

Liber Primus

I

- 1 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; volentes discretionem aequaliter lucidare illorum qui tanquam ceci ambulant per plateas, plerumque anteriora posteriora putantes, Verbo aspirante de celis locutioni vulgarium gentium prodesse temptabimus, non solum aquam nostri ingenii ad tantum poculum aurientes, sed, accipiendo vel compilando ab aliis, potiora miscentes, ut exinde potionare possimus dulcissimum hydromellum.
- 2 Sed quia unamquamque doctrinam oportet non probare, sed suum aperire subiectum, ut sciatur quid sit super quod illa versatur, dicimus, celeriter actendentes, quod vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infantes assuefiunt ab assistentibus cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus
- 3 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.
- 4 Harum quoque duarum nobilior est vulgaris: tum quia prima fuit humano generi usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobis, cum illa potius artificialis existat.
- 5 Et de hac nobiliori nostra est intentio pertractare.

Book One

I

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 plainly 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, inspired by the Word that comes from above, to say something useful about the language of people who speak the vulgar tongue, hoping thereby to enlighten somewhat the understanding of those who walk the streets like the blind, ever thinking that what lies ahead is behind them. Yet, in so doing, I shall not bring to so large a cup only the water of my own thinking, but shall add to it more potent ingredients, taken or extracted from elsewhere, so that from these I may concoct the sweetest possible mead.

But since it is required of any theoretical treatment that it not leave its basis implicit, but declare it openly, so that it may be clear with what its argument is concerned, I say, hastening to deal with the question, 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 *gramatica*.¹ 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 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.

And this more noble kind of language is what I intend to discuss.

II

- 1 Hec est nostrà vera prima locutio. Non dico autem 'nostra' ut et aliam sit esse locutionem quam hominis: nam eorum que sunt omnium soli
- 2 homini datum est loqui, cum solum sibi necessarium fuerit. Non angelis, non inferioribus animalibus necessarium fuit loqui, sed nequicquam datum fuisset eis: quod nempe facere natura aborret.
- 3 Si etenim perspicaciter consideramus quid cum loquimur intendamus, patet quod nichil aliud quam nostre mentis enucleare aliis conceptum. Cum igitur angeli ad pandendas gloriosas eorum conceptiones habeant promptissimam atque ineffabilem sufficientiam intellectus, qua vel alter alteri totaliter innotescit per se, vel saltim per illud fulgentissimum Speculum in quo cuncti representantur pulcherrimi atque avidissimi speculantur, nullo signo locutionis indiguisse videntur. Et si obiciatur de hiis qui corruerunt spiritibus, dupliciter responderi potest: primo quod, cum de hiis que necessaria sunt ad bene esse tractemus, eos preterire debemus, cum divinam curam perversi expectare noluerunt; secundo et melius quod ipsi demones ad manifestandam inter se perfidiam suam non indigent nisi ut sciat quilibet de quolibet quia est et quantus est; quod quidem sciunt: cognoverunt enim se invicem ante ruinam suam.
- 5 Inferioribus quoque animalibus, cum solo nature instinctu ducantur, de locutione non oportuit provideri: nam omnibus eiusdem speciei sunt iidem actus et passiones, et sic possunt per proprios alienos cognoscere; inter ea vero que diversarum sunt specierum non solum non necessaria fuit locutio, sed prorsus dampnosa fuisset, cum nullum amicabile commercium fuisset in illis.
- 6 Et si obiciatur de serpente loquente ad primam mulierem, vel de asina Balaam, quod locuti sint, ad hoc respondemus quod angelus in illa et dyabolus in illo taliter operati sunt quod ipsa animalia moverunt organa sua, sic ut vox inde resultavit distincta tanquam vera locutio; non quod aliud esset asine illud quam rudere, neque quam sibilare serpenti. Si vero contra argumentetur quis de eo quod Ovidius dicit in quinto Metamorphoseos de picis loquentibus, dicimus quod hoc figurate dicit, aliud intelligens. Et si dicatur quod pice adhuc et alie aves locuntur, dicimus quod falsum est, quia talis actus locutio non est, sed quedam imitatio soni nostre vocis; vel quod nituntur imitari nos in quantum sonamus, sed non in quantum loquimur. Unde si expresse dicenti 'pica' resonaret etiam 'pica', non esset hec nisi representatio vel imitatio soni illius qui prius dixisset.

II

This, in truth, is our primary language. I do not, though, say 'our' 1
 because there is or could be any other kind of language than that of
 human beings; for, of all creatures that exist, only human beings were
 given the power of speech, because only to them was it necessary. It was 2
 not necessary that either angels or the lower animals should be able to
 speak; rather, this power would have been wasted on them, and nature,
 of course, hates to do anything superfluous.²

Now, if we wish to define with precision what our intention is when 3
 we speak, it is clearly nothing other than to expound to others the con-
 cepts formed in our minds. Therefore, since the angels possess, in order to
 communicate their own glorious conceptions, a ready and ineffable suffi-
 ciency of intellect – through which either they make themselves, in
 themselves, completely known to each other, or, at least, are reflected, in
 the fullness of their beauty and ardour, by that resplendent mirror which
 retains an image of all of them – they seem not to have needed signs to re- 4
 present speech. And if it be objected that some angels have fallen from
 heaven, a twofold answer may be made. First, that when we are dis-
 cussing things that are necessary for a rightly ordered life, we should
 leave the fallen angels aside, since, in their perversity, they chose not to
 wait on God's care; second, and better, that these demons, in order to de-
 monstrate their corruption to each other, need only to know, of any one of
 their number, the nature and the degree of his fallen condition. And this
 they already know, for they knew each other before their ruin.

As for the lower animals, since they are guided only by their natural 5
 instinct, it was not necessary for them to be given the power of speech.
 For all animals that belong to the same species are identical in respect of
 action and feeling; and thus they can know the actions and feelings of
 others by knowing their own. Between creatures of different species, on
 the other hand, not only was speech unnecessary, but it would have been
 injurious, since there could have been no friendly exchange between
 them.

And if it be objected that the serpent addressed the first woman, or 6
 that the ass did likewise to Balaam, and that they did so by speaking, I
 reply that an angel (in the latter case) and the devil (in the former)
 brought it about that the animals in question manipulated their vocal
 organs in such a way that a sound came out that resembled real speech;
 but to the ass this was nothing more than braying, to the serpent, only
 hissing.³ Moreover, if anyone finds a contrary argument in what Ovid, 7

- 8 Et sic patet soli homini datum fuisse loqui. Sed quare necessarium sibi foret, breviter pertractare conemur.

III

- 1 Cum igitur homo non nature instinctu, sed ratione moveatur, et ipsa ratio vel circa discretionem vel circa iudicium vel circa electionem diversificetur in singulis, adeo ut fere quilibet sua propria specie videatur gaudere, per proprios actus vel passiones, ut brutum animal, neminem alium intelligere opinamur. Nec per spiritualem speculationem, ut angelum, alterum alterum introire contingit, cum grossitie atque opacitate mortalis corporis humanus spiritus sit obiectus.
- 2 Oportuit ergo genus humanum ad comunicandas inter se conceptiones suas aliquod rationale signum et sensuale habere: quia, cum de ratione accipere habeat et in rationem portare, rationale esse oportuit; cumque de una ratione in aliam nichil deferri possit nisi per medium sensuale, sensuale esse oportuit. Quare, si tantum rationale esset, pertransire non posset; si tantum sensuale, nec a ratione accipere nec in rationem deponere potuisset.
- 3 Hoc equidem signum est ipsum subiectum nobile de quo loquimur: nam sensuale quid est in quantum sonus est; rationale vero in quantum aliquid significare videtur ad placitum.

IV

- 1 Soli homini datum fuit ut loqueretur, ut ex premissis manifestum est. Nunc quoque investigandum esse existimo cui hominum primum

in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, says about talking magpies, I reply that this is said figuratively, and means something else.⁴ And if it be claimed that, to this day, magpies and other birds do indeed speak, I say that this is not so; for their act is not speaking, but rather an imitation of the sound of the human voice – or it may be that they try to imitate us in so far as we make a noise, but not in so far as we speak. So that, if to someone who said ‘*pica*’⁵ aloud the bird were to return the word ‘*pica*’, this would only be a reproduction or imitation of the sound made by the person who uttered the word first.

And so it is clear that the power of speech was given only to human beings. But now I shall try briefly to investigate why it should have been necessary for them.

III

Since, therefore, human beings are moved not by their natural instinct but by reason, and since that reason takes diverse forms in individuals, according to their capacity for discrimination, judgement, or choice – to the point where it appears that almost everyone enjoys the existence of a unique species – I hold that we can never understand the actions or feelings of others by reference to our own, as the baser animals can. Nor is it given to us to enter into each other’s minds by means of spiritual reflection,⁶ as the angels do, because the human spirit is so weighed down⁷ by the heaviness and density of the mortal body.

So it was necessary that the human race, in order for its members to communicate their conceptions among themselves, should have some signal based on reason and perception. Since this signal needed to receive its content from reason and convey it back there, it had to be rational; but, since nothing can be conveyed from one reasoning mind to another except by means perceptible to the senses, it had also to be based on perception. For, if it were purely rational, it could not make its journey; if purely perceptible, it could neither derive anything from reason nor deliver anything to it.

This signal, then, is the noble foundation that I am discussing;⁸ for it is perceptible, in that it is a sound, and yet also rational, in that this sound, according to convention, is taken to mean something.

IV

So the power of speech was given only to human beings, as is plain from what was said above. I think it now also incumbent upon me to find

locutio data sit, et quid primitus locutus fuerit, et ad quem, et ubi, et quando, nec non et sub quo ydiomate primiloquium emanavit.

- 2 Secundum quidem quod in principio Genesis loquitur, ubi de primordio mundi Sacratissima Scriptura pertractat, mulierem invenitur ante omnes fuisse locutam, scilicet presumptuosissimam Evam, cum dyabolo sciscitanti respondit: 'De fructu lignorum que sunt in paradiso vescimur; de fructu vero ligni quod est in medio paradisi precepit nobis
- 3 Deus ne comederemus nec tangeremus, ne forte moriamur.' Sed quamquam mulier in scriptis prius inveniatur locuta, rationabilius tamen est ut hominem prius locutum fuisse credamus, et inconvenienter putatur tam egregium humani generis actum non prius a viro quam a femina profluxisse. Rationabiliter ergo credimus ipsi Ade prius datum fuisse loqui ab Eo qui statim ipsum plasmaverat.
- 4 Quid autem prius vox primi loquentis sonaverit, viro sane mentis in promptu esse non titubo ipsum fuisse quod 'Deus' est, scilicet *El*, vel per modum interrogationis vel per modum responsionis. Absurdum atque rationi videtur orrificum ante Deum ab homine quicquam nominatum fuisse, cum ab ipso et in ipsum factus fuisset homo. Nam sicut post prevaricationem humani generis quilibet exordium sue locutionis incipit ab 'heu', rationale est quod ante qui fuit inciperet a gaudio; et cum nullum gaudium sit extra Deum, sed totum in Deo, et ipse Deus totus sit gaudium, consequens est quod primus loquens primo et ante omnia dixisset 'Deus'.
- 5 Oritur et hinc ista questio, cum dicimus superius per via responsionis hominem primum fuisse locutum, si responsio fuit ad Deum: nam, si ad Deum fuit, iam videretur quod Deus locutus exitisset, quod contra
- 6 superius prelibata videtur insurgere. Ad quod quidem dicimus quod bene potuit respondisse Deo interrogante, nec propter hoc Deus locutus est ipsa quam dicimus locutionem. Quis enim dubitat quicquid est ad Dei nutum esse flexibile, quo quidem facta, quo conservata, quo etiam gubernata sunt omnia? Igitur cum ad tantas alterationes moveatur aer imperio nature inferioris, que ministra et factura Dei est, ut tonitrua personet, ignem fulgoret, aquam gemat, spargat nivem, grandines lancinet, nonne imperio Dei movebitur ad quedam sonare verba, ipso distinguente qui maiora distinxit? Quid ni?
- 7 Quare ad hoc et ad quedam alia hec sufficere credimus.

out to which human being that power was first granted, and what he first said, and to whom, and where, and when; and also in what language that primal utterance was made.

According to what it says at the beginning of Genesis, where sacred scripture describes the origin of the world, we find that a woman spoke before anyone else, when the most presumptuous Eve responded thus to the blandishments of the Devil: 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees that are in Paradise: but God has forbidden us to eat or to touch the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of Paradise, lest we die.'⁹ But although we find in scripture that a woman spoke first, I still think it more reasonable that a man should have done so; and it may be thought unseemly that so distinguished an action of the human race should first have been performed by a woman rather than a man. Therefore it is reasonable to believe that the power of speech was given first to Adam, by Him who had just created him.¹⁰

As to what was first pronounced by the voice of the first speaker, that will readily be apparent to anyone in their right mind, and I have no doubt that it was the name of God, or *El*, in the form either of a question or of an answer. It is manifestly absurd, and an offence against reason, to think that anything should have been named by a human being before God, when he had been made human by Him and for Him. For if, since the disaster that befell the human race, the speech of every one of us has begun with 'woe!',¹¹ it is reasonable that he who existed before should have begun with a cry of joy; and, since there is no joy outside God, but all joy is in God, and since God Himself is joy itself, it follows that the first man to speak should first and before all have said 'God'.

From this arises a question: if, as I said above, the first man spoke in the form of an answer, was that answer addressed to God? For if it was, it would seem that God had already spoken – which would appear to raise an objection to the argument offered above.¹² To this, however, I reply that Adam may well have answered a question from God; nor, on that account, need God have spoken using what we would call language. For who doubts that everything that exists obeys a sign from God, by whom, indeed, all things are created, preserved, and, finally, maintained in order? Therefore, if the air can be moved, at the command of the lesser nature which is God's servant and creation, to transformations so profound that thunderbolts crash, lightning flashes, waters rage, snow falls, and hailstones fly, can it not also, at God's command, so be moved as to make the sound of words, if He distinguishes them who has made much greater distinctions? Why not?

V

- 1 Opinantes autem non sine ratione, tam ex superioribus quam inferioribus sumpta, ad ipsum Deum primitus primum hominem direxisse locutionem, rationabiliter dicimus ipsum loquentem primum, mox postquam afflatus est ab Animante Virtute, incunctanter fuisse locutum. Nam in homine sentiri humanius credimus quam sentire, dummodo sentiatur et sentiat tanquam homo. Si ergo Faber ille atque Perfectionis Principium et Amator afflando primum nostrum omni perfectione complevit, rationabile nobis apparet nobilissimum animal non ante sentire quam sentiri cepisse.
- 2 Si quis vero fatetur contra obiciens quod non oportebat illum loqui, cum solus adhuc homo existeret, et Deus omnia sine verbis archana nostra discernat etiam ante quam nos, cum illa reverentia dicimus, qua uti oportet cum de Eterna Voluntate aliquid iudicamus, quod licet Deus sciret, immo presciret (quod idem est quantum ad Deum) absque locutione conceptum primi loquentis, voluit tamen et ipsum loqui, ut in explicatione tante dotis gloriaretur ipse qui gratis dotaverat. Et ideo divinitus in nobis esse credendum est quod in actu nostrorum effectuum ordinato letamur.
- 3 Et hinc penitus elicere possumus locum illum ubi effutita est prima locutio: quoniam, si extra paradisum afflatus est homo, extra, si vero intra, intra fuisse locum prime locutionis convicimus.

VI

- 1 Quoniam permultis ac diversis ydiomatibus negotium exercitatur humanum, ita quod multi multis non aliter intelligantur verbis quam sine verbis, de ydiomate illo venari nos decet quo vir sine matre, vir sine lacte, qui nec pupillarem etatem nec vidit adultam, creditur usus.
- 2 In hoc, sicut etiam in multis aliis, Petramala civitas amplissima est, et patria maiori parti filiorum Adam. Nam quicumque tam obscene rationis est ut locum sue nationis delitiosissimum credat esse sub sole, hic etiam pre cunctis proprium vulgare licetur, idest maternam locutionem,

On this account, I think that such an answer is adequate for both this and other questions. 7

V

Thinking, therefore, not without reasonable grounds derived both from above and from below,¹³ that the first man addressed his first speech to God Himself, I say, equally reasonably, that this first speaker spoke immediately – as soon, indeed, as God's creative power had been breathed into him. For we hold that it is more truly human for a human being to be perceived than to perceive, as long as he or she is perceived and perceives as a human being. So if our creator, that source and lover of perfection, completed our first ancestor by infusing all perfection into him, I find it reasonable that this most noble creature should not have begun to perceive before he was perceived. 1

If, though, someone should object to this, saying that there was no need for him to speak, since he was the only human being yet in existence, and since God knows all our secrets without our putting them into words (indeed, before we know them ourselves), I reply, with all the reverence that we must feel when expressing an opinion about the eternal will of God, that even if God knew (or rather foreknew, which is the same thing where God is concerned) the first speaker's conception without his having to speak, yet He still wished that Adam should speak, so that He who had freely given so great a gift should be glorified in its employment. And likewise, we must believe that the fact that we rejoice in the ordered activity of our faculties is a sign of divinity in us. 2

And from this we can confidently deduce where the first speech was uttered: for I have clearly shown that, if God's spirit was breathed into man outside Paradise, then it was outside Paradise that he spoke; if indeed inside, then the place of the first speech was in Paradise itself.¹⁴ 3

VI

Since human affairs are now carried on in so many different languages, so that many people are no better understood by others when they use words than when they do not, it behoves us to hunt for the language believed to have been used by the man who never had a mother nor drank her milk, the man who never saw either childhood or maturity.¹⁵ 1

In this, as in many other matters, Pietramala¹⁶ is a great city indeed, the home of the greater part of the children of Adam. For whoever is so misguided as to think that the place of his birth is the most delightful spot 2

- 3 et per consequens credit ipsum fuisse illud quod fuit Ade. Nos autem, cui mundus est patria velut piscibus equor, quanquam Sarnum biberimus ante dentes et Florentiam adeo diligamus ut, quia dileximus, exilium patiamur iniuste, rationi magis quam sensui spatulas nostri iudicii podiamus. Et quamvis ad voluptatem nostram sive nostre sensualitatis quietem in terris amenior locus quam Florentia non existat, revolventes et poetarum et aliorum scriptorum volumina, quibus mundus universaliter et membratim describitur, ratiocinantesque in nobis situationes varias mundi locorum et eorum habitudinem ad utrunque polum et circulum equatorem, multas esse perpendimus firmiterque censemus et magis nobiles et magis delitiosas et regiones et urbes quam Tusciam et Florentiam, unde sumus oriundus et civis, et plerasque nationes et gentes delectabiliori atque utiliori sermone uti quam Latinos.
- 4 Redeuntes igitur ad propositum, 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 uteretur, nisi culpa presumptionis humane dissipata fuisset, ut inferius ostendetur.
- 5 Hac forma locutionis locutus est Adam; hac forma locutionis locuti sunt omnes posteri eius usque ad edificationem turris Babel, que 'turris confusionis' interpretatur; hanc formam locutionis hereditati sunt filii
- 6 Heber, qui ab eo dicti sunt Hebrei. Hiis solis post confusionem remansit, ut Redemptor noster, qui ex illis oriturus erat secundum humanitatem, non lingua confusionis, sed gratie frueretur.
- 7 Fuit ergo hebraicum ydioma illud quod primi loquentis labia fabricarunt.

VII

- 1 Disputet, heu, nunc humani generis ignominiam renovare! Sed quia preterire non possumus quin transeamus per illam, quanquam rubor ad ora consurgat animusque refugiat, percurreremus.
- 2 O semper natura nostra prona peccatis! O ab initio et nunquam desinens nequitatrix! Num fuerat satis ad tui correptionem quod, per primam prevaricationem eluminata, deliciarum exulabas a patria? Num

under the sun may also believe that his own language – his mother tongue, that is – is pre-eminent among all others; and, as a result, he may believe that his language was also Adam's. To me, however, the whole world is a homeland, like the sea to fish – though I drank from the Arno before cutting my teeth, and love Florence so much that, because I loved her, I suffer exile unjustly¹⁷ – and I will weight the balance of my judgement more with reason than with sentiment. And although for my own enjoyment (or rather for the satisfaction of my own desire), there is no more agreeable place on earth than Florence, yet when I turn the pages of the volumes of poets and other writers, by whom the world is described as a whole and in its constituent parts, and when I reflect inwardly on the various locations of places in the world, and their relations to the two poles and the circle at the equator, I am convinced, and firmly maintain, that there are many regions and cities more noble and more delightful than Tuscany and Florence, where I was born and of which I am a citizen, and many nations and peoples who speak a more elegant and practical language than do the Italians.

Returning, then, to my subject, I say that a certain form of language was created by God along with the first soul; I say 'form' with reference both to the words used for things, and to the construction of words, and to the arrangement of the construction; and this form of language would have continued to be used by all speakers, had it not been shattered through the fault of human presumption, as will be shown below.

In this form of language Adam spoke; in this form of language spoke all his descendants until the building of the Tower of Babel (which is interpreted as 'tower of confusion'); this is the form of language inherited by the sons of Heber, who are called Hebrews because of it.¹⁸ To these alone it remained after the confusion, so that our redeemer, who was to descend from them (in so far as He was human), should not speak the language of confusion, but that of grace.

So the Hebrew language was that which the lips of the first speaker moulded.¹⁹

VII

Alas, how it shames me now to recall the dishonouring of the human race! But since I can make no progress without passing that way, though a blush comes to my cheek and my spirit recoils, I shall make haste to do so.

Oh human nature, always inclined towards sin! Engaged in evil²⁰ from the beginning, and never changing your ways! Was it not enough to

satis quod, per universalem familie tue luxuriam et trucitatem, unica reservata domo, quicquid tui iuris erat cataclismo perierat, et <que> commiseras tu animalia celi terreque iam luerant? Quippe satis extiterat. Sed, sicut proverbialiter dici solet, 'Non ante tertium equitabis', misera
 3 miserum venire maluisti ad equum. Ecce, lector, quod vel oblitus homo vel vilipendens disciplinas priores, et avertens oculos a vibicibus que remanserant, tertio insurrexit ad verbera, per superbam stultitiam presumendo.

4 Presumpsit ergo in corde suo incurabilis homo, sub persuasione gigantes Nembroth, arte sua non solum superare naturam, sed etiam ipsum naturantem, qui Deus est, et cepit edificare turrim in Sennaar, que postea dicta est Babel, hoc est 'confusio', per quam celum sperabat ascendere, intendens inscius non equare, sed suum superare Factorem. O sine
 5 mensura clementia celestis imperii! Quis patrum tot sustineret insultus a filio? Sed exurgens non hostili scutica sed paterna et alias verberibus assueta, rebellantem filium pia correctione nec non memorabili castigavit.

6 Siquidem pene totum humanum genus ad opus iniquitatis coierat: pars imperabant, pars architectabantur, pars muros moliebantur, pars amussibus regulabant, pars trullis linebant, pars scindere rupes, pars mari, pars terra vehere intendebant, partesque diverse diversis aliis operibus indulgebant; cum celitus tanta confusione percussi sunt ut, qui omnes una eademque loquela deservebant ad opus, ab opere multis diversificati loquelis desinerent et nunquam ad idem commercium convenirent. Solis etenim in uno convenientibus actu eadem loquela remansit:
 7 puta cunctis architectoribus una, cunctis saxa volventibus una, cunctis ea parantibus una; et sic de singulis operantibus accidit. Quot quot autem exercitii varietates tendebant ad opus, tot tot ydiomatibus tunc genus humanum disiungitur; et quanto excellentius exercebant, tanto rudius nunc barbariusque locuntur.

8 Quibus autem sacratum ydioma remansit nec aderant nec exercitium commendabant, sed graviter detestantes stoliditatem operantium deridebant. Sed hec minima pars, quantum ad numerum, fuit de semine Sem, sicut conicio, qui fuit tertius filius Noe: de qua quidem ortus est populus Israel, qui antiquissima locutione sunt usi usque ad suam dispersionem.

correct you that, banished from the light for the first transgression, you should live in exile from the delights of your homeland? Was it not enough that, because of the all-pervading lust and cruelty of your race, everything that was yours should have perished in a cataclysm, one family alone being spared, and that the creatures of earth and sky should have had to pay for the wrongs that you had committed?²¹ It should indeed have been enough. But, as we often say in the form of a proverb, 'not before the third time will you ride';²² and you, wretched humanity, chose to mount a fractious steed. And so, reader, the human race, either forgetful or disdainful of earlier punishments, and averting its eyes from the bruises that remained, came for a third time to deserve a beating, putting its trust in its own foolish pride.

Incorrigible humanity, therefore, led astray by the giant Nimrod, presumed in its heart to outdo in skill not only nature but the source of its own nature, who is God; and began to build a tower in Sennaar, which afterwards was called Babel (that is, 'confusion').²³ By this means human beings hoped to climb up to heaven, intending in their foolishness not to equal but to excel their creator. Oh boundless mercy of the kingdom of heaven! What other father would have borne so many insults from his child? Yet, rising up not with an enemy's whip but that of a father, already accustomed to dealing out punishment, He chastised His rebellious offspring with a lesson as holy as it was memorable.

Almost the whole of the human race had collaborated in this work of evil. Some gave orders, some drew up designs; some built walls, some measured them with plumb-lines, some smeared mortar on them with trowels; some were intent on breaking stones, some on carrying them by sea, some by land; and other groups still were engaged in other activities – until they were all struck by a great blow from heaven. Previously all of them had spoken one and the same language while carrying out their tasks; but now they were forced to leave off their labours, never to return to the same occupation, because they had been split up into groups speaking different languages. Only among those who were engaged in a particular activity did their language remain unchanged; so, for instance, there was one for all the architects, one for all the carriers of stones, one for all the stone-breakers, and so on for all the different operations. As many as were the types of work involved in the enterprise, so many were the languages by which the human race was fragmented; and the more skill required for the type of work, the more rudimentary and barbaric the language they now spoke.

But the holy tongue remained to those who had neither joined in the project nor praised it, but instead, thoroughly disdaining it, had made

VIII

- 1 Ex precedenter memorata confusione linguarum non leviter opinamur per universa mundi climata climatumque plagas incolendas et angulos tunc primum homines fuisse dispersos. Et cum radix humane propaginis principalis in oris orientalibus sit plantata, nec non ab inde ad utrunque latus per diffusos multipliciter palmites nostra sit extensa propago, demumque ad fines occidentales protracta, forte primitus tunc
- 2 vel totius Europe flumina, vel saltim quedam, rationalia guctura potaverunt. Sed sive advene tunc primitus advenissent, sive ad Europam indigene repedassent, ydioma secum tripharium homines actulerunt; et afferentium hoc alii meridionalem, alii septentrionalem regionem in Europa sibi sortiti sunt; et tertii, quos nunc Grecos vocamus, partim Europe, partim Asye occuparunt.
- 3 Ab uno postea eodemque ydiomate in vindice confusione recepto diversa vulgaria traxerunt originem, sicut inferius ostendemus. Nam totum quod ab hostiis Danubii sive Meotidis paludibus usque ad fines occidentales Anglie Ytalorum Francorumque finibus et Oceano limitatur, solum unum obtinuit ydioma, licet postea per Sclavones, Ungaros, Teutonicos, Saxones, Anglicos et alias nationes quamplures fuerit per diversa vulgaria dirivatum, hoc solo fere omnibus in signum eiusdem principii
- 4 remanente, quod quasi predicti omnes *id* affirmando respondent. Ab isto incipiens ydiomate, videlicet a finibus Ungarorum versus orientem, aliud occupavit totum quod ab inde vocatur Europa, nec non ulterius est protractum.
- 5 Totum vero quod in Europa restat ab istis tertium tenuit ydioma, licet nunc tripharium videatur: nam alii *oc*, alii *oil*, alii *si* affirmando 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',
- 6 'amorem', 'mare', 'terram', 'est', 'vivit', 'moritur', 'amat', alia fere omnia. Istorum vero proferentes *oc* meridionalis Europe tenent partem occidentalem, a Ianuensium finibus incipientes. Qui autem *si* dicunt a predictis finibus orientalem tenent, videlicet usque ad promuntorium illud Ytalie qua sinus Adriatici maris incipit, et Siciliam. Sed loquentes *oil* quodam modo septentrionales sunt respectu istorum: nam ab oriente Alamannos

fun of the builders' stupidity. This insignificant minority – insignificant in numbers alone – were, as I believe, of the family of Shem, Noah's third son, from which descended the people of Israel, who used this most ancient language until the time of their dispersal.

VIII

The confusion of languages recorded above leads me, on no trivial grounds, to the opinion that it was then that human beings were first scattered throughout the whole world, into every temperate zone and habitable region, right to its furthest corners. And since the principal root from which the human race has grown was planted in the East, and from there our growth has spread, through many branches and in all directions, finally reaching the furthest limits of the West, perhaps it was then that the rivers of all Europe, or at least some of them, first refreshed the throats of rational beings. But, whether they were arriving then for the first time, or whether they had been born in Europe and were now returning there, these people brought with them a tripartite language. Of those who brought it, some found their way to southern Europe and some to northern; and a third group, whom we now call Greeks, settled partly in Europe and partly in Asia.²⁴

Later, from this tripartite language (which had been received in that vengeful confusion),²⁵ different vernaculars developed, as I shall show below. For in that whole area that extends from the mouth of the Danube (or the Meotide marshes)²⁶ to the westernmost shores of England, and which is defined by the boundaries of the Italians and the French,²⁷ and by the ocean, only one language prevailed, although later it was split up into many vernaculars by the Slavs, the Hungarians, the Teutons, the Saxons, the English, and several other nations. Only one sign of their common origin remains in almost all of them, namely that nearly all the nations listed above, when they answer in the affirmative, say *id*. Starting from the furthest point reached by this vernacular (that is, from the boundary of the Hungarians towards the east), another occupied all the rest of what, from there onwards, is called Europe; and it stretches even beyond that.

All the rest of Europe that was not dominated by these two vernaculars was held by a third, although nowadays this itself seems to be divided in three: for some now say *oc*, some *oil*, and some *sì*, when they answer in the affirmative; and these are the Hispanic,²⁸ the French, and the Italians. Yet the sign that the vernaculars of these three peoples derive from one and the same language is plainly apparent: for they can be seen to use

habent et ab occidente et septentrione anglico mari vallati sunt et montibus Aragonie terminati; a meridie quoque Provincialibus et Apenini devexione clauduntur.

IX

- 1 Nos autem oportet quam habemus rationem periclitari, cum inquirere intendamus de hiis in quibus nullius autoritate fulcimur, hoc est de unius eiusdemque a principio ydiomatis variatione secuta. Et quia per notiora itinera salubrius breviusque transitur, per illud tantum quod nobis est ydioma pergamus, alia desinentes: nam quod in uno est rationale, videtur in aliis esse causa.
- 2 Est igitur super quod gradimur ydioma tractando tripharium, ut superius dictum est: nam alii *oc*, alii *si*, alii vero dicunt *oīl*. Et quod unum fuerit a principio confusionis (quod prius probandum est) apparet, quia convenimus in vocabulis multis, velut eloquentes doctores ostendunt: que quidem convenientia ipsi confusioni repugnat, que ruit celitus in edificatione Babel. Trilingues ergo doctores in multis conveniunt, et maxime in hoc vocabulo quod est 'amor'. Gerardus de Brunel:

*Si m sentis fezelz amics,
per verencusera amor;*

Rex Navarre:

Defin amor si vient sen et bonté;

Dominus Guido Guinizelli:

*Néfe' amor prima che gentil core,
né gentil <cor> prima che amor, natura.*

- 4 Quare autem tripharie principalius variatum sit, investigemus; et quare quelibet istarum variationum in se ipsa variatur, puta dextre Ytalie locutio ab ea que est sinistre: nam aliter Paduani et aliter Pisani locuntur; et quare vicinius habitantes adhuc discrepant in loquendo, ut Mediolanenses et Veronenses, Romani et Florentini, nec non convenientes in

the same words to signify many things, such as 'God', 'heaven', 'love', 'sea', 'earth', 'is', 'lives', 'dies', 'loves', and almost all others. Of these peoples, those 6 who say *oc* live in the western part of southern Europe, beginning from the boundaries of the Genoese. Those who say *si*, however, live to the east of those boundaries, all the way to that outcrop of Italy from which the gulf of the Adriatic begins, and in Sicily. But those who say *oïl* live somewhat to the north of these others, for to the east they have the Germans, on the west and north they are hemmed in by the English sea²⁹ and by the mountains of Aragon, and to the south they are enclosed by the people of Provence and the slopes of the Apennines.

IX

Now I must undertake to risk whatever intelligence I possess, since I 1 intend to enquire into matters in which I can be supported by no authority – that is, into the process of change by which one and the same language became many. And since it is quicker and safer to travel along better-known routes, I shall set out only along that of our own language, leaving the others aside; for what can be seen to be a reason in one case can be assumed to be the cause in others.

The language with which I shall be concerned, then, has three parts, 2 as I said above: for some say *oc*, some say *si*, and others, indeed, say *oïl*. And the fact – which must first of all be proved³⁰ – that this language was once unitary, at the time of the primal confusion, is clear, because the three parts agree on so many words, as masters of eloquence and learning show. This agreement denies the very confusion that was hurled down from heaven at the time of the building of Babel. Learned 3 writers in all three vernaculars agree, then, on many words, and especially on the word 'love'. Thus Giraut de Borneil:

*Si m sentis fezelz amics,
per verencusera amor;*³¹

The King of Navarre:

*Defin amor si vient sen et bonté;*³²

Master Guido Guinizzelli:

*Néfe' amor prima che gentil core,
né gentil cor prima che amor, natura.*³³

But now we must investigate why the original³⁴ language should 4 first have split into three, and why each of the three different forms exhi-

- eodem genere gentis, ut Neapolitani et Caetani, Ravennates et Faventini, et, quod mirabilius est, sub eadem civilitate morantes, ut Bononienses
- 5 Burgi Sancti Felicis et Bononienses Strate Maioris. Hee omnes differentie atque sermonum varietates quid accidant, una eademque ratione patebit.
- 6 Dicimus ergo quod nullus effectus superat suam causam, in quantum effectus est, quia nil potest efficere quod non est. Cum igitur omnis nostra loquela – preter illam homini primo concreatam a Deo – sit a nostro beneplacito reparata post confusionem illam que nil aliud fuit quam prioris oblivio, et homo sit instabilissimum atque variabilissimum animal, nec durabilis nec continua esse potest, sed sicut alia que nostra sunt, puta mores et habitus, per locorum temporumque distantias
- 7 variari oportet. Nec dubitandum reor modo in eo quod diximus ‘temporum’, sed potius opinamur tenendum: nam si alia nostra opera perscrutemur, multo magis discrepare videmur a vetustissimis concivibus nostris quam a coetaneis perlonginquis. Quapropter audacter testamur quod, si vetustissimi Papienses nunc resurgerent, sermone vario vel
- 8 diverso cum modernis Papiensibus loquerentur. Nec aliter mirum videatur quod dicimus quam percipere iuvenem exoletum quem exolescere non videmus: nam que paulatim moventur, minime perpenduntur a nobis, et quanto longiora tempora variatio rei ad perpendi requirit, tanto
- 9 rem illam stabiliorem putamus. Non etenim ammiramur si extimationes hominum qui parum distant a brutis putant eandem civitatem sub invariabili semper civicasse sermone, cum sermonis variatio civitatis eiusdem non sine longissima temporum successione paulatim contingat, et
- 10 hominum vita sit etiam, ipsa sua natura, brevissima. Si ergo per eandem gentem sermo variatur, ut dictum est, 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.
- 11 Hinc moti sunt inventores gramatice facultatis: que quidem gramatica nichil aliud est quam quedam inalterabilis locutionis ydemptitas diversibus temporibus atque locis. Hec cum de comuni consensu multarum gentium fuerit regulata, nulli singulari arbitrio videtur obnoxia, et per consequens nec variabilis esse potest. Adinvenere ergo illam ne, propter variationem sermonis arbitrio singularium fluitantis, vel nullo modo vel saltim imperfecte antiquorum attingeremus auctoritates et gesta, sive illorum quos a nobis locorum diversitas facit esse diversos.

bits variations of its own, so that, for instance, the speech of the right side of Italy differs from that of the left (for the people of Padua speak one way and those of Pisa another).³⁵ We must also ask why people who live close together still differ in their speech (such as the Milanese and the Veronese, or the Romans and the Florentines); why the same is true of people who originally belonged to the same tribe (such as those of Naples and Gaeta, or Ravenna and Faenza); and, what is still more remarkable, why it is true of people living in the same city (such as the Bolognese of Borgo San Felice and those of Strada Maggiore). It will be clear that all these differences and varieties of speech occur for one and the same reason.

I say, therefore, that no effect exceeds its cause in so far as it is an effect, because nothing can bring about that which it itself is not. Since, therefore, all our language (except that created by God along with the first man) has been assembled, in haphazard fashion, in the aftermath of the great confusion that brought nothing else than oblivion to whatever language had existed before, and since human beings are highly unstable and variable animals, our language can be neither durable nor consistent with itself; but, like everything else that belongs to us (such as manners and customs), it must vary according to distances of space and time. Nor do I think that this principle can be doubted even when I apply it, as I just have, to 'time'; rather, it should be held with conviction. For, if we thoroughly examine other works of humanity, we can see that we differ much more from ancient inhabitants of our own city than from our contemporaries who live far off. On this account, therefore, I make so bold as to declare that if the ancient citizens of Pavia were to rise from the grave, they would speak a language distinct and different from that of the Pavians of today.³⁶ Nor should what I have just said seem more strange than to see a young man grown to maturity when we have not witnessed his growing. For, when things happen little by little, we scarcely register their progress; and the longer the time that the changes in a thing take to be detected, the more stable we consider that thing to be. Let us not, then, be surprised that, in the opinion of men who differ little from brute beasts, it seems credible that a particular city should always have carried on its affairs in an unchanging language, since changes in a city's speech can only come about gradually, and over a vast span of time; and human life is, by its nature, very short. If, therefore, the speech of a given people changes, as I have said, with the passing of time, and if it can in no way remain stable, it must be the case that the speech of people who live distant and apart from each other also varies in many ways, just as do their manners and customs – which are not maintained either by nature

X

- 1 Triphario nunc existente nostro ydiomate, ut superius dictum est, in comparatione sui ipsius, secundum quod trisonum factum est, cum tanta timiditate cunctamur 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 auctoritatem erogare videtur Ytalis, qui *si* dicunt.
- 2 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 prosaycum, suum est: videlicet Biblia cum Troianorum Romanorumque gestibus compilata et Arturi regis ambages pulcherrime et quamplures alie ystorie ac doctrine. Pro se vero argumentatur 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> Latinarum est, se duobus privilegiis actestatur preesse: primo quidem quod qui dulcius subtiliusque poetati vulgariter sunt, hii familiares et domestici sui sunt, puta Cynus Pistoriensis et amicus eius; secundo quia magis videntur initi gramatice que comunis est, quod rationabiliter inspicientibus videtur gravissimum argumentum.
- 3 Nos vero iudicium relinquentes in hoc et tractatum nostrum ad vulgare latium retrahentes, et receptas in se variationes dicere nec
- 4 non illas invicem comparare conemur. Dicimus ergo primo Latium bipartitum esse in dextrum et sinistrum. Si quis autem querat de linea dividente, breviter respondemus esse iugum Apenini quod, ceu fistule culmen hinc inde ad diversa stillicidia grundat aquas, ad alterna hinc inde litora per ymbria longa distillat, ut Lucanus in secundo de-

or association, but arise from people's preferences and geographical proximity.

This was the point from which the inventors of the art of grammar began; for their *gramatica* is nothing less than a certain immutable identity of language in different times and places. Its rules having been formulated with the common consent of many peoples, it can be subject to no individual will; and, as a result, it cannot change. So those who devised this language did so lest, through changes in language dependent on the arbitrary judgement of individuals, we should become either unable, or, at best, only partially able, to enter into contact with the deeds and authoritative writings of the ancients, or of those whose difference of location makes them different from us. 11

X

Our language now exists in a tripartite form, as I said above; yet, when it comes to assessing its constituent parts on the basis of the three types of sound that they have developed, I find myself timidly hesitating to place any of them in the scale, and not daring to prefer any one to any other for the purposes of comparison, unless it be because those who devised the rules of *gramatica* are known to have chosen the word *sic* as an adverb of affirmation: and this fact would seem to confer a certain pre-eminence on the Italians, who say *si*. 1

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 style, everything that is recounted or invented in vernacular prose belongs to it: such as compilations from the Bible and the histories of Troy and Rome,³⁷ and the beautiful tales of King Arthur,³⁸ and many other works of history and doctrine. The second part, the language of *oc*, argues in its own favour that eloquent writers in the vernacular first composed poems in this sweeter and more perfect language: they include Peire d'Alvernya and other ancient masters.³⁹ 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, have been its intimates and faithful servants;⁴⁰ and second, because they seem to be in the closest contact with the *gramatica* which is shared by all – and this, to those who consider the matter rationally, will appear a very weighty argument. 2

I will refrain, however, from passing judgement on this question, 3

- scribit: dextrum quoque latus Tyrenum mare grundatorium habet,
 5 levum vero in Adriaticum cadit. Et dextri regiones sunt Apulia, sed
 non tota, Roma, Ducatus, Tuscia et Ianuensis Marchia; sinistri autem
 pars Apulie, Marchia Anconitana, Romandiola, Lombardia, Marchia
 Trivisiana cum Venetiis. Forum Iulii vero et Ystria non nisi leve Ytalie
 6 esse possunt; nec insule Tyrene maris, videlicet Sicilia et Sardinia, non
 nisi dextre Ytalie sunt, vel ad dextram Ytaliam sociande. In utroque
 quidem duorum laterum, et hiis que secuntur ad ea, lingue hominum
 variantur: ut lingua Siculorum cum Apulis, Apulorum cum Romanis,
 Romanorum cum Spoletanis, horum cum Tuscis, Tuscorum cum Ia-
 nuensibus, Ianuensium cum Sardis; nec non Calabrorum cum Anconi-
 tanis, horum cum Romandiolis, Romandiolorum cum Lombardis,
 Lombardorum cum Trivisianis et Venetis, horum cum Aquilegiensibus,
 et istorum cum Ystrianis. De quo Latinorum neminem nobiscum dis-
 sentire putamus.
- 7 Quare adminus xiiii vulgaribus sola videtur Ytalia variari. Que adhuc
 omnia vulgaria in sese variantur, ut puta in Tuscia Senenses et Aretini,
 in Lombardia Ferrarenses et Placentini; nec non in eadem civitate ali-
 qualem variationem perpendimus, ut superius in capitulo immediato po-
 suimus. Quapropter, si primas et secundarias et subsecundarias vulgarias
 Ytalie variationes calculare velimus, et in hoc minimo mundi angulo
 non solum ad millenam loquele variationem venire contigerit, sed etiam
 ad magis ultra.

and, bringing the discussion back to the Italian vernacular, will try to describe the various forms it has developed, and to compare them one with another. First of all, then, I state that Italy is divided in two, a left-hand and a right-hand side. If anyone should ask where the dividing-line is drawn, I reply briefly that it is the range of the Apennines; for just as from the topmost rain-gutter⁴¹ water is carried to the ground, dripping down through pipes on each side, these likewise irrigate the whole country through long conduits, on one side and the other, as far as the two opposite shores. All this is described in the second book of Lucan.⁴² The drip-tray on the right-hand side is the Tyrrhenian Sea, while the left-hand side drips into the Adriatic. The regions of the right-hand side are Apulia (though not all of it), Rome, the Duchy,⁴³ Tuscany, and the Genoese Marches; those on the left, however, are the other part of Apulia, the Marches of Ancona, Romagna, Lombardy, the Marches of Treviso, and Venice. As for Friuli and Istria, they can only belong to the left-hand side of Italy, while the islands in the Tyrrhenian – Sicily and Sardinia – clearly belong to the right-hand side, or at least are to be associated with it. On each of the two sides, as well as in the areas associated with them, the language of the inhabitants varies. Thus the language of the Sicilians is different from that of the Apulians, that of the Apulians from that of the Romans, that of the Romans from that of the people of Spoleto, theirs from that of the Tuscans, that of the Tuscans from that of the Genoese, and that of the Genoese from that of the Sardinians; and, likewise, the language of the Calabrians is different from that of the people of Ancona, theirs from that of the people of Romagna, that of the people of Romagna from that of the Lombards, that of the Lombards from that of the people of Treviso and the Venetians, theirs from that of the people of Aquileia, and theirs from that of the Istrians. And I think that no Italian will disagree with me about this.

So we see that Italy alone presents a range of at least fourteen different vernaculars. All these vernaculars also vary internally, so that the Tuscan of Siena is distinguished from that of Arezzo, or the Lombard of Ferrara from that of Piacenza; moreover, we can detect some variation even within a single city, as was suggested above, in the preceding chapter. For this reason, if we wished to calculate the number of primary, and secondary, and still further subordinate varieties of the Italian vernacular, we would find that, even in this tiny corner of the world, the count would take us not only to a thousand different types of speech, but well beyond that figure.

XI

1 Quam multis varietatibus latio dissonante vulgari, decentiorem
 atque illustrem Ytalie venemur loquelam; et ut nostre venationi pervium
 callem habere possimus, perplexos frutices atque sentes prius eiciamus
 de silva.

2 Sicut ergo Romani se cunctis preponendos existimant, in hac eradica-
 tione sive discriptione non inmerito eos aliis preponamus, protestantes
 eosdem in nulla vulgaris eloquentie ratione fore tangendos. Dicimus
 igitur Romanorum non vulgare, sed potius tristiloquium, ytalorum vul-
 garium omnium esse turpissimum; nec mirum, cum etiam morum habi-
 tumque deformitate pre cunctis videantur fetere. Dicunt enim *Messure*,
quinto dici?.

3 Post hos incolas Anconitane Marchie decerpamus, qui *Chignamente*
 4 *state siate* locuntur: cum quibus et Spoletanos abicimus. Nec preter-
 eundum est quod in improprium istarum trium gentium cantiones
 quamplures invente sunt: inter quas unam vidimus recte atque perfecte
 ligatam, quam quidam Florentinus nomine Castra posuerat; incipiebat
 etenim

*Unafermana scopai da Cascioli,
 cita cita se'n già'n grande aina.*

5 Post quos Mediolanenses atque Pergameos eorumque finitimos eru-
 nemus, in quorum etiam improprium quendam cecinisse recolimus

Enter l'ora del vesper, ciò fu del mes d'ochiover.

6 Post hos Aquilegienses et Ystrianos cribremus, qui *Ces fas-tu?* crude-
 liter accentuando eructuant. Cumque hiis montaninas omnes et rusti-
 canas loquelas eicimus, que semper mediastinis civibus accentus
 enormitate dissonare videntur, ut Casentinenses et Fractenses.

7 Sardos etiam, qui non Latii sunt sed Latiis associandi videntur, ei-
 ciamus, quoniam soli sine proprio vulgari esse videntur, gramaticam
 tanquam simie homines imitantes: nam *domus nova* et *dominus meus* lo-
 cuntur.

XI

Amid the cacophony of the many varieties of Italian speech, let us
 hunt for the most respectable and illustrious vernacular that exists in
 Italy; and, so that we may have an unobstructed pathway for our
 hunting, let us begin by clearing the tangled bushes and brambles out
 of the wood.

Accordingly, since the Romans believe that they should always
 receive preferential treatment, I shall begin this work of pruning or up-
 rooting, as is only right, with them; and I do so by declaring that they
 should not be taken into account in any didactic work about effective use
 of the vernacular. For what the Romans speak is not so much a vernac-
 ular as a vile jargon, the ugliest of all the languages spoken in Italy; and
 this should come as no surprise, for they also stand out among all Italians
 for the ugliness of their manners and their outward appearance. They
 say things like '*Messure, quintodici*?'⁴⁴

After these let us prune away the inhabitants of the Marches of
 Ancona, who say '*Chignamente state siate*','⁴⁵ and along with them we
 throw out the people of Spoleto. Nor should I fail to mention that a
 number of poems have been composed in derision of these three peoples;
 I have seen one of these, constructed in perfect accordance with the
 rules, written by a Florentine of the name of Castra. It began like this:

*Unafermana scopaida Cascioli,
 cita cita se'n'gia'n grande aina.*⁴⁶

After these let us root out the Milanese, the people of Bergamo, and
 their neighbours; I recall that somebody has written a derisive song
 about them too:

*Enter lora del vesper, ciò fu del mes d'ochiover.*⁴⁷

After these let us pass through our sieve the people of Aquileia and
 Istria, who belch forth '*Ces fas-tu*?'⁴⁸ with a brutal intonation. And along
 with theirs I reject all languages spoken in the mountains and the coun-
 tryside, by people like those of Casentino and Fratta, whose pronounced
 accent is always at such odds with that of city-dwellers.

As for the Sardinians, who are not Italian but may be associated with
 Italians for our purposes, out they must go, because they alone seem to
 lack a vernacular of their own, instead imitating *gramatica* as apes do
 humans: for they say '*domus nova*' and '*dominus meus*.'⁴⁹

XII

1 Exaceratis quodam modo vulgaribus ytalis, inter ea que remanserunt
in cribro comparisonem facientes honorabilius atque honorificentius
breviter seligamus.

2 Et primo de siciliano examinemus ingenium: nam videtur sicilianum
vulgare sibi famam pre aliis asciscere, eo quod quicquid poetantur Ytali
sicilianum vocatur, et eo quod perplures doctores indigenas invenimus
graviter cecinisse, puta in cantionibus illis

Ancor che l'aigua per lo foco lassi,

et

Amor, che lungiamente m'hai menato.

3 Sed hec fama trinacrie terre, si recte signum ad quod tendit inspi-
ciamus, videtur tantum in obproprium ytalorum principum remansisse,
qui non heroico more sed plebeio secuntur superbiam. Siquidem illustres
4 heroes, Fredericus Cesar et benegenitus eius Manfredus, nobilitatem ac
rectitudinem sue forme pandentes, donec fortuna permisit, humana
secuti sunt, brutalia dedignantes. Propter quod corde nobiles atque gra-
tiarum dotati inherere tantorum principum maiestati conati sunt, ita ut
eorum tempore quicquid excellentes animi Latinorum enitebantur pri-
mitus in tantorum coronatorum aula prodibat; et quia regale solium erat
Sicilia, factum est ut quicquid nostri predecessores vulgariter protu-
lerunt, sicilianum vocetur: quod quidem retinemus et nos, nec posteri
5 nostri permutare valebunt.

6 Racha, racha! Quid nunc personat tuba novissimi Frederici, quid tinti-
nabulum secundi Karoli, quid cornua Iohannis et Azonis marchionum
potentum, quid aliorum magnatum tibie, nisi 'Venite carnifices, venite
altriplices, venite avaritie sectatores'?

Sed prestat ad propositum repedare quam frustra loqui. Et dicimus
quod, si vulgare sicilianum accipere volumus secundum quod prodit a
terrigenis mediocribus, ex ore quorum iudicium eliciendum videtur, pre-
lationis honore minime dignum est, quia non sine quodam tempore pro-
fertur; ut puta ibi:

Tragemi d'este focora se t'este a bolontate.

Si autem ipsum accipere volumus secundum quod ab ore primorum
Siculorum emanat, ut in preallegatis cantionibus perpendi potest, nichil
differt ab illo quod laudabilissimum est, sicut inferius ostendemus.

XII

Having thus, as best we can, blown away the chaff from among the vernaculars of Italy, let us compare those that have remained in the sieve with each other, and quickly make our choice of the one that enjoys and confers the greatest honour. 1

First let us turn our attention to the language of Sicily, since the Sicilian vernacular seems to hold itself in higher regard than any other, first because all poetry written by Italians is called 'Sicilian', and then because we do indeed find that many learned natives of that island have written serious poetry, as, for example, in the *canzoni* 2

*Ancor che l'aigua per lo foco lassi*⁵⁰

and

*Amor, che lungiamente m'hai menato.*⁵¹

But this fame enjoyed by the Trinacrian isle,⁵² if we carefully consider the end to which it leads, seems rather to survive only as a reproof to the princes of Italy, who are so puffed up with pride that they live in a plebeian, not a heroic, fashion. Indeed, those illustrious heroes, the Emperor Frederick and his worthy son Manfred, knew how to reveal the nobility and integrity that were in their hearts; and, as long as fortune allowed, they lived in a manner befitting men, despising the bestial life.⁵³ On this account, all who were noble of heart and rich in graces⁵⁴ strove to attach themselves to the majesty of such worthy princes, so that, in their day, all that the most gifted individuals in Italy brought forth first came to light in the court of these two great monarchs. And since Sicily was the seat of the imperial throne, it came about that whatever our predecessors wrote in the vernacular was called 'Sicilian'. This term is still in use today, and posterity will be able to do nothing to change it.⁵⁵ 3

*Racha, racha!*⁵⁶ What is the noise made now by the trumpet of the latest Frederick, or the bells of the second Charles, or the horns of the powerful marquises Giovanni and Azzo, or the pipes of the other warlords?⁵⁷ Only 'Come, you butchers! Come, you traitors! Come, you devotees of greed!' 4

But I should rather return to my subject than waste words like this. So I say that, if by Sicilian vernacular we mean what is spoken by the average inhabitants of the island – and they should clearly be our standard of comparison – then this is far from worthy of the honour of heading the list, because it cannot be pronounced without a certain drawl, as in this case: 6

- 7 Apuli quoque vel sui acerbitate vel finitimorum suorum contiguitate, qui Romani et Marchiani sunt, turpiter barbarizant: dicunt enim

Bòlzerache chiangesse lo quatraro.

- 8 Sed quamvis terrigene Apuli loquantur obscene comunitè, prefulgentes eorum quidam polite locuti sunt, vocabula curialiora in suis cantionibus compilantes, ut manifeste apparet eorum dicta perspicientibus, ut puta

Madonna, dir vi voglio,

et

Per fino amore vo si letamente.

- 9 Quapropter superiora notantibus innotescere debet nec siculum nec apulum esse illud quod in Ytalia pulcerrimum est vulgare, cum eloquentes indigenas ostenderimus a proprio divertisse.

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, Gallum Pisanum, Minum Mocatam Senensem, Brunectum Florentinum: quorum dicta, si rimari vacaverit, non curialia sed municipalia tantum invenientur.
- 2 Et quoniam Tusci pre aliis in hac ebrietate baccantur, dignum utileque videtur municipalia vulgaria Tuscanorum sigillatim in aliquo depompare. Locuntur Florentini et dicunt *Manichiamo, introcque che noi non facciamo altro*. Pisani: *Bene andonno li fatti de Fiorenza per Pisa*. Lucenses: *Fo voto a Dio ke in grassarra eie lo comuno de Lucca*. Senenses: *Onche renegata avess'io Siena. Chèe chesto?* Aretini: *Vuo' tu venire ovelle?* De Perusio, Urbe Veteri, Viterbio, nec non de Civitate Castellana, propter affinitatem quam
- 3

*Tragemi d'este focorase teste a bolontate.*⁵⁸

If, however, we mean what emerges from the mouths of the leading citizens of Sicily – examples of which may be found in the *canzoni* quoted above – then it is in no way distinguishable from the most praiseworthy variety of the vernacular, as I shall show below.

The people of Apulia, to continue, whether through their own native crudity or through the proximity of their neighbours (the Romans and the people of the Marches), use many gross barbarisms: they say

*Bòlzerache chiangesse lo quatraro.*⁵⁹

But although the inhabitants of Apulia generally speak in a base fashion, some of the most distinguished among them have managed to attain a more refined manner, by including courtlier words in their poetry. This will be clear to anyone who examines their works, such as

*Madonna, dir vi voglio,*⁶⁰

and

*Per fino amore vosi letamente.*⁶¹

Therefore, if we take due account of what was said above, it seems irrefutable that neither Sicilian nor the language of Apulia can be the most beautiful of the Italian vernaculars, since, as I have shown, the most eloquent natives of the two regions have preferred not to use them.

XIII

After this, we come to the Tuscans, who, rendered senseless by some aberration of their own, seem to lay claim to the honour of possessing the illustrious vernacular. And it is not only the common people who lose their heads in this fashion, for we find that a number of famous men have believed as much: like Guittone d'Arezzo,⁶² who never even aimed at a vernacular worthy of the court, or Bonagiunta da Lucca,⁶³ or Gallo of Pisa,⁶⁴ or Mino Mocato of Siena,⁶⁵ or Brunetto the Florentine,⁶⁶ all of whose poetry, if there were space to study it closely here, we would find to be fitted not for a court but at best for a city council.

Now, since the Tuscans are the most notorious victims of this mental intoxication, it seems both appropriate and useful to examine the vernaculars of the cities of Tuscany one by one, and thus to burst the bubble of their pride. When the Florentines speak, they say things like: '*Manichiamo, introcque che noi non facciamo altro.*'⁶⁷ The Pisans: '*Bene andonno li*

- 4 habent cum Romanis et Spoletanis, nichil tractare intendimus. Sed
 quanquam fere omnes Tusci in suo turpiloquio sint obtusi, nonnullos
 vulgaris excellentiam cognovisse sentimus, scilicet Guidonem, Lapum
 et unum alium, Florentinos, et Cynum Pistoriensem, quem nunc indigne
 5 postponimus, non indigne coacti. Itaque si tuscanas examinemus lo-
 quelas, et pensemus qualiter viri prehonorati a propria diverterunt, non
 restat in dubio quin aliud sit vulgare quod querimus quam quod attingit
 populus Tuscanorum.
- 6 Si quis autem quod de Tuscis asserimus, de Ianuensibus asserendum
 non putet, hoc solum in mente premat, quod si per oblivionem Ianuenses
 ammitterent z licteram, vel mutire totaliter eos vel novam reparare opor-
 teret loquelam. Est enim z maxima pars eorum locutionis: que quidem
 lictera non sine multa rigiditate profertur.

XIV

- 1 Transeuntes nunc humeros Apenini frondiferos levam Ytaliam con-
 tatim venemur ceu solemus, orientaliter ineuntes.
- 2 Romandiolam igitur ingredientes, dicimus nos duo in Latio invenisse
 vulgaria quibusdam convenientiis contrariis alternata. Quorum unum
 in tantum muliebre videtur propter vocabulorum et prolotionis molli-
 tiem quod virum, etiam si viriliter sonet, feminam tamen facit esse cre-
 dendum. Hoc Romandiolos omnes habet, et presertim Forlivienses,
 3 quorum civitas, licet novissima sit, meditullium tamen esse videtur
 totius provincie: hii *deusci* affirmando locuntur, et *oclo meo* et *corada mea*
 proferunt blandientes. Horum aliquos a proprio poetando divertisse
 4 audivimus, Thomam videlicet et Ugolinum Bucciolam, Faventinos. Est et
 aliud, sicut dictum est, adeo vocabulis accentibusque yrsutum et
 yspidum quod propter sui rudem asperitatem mulierem loquentem non
 5 solum disterninat, sed esse virum dubitares, lector. Hoc omnes qui
magara dicunt, Brixianos videlicet, Veronenses et Vigentinos, habet; nec
 non Paduanos, turpiter sincopantes omnia in ‘-tus’ participia et denomi-
 nativa in ‘-tas’, ut *mercò* et *bontè*. Cum quibus et Trivisianos adducimus,

*fatti de Fiorenza per Pisa.*⁶⁸ The people of Lucca: '*Fo voto a Dio ke in grassarra eie lo comuno de Lucca.*'⁶⁹ The Sienese: '*Onche reneḡata avess'io Siena. Chèe chesto?*'⁷⁰ The people of Arezzo: '*Vuo' tu venire ovelle?*'⁷¹ I have no intention of dealing with Perugia, Orvieto, Viterbo, or Città di Castello, because of their inhabitants' affinity with the Romans and the people of Spoleto. However, though almost all Tuscans are steeped in their own foul jargon, there are a few, I feel, who have understood the excellence of the vernacular: these include Guido, Lapo, and one other, all from Florence, and Cino, from Pistoia, whom I place unworthily here at the end, moved by a consideration that is far from unworthy.⁷² Therefore, if we study the languages spoken in Tuscany, and if we think what kind of distinguished individuals have avoided the use of their own, there can be no doubt that the vernacular we seek is something other than that which the people of Tuscany can attain.

If there is anyone who thinks that what I have just said about the Tuscans could not be applied to the Genoese, let him consider only that if, through forgetfulness, the people of Genoa lost the use of the letter z, they would either have to fall silent for ever or invent a new language for themselves. For z forms the greater part of their vernacular, and it is, of course, a letter that cannot be pronounced without considerable harshness.

XIV

Let us now traverse the leafy shoulders of the Apennines, and continue our hunt, in the accustomed manner, on the left-hand side of Italy, beginning from the east.

Our first encounter, therefore, is with the language of Romagna, of which I say that in this part of Italy are found two vernaculars which stand in direct opposition to each other because of certain contradictory features. One of them is so womanish, because of the softness of its vocabulary and pronunciation, that a man who speaks it, even if in a suitably virile manner, still ends up being mistaken for a woman. This is spoken by everybody in Romagna, especially the people of Forlì, whose city, despite being near the edge of the region, none the less seems to be the focal point of the whole province: they say '*deusci*'⁷³ when they wish to say 'yes', and to seduce someone they say '*oclo meo*'⁷⁴ and '*corada mea*'.⁷⁵ I have heard that some of them depart from their native speech in their poetry; these include Tommaso, and Ugolino Bucciòla, both of Faenza.⁷⁶ There is also another vernacular, as I said, so hirsute and shaggy in its vocabulary and accent that, because of its brutal harshness, it not only destroys the femi-

qui more Brixianorum et finitimorum suorum *u* consonantem per *f* apoc-
opando proferunt, puta *nof* pro 'novem' et *vif* pro 'vivo': quod quidem bar-
barissimum reprobamus.

- 6 Veneti quoque nec sese investigati vulgaris honore dignantur; et si
quis eorum, errore confossus, vanitaret in hoc, recordetur si unquam
dixit

Per le plaghe di Dio tu no verras.

- 7 Inter quos omnes unum audivimus nitentem divertere a materno et
ad curiale vulgare intendere, videlicet Ildebrandinum Paduanum.
- 8 Quare, omnibus presentis capituli ad iudicium comparentibus, arbi-
tramur nec romandiolum nec suum oppositum, ut dictum est, nec vene-
tianum esse illud quod querimus vulgare illustre.

XV

- 1 Illud autem quod de ytalica silva residet percontari conemur expe-
dientes.
- 2 Dicimus ergo quod forte non male opinantur qui Bononienses as-
serunt pulcriori locutione loquentes, cum ab Ymolensibus, Ferrarensibus
et Mutinensibus circumstantibus aliquid proprio vulgari asciscunt, sicut
facere quoslibet a finitimis suis conicimus, ut Sordellus de Mantua sua
ostendit, Cremona, Brixie atque Verone confini: qui, tantus eloquentie vir
existens, non solum in poetando sed quomodocunque loquendo patrium
3 vulgare deseruit. Accipiunt enim prefati cives ab Ymolensibus lenitatem
atque mollitiem, a Ferrarensibus vero et Mutinensibus aliqualem garru-
litem que proprie Lombardorum est: hanc ex commixtione advenarum
4 Longobardorum terrigenis credimus remansisse. Et hec est causa quare
Ferrarensium, Mutinensium vel Regianorum nullum invenimus poe-
tasse: nam proprie garrulitati assuefacti nullo modo possunt ad vulgare
aulicum sine quadam acerbitate venire. Quod multo magis de Parmen-
sibus est putandum, qui *monto* pro 'multo' dicunt.

ninity of any woman who speaks it, but, reader, would make you think 5
 her a man. This is the speech of all those who say ‘*magara*,⁷⁷ such as the ci-
 tizens of Brescia, Verona and Vicenza; and the Paduans also speak like
 this, when they cruelly cut short all the participles ending in *tus* and the
 nouns in *tas*, saying ‘*mercò*’⁷⁸ and ‘*bontè*’.⁷⁹ Along with these I will
 mention the people of Treviso, who, like those of Brescia and their neigh-
 bours, abbreviate their words by pronouncing consonantal *u* as *f*, saying
 ‘*nof*’ for ‘*nove*’⁸⁰ and ‘*vif*’ for ‘*vivo*’.⁸¹ This I denounce as the height of bar-
 barism.

Nor can the Venetians be considered worthy of the honour due to the 6
 vernacular for which we are searching; and if any of them, transfixed by
 error, be tempted to take pride in his speech, let him remember if he ever
 said

*Per le plaghe di Dio tu no verras.*⁸²

Among all these peoples I have heard only one individual who tried 7
 to break free of his mother-tongue and aspire to a vernacular worthy of
 the court, and that was Aldobrandino Padovano.⁸³

So on all the vernaculars that have presented themselves before the 8
 tribunal of the present chapter I pronounce the following verdict: that
 neither the language of Romagna, nor its opposite described above, nor
 Venetian is that illustrious vernacular which we are seeking.

XV

I shall now try to bring to a rapid conclusion our hunt through what 1
 remains of the Italian forest.

I say, then, that perhaps those are not wrong who claim that the Bolog- 2
 nese speak a more beautiful language than most, especially since they
 take many features of their own speech from that of the people who live
 around them, in Imola, Ferrara and Modena. I believe that everybody
 does this with respect to his own neighbours, as is shown by the case of
 Sordello of Mantua, on the borders of Cremona, Brescia, and Verona: this
 man of unusual eloquence abandoned the vernacular of his home town
 not only when writing poetry but on every other occasion.⁸⁴ So the 3
 above-mentioned citizens of Bologna take a soft, yielding quality from
 those of Imola, and from the people of Ferrara and Modena, on the other
 hand, a certain abruptness which is more typical of the Lombards (to
 whom it was left, I believe, after the mingling of the original inhabitants
 of the area with the invading Longobards). And this is why we find that 4
 no one from Ferrara, Modena, or Reggio has written poetry; for, being ac-

- 5 Si ergo Bononienses utrinque accipiunt, ut dictum est, rationabile videtur esse quod eorum locutio per commixtionem oppositorum ut dictum est ad laudabilem suavitatem remaneat temperata: quod procul
6 dubio nostro iudicio sic esse censemus. Itaque si preponentes eos in vulgari sermone sola municipalia Latinorum vulgaria comparando considerant, allubescentes concordamus cum illis; si vero simpliciter vulgare bononiense preferendum existimant, dissentientes discordamus ab eis. Non etenim est quod aulicum et illustre vocamus: quoniam, si fuisset, maximus Guido Guinizelli, Guido Ghisilerius, Fabrutius et Honestus et alii poetantes Bononie nunquam a proprio divertissent: qui doctores fuerunt illustres et vulgarium discretione repleti. Maximus Guido:

Madonna, 'l'fino amore ch'io vi porto;

Guido Ghisilerius:

Donna, lo fermo core;

Fabrutius:

Lo meo lontano gire;

Honestus:

Più non attendo il tuo soccorso, amore.

Que quidem verba prorsus a mediastinis Bononie sunt diversa.

- 7 Cumque de residuis in extremis Ytalie civitatibus neminem dubitare pendamus – et si quis dubitat, illum nulla nostra solutione dignamur –, parum restat in nostra discussione dicendum. Quare, cribellum cupientes deponere, ut residentiam cito visamus, dicimus Tridentum atque Taurinum nec non Alexandriam civitates metis Ytalie in tantum sedere propinquas quod puras nequeunt habere loquelas; ita quod, si etiam quod turpissimum habent vulgare, haberent pulcherrimum, propter aliorum commixtionem esse vere latium negaremus. Quare, si latium illustre venamur, quod venamur in illis inveniri non potest.

customed to their native abruptness, they could not approach the high poetic vernacular without betraying a certain lack of sophistication. And the same must also be thought, with still greater conviction, of the people of Parma, who say '*montò*' when they mean '*molto*'.⁸⁵

If, then, the Bolognese take from all sides, as I have said, it seems reasonable to suggest that their language, tempered by the combination of opposites mentioned above, should achieve a praiseworthy degree of elegance; and this, in my opinion, is beyond doubt true. Therefore, if theirs is put forward as the most admirable of vernaculars on the basis of a comparison of all the languages actually spoken in the different cities of Italy, I will agree wholeheartedly; if, however, it were to be suggested that the Bolognese vernacular should be given pride of place in absolute terms, then, dissenting, I must register my firm disagreement. For it is not what we could call 'aulic' or 'illustrious' language; if it were, Bolognese poets like the great Guido Guinizzelli, or Guido Ghislieri, or Fabruzzo or Onesto or many others, would never have left off using it.⁸⁶ Yet these were distinguished men of learning, who fully understood the nature of the vernacular. The great Guido wrote

*Madonna, l'fino amore ch'io vi porto;*⁸⁷

Guido Ghislieri:

*Donna, lofermo core;*⁸⁸

Fabruzzo:

*Lomeo lontanogire;*⁸⁹

Onesto:

*Più non attendo il tuo soccorso, amore.*⁹⁰

All these words are very different from what you will hear in the heart of Bologna.

As for the remaining cities located on the furthest edges of Italy, I do not think that anyone can have doubts about them – and if he has, I will waste no explanations on him. So there remains little to be said about our present subject. On which account, and in order to survey quickly what is left (for I am anxious to lay down my sieve), I say that Trento and Turin, in my opinion, along with Alessandria, are situated so close to the boundaries of Italy that they could not possibly speak a pure language. So, even if they possessed the most beautiful of vernaculars – and the ones they do have are appalling – I would deny that their speech is truly Italian, because of its contamination by that of others. I conclude, therefore, that

XVI

- 1 Postquam venati saltus et pascua sumus Ytalie, nec pantheram quam sequimur adinvenimus, ut ipsam reperire possimus rationabilius investigemus de illa ut, solerti studio, redolentem ubique et necubi apparentem nostris penitus irretiamus tenticulis.
- 2 Resumentes igitur venabula nostra, dicimus quod in omni genere rerum unum esse oportet quo generis illius omnia comparentur et ponderentur, et a quo omnium aliorum mensuram accipiamus: sicut in numero cuncta mesurantur uno, et plura vel pauciora dicuntur secundum quod distant ab uno vel ei propinquant, et sicut in coloribus omnes albo mesurantur – nam visibiles magis et minus dicuntur secundum quod accedunt vel recedunt ab albo. Et quemadmodum de hiis dicimus que quantitatem et qualitatem ostendunt, de predicamentorum quolibet, etiam de substantia, posse dici putamus: scilicet ut unumquodque mensurabile sit, secundum quod in genere est, illo quod simplicissimum est in ipso genere. Quapropter in actionibus nostris, quantumcunque dividantur in species, hoc signum inveniri oportet quo et ipse mesurentur. Nam, in quantum simpliciter ut homines agimus, virtutem habemus – ut generaliter illam intelligamus –: nam secundum ipsam bonum et malum hominem iudicamus; in quantum ut homines cives agimus, habemus legem, secundum quam dicitur civis bonus et malus; in quantum ut homines latini agimus, quedam habemus simplicissima signa et morum et habituum et locutionis, quibus latine actiones
- 3 ponderantur et mesurantur. Que quidem nobilissima sunt earum que Latinorum sunt actiones, hec nullius civitatis Ytalie propria sunt, et in omnibus comunia sunt: inter que nunc potest illud discerni vulgare quod superius venabamur, quod in qualibet redolet civitate nec cubat in
- 4 ulla. Potest tamen magis in una quam in alia redolere, sicut simplicissima substantiarum, que Deus est, in homine magis redolet quam in bruto, in animali quam in planta, in hac quam in minera, in hac quam in elemento, in igne quam in terra; et simplicissima quantitas, quod est unum, in impari numero redolet magis quam in pari; et simplicissimus color, qui albus est, magis in citrino quam in viride redolet.
- 5
- 6 Itaque, adepti quod querebamus, dicimus illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale vulgare in Latio, quod omnis latie civitatis est et nullius esse videtur, et quo municipalia vulgaria omnia Latinorum mesurantur et ponderantur et comparantur.

if we are hunting an illustrious form of Italian, our prey is not to be found in any of these cities.

XVI

Now that we have hunted across the woodlands and pastures of all Italy without finding the panther we are trailing, let us, in the hope of tracking it down, carry out a more closely reasoned investigation, so that, by the assiduous practice of cunning, we can at last entice into our trap this creature whose scent is left everywhere but which is nowhere to be seen.

Accordingly, I take up my equipment once more for the hunt, and state that in any kind of thing there needs to be one instance with which all others can be compared, against which they can be weighed, and from which we derive the standard by which all others are measured.⁹¹ Thus, in arithmetic, all numbers are measured by comparison with the number one, and are deemed larger or smaller according to their relative distance from or closeness to that number. Likewise with colours, all are measured against white, and held to be brighter or darker as they approach or recede from that colour. And I hold that what can be said of things that have quantity and quality is also true of any predicate whatever, and even of substances: in short, that everything can be measured, in so far as it belongs to a genus, by comparison with the simplest individual found in that genus. Therefore, when dealing with human actions, in so far as these can be allotted to different categories, we must be able to define a standard against which these too can be measured. Now, in so far as we act simply as human beings, we possess a capacity to act – a ‘virtue’, if we understand this in a general sense – and according to this we judge people to be good or bad. In so far as we act as human beings who are citizens, we have the law, by whose standards we can describe a citizen as good or bad; in so far as we act as human beings who are Italians, there are certain very simple features, of manners and appearance and speech, by which the actions of the people of Italy can be weighed and measured. But the most noble actions among those performed by Italians are proper to no one Italian city, but are common to them all; and among these we can now place the use of the vernacular that we were hunting above, which has left its scent in every city but made its home in none. Its scent may still be stronger in one city than another, just as the simplest of substances, which is God, is more clearly present in human beings than in animals, in animals than in plants,⁹² in plants than in minerals, in minerals than in the basic element, and in fire than in earth;

XVII

- 1 Quare autem hoc quod repertum est, illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale adicientes vocemus, nunc disponendum est: per quod clarius ipsum quod ipsum est faciamus patere.
- 2 Primum igitur quid intendimus cum illustre adicimus, et quare illustre dicimus, denudemus. Per hoc quoque quod illustre dicimus, intelligimus quid illuminans et illuminatum prefulgens: et hoc modo viros appellamus illustres, vel quia potestate illuminati alios et iustitia et karitate illuminant, vel quia excellenter magistrati excellenter magistrent, ut Seneca et Numa Pompilius. Et vulgare de quo loquimur et sublimatum est magistratu et potestate, et suos honore sublimat et gloria.
- 3 Magistratu quidem sublimatum videtur, cum de tot rudibus Latinorum vocabulis, de tot perplexis constructionibus, de tot defectivis prolationibus, de tot rusticanis accentibus, tam egregium, tam extricatum, tam perfectum et tam urbanum videamus electum ut Cynus Pistoriensis et amicus eius ostendunt in cantionibus suis.
- 4 Quod autem exaltatum sit potestate, videtur. Et quid maioris potestatis est quam quod humana corda versare potest, ita ut nolentem volentem et volentem nolentem faciat, velut ipsum et fecit et facit?
- 5 Quod autem honore sublimet, in promptu est. Nonne domestici sui
- 6 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 posteramus.
- 7 Quare ipsum illustre merito profiteri debemus.

or as the simplest quantity, one, is more apparent in odd numbers than in even; or as the simplest colour, white, shines more visibly in yellow than in green.

So we have found what we were seeking: we can define the illustrious, 6
cardinal, aulic, and curial vernacular in Italy as that which belongs to
every Italian city yet seems to belong to none, and against which the ver-
naculars of all the cities of the Italians can be measured, weighed, and
compared.

XVII

Now, however, it becomes necessary to explain why what we have 1
found should be given the epithets 'illustrious', 'cardinal', 'aulic', and
'curial'; and by so doing I shall reveal more clearly what the phenomenon
is in itself.

First of all, therefore, I shall explain what I mean when I use the term 2
'illustrious', and why it is applied to the vernacular. Now when we call
something 'illustrious', we mean that it gives off light or reflects the light
that it receives from elsewhere: and we call men 'illustrious' in this sense,
either because, enlightened by power, they shine forth justice and
charity upon other people, or because, excellently taught, they teach
most excellently, like Seneca or Numa Pompilius.⁹³ And this vernacular
of which I speak is both sublime in learning and power, and capable of ex-
alting those who use it in honour and glory.

That it is sublime in learning is clear when we see it emerge, so out- 3
standing, so lucid, so perfect and so civilised, from among so many ugly
words used by Italians, so many convoluted constructions, so many de-
fective formations, and so many barbarous pronunciations – as Cino da
Pistoia and his friend show us in their *canzoni*.

That it is exalted in power is plain. And what greater power could 4
there be than that which can melt the hearts of human beings, so as to
make the unwilling willing and the willing unwilling, as it has done and
still does?

That it raises to honour is readily apparent. Does not the fame of its de- 5
votees exceed that of any king, marquis, count or warlord? There is no 6
need to prove this. And I myself have known how greatly it increases the
glory of those who serve it, I who, for the sake of that glory's sweetness,
have the experience of exile behind me.

For all these reasons we are right to call this vernacular 'illustrious'. 7

XVIII

- 1 Neque sine ratione ipsum vulgare illustre decusamus adiectione secunda, videlicet ut id cardinale vocetur. Nam sicut totum hostium cardinem sequitur ut, quo cardo vertitur, versetur et ipsum, seu introrsum seu extrorsum flectatur, sic et universus municipalium grex vulgarium vertitur et revertitur, movetur et pausat secundum quod istud, quod quidem vere paterfamilias esse videtur. Nonne cotidie extirpat sentosos frutices de ytalia silva? Nonne cotidie vel plantas inserit vel plantaria plantat? Quid aliud agricole sui satagunt nisi ut amoveant et admoveant, ut dictum est? Quare prorsus tanto decusari vocabulo promeretur.
- 2 Quia vero aulicum nominamus illud causa est quod, si aulam nos Ytali haberemus, palatinum foret. Nam si aula totius regni comunis est domus et omnium regni partium gubernatrix augusta, quicquid tale est ut omnibus sit comune nec proprium ulli, conveniens est ut in ea conversetur et habitet, nec aliquod aliud habitaculum tanto dignum est habitante: hoc nempe videtur esse id de quo loquimur vulgare. Et hinc est quod in regis omnibus conversantes semper illustri vulgari locuntur; hinc etiam est quod nostrum illustre velut acola peregrinatur et in humilibus hospitatur asilis, cum aula vacemus.
- 4 Est etiam merito curiale dicendum, quia curialitas nil aliud est quam librata regula eorum que peragenda sunt: et quia statera huiusmodi librationis tantum in excellentissimis curiis esse solet, hinc est quod quicquid in actibus nostris bene libratum est, curiale dicatur. Unde cum istud in excellentissima Ytalorum curia sit libratum, dici curiale meretur.
- 5 Sed dicere quod in excellentissima Ytalorum curia sit libratum, videtur nugatio, cum curia careamus. Ad quod facile respondetur: nam licet curia, secundum quod unita accipitur, ut curia regis Alamannie, in Ytalia non sit, membra tamen eius non desunt; et sicut membra illius uno Principe uniuntur, sic membra huius gratioso lumine rationis unita sunt. Quare falsum esset dicere curia carere Ytalos, quanquam Principe careamus, quoniam curiam habemus, licet corporaliter sit dispersa.

XVIII

Nor are we without justification if we adorn this illustrious vernacular 1
with our second epithet, by calling it 'cardinal'.⁹⁴ For, just as the whole
structure of a door obeys its hinge, so that in whatever direction the
hinge moves, the door moves with it, whether it opens towards the inside
or the outside, so the whole flock of languages spoken in the cities of Italy
turns this way or that, moves or stands still, at the behest of this vernacular,
which thus shows itself to be the true head of their family. Does it
not daily dig up thorn-bushes growing in the Italian forest? Does it not
daily make new grafts or prick out seedlings? What else do its gardeners
do, if they are not uprooting or planting, as I said earlier? For this reason it
has fully earned the right to deck itself out with so noble an epithet.

The reason for calling this vernacular 'aulic', on the other hand, is 2
that if we Italians had a royal court, it would make its home in the court's
palace. For if the court is the shared home of the entire kingdom, and the
honoured governor of every part of it, it is fitting that everything that is
common to all yet owned by none should frequent the court and live
there; and indeed no other dwelling-place would be worthy of such a resident.
And this certainly seems to be true of this vernacular of which I 3
speak. So this is why those who frequent any royal court always speak an
illustrious vernacular; it is also why our illustrious vernacular wanders
around like a homeless stranger, finding hospitality in more humble
homes – because we have no court.

It is right to call this vernacular 'curial', because the essence of being 4
curial is no more than providing a balanced assessment of whatever has
to be dealt with; and because the scales on which this assessment is
carried out are usually found only in the most authoritative of tribunals,
whatever is well balanced in our actions is called 'curial'. Therefore, since
this vernacular has been assessed before the most excellent tribunal in
Italy, it deserves to be called 'curial'.⁹⁵

Yet it seems contradictory to say that it has been assessed in the most 5
excellent tribunal in Italy, since we have no such tribunal. The answer to
this is simple. For although it is true that there is no such tribunal in Italy
– in the sense of a single institution, like that of the king of Germany⁹⁶ –
yet its constituent elements are not lacking. And just as the elements of
the German tribunal are united under a single monarch, so those of the
Italian have been brought together by the gracious light of reason. So it
would not be true to say that the Italians lack a tribunal altogether, even
though we lack a monarch, because we do have one, but its physical components
are scattered.

XIX

- 1 Hoc autem vulgare quod illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale ostensum est, dicimus esse illud quod vulgare latium appellatur. Nam sicut quoddam vulgare est invenire quod proprium est Cremonae, sic quoddam est invenire quod proprium est Lombardie; et sicut est invenire aliquod quod sit proprium Lombardie, <sic> est invenire aliquod quod sit totius sinistre Ytalie proprium; et sicut omnia hec est invenire, sic et illud quod totius Ytalie est. Et sicut illud cremonense ac illud lombardum et tertium semilatum dicitur, sic istud, quod totius Ytalie est, latium vulgare vocatur. Hoc enim usi sunt doctores illustres qui lingua vulgari poetati sunt in Ytalia, ut Siculi, Apuli, Tusci, Romandioli, Lombardi et utriusque Marchie viri.
- 2 Et quia intentio nostra, ut 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, in immediatis libris tractabimus. Quibus illuminatis, inferiora vulgaria illuminare curabimus, gradatim descendentes ad illud quod unius solius familie proprium est.
- 3

XIX

So now we can say that this vernacular, which has been shown to be illustrious, cardinal, aulic, and⁹⁷ curial, is the vernacular that is called Italian. For, just as one vernacular can be identified as belonging to Cremona, so can another that belongs to Lombardy; and just as one can be identified that belongs to Lombardy, so can another that belongs to the whole left-hand side of Italy; and just as all these can be identified in this way, so can that which belongs to Italy as a whole. And just as the first is called Cremonese, the second Lombard, and the third half-Italian, so this last, which belongs to all Italy, is called the Italian vernacular. This is the language used by the illustrious authors who have written vernacular poetry in Italy, whether they came from Sicily, Apulia, Tuscany, Romagna, Lombardy, or either of the Marches.

And since my intention, as I promised at the beginning of this work, is to teach a theory of the effective use of the vernacular, I have begun with this form of it, as being the most excellent; and I shall go on, in the following books,⁹⁸ to discuss the following questions: whom I think worthy of using this language, for what purpose, in what manner, where, when, and what audience they should address. Having clarified all this, I shall attempt to throw some light on the question of the less important vernaculars, descending step by step until I reach the language that belongs to a single family.