondary kind of language. Few, however, achieve complete fluency in it, since knowledge of its rules and theory can only be developed through dedication to a lengthy course of study. Of these two kinds of language, the more

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<sup>75</sup> On this term, see Tavoni, comm. *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1241: ‘Questa marcata scelta di Dante si inserisce in una strategia terminologica coerentissima, che include *Latium* per significare (esclusivamente) “Italia” e *latinus-Latini* per significare (esclusivamente) “italiano-italiani”, e ha lo scopo di accreditare il volgare di sì come volgare strettamente affine al latino ... e gli italiani come eredi dei romani, soprattutto ai fini dei loro diritti imperiali.’

<sup>76</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.viii.5: ‘Totum vero quod in Europa restat ab istis, tertium tenuit ydioma, licet nunc tripharium videatur: nam alii *oc*, alii *oïl*, alii *sì* affirmantur locuntur, ut puta Yspani, Franci et Latini. Signum autem quod ab uno eodemque ydiomate istarum trium gentium progrediantur vulgaria, in promptu est, quia multa per eadem vocabula nominare videntur, ut “Deum”, “celum”, “amorem”, “mare”, “terram”, “est”, “vivit”, “moritur”, “amat”, alia fere omnia.’

noble is the vernacular: first, because it was the language originally used by the human race; second, because the whole world employs it, though with different pronunciations and using different words; and third, because it is natural to us, while the other is, in contrast, artificial.

[vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus. Est et inde alia locutio secundaria nobis, quam Romani gramaticam vocaverunt. Hanc quidem secundariam Greci habent et alii, sed non omnes: ad habitum vero huius pauci perveniunt, quia non nisi per spatium temporis et studii assiduitatem regulamur et doctrinamur in illa. Harum quoque duarum nobilior est vulgaris: tum quia prima fuit humano genere usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversa prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobis, cum illa potius artificialis existat.]<sup>77</sup>

He came back to the question later by addressing the historical invention of Latin: as in the commentary of Robert Kilwardby mentioned above, Dante explained the relationship between Latin and Romance varieties by the fact that Latin had been invented by the common consent of the Romance peoples, but he corrected this view by suggesting that they had privileged Italian as its foundation. In contrast to Henri de Crissey, Dante did not speak of any historical continuity in the transmission of grammatical doctrine from Greek to Latin. His own version of the *translatio studii* was

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., I.i.3-4. Transl. Botterill, p. 3.

limited to suggesting the 'special relationship' between Latin and Italian. Furthermore, he thought that Hebrew, the original language given by God to Abraham, had been lost to humanity except for the Jews after Babel,<sup>78</sup> and after the diaspora to the Jews as well.<sup>79</sup> So, on the one hand, he rejected the idea that Hebrew was a grammatical language; and, on the other, he removed any divine character from grammar. The notion, typical of diglossia, that Latin was a divinely inspired language and, as such, belonged to all of Christendom does not figure in *De vulgari eloquentia*.

One of the pillars of Dante's theory was his idea of language change,<sup>80</sup> which connected linguistic variation in time and space to the intrinsic instability of human customs and habits. This notion is also found in Restoro d'Arezzo,<sup>81</sup> who, however, connected language change to astrological

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<sup>78</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.vi.4-7: 'dicimus certam formam locutionis a Deo cum anima prima concreatam fuisse. Dico autem "formam" et quantum ad rerum vocabula et quantum ad vocabulorum constructionem et quantum ad constructionis prolationem: qua quidem forma omnis lingua loquentium uterentur, nisi culpa presumptionis humane dissipata fuisset ... . Hac forma locutionis locutus est Adam; hac forma locutionis locuti sunt omnes posterii eius usque ad edificationem turris Babel ...; hanc formam locutionis hereditati sunt ... Hebrei. Hiis solis post confusionem remansit, ut Redemptor noster, qui ex illis oriturus erat secundum humanitatem, non lingua confusionis, sed gratie fruatur. Fuit ergo hebraicum ydiuma illud quod primi loquentis labia fabricantur.'

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., I.vii.8: 'qui antiquissima locutione sunt usi usque ad suam dispersionem'.

<sup>80</sup> It is when discussing language change that Dante refers to *De vulgari eloquentia* in *Convivio*, I.v.9-10: 'Onde vedemo nelle cittadi d'Italia, se bene volemo aguardare, da cinquanta anni in qua molti vocabuli essere spenti e nati e variati; onde se 'l picciol tempo così transmuta, molto più transmuta lo maggiore. Sì ch'io dico che se coloro che partiro d'esta vita già son mille anni tornassero alle loro cittadi, crederebbero la loro cittade essere occupata da gente strana, per la lingua da[lla] loro discordante. Di questo si parlerà altrove più compiutamente in uno libello ch'io intendo di fare, Dio concedente, di Volgare Eloquenza.' And in *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.ix.1, Dante introduces the topic stressing its novelty.

<sup>81</sup> Restoro d'Arezzo, *La composizione del mondo*, pp. 24-5 (II.iv.7): 'E emperciò non se trova nulla provincia e nulla città e nulla villa e nullo castello che non abbia diversi regimenti e diversi atti e diverso parlare; e troveremo li abetatori d'una città e demeno en regimenti e en atti ello parlare essere svariati, chè da l'uno lato dela città parlaranno d'uno modo, da l'altro parlaranno d'uno modo, da l'altro parlaranno svariato d'un altro; e so' provenzie che no entende l'uno l'altro. E s'alcuno omo

influx.<sup>82</sup> What was central for Dante was instead the fact that the vernaculars changed because they were created and modified in time through human interaction – in other words, because their development depended on human free will as exercised within specific social (and political) communities.<sup>83</sup> This was linked to the manner in which Dante described the difference between Latin and the vernaculars: as we have seen, he called the vernaculars natural, while grammatical languages such as Latin he considered to be artificial. It must be stressed that this did not mean that the actual form assumed by the vernaculars was natural. When he came back to this question in the *Commedia*, in fact, he made this clear: ‘That man should speak is nature’s doing, but whether thus or thus, nature then leaves you to follow your own pleasure.’<sup>84</sup> This view is perfectly in line with medieval linguistic thought, as it translates a common Aristotelian dictum about the arbitrariness of linguistic signs, which get their meaning by human convention and not by nature.<sup>85</sup> This theory, usually called ‘*significatio ad placitum*’, implies that *every* language is a human creation.

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tornasse ella sua provinzia en meno di mille anni, non consciarea le sue contadie, che trovarea travallati e variati li monti, e li valli, e li rii, e li fiumi, e le fonti, e le citta, e le castella, e le ville, e lo parlare delle genti.’

<sup>82</sup> See n. 45 above.

<sup>83</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.ix.10: ‘Si ergo per eandem gentem sermo variatur ... successive per tempora, nec stare ullo modo potest, necesse est ut disiunctim abmotimque morantibus varie varietur, ceu varie variantur mores et habitus qui nec natura nec consortio confirmantur sed humanis beneplacitis localique congruitate nascuntur.’

<sup>84</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, XXVI, vv. 130-2: ‘Opera naturale è ch’uom favella; / ma così o così, natura lascia / poi fare a voi secondo che v’abbella.’ Translation from Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, ed. and transl. C. Singleton, 6 vols, London, 1971-5, *Paradiso*, p. 297.

<sup>85</sup> See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *In libros Peri Hermeneias expositio*, I, 6.8: ‘oratio significat secundum placitum, id est secundum institutionem humanae rationis et voluntatis ... sicut omnia artificialia causantur ex humana voluntate et ragione’. Cf. Dante, *Convivio*, I.v.7-8: ‘... lo latino è perpetuo e non corruttibile, e lo volgare è non stabile e corruttibile. Onde vedemo nelle scritture antiche delle commedie e tragedie latine, che non si possono trasmutare, quello medesimo che oggi avemo;

As noted by Rosier-Catach, the linguistic state of humanity after Babel corresponded for Dante to the moral (and therefore political) condition of humans after the Fall: they were free to make up their own languages – which also meant that they were free to do it wrongly.<sup>86</sup> Dante appended to this principle the Aristotelian-Thomist notion that some forms of political structure are the natural expression of human essence, while other forms of organization, though possible thanks to mankind’s freedom, are unnatural and, therefore, unjust.<sup>87</sup> What qualified Latin as artificial was, then, not so much that it had been invented – as we have seen, every language had been invented – but rather by whom it had been invented, in which circumstances and in which manner. While the vernaculars were freely developed by an entire community of speakers to express their moral and political needs, Latin had been invented, imposed and preserved through the establishment of rules and formal education, by a small group of individuals, who were not coterminous with any natural community – and who often, as Dante had argued in the *Convivio*, acted as a potentially disruptive – unnatural – force against the interests of natural social groups.<sup>88</sup>

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che non avviene del volgare, *lo quale a piacimento artificiato si tramuta*’ (my emphasis).

<sup>86</sup> Rosier-Catach, ‘Man as a Speaking and Political Animal’, pp. 34-5. The idea that after Nimrod – to whom construction of the tower of Babel was traditionally attributed – every human group was free to choose its own particular political system is also found in Brunetto, *Tresor*, p. 790 (III.lxxii.3): ‘Car des lors que Nembrot li jahanz surprist premierement le roiaume dou pais, et que covoitise sema les guerres et les mortels haines entre les genz dou siecle, il convint as homes qu’il eussent seingnors de plusors manieres, selonc ce que li uns furent esleus a droit, et li autre par lor pooir.’

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *In libri Politicorum expositio*, p. 12 (I.40-1): ‘in omnibus hominibus est quidam naturalis impetus ad communitatem civitatis sicut et ad virtutes. Sed tamen, sicut virtutes acquiruntur per exercitium humanum ... ita civitates sunt institutae humana industria. Ille autem qui primo instituit civitatem, fuit causa hominibus maximorum bonorum. Homo enim est optimum animalium si perficiatur in eo virtus, ad quam habet inclinationem naturalem. Sed si sit sine lege et iustitia, homo est pessimum omnium animalium.’

<sup>88</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.vii.12-3 and I.ix.1-9.

As Dante had learnt from Thomas Aquinas, the drive to unite in political bodies is a natural human tendency, but actual communities have to be built by human industry;<sup>89</sup> and the same principle, according to Dante, applied to languages. The theoretical identification of an Italian speech community based on ethnic identity had to be complemented by a plan for the organization of the Italian community's language behaviour. It is now time to consider Dante's theory of the division of linguistic labour.

## V

*De vulgari eloquentia* opens with the following words:

Since I find that no one, before myself, has dealt in any way with the theory of eloquence in the vernacular, and since we can see that such eloquence is necessary to everyone – for not only men, but also women and children strive to acquire it, as far as nature allows – I shall try ... to say something useful for the language of people who speak in the vernacular.

[Cum neminem ante nos de vulgaris eloquentie doctrina quicquam inveniamus tractasse, atque talem scilicet eloquentiam penitus omnibus necessariam videamus, cum ad eam non tantum viri sed etiam mulieres et parvuli nitantur, in quantum natura permittit ... locutioni vulgarium gentium prodesse temptabimus.]<sup>90</sup>

The relationship established here between *eloquentia* and *locutio* indicates a contextual difference between formal uses (*eloquentia*) and ordinary conversation (*locutio*): the type of variation which in medieval

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<sup>89</sup> See n. 87 above.

<sup>90</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.i.1. Transl. Botterill, p. 3, slightly modified.



diglossia was generally expressed by the opposition between Latin and the vernaculars. The novelty of Dante's approach did not lie so much in advocating the vernacular's right to be employed in formal genres of discourse – that was already the case. It rather consisted in three specific assumptions: 1) every use of language – whether formal or informal – should be performed in the vernacular; 2) every speaker has the potential to achieve *eloquentia*; and 3) the development of a vernacular *eloquentia* is a force which actively influences everyone's way of speaking. Underlying these ideas was arguably the fact that, since no one had to learn the vernacular through formal education – unlike Latin – virtually everyone could have access to it.<sup>91</sup> In the *Convivio*, Dante had proposed a theory to explain the unequal distribution of knowledge according to the disparity of intellectual and social means; and, similarly, in *De vulgari eloquentia* he attempted to provide a rational theory for the inequality between language varieties. He did not present linguistic inequality as a direct reflection of social inequality; instead, it was based on two sets of criteria: one political and the other aesthetic (that is, stylistic). I shall discuss the political criteria in the present section, and the aesthetic criteria in the next one.

The first set of criteria revolved around spheres of political and social life – family, village, city and kingdom – and was mainly borrowed from Aristotle.<sup>92</sup> The native vernacular, which was learned within family structure

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<sup>91</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.xi.16: 'Intra li uomini d'una lingua è la paritade del volgare; e perché l'uno quello non sa usare come l'altro, nasce invidia.' As happened with the distribution of knowledge in the *Convivio*, language difference – and therefore linguistic inequality – was treated in *De vulgari eloquentia* as a matter of natural disposition ('in quantum natura permittit').

<sup>92</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xix.2-3: 'Et quia intentio nostra, et polliciti sumus in principio huius operis, est doctrinam de vulgari eloquentia tradere, ab ipso tanquam ab excellentissimo incipientes, quos putamus ipso dignos uti, et propter quid, et quomodo, nec non ubi, et quando, et ad quos ipsum dirigendum sit ... Quibus illuminatis, inferiora vulgaria illuminare curabimus, gradatim descendentes ad illud quod unius solius familie proprium est' (my emphasis). Cf. Dante, *Convivio*,

and chiefly from women, was surpassed by superposed varieties corresponding to progressively broader political communities. How Dante saw the actual functioning of this ingenious scheme of variation is not entirely clear, for the simple reason that he left the treatise unfinished: the main variety he analysed at length was the supreme one – the (Italian) kingdom’s vernacular, which he termed ‘illustrious’. The question is all the more paradoxical since the kingdom was the only political entity, among those listed above, which did not exist: there were numerous families, villages and cities in Italy, but there was no kingdom. Dante’s focus on the illustrious variety as the true common Italian vernacular and the absence of an Italian political entity are not unrelated: the aim of *De vulgari eloquentia* was to identify a vernacular which would serve the purpose of unifying Italy as a future political entity.

Dante’s description of the illustrious vernacular set out – though rather vaguely – its prospective role within the variational system. He defined it in terms of four attributes: ‘illustrious’, ‘cardinal’, ‘aulic’ and ‘curial’.<sup>93</sup> ‘Illustrious’ describes the superior vernacular as a force, ennobled by its intrinsic authority and power (*magistratus* and *potestas*), which at the same time ennobles its users, conferring on them authority and power. ‘Cardinal’ indicates its function as a regulative factor, a pivot around which the inferior varieties revolve. The remaining two adjectives describe more precisely the vernacular’s political function: ‘aulic’ refers to the physical space of the *aula palatina*, the royal palace of the future Italian kingdom,

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IV.iv.1-2: ‘E però dice lo filosofo che l’uomo è naturalmente compagnevole animale. E sì come un uomo a sua sufficienza richiede compagnia domestica di famiglia, così una casa a sua sufficienza richiede una vicinanza ... . E però che una vicinanza [a] sé non può in tutto soddisfare, conviene a satisfacimento di quella essere la cittade. Ancora la cittade richiede alle sue arti e alle sue difensioni vicenda avere e fratellanza colle circavicine cittadi; e però fu fatto lo regno.’ This description of society’s organization depends on Aristotle’s *Politics* (1265a). See Rosier-Catach, ‘Man as a Speaking and Political Animal’, pp. 41-2.

<sup>93</sup> This paragraph is based on Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xvii-xviii.

while 'curial' indicates the *curia*, a body of people and functions pertaining to the kingdom's organization. These two entities – the *aula* and the *curia* – were singled out as the illustrious vernacular's elective domains of use.

With regard to language use in the royal palace, Dante observed: 'those who frequent any royal court always speak an illustrious vernacular'.<sup>94</sup> This is probably the only statement in *De vulgari eloquentia* which openly qualifies the illustrious vernacular as a potential variety of ordinary use. This is hardly surprising, given that this is also one of the few instances in which the usage of the illustrious vernacular is located in a social dimension, though an unreal one – a yet-to-be formed court in a yet-to-be united Italian kingdom, which at the time existed solely as a figment of Dante's imagination, fuelled by the mythical memory of Frederick II's court.

## VI

Forms of *eloquentia* – that is, literary genres – are discussed in Book II of *De vulgari eloquentia*. Dante aspired to linguistic unity and stability, and he saw in poetics – as a form of regulated discourse – an apt means to achieve this: his declared model was Latin poetry.<sup>95</sup> He proposed a division of styles

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 1348 (I.xviii.3): 'in regis omnibus conversantes semper illustri vulgari locuntur'. Transl. Botterill, p. 42. Cf. Giles of Rome, *Reggimento de' principi: volgarizzamento*, p. 120: 'Che sì come e villani che vivono solitari e senza compagnia di genti, sono orridi e selvaticchi, così ei gentili uomini che vivono in gran compagnia, sono compagnevoli e cortesi. Perciò che costumano ne le corti dei gentili uomini, usano molte genti, le quali si studiano d' avere buoni costumi.'

<sup>95</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.iv.3: '[Vernacular poets] differunt tamen a magnis poetis, hoc est regularibus [i.e., Latin poets], qui magni sermone et arte regulari poetati sunt, hii vero casu ... Idcirco accidit ut, quantum illos proximius imitemur, tantum rectius poetemur. Unde nos doctrine operi intendentes doctrinatas eorum poetrias emulari oportet.' See R. Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization: From Petrarch to Valla*, Durham and London, 2003, p. 15: 'if on a doctrinal level regularity is a

largely indebted to manuals of the *ars dictaminis* and of medieval *poetriae*. Firstly, he pointed out that the illustrious vernacular could be employed in both prose and verse. Secondly, he introduced a tripartite stylistic taxonomy, based on formal properties and thematic range. He called the three types of literary discourse ‘tragic’, ‘comic’ and ‘elegiac’; to each one he attached a vernacular stylistic register: illustrious, mediocre and humble respectively.<sup>96</sup> Only the tragic style was suitable for the illustrious vernacular – so that the Book II of *De vulgari eloquentia* became essentially a manual for composing high vernacular lyric. Before the end of this discussion, the book was abruptly abandoned and never completed.

The social background of the tragic style was grounded in its thematic range: in line with the *Convivio*, what emerged was an ideological exaltation of the aristocratic life, sanctioned by the authority of Aristotle.<sup>97</sup> The aristocrats’ sentimental education occurred during their youth; their maturity was spent in war; and their aspiration was to attain power. Dino Compagni, as we have seen in the previous chapter, accordingly divided the heirs of the *bellatores* of the high Middle Ages into three orders: young gentlemen, knights and barons – and described them as lovers, fighters and rulers. Dante declared in *De vulgari eloquentia* that high vernacular poetry should only be used to talk about war, love and ethics – he called these topics the three *magnalia* of poetry: *salus*, *venus* and *virtus*.<sup>98</sup> He analysed the

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specific attribute of a conventional language and is contrary to the natural fickleness of human language, then on an artistic level, which is the most important to Dante, regularity is thought to be transferable into “vulgar eloquence”, and Latin, at least in its illustrious authors, from a “secondary” language becomes the model and the subject of emulation.’

<sup>96</sup> For Dante’s theory of styles, see P. V. Mengaldo, ‘Stili, dottrina degli’, in *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 6 vols, Rome, 1970-1978, V, pp. 435-8.

<sup>97</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.ii.6.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, II.ii.7: ‘Quare hec tria, salus videlicet, venus et virtus, apparent esse illa magnalia que sint maxime pertractanda, hoc est ea que maxime sunt ad ista, ut armorum probitas, amoris accensio et directio voluntatis.’

use of these *magnalia* in the work of a few champions of vernacular lyric – *d’oc* and *del sì* – placing himself at the top as the poet of ethics – that is, the poet of the *Convivio*. Most interestingly, he associated the *magnalia* with Aristotle’s tripartition of the soul: war corresponded to the vegetative soul, love to the sensitive soul and virtue to the rational soul.<sup>99</sup> Assuming that this correspondence was an invention of Dante’s, it originated in the history of vernacular poetry, a history which largely coincided with the ideological and cultural affirmation of the lay nobility.

Dante maintained that the language of poetry influenced the language of society; but it is difficult to see how, in his view, such an influence worked in practice. The only concrete indication he gives is that poetic language shapes the language of prose.<sup>100</sup> Here, too, our ability to understand the theory is hampered by the treatise’s incompleteness. The most baffling question, finally, concerns the link between the two systems of variation – political and stylistic. As Mirko Tavoni has argued, the illustrious vernacular is a form of *eloquentia*. Yet the comic and elegiac genres – and so, presumably, their corresponding stylistic registers, middle and low – are also forms of *eloquentia*. How Dante thought these styles were related to inferior political spheres – such as cities, villages and families – it is difficult to say for certain.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, II.ii.6.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, II.i.1: ‘ante omnia confitemur latium vulgare illustre tam prosayce quam metrice decere proferri. Sed quia ipsum prosaycantes ab avientibus magis accipiunt et quia quod avietum est prosaycantibus permanere videtur exemplar, et non e converso – que quendam videtur prebere primatum – primo secundum quod metricum est ipsum carminemus ...’

<sup>101</sup> Tavoni, comm. ad Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1363, cites Aristide Marigo, who maintained that, had the treatise been completed, there would have been a straightforward correspondence between politico-geographical varieties and inferior stylistic levels, so that the middle and low vernaculars would have been described, ‘il primo con caratteristiche regionali o interregionali, il secondo con caratteristiche regionali o municipali: ambedue però orientati verso quella unificazione per la quale era maestro e signore il volgare proprio *totius Ytalie*.’ All

## VII

The incompleteness of the treatise, as we have seen, prevents us from gaining a clear understanding of precisely how Dante thought that poetry influenced the language of society. No less obscure, however, is the relationship between the illustrious vernacular and existing ones. This obscurity is due, however, not to the unfinished status of the treatise, but rather to the conceptual apparatus which Dante employed to develop his notion of the illustrious vernacular. It is here, in fact, that we can measure the distance which separates our modern notion of national, or standard, language from that of Dante. Much confusion surrounding the treatise derives, I believe, from the distorted view that it is a prophetic vision of the national language which took shape in the sixteenth century. A comparison of Dante's ideas with the modern model of standardized language will help, I hope, to place *De vulgari eloquentia* more firmly within the history of the attitudes towards language of its own time.

Using the terminology introduced by Einar Haugen for the study of standardization, we can say that the core objective pursued by Dante was the *selection* of a standard variety for a potentially unified Italian speech community. As I discussed in chapter 4, in standard-with-dialects systems this normally entails the choice of a diastratic or diatopic variety which is imposed as a standard on the speech community. This was, *grosso modo*, what had happened in France: the Parisian vernacular spoken at court became a prestigious variety gradually imposing itself on the expanding kingdom. Dante, however, did not select either a specific diatopic variety

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we know about what Dante intended to discuss in the remaining books is that the third was going to cover illustrious prose, and the fourth sonnets, ballads and, in general, comic poetry: *ibid.*, pp. 1408-10 (II.iv.1). Nevertheless, Dante's own sonnets and ballads (which we can safely assume he would have included) do not seem to have more markedly regional or municipal linguistic traits than his songs.

nor a diastratic one. To clarify his position and his motivations, I shall treat the two options separately.

*Diatopic.* Dante devoted a series of chapters to surveying the vernaculars spoken in Italy, in search of a speech variety worthy to be considered illustrious – and therefore Italian. He counted fourteen of these, which he called ‘municipal vernaculars’. Since the illustrious vernacular was meant to be an eloquent – that is, literary – variety, the main criterion employed to distinguish it from other vernaculars was aesthetic: the outcome was negative. The kind of evidence Dante used was essentially of three types, sometimes combined: a) specimens of ordinary speech, intended to be representative of the various municipal vernaculars; b) excerpts of poetic compositions in which informal traits of specific vernaculars were represented mimetically or, more often, parodied – quoted as proof of the intrinsic ugliness of the vernaculars in question;<sup>102</sup> and c) compositions in the high lyric style – but only *canzoni* – which are the sole examples of the illustrious vernacular which he provided: while Dante projected the full political potential of the illustrious vernacular into the future, he detected its present existence in the work of a handful of poets, obviously including his own poetry, which belonged to an ideal tradition of tragic lyric that had started in the Sicily of Frederick II and lived on in contemporary centres such as Florence and Bologna.

The point Dante wanted to stress was that no municipal vernacular was suitable to be employed as a common language. The only Italians – notably just poets – who had risen to the challenge of writing in such a language had done so by deviating (the verb he uses repeatedly is *divertere*)

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<sup>102</sup> On these passages, see G. Contini, ‘La poesia rusticale come caso di bilinguismo’, in *La poesia rusticana nel Rinascimento: Atti del convegno*, Rome, 1969, pp. 43-55, which should now be read together with C. Giunta, ‘Espressionismo medievale?’, in id., *Codici: Saggi sulla poesia del Medioevo*, Bologna, 2005, pp. 281-97.

from their native tongues.<sup>103</sup> This meant that the illustrious vernacular was somehow a different speech variety from any of those currently spoken. The essence of the argument was, as usual in *De vulgari eloquentia*, at the same time political and stylistic: on the one hand, no municipal vernacular could, in Dante's opinion, arrogate to itself the right to be considered Italian; and, on the other, ordinary speech could not be considered stylistically illustrious. Furthermore, some kinds of poetry were not elevated enough to be deemed illustrious, such as the group of Tuscan poets Dante called 'municipal', including Guittone of Arezzo and Brunetto Latini.<sup>104</sup> One of the most surprising elements of the treatise is that even Tuscan varieties did not pass muster for Dante; on the contrary, Tuscans were openly mocked, together with Romans, for the arrogance with which they praised their own tongue.<sup>105</sup>

Dante was probably right in identifying the fierce language pride of Tuscans as a sign of parochial provincialism. What he perhaps did not fully realize was how much his own linguistic perceptions were indebted to that very provincialism. First, his idea that Sicilians had developed a supra-local language for lyric probably came about because the original Sicilian poems had been strongly Tuscanized by copyists.<sup>106</sup> Secondly, if one looks at the

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<sup>103</sup> See Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xii.9 (on Sicilians); I.xiii.5 (on Tuscans); I.xiv.3 (on Romagna); I.xiv.3 (on Paduans); I.xv.6 (on Bologna).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, I.xiii.1: 'Post hec veniamus ad Tuscos, qui propter amentiam suam infronti titulum sibi vulgaris illustris arrogare videntur. Et in hoc non solum plebeia dementat intentio, sed famosos quamplures viros hoc tenuisse comperimus: puta Guittonem Aretinum, qui nunquam se ad curiale vulgare direxit, Bonagiuntam Lucensem, Galum Pisanum, Minum Mocatum Senensem, Brunectum Florentinum, quorum dicta, si rimari vacaverit, non curialia sed municipalia tantum invenientur.'

<sup>105</sup> See nn. 29 (on Romans) and 104 (on Tuscans) above.

<sup>106</sup> Tavoni, comm. ad Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1273: 'Dante rileva qui la differenza fra il siciliano parlato e la lingua dei poeti siciliani, a lui nota nella forma toscanizzata che è la stessa giunta fino a noi nei canzonieri. Egli mostra di non sospettare minimamente che quella forma non sia l'originale. Su questa inconsapevolezza, a sua volta frutto della rapidissima scomparsa, nell'arco di un



other poets he singles out as *doctores illustres*, four of them are Tuscans; four are from Bologna – and therefore belong to a Tusco-Emilian tradition well established at least since Dante's youth;<sup>107</sup> one, Aldobrandino de' Mezzabati, is a Paduan who was living in Florence around 1291-2, where he probably met Dante, and who wrote, for all intents and purposes, in Tuscan.<sup>108</sup> Although he dismissed Tuscan poetry as municipal, non-Tuscan (or at least non-'Tuscanized') poetry, for him, did not really exist, given that, as noted above, the only models of vernacular poetry he cited were in Tuscan. It cannot be excluded, however, that Dante was indulging here in a certain degree of deliberate mystification. In the same years, for example, Francesco da Barberino expressed a language policy which was not so dissimilar from Dante's, with the important difference that he openly acknowledged the Tuscan basis of the language in which he wrote.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps Dante, while being true to his principle of anti-municipalism, was well aware that he was, in fact, promoting his own native vernacular to the rank of 'Italian'. That said, whether consciously or unconsciously, whether mystifying or

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solo cinquantennio, dei testi originali, si basa tutta la teoria del vulgare latium ... che misconosce la sostanziale toscanità del volgare della lirica illustre.'

<sup>107</sup> See P. Beltrami, 'Intorno a Dante: tra lingue d'Italia e lingua italiana del Duecento e Trecento', in *150 anni. L'identità linguistica italiana*, ed. R. Bambi et al. Rome, 2012, pp. 75-91 (87-8): 'Posta così, questa lingua è sostanzialmente il toscano dei poeti a cui Dante accorda il suo favore, incluso il bolognese Guido Guinizzelli, che condivide la lingua e la cultura poetica dei toscani (per quanto sia ragionevole pensare che la sua lingua sia stata resa più toscana dai canzonieri), nell'ambito della stretta solidarietà culturale che esisteva nel Duecento fra Bologna e Firenze.'

<sup>108</sup> On Mezzabati, see F. Brugnolo, 'I toscani nel Veneto', in *Meandri. Studi sulla lingua veneta e italiana settentrionale del Due-Trecento*, Rome-Padua, 2010, pp. 139-258 (see esp. p. 147).

<sup>109</sup> Francesco da Barberino, *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, p. 5: 'Non vo' che sia lo tuo parlare oscuro, acciò ch'aver è a mente con ogni donna posso dimorare; né parlerai rimato, acciò che non ti parta, per forza di rima, dal proprio intendimento; ma ben porrai tal fiata, per dare alcun diletto a chi ti legerà, di belle gobbolette seminare, e anco poi di belle novelle indurrai ad exemplo. E parlerai sol nel volgar toscano, e porrai mescidare alcuni volgari, consonanti con esso, di que' paesi dov'hai più usato, pigliando i belli e' non belli lasciando.'

mystified, he *explicitly* refused to select a specific diatopic variety as a model for the Italian standard.

*Diastratic.* While in the *Convivio* he had explained to nobles the essence of nobility, in *De vulgari eloquentia* – addressed to a literate readership and therefore written in Latin – his aim was to persuade literates of their political mission, which meant their conversion to writing vernacular poetry: the treatise was a call to a massive *trahison des clercs*. He argued that, thanks to their knowledge and authority, they could be superior even to rulers in fame and glory.<sup>110</sup> Such self-assurance – along with his altered attitude to the literate, for whom in the *Convivio* he had expressed only contempt – was probably the result of his change of residence: moving from the environment of northern courts, possibly Verona, to Bologna and its university.<sup>111</sup> It is telling, however, that this new approach never translates into a rehabilitation of the literate as a class: while he focuses in detail on the moral and political function of poetry, he never fully addresses the social position of its practitioners, apart from the implicit suggestion that they should put themselves at the service of feudal rulers – as Dante himself had done.

It is tempting to assume that the contrast between municipal vernaculars and illustrious Italian had direct social connotations. Mario Alinei, for example, as we have seen in chapter 4, suggested that Dante's

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<sup>110</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xvii.5-6: 'Nonne domestici sui [i.e., of the illustrious vernacular] reges, marchiones, comites et magnates quoslibet fama vincunt? Minime hoc probatione indiget. Quantum vero suos familiares gloriosos efficiat, nos ipsi novimus, qui huius dulcedine glorie nostrum exilium postergamus.' This autobiographical information is telling: the model Dante proposed for the renovation of society – to the nobles of the *Convivio* and to the literate of *De vulgari eloquentia* – was consistently himself.

<sup>111</sup> The identification of Bologna as the place of composition of *De vulgari eloquentia* has been repeatedly upheld by Mirko Tavoni; see, e.g., Tavoni, '*Convivio e De vulgari eloquentia*', pp. 46-53.

illustrious vernacular was the sociolect of the bourgeoisie.<sup>112</sup> Dante, however, did not oppose two alternative sociolects, but instead ordinary (informal) to literary (formal) uses: speech varieties which linguists usually call registers, determined by the context of use, not by the social status of the user. The illustrious vernacular was a literary register: it was used only by poets, who, as I have said, were not explicitly envisioned as a social class. Differences between poets were judged according to technical and, especially, intellectual criteria – not social ones.<sup>113</sup> True, the thematic range of the high lyric style was informed by aristocratic ideology. Nothing, however, indicates that this purpose determined the choice of a specific aristocratic speech variety. The illustrious vernacular theorized by Dante cannot be considered a sociolect – and even less the sociolect of the bourgeoisie.

In his description of municipal vernaculars there are, however, a few instances in which Dante addressed a kind of variation which may be regarded as ‘diastratic’ – that is, explicitly indexing the speech habits of different social groups. The social opposition he identified as linguistically marked, however, was that between urbanites and those who lived in the countryside or the mountains: ‘I reject all languages spoken in the mountains and the countryside ... whose pronounced accent is always at such odds with that of city-dwellers.’<sup>114</sup> The observation, applied here to

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<sup>112</sup> See Ch. 4, n. 15 above.

<sup>113</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.i.8: ‘Et cum loquela non aliter sit necessarium instrumentum nostre conceptionis quam equus militis, et optimis militibus optimi convenient equi, ut dictum est, optimis conceptionibus optima loquela conveniet. Sed optime conceptiones non possunt esse nisi illis in quibus ingenium et scientia est. Et sic non omnibus versificantibus optima loquela conveniet, cum plerique sine scientia et ingenio versificentur, et per consequens nec optimum vulgare.’

<sup>114</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xi.6: ‘montaninas omnes et rusticanas loquelas eicimus, que semper mediastinis civibus accentus enormitate dissonare videntur.’ Transl. Botterill, p. 26. For the adjective ‘mediastinus’, Tavoni (comm. ad *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1323) quotes Hugh of Pisa’s *Derivationes*: ‘mediastinus -a -um, idest in

specific geographical speech varieties (from the Casentino and Fratta), is later stated as a general principle, postulating the urban character of the illustrious vernacular.<sup>115</sup> Similarly, in Book II, when Dante discusses the kind of vocabulary permissible in the high lyric style, the words he regarded as inappropriate are related to three specific social groups: children, women and those who lived in the countryside or the mountains.<sup>116</sup> The exclusion of this type of vocabulary from the discourse he considered to be illustrious corresponds to his classification of speech varieties according to spheres of political activity: Dante's theory of language variation was an attempt to formulate a coherent system of what we would now call private and public spheres of discourse, by regulating the admission of specific social actors to each sphere. Children and women were admitted to the family, but

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medio civitatis existens et tunc componitur a mediis et asinis, quod est civitas; unde Oratius in Epistulis (I.xiv.14) "tu mediastinus tacita prece rura petebas". See also P. V. Mengaldo, 'Mediastinus', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, III, p. 879. We have encountered the same attitude towards the speech varieties of country- and mountain-dwellers in Passavanti: see n. 27 above.

<sup>115</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xvii.3: '[the illustrious vernacular] Magistratu quidem sublimatum videtur, cum de tot rudibus Latinorum vocabulis, de tot defectivis prolationibus, de tot *rusticanis* accentibus, tam egregium, tam perfectum et tam *urbanum* videamus electum ut Cynus Pistoriensis et amicus eius [scil. Dante] ostendunt in cationibus suis' (my emphasis). On this passage, see V. Mengaldo, 'Rusticanus', in *Enciclopedia dantesca*, IV, p. 1060: 'si dovrà intendere che Dante mette a confronto l'esistenza di pronunce o "accenti" rustici, campagnoli nei vari dialetti con una caratterizzazione del volgare illustre come volgare, fra l'altro, precisamente e concretamente "cittadino" ... .' In Book II, where Dante's main concerns are rhetorico-stylistic, the life of country folk is presented as unworthy to be treated in illustrious speech: see Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.i.6: 'Sed hoc [scil. the illustrious vernacular] non convenit nobis gratia generis, quia etiam brutis conveniret; nec gratia speciei, quia cunctis hominibus esset conveniens, de quo nulla questio est: nemo enim montaninis rusticana tractantibus hoc dicet esse conveniens.'

<sup>116</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.vii.2: 'Nam vocabulorum quedam puerilia, quedam muliebria, quedam virilia; et eorum quedam silvestria, quedam urbana ...'; *ibid.*, II.vii.4: 'In quorum numero nec puerilia propter sui simplicitatem, ut *mamma* et *babbo*, *mate* et *pate*, nec muliebria propter sui mollitiem, ut *dolciada* et *placevole*, nec silvestria propter austeritatem, ut *greggia* et *creta* ... ullo modo poteris conlocare.' The identification of linguistic traits proper to women and children is also found in Salimbene: see n. 32 above.

excluded from all public (that is, higher) spheres, while those in the countryside were excluded from the political life of cities.<sup>117</sup>

The explicit exclusion of those who did not live in cities indicates that Dante's attitudes to language as a social fact emerged from a concrete experience, that of the city-state, and should be traced back to a specific feature of Italian society: its urban character, the formation of a homogeneous social and cultural compact within the city walls, as opposed to the surrounding countryside. If there was any sociolectal basis in Dante's conception of language variation, this should not be sought in the variety of speech behaviour characterizing social classes such as the aristocracy, the bourgeoisie and so on, but rather in the fundamental division in late medieval Italian society between the population living in cities and those dwelling in the countryside.

As with diatopic varieties, then, reading between the lines, we can detect a social sensibility informing Dante's language attitudes. Even in this case, however, these considerations were not determining factors for his definition of the illustrious vernacular as a future Italian language. We should bear in mind that his chief goal was the promotion of poetry; and we should not underestimate the power exercised by the French language, which Dante mainly knew through books and which he probably perceived

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<sup>117</sup> Brunetto Latini explicitly addresses the exclusion of women and the lower artisan classes (the so-called 'popolo minuto') from public spheres of discourse – which in his case coincided with rhetorical discourse and participation in communal political life; see Brunetto Latini, *Tresor*, p. 646 (III.iv.2): 'Car quiconques dit de boche ou envoie letres a aucun home, ou il le fait por movoir le corrage de celui a croire et a voloir ce que dit, ou non; et se il ne le fait mie par ce, je di sans faille que ses dis n'appartiennent as enseingnemenz de rethorique, ainz est la comune parleure des homes, qui est sans art et sans maistrie, et ce soit loins de nos, et remaingne a la niceté des femes et dou menu pueple, car il n'ont que faire de citienes choses.'

as 'national' and standardized, without fully being fully aware of the process of development it had undergone in the previous centuries.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, Dante's decision to stand on the firm ground of Latin poetics proved to be both a blessing and a curse, since the diglossic Latin Dante was familiar with did not admit, in principle, diastratic or diatopic variation. Furthermore, the equivalence between Latin and the illustrious vernacular which he proposed could be pressed only so far: relying on Latin terminology prevented him from accounting for, or even admitting, ordinary speech into his theoretical discussion. To some modern observers, Dante appears to have been struggling to free himself from the straightjacket of Latin theory in which he had tied himself up.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps, however, this is not how he perceived his situation. His ideal of an illustrious vernacular resembles Latin but a Latin which nobles could understand. Before explaining why I believe this to be a central question for the interpretation of *De vulgari eloquentia*, however, I want to discuss another point of divergence between Dante's attitudes and modern standard ideology.

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<sup>118</sup> See Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.vi.3: 'Et quamvis ad voluptatem nostram sive nostre sensualitatis quietem in terris amenior locus quam Florentiam non existat, revolventes et poetarum et aliorum scriptorum volumina quibus mundus universaliter et membratim describitur ... multas esse perpendimus firmiterque censemus et magis nobiles et magis delitiosas et regiones et urbes quam Tusciam et Florentiam, et plerasque nationes et gentes delectabiliore atque utiliori sermone uti quam Latinos.' That he is speaking of French is suggested by the expression 'delectabiliore atque utiliori sermone uti quam Latinos' (i.e., Italians): cf. *ibid.*, I.x.2: 'lingua oïl ... propter sui faciliorem ac delectabiliorem vulgaritatem'. Note the contrast between, on the one hand, attachment to the motherland and the mother tongue, which is presented as a sensual passion ('voluptatem ... sensualitatis quietem'), and, on the other, the rational ('rationi magis quam sensui') appreciation of a culturally and politically broader community.

<sup>119</sup> This is, e.g., the opinion of Riccardo Fubini: see n. 144 below.

## VIII

It is sometimes said that the idea of a superposed Italian variety was suggested to Dante by his exile and the consequent necessity of addressing a pan-Italian audience.<sup>120</sup> This is true as far as his decision to theorize and convince others of the existence of an Italian language was concerned. If we stick to the purely linguistic side of the question, however, it is not the case: he did not start writing in another language in order to be understood by a broader audience. He even mentions several of his *canzoni*, written years before, in Florence, as examples of the illustrious vernacular: indeed, in *De vulgari eloquentia* he seeks to prove that he had *always* written in 'Italian'. This reflects the fact that his ultimate goal in the treatise was to impose an already existent cultural artefact, rather than to devise an entirely new form of expression. The development of a common language is never presented as a pragmatic necessity, stemming from the need of mutual understanding: one looks in vain, in Dante, for a central tenet of standard language ideology: that a standard language is useful for communicative efficiency.<sup>121</sup> What Dante offered to Italians was a symbol to represent their shared identity, not a means to understand each other.

This tells us something about the general attitude towards language in Dante's time: it is the outlook of someone who is quite comfortable in an unstandardized linguistic landscape. In a recent essay, Giulio Lepschy lamented the dearth of information we have at our disposal concerning the ordinary language behaviour of exiles and displaced individuals, like Dante and many of his generation: 'Notwithstanding the unbelievable extent of Dante bibliography, we seem not to have precise information on how he communicated with ordinary people when he was not in Florence, but in

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<sup>120</sup> See, e.g., M. Shapiro, *De vulgari eloquentia, Dante's Book of Exile*, Lincoln NE and London, 1990.

<sup>121</sup> See D. Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*, London and New York, 1995, pp. 23-7.

Bologna, Ravenna, Padua, Verona, Venice ... .'<sup>122</sup> For that matter, I would add, we do not have precise information as to how he communicated, not just with ordinary people, but with anyone at all. While the absence of such information is an insuperable obstacle for the linguist interested in the phenomena of language contact, Lepschy's observation does not preclude us from wondering why there was such a 'conspiracy of silence' concerning ordinary language behaviour.

There are, I believe, three viable explanations that we might start from. In the first place, ordinary conversation was not normally considered in written metalinguistic discussion: it was superfluous in formal domains to discuss ordinary communicative issues – as before, in a full diglossic regime, it was irrelevant to mention the vernaculars, except to stigmatize them.<sup>123</sup> Secondly, at least within 'Romania', people generally understood each other: merchants wrote one another letters in different Romance languages without much difficulty; preachers preached in their own native speech to any audience within the Romance linguistic landscape.<sup>124</sup> Thirdly, as suggested by Varvaro, 'the language issue, which in the modern age has engendered and still engenders so many problems and dramas, was not much felt in the

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<sup>122</sup> G. Lepschy, 'Mother Tongues in the Middle Ages and Dante', in *Dante's Plurilingualism: Authority, Knowledge, Subjectivity*, ed. S. Fortuna et al. Oxford, 2010, pp. 16-23 (p. 19).

<sup>123</sup> This is not unlike the situation nowadays in a city like London, where people who are perfectly fluent in languages like Punjabi or Jamaican Patois, sometimes do not regard themselves as bilingual unless they also master a prestigious European language other than English.

<sup>124</sup> See Tavoni, 'Linguistic Italy', p. 249 (on merchants' letters); pp. 250 (on preachers); he concludes, p. 251: 'In general, communication within the Italian and Romance vernaculars must have been considerable. A continuum existed between geographically neighbouring vernaculars, whereby speakers must have been conscious of both what united and divided them linguistically.' On preachers, see also F. Bruni, *La città divisa. Le parti e il bene comune da Dante a Guicciardini*, Bologna, 2003, pp. 175-6.



Middle Ages'.<sup>125</sup> These three explanations are all equally valid, as they each depend on the fundamental diglossic basis of the medieval language system: consciousness of language variation and reports of language competence acquire public recognition when they have a social value, that is, when a given speech variety becomes relevant as the marker of someone's identity or when it gains a certain degree of prestige. In medieval diglossia, vernacular varieties did not generally enjoy this privilege. Furthermore, the lack of codified rules of language behaviour and neatly cut language borders favoured mutual understanding: in the absence of standardization, intelligibility was generally less problematic – since it was free from the constraints imposed by language correctness.<sup>126</sup>

In Italy, however, as we have seen in chapter 4, *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl* had started to gain social recognition. Cecco Angiolieri, from Siena, wrote a sonnet mocking a certain Neri Piccolino, who had just returned from France, importing a good deal of money and a pretentious French accent.<sup>127</sup> As early as 1251, the anonymous author of an *Antéchrist* boasted with pride about his competence in French;<sup>128</sup> in Bologna, a certain Daniel Deloc of

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<sup>125</sup> A. Varvaro, 'La tua loquela ti fa manifesto: lingue e identità nella letteratura medievale', in *Identità linguistiche e letterarie nell'Europa romanza*, Rome, 2004, pp. 227-42 (235): 'il problema linguistico, che in epoca moderna ha suscitato e suscita tanti problemi e tanti drammi [era] poco sentito nel medioevo'.

<sup>126</sup> As remarked by Tavoni, 'Linguistic Italy', p. 252: 'It would be the emergence of national languages and their grammatical formalization, running in tandem with the consolidation of the nation state in the sixteenth century, that would make the Romance languages much more obviously "foreign" to each other in a manner that the ordinary speaker had never before been aware.'

<sup>127</sup> See Bruni, 'Fra Lombardi, Tusci e Apuli', p. 230-1: 'Quando Ner Picciolin tornò di Francia, / era sì caldo de' molti fiorini, / che li uomin li parevan topolini / e di ciascun si facea beff'e ciancia / ed usava di dir: "Mala meschianza ... ". The phrase 'mala meschianza', from the French *male meschance*, soon became a standard expression.

<sup>128</sup> *Deux versions inédites de la légende de l'Antéchrist en vers français du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, ed. E. Walberg, Lund, 1928, p. 3 (vv. 1-12): 'Por ce qe je say le francois / E qe [je] soy parler ancois / Franchois qe nul altre lengaje, / Si me samble strange e sauvaje / De

Cremona, translating a treatise on falconry for King Enzo (1220-72), excused his poor French by referring to his Italian origins.<sup>129</sup> In a famous letter, Lovato Lovati expressed his disdain for the bad French of a street minstrel, indicating that a notion of correct French was engrained among educated Paduans.<sup>130</sup> As far as Occitan was concerned, the author of *Novellino* mentions as worthy of note the Occitan competence of the Florentine Migliore degli Abati.<sup>131</sup> In the *Convivio*, Dante despises as provincial the admiration enjoyed among the populace by those who boasted about their Occitan proficiency and claimed that it was more beautiful than other languages.<sup>132</sup>

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ce qe j'aipris en enfance / Laiser, car le lengue de France / Est tels, qi en primer l'apprent / Ja ni pora mais autrement / Parler ne autre lengue apprendre.'

<sup>129</sup> C. Frati, 'Re Enzo e un'antica versione francese di due trattati di falconeria', *Miscellanea Tassoniana di studi storici e letterari pubblicati nella festa della Fossalta*, Bologna-Modena, 1908, pp. 61-81 (76): 'Tot soie ie de poure letreure et de poure science garnic, e tot soit greueuse chose a ma lange profferre le droit françois, por ce qe lombard sui ... .'

<sup>130</sup> I quote from the text edited by M. Pastore Stocchi, 'Le fortune della letteratura cavalleresca e cortese nella Treviso medievale e una testimonianza di Lovato Lovati', in *Tomaso da Modena e il suo tempo*, Treviso, 1980, pp. 201-17 (206): 'Ausculto tacitus: Francorum dedita lingue / carmina barbarico passim deformat hiatus, / tramite nulla suo, nulli innitentia penso / ad libitum volvens; vulgo tamen illa placebant.' For a recent discussion of this passage, with bibliography, see L. Morlino, 'Spunti per un riesame della costellazione letteraria franco-italiana', *Francigena*, 1, 2015, pp. 5-82, esp. 5-7.

<sup>131</sup> *Novellino*, p. 311 (lxxx): 'il cavaliere era molto bene costumato, e ben seppe cantare, e seppe il provenzale oltre misura bene proferere'.

<sup>132</sup> Dante, *Convivio*, I.x.11: 'Mossimi ancora per difendere lui [i.e. the Italian vernacular] da molti suoi accusatori, li quali dispregiano esso e commendano li altri, massimamente quello di lingua d'oco, dicendo che è più bello e migliore quello che questo; partendo sé in ciò dalla veritate.' Later, he lists five reasons why people are deceived into making this mistake. The first, 'cechitade di discrezione', or lack of rational judgement, he attributes mainly to the popular classes and, in particular, to artisans, who are often tricked by liars into believing whatever they are told; *ibid.*, pp. 168-70 (I.xi.5-8): 'E li ciechi sopra notati, che sono quasi infiniti, colla mano in sulla spalla a questi mentitori, sono caduti nella fossa della falsa opinione, della quale uscire non sanno. Dell'abito di questa luce discretiva massimamente le popolari persone sono orbate; però che, occupate dal principio della loro vita ad alcuno mestiere, dirizzano sì l'animo loro a quello per [la] forza

Nothing of this sort had happened so far to Italian vernaculars. To be sure, various parlances were recognized as signifiers of local identities: as early as 1215, Boncompagno pointed out that merchants were writing not generically ‘in vernacular’, but ‘in their own different idioms or vernaculars’.<sup>133</sup> As we have seen, in *De vulgari eloquentia* fourteen autonomous Italian vernaculars are singled out; and in the *Commedia*, Dante is sometimes recognized as Florentine because of the way he speaks.<sup>134</sup> No single Italian speech variety, however, could really claim any sort of supra-local prestige. This is why no one had much to say about other people’s speech behaviour: local speech varieties had no social relevance beyond the walls of the city in which they were spoken. This situation partly changed in favour of Tuscan in the following century, thanks, in part, to the success of Dante’s *Commedia*.<sup>135</sup> In Dante’s time, however, it was only local pride which extolled one speech variety over the others – and it was precisely local pride which Dante stigmatized as ‘municipal’. This is also why we hear no mention of the need to ‘learn’ another Italian vernacular: there was no impetus to acquire proficiency in a speech variety which did not have any distinctive social value.<sup>136</sup> This, in my view, also explains a specific feature of

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della necessitate, che ad altro non intendono. E però che l’abito di vertude, sì morale come intellettuale, subitamente avere non si può, ma conviene che per usanza s’acquisti, ed ellino la loro usanza pongono in alcuna arte e a discernere l’altre cose non curano, impossibile è a loro discrezione avere.’

<sup>133</sup> Buoncompagno da Signa, *Boncompagnus*, p. 173: ‘Mercatores ... per idiomata propria seu uulgaria uel per corruptum latinum ad invicem sibi scribunt et rescribunt.’ Probably this observation is not unrelated to the fact that they *wrote* in different vernaculars.

<sup>134</sup> For example, *Inferno*, XXXIII, vv. 10-2: ‘Io non so chi tu se’ né per che modo / venuto se’ qua giù; ma fiorentino / mi sembri veramente quand’io t’odo.’

<sup>135</sup> See, for example, Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, I, p. 336: ‘nullum loqui est pulcrius aut proprius in Italia quam florentinum’.

<sup>136</sup> Cf., in addition to the examples given above on the acquisition of French competence, Giles of Rome, *Reggimento de’ principi: volgarizzamento*, p. 165: ‘noi vedemo li uomini che vanno in Francia o nella Magna, ovvero in altra terra, essendo d’altro paese elli non possono mai sì bene apprendere il linguaggio, che

*De vulgari eloquentia*: that Dante did not attempt any kind of grammatical codification of what he called the illustrious vernacular. Since this touches on an important element of his language theory, it is worth dwelling a bit longer on this issue.

The only part of *De vulgari eloquentia* which can be considered to be, in a proper sense, grammatical is a passage on the different levels of complexity of syntactic constructions:

we call 'construction' a group of words put together in regulated order ... some constructions are congruent, and some, on the other hand, incongruent ... . But a distinction no less tricky that this must be made before we can find what we seek, which is the construction

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quelli del paese nol cognoscano, e questo avviene perciocchè ad imparare il linguaggio nuovo richiere molto tempo. Donde quelli ch'è nato nella terra, perciò che v'è stato più, sa meglio il linguaggio di quelli che vi viene nuovo. Dunque se'l linguaggio delli uomini laici richiere tempo, maggiormente e' richiere il latino; conciosiacosachè esso sia il più forte e'l più perfetto linguaggio che sia.' Note the stress on the impossibility of acquiring native competence in a foreign language, which depends on the social value attributed to the native speaker as the possessor of the proper (i.e., correct) form of the language. It must be emphasized that what the translator refers to is active, not passive, French competence ('sì bene apprendere il linguaggio, che quelli del paese nol cognoscano'). On the other hand, the French Dominican Humbert de Romans, in his manual *De eruditione praedicatorum*, lamented that preachers who lived for a long time abroad and frequently communicated in a foreign tongue tended to forget their native language: 'Ex hoc enim accidit quod addiscunt lingua eorum, et suam obliviscuntur, licet sit melior: sicut Gallicus commorans inter homines alterius linguae suam linguam pro parte obliviscitur, et aliam addiscit': quoted by Lusignan, *Parler vulgairement*, p. 57. Progressive loss of one's native speech must have been a common feature among people living abroad for long periods of time; it was commented on, however, only when forgetting one's native speech was considered a real loss, that is, if it was a prestigious language like French ('licet sit melior'). In fact, Humbert added, *ibid.*, p. 58: 'Et ideo cum vadunt per mundum, non debent dimittere linguam coelestem per linguam mundi, sicut Gallicus, quocumque vadat, non de facili dimittit linguam propter aliam, et propter nobilitatem linguae suae, et patriae suae.'

with the highest possible degree of urbanity. For there are many degrees of construction.<sup>137</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Mirko Tavoni has written:

The presumption that the vernacular can develop complex sentences ... and, even more, that it is already possible to collect examples of these, does not square with the fact that the vernacular is based on nature and not on art. It was not until 130 years later ... that the humanist Flavio Biondo introduced the idea of the 'natural grammaticality' of the vernacular, which in Dante's thought would have been a contradiction in terms and which, in fact, remains unfocused.<sup>138</sup>

In my view, the contradiction does not lie so much in Dante's belief that it was possible to develop complex sentences in the vernacular, but in

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<sup>137</sup> Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1436 (II.vi.2): 'constructionem vocamus regulatam compaginem dictionum ... constructionum alia congrua est, alia vero incongrua. ... Sed non minoris difficultatis accedit discretio priusquam quam querimus actingamus, videlicet urbanitate plenissimam. Sunt etenim gradus constructionum quamplures ...'. Transl. Botterill, p. 63. That this subject was pertinent to grammarians – and not, for example, to rhetoricians – is indicated by Dante in *Convivio*, p. 296 (II.xi.9): 'O uomini, che vedere non potete la sentenza di questa canzone, non la rifiutate però; ma ponete mente la sua bellezza, che è grande sia per [la] costruzione, che si pertiene alli grammatici, sì per l'ordine del sermone, che si pertiene alli rettorici, sì per lo numero delle sue parti, che si pertiene alli musici.' On Dante's syntactic theory, see A. Scaglione, 'Dante and the Theory of Sentence Structure', in *Medieval Eloquence*, ed. J. J. Murphy, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1978, pp. 252-69.

<sup>138</sup> Tavoni, comm. ad Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, p. 1438: 'L'assunto che il volgare possa sviluppare periodi complessi ... anzi il fatto che se ne possano già dedurre esempi, non fa i conti con l'altro fatto che il volgare è per definizione fondato sulla natura e non sull'arte. Solo 130 anni più tardi ... l'umanista Flavio Biondo partorirà l'idea di "grammaticalità naturale" del volgare, che nel pensiero di Dante sarebbe stata una contraddizione in termini, e che rimane infatti non focalizzata.'

the conclusion drawn by Tavoni that vernaculars, because they were ‘natural’, could not be ‘grammatical’ – or even admit syntactically complex sentences. First of all, it is not true that the idea of the ‘natural grammaticality’ of the vernacular had to wait until Flavio Biondo to emerge: as we have seen, it had been maintained, as a theoretical possibility, by Petrus Elias for French,<sup>139</sup> and it was not unknown even to modest grammarians.<sup>140</sup> Moreover, as was discussed in chapter 4, this idea had already been applied to Occitan by Raimon Vidal and his continuators, whose works Dante almost certainly knew. Finally, even in Dante there are hints that certain aspects of vernacular structure could be described by employing grammatical concepts and terminology.<sup>141</sup> Why, then, did he not proceed further in this direction? Why did he not provide a grammatical description of Italian? A first answer is that *De vulgari eloquentia* was an advanced manual, written in Latin and therefore for readers who did not need to be reminded of basic grammatical notions: as he says when introducing the passage on syntax cited above, sentences that are logically and grammatically incorrect – which means that such sentences existed – did not even need to be discussed.<sup>142</sup>

But there is also another explanation, which stems from what I said above about the lack of social prestige of Italian vernaculars. Grammatical codification derives from and reinforces the cohesion of speech varieties which have already reached a high degree of autonomy – that is, that have acquired a social function by marking socially and geographically defined

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<sup>139</sup> See n. 55 above.

<sup>140</sup> See n. 59 above.

<sup>141</sup> See, for example, Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, I.xiv.5: ‘nec non Paduanos, turpiter sincopantes omnia in *-tus* participia et denominativa in *-tas*, ut *mercò* et *bonté*.’ It is evident here that the tools of linguistic analysis learnt at school for Latin could be equally applied to the vernaculars.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, II.vi.2: ‘Et quia ... sola suprema venamur, nullum in nostra venatione locum habet incongrua, quia nec inferiorem gradum bonitatis promeruit.’

groups. In our standardized language systems, we do not go to school to learn how to speak. Instead, we learn to distinguish and practice a specific speech variety which is considered socially acceptable, as well as the criteria which determine its acceptability. This variety is presented as perfectly usable in any domain, starting from ordinary conversation: it is so because a certain segment of society, generally the *élite*, actually uses it in ordinary conversation.

But for Dante, this speech variety simply did not exist: there was no such thing as correct Italian, simply because there was no such thing as an Italian speaker. Italians existed as an abstraction, but he could not attach to them any sort of specific language behaviour, apart from poetry; and, unsurprisingly, it was poetry which he decided to codify. No one, in his view, had to learn Italian; rather, Italians had to learn to write poetry. Social conformity and normativity regulated the usage of individual municipal vernaculars; and, as we have seen, Dante acknowledged this when he dismissed the speech behaviour of children, women and those who lived in the countryside or mountains.<sup>143</sup> But since he dismissed each and every one of these vernaculars, he could not rely, unlike Raimon Vidal, on any normative notion of native speaker or of pure language form. He had no reason to equate social norms with grammatical ones, since his Italian vernacular had concrete existence only in the handful of texts he proposed as models of the illustrious vernacular. The core assumption of standardization, which proclaims, at least in principle, that one standard speech variety is uniformly imposed on an entire community for every kind of linguistic use, was still fundamentally alien to Dante and so, too, was the idea of prescribing one through codification.

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<sup>143</sup> See n. 114-16 above.

## IX

According to Riccardo Fubini: 'Dante's linguistic thought, within the terms in which it was expressed, led to a deadlock with no further possibility of development.'<sup>144</sup> This judgement is ungenerous: Dante was extremely perceptive in sensing that the time was ripe for a new type of secular culture, which could find its strength by appealing to a common Italian identity. He was also right in realizing that the future of Italian culture was in the hands of its secular ruling class: a landed gentry which was not adverse to commercial activity and which was progressively centralizing and extending its power. We are so used to the democratic myth of the free communes that we often forget that the future did not lie there, but instead in the inexorable advance of *signorie* and large oligarchical territorial states throughout Italy.<sup>145</sup> Dante's first mistake was political: he placed his faith in an institution, the empire, which in Italy, as we now know, was doomed to almost complete irrelevance.

More importantly, he did not entirely understand the direction in which the relationship between lay intellectuals and urban ruling classes was developing. On the one hand, the type of intellectual embodied by Dante and his contemporaries was fundamentally new. Sylvain Piron and Emanuele Coccia have recently provided an excellent profile of this intellectual class, which they describe as a 'community of learning', coinciding with a specific generation, often independent from established institutions and sharing some core traits: a wide range of eclectic interests, stretching from the so-called lucrative sciences – medicine and civil law – to theology and vernacular poetry, and marked by a secular character; political

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<sup>144</sup> Fubini, *Humanism and Secularization*, p. 16.

<sup>145</sup> See P. J. Jones, 'Communes and Despots: The City-State in Late-Medieval Italy', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 15, 1965, pp. 71-96.



engagement; and both social and geographical mobility.<sup>146</sup> The difficulties Dante had in drawing a coherent sociocultural picture of this new intellectual type<sup>147</sup> – so much so that, as in the *Convivio*, the model he proposed sometimes seemed to be a portrait of himself – were due to an aristocratic reluctance to associate with clerics, doctors and lawyers, which we have observed in the *Convivio*;<sup>148</sup> they also testify to how new, and frail, the *raison d'être* of this generation was in a rapidly changing society. As we shall see in the next chapter, the heirs of these new intellectuals found the group-awareness which Dante lacked when they attached themselves unambiguously to strong institutions, such as the church, the territorial state or the educational system – in other words, when they became humanists.

On the other hand, Dante was mistaken in considering his own unique cultural development as a paradigm and a model for the future. The kind of philosophical programme of moral advancement he proposed to the Italian aristocracy could not be transformed into a concrete social and cultural force. Even though he placed great faith in the aristocracy as an agent of political and cultural renovation, Dante could not imagine it as a scholarly class; however, as we shall see in the next chapter, this was precisely what happened. From a linguistic point of view, paradoxically, the road opened up by Dante with the vernacular in mind led directly to Latin: if we consider the sociolinguistic context of Dante's Italy, and replace his illustrious vernacular with the classicizing Latin of sixty years later, his project makes complete sense and even seems far-sighted. Rather than seeking to square the circle of making a vernacular which looked like Latin, humanists and their patrons turned to a different, and perhaps more

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<sup>146</sup> See S. Piron and E. Coccia, 'Poésie, science et politique. Une génération d'intellectuels italiens (1290-1330)', *Revue de Synthèse*, 129, 2008, pp. 549-86.

<sup>147</sup> See n. 110 above.

<sup>148</sup> See n. 11 above.

feasible, task: that of making Latin look like a vernacular. But for that to happen, Latin had to become a national standardized language.

## Chapter 6. The Use and Abuse of Latin

The boys' main study remained the dead languages of Greece and Rome. That the classics should form the basis of all teaching was an axiom with Dr. Arnold. 'The study of language', he said, 'seems to me as if it was given for the very purpose of forming the human mind in youth; and the Greek and Latin languages seem the very instruments by which this is to be effected.' Certainly, there was something providential about it – from the point of view of the teacher as well as of the taught. If Greek and Latin had not been 'given' in that convenient manner, Dr. Arnold, who had spent his life in acquiring those languages, might have discovered that he had acquired them in vain.

Lytton Stratchey, *Eminent Victorians*

'I can see a great and wonderful future ahead of us, if we, as Italians already do, start teaching the sciences in the vernacular.'<sup>1</sup> These words, written by the French jurist and political thinker Jean Bodin in 1559, suggest that, if the model of standard language system now dominant in Europe first came to full fruition in the sixteenth century, then – far from being a natural linguistic development – that model had its origins in a specific time and place: Italy in the early Cinquecento. The story of that moment, when the *questione della lingua* came to the fore, has been told many times. The purpose of this chapter will be to trace its premises: my argument will be that its origins must be sought in the Italian humanist movement, and its linguistic antecedent in the humanists' reform of Latin. This reform, however, cannot be fully understood if it is not considered as the culmination of a process

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by M. Goyens, 'Introduction. Objectifs et délimitation', in *The Dawn of the Written Vernacular*, pp. ix-xiv (ii): 'Fateor equidem magnum aliquid ac praeclarum futurum, si apud nos, ut iam apud Italos fieri coeptum est, artes scientie lingua vernacula doceantur.'

which started in Italy in the late twelfth century. The chapter is divided into three sections, corresponding to three phases in the development of Latin: the initial phase, linked to the emergence of the first communal institutions, in which Latin, freed from the clerical monopoly, was secularized; the second phase, characterized by the spread of Latin literacy and the consequent multiplication of the uses of Latin, in which competence in the language was diversified and its use was functionalized among the members of an increasingly complex and competitive society; and the last phase, in which the humanist reform of Latin took place and, as we shall see, Latin became the national Italian language and the speech variety of the upper classes in Italy. Throughout this entire history, Latin was a language learned solely by means of formal education; and, to understand its internal evolution, it will be necessary to contextualize it within the institutional and social developments which characterized Italian history between the end of the twelfth and the first half of the fifteenth century.

## I

The rise of Italian communes is part of a broader process of localization of power which affected the whole of Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>2</sup> Steady economic growth did not find support from the two great supra-local powers – the empire and the church – debilitated by the Investiture Controversy; so, various forms of local institutions stepped in to fill the vacuum.<sup>3</sup> Within this broader process, the case of northern and central Italy was distinctive in at least two respects. Firstly, the persistence of the urban civilization of antiquity favoured the localization of power in city

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<sup>2</sup> E. Artifoni, 'Città e comuni', in *Storia medievale*, Rome, 1998, pp. 363-86 (364).

<sup>3</sup> C. Wickham, *Legge, pratiche e conflitti: Tribunali e risoluzione delle dispute nella Toscana del XII secolo*, Rome, 2000, pp. 46-9.

centres. The continuity of this ancient tradition had been secured throughout the High Middle Ages by episcopal authority: *civitas* had become a synonym for the episcopal seat.<sup>4</sup> The earliest period of communal history – known as the ‘consular commune’ – began when the government of cities was transferred from the bishops to an official body of lay city rulers: the *consules*.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, while urban centres in Northern Europe were dominated by the bourgeois and mercantile classes, the social composition of the ruling oligarchy in Italian cities was more diverse: it included soldiers, bankers, merchants and lawyers;<sup>6</sup> and it was notable for the prominence of the so-called *militia*, a class of landed knights which had a shared chivalric ethos and which, in most cities, comprised urbanised feudal aristocrats as well as newly promoted urban landowners and money-lenders – a wide and inclusive social group which could extend to 10-15% of a city’s population.<sup>7</sup> It was from among the ranks of the *militia* that the commune’s *consules* were selected. The presence of a militarized class of landowners at the centre of the commune’s power structures helped to produce another distinctive feature of Italian communes: their territorial expansion. Unlike urban centres in Northern Europe, Italian cities extended their dominion to the countryside – an expansion, achieved and preserved by the martial pursuits of the *militia*, which served its own economic needs by broadening land investments, while also promoting economic growth through the

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<sup>4</sup> G. Milani, ‘Il potere delle città’, in *Storia d’Europa e del Mediterraneo*, viii: *Il Medioevo (secoli V-XV). Popoli, poteri, dinamiche*, ed. S. Carocci, Rome, 2006, pp. 629-64 (634-5).

<sup>5</sup> C. Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World: The Emergence of Italian City Communes in the Twelfth Century*, Princeton, 2015, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> Artifoni, ‘Città e comuni’, p. 371.

<sup>7</sup> The standard work on the *militia* is J.-C. Maire Vigueur, *Cavaliers et citoyens: guerre, conflits et société dans l’Italie communale, XII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, Paris, 2003.

accumulation of monetary capital and the creation of local and progressively wider markets.<sup>8</sup>

The capital acquired by urban landowners through territorial expansion and land exploitation was chiefly invested in the strengthening of civic institutions: these were meant to grant them political autonomy and legitimacy, and to secure their economic interests.<sup>9</sup> Justice – together with the army and public finance, which developed slowly during the course of the twelfth century – was one of the three key components of communal governments. Communal legal books (*libri iurium*) transcribed the text of the Peace of Constance (1183), which had concluded the war between northern communes and Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, proclaiming it as the official birth of their political power: the self-consciousness of communal authority rested on imperial recognition of its rights of jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> This formal act, however, merely ratified what was already an established practice: in every city, communal institutions had emerged originally from a judiciary assembly – a development which was complete almost everywhere by 1150.<sup>11</sup> The nucleus of self-government rested on the authority of legal tribunals, which presided over disputes concerning property rights and taxation: as we have seen, what had originally brought citizens – and especially *milites* – together were economic interests.<sup>12</sup> It is in this context that we should understand a further distinctive trait of the Italian urban

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<sup>8</sup> Artifoni, 'Città e comuni', p. 634.

<sup>9</sup> See G. Milani, 'Il peso della politica sulla mobilità sociale (Italia comunale, 1300 ca.)', in *La mobilità sociale nel Medioevo*, ed. S. Carocci, Rome, 2010, pp. 409-36 (411).

<sup>10</sup> See G. Milani, 'Lo sviluppo della giurisdizione nei comuni italiani del secolo XII', in *Praxis der Gerichtsbarkeit in europäischen Städten des Spätmittelalters*, ed. F.-J. Arlinghaus, Frankfurt, 2006, pp. 21-45.

<sup>11</sup> C. Wickham, *Sleepwalking into a New World*, pp. 18-9.

<sup>12</sup> P. Cammarosano, 'Il ricambio e l'evoluzione dei ceti dirigenti nel corso del XIII secolo', in *Magnati e popolani nell'Italia comunale*, Pistoia, 1997, pp. 17-40 (25), highlights the 'interrelazione tra l'inurbamento dei signori e dei loro dipendenti più agiati e più forti, l'investimento fondiario dei cittadini nelle campagne e le crescenti necessità di controllo territoriale e di sovranità dei comuni.'

experience, and the most important for our purposes: the central part played in the communes' institutional and ideological development by lay lawyers – acting in their capacity as counsellors for the urban authorities or even as *consules* themselves – who precisely in these years were acquiring a self-conscious professional identity. It was mainly these lay intellectuals who formulated the legal definition of the city as a *res publica*, which, in turn, reconfigured the ruling *milita* from a group bound by the defence of individual and oligarchic privileges into a class responsible for the city's government and representative of its collective interests.<sup>13</sup>

The presence of legal experts as a counselling body for the city's authorities was an element of continuity with the 'episcopal city' which preceded the commune.<sup>14</sup> When they acted as counsellors of lay governments, however, not only did they help to define the legitimacy of communal governments, their own social profile was also transformed.<sup>15</sup> In the Carolingian and post-Carolingian age preceding the communes, the mere formal recognition of a supreme power – imperial or ecclesiastical – was sufficient to confer the formal title of *iudex*, loosely indicating a basic legal competence, but grounded chiefly in the social prestige linked to

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<sup>13</sup> As noted by G. Tabacco, *Egemonie sociali e strutture del potere nel Medioevo italiano*, Turin, 1979, p. 236: 'La definizione di una magistratura cittadina permanente presupponeva ... una consapevolezza nuova della necessità di tradurre nell'attività di un peculiare organo di governo l'orientamento unitario della collettività: una consapevolezza che poteva nascere soltanto dall'incontro di una ferma volontà politica di gruppi ... con l'attitudine dei giurisperiti a disegnare un apposito schema istituzionale.'

<sup>14</sup> See E. Cortese, 'Legisti, canonisti e feudisti: la formazione di un ceto medievale', in *Università e società nei secoli XII-XVI*, Pistoia, 1982, pp. 195-284 (200-1).

<sup>15</sup> S. Menzinger, 'Forme di implicazione politica dei giuristi nei governi comunali italiani del XIII secolo', in *Pratiques sociales et politiques judiciaires*, ed. J. Chiffolleau et al., Rome, 2017, pp. 191-241: 'nel corso del XII secolo ... si compie infatti il passo più significativo, quando, per conferire legittimità alle decisioni, si assiste alla frequente tendenza di motivare tecnicamente gli atti giuridici da parte di chiunque eserciti un potere di giurisdizione. Ne consegue una valorizzazione delle competenze giuridiche e la crescente presenza di giuristi nelle posizioni dominanti.'

aristocratic status and largely independent of acquired technical expertise.<sup>16</sup> With the communal age, the increasingly complex issues of institutional growth, fiscal administration and social conflict required more refined technical competence, prompting the legal profession to forward on its path to specialization: in particular, the careers of judges and notaries were separated, with the training of the former entrusted to private schools, which soon, as in the case of Bologna, gave rise to universities.<sup>17</sup>

A few elements of the sociocultural profile of judges are worth highlighting. First of all, while notaries were assimilated to the artisanal class, judges, thanks to their role as legal experts within the ruling oligarchy of the communes, aspired to a *dignitas* – a social status – equivalent to that of the *militia*, and they were attracted into its ideological orbit, defining themselves as an aristocracy of the law, functionally complementary to that of the sword.<sup>18</sup> Judges initially came from families of the *militia*, but

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<sup>16</sup> See F. Bougard, *La justice dans le royaume d'Italie de la fin du VIII<sup>e</sup> au début du XI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Rome, 1995, pp. 139-200 and 281-95. See Azzo, quoted by N. Tamassia, 'Odofredo. Studio storico-giuridico', *Atti e memorie della Reale Deputazione di Storia Patria per la Provincia di Romagna*, 3.12, 1895, pp. 330-90 (p. 369, n. 2), who distinguishes between *iudices* by right (i.e., appointed by a sovereign) and *iudices* by training: 'Hic loquitur de illis qui habent peritiam legum, tales enim oportet esse iudices – tamen in consuetudine aliter est hodie, vel si dentur a principe, quamvis illiterati sint, possunt esse iudices ... .'

<sup>17</sup> See S. Menzinger, 'Le professioni legali nel Medioevo: verso una circolarità della cultura giuridica europea', *Rivista Internazionale di Diritto Comune*, 27, 2016, pp. 227-44 (233).

<sup>18</sup> For the assimilation of jurists to *milites*, see Azzo (d. ante 1233), quoted by S. Menzinger and M. Vallerani, 'Giuristi e città: fiscalità, giustizia e cultura giuridica fra XII e XIII secolo. Ipotesi e percorsi di ricerca', in *I comuni di Jean-Claude Maire Vigueur. Percorsi storiografici*, ed. M. T. Caciorgna et al., Rome, 2014, pp. 201-34 (p. 209, n. 26): 'Imperator ... assignat duo tempora, unum bellorum et alterum pacis. In tempore bellorum necessaria sunt ad summam reipublicae tuitionem ista quatuor: arma, usus armorum, victoria, triumphus. In tempore vero pacis necessaria sunt quatuor similia: leges scilicet, usus legum, calumniae pulsio, iuris religio ... . Ista ergo duo, arma et leges, pariter debent esse in principe et alterum semper eguit alterius auxilio, et tam militaris res legibus est in tuto collocata, quam ipsae leges armorum praesidio servatae sunt ...; et tanta gaudet similitudine pariter et



progressively legal training itself became an independent marker of their identity and prestige, and often a means to improve their social standing.<sup>19</sup> Second, the value attributed to legal competence had an economic counterpart: legal training, provided by private schools and later by universities, was a costly investment, and it was rewarded economically. Law and medicine were paired and attacked by clerics as ‘lucrative sciences’: the wealth (and avarice) of lawyers and physicians, whether practitioners or teachers, became a commonplace.<sup>20</sup> Third, the various bulls issued by popes to discourage clerics from studying and teaching civil law in Paris, culminating in *Super speculum* (1219), although intended to concentrate the efforts of the clergy on theology and the fight against heresy, had the paradoxical effect of favouring lay engagement in (and identification with) these disciplines – particularly in Italy,<sup>21</sup> judges and notaries retained

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splendens utilitate, ut nomen armorum et nomina eorum, qui exercentur in armis, accomodentur legibus et legistis. Leges ergo dicuntur arma ... et milites advocati.’

<sup>19</sup> Menzinger and Vallerani, ‘Giuristi e città’, p. 208: ‘L’impressione è che lo studio del diritto rappresenti da subito una canale di promozione e che l’identificazione dei giuristi con i *milites* urbani sia anche il risultato di un’operazione culturale, tutta strumentale alla ratificazione di una collocazione sociale elitaria degli uomini di legge.’

<sup>20</sup> Walter of Chatillon, in his ‘In domino confido’, complained bitterly about the poverty of grammarians, when compared to lawyers and physicians: ‘Seminat gramatica, semper tamen indiget, / lex autem et phisica manipulos colliget.’ (Walter of Chatillon, *Moralisch-Satirische Gedichte*, ed. K. Strecker, Heidelberg, 1929, p. 41). The problem of justifying an economic remuneration was particularly pressing for teachers of canon law: see G. Post, K. Giocarinis and R. Kay, ‘The Medieval Heritage of a Humanistic Ideal: “Scientia donum Dei est unde vendi non potest”’, *Traditio*, 11, 1955, pp. 197-210. Although in theory they could not request payment for teaching, canon law teachers solved the problem by permitting themselves to accept ‘gifts’ from their students. As far as civil law was concerned, Azzo admitted quite frankly: ‘licet pecunia non abiiciamus’; quoted by Cortese, ‘Legisti, canonisti e feudisti’, p. 259.

<sup>21</sup> Piron and Coccia, ‘Poésie, sciences et politique’, p. 554: ‘En appelant les clercs à se focaliser sur les disciplines “sacrées”, ce décret a contribué à durcir une distinction qui avait jusqu’alors une pertinence épistémologique relativement faible.’

their lay status, which horrified clerics North of the Alps<sup>22</sup> – and favoured the establishment of dynasties of legal professionals.<sup>23</sup> The equation of *clericus* and *litteratus*, still prevalent in Northern Europe, did not apply to communal Italy: over the course of time, the image of Latin competence – a necessary requirement for both judges and notaries – was positively expropriated from clerical monopoly.<sup>24</sup>

It is in this context that we can appreciate the evolution of the other core subject – apart from law – with which the *Studium* of Bologna became associated: the so-called *ars dictaminis*. This peculiarly medieval development of the classical rhetorical tradition arose from the fact that the entire documentary production of chanceries – whether lay or ecclesiastic – up to the early thirteenth century was chiefly (and, in the case of the papal curia, only) written in epistolary form.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, codified principles were needed for the composition of official letters, and ancient rhetorical rules, which by this point were useless for political oratory, were applied instead to letters. Alberic of Monte Cassino, generally regarded as the first theorist of the *ars dictaminis*, composed his *Breviarium de dictamine* around

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<sup>22</sup> Bacon, *Compendium studii philosophiae*, IV, p. 419: ‘Non solum jus civile Italicum destruit studium sapientiae, quia aufert expensas studentium et utiles personas removet; sed quia omnino sua affinitate laicali clerum confundit indigne, cum non sit clericale officium talia jura exercere sed penitus laicale. Quod est manifestum si consideremus quod hoc jus et a laicis principibus statutum est, et pro laico populo dirigendo. Atque domini legum Bononiae et per totam Italiam volunt vocari magistri vel clerici, nec coronam sicut clerici habent. Uxores ducunt et omnino sicut laici familiam regunt, et consortio et consuetudinibus laicalibus sunt subjecti.’

<sup>23</sup> See Piron and Coccia, ‘Poésie, sciences et politique’, p. 558.

<sup>24</sup> Benvenuto da Imola remarked that, in his time, the equation of *clericus* and *litteratus* was a French usage. See Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, I, p. 521: *In somma sappi che tutti fur cherici, idest clerici, religiosi, e litterati grandi e di gran fama, idest magni viri studiosi et famosi. Nec dicas quod debeat exponi clerici, idest litterati, more gallico, sicut quidam exponunt, et dicunt, quod omnis litteratus est clericus; quia tunc esset nugatio, et inutilis repetitio.*

<sup>25</sup> See A. Bartoli Langeli, ‘Cancellierato e produzione epistolare’, in *Le forme della propaganda politica nel Due e Trecento*, ed. P. Cammarosano, Rome, 1994, pp. 251-61 (252).

the 1070s; in it he 'set forth, in systematic fashion and embedded in a framework of classical rhetoric, basic principles of epistolary theory'.<sup>26</sup> The central role played by chanceries in the production of letters, in turn, helped to give epistolography a public orientation: the letter became the preferred genre for the representation of relations between public powers.<sup>27</sup> Alberic's most important innovation was his theory of salutation: the systematic pattern he devised to represent the hierarchical level of senders and addressees proved particularly suitable for the documentary and communicative needs of medieval powers and, soon thereafter, of medieval society in general.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, as a defender of the reformist party in the Investiture Contest, and probably working in the papal curia, he associated rhetoric – and specifically epistolography – with the diplomatic and propagandist demands of the papal chancery.<sup>29</sup>

From the 1110s to the 1150s, Bolognese manuals of *ars dictaminis* started appearing, in which the pioneering work of Alberic was adapted to the emerging urban society of the northern Italian communes and, in particular, to the needs of practitioners – notaries, lawyers, and communal administrators – to whom the precepts of the new discipline were chiefly addressed. While Alberic had considered epistolography to be a branch of rhetoric, Bolognese *dictatores* such as Adalbertus Samaritanus, Hugh of Bologna and Enricus Francigena developed an extremely pragmatic approach to their discipline based on bare-bones manuals which *de facto*

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<sup>26</sup> C. D. Lanham, 'Freshman Composition in the Early Middle Ages: Epistolography and Rhetoric before the *Ars Dictaminis*', *Viator*, 23, 1992, pp. 115-34 (131).

<sup>27</sup> Bartoli Langeli, 'Cancellierato', p. 253.

<sup>28</sup> J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages. A History of Rhetorical Theory from Augustine to the Renaissance*, Berkeley, 1974, p. 189 and p. 210.

<sup>29</sup> F. Hartmann, 'Eloquence and Friendship. Letter-writing Manuals and the Importance of Being Somebody's Friend', in *Networks of Learning: Perspectives on Scholars in Byzantine East and Latin West, c. 1000-1200*, ed. S. Steckel et al., Berlin, 2015, pp. 67-88 (73-5).

reduced rhetoric itself to the utilitarian practice of letter-writing:<sup>30</sup> strictly limited to prose, focused on the *salutatio* and *exordium*, with the classical core of rhetorical doctrine (*inventio*, *dispositio* and *elocutio*) reduced to the minimum and direct contact with classical sources progressively pared away,<sup>31</sup> their method became the hallmark of the dictaminal school of Bologna and the essence of communal Italy's public discourse.

Bolognese *dictamen* manuals were soon exported to France, where they started to bear fruit in a different soil. French education, still monopolized by cathedral chapters, clung to a traditional, integrated Arts

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<sup>30</sup> See the programmatic words of Adalbertus Samaritanus, *Praecepta dictaminum*, ed. F.-J. Schmale, Weimar, 1961, p. 31: 'Inter breve enim temporis spatium, si meis ammonitionibus obsecundare volueritis, huius artis scientiam adipisci valebitis ac per nostrarum regularum compendiosam traditionem prosaicarum epistolarum poteritis comprehendere rationem, quam specialiter tamen omnibus profuturam nullius spernat invidia.'

<sup>31</sup> No school commentary on any classical rhetorical text was written in Italy until the fourteenth century. Adalbertus, however, still displays a thorough acquaintance of classical authors: see Adalbertus, *Praecepta*, pp. 50-1: 'Tunc ergo est laudabilis brevitatis, si ob eam non generatur obscuritas ... quod vitari potest, si ... fuerint Tulliano melle circumlita, Sallustiana serie composita, in divinis vero dulcedine Gregoriana, rethorica Ambrosiana, sententiarum pondere Ieronimi innodata. Horum ergo omnium et consimilium lectionum cupidus dictator assistat, pernoctans insudet, imitans, existat, perlegat, relegat, donec habitum ex dispositione faciat. Spernat aspera et spinosa dictamina Alberici monachi insolubilia, nisi Sphingi monstro familiaria, que auctores componunt ...'. It is significant, however, that his 'classicism' is driven by an aspiration to clarity and brevity, and is specifically directed against the obscurity for which he blames the monk Alberic. G. C. Alessio, 'L'ars dictaminis nelle scuole dell'Italia meridionale (secoli XI-XIII)', in Id., *Lucidissima dictandi peritia*, pp. 205-22 (209), suggests that the polemic might have been due to 'un contrasto fra scuole laiche e scuole monastiche, o comunque ecclesiastiche'. This hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that the canon and priest Hugh of Bologna intervened in the debate taking the side of Alberic; see Hugh of Bologna, 'Rationes dictandi prosaice' in Rockinger, *Briefsteller*, I, pp. 53-88 (53-4). From this point of view, it is also interesting that, while Adalbertus's *Praecepta* are presented as responding to a request from his students (Adalbertus, *Praecepta*, pp. 28-9), which points to a private school, Hugh of Bologna, 'Rationes', p. 53, dedicates his work to a certain 'D Ferarensium cui sacri palacii imperatoris equissimo iudici' and declares that he has taken up his pen on his own volition: 'feci itaque non inuitus, ut tum tua tum communi omnium utilitate'. Evidently, at this time, a cleric could enjoy a higher level of personal autonomy and initiative than his lay counterpart.

curriculum, less praxis-oriented than its Bolognese counterpart and based on a sounder and more scholarly classical foundation. Mostly clerics, French *dictatores* re-inserted the art of letter-writing into the broad field of classical rhetoric, also keeping alive a tradition of Ciceronian exegesis thanks to the activity of learned commentators<sup>32</sup> – the school of Orléans was especially famous for its commitment to classical authors.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, they developed a mannerist style of *dictamen*, full of verbal artifices, obscurities and classical reminiscences, which came to be known as ‘stilus Gallicus’.

In the early years of the thirteenth century, however, Italian *dictatores* took back the initiative: with the three great masters, Bene of Florence, Boncompagno of Signa and Guido Faba, northern Italian *ars dictaminis* reached its apogee. Even though epistolography remained their main concern, these masters adopted the French approach and broadened their theoretical interests to encompass the whole field of rhetoric: wide-ranging theoretical *summae* became their favoured textual medium. Boncompagno and Guido Faba constructed a specific manner of self-fashioning, which Enrico Artifoni has aptly termed ‘hyperbolic-theological’:<sup>34</sup> in allegorically constructed proems, God himself – or some other divine agent – revealed the secrets of rhetoric to the *dictator*, who then disclosed them to his

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<sup>32</sup> See Alessio, ‘Le istituzioni scolastiche’, pp. 163-4, who mentions the commentaries of Thierry of Chartres, Guillaume of Champeaux, Manegoldo of Lautenbach and Petrus Elias, and cites the relevant bibliography.

<sup>33</sup> See the texts collected by L. Delisle, ‘Les Écoles d’Orléans, au douzième et au treizième siècle’, *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de France*, 7, 1869, pp. 139-48; and L. J. Paetow, *The Arts Course at Medieval Universities with Special Reference to Grammar and Rhetoric*, Champaign IL, 1910, pp. 14-18.

<sup>34</sup> E. Artifoni, ‘Sapientia Salomonis. Una forma di presentazione del sapere retorico nei dettatori italiani (prima metà del sec. XIII)’, *Reti Medievali* (available online at: <http://www.rmoa.unina.it/id/eprint/68>), 1997, pp. 1-11 (2): ‘Nel consolidamento della maniera iperbolico-teologica di presentazione del *dictamen* ... sono da prendere in considerazione anche fattori interni al mercato culturale: la competizione dei dettatori per gli incarichi più ambiti, la concorrenza fra le scuole ... una sorta di gara percepibile a chi formulasse l’uscita più stupefacente e inconsueta.’

students. Rhetoric was sold as a gate to arcane mysteries, its teachers as gatekeepers. The allegorically inflated language employed in these proems demonstrates how durable the clerical image of the intellectual was: masters had to appeal to revealed truths and recondite knowledge, and present themselves as priests of a new cult. The exaltation of rhetoric was a way of identifying and defining themselves and their social role, in a manner which recalls monastic religious orders.<sup>35</sup> What was at stake here, however, was not salvation of the soul, but social and economic security.

More importantly, the discipline to which they owed their living and reputation was based on language: perhaps for the first time since antiquity, linguistic proficiency in Latin was at the same time a marker of and a means to acquire social distinction. Given, however, the extremely small number of literate individuals, all with essentially the same linguistic competence, level of education and social standing, neither a clear functional differentiation of linguistic uses nor a standard criterion for linguistic evaluation were in place yet. Competing schools therefore struggled for hegemony in a narrow market of literacy. Thus, Boncompagno, firstly, defended the Bolognese tradition of *stilus humilis* against French trends, above all, the mixture of grammatical purism and stylistic mannerism of the school of Orléans – whose representatives he disparagingly referred to as ‘grammarians’.<sup>36</sup> Secondly, he extolled the centrality of prose against those who claimed the superiority of metrical verse.<sup>37</sup> Thirdly, he opposed the traditional

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<sup>35</sup> For a discussion of organized religious groups in the twelfth century as models of self-affirmation through group consciousness, identification and competition, see C.W. Bynum, ‘Did the twelfth century discover the individual?’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 31, 1980, pp. 1-17.

<sup>36</sup> See Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures*, pp. 386-8, for a detailed discussion.

<sup>37</sup> Boncompagno, ‘Palma’, in C. Sutter, *Aus Leben und Schriften des Magisters Boncompagno*, Freiburg, 1894, pp. 105-27 (106), wrote: ‘Vel prosaicum dictamen est ars, secundum quod est collectio preceptorum. Set non debet dici ars, immo artium mater, quia tota scriptura trahit originem a prosa. Nam rithmi et metra sunt quedam mendicata suffragia, que a prosa originem trahunt.’ In contrast, Bene,

curriculum with attacks on Cicero which are justly famous.<sup>38</sup> Throughout the thirteenth century, as we shall see, this pragmatic approach was to have momentous effects on the system of Italian education, including primary and secondary schools – in other words, on the practice of learning Latin.

## II

In order to appreciate the cultural movements which characterized communal Italy in the Duecento, we need to look once more at political and institutional developments. Between the end of the twelfth century and the first two decades of the thirteenth, all communes abandoned the consular regime and entrusted the guidance of the commune to a foreign official, called the *podestà*. The crisis which brought about this change was mainly due to internal conflicts within the *militia* and between it and the rest of the citizenry – the non-military productive classes, or *popolo*, who in principle were excluded from participation in the consulate. The economic growth promoted by territorial expansion and the immigration of rural nobles from the countryside had modified the internal composition, social profile and life style of a sizable portion of the *militia*: in every commune, an average of 20-30 families had emerged – thanks also to alliances and relationships with external powers as the church and the empire – which were conspicuously

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*Candelabrum*, p. 182 (VI.3.2-5), stated: 'Dictaminum tria sunt genera, scilicet primum, medium et extremum. Primum est prosaicum, id est longum et diffusum, quod civile vocatur eo quod inter cives naturaliter locum habet et trahit etiam originem a natura. Medium est rithmicum, id est molle vel numerosum, quod habet convenientiam cum primo pariter et extremo, quia nec vagatur longius sicut prosa nec tempora sillabarum iudicat sicut metrum. Extremum vero dicitur phylosophicum sive metricum, quia istud causa rectitudinis et brevitatis et delectationis diligentissime a phylosophis est inventum.'

<sup>38</sup> Boncompagno, 'Palma', p. 62: 'Nunquam enim memini me Tullium legisse nec secundum alicuius doctrinam me aliquid in rethoricis tradictionibus vel dictamine fecisse profiteor.'

richer and more powerful than the rest: these clans gradually affirmed themselves as an urban aristocratic class.<sup>39</sup>

Since its inception, this class was a formidable threat to the stability of communal institutions, through its stubborn defence of fiscal privileges, its systematic disregard for juridical institutions and its tendency to squander public resources – often with the excuse of expenditure on warfare.<sup>40</sup> The capacity of these clans to seize direct control of the consulate – and therefore to occupy the centre of political power and control public finances – provoked bitter protest from the less powerful sections of the *militia* and from the productive classes which were organized in guilds. The consular regime showed itself unable to fulfil the tasks for which it was created: securing the stability of jurisdictional rights and maintaining social peace or *concordia*. It was as a reaction to this situation that the office of the *podestà* was established.<sup>41</sup> This new magistrate was set up with the aim, firstly, of separating political power from the direct control of socially hegemonic local classes,<sup>42</sup> and, secondly, of strengthening communal jurisdiction through

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<sup>39</sup> See P. Cammarosano, 'Il ricambio e l'evoluzione', pp. 207-29.

<sup>40</sup> See E. Artifoni, 'Tensioni sociali e istituzioni nel mondo comunale', in *La Storia. I grandi problemi dal Medioevo all'età contemporanea*, ed. N. Tranfaglia et al. Turin, 1986, pp. 461-91.

<sup>41</sup> The novelty of the institution, and the motives behind its creation, were clearly perceived by a contemporary chronicler; see *Annali genovesi di Caffaro e de' suoi continuatori*, II: 1174-1224, ed. L. T. Belgrano et al., Genoa, 1901, p. 36: 'Ut autem noua et inaudita, quae modernis temporibus euenerunt, posterius innotescant, ad memoriam inde in posterum conseruandum infra scripta presenti uolumine intitulaui et in scriptis redege. nouerint ergo tam futuri in posterum quam moderni, quod ob multorum inuidiam, qui consulatus communis officium ultra modum cupiebant habere, nonnullae ciuiles discordiae et odiosae conspirationes et diuisiones in ciuitate plurimum inoleuerant. unde contigit quod sapientes et consiliarii ciuitatis conuenerunt in unum, et de communi consilio statuerunt ut consulatus comunis in futuro anno cessaret et de habenda potestate fuerunt omnes fere concordēs.'

<sup>42</sup> P. Cammarosano, 'L'economia italiana nell'età dei comuni e il "modo feudale di produzione": una discussione' in id., *Studi di storia medievale: economia, territorio, società*, Trieste, 2009, pp. 255-78 (275): 'Si spezzò in quell'epoca, definitivamente, il



tighter, more impartial control of public resources and juridical institutions.<sup>43</sup> From the point of view of intellectual history, these two aims precipitated two consequences, destined to have a tremendous impact on the cultural life of the Duecento: the affirmation of the autonomy of the political sphere, which resulted in a renaissance of public oratory; and the spread of literacy in all the basic domains of human activity, so that the written word became the fundamental regulator of social life.

I shall start with the second development, which has been appropriately defined as a 'documentary revolution'.<sup>44</sup> From the early decades of the thirteenth century, the number and quality of private and public documents produced in and by communes witnessed a veritable explosion. This phenomenon was determined by a common desire for legal security, both in private transactions and at the level of public institutions.<sup>45</sup> The same material conditions – increased potential for social conflict; mobility of property and of capital; instability of internal and external political conditions – enhanced the demand for objective evidence to secure private and public property and acquired rights from the threats posed by powerful individuals.<sup>46</sup> Although this proliferation of documents affected the entire society, its main beneficiaries were those middle, non-feudal ranks of society – merchants, notaries and soon thereafter artisans – who were

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nesso immediato e necessario tra possesso terriero e castrense ed esercizio del potere che aveva caratterizzato i secoli dal X al XII.'

<sup>43</sup> J.-C. Maire Vigueur, 'Révolution documentaire et révolution scripturaire: le cas de l'Italie médiévale', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 153, 1995, pp. 177-85 (183).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 180.

<sup>45</sup> See the testimony of John of Bologna, who, having visited England, noticed the differences in documentary practice: 'Ytatici tamquam cauti quasi de omni eo quod ad inuicem contrahunt habere volunt publicum instrumentum, quod quasi contrarium est in Anglicis, videlicet quod nisi necessarium esset non nisi rarissime petitur instrumentum ...': quoted by T. Behrmann, 'The Development of Pragmatic Literacy in the Lombard City Communes', in *Pragmatic Literacy, East and West, 1200-1300*, ed. R. Britnell, Woodbridge, 1997, pp. 25-42 (28-9, n. 17).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

more inclined to seek protection in the law and who were destined to become the driving force behind the spread of literacy throughout the thirteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

The development of a standardized theory and practice of the document (*instrumentum*), initiated in Bologna by Ranieri da Perugia, emancipated – formally and conceptually – the (private and public) document from the *ars dictaminis*.<sup>48</sup> This resulted in an increased specialization of notaries' skills, which divided the notarial class according to the type and level of competence of its practitioners: on the one hand, the vast majority of notaries who acquired, chiefly through private apprenticeship, a technical training essentially limited to the ability to draft documents; and on the other hand, a smaller group of notaries who, thanks to the preparation in the *ars dictaminis* offered by university courses, could aspire to more prestigious – and better paid – positions in communal administrations, where their tasks included compiling official diplomatic letters, keeping a record of talks pronounced at the city councils, and, in some cases, composing official or semi-official communal chronicles.<sup>49</sup> At the centre of communal administrations, the collaboration between the *podestà* and his notaries gradually brought about the conjunction between rhetoric and politics which is one of the fundamental traits of thirteenth-century intellectual life.

The second innovation concerns the field of oratory. As noted by Ronald Witt: 'The early thirteenth century witnessed the extension of the manual of *ars dictaminis* into the area of oratory. Given the conception of the

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<sup>47</sup> See F. Menant, 'Les transformations de l'écrit documentaire entre le XII<sup>e</sup> et le XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Écrire, compter, mesurer. Vers une histoire des rationalités pratiques*, Paris, 2006, pp. 30-50.

<sup>48</sup> Bartoli Langeli, 'Cancellierato', pp. 254-5.

<sup>49</sup> See M. Zabbia, 'Tra istituzioni di governo ed opinione pubblica. Forme ed echi di comunicazione politica nella cronachistica notarile italiana (secc. XII-XIV)', *Rivista storica italiana*, 110.1, 1998, pp. 100-18 (100-2).

letter as a written speech, the step seems natural but only the Italians seem to have taken it.<sup>50</sup> It is therefore imperative to understand the specific Italian conditions which made this development possible. The cause pertains specifically to the shape assumed by communal governments in this period, which was entrusted to the *podestà* and the citizens' council. These two institutions increased the number of occasions in which the public use of speech could be employed, evaluated, legitimated and regulated by technical competence.<sup>51</sup> One of the central aims of governments in this period was to secure high professional standards in the exercise of communal political leadership: this specifically political professionalism involved the capacity to coordinate the different institutions of the commune and to represent the entire body of citizens by mediating between its conflicting social strata. In his capacity as a chairman of the council, the *podestà* had the duty of regulating the times and places in which citizens could speak in the assembly, and he also presided over the recording of their interventions by his notaries.<sup>52</sup> As a representative of an autonomous political sphere at the head of the city's government, he had to secure the legitimacy of his authority through the ritual construction and performance of consensus, the latter finding its natural expression in public eloquence. A body of treatises produced in these years – such as the *Oculus pastoralis*, Giovanni da Viterbo's *De regimine civitatis* and Guido Faba's *Parlamenta ed epistole* – inform us of the occasions and symbolic meaning which this new

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<sup>50</sup> R. G. Witt, 'The Arts of Letter-Writing', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, II: *The Middle Ages*, ed. A. Minnis et al., Cambridge, 2005, pp. 68-83 (78).

<sup>51</sup> See P. Cammarosano, 'L'éloquence laïque dans l'Italie communale (fin du XII<sup>e</sup>-XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle)', *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, 158, 2000, pp. 431-42 (431-2).

<sup>52</sup> E. Artifoni, 'I podestà professionali e la fondazione retorica della politica comunale', *Quaderni storici*, 21.63, 1986, pp. 687-719 (700): 'il podestà è allora in grado di disciplinare il flusso dell'oratoria consiliare, ordinando il silenzio e il proferire secondo una precisa scansione rituale e curando infine, attraverso l'opera dei notai verbalizzatori, il trapasso dall'oralità alla scrittura.'

form of public eloquence – the *arenza* or *concione* – gradually assumed and of the type of rhetorical competence it required.<sup>53</sup>

The most immediate consequence of this development was the admission to formal domains of discourse of individuals who had been previously excluded: starting with the *podestà* himself. The novelty of this phenomenon is apparent from the disparaging comments which an old-style *dictator* such as Boncompagno made about the new forms of public eloquence in his last work, the *Rhetorica novissima*.<sup>54</sup> His reservations chiefly concerned the *concioni*, which were not composed according to the precepts of rhetoric, but merely governed by customary practice. This was because the orators and, in particular, the *podestà*, were recruited from the aristocratic élite and, therefore, uneducated – at least according to Boncompagno's standards.<sup>55</sup> The disgruntled attitude of a traditional university master like Boncompagno shows that, by this time, the Italian cultural avant-garde, led chiefly by notaries employed in communal administrations, had moved outside the university and was in open dialogue with political institutions and the new forces of society. This brings me to my next point.

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<sup>53</sup> See E. Artifoni, 'Retorica e organizzazione del linguaggio politico nel Duecento italiano', in *Le forme della propaganda nel Due e Trecento*, Rome, 1994, pp. 154-82.

<sup>54</sup> See E. Artifoni, 'Boncompagno da Signa, i maestri di retorica e le città comunali nella prima metà del Duecento', in *Il pensiero e l'opera di Boncompagno da Signa*, ed. M. Baldini, Signa, 2002, pp. 23-36.

<sup>55</sup> Boncompagno da Signa, *Rhetorica novissima*, ed. A. Gaudenzi, in *Bibliotheca iuridica medii aevi*, ed. A. Gaudenzi, 3 vols, Bologna, 1888-1901, II, pp. 249-97 (296-297): 'De contionibus. Contio est conventus populi, qui secundum consuetudinem civitatis aut loci ad clamorem tubarum vel campane sonitum congregatur. ... Officium contionatoris est adulari, interponere mendacia palliata, et uti persuasionibus deceptivis. ... Consuetudo contionandi viget in civitatibus et oppidis Italiae propter eximiam libertatem. ... Omnem contionatores habent contionandi scientiam magis per consuetudinem quam naturam: quia non potest esse scientia naturalis, maxime cum verba contionatorum in abusionem et aperta mendacia dilabuntur. ... Verum quia contionandi officium rarissime ad viros pertinet litteratos, idcirco hec plebeia doctrina est laicis Italiae relinquenda, qui ad narrandum magnalia contionum a sola consuetudine sunt instructi.'

The new textual traditions – documentary and rhetorical – which emerged in these years were characterized by a marked Latin-vernacular bilingualism. Indeed, to describe it as bilingualism would be too simplistic. It would be more appropriate to say that the communicative space was thoroughly re-organized: on the one hand, by the promotion of the vernacular to some specific formal domains; and on the other hand, by a functional differentiation of Latin registers based on the level of education of producers and consumers. This can be demonstrated by numerous examples. It is well known that notaries were expected to switch readily from Latin to the vernacular when moving from written texts to their oral delivery: reading Latin documents aloud in the vernacular or, for the better trained ones, recording vernacular speeches delivered in councils in Latin.<sup>56</sup> Again, Boncompagno informs us that merchants composed their letters in bad Latin or directly in their own vernacular.<sup>57</sup> As Armando Petrucci pointed out, the typical expression of Florentine merchant culture, the *ricordanze* or *libri di famiglia*, originated in vernacular translations of notarial documents kept for their own personal records.<sup>58</sup> In all these cases, not only do we find traces of a constant dialogue between Latin and the vernacular,

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<sup>56</sup> The exam for the admission to the notarial corporation published in Bologna in 1246 prescribed that a commission had to ‘examinare volentes fieri tabelliones et inquirere diligenter ab eis de multis et diversis contractibus et videre et scire qualiter sciunt scribere et qualiter legere scripturas quas fecerint vulgariter et literariter, et qualiter latinare’: *Statuti del comune di Bologna dall’anno 1245 all’anno 1267*, ed. L. Frati, 3 vols, Bologna, 1869-77, II, p. 188. Note that the document distinguishes three different types of competence: to write contracts (‘scribere’); to read them aloud in Latin and vernacular (‘legere scripturas quas fecerint vulgariter et literariter’); and to write letters (‘latinare’).

<sup>57</sup> Buoncompagno da Signa, *Boncompagnus*, p. 173: ‘Mercatores ... per idiomata propria seu uulgaria uel per corruptum latinum ad invicem sibi scribunt et rescribunt.’

<sup>58</sup> See A. Petrucci, *Il libro di ricordanze dei Corsini: 1362-1457*, Rome, 1965, p. lxiv: ‘[gli] uomini d’affari toscani [erano] impegnati nella creazione di un tipo di documentazione del tutto nuovo, per il quale mancavano tradizioni e norme retoriche e per il quale essi dovettero cercare e finirono col trovare un modello nella produzione documentaria di cui erano abituati a servirsi, e cioè in quella notarile.’

but also of an increasingly complex diversification of types of Latin competence: from mere passive Latin competence, to the uncouth Latin of low level notaries and merchants, to the rhetorically inflated Latin of university-trained notaries and *dictatores*.

The same sort of bilingualism, paired with a tendency to diversify Latin registers according to levels of competence (and therefore of education), can be detected in the manuals for *podestà*.<sup>59</sup> As observed by Boncompagno, *podestà* were often poorly educated: the production of highly formulaic manuals for the composition of orations to some extent remedied the deficiencies which could hinder their ability to perform official duties. Furthermore, they could deliver speeches, according to the circumstances, in either Latin or vernacular. The models provided by Giovanni da Viterbo, for example, constantly switch between Latin and the vernacular.<sup>60</sup> In Guido Faba's *Parlamenta ed epistole* every *parlamentum*, or speech, in the vernacular is followed by three Latin letters which translate it into three different stylistic levels (*maior*, *minor* and *minima*). This division between types of text, respective speech varieties and levels of rhetorical elaboration probably mirrors the communicative context in which diplomatic exchanges took place: the ambassador would deliver the speech orally and hand over the letters, which would then be examined by the notaries of the *podestà* and communicated orally to him.<sup>61</sup> Finally, the author of the *Oculus pastoralis*

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<sup>59</sup> The jurist Odofredo similarly observed that the *podestà*, as an aristocrat and therefore uneducated, needed the collaboration of judges; see Tamassia, 'Odofredo', p. 369, n. 2: 'Domini mei, vos debetis scire quod quidam erant viri literati et quidem non erant literati, sed erant viri militares, ut videtis bene in Italia. Quia isti qui eliguntur in potestates civitatum et terrarum sunt viri illitterati, tamen secum ducunt iudices literatos, quia multum indigent eis.'

<sup>60</sup> See G. Folena, "'Parlamenti" podestarili di Giovanni da Viterbo', *Lingua nostra*, 20, 1959, pp. 97-105.

<sup>61</sup> G. Faba, *Parlamenti ed epistole*, ed. A. Gaudenzi, *I suoni, le forme e le parole dell'odierno dialetto della città di Bologna*, Turin, 1889, pp. 127-61; see, e.g., *ibid.*, p. 142: '*Parlamentum responsivum militis electi in potestatem: ... e la vostra ambaxata aveti*

explicitly excused the simplicity of his style by explaining that the work's potential readers were 'lay, beginners and semi-literates' ('laicis rudibus et modice literatis').<sup>62</sup> While the Italian – legal, rhetorical and later medical – culture of the twelfth century broke down the equation *clerici = literati* (that is, the ecclesiastical monopoly of Latin competence), in the following century, the extension of the domains of, and participants in, public discourse served to redraw – or sometimes blur – the line which separated *literati* and *illiterati*.

Such a multi-layered, diversified and at times chaotic distribution of linguistic resources was made possible by an equally diversified, open and increasingly widespread system of language education. A contract drafted in Genoa in the first half of the century will help us to approach this topic. On 6 February 1221, the banker Giovanni di Cogorno signed an agreement with a certain Bernardo, notary and grammar teacher, entrusting to him the education of his son Enrichetto. Enrichetto was meant to join Bernardo's school for a total of five years. During the first three years, at the cost of one *lira* and eleven *soldi*, Enrichetto was to learn Latin, with the specific aim of teaching him to produce documents ('facere scripturas'). In the next two years, for which the annual fee was reduced to just ten *soldi*, he was to help

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proposta tanto savia mente cum ella se potesse dire plue, e representato le littere de la parte del vostro commune'; and *ibid.*, p. 146: '*Parlamentum responsivum pro dicto de podestate ad podestatem*: ... Unde sapia che, sci che veçute le vostre littere, çença demoranza ... sopra le ademandexone facte dal vostro cittadino fecemo receiveve testimonii, et, habiuto consiglo de savie homine, avemo dato diffinitiva sententia ...

<sup>62</sup> *Oculus pastoralis*, ed. D. Franceschi, Turin, 1966, p. 23: 'In hoc oppuscolo quod rogatus quasi invitus agredior, stillo clariori et simplici dictamine fungar, quoniam simplicitas est amica laicis rudibus et modice literatis, ad utilitatem quorum, si qui quandoque ad locorum regimina sint asumpti, sequentia componuntur ...'. For an analysis of this passage, see E. Artifoni, 'L'oratoria politica comunale e i "laici rudes et modice literati"', in *Zwischen Pragmatik und Performanz. Dimensionen mittelalterlicher Schriftkultur*, ed. C. Dartmann et al., Turnhout, 2011, pp. 237-62.

the master by teaching basic literacy skills to younger pupils as a *repetitor*.<sup>63</sup> This document reveals that, by 1221, several changes in the system of Latin teaching were taking place: first, Latin teaching was regulated by a contract; second, it was intended as strictly pragmatic and instrumental, with exclusive application to notarial practice; third, it was assimilated to an artisan's apprenticeship; fourth, it was divided into two stages: a primary stage, which could be supervised by a young and relatively inexperienced apprentice such as Enrichetto, after he had gone through the secondary stage of proper Latin learning, supervised by the master notary and focused on the eminently practical goal of learning how to produce notarial documents.

The pedagogical system envisaged in this document was the dawn of a brave new world of Latin education. To understand its impact, it is necessary to contrast it with the programme for learning Latin, entrusted to the clergy, which had prevailed up to this time. Until the end of the twelfth century, Latin education had been monopolized by cathedral chapters. The pedagogical model of these structures was universal and theoretically open to everyone; free and indifferent to societal pressures; and oriented towards the spiritual goals of the clergy.<sup>64</sup> The type of language education practised in this environment has been described by Robert Black:

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<sup>63</sup> The contract is edited in G. Manancorda, *Storia della scuola in Italia*, 2 vols, Milan, Palermo and Naples, 1913, I, p. 140: 'usque ad annos quinque proxime venturos ad standum tecum et tibi serviendum et ad disciplinam tuam audiendum et scolares tuos prout melius sciverit, educendum et ad scripturas, quas eidem facere praeceperis, scribendas ... et quod scripturas, quas volueris, tibi scribet et libros quos sibi docueris et psalterium in tuo ordine mandato edocebit. Insuper promitto ... .' See also G. Petti Balbi, *L'insegnamento nella Liguria medievale: scuole, maestri, libri*, Genoa, 1979, pp. 48-50.

<sup>64</sup> For a description of education in cathedral chapters, Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures*, pp. 268-76.



pupils learned Latin through a process of total immersion similar to what a foreign pupil would now experience when transplanted into a native-speaking classroom, simulated in the Middle Ages by a long process of reading and memorizing texts of increasing difficulty. The result was that the medieval pupil very gradually learnt how to read and write in Latin without the aid of theoretical guidance on how to construct correct Latin sentences ...<sup>65</sup>

The foundations on which this model rested, as we have seen, had already been shaken at the level of superior education – mainly involving legal professions – by the rise of private professional schools and universities. Throughout the thirteenth century, the secularization and commercialization of education were brought down to the level of basic literacy and Latin teaching – a process which can be observed both at the institutional and at the methodological level. In the first instance, private schools gradually replaced cathedral chapters as the leading structures of pre-university education; and in many cities, communes themselves started providing for the appointment of state teachers.<sup>66</sup> Overall, the number of pupils acquiring basic literacy skills grew impressively: soon the role of the *doctor puerorum*, who taught pupils reading and writing, was differentiated from that of the *grammaticus*, who focused on Latin teaching. In Florence and Tuscany abacus schools started to appear, providing a curriculum entirely focused on commercial arithmetic.<sup>67</sup> In Genoa, there was a strong demand for a secondary school especially designed for merchants, teaching basic

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<sup>65</sup> R. Black, 'The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy (review)', *The American Historical Review*, 118, 2013, pp. 804-6 (805).

<sup>66</sup> For a survey, see P. Denley, 'Governments and Schools in Late Medieval Italy', in *City and Countryside in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, London, 1990, pp. 92-107.

<sup>67</sup> R. Black, 'Education and the Emergence of a Literate Society', in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance 1300-1550*, ed. J. M. Najemy, Oxford, 2004, pp. 18-36.

grammar, the rudiments of the notarial art and of epistolography, and mathematics.<sup>68</sup>

A few pupils, who intended to become physicians, lawyers or notaries, proceeded to grammar school. The importation from France of new teaching methods which were focused on syntax allowed much quicker progress in Latin learning: works such as Alexandre of Villedieu's *Doctrinale* and Evrard de Béthune's *Graecismus* brought down to the classroom level the doctrines of logical grammarians in the Parisian Faculty of the Arts. They also established firmly that separation between primary and secondary Latin education which we have already observed in the school of Master Bernardo. At the secondary level, three innovations are worth highlighting. First, the goal of language learning, pursued at the higher level of secondary Latin teaching, and mainly concerned with epistolography, was essentially prose composition: Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, which enjoyed a wide diffusion in Italy, was employed in Italian classrooms as a repository of rhetorical figures for advanced prose composition.<sup>69</sup> Second, the curriculum excluded almost completely the study of *auctores*: anti-classicism was already a central feature of the Parisian scholastic milieu from which the *Doctrinale* and the *Poetria nova* had originally emerged. In Italy, it found fertile ground in a curriculum designed for students to progress as quickly as possible to the study of the *ars dictaminis*, law and medicine.<sup>70</sup> Third, the vernacular gradually came to play a central role in Latin learning: employment of the vernacular to elucidate grammatical difficulties was already suggested by the *Doctrinale*.<sup>71</sup> Even in this case, Italian teachers

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<sup>68</sup> Petti Balbi, *L'insegnamento nella Liguria*, pp. 56-60.

<sup>69</sup> Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 344-9.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 192-5.

<sup>71</sup> Alexander of Villedieu, *Doctrinale*, ed. D. Reichling, Berlin, 1893, p. 7: 'si pueri primo nequeant attendere plene, / hic tamen attendet, qui doctoris vice fungens, /

innovated on French foundations, drawing on the professional orientation of their schools: *themata*, vernacular passages assigned to be translated into Latin, probably began as exercises for notaries in bilingual documentary and epistolary training.<sup>72</sup>

To complete the picture of cultural developments in the thirteenth century, something needs to be said about its ideological output. This was fully realized in the latest period of communal government, known as the 'popular commune', and was defined by the challenge which, starting in the mid-thirteenth century, the *popolo* posed to aristocratic power. According to John Najemy: 'At the center of ... popular political culture were the ideas and assumptions associated with guild association and the kind of political culture to which they gave rise.'<sup>73</sup> It is from guilds, therefore, that we should begin. Since the closing years of the twelfth century, large sections of the population – especially the urban productive classes, excluded from political representation and unprotected by family structures – had started organizing themselves into armed neighbourhood companies and craft-based guilds. The stabilization of the head of state brought about by the institution of the office of *podestà*, separating government from the power struggles of local aristocratic clans, gave free rein instead to social conflict: the enlargement of city councils, where organized groups such as the guilds

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atque legens pueris laica lingua reserabit; / et pueris etiam pars maxima plana patebit.'

<sup>72</sup> The same terminology is used in the statutes for the admission to Bologna's guild of notaries in 1252, quoted by G. Fasoli, 'Giuristi, giudici e notai nell'ordinamento comunale e nella vita cittadina', *Scritti di storia medievale*, ed. F. Bocchi et al., Bologna, 1974, pp. 611-22 (615): 'faciant singulos examinandos scribere in presentia vel dictare epistulam secundum thema datam a se iudice et faciat singulos legere et recitare scripturas quas fecerint et instrumenta qua dixerint vel vulgariter vel litterariter.'

<sup>73</sup> Najemy, *History of Florence*, p. 39.

could have an impact on collective decision-making, opened up participation and influence in state affairs to the popular classes.<sup>74</sup>

Towards the mid-thirteenth century, popular groupings tended to unify and create a system of institutions parallel to the established communal ones. A horizontal system of organization based on solidarity – and the fundamental political values embedded in guild associations, as defined by Najemy, were ‘consent, representation, delegation, accountability’<sup>75</sup> – arose in opposition to the vertical structures constituted by aristocratic clans based on family bonds and clientele.<sup>76</sup> Where popular movements succeeded, they challenged the structures on which aristocratic power rested: in some cases (such as Perugia), they denied the legal validity of feudal ties; in other cities, they tried to break down the means of aristocratic control on the populace, for example (as in Bologna) by abolishing serfdom; finally, in many communes they promulgated laws which excluded nobles from participation in political offices with anti-magnate legislation.<sup>77</sup>

The unified *popolo* brought into communal institutions a new ideology of popular participation and a new conception of power.<sup>78</sup> When this found eventually explicit expression, its articulation was entrusted to

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<sup>74</sup> See S. Bortolami, ‘Le forme societarie di organizzazione del Popolo’, in *Magnati e popolani nell’Italia comunale*, Pistoia, 1997, pp. 41-79.

<sup>75</sup> Najemy, *History of Florence*, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup> Cammarosano, ‘Il ricambio e l’evoluzione’, p. 219: ‘Il popolo esprimeva la volontà di un sistema di potere non determinato dalla qualità personale e familiare degli individui.’

<sup>77</sup> For an overview, see G. Fasoli, ‘Ricerche sulla legislazione antimagnatizia nei comuni dell’alta e media Italia’, in *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano*, 12, 1939, pp. 86-133.

<sup>78</sup> E. Artifoni, ‘I governi di “popolo” e le istituzioni comunali nella seconda metà del secolo XIII’, in *Reti Medievali, Rivista*, 4, 2003 (the content is available online), p. 5: ‘il “popolo” è portatore di una cultura delle istituzioni come luogo dell’attività politica, in opposizione a una cultura della potenza sociale connaturata alle tradizioni aristocratiche.’

the natural cultural leaders of the popular classes: once again, notaries.<sup>79</sup> Rolandino Passeggeri, leader of the Bolognese notaries, in a series of proems to statutes, defined the divine justification of the popular classes' rule over the commune. Although, he argued, the Fall had corrupted humans and determined the rise of unjust, tyrannical powers, nevertheless some Edenic virtues had been preserved by specific classes of men: notaries and money-lenders, both of which groups were organized into guilds. These proems owed much to the hyperbolic-theological tradition initiated by Boncompagno; but in Passeggeri's formulation, God was giving his blessing, not to a subject such as rhetoric or to the *dictator* and his school, but instead to guilds and their political assumptions, which were embodied in the 'popular commune' led by notaries.<sup>80</sup>

Not only were aristocratic power structures defied, but so, too, were the aristocracy's cultural values and predispositions: aristocratic claims to natural superiority conferred by status were challenged by a notion of value acquired through study, moral discipline and commitment to the common good.<sup>81</sup> Guglielmo Ventura, a middling spice merchant and active member

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<sup>79</sup> The ideological and propagandistic role played by notaries in the popular movement was addressed by the Dominican Iacopo da Cessole, in his *Liber de moribus hominum* (composed between 1259 and 1273), quoted by Artifoni, 'I governi di "popolo"', p. 18, n. 35: 'Sed heu hodie, qui plura de re publica noverunt bona agere praetermisso Dei timore, infirmiores er inscios populares seducunt. Ad coniurationes et inepta collegia attrahunt et venientes in unum, seditiones in civitate potius quam concordiae foedere nectunt. Nullum hodie Lombardis tantum est nocuum collegium quantum notariorum, in quibus invenitur discordia voluntatum.'

<sup>80</sup> For a thorough discussion, see M. Giansante, *Retorica e politica nel Duecento. I notai bolognesi e l'ideologia comunale*, Rome 1999, esp. pp. 51-70; and id., 'Rolandino e l'ideologia del comune di Popolo. Dallo statuto dei Cambiatori del 1245 a quello dei notai del 1288', in *Rolandino e l'Ars notaria da Bologna all'Europa*, ed. G. Tamba, Milan, 2002, pp. 51-74.

<sup>81</sup> See S. Raveggi, 'Appunti sulle forme di propaganda nel conflitto tra magnati e popolani', *Publications de l'École Française de Rome*, 201, 1994, pp. 169-89. A good example is found in the anonymous *Fiori e vita di filosafi ed altri savii ed imperadori*, ed. H. Varnhagen, Erlangen, 1893, p. 1: 'Pittagora fue lo primo filosofo e fue d'uno

of the popular party in Asti, inserted into his chronicle a brief piece of advice for his sons: he recommended them to honour God and their mother, to serve the commune, to pursue wisdom through education and, finally, never to read those French romances ‘which *he* had always hated’, always preferring the constant reading of the Scriptures.<sup>82</sup> As the last point indicates, the core of popular ideology owed much of its values to the

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paese ch’avea nome Samo. Nel quale paese regnava uno prencipe, che si come tyranno struggea la terra; la cui crudelita e la cui soperbia offendeva tanto l’animo di questo filosofo, che elli lascio il suo paese e venne in Ytalia ... per non vedere cosi malvagia signoria. In questo Pittagora si comincio il nome de la filosofia; che in prima erano appellati savii quelli ch’erano innanti alli altri per costumi e per nobile vita.’ The author’s ideological intent becomes evident if we compare the text to its source, the *Speculum historiale* of Vincent of Beauvais, quoted *ibid.*, p. 1: ‘In Samo nichil nobilius quam Pitagora civis, qui mox offensus fastu tyrannico Bruto consule relicta patria Ytaliā advectus est. ... A quo etiam ferunt ipsum philosophie nomen exortum. Nam cum antea sapientes appellarentur qui modo quodam vite laudabilis aliis prestare videbantur ... .’ The author removes any reference to the *nobilitas* of Pythagoras, stresses his opposition to tyrannical rule in Samos (‘crudelita’, ‘soperbia’, ‘malvagia signoria’ were the typical sins magnates were accused of) and interprets the thinkers who were called *savii* before Pythagoras not, as in his source, as sages admired for their life style, but rather as aristocrats respected for their prestige. The implication is that the moral qualities acquired through study are a challenge to the social prestige granted to aristocrats by their status.

<sup>82</sup> *Memoriale Guilielmi Venturæ civis Astensis de gestis civium Astensium et plurimum aliorum*, ed. C. Combetti, in *Monumenta Historiæ Patriæ, Scriptores*, III, Turin, 1848, col. 701-816 (774): ‘Primum, ut Deum timeant, et præceptis eius obediant, et ultra illum alium timere non debeant ... matri eorum honorem conferant, et cunctis diebus serviant ei ... . Comuni et civitati eorum obediant, et fideles eidem existant, et cunctis viribus resistant omnibus pugnantibus contra ipsum, ut in Catone scriptum est: “Pugna pro patria”. Officia et consilia comunis pro posse vitare debeant; multos enim populares vidi mendicari sectantes comunis consilia, ac etiam michi nocuit prout sciunt. Officia sive ministeria sua legaliter agant, et maxime officium specialie ... . In divinis Scripturis novis et antiquis saepius studeant, et fabulas scriptas in libris, qui romani vocantur, vitare debeant, quae semper odio habui, et in Catone studiose legant, dum poterunt, dicente: “discere ne cesses, cura sapientia crescit.”’ On Ventura’s chronicle and its popular ideology, see B. Garofani, ‘Un cronista di “popolo” e le stirpi signorili: prospettive su Guglielmo Ventura’, in *Il Monferrato: crocevia politico, economico e culturale tra Mediterraneo e Europa*, ed. G. Soldi Riondini, Ponzzone, 2002, pp. 141-55. For the deeply religious background of popular culture, see Raveggi, ‘Appunti sulle forme di propaganda’, pp. 473-4.

heritage of Christianity; and in many cases, as for example in Bologna and Florence, Dominicans took an active part in the formulation of the popular political discourse.<sup>83</sup> We should therefore avoid giving too much weight to the 'classical' character of popular culture, as some scholars have done: Guglielmo Ventura's praise of a useful and morally sound educational programme, which was in polemic with aristocratic culture, was centred on the Bible and on the sayings of Cato – not Cato the Censor, but a collection of moral sentences, entitled *Disticha Catonis*, compiled in late antiquity and peppered with medieval additions, which was taught to *non latinantes* at a very early stage of the Latin curriculum. Popular culture, led by notaries, perfectly mirrored the distinctively non-classical paradigm which dominated the entire educational system.

Most important for our purposes are the implications of popular assumptions in the sphere of language ideology. While, as we have seen in chapter 4, the admission of aristocratic classes to public spheres of discourse had resulted in the development of the vernacular – and in the evaluation of vernaculars as speech varieties which served as markers of one's own essential nature and ethnic identity<sup>84</sup> – the admission of the middle classes was achieved through learning and education, framed by communal politics and found its chief expression in rhetoric.<sup>85</sup> The linguistic attitudes of Brunetto Latini, for example, reveal that he learned to speak a public language through education and admission to communal councils; they are

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<sup>83</sup> Famous is the case of Remigio de' Girolami, on whom see A. Zorzi, '*Fracta est civitas magna in tres partes. Conflitto e costituzione nell'Italia comunale*', *Scienza e politica*, 39, 2008, pp. 61-87.

<sup>84</sup> See Ch. 4, nn. 68 and 71 above.

<sup>85</sup> Brunetto, *Tresor*, p. 638 (III.i.10): 'Or est il donc prové que la science de rethorique n'est pas dou tout aqoise par nature ou par us, mes par enseignement et par art ... .' See E. Artifoni, 'Tra etica e professionalità politica: la riflessione sulle forme di vita in alcuni intellettuali pragmatici del Duecento italiano', in *Vie active et vie contemplative au Moyen Âge et au seuil de la Renaissance*, ed. C. Trottmann, Rome, 2009, pp. 403-23.

the linguistic assumptions of a guildsman and a notary. For Brunetto, language competence was compared to an artisan's skill: it coincided with rhetoric and political engagement, and could be expressed indifferently in Latin or vernacular.<sup>86</sup> For intellectuals like Brunetto from the *popolo*, languages such as French or Italian were not important as symbolic banners; rather, they were significant on account of the message they conveyed and their social impact.<sup>87</sup> The implications of this approach can be fully appreciated if we compare it to Dante's aristocratic conception of language, as described in the previous chapter. For Dante, the illustrious vernacular was something which individuals essentially owned – rooted in their ethnic origin and natural intelligence. In the perspective of pragmatic intellectuals, language competence was instead a technique which could be learnt. This explains why Dante dismissed the Latin of jurists and doctors as an 'economic language': he contrasted the vernacular as symbolic capital to

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<sup>86</sup> See Brunetto, *Tresor*, p. 12 (I.iv.6): 'Et si [politics] nos enseigne totes les ars et toz les mestiers que a vie d'ome sont beseignables; c'est en .ii. manieres, car l'une est en huevre et l'autre en parole: cele qui est en huevre sont les metiers que l'en huevre touzjours de mains et de piez, ce sont fevres, drapiers, corduaniers, et [c]es autres mestiers qui sont besoignables a la vie des homes, et sont apelés mecanique. Cele qui est en parole sont celes que l'en huevre de [sa] boche et de sa langue, et sont en .iii. manieres, sor quoi sont estrablies .iii. sciences: gramatique, dialetique et rethorique.' The analogy between the system of education and the organization of the guilds was also noticed by the jurist Odofredo, quoted by Tamassia, 'Odofredo', p. 366, n. 7: 'Secundum vulgare nostrum dicuntur magistri societatum ministrales, et secundum Tuscos appellamus eos priores artium. Sed lex vocat eos magistri, quia, sicut magistri in docendo, debent regere discipulos, ita isti ministrales debent regere societatem suam, et facere que expediunt civitati.'

<sup>87</sup> Brunetto, *Tresor*, p. 12 (I.vi.9): 'C'est [rhetoric] la mere des parliers, c'est l'enseignement des diteors, c'est la science qui adre[ça] le monde premierement a bien fere, et qui encor l'adresce par la predication des sainz homes, per les divines Escritures et per la loy qui les genz gouverne a droit et a justice.' Notably, Dante objected to the primacy accorded to rhetoric by some of his contemporaries; see Dante, *Convivio*, III.xi.9: 'Onde non si dee dicere vero filosofo alcuno che per alcuno diletto colla sapienza in alcuna sua parte sia amico: sì come sono molti che si diletano in intendere canzoni ed istudiare in quelle, e che si diletano studiare in Rettorica o in Musica, e l'altre scienze fuggono e abandonano, che sono tutte membra di sapienza.'



Latin as economic capital – that is, an essentialist and identitarian language ideology to a functionalist and pragmatic one. It is at the conjunction of these two visions that we can begin to appreciate the profound novelty represented by humanism.

### III

In this section I shall investigate how the cultural movement we call humanism modified the linguistic landscape of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy. As is well known, the chief linguistic achievement of the humanists was the revival of classical Latin. My aim here is to determine, first, the socio-cultural conditions in which the event took place and, second, the implications it had for the organization of the contemporary linguistic landscape. Although it is not my intention to provide a full critical assessment of humanism as an intellectual movement, it is necessary to locate it within the social and cultural context which gave birth to it and favoured its success.

It is perhaps expedient to start from an old definition of Kristeller – not, as we shall see, because I embrace it uncritically, but because it exemplifies the terms in which the question must be put. In his classic article ‘Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance’, Kristeller defined humanists as ‘professional rhetoricians with a new, classicist ideal of culture.’<sup>88</sup> This definition allowed him to suggest a continuity between the professional profile of humanists and that of thirteenth-century *dictatores*, while at the same time ascribing their classical inclinations to the

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<sup>88</sup> P. O. Kristeller, ‘Humanism and Scholasticism in the Italian Renaissance’, in id., *Renaissance Thought and Its Sources*, ed. M. Mooney, New York, 1979, pp. 85-105 (92). For a recent critique of Kristeller’s definition, see J. Kraye, ‘Beyond Moral Philosophy: Renaissance Humanism and the Philosophical Canon’, *Rinascimento*, 56, 2016, pp. 3–22.

importation of French twelfth-century classicism. These propositions have been widely debated. I shall, however, try to separate and assess critically both terms in Kristeller's definition – 'professional rhetoricians' and 'classicist ideal of culture' – in order to attempt a broader interpretation of the novelty represented by humanism which can also serve to interpret the linguistic innovations it introduced.

First of all, instead of referring to 'professional rhetoricians', we should try to discover the precise nature and social status of this intellectual profession in a changing context – not considering it in isolation, but rather locating more precisely its role within society at large. From the early decades of the Trecento, the social and political context in which writers moved was gradually transformed, as was their social profile. In a recent study, specifically devoted to social mobility in the early fourteenth century, Maire Vigueur has drawn a brief and convincing picture of the factors which distinguished the socio-economic context of this period from the previous century. First, while in the preceding century improvement of status was chiefly reserved to the productive classes (merchants, artisans, notaries), in the Trecento the main factor in ascending social mobility became public institutions – and chiefly political powers such as the church, the state and the kingdom. Second, while in the thirteenth century ascending mobility had involved entire social or professional groups, in the fourteenth it was generally just a matter of individual achievement. Third, in contrast to ascending mobility, descending mobility involved entire social groups, in particular, artisans and notaries, whose prospects of collective social improvement were dramatically reduced.<sup>89</sup>

These points describe perfectly the situation of the intellectual class, and especially the notaries, from the early decades of the fourteenth century.

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<sup>89</sup> J.-C. Maire Vigueur, 'Conclusioni: mobilità e identità' in *La mobilità sociale nel medioevo*, ed. S. Carocci, Rome, 2010, pp. 577-89 (582-3).

It was probably the spread of literacy – in which, as we have seen, notaries had played a central role in the thirteenth century – which caused its economic value to plummet: education in itself was no longer a secure path to social improvement.<sup>90</sup> At the public level of service in state administration, the progressive consolidation of territorial states and their institutions deprived notaries of the collective political force which had made their fortunes in the thirteenth century. Impressive careers were now reserved to individual figures who rose to prominence – for example, as chancellors – while notaries employed in the administration progressively declined to the level of mere functionaries in the state bureaucracy or were forced to turn to private practice and grammar teaching.<sup>91</sup>

If we now consider the urban aristocracy, we see that the situation was just the reverse. Reacting to the challenge posed by the popular movement, this élite class in many cases welcomed the richest and most powerful sections of the popular classes – such as bankers and great merchants – into its ranks; and it emerged from the confrontation as a new, distinct social group which would later be called the patriciate. Throughout

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<sup>90</sup> F. Menant and É. Anheim, 'Mobilité sociale et instruction: clercs et laïcs du milieu du XIII<sup>e</sup> au milieu du XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *La mobilità sociale*, ed. Carocci, pp. 341–79 (377–8): 'bien des travailleurs qualifiés – tisserands, notaires, maîtres d'école, artisans de toutes sortes, sans compter les petits propriétaires ruraux – qui pouvaient jusqu'aux dernières décennies du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle espérer former une classe moyenne, voire se glisser dans le groupe dominant, basculent du côté des pauvres; non seulement ils ne montent plus l'échelle sociale, mais le déclassement les guette. L'instruction n'est plus ... un gage assuré de mobilité ascendante et d'intégration aux classes moyennes des artisans aisés et des marchands, avec des perspectives d'insertion dans les groupes dominants, comme cela a été le cas pour beaucoup au cours du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle.'

<sup>91</sup> See A. Bartoli Langeli, 'La documentazione degli stati italiani nei secoli XIII–XV', in *Culture et idéologie dans la genèse de l'État moderne*, Rome, 1985, pp. 35–55 (42–4), who quotes the following verses by a notary of the late Trecento: 'Debitamente solivam li notari / actender solamente alle scripture / or li convien procacciar li somari / sì como mixi dentro delle mure / ad casa ad casa, come li fornari / per le taverne e per l'altre bructure; / ma'l bon salario li restora un pocho: / ché spisso l'à maggiore il birro o el coco.'

Italy, the patriciate gradually formed a homogeneous social class, which was substantially indifferent to specific political configurations – whether oligarchic republics or seignorial regimes.<sup>92</sup> We should not assume, however, that the élites were unchanged by the tumultuous events of the previous century. As Najemy has argued, ‘once the question of the legitimacy of power had been posed, it could not be dismissed, forgotten or shoved aside.’<sup>93</sup> Thus, the élites embraced a public image of mature civic leaders, designed to inspire consensus.<sup>94</sup>

The same principle applies to the cultural sphere. Once the popular appeal for education had been made, the élite could no longer reply by upholding the natural beauty of their speech and the delicacy of their manners – as the author of the *Novellino* and Corso Donati had done – or by writing love poetry, as Dante realized when he turned to the philosophical poetry of *Convivio*. The ‘educational turn’ taken by the Italian élites, which slowly but surely converted the offspring of the patriciate from vernacular love poetry to the Latin curriculum of humanist schools, was a long-term response to the question of political and cultural legitimacy which the

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<sup>92</sup> See R. Bordone, ‘I ceti dirigenti urbani dalle origini comunali alla costruzione dei patriziati’, in R. Bordone, G. Castelnuovo and G. M. Varanini, *Le aristocrazie dai signori rurali ai patriziati*, Rome and Bari, 2004, pp. 37-120 (106): ‘Il ceto dirigente che, al tramonto politico delle libere istituzioni, appare essersi affermato in tutte le realtà cittadine ... presenta delle caratteristiche ormai sostanzialmente omogenee, quali che fossero stati gli ambiti sociali di provenienza dei suoi membri ... . Il collante di questo gruppo sociale, originariamente eterogeneo, fu senz’altro rappresentato dalla comune cultura cittadina e dal persistente modello “aristocratico” che la governava.’

<sup>93</sup> J. M. Najemy, ‘The Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics’, in *The Renaissance: Italy and Abroad*, ed. J. J. Martin, London and New York, 2003, pp. 45-65 (60).

<sup>94</sup> As observed by Machiavelli, *Istorie*, III.i: ‘in Firenze, vincendo il popolo, i nobili privi de’ magistrati rimanevano; e volendo raquistargli, era loro necessario, con i governi, con lo animo e con il modo di vivere, simili ai popolani non soltanto essere ma parere.’

popular movement had posed at the end of the thirteenth century.<sup>95</sup> On the other hand, the concrete economic and political advantages achieved by the popular classes had increased the value of immaterial and symbolic capital as a sign of privileged status.<sup>96</sup> As we shall see, the popular and professional ideal of education as a means of economic advancement or access to lucrative professions was rejected in favour of a truly classical programme of education as the disinterested pursuit of the ruling class.<sup>97</sup>

Finally, the consolidation of large territorial states ruled by an increasingly socially and culturally homogeneous élite was accompanied, from the early Trecento, by a period of relative autonomy of Italian politics from foreign powers, which was to last roughly until the late fifteenth century.<sup>98</sup> Although this autonomy was chiefly political, it also had cultural consequences, again in contrast to the previous century, as described by Kenneth Hyde:

It is this sense of continuity both with the past and with other parts of the Catholic world ... which distinguishes the Italians of the age of Dante from the spokesmen of the Florentine enlightenment of the

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<sup>95</sup> See J. M. Najemy, 'Introduction: Italy and the Renaissance', in *Italy in the Age of the Renaissance*, ed. Najemy, pp. 1-17 (9-14).

<sup>96</sup> Maire Vigueur, 'Mobilità e identità', p. 588: 'si ha l'impressione che l'aumento della mobilità nel corso del XIII secolo abbia suscitato una forte moltiplicazione dei segni immateriali della superiorità sociale, come se l'esibizione del loro capitale simbolico da parte dei gruppi eminenti avesse rappresentato il miglior modo di difender il loro status di fronte all'arricchimento e alle aspirazioni dei gruppi emergenti.'

<sup>97</sup> As implied by the irony of Franco Sacchetti, *Il Trecentonovelle*, ed. D. Puccini, Turin, 2004, p. 420 (CLIII): 'Come risiede bene che uno giudice per poter andare rettore si faccia cavaliere! E non dico che la scienza non istea bene al cavaliere, ma scienza reale senza guadagno, senza stare a leggío a dare consigli, senza andare avvocatore a' palagi de' rettori. Ecco bello esercizio cavalleresco! Ma e' ci ha peggio, che li notai si fanno cavalieri, e piú su; e 'l pennaiuolo si converte in aurea coltellesca.'

<sup>98</sup> Najemy, 'Introduction: Italy and the Renaissance', pp. 1-3.

fifteenth century. The humanists stood against continuity, using the metaphor of rebirth to express their desire to draw selectively from the past. Rejecting intellectual cathedrals, they concentrated on what was close at hand, digging deep rather than spreading wide, so that their world revolved around central Italy, and only gradually was their new outlook exported to other parts of Europe.<sup>99</sup>

It is in the light of these three factors – crisis of the professional intellectuals; acculturation of the élites; and construction of an Italian identity – that I propose to interpret the meaning of classicism in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century Italy. Before doing so, however, and in order to make my argument clearer, it is necessary to consider a different interpretation of the origins of humanism. The hypothesis in question was put forward by Robert Black, according to whom: ‘humanism originated as a reaction to the ebb of classicism in thirteenth century Italy ... ; [it] emerged as the ideology of the professional legal class attempting to assert its political and social position in Italian communes hitherto dominated by an aristocratic elite.’<sup>100</sup> Specifically, Black argues that early classicism in Padua should be interpreted as a reaction to vernacular aristocratic culture: ‘Lovato rejected the contemporary vernacular, at least in part, because of its associations with the upper echelons of society’.<sup>101</sup> I agree in some respects with this interpretation: it is true that humanism was a reaction to the anti-classicism of the thirteenth century; and I also concur, as discussed in chapter 4, with the view that vernacular culture was associated with aristocratic circles. I believe, however, that the antagonism of the

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<sup>99</sup> J. K. Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy. The Evolution of the Civil Life 1000-1350*, London, 1973, p. 197.

<sup>100</sup> R. Black, ‘The Origins of Humanism’, in *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, ed. A. Mazzocco, Leiden, 2006, pp. 37-71 (39).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

‘professional legal class’ towards the aristocratic élite should be, at least, nuanced. Moreover, I think that until Petrarch imposed his personal interpretation on the movement, the dialogue between classical and vernacular traditions was much more fluid and less adversarial than Black seems to imply.

The classics did indeed experience an upsurge in the early Trecento – a vogue which in the second part of the century took hold in the schools. Explaining this phenomenon as a symptom of a victorious ‘ideology of the professional legal class’ is, however, reductive, as Black himself recognized elsewhere:

It is difficult not to associate this upsurge of school interest in the classics during the Trecento with pre-humanism and then with Petrarchan humanism itself. Nevertheless, it would be unconvincing to argue that such a wide-ranging and extensive phenomenon as this new diffusion of the Latin authors could owe its origins wholly to a movement like early humanism, still limited to an avant-garde, however influential. What must be true, however, is that an undoubted change of educational fashion from the thirteenth century obviously encouraged, and was encouraged by, leading humanists from Lovato, Mussato and Geri up to Petrarch, Boccaccio and Salutati.<sup>102</sup>

An explanation for the rise of interest in antiquity described by Black should be sought, I believe, in the broader socio-cultural world of early fourteenth-century Italy: a context which not only framed early humanism, but also determined its ultimate success. With this purpose in mind, I shall

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<sup>102</sup> Black, *Humanism and Education*, p. 204.

start by surveying some representative cases which testify to a revival of interest in ancient history and classical authors, which differed from the approach of scholastic thinkers, who, even when they cited classical material, did not attempt to imitate the style, nor did they seek to make classical literature the essential basis of upper class lay secondary. My aim is to show: that there was a remarkable continuity between this revival and vernacular traditions; that this continuity was due precisely to the growing demand of an urban patriciate increasingly desirous of cultural distinction; and that a central ideological element of this phenomenon was its role in the progressive construction of a distinctively Italian national identity based on the classical heritage. I shall then conclude this section by focusing on the specifically linguistic dimension of the revival of classical Latin.

A first, somewhat odd, document plunges us into a different world from the close, competitive space of the central and northern Italian communes under examination so far. The *Historia destructionis Troiae*, composed in Sicily between 1272 and 1287 by Guido delle Colonne, a judge from Messina who may perhaps be identified as Guido Giudice, a vernacular poet active at the court of Frederick II admired by Dante,<sup>103</sup> was dedicated to Matteo della Porta, archbishop of Salerno.<sup>104</sup> Rather than the swan song of a dying culture, however, the *Historia* marks the beginning of a new epoch. Written almost a century before Petrarch's *Griselda*, it is the first important Latin version of a vernacular text to appear in Italy. It is a translation of the *Roman de Troie* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure, which, as we saw in chapter 4, accompanied the crusaders to Constantinople, provided a

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<sup>103</sup> This identification is defended by C. Dionisotti, 'Proposta per Guido Giudice', in *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale*, 7, 1965, pp. 452-66 (454-6).

<sup>104</sup> The only modern edition of the *Historia* remains Guido delle Colonne, *Historia destructionis Troiae*, ed. N. E. Griffin, Cambridge MA, 1936. See also E. Gorra, *Testi inediti di storia troiana preceduti da uno studio della leggenda troiana in Italia*, Turin, 1887, pp. 101-51.



mythical Trojan and Roman heritage for the French monarchy and found an early reception among the Italian nobility. Appropriating a distinctively French cultural tradition in the rigorous – at least in its intentions – historical style of an Italian *dictator*, and in open polemic with the fantastic and erotic elements of his source, Guido delle Colonne produced the first serious work exclusively devoted to classical history written by an Italian in the thirteenth century.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, as Dionisotti suggested, the translation may have been partly intended as a vindication of Guido's Italian heritage in the aftermath of the Sicilian Vespers, challenging the French dominion of Sicily and claiming back its Trojan – and therefore Roman – past for Italy.<sup>106</sup>

The *Historia* enjoyed an immense success and was a true best-seller of the late Middle Ages, and even beyond. One of the first areas in which this huge *fortuna* took place was early Trecento Florence, where it was soon made into a *volgarizzamento*, one of many classical *volgarizzamenti* produced in Florence at this time.<sup>107</sup> Before the radical influence of Petrarch's teaching, the greatest cultural achievement of Trecento Florence had been the production of a series of *volgarizzamenti* of classical authors.<sup>108</sup> To measure the novelty of these works, it will be helpful to compare them with the *volgarizzamenti* produced in the previous century. In the Duecento, Florence had witnessed the activity of three great *volgarizzatori*, all prominent notaries

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<sup>105</sup> Dionisotti, 'Proposta per Guido Giudice', p. 462.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., pp. 453-5. For the historical background, see S. Runciman, *The Sicilian Vespers, a History of the Mediterranean World in the Later Thirteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1958.

<sup>107</sup> The best study to date of Trecento *volgarizzamenti* is M. Zaggia, 'Introduzione' to Ovidio, *Heroides. Volgarizzamento fiorentino trecentesco di Filippo Ceffi*, ed. M. Zaggia, 3 vols, Florence, 2009, I, pp. 3-48, with an updated bibliography. See also A. Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy. Illiterate Literature*, Cambridge, 2011; and the online 'Corpus del Dizionario dei Volgarizzamenti' at <http://divoweb.ovi.cnr.it>.

<sup>108</sup> The watershed determined by Petrarch's irruption on the scene is well proved by the quality of manuscripts: very high in the first half of the century, it drops dramatically afterwards; see *ibid.*, p. 3.

and variously linked to the popular movement: Brunetto Latini, who translated Cicero; Zuccherò Bencivenni, who concentrated on scientific literature; and Bono Giamboni, who, as well as a version of the *Ad Herennium*, translated Orosius, Vegetius and Innocent III's *De miseria humanae conditionis*, which also inspired his best-known original work, the *Libro de' vizi e delle virtuti*. The mixture of moralistic, religious and rhetorical elements in the culture of the three authors, whom Cesare Segre called the 'first triumvirate' of Florentine *volgarizzatori*, clearly bears the signs of the thirteenth-century notarial, communal and popular culture described above.<sup>109</sup>

Trecento *volgarizzamenti* were of a different kind. The first ones produced in this context largely depended on earlier French translations. Around the 1320s, however, the need was felt for direct contact with the classical sources: among poets, the undisputed favourite was Ovid, and, among prose writers, Valerius Maximus and, above all, Livy.<sup>110</sup> The interest in Livy, especially in the First Decade – proceeded along similar lines to the *Historia destructionis Troiae*: it was the history of the origins of Rome and fed into the growing passion for national history which affected Italian culture at this time.<sup>111</sup> The fashion for Ovid, initially limited to the *Ars amatoria* and the *Remedia amoris*, was inspired by the aristocratic fondness for love poetry – thus in continuity with the tradition established by the *dolce stil novo* and

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<sup>109</sup> See C. Segre, 'I volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento', in id., *Lingua, stile e società: Studi sulla storia della prosa italiana*, Milan, 1963, pp. 49-78 (53-6). For Bono Giamboni as a 'popular intellectual', see S. Diacciati and E. Faini, 'Ricerche sulla formazione dei laici a Firenze nel tardo Duecento', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, 652, 2017 pp. 205-38.

<sup>110</sup> Zaggia, 'Introduzione' to Ovid, *Heroides*, pp. 26-8 (on Livy); *ibid.*, pp. 30-2 (on Ovid).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27, n. 94.

perhaps a precursor to the *fortuna* of Ovid among Florentine grammar masters of the early Quattrocento, lamented by Giovanni de' Dominici.<sup>112</sup>

These translations were produced by a handful of notaries – whose considerable cultural preparation is revealed by the commentaries appended to some of their works.<sup>113</sup> All the Trecento *volgarizzamenti*, however, were written at the request of some rich Florentine patrician – prefiguring later humanist patronage. The notaries who made the translations were no longer members of a literate class in the service of the commune, but individual writers working for a powerful patron.<sup>114</sup> Finally, any doubts we might have as to the ideological framework which inspired them are quickly dispelled by the anonymous commentator on Ovid, who was not only eager to stress the élitism of love literature, reserved for the 'nobili' and inaccessible to the populace,<sup>115</sup> but who even provides a classical definition of the liberal arts as

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<sup>112</sup> Giovanni Dominici, *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, ed. D. Salvi, Florence, 1860, p. 134: 'Ora sì crescono i moderni figliuoli, e così invecchia l'apostatrice natura nel grembo degl'infedeli, nel mezzo degli atti disonesti sollicitanti la ancora impotente natura al peccato, e insegnando tutti i vituperosi mali si possono pensare, nello studio d'Ovidio maggiore, delle pistole, *De arte amandi*, e più meretriciosi suoi libri e carnali scritture.' On this passage, see Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 247-52.

<sup>113</sup> Zaggia, 'Introduzione' to Ovid, *Heroides*, pp. 32-4. See also G. Vaccaro, 'Questo libretto che t'ho volgarizzato e chiosato. Volgarizzamenti tra Due e Trecento', in *Traduttori come mediatori culturali*, ed. S. Portelli et al., Bologna, 2016, pp. 11-19.

<sup>114</sup> See G. Folena, 'Introduzione' to *La Istoria di Eneas vulgarizata per Angilu di Capua*, Palermo, 1956, p. xxix. See also F. Bruni, 'Figure della committenza e del rapporto autori-pubblico: aspetti della comunicazione nel basso Medio Evo', in *Patronage and Public in the Trecento*, ed. V. Moleta, Florence, 1986, pp. 105-24 (116-18).

<sup>115</sup> *I volgarizzamenti trecenteschi dell'Ars amandi e dei Remedia amoris*, ed. V. Lippi Bigazzi, 2 vols, Florence, 1987, II, p. 842: 'E vedi bene che 'l poeta non favella a' fabri, né a' calzolai, non ad artefici, però che non cadea nell'animo suo che il sartore, che il die tutto e le tre parte della notte consuma per ricevere il pane la domenica, si vestisse la risparmiata roba e andasse a vagheggiare. Elli favella alli nobili e "amor ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende" [Dante, *Inferno*, V.100]. Vergogninsi dunque d'inamorare zaccheraiuoli, bingonciai e 'l marama vituperoso; lascino bagnare l'amorose saette nel sange de' nobili, ne' cui cuori disia sedere amore ... '

the leisure endeavour of the ruling class.<sup>116</sup> Characteristically, he disparagingly dismisses the timid attempts at cultural emancipation on the part of artisans, as well as the petit bourgeois world of the lucrative sciences. Even in this case, we encounter a cultural attitude which has its precedent in Dante's *Convivio* and which would be continued by Petrarch and Boccaccio, finally reaching its maturity in the attitude of humanists towards the scholastic world of the universities.

My third example comes from that world. As was pointed out above, the classical revival I have been describing also had an impact on the curriculum of schools, with the lion's share of evidence coming from the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>117</sup> From earlier in the Trecento, there is a document, which is often cited, testifying to communal appointment, in 1321, of Giovanni del Virgilio, master of grammar and rhetoric at the Bolognese *Studium*, to deliver a series of lectures on Virgil, Statius, Lucan and Ovid.<sup>118</sup> It is, however, a curious and isolated document: the contract, lasting two years, was not renewed; and nothing of this sort appeared again for several decades. Furthermore, it should be noted that there is no mention of the Bolognese *Studium's* direct involvement in the appointment: as far as

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 748: 'Cioè: gramatica, dialetica, retorica, arismetica, geometria, musica e astronomia. E sono chiamate liberali ... però che i figliuoli de' nobili e liberi uomini solamente le imparavano, overo, e meglio, però ch'elle danno cognoscimento delle virtudi, le quali fanno l'uomo libero e exento da ogni vizio, la cui servitudine è mortale ... .'

<sup>117</sup> See Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 200-2.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted by G. Albin, *La corrispondenza poetica di Dante e Giovanni del Virgilio e l'ecloga di Giovanni al Mussato*, ed. G. B. Pighi, Bologna, 1965, p. 17, n. 6: 'in civitate Bononie presentialiter non sint alliqui doctores versificaturam poesim et magnos auctores videlicet Virgillum Stacium Lucchanum et Ovidium maiorem excepto magistro Iohanne quod magistri Antonii qui dicitur de Virgillio ... et instanter supplicatum sit per magistros repetitores et scholares Bononie commorantes ...; cogatur et compellatur ad poesim verxificaturam et dictos auctores legendos ... .'

can be determined from the surviving documentation, Giovanni del Virgilio was hired by the commune.<sup>119</sup>

Del Virgilio was not just a teacher, but also a poet. He is famous for his correspondence with Dante, which marks the rebirth of classical bucolic poetry in medieval Europe, which remained an important classicizing genre throughout the Trecento.<sup>120</sup> Equally famous – and also found in this correspondence – is his objection to Dante’s choice of the vernacular for the *Commedia*: a polemic which is often considered the beginning of the antagonism of humanists towards vernacular literature, but which is also remarkable because of the respect that a university teacher such as Del Virgilio accords to the *Commedia* – and to Dante.<sup>121</sup> Del Virgilio’s *Diaffonus*, a very modest poetic achievement, belongs to the vogue for Ovidian love poetry, which, as we have seen, was a notable feature of Florentine vernacular culture in the same years.<sup>122</sup>

Although Del Virgilio’s appointment is justly considered a testimony of the resurgence of Italian interest in classical authors, and an important precedent for the transformation of the humble grammar teacher, or *grammaticus*, into a specialized teacher of the classics in secondary school, or *auctorista*, which took place later in the century, not much attention is

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<sup>119</sup> Giovanni’s work in the *Studium* as a teacher of *dictamen* was largely traditional; see P. O. Kristeller, ‘Un’*Ars dictaminis* di Giovanni del Virgilio’, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 4, 1961, pp. 181-200. His grammar treatises, equally traditional but bearing some traces of the influence of modistic grammar (and so definitely non-classical), have been studied by G. C. Alessio, ‘I trattati grammaticali di Giovanni del Virgilio’, *Italia medioevale e umanistica*, 24, 1981, pp. 159-212.

<sup>120</sup> See E. Bartoli, ‘Le *poetrie* e la bucolica medievale latina’, in *Le poëtriae del medioevo latino. Modelli, fortuna, commenti*, ed. G. C. Alessio et al., Venice, 2018, pp. 15-44.

<sup>121</sup> See Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 214-24.

<sup>122</sup> E. Carrara, ‘Il *Diaffonus* di Giovanni del Virgilio’, *Atti e memorie della Reale Deputazione di Storia Patria per le Province di Romagna*, ser. 4, 15, 1925, pp. 1-50.

usually paid to the content of his teaching.<sup>123</sup> Only two of his lectures, both on Ovid, have survived:<sup>124</sup> the *Allegorie*, an allegorical interpretation of the *Metamorphoses* largely dependent on Arnoulf of Orléans; and the *Expositiones*, a much more interesting and innovative piece.<sup>125</sup> The title *Expositiones* and the work's elaborate *accessus* seem to indicate that it is a serious scholarly work. The content, however, reveals it to be a humorous and trivializing retelling of the *Metamorphoses*: paying little attention to the letter of the text, Giovanni del Virgilio constantly amplifies passages of the original, often resorting to direct speech and always employing a very simplified, we might say oral, Latin style, in one case even translating an Ovidian episode into the vernacular.<sup>126</sup> As the first editor of the *Expositiones* observed, the work paradoxically configures itself as a 'Latin *volgarizzamento*' of Ovid, directly indebted to the French *Ovide moralisée*.<sup>127</sup> From this one-off experiment, we can deduce: firstly, the absence, at this stage, of a well-defined Italian tradition of classical scholarship;<sup>128</sup> secondly, the persistent role, well into the fourteenth century, of French vernacular culture as the mediator between Italian culture and antiquity; and, thirdly, the presence, in Bologna, of a readership – certainly larger than the mass of

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<sup>123</sup> On the emergence of the *auctorista* in the Trecento, see Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 30-1. See also G. Billanovich, 'Auctorista, humanista, orator', *Rivista di Cultura Classica e Medioevale*, 7, 1965, pp. 143-63.

<sup>124</sup> V. De Angelis, 'Un percorso esemplare della lezione sui classici nel Trecento: Giovanni del Virgilio e l'*Achilleide* di Stazio', in *I classici e l'università umanistica*, ed. L. Gargan, Messina, 2006, pp. 225-60, attributes to Giovanni an anonymous commentary on Statius, known as *Casualis eventus*.

<sup>125</sup> The commentary has been partly edited by F. Ghisalberti, 'Giovanni del Virgilio espositore delle *Metamorfosi*', *Giornale dantesco*, 34, 1931, pp. 3-110.

<sup>126</sup> De Angelis, 'Un percorso esemplare', pp. 234-5.

<sup>127</sup> See Ghisalberti, 'Giovanni del Virgilio espositore delle *Metamorfosi*', p. 29, who saw in the *Expositiones* 'un documento di quella connessione che esistette tra lo svolgimento della letteratura medievale in lingua latina e quella delle lingue volgari'.

<sup>128</sup> We should not forget that the first commentary on a classical author produced in Italy in the thirteenth century was Brunetto Latini's *Rettorica*.

university students – fascinated by the classical world, but at the same time much more familiar with French vernacular material.<sup>129</sup>

While Giovanni del Virgilio contributed in this somewhat odd manner to the evolution of the *grammaticus* into the *auctorista*, the beginnings of the linguistic revival of classical Latin are located, not in Bologna, but in Padua. Black noted that both Lovato and Mussato, the two main figures of this literary movement, were notaries, and he associated their supposed anti-aristocratic and anti-vernacular ideology with this background.<sup>130</sup> A closer look at their biographies, however, reveals a slightly different picture. We are not well informed about Lovato's personal opinions; however, we do know that he had an impressive career: he may have started as a notary, but he became a judge, served several times as a *podestà* and was later accorded the honour of a knighthood, ending his life as a prominent member of the commune's ruling class.<sup>131</sup> Mussato, like Lovato, made an outstanding career for himself, no doubt thanks to his oratorical talents, but also to the patronage of the magnate clan of the Lemici.<sup>132</sup> He had nothing but contempt for guildsmen; and in his autobiography he recalled how he had always sought to imitate the aristocratic life-style.<sup>133</sup> Rather than the antagonistic

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<sup>129</sup> De Angelis, 'Un percorso esemplare', p. 235: 'È un testo che presenta quindi le caratteristiche proprie dei volgarizzamenti, che si rivolgono a un pubblico ben diverso da quello scolastico, e che mantiene la lingua di cultura propria del commento all'*auctor*, in una contaminazione di linguaggi di estrema arditezza.'

<sup>130</sup> Black, 'Origins of Humanism', p. 54.

<sup>131</sup> See J. K. Hyde, *Padua in the Age of Dante*, Manchester and New York, 1966, pp. 134 and 159-61.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>133</sup> On guildsmen, see Mussato's *De Gestis*, quoted *ibid.*, p. 260, n. 1: 'Ad tribunos quidem, quos Gastaldiones vocitabant, omnia publica, privataque iudicia transtulere, et hi omnes opifices erant et qui sordidis commerciis vitabundi volutabantur. Hi forenses, publicasque causas sedentes, applaudibus hortantibusque Gibolengorum demagogis audiebant, iudicioque glorientes ad nutum finiebant.' On his attachment to the nobility, *ibid.*, p. 261, n. 2: 'Dilixi proceres et eis solertior haesi / His propior multa sedulitate fui. / Utque erat urbanus tanto mihi carior usus / Regnat in his mixta nobilitate vigor?'

attitude Black attributes to them, these ex-notaries reveal an ambiguous mixture of admiration, envy and dependency towards the upper echelons of society, to whom they ultimately owed their personal fortunes. Towards their former peers, however, they affected a markedly disdainful superiority, which, as we shall see, was a central factor in their language behaviour.

Witt attributed the origins of classicism in Padua to the supposed revival enjoyed by classical studies in grammar schools in the thirteenth century, a revival which, according to him, was presided over by notaries.<sup>134</sup> There are at least two compelling arguments against this hypothesis. First, it is based on the putative scholarly collaboration between the Paduan circle and the local *Studium*, which is unproven,<sup>135</sup> and on the fact that notaries were often grammar school teachers, which is generally true, but which does not seem to have been the case for those Paduan notaries, like Lovato and Mussato, whom Witt is discussing. Second, and most important, the hypothesis is founded on the assumption that grammar school teaching in the thirteenth century experienced a classical revival; but, as Black's surveys have demonstrated, under the pressure of both French 'logical' anti-classicism and Italian pragmatic-economical necessities, the classical *auctores* had almost completely disappeared from thirteenth-century grammar schools.<sup>136</sup> It seems, therefore, that the origins of Paduan humanism are not to be found in school curricula.

If this poetic dawn cannot be traced to grammar schools, how, then, do we explain it? Witt himself observed the similarity between the behaviour of the group headed by Lovato and that of contemporary

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<sup>134</sup> Witt, *In the Footseps of the Ancients*, pp. 88-95; and id., 'Kristeller's Humanists as the Heirs of Medieval Dictatores', in *Interpretations of Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Mazzocco, pp. 21-35.

<sup>135</sup> See Hyde, *Padua in the Age of Dante*, p. 294.

<sup>136</sup> See Black, 'Origins of Humanism', p. 46.



vernacular poets: a combination of private poetic effusion of feelings, group exclusiveness and elegant linguistic elaboration.<sup>137</sup> In addition to these formal parallels, there are also more explicit contacts: a famous passage in which Lovato describes a street *jongleur* is frequently cited as proof of his disdain for vernacular literature – in fact, as noted by Folena, quite the opposite is true: Lovato despised the bad French and the delivery of the *jongleur*, not the chivalric matter itself.<sup>138</sup> And this impression is confirmed by what was probably Lovato's most ambitious poem, of which only a few verses survive, but which we know was dedicated to the story of Tristan and Isolde.<sup>139</sup> Lovato comes across as a middle-aged judge pretending to be a young aristocrat.<sup>140</sup> Together with Guido delle Colonne's *Historia* and Giovanni del Virgilio's *Expositiones*, Lovato's poetic experiments allow us to see a different picture of early Trecento cultural life in Italy, which reveals a revival of antiquity – based on the appropriation of French culture – coloured by an aristocratic ethos which was gradually spreading even among the most prominent members of the literate classes.

The work of Mussato seems to follow a different trajectory. Invested with official duties by the Paduan commune, he produced works which are in many respects in continuity with the thirteenth-century notarial tradition, starting with the contemporary subject-matter. His main innovation involved instead the linguistic form: he applied the intimate classicizing style re-invented by Lovato to tragedy, history and epic. Mussato was

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<sup>137</sup> Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, pp. 100-3; and note esp. p. 103: 'Lovato's rivalry with the vernacular forced him to develop a poetic form alien to the narrow Latin verse tradition of northern Italy.'

<sup>138</sup> Folena, 'Letteratura cavalleresca e protoumanesimo', in Id., *Culture e lingue nel Veneto*, pp. 377-94 (378-9).

<sup>139</sup> For a thorough discussion of the fragment, preserved by Boccaccio, see D. Delcorno Branca, 'Tristano, Lovato e Boccaccio', *Lettere Italiane*, 42, 1990, pp. 51-65.

<sup>140</sup> Boccaccio clearly appreciated the irony of the situation, finding it rather amusing that a judge of mature years was trying his hand at writing an Arthurian love story; see *ibid.*, pp. 64-5.

crowned poet and historian by the Paduan College of the Arts in 1315, for his *Ecerinis* and his *De gestis Henrici VII Cesaris* (also known as the *Historia Augusta*) – a Senecan tragedy and a Livian history.<sup>141</sup> His most explicit statements on language use appear, however, in the preface to a later work, the *De obsidione domini Canis Grandis de Verona ante civitate Paduana*, composed in 1321. In this preface, Mussato addresses the members of the Palatine Society of Notaries, who had commissioned the work. The notaries had made this request – according to Mussato – because his prose account of the war of Padua against Cangrande della Scala in *De gestis* was too difficult for them to understand. They, therefore, suggested to him that he should write an easier metrical poem, like the *Disticha Catonis*, or even a vernacular epic, like those sung in the streets by *jongleurs*. Mussato concluded the preface by agreeing to their request: ‘crude with the crude, I will comply in a popular way as the matter demands, using the heroic meter as well as I can’.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, p. 130.

<sup>142</sup> A. Mussato, *De obsidione domini Canis Grandis de Verona ante civitate Paduana*, ed. G. M. Gianola, Padua, 1999, pp. 3-9: ‘Percontamini me, frequens importunius quam oportunius instans, notariorum Palatina Societas, iam seposita in litteras exitia nostre urbis, que in illam humanisque favoribus per hec tempora intulit Canis Grandis que et post versis fatis versa sunt in contrariis successibus in auctorem, ad vestrum civiumque solacium in quempiam metrico transferre concentum, hoc postulacioni vestre subicientes, ut et illud, quodcumque sit, metrum non altum non tragedum sed molle et vulgi intellectione propinquum sonet eloquium, quo altus edoctis nostra stilo eminentiore deserviret istoria essetque metricum hoc demissum sub camena leniore notariis et quibusque clericulis blandimentum ... . Illud quoque Catonis, qui de moribus censuit, in exemplum adducitis quod Lucio Aneo Senece reputatur opusculum; quod quia plano gramate vulgari idiomati fere similium sanctiores sententia ediderit suaves popularium auribus inculcavit applausus. Et solere etiam, inquitis, amplissima regum ducumque gesta, quo se vulgi intelligentiis conferant, pedum sillabarumque mensuris variis linguis in vulgare traduci sermones et in theatri et pulpitis cantilenarum modulatione proferri. Nichil ergo recusandum disponens quod vestra deposcat amica suasio, fratribus meis annuens, qua licet et sciero, heroico usus metro exigente materia, populariter morem geram rudis cum rudibus.’ The translation is by Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, p. 132

The text seems quite plain, but on second glance it presents some difficulties. First of all, the claim that prose was more difficult to understand than verse is unusual. Witt explains it in the light of his theory about the grammatical preparation of notaries, whose school curriculum, he argues, familiarized them with the classical poets but not with the classicizing prose of Mussato. In fact, as I discussed above, the evidence does not support the grammatical curriculum on which Witt based his assumptions: notaries did not read Virgil any more than they read Livy; what they read, as Mussato confirms, is the *Disticha Catonis* along with similar works. So, it seems unlikely that they would have found the heroic metre of *De obsidione* any easier to comprehend than the Livian prose of *De gestis*.<sup>143</sup> Furthermore, Gianola, the most recent editor of *De obsidione*, remarks that, as far as the style is concerned, it does not seem that this work can be considered inferior to *De gestis*.<sup>144</sup> She therefore suggests that the real comparison should be sought instead in the *Ecerinis*, Mussato's Senecan tragedy, the difficulty of which depended on its novel metrical choices and dramatization.<sup>145</sup>

Perhaps so. Nevertheless, I would like to stress two points which I believe have a certain bearing on the interpretation of this passage. First, we need to remember that it is Mussato who is speaking, not the notaries; and

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<sup>143</sup> Indeed, we have proof that in the same years, not only classical prose, but even poetry was a formidable obstacle for readers. For example, Benzo d'Alessandria described in these terms the style of Statius: M. Petoletti, *Il Chronicon di Benzo d'Alessandria e i classici latini all'inizio del XIV secolo. Edizione critica del libro XXIV: 'De vita et moribus philosophorum'*, Milan, 2000, p. 109: 'Et quid stilus eiusdem auctoris et altus et succintus est et totus rethoricus ac interdum poeticus et pene a modernis vetustate cognitus, usus sum commentatorum adminiculo; visus sum, quantum potui, antiqua et peregrina ac poetica et a modernis inusitata vocabula ad illa reducere que novit presentium etas.'

<sup>144</sup> See Gianola, 'Introduzione' to Mussato, *De obsidione*, pp. lii-liii and clxxxviii. Witt, *In the Footsteps*, p. 134, eventually admits: 'Even so, Mussato's public would perhaps not have understood much of his *De obsidione* ... the preface ... however, conveyed the author's conviction that this poem was to be eventually accessible to his audience.'

<sup>145</sup> Gianola, 'Introduzione' to Mussato, *De obsidione*, p. lvii-lviii.

second, neither Witt nor Gianola give due weight to Mussato's attitude towards the notaries who commissioned the work, which is quite unflattering. He starts by saying that they kept importuning him ('percontamini me, frequens importunius quam oportunius instans'); he says that he has lowered the stylistic level as a favour to notaries and humble clerics ('essetque metricum hoc demissum sub camena leniore notariis et quibusque clericulis blandimentum'); he compares them to the populace who gathers on street corners to listen to *jongleurs* ('in vulgare traduci sermones et in theatri et pulpitis cantilenarum modulatione proferri'); and finally, pretending to comply with their requests by lowering himself to their level ('rudis cum rudibus'), he writes in an heroic verse which they would have found as unusual and as difficult as his Livian prose – calling it, no doubt ironically, a popular style ('heroico usus metro exigente materia, populariter morem geram').

The key point, in my view, is that Mussato did not intend to say that *De obsidione* was easier to understand than the *Historia Augusta* – as we have seen, it probably was not – but rather to stress, with the mocking arrogance which would become a defining feature of humanism, that his prose was so good, so new and so demanding that notaries could not understand it – which, in turn, gave him the opportunity to demonstrate his skill in composing heroic verse. He was challenging the entire notarial culture as it had developed in the previous century – epitomized here by the *Disticha Catonis*, a basic text for Latin beginners, which, as we have seen, just a few years before, the popular leader Guglielmo Ventura was still recommending to his sons as fundamental reading. Mussato's criticism of popular notarial culture was not so dissimilar from Boncompagno's disparagement of uneducated communal orators. The context, however, had changed dramatically. Boncompagno – *dictator* and university teacher – was defending his own status and that of his peers, while Mussato singled

himself out against the members of his own class. Boncompagno's attack was aimed at the level of education of the public orators, not at their social class, while Mussato denigrated notarial culture as popular. Boncompagno had attacked the unschooled, while Mussato targeted a certain kind of schooling: the spread of education had raised the bar of Latin competence one had to display in order to outdo one's contemporaries. Mussato, for the first time, set the bar at a specific height: classical Latinity, which he promoted as an objective standard for measuring linguistic ability. By subjecting the entire linguistic space to this standard, and suggesting that classical Latin was a sign of social distinction, he was opening the way for the hierarchization of language competence which became the central achievement of Italian humanism.

The classicizing revolution initiated by the Paduan circle was carried forward by Petrarch. In *Familiars*, XIII.5, he tells his Florentine friend Francesco Nelli about the only time he failed a language test – because he was too good. Unsuspectingly, so he claims, summoned to the detested Avignon, Petrarch had been tricked into accepting the position of apostolic secretary; he was accordingly asked to submit a sample of his writing in a style suitable for the papal curia. This request offered him the opportunity to eschew the unwanted position:

What I had written was considered insufficiently intelligible for the most part, although it was really very clear; by some, it was viewed as Greek or some barbaric tongue. Imagine the kind of men in charge of the highest matters!

[quod dictaveram magne parti non satis intelligibile, cum tamen esset apertissimum, quibusdam vero grecum seu mage barbaricum visum est: en quibus ingeniis rerum summa committitur!]<sup>146</sup>

Petrarch continues, saying that we know after Cicero that there are three rhetorical styles:

Any style beneath these three certainly does not reach any level of artistic eloquence, but is rather a simple effusion of plebeian or rustic or servile words; although it may have grown over a thousand years through continuous usage, it still will never gain through the passage of time the dignity that it lacks by nature ... . Certainly what they order me to use, what they themselves call style, is not style.

[quicquid infra est, iam profecto nullum orationis ingenue gradum tenet sed verborum potius plebeia quedam et agrestis et servilis effusio est, et quanquam mille annorum observatione continua involverit, dignitatem tamen, quam naturaliter non habet, ex tempore non habebit ... certe quo me uti iubent et quem ipsi stilum nominant, non est stilus.]<sup>147</sup>

As with Mussato, the notions of linguistic competence and intelligibility enter the field as signs of cultural dominance: with the difference that Petrarch was not in front of a group of notaries, but in the presence of a pope. Petrarch, however, was not just aiming higher, but also deeper: he was not merely ridiculing an educational system or reproaching

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<sup>146</sup> Petrarch, *Familiars*, XIII.5.16; and *Letters on Familiar Matters*, transl. Bernardo, II, p. 190.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, XIII.5.17; transl. Bernardo, II, p. 190.

the ignorance of his opponents. The Latin of papal *dictatores* was programmatically excluded from the realm of what could even be called Latin. Moreover, imitation of classical Latin found a place within a much broader conception of culture and gave Petrarch a clear perception of the historical meaning of the new vision he was setting out:<sup>148</sup> not just the *Disticha Catonis*, but an entire millennium came under his condemnation.

The impact of Petrarch's Latin reform and of his ideas on imitation have been thoroughly studied, so there is no need to discuss these issues here.<sup>149</sup> Instead, I shall limit myself to highlighting some linguistic assumptions which constituted the core of his legacy to the language thought of later humanism. At the centre of Petrarch's broad conception of culture and of his heightened perception of historical change was a language. Like Dante before him, he was searching for an illustrious Italian language; but unlike Dante, he found it in Latin. Thus he became the first to declare that Latin, which so far had been the diglossic language of Christianity and the pragmatic language of literate professionals, a totem or a tool, was the national language of Italians.<sup>150</sup> I have said above that, by opposing Latin to the vernacular, Dante was contrasting a functional approach to language with a symbolic and essentialist one. Petrarch, by

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<sup>148</sup> For Petrarch's ideas on language change, see Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, pp. 65-8.

<sup>149</sup> Two classic studies are G. Martellotti, 'Latinità del Petrarca', in *Studi petrarcheschi*, 7, 1961, pp. 219-30; and S. Rizzo, 'Il latino del Petrarca nelle Familiari', in *The Uses of Greek and Latin: Historical Essays*, ed. A. C. Dionisotti et al., London, 1988, pp. 41-56. See also S. Rizzo, 'Il latino del Petrarca e il latino dell'umanesimo', *Quaderni petrarcheschi*, 9-10, 1992-3, pp. 349-65. For Petrarch's ideas on imitation, see M. L. McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Italy from Dante to Bembo*, Oxford, 1995, pp. 22-48.

<sup>150</sup> Petrarch, *Seniles*, IX, 1.35-6: 'Ius utrumque quo utimur itali condidere, contumque itali exposuere ... . Oratores et poete extra Italiam non querantur, de latinis loquor, vel hinc orti omnes vel hic docti. Sed quid ago? aut quid rem certissimam verbis traho? Radix artium nostrarum et omnis scientie fundamentum, latine hic reperte sunt litere, et latinus sermo, et latinitatis nomen quo ipsi gallici gloriantur.'

stressing the role of Latin as a marker of his Italian identity, suggested that the functions Dante imagined for the illustrious vernacular could be better performed by Latin itself. This innovative position, however, compelled him to dispose of the languages which so far had been considered markers of (proto-) national identities: the vernaculars.

He did this by imposing a firm hierarchical pattern on language organization. First, he prescribed a strict compartmentalization of Latin and vernacular uses, in which the vernacular was classified solely as the language of lyric – a lyric limited to erotic themes and continually described as a youthful pursuit, unworthy of a mature man.<sup>151</sup> Second, he advanced the tentative suggestion that the line which separated Latin and the vernaculars could be interpreted in terms of social prestige. A famous letter to Boccaccio in the *Familiare*s provides a characteristic description of the readers of the *Commedia*:

Among your praises you said that [Dante] could have made use of another style, if he had wanted to; indeed, I believe, and I have a high opinion of his talent, that he could do whatever he set his mind to, and it is of course clear what he did dedicate himself to [i.e., vernacular poetry]. Suppose that he had turned to something else in which he enjoyed success – what then? Why should this have been a source of envy rather than satisfaction? Or how can someone [i.e., Petrarch himself] who does not envy Virgil envy anyone else, unless perhaps I envied him the applause and raucous acclaim of the fullers or tavern keepers or woolworkers who offend the ones whom they wish to praise, whom I, like Virgil and Homer, delight in doing without?

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<sup>151</sup> See Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia*, p. 142.



[Nam quod inter laudes dixisti, potuisse illum si voluisset alio stilo uti, credo edepol – magna enim michi de ingenio eius opinio est – potuisse eum omnia quibus intendisse; nunc quibus intenderit, palam est. Et isto iterum: intenderit, potuerit, impleverit; quid tamen ideo? que ve inde michi invidie et non potius gaudii materia? aut cui tandem invideat qui Virgilio non invidet, nisi forte sibi fullonum et cauponum et lanistarum ceterorum ve, qui quos volunt laudare vituperant, plausum et raucum murmur invideam, quibus cum ipso Virgilio cumque Homero carere me gratulor?]<sup>152</sup>

The false humility is not very subtly disguised, and the attack on Dante and vernacular literature is quite open. The letter soon became a classic of Dante criticism in the fourteenth century: already Benvenuto da Imola, in his commentary on the *Commedia*, quoted it in relation to the issue of the vernacular.<sup>153</sup> Dionisotti observed that, if it was true that the *Commedia* was the book of fullers, tavern keepers and woolworkers, there would have been

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<sup>152</sup> Petrarch, *Familiars*, XXI.15.22; and *Letters on Familiar Matters*, transl. Bernardo, II, p. 2016.

<sup>153</sup> Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, I, p. 79 (ad *Inferno* II.10): 'Alii tamen et multi comuniter dicunt, quod auctor cognovit stilum suum literalem non attingere a tam arduum thema; quod et ego crederem, nisi me moveret auctoritas novissimi poetae Petrarchae, qui loquens de Dante scribit ad venerabilem praeceptorem meum Boccacium de Certaldo: "Magna mihi de ingenio ejus oppinio est, potuisse eum omnia, quibus intendisset."' Carlo Paolazzi, 'Petrarca, Boccaccio e il Trattatello in laude di Dante', *Studi danteschi*, 55, 1983, pp. 165-249 (242-3), argues that it was Boccaccio himself who provided Benvenuto with Petrarch's letter. In any case, it seems that Benvenuto did not understand, or refused to understand, or did not think it appropriate to communicate to his students how back-handed this praise of Dante was. See S. A. Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge, 2005, p. 253, n. 76; and L. C. Rossi, 'Presenze di Petrarca in commenti danteschi fra Tre e Quattrocento', *Aevum*, 70, 1996, pp. 441-76.

no need to criticize it.<sup>154</sup> Petrarch, however, insinuated the idea that vernacular literature – which so far, especially in Florence, had been the highest form of language and a marker of social prestige – could be appropriated by the lower classes.<sup>155</sup> Implicitly, he even suggested to patricians a way out of the impasse: if the Latin currently taught in schools was, as Dante already thought, irredeemably compromised by its association with notaries, lawyers and doctors, then classical Latin could be employed as an upper class sociolect. In the end, he was offering them the honour of being Romans and Italians, and at the same time telling them how to distinguish themselves from the popular masses. In due course, they accepted the challenge.

Yet in the late fourteenth century, this was still not the case. As both Coluccio Salutati and Benvenuto da Imola observed with disappointment, not only did the upper classes not know much Latin, but they often wasted their time learning French.<sup>156</sup> In the early years of Quattrocento, however, Florentine patricians started hiring humanist teachers for the education of their sons.<sup>157</sup> The Venetian patriciate followed suit.<sup>158</sup> By 1430, thanks to the activity of pioneers such as Gasparino Barzizza, Guarino Veronese and

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<sup>154</sup> C. Dionisotti, 'Dante nel Quattrocento', in id., *Scritti di storia della letteratura italiana, II, 1963-1971*, Rome, 2009, pp. 173-212 (173-4).

<sup>155</sup> For the effects that Petrarch's ideas had on Boccaccio and on later generations of Florentines, see M. McLaughlin, 'Latin and Vernacular from Dante to the Age of Lorenzo (1321-c.1500)', in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, ed. Minnis, pp. 612-25 (613-16).

<sup>156</sup> Salutati, *Epistolario*, I, p. 77: 'nimis etate nostra eloquentie studia negliguntur et iam reges et principes non latine, sed gallice vel suis vulgaribus scribunt.' Benvenuto da Imola, *Comentum*, p. 409 (ad *Inferno*, xxix.121.3): 'Unde multum miror, et indignor animo, quando video italicos et praecipue nobiles, qui conantur imitari vestigia eorum [i.e., the French], et discunt linguam gallicam, asserentes quod nulla est pulcrrior lingua gallica: quod nescio videre; nam lingua gallica est bastarda linguae latinae, sicut experientia docet.'

<sup>157</sup> L. Martines, *The Social World of the Florentine Humanists, 1390-1460*, London, 1963, pp. 313-36.

<sup>158</sup> M. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, Princeton, 1986, p. 216.

Vittorino da Feltre, a new programme of humanist studies, based in the novel institution of the boarding school, became the central educational structure of Italian pre-university education, especially designed for patrician youth.<sup>159</sup> As Grendler remarked: ‘when in 1435 Guarino’s pupil Leonello d’Este married Vittorino’s student Margherita Gonzaga, humanists must have felt that their efforts to win over the ruling class to the *studia humanitatis* had been crowned with success’.<sup>160</sup>

In the nineteenth century, Thomas Gaisford, Dean of Christ Church and Professor of Greek at Oxford, reportedly said that a classical education ‘enables us to look down with contempt on those who have not shared its advantages’.<sup>161</sup> It would not be unjust to say that a large part of humanist education – which played a crucial part in reviving and spreading this model in the following centuries – was also intended to achieve this aim. The conviction that there was something intrinsically moral in studying grammar freed grammar teachers from having to impart any moral doctrines in the classroom.<sup>162</sup> As for rhetoric, if Marc Fumaroli was right to describe the period we are treating as an ‘Age of Eloquence’,<sup>163</sup> it should be pointed out that, paradoxically, rhetoric acquired that status in a society which was progressively reducing its practical application, especially to politics: the era of Brunetto Latini’s communal councils was long gone. Humanist education had to be uneconomic – long and difficult to attain, and not immediately useful – and, in a material and practical sense, unproductive.

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<sup>159</sup> P. F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1300-1600*, London and Baltimore, 1989, pp. 125-31.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>161</sup> Quoted by P. Green, *Classical Bearings: Interpreting Ancient History and Culture*, London, 1998, p. 19.

<sup>162</sup> See Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>163</sup> M. Fumaroli, *L’Age de l’éloquence : rhétorique et “res literaria”, de la Renaissance au seuil de l’époque classique*, Geneva, 1980.

Yet, this does not mean that it was dysfunctional. Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argued that humanist education, especially when compared to the scholastic medieval tradition, had the ultimate result of producing uncritical and complacent individuals.<sup>164</sup> This interpretation, however, misses two fundamental points. First, as observed by Black, it is incorrect to compare scholastic education, which was superior training reserved for universities, with humanist education, which remained largely confined to the pre-university level.<sup>165</sup> Second, until the end of fourteenth century, pre-university Latin education was restricted to those who wanted to exercise an intellectual profession – lawyers, physicians, notaries and clerics. The ruling classes, generally speaking, did not go to school: the alternative was not, as Grafton and Jardine portrayed it, between Plato and Isocrates, but instead between Isocrates and Achilles. In the early fifteenth century, the Italian élite chose Isocrates. The invention of a non-vocational pedagogical system for the leisure classes was a true innovation of early Quattrocento humanism and its most essential act of continuity with the classical tradition. By temporarily separating upper echelon pupils from their families, which up to then had provided their basic (informal) education, the humanist boarding school favoured a sense of class consciousness. By redefining the values of this class in a formal educational context, it clarified their relationship to the rest of society: it laid emphasis on their duty as rulers and gave them a sense of purpose and an historical mission.<sup>166</sup> A future ruler did not merely inherit his role: he also had to learn and to justify it.<sup>167</sup> The

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<sup>164</sup> A. Grafton and L. Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities*, London, 1986, pp. 2-3 and 23-5.

<sup>165</sup> Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 22-6.

<sup>166</sup> Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 131-2.

<sup>167</sup> As openly stated by Pietro Paolo Vergerio, *De ingenuis moribus*, in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. and transl. by C. W. Kallendorf, Cambridge MA and London, 2002, p. 4: 'Verum cum omnes homines deceat ... eos esse qui recte erudire suos liberos studeant et filios deinde tales qui parentibus bonis digni videri possint,

aristocracy, we might say, matured – it is probably not by accident that the Italian cultural avant-garde, in both Latin and vernacular, consistently paid little or no attention to poetry from Petrarch's death (1374) until the 1460s, so much so that Benedetto Croce famously christened this period a 'century without poetry':<sup>168</sup> the *donzelli* had become students. As we shall see, all these features had a bearing on the way in which humanists taught and thought about Latin.

Latin learning was at the centre of the humanist school curricula; but, as recent studies have shown, humanists were much more conservative than has previously been assumed. The curriculum designed in the thirteenth century for primary and secondary grammar teaching was not completely overhauled: although humanists were vocal in their condemnation of medieval grammarians, in practice even Guarino kept Alexandre of Villedieu's *Doctrinale* as a textbook for basic grammar teaching.<sup>169</sup> Epistolography remained – at least until late fifteenth century – the final phase of the curriculum; but it was precisely at this stage that humanist educators introduced their most important innovation. While at the end of the traditional curriculum pupils used to learn the rhetorical style by studying Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, in the fifteenth century Cicero's letters and orations, rediscovered by Petrarch and Salutati, and already upheld as models by Leonardo Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini, progressively became the chief models for Latin composition.<sup>170</sup> The distance which

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praecipue tamen qui excelsiore loco sunt ... decens est ita principalibus artibus instructos esse, *ut et fortuna et gradu dignitatis quam obtinent digni habeantur.*' (my emphasis).

<sup>168</sup> See B. Croce, 'Il secolo senza poesia', *La critica*, 30, 1932, pp. 161-84. See also C. Dionisotti, 'Lettura del commento di Benvenuto da Imola', in *Atti del convegno internazionale di studi danteschi*, Ravenna, 1971, pp. 203-16 (212-3); and McLaughlin, 'Latin and Vernacular', p. 625.

<sup>169</sup> See Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 124-9.

<sup>170</sup> See Battista Guarini, *De ordine docendi et discendi*, in *Il pensiero pedagogico dell'umanesimo*, ed. E. Garin, Florence, 1958, pp. 435-72 (452): 'In Ciceronis epistulis

separated the two practices was significant: whereas Geoffrey of Vinsauf provided deductive rules for the construction of an artificial style (*ordo artificialis*), the ultimate goal of language study in humanist schools became the inductive acquisition of linguistic habits through imitation of classical models.<sup>171</sup> Pupils were not only taught how to imitate Cicero in written compositions, but were even encouraged to practise Latin constantly in everyday speech.<sup>172</sup> Geoffrey of Vinsauf referred to the rhetorical style he taught as ‘artificial’. Humanists, however, described the style learned at the final stage of their curriculum as ‘elegant’ and maintained that it was the only one worthy to be called Latin: they dismissed every other variety of Latin as a preparatory stage or, as with the Latin spoken in universities, contemptuously rejected it as technical jargon.<sup>173</sup> This was also because the elegant Latinity promoted by humanists was a speech variety which, at least in principle, could be employed in any type of discourse, whether in a public oration, a private letter to a friend or even in everyday conversation.

Together with the discovery of new classical texts, the kind of language use fostered by humanists – in which Latin, valued as a marker of group identity and as a collective form of cultural capital, was divorced from mere contingent employment – allowed them to disentangle the idea of

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declamabunt, ex quibus stili tum elegantiam tum facilitatem et sermonis puritatem ac scientiarum gravitatem adipiscentur; quas si memoriae mandaverint mirificos postea fructus in scribendi promptitudine percipient.’ For a history of early Ciceronianism, see Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, pp. 338-51, where he evaluates the importance of the teaching of Giovanni Malpaghini, who had among his students Leonardo Bruni, Guarino Veronese and Vittorino da Feltre; on Bruni, see *ibid.*, pp. 392-42.

<sup>171</sup> See Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy*, pp. 121-4; see also R. Black, ‘Italian Education’, pp. 104-7.

<sup>172</sup> See, e.g., A. Rinuccini, *Lettere ed orazioni*, ed. V. R. Giustiniani, Florence, 1953, p. 39: ‘Multum quoque in his primordiis valet ut inter se pueri et cum praeceptore latine loquantur, ne, quod usu venisse plerisque etiam doctis viris animadverti, pueris nostris contingat, ut, quanvis multarum rerum cognitione abundant, tamen latine verbum sine barbarismo proferre non possint.’

<sup>173</sup> Black, *Humanism and Education*, pp. 353-62.

Latin from its concrete uses. This attitude is exemplified in a debate of 1435 which arose between Leonardo Bruni and Flavio Biondo concerning the nature of the language spoken in ancient Rome.<sup>174</sup> While Bruni remained faithful to the medieval idea that the contemporary diglossic system had already existed in antiquity and that Latin was an invented, artistic creation, Biondo advanced the hypothesis that contemporary vernaculars were the result of the corruption of classical Latin due to the barbarian invasions and that ancient Rome had been substantially a monolingual world.<sup>175</sup> Nevertheless, just as there were different vernacular sociolects in his own time, so, too, Latin in antiquity must also have had sociolectal variation.<sup>176</sup> Biondo's historical approach led him to maintain that contemporary vernaculars retained a fundamental grammatical structure, inherited from their Latin progenitor.<sup>177</sup> Even though Biondo's thesis tended to demote the

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<sup>174</sup> For a comprehensive study of the debate, see M. Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare: storia di una questione umanistica*, Padua, 1984; see also A. Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists*, Leiden, 1993; and Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, pp. 75-85.

<sup>175</sup> For an assessment of the two respective positions, see M. Tavoni, 'The 15th-Century Controversy on the Language Spoken by the Ancient Romans: An Inquiry into Italian Humanist Concepts of "Latin", "Grammar", and "Vernacular"', *Historiographia Linguistica*, 9, 1982, pp. 237-64 (238-41). On Bruni's thesis, see also McLaughlin, 'Latin and Vernacular', pp. 618-19.

<sup>176</sup> Tavoni, *Latino, grammatica, volgare*, pp. 206-7: 'Opinor non negabis in vulgari aetatis nostrae loquendi genere, cuius gloriam inter Italicos apud Florentinos esse concesserim, multo facundiores esse qui honesto nati loco ab urbanis educati parentibus et civilibus innutriti sint officii quam ceteram ignavae aut rusticanae multitudinis turbam; cumque eisdem verbis sermonem utrique conficiant, suaviloquentia unum placere multitudini, incondito garritu alterum displicere. Pari modo apud Romanos, etsi latinis omnes verbis quibus uni utebantur et reliqui, quos tamen parentes, educatio, consuetudo bona et morum gravitas vita praestantiores reddiderunt, quamquam litteris carerent oratione etiam praestantiores ac potentiores erant.'

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 213: 'Quamquam omnibus ubique apud Italos corruptissima etiam vulgaritate loquentibus idiomatis natura insitum videmus ut nemo tam rusticus, nemo tam rudis tamque ingenio hebes sit, qui modo loqui possit, quin aliqua ex parte tempora, casus modosque et numeros noverit dicendo variare prout narrandae rei tempus ratioque videbuntur postulare.'

vernaculars, insofar as they were the result of the corruption of Latin, his interpretation was promptly picked up by Leon Battista Alberti, a proponent of the Tuscan vernacular, who demonstrated its validity by devising a pioneering Tuscan grammar.<sup>178</sup>

This debate went on for several years and involved many of the leading scholars of the time. Lorenzo Valla, who belonged to a younger generation than the avant-garde humanists of the early fifteenth-century, grew up in a context in which humanist schools were already an established reality in the Italian system of education. Valla defended – against modist grammarians – the conventional nature of linguistic standards: he maintained that Latin was a system governed by norms, that these norms were established by the usage of good Latin authors and that they had to be

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<sup>178</sup> See Leon Battista Alberti, *Grammatichetta e altri scritti sul volgare*, ed. G. Patota, Rome, 1996, p. 15: 'Que' che affermano la lingua latina non essere stata comune a tutti e' populi latini, ma solo propria di certi dotti scolastici, come noi hoggi la vediamo in pochi, credo deporranno quello errore vedendo questo nostro opuscholo, in quale io racolsi l'uso della lingua nostra in brevissime annotationi.' In response to Bruni's objection that unlearned people in antiquity could not have understood Latin (Tavoni, 'The 15th-Century Controversy', p. 240, describes Bruni's idea of the vernacular as 'Latin minus "grammar"'), Alberti observed in the proem to the third book of his *Libri della famiglia*: 'E ancora domanderei se credono meno alle strane genti essere difficile, netto e sincero profferire questa oggi nostra quale usiamo lingua, che a noi quella quale usavano gli antichi. Non vediamo noi quanto sia difficile a' servi nostri profferire le dizioni in modo che sieno intesi, solo perché non sanno, né per uso possono variare casi e tempi, e concordare, quanto ancora nostra lingua oggi richiede?': Alberti, *Grammatichetta*, p. 8. On Alberti's attitude towards vernacular literature, see McLaughlin, 'Latin and Vernacular', pp. 619-20. Interestingly, Alberti admitted that, since he had grown up in exile, his competence in Tuscan had initially been severely impaired: 'Scripsit ... ut linguae latinae ignaris prodesset, patrio sermone annum ante trigesimum aetatis suae etruscos libros ... *De familia* ... sed inelimosos et asperos, neque usquequaque etruscos. Patriam enim linguam, apud exteris nationes per diutinum familiae Albertorum exilium educatus, non tenebat, et durum erat hac in lingua scribere eleganter atque nitide, in qua tum primum scribere assuesceret.' (R. Fubini and A. Menci Gallorini, 'L'autobiografia di L. B. Alberti. Studio e edizione', *Rinascimento*, XII, 1972, pp. 21-78, at p. 70). Perhaps, as in the case of Raimon Vidal with Occitan (see Ch. 4, n. 144 above), the necessity to perfect his Tuscan helped Alberti to envision it as an autonomous rule-governed system.



learned through formal education.<sup>179</sup> At the same time, he stressed the geographical and historical embeddedness of historical languages, based on the conventional nature of language norms.<sup>180</sup> Like Petrarch before him, he regarded classical Latin as the highest expression of Italian culture; and, therefore, the revival of classical Latin was not just the necessary condition for a cultural rebirth, but also the fullest realization of Italian identity.<sup>181</sup> Furthermore, he excluded scholastic Latin from this historical process, on the grounds that it was an unnatural language, invented by a small group of individuals who were unworthy to be part of the community of Latin speakers.<sup>182</sup>

What was new in Valla was the way in which he construed this ‘community of Latin speakers’. His integrated conception – comparable to the modern standard-with-dialects – of the linguistic landscape in which he lived led him to the view that Latin not only presided over a single language

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<sup>179</sup> Lorenzo Valla, *Dialectical Disputations*, ed. and transl. B. Copenhaver and L. Nauta, 2 vols, Cambridge MA, 2012, II, p. 84 (II.xi.7): ‘Nobis quidem ad normam grammatices loquendum est, nec tam grammatices quam Latine loquendum – hoc est non tam ad praecepta artis, quam ad consuetudinem eruditorum atque elegantium, quae optima ars est. Nam quis nescit maximam loquendi partem auctoritate niti et consuetudine? De qua ita ait Quintilianus: Consuetudo certissima est loquendi magistra, utendumque plane sermone ut nummo, cui publica forma est.’ See also L. Nauta, ‘Latin as a Common Language: The Coherence of Lorenzo Valla’s Humanist Program’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, 71, 2018, pp. 1-32 (10-13 and 26-8).

<sup>180</sup> Valla, *Dialectical Disputations*, II, p. 84 (II.xi.7): ‘Nam quod Graecus, Hebraeus, Latinus, Afer, Dalmata ceteraeque linguae praeter ipsas voces figura loquendi discordant, usu fit, non ratione, nisi in paucis. Nec magis de grammatica reddi ratio potest (quod quidam nugatores faciunt, ut ii qui de modis significandi scribunt) quam cur aliis vocibus aliae nationes utantur.’

<sup>181</sup> See G. Patota, *Lingua e linguistica in Leon Battista Alberti*, Rome, 1999, pp. 60-7.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, II, pp. 88-90 (II.xi.14): ‘A qua si quis desciverit non secus a choro litteratorum explodendus quam legum morumque contemptor e civitate expellendus est. Et ut sunt varii mores variaeque leges nationum ac populorum, ita variae naturae linguarum, apud suos unaquaeque intemerata et sancta. Itaque consuetudine, tanquam quodam more civili, standum est.’ Note that scholastics should be expelled not just from the learned choir, but even from civil society. See Nauta, ‘Latin as a Common Language’, pp. 23-4.

system in antiquity, but that it still did so in his own day. Even in antiquity, he suggested, the Latin learned through formal education and the vernaculars were distinct linguistic varieties, as was demonstrated by the fact that there were schools back then;<sup>183</sup> yet, in antiquity, as in his own time, both were varieties of Latin.<sup>184</sup> The term *vernaculus*, first introduced by Biondo, who took it over from Cicero,<sup>185</sup> in Valla's hands came to denote diatopic and diastratic varieties of Latin: *vernacula*, for him, were what

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<sup>183</sup> Lorenzo Valla, *Apologus*, ed. S. I. Camporeale, *Lorenzo Valla. Umanesimo e teologia*, Florence, 1972, pp. 471-534 (527): 'An non Quintilianus scholas, non dico fuisse sed etiam debere esse confirmat, ad quas pueri etiam infantesque mittantur, cuius secundus titulus est: "Utilius domi, an in scholis erudiantur"? ... grammaticae statim pueri loquebantur? Nullae scholae erant? Frustra igitur compositi erant tam scrupolose libri de arte grammatica; frustra vocabantur praeceptores; frustra ei doctrinae dabatur opera, si usu percipi poterat'. In this sense, Valla followed Bruni's thesis concerning the languages spoken in ancient Rome: see Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, pp. 87-118.

<sup>184</sup> Lorenzo Valla, *Antidotum primum. La prima apologia contro Poggio Bracciolini*, ed. A. Wesseling, Assen and Amsterdam, 1978, p. 172: 'Aut nunc Romana lingua dicitur, ut ais, qua utuntur Romani, ea non dicitur fuisse lingua Romana qua tunc Romani utebantur? Quid hoc dici possit absurdius? "At – inquires – ea fuit lingua Latina, non Romana, sicut nunc lingua Romana non est Latina, sed vulgaris, que vulgaris olim non fuit." An fuerit diversa olim lingua eruditorum et ineruditorum ... alias disputabimus. Certe, que nunc lingua in usu Romanis est, Latina appellanda est, etsi multum degeneravit a prisca.' See Rizzo, *Ricerche sul latino umanistico*, p. 105, who comments: '[Valla] è ... il primo ad affermare esplicitamente che la differenza era interna a un'unica lingua latina, di cui il vernacolo e la grammatica sono fin dall'antichità differenti aspetti, che hanno subito nel corso dei secoli profonde trasformazioni.' Later in his life, he came to the conclusion that in antiquity the two varieties of Latin, like those of Greek, were closer than they were in his time; quoted *ibid.*, p. 101: 'quippe cum lingua graeca tunc esset una pene atque eadem vulgi et litteratorum, quemadmodum et apud priscos Romanos, quorum lingua nunc "romana", ut semper apud Grecos, nunc "latina" dicitur.'

<sup>185</sup> Biondo employed the term to suggest that the Roman vernacular of his day retained some traces of ancient Latin; see Flavio Biondo, *De verbis Romanae locutionis*, ed. F. Delle Donne, Rome, 2008, pp. 23-4 (xxii.98): 'Eas [i.e., mulieres Romanas] saepenumero adverti, mutua salute obvianti data redditaque ... verbis magna ex parte litteratis vicissim interrogantes ... maiorem ... quam quae a nostrorum paucis servari possit, urbanitatis et gentis Romanae vernaculi saporis proprietatem elegantiamque adhibere.' See, e.g., Cicero, *De oratore*, III.92, and *Brutus*, 172. For the evolution of the meaning of *vernaculus*, see J. Ramminger, 'Humanists and the Vernacular: Creating the Terminology for a Bilingual Universe', *Renæssanceforum*, 10, 2010, pp. 1-22.

would later be called ‘dialects of Latin’.<sup>186</sup> But Valla did not stop there. His idea of the ‘Latin speech community’ embraced, as well as the high Latin used by scholars like himself, another variety, which he called *sermo vulgaris*, *sermo popularis*, *communi consuetudo loquendi* (in other words, ‘common and everyday speech’) – expressions which he did not generally apply to vernaculars.<sup>187</sup> What Valla actually meant by this has been the cause of intense debate: he has been accused of being inconsistent,<sup>188</sup> or of disingenuously adopting a Latin terminology which had no real counterpart in the linguistic situation of his time.<sup>189</sup> As far as I am aware, however, it has not previously been taken into account that in his time Latin was no longer solely the idiolect of a scholarly caste. It was also becoming, thanks to the new system of Latin education, the language of the Italian patrician class. This is why, in my view, Valla could imagine an entirely Latinate world, in which a common, everyday Latin existed alongside the learned variety.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> The diastratic and diatopic connotation of the term is particularly evident in Lorenzo Valla, *Elegantiae linguae Latinae*, ed. and transl. (Spanish) S. López Moreda, 2 vols, Cáceres, 1999, I, p. 72: ‘Vernaculus, -a, -um, quod est domi nostrae vel in nostra patria natum – lingua vernacula, quod vulgo dicunt ‘lingua materna’ –; dictum est a “verna”, quod est “servus domi nostrae natus”, id est, ex nostra ancilla.’ See also Lorenzo Valla, *Apologus*, p. 525: ‘Si omnes latinum sermonem a matribus nutricibusve discebant, ergo omnes norant, quemadmodum nunc in omnibus civitatibus fieri videmus de sermone vernaculo: quae res nulli hominum inter concives unquam laudi data est. ... ut nunc est civitatum sua quisque vernacula, ut florentinorum florentina, ut neapolitanorum neapolitana, ut venetorum veneta.’ For Valla’s other (rare) references to the vernacular and the terminology he employs – which notably and explicitly excludes the term *vulgaris* – see M. Tavoni, ‘Lorenzo Valla e il volgare’, in *Lorenzo Valla e l’umanesimo italiano*, ed. O. Besomi et al., Padua, 1986, pp. 199-216 (202-10).

<sup>187</sup> See Nauta, ‘Latin as a Common Language’, pp. 24-5. See also Tavoni, ‘Lorenzo Valla e il volgare’, pp. 199-201.

<sup>188</sup> M. Regogliosi, ‘Le *Elegantie* del Valla come “grammatica” antinormativa’, *Studi di grammatica italiana*, 19, 2000, pp. 315-36 (334-5).

<sup>189</sup> Tavoni, ‘Lorenzo Valla e il volgare’, p. 212.

<sup>190</sup> For this reason, I do not agree with Tavoni’s claim, *ibid.*, pp. 212-13: ‘il *sermo vulgaris* del Valla non è il volgare, ma un’entità che nelle condizioni sociolinguistiche del XV secolo ha qualcosa di fittizio ... . Il Valla non affronta minimamente il paradosso contenuto nel suo assumere come centrale la nozione di

The entrance of the ruling classes into the system of formal education had a momentous impact on European language ideas: for the first time since antiquity, a formally codified standard coincided with a prestige speech variety. In the end, humanism was overtaken by the application of its own principles to the European vernaculars, starting with Tuscan. Humanism's fundamental legacy, however, was the model which it imposed on Western language thought and which consisted of the following set of ideas: first, that there is a standard of linguistic behaviour which, if not in practice, then in principle, is shared by the entire speech community, insofar as it is an essential cultural possession of the whole society or nation – which means that every other variety used by the speech community is considered a variety of the same language; second, that this standard, although it might be contested, is an objective, autonomous entity, independent of individual wills and therefore has a history; third, that it is a linguistic staple of the upper echelons of society; fourth, that it 'has been deliberately codified so that it varies minimally in linguistic form but is maximally elaborated in function'.<sup>191</sup> This model, which we now call standardization and which is the

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*consuetudo* in riferimento ad una lingua seconda che consiste nell'uso prevalentemente scritto della comunità internazionale dei dotti.' I have no doubt that, in Valla, as in many humanists, there was a tendency to play at being a Roman – what Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, p. 29, calls a 'language game'. In the middle of the fifteenth century, however, the 'comunità internazionale dei dotti' still chiefly expressed itself in scholastic Latin, a speech variety which was, as I have indicated, excluded in principle from Valla's ideal Latin community. At the same time, particularly in Italy, classical Latin was taught, and not just to scholars like Valla, in humanist schools: from his perspective, a nobleman such as Leonello d'Este, who studied at Guarino's school and who certainly was not a scholar, spoke much better Latin than any scholastic philosopher. As Tavoni himself reports, Valla sings the praises of a nobleman at the court of Naples for the quality of his *quotidianus sermo*, which was without doubt Latin; *ibid.*, p. 211: 'Neminem, ne ex iis quidem qui omnem operam atque omne tempus in studiis ponunt, videre mihi contigit in quotidiano sermone abundantiorum.'

<sup>191</sup> S. Romaine, *Language in Society: An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, Oxford, 2000 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), p. 14.

basic pattern informing our very notion of what a 'language' is, was the invention of Renaissance humanism.

## Conclusion

Tutta un'impostura. La storia non esiste. Forse che esistono le generazioni di foglie che sono andate via da quell'albero, un autunno appresso all'altro?

Esiste l'albero, esistono le foglie nuove: poi anche queste foglie se ne andranno; e a un certo punto se ne andrà anche l'albero: in fumo, in cenere ... La storia! E mio padre? E vostro padre? E il gorgoglio delle loro viscere vuote? E la voce della loro fame? Credete che si sentirà, nella storia? Che ci sarà uno storico che avrà orecchio talmente fino da sentirlo?

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'Tra poco sarà nel mondo della verità' pensò. Ma gli sorse, a sgomentarlo, il pensiero che il mondo della verità fosse questo: degli uomini vivi, della storia, dei libri.

Leonardo Sciascia, *Il Consiglio d'Egitto*

In this dissertation, I have attempted to provide an account of how historical actors identified, interpreted and rationalized linguistic variation in Italy, between roughly 1200 and 1450. I now want to discuss briefly the practical and methodological difficulties I encountered, the strategies I devised to overcome them and the lessons for future research which I believe can be drawn from my experiences.

A good way to tackle these issues is to draw a brief sketch of the genesis of my own research. But I must start with a confession: when I began working on this dissertation, I thought that historical languages were objective, autonomous entities, existing somehow independently from the activity of their speakers. I believed that in late medieval Italy some people were bilingual, since they knew Latin and a local vernacular. I also believed that vernaculars changed according to a natural course of development and that the permanence of Latin, at least down to the sixteenth century and in some subjects even much later, was a stable, artificial feature, supported by

the inertia of tradition in a conservative society. I felt that the history of language ideas could be approached in the same way, for instance, as a historian of science studies the Copernican revolution or Newton's theory of gravity: as a series of more or less (and on the whole increasingly) correct statements concerning a natural, factual 'state of things'. Finally, I assumed that there must have been some sort of causal relationship between the progress of these ideas and what I believed was the 'emancipation' of the vernaculars from the unnatural tyranny of Latin – and it was this causal relationship which I set out to investigate.

As soon as I started examining late medieval ideas about language, however, what struck me was not that they were 'wrong' or misplaced when compared to modern, 'objective' ones, but rather that they were opaque, ambiguous and, so it seemed, frankly contradictory. As my research continued, it became clearer and clearer to me that all these characteristics were not due to the (flawed, as I supposed) inner logic of those who formulated them but rather to a mismatch between their logic and mine. Perhaps, I started to wonder, the problem was not their logic but mine. And this impression was strengthened by the realization that what had escaped me was the linguistic 'reality' to which they applied these ideas. I had been trying to figure out what Petrarch thought about Latin, but I did not know when, to whom and, above all, why he spoke Latin.

Broadening my perspective, I came to understand that what I had thought of simply as the bilingualism of figures like Dante and Petrarch was, in fact, part and parcel of a system of linguistic behaviour which concerned not merely a handful of well-known individuals, but an entire society. That system, moreover, was so radically different from ours that it had to be studied on its own terms if I wanted to make proper sense of it and of how it was perceived, interpreted, and rationalized by historical actors. Consequently, I needed, firstly, to find a method to describe the exact nature

of this system and identify the factors which maintained and sustained it. Secondly, it was necessary to explain the relationship between the origin and development of language ideas and the linguistic system in which speakers participated, as well as determining whether ideas about language could modify this system and, if so, how.

Traditional language disciplines did not provide satisfying answers to my questions. Literary history focuses on a narrow, very specific, range of language uses and is not very interested in the relationship between these uses and other types. Pure linguists, even when they study language history, are not concerned with supposedly artificial languages such as late medieval Latin and pay only limited attention to sociolinguistic phenomena. Historians of linguistics concentrate largely on explicit theoretical formulations rather than on the ideas, attitudes and beliefs which provide the practical basis for linguistic acts; and they have very little to say about the relationship between such formulations and concrete systems of language organization, or about the relationship between the authors of these theories and the rest of society.

At the core of this dissertation is instead the conviction that a history of language ideas must approach language as an institution of human interaction, a regulator as well as an expression of social relationships and conflicts, ideologies and cultural traditions. In other words, a history of language ideas cannot be divorced from a broader 'social history of language', which Peter Burke has defined as: 'the attempt to add a social dimension to the history of language and a historical dimension to the work of sociolinguists and ethnographers of speaking'.<sup>1</sup> The main lesson which a language historian can learn from sociolinguists is that language variation is a social, not a natural, phenomenon. Since communities of speakers tend to

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<sup>1</sup> P. Burke, *The Art of Conversation*, Ithaca NY, 1997, p. 7.



organize language behaviour in systematic patterns of variation, it is seldom useful to analyse single speech varieties in isolation – as language historians have mostly done. Instead, it is preferable to focus on the interrelation between the domains of linguistic activity making up a sociolinguistic system such as formal education, the household, the church and so on – a system in which the existence of ‘language professionals’, as for example teachers and ‘intellectuals’, is itself a social phenomenon which must be interpreted accordingly.

A social history of language in Italy from 1200-1450 is still to be written. My dissertation is therefore intended as a step towards future studies in this field and as an attempt to test how a history of language ideas which gives due weight to the sociocultural embeddedness of linguistic phenomena can contribute to such a history. What needs to be stressed is that, as linguistic anthropologists teach us, ideas, attitudes and beliefs about language, along with language variation, not only reflect, or depend on, the sociolinguistic systems to which speakers belong, but also play a central part in the construction of those very systems.<sup>2</sup> Even highly focused, autonomous speech varieties like the ones we call ‘languages’ have no objective existence beyond the practices and perceptions of individuals: language ideas produce linguistic variation and, therefore, language change. This perspective allows us to study the language practices and ideas of individual speakers and social groups by treating them as active agents contributing to the organization of linguistic activity in their own society.

Furthermore, perhaps the most crucial contribution which the history of language ideas can make to language history – and maybe to history *tout court* – lies not only in the recognition that language behaviour reflects social organization, but also in the appreciation that at specific historical times

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<sup>2</sup> J. T. Irvine and S. Gal, ‘Language Ideology’, pp. 78-9.

language itself 'becomes the arena where certain social conflicts find symbolic expression'.<sup>3</sup> In Italy, the period which stretches from 1200 to 1450 was doubtless one of these times: as I have argued throughout this dissertation, ideas on language, language use and linguistic variation played a highly significant role in the formation of national identities, the 'ideological fortification of social groups'<sup>4</sup> and the invention of cultural traditions. Dante's proposal to unify Italy through language, or Lorenzo Valla's ideal of founding a new civilization on classical Latin, can thus be seen, firstly, as documents of the emergence of new sociocultural forces which influenced contemporary language organization; secondly, as the personal – and, in case of Valla, particularly successful – interpretations by two individuals with specific social and cultural backgrounds of how such language organization should be interpreted and directed; and, thirdly, as signs of a historical point in time when language could be conceived as a force in the self-representation of a changing society.

The views of Dante and Valla can be regarded as the culmination of two key events in the language history of the period covered by this dissertation: Dante for the emergence of supra-local prestigious varieties of the vernacular and Valla for the humanist classicizing reform of Latin. The research methods I adopted have allowed me to offer new (and I hope convincing) interpretations of these two developments, which differ from the traditional explanations: the first as the moment when a new meaning was attributed to language identity and diversity – as markers of a secular, class-consciousness and collective proto-national identity; the second as the moment when this novel linguistic awareness was applied to and elaborated in the context of formal education, particularly in Italy. I have identified as a

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<sup>3</sup> D. Cameron, *Verbal Hygiene*, London and New York, 1995, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> R. Darnton, 'Intellectual and Cultural History', in *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. M. Kammen, Ithaca NY, 1980, pp. 327-51 (340).

central factor in both developments the affirmation and cultural emancipation of a secular ruling class, as it acquired a growing sense of self-consciousness and established its role in society through conflict and negotiation with different social groups such as the clergy and the popular classes. Instead of seeing the rise of supra-local vernaculars and the humanist reform of Latin as two unconnected phenomena, I have presented them as part of a unitary movement in the history of language standardization and, therefore, in the construction of a specifically European, and later Western, tradition of language organization and representation.

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