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1946

Journal Article

**To cite this version:**

Kristeller, P. O. (1946). The Origin and Development of the Language of Italian Prose. *Word. Journal of the International Linguistic Association*, *1*(2), 15. https://doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1946.11659276

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**Publisher's URL:** https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rwrd20/current

**DOI:** 10.1080/00437956.1946.11659276

**Date submitted:** 2020-03-23

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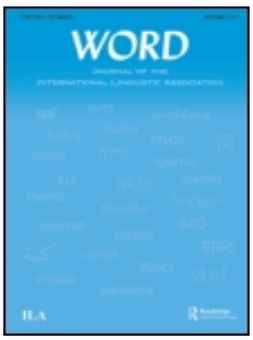

WORD

ISSN: 0043-7956 (Print) 2373-5112 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rwrd20

# The Origin and Development of the Language of Italian Prose

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**To cite this article:** Paul Oskar Kristeller (1946) The Origin and Development of the Language of Italian Prose, WORD, 2:1, 50-65, DOI: 10.1080/00437956.1946.11659276

**To link to this article:** http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00437956.1946.11659276

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# THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LANGUAGE OF ITALIAN PROSE

PAUL OSKAR KRISTELLER

During the earlier phases of modern linguistics, literary languages were commonly used as points of departure for the comparative study of the various languages. More recently, the interest of most linguists has shifted to the spoken languages and dialects, and accordingly the relationship between the written or literary languages and the spoken dialects has become a problem of increasing importance. Altho a literary language may serve for the territory of many different dialects, it is usually taken to originate in one or two particular dialects. In this sense, the problem of the Italian literary language is quite familiar to modern linguists. They have debated the question whether it is based on the Tuscan dialect, and they have studied the historical antecedents of this controversy, which can be traced back to the fourteenth century and which assumed especial importance in the sixteenth.[1] The problem of the relationship between literary Italian and the various dialects of Italy is not the major subject of this paper, altho we have to mention it at several points.[2] Instead we concentrate on another related problem which has also been discussed by many historians of Italian language and literature, altho in a rather subordinate and almost reluctant manner: the relation of the Italian literary language to Latin. I am not referring to classical Latin, or to its late ancient successor, vulgar Latin, which was the basis of all Italian dialects, as of all other Romance languages. I am speaking of the Latin of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, which in Italy, as in all other countries of Western Europe, served as a written literary language for many centuries after the commonly spoken language had changed from vulgar Latin to the vernacular Italian dialects. The Italian literary language hence did not grow in a vacuum, but it had to conquer its territory from medieval Latin. During the period that goes at least from the tenth to the end of the twelfth century, when Italian dialects were commonly spoken thruout the peninsula, Latin continued to serve almost exclusively as a vehicle of literary expression. Long after literary Italian had made its appearance, from the thirteenth century to the end of the eighteenth, Latin survived

[1] For a bibliography, see Robert A. Hall, Jr., *Bibliography of Italian Linguistics* (Baltimore 1941), especially p. 30 ff., 53 ff., 425 ff. Also B. Migliorini, Storia della lingua italiana, in *Un Cinquantenario de studi sulla letteratura italiana (1886–1936), Saggi raccolti dalla Società Filologica Romana e dedicati a Vittorio Rossi*, 2.3–27 (Florence 1937). On the 'Questione della lingua,' see: Therèse Labande-Jeanroy, *La Question de la langue en Italie* (Strasbourg 1925); V. Vivaldi, *Storia delle controversie linguistiche in Italia da Dante ai nostri giorni*, vol. 1 (Catanzaro 1925); Robert A. Hall, Jr., *The Italian Questione della Lingua, An Interpretative Essay* (Chapel Hill 1942).

[2] For the various Italian dialects and their literary documents, see Mario E. Pei, *The Italian Language* (New York 1941). Several early examples are given in E. Monaci's *Crestomazia italiana dei primi secoli* (Città di Castello 1912).

as an alternate literary language.[3] The gradual rise and expansion of the Italian literary language at the expense of its Latin rival will be the major subject of this paper.[4]

Let us begin with the familiar view of the matter. As it is well known, vernacular literature began in Italy much later than in France, Germany, or England, that is, toward the end of the twelfth century. The thirteenth century witnessed a rapid development of lyrical poetry in the three schools of Sicily, Bologna, and Tuscany, which all left the impact of their dialects upon the resulting literary language. The influence of Tuscany finally prevailed because it dominated the last phase of this development and produced the greatest poets.[5] The Tuscan school culminated in Dante, who also gave the language its final form, and thus Italy attained around 1300 a common literary language. This language made further progress during the fourteenth century, which produced a large amount of vernacular literature and at least two great writers, Petrarch and Boccaccio. This promising development was suddenly stopped around 1400 when the humanists attempted their artificial revival of classical Latin. Vernacular literature was thus doomed to decline, and almost threatened with extinction. Yet it began to rise again toward the end of the fifteenth century and, in spite of continuing humanist opposition, the vernacular asserted itself against Latin and achieved a complete and permanent victory after the beginning of the sixteenth century.[6]

This general view seems to find its confirmation in the theoretical treatises of the sixteenth century, and also in the general history of Italian literature as represented by its greatest writers. However, it has never been made the subject of a thoro and accurate examination that would take into account the full range of available textual and documentary material. Several scholars who came across certain facts that did not fit the general conception have questioned or corrected it in various points, but even these scholars usually failed to draw all

[3] The medieval term *per lettera* or *literaliter* for Latin as opposed to *volgare* or *vulgariter* reflects the earlier stage in which Latin was the written language in contrast to the spoken vernacular. The term *grammatica* for Latin reflects the later situation in which the vernacular, although used for writing, had no book of rules.

[4] There are no bibliographies illustrating the respective use of Latin and vernacular in Italian literature. The major data can be derived from Bertoni's *Il Duecento* and the other volumes of the *Storia letteraria d'Italia*, see below. For a bibliography of vernacular works, see G. Fontanini, *Biblioteca dell'Eloquenza Italiana* (with the annotations of Apostolo Zeno), 2 vols. (Venice 1753); B. Gamba, *Serie dei testi di lingua e di altre opere importanti nella italiana letteratura scritte dal secolo XIV al XIX* (4th ed., Venice 1839); F. Zambrini, *Le opere volgari a stampa dei secoli XIII e XIV* (4th ed., Bologna 1878, and several supplements). Zambrini's work stops with the fourteenth century, is dominated by purist prejudices, and often fails to indicate the dialect, place and date of origin.

[5] The development of the poetical language in the thirteenth century has been the subject of a lengthy discussion that does not directly concern our problem.

[6] For this common view, see Robert A. Hall, *The Italian Questione della Lingua*, *op. cit.* 3 f., 12 ff., 51 f. Vernon Hall Jr., *Renaissance Literary Criticism* (New York 1945), 16 ff. The common view is assumed by most general historians of Italian literature, and by many students of Italian humanism, although some of the details are differently presented by different scholars.

the conclusions suggested by their own findings, and certainly their criticism did not influence common opinion. The latter is often presented in quite suggestive fashion and with a colorful oratory that tends to fill the gaps left by textual evidence. The rise of the vernacular against Latin is pictured by different scholars as a fight of the lay spirit against Church authority, of democracy against the forces of feudalism and absolutism, of patriotism against foreign or international influences, or of the open-minded plain citizen against the narrow professional interests of Academic cliques. Such statements which are scattered with more or less emphasis in the scholarly literature may contain a nucleus of truth, yet they are on the whole difficult to reconcile with each other or with the historical development which they are intended to explain. They reflect ideas that have been prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and that may in part be traced back to the late sixteenth century[7] but that should be applied to earlier periods only with the greatest caution. The vigorous and extensive religious literature in the vernacular produced during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries shows that religious and ecclesiastic interests were not identified with the use of Latin or opposed to the vernacular. Since the vernacular was cultivated at many feudal and monarchical courts whereas Latin literature was often promoted in the free republics the rivalry between the two languages can hardly be reduced to a political issue. The active part taken by learned circles and even by many humanists in the development of vernacular literature shows that the latter was not merely the concern of the plain citizen, whereas the Latin literature of the Renaissance, which includes descriptions of tournaments and of snowball fights as well as translations from the vernacular of sonnets and *novelle* cannot be labeled as academic. In Italy where the heritage of ancient Rome was always considered as a national glory Latin could not easily be discarded as a 'foreign' language.

There thus arises considerable doubt concerning many general notions associated with the language question, and this doubt also seems to affect the current view of the question and to call for a careful reexamination of its various elements. For this purpose, it is not sufficient to accept the statements made in various theoretical treatises of the distant or recent past or to base generalizations upon narrowly selected material. Instead, it is necessary to study the actual use of Latin and literary Italian thru the centuries by lesser poets as well as great ones, by prose writers as well as poets, in documentary and popular as well as literary and learned material in Tuscany and in the rest of Italy. The task has been recognized by a few scholars, but so far very little has been done towards an actual investigation of the problems involved.[8] To attain a satisfactory

[7] Lionardo Salviati expressed the view that the Italian language declined in the fifteenth century as a result of the excessive study of Latin, and that among the writers of the 'buon secolo' the unlearned authors must be preferred to the learned ones (*Degli Avvertimenti della lingua sopra'l Decamerone*, Venice 1584, p. 87 ff., 93 f., 100).

[8] Jacob Burckhardt formulated the problem as early as 1860: 'Das allmaehliche Vordringen derselben [of the 'ideal' language] in Literatur und Leben koennte ein einheimischer Kenner leicht tabellarisch darstellen. Es muesste konstatiert werden, wie lange sich

solution the work of many scholars will be required. In the present paper, I only try, in a tentative and hypothetical manner, to propose a revision of the current opinion.

This current opinion would seem to be largely correct as far as the history of poetry is concerned. There was around 1300 a common poetical language for all of Italy, which has maintained itself up to the present day.[9] However, altho the fifteenth century and especially its earlier part failed to produce any major poet, the tradition of vernacular poetry was by no means interrupted during that period.[10] On the other hand, Latin poetry did by no means disappear after the beginning of the sixteenth century, but continued to flourish in respectable quantity and quality long after that period.[11] Moreover, the fact that thruout the sixteenth century, as in earlier times, many authors wrote verses in both languages[12] and that the collections of occasional poetry often included compositions in both Latin and Italian[13] shows that the rivalry between Latin and literary Italian even in the field of poetry was not always a struggle for existence or a matter of deep convictions, but rather a peaceful competition between two alternative modes of literary expression.

On the other hand, the development of literary Italian seems to have been quite different as far as prose is concerned, and it is in this point that the traditional view is especially subject to criticism.[14] If we want to understand the development of literary prose in Italy, we must base ourselves primarily on the extant material and refrain from postulating the existence of earlier or more numerous vernacular works than have actually been preserved. This is often done by scholars who argue that there are analogous vernacular works in French or that an extant Latin work must have been based on a vernacular original since Latin

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warhrend des 14, und 15. Jahrhunderts die einzelnen Dialekte in der taeglichen Korrespondenz, in den Regierungsschriften und Gerichtsprotokollen, endlich in den Chroniken und in der freien Literatur ganz oder gemischt behauptet haben. Auch das Fortleben der italienischen Dialekte neben einem reinern oder geringeren Latein, welches dann als offizielle Sprache diente, kaeme dabei in Betracht' (*Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, 13th ed., Stuggart 1921, 418). In 1937, Migliorini had to admit that such a study is still lacking (*op. cit.* 6).

[9] This poetical language is called Tuscan by two non-Tuscan authors of the fourteenth century, Antonio da Tempo of Padua and Gidino da Sommacampagna of Verona (O. Bacci, *La Critica Letteraria*, Milan 1910, 169 ff.).

[10] V. Rossi, *Il Quattrocento* (2nd ed., Milan 1933); F. Flamini, *La Lirica Toscana del Rinascimento anteriore ai tempi del Magnifico* (Pisa 1891).

[11] Some of the most famous Latin poets belong to the sixteenth century, such as Bembo, Fracastoro, Vida, Flaminio.

[12] Ariosto, Bembo, Castiglione, Fracastoro, and many others. They were preceded by Dante, Petrarch, and Poliziano.

[13] The titles of some such collections are given by F. S. Quadrio, *Della Storia e della Ragione d'ogni poesia*, 2.516, 519, 525, 529 f., 676, 763 ff. (Milan 1741).

[14] The difference between the development of the prose language and of the poetical language was clearly seen as early as 1869 by Gino Capponi in an excellent article which has attracted too little attention (Fatti relativi alla storia della nostra lingua, *Nuova Antologia*, 11.665–82, especially 673).

could not have been understood by the people. These arguments do not carry much weight. The fact that a certain type of vernacular literature existed in French does not prove that it must have existed at the same time also in Italian. The opinion that Latin could not be understood by the people is hardly convincing for a period in which any person who could read and write acquired some elements of Latin, and in a country where Latin is to some extent understood even nowadays, let alone medieval Latin which was pronounced in the Italian manner and which became so non-classical and 'barbarous' just because it was adapted to the spoken vernacular language.

The use of vernacular prose for literary purposes began in Italy during the thirteenth century. Attempts to link the early phases of its development with Bologna and its university are suggestive but not entirely convincing.[15] The number of vernacular prose texts and documents from Bologna remained scarce thruout the fourteenth century, and the examples cited for the earlier period present several difficulties. The statute for the notaries published in 1246 provides that they had to be able to translate documents from or into the vernacular but not that they had to compose the documents in the vernacular. The vernacular forms included in the works of Fava and other 'dictatores' served in most cases as helps for drawing up Latin models, not as vernacular models. Fava's *Parlamenti ed epistole* contain references to Siena and may have been written in that city. Fra Guidotto's *Fiore di Rettorica* survives only in several more or less Tuscanized versions, some of which are attributed to the Florentine, Bono Giamboni, and Guidotto himself is known to have lived and taught in Siena. Fra Tommaso Gozzadini's *Fior di Virtú* was written in dialect and later Tuscanized. Giovanni di Bonandrea's treatise on rhetoric, Pier de'Crescenzi's book on agriculture, and Graziolo Bambagliuoli's commentary on Dante were written in Latin and later Tuscanized. The same probably happened with Matteo de'Libri's *Dicerie* which survive only in Tuscan translations. Jacopo della Lana's commentary on Dante most probably was written in Bolognese dialect and Tuscanized to a varying degree by the copyists. Armannino Giudice's *Fiorita d'Italia* which may be the most serious exception was written in Fabriano, and has never been published or thoroughly studied.

Whereas examples of vernacular prose from earlier periods and from other parts of Italy are comparatively rare, a rich and diversified prose literature appeared in Tuscany during the second half of the thirteenth century and continued to develop vigorously during the fourteenth century. This literature included fiction and chronicles, sermons and ascetic works, letters and speeches, business and family records, a large number of translations from the French,

[15] E. Monaci Su la Gemma purpurea e altri scritti volgari di Guido Fava o Faba, maestro di grammatica in Bologna nella prima metà del secolo XIII, *Atti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Rendiconti*, Series IV, vol. 4, pt. 2.399–405 (1888); A. Gaudenzi, *I Suoni, le forme e le parole dell'odierno dialetto della Città di Bologna* (Turin 1889); G. Bertoni, *La Prosa della Vita Nuova di Dante* (Genoa 1914); G. Zaccagnini, I grammatici e l'uso del volgare eloquio a Bologna nel secolo XIII, *Studi e Memorie per la Storia dell'Università di Bologna*, 12.177–91 (1935), and others.

from classical and medieval Latin, and even a number of learned treatises.[16] Dante contributed to this prose literature his *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*, but his place in the history of Italian prose literature was not as original or influential as it was in poetry. The language of this Tuscan prose was often free from the colloquial elements of local dialects, but it was undoubtedly based on the speech of Tuscany as compared with that of other Italian provinces. These texts provide the great mass of the *Testi di lingua* and of the *Testi del buon secolo della lingua*, which have been the delight of purists ever since and actually display all the charm and attractiveness of which Tuscan prose is capable. The quality, variety and quantity of this laterature easily explains why it could become the linguistic basis and model for later Italian prose. For this literature gave to the Tuscan dialect such an advantage in comparison with other dialects that its adoption was practically inevitable when the question of a literary prose for all of Italy became a burning problem, that is, in the sixteenth century.

Most scholars seem to assume that this Tuscan prose was actually an Italian prose, used and understood as a literary language of all Italy, as early as the time of Dante. They take it for granted that since there was a common poetical language the same must also be true for prose literature. Some of them also cite the testimony of Dante who in his *De Vulgari Eloquentia*[17] seems to demonstrate that there was at his time a *volgare illustre*, a common literary language actually used in poetry, in prose and in conversation. Yet there are many reasons for assuming that Dante was speaking of an ideal rather than of an accomplished fact, at least in the case of prose language.[18] Moreover, his testimony is contradicted by that of a contemporary, and by the evidence of the extant literary and documentary sources. About 1290, an anonymous copyist of the *Fiore di Virtú* confesses his ignorance of the vernacular, stresses the poverty of abstract terms in the vernacular as compared with Latin, and adds that the vernacular differs in every town and region whereas Latin is the same everywhere.[19] He thus implies that it was for him more difficult to understand a vernacular dialect different from his own than it was to understand Latin, and

[16] G. Bertoni, *Il Duecento* (Milan 1939); N. Sapegno, *Il Trecento* (Milan 1934); A. Schiaffini, *Testi Fiorentini del Dugento e dei primi del Trecento* (Florence 1926). Especially striking is the Tuscan origin of most vernacular translations whose authors are known. An early doctrinal treatise is Ristoro d'Arezzo's *Composizione del mondo*.

[17] See 1.13 ff. and 2.1. Recently, the *volgare illustre* has been assumed as a historical fact by A. Ewert (Dante's Theory of Language, *Modern Language Review*, 35.355–66, 1940), based on Dante's testimony and on general considerations about the possibility of such a development. He does not ask whether the numerous literary and documentary sources of the time confirm such as assumption.

[18] The ideal character of the *volgare illustre* in Dante is suggested by the political consideration that it is the language of an imperial court which actually did not exist, in contrast to the 'municipal' dialects (G. Bertoni, Il De Vulgari Eloquentia, *Archivum Romanicum*, 20.91–102, especially 100 f.), and by the philosophical consideration that it is the most perfect of its kind, in which the dialects participate to a higher or lesser degree (A. Gaspary, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, tr. by N. Zingarelli, 2nd ed., 1.247, Turin 1914).

[19] Quoted in O. Bacci, *La Critica letteraria*, Milan, p. 80.

that he was not aware of any common literary language other than Latin. This statement is confirmed by a number of additional facts. Above all, Latin remained the language of the great majority of documents far beyond the end of the fourteenth century.[20] After the middle of the fourteenth century, the various local dialects were used with increasing frequency for internal communications between officials of the same city, whereas the diplomatic correspondence between various Italian cities or states continued in Latin.[21] Moreover, altho there was certainly no lack of a prose literature in the other, non-Tuscan dialects during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a literature that has deserved the interest of linguistic and literary historians, it is by no means comparable in quantity or quality to the Tuscan prose literature of the same period. Finally, even if it were more extensive or more important than it actually is, its existence would not decide the question which we are considering. If there had been a common Italian prose language during the fourteenth century, there should be abundant evidence that the prose language which we call Tuscan was used and written by non-Tuscan writers, as certainly was the case for poetry. However, examples of that kind are very rare, and they are all of a peculiar character. That is, either there is reason to believe that the author lived in Tuscany and adopted the language of his residence, or there are indications that the extant work was revised or translated by a native Tuscan from another dialect or even from Latin.[22] The conclusion seems to be inevitable that there was a Tuscan, but no common Italian prose language during the thirteenth and fourteenth century, and that it is an anachronism to speak of an 'Italian' prose for that period. However, the fact that Tuscany was ahead of the other regions in the production of literary prose does not mean that Tuscany had a monopoly in the intellectual life of Italy. Many branches of literature were cultivated in the other provinces as much as, or even more than, in Tuscany. Yet their linguistic vehicle was mostly Latin, and in some cases French,[23] whereas Tuscany had already begun to use its own vernacular. Accordingly, many prose works were composed in Latin by non-Tuscan writers and soon translated into the Tuscan vernacular by native Tuscans. However, the rapid rise of vernacular prose in Tuscany did not mean that Latin was abandoned as a literary language even in

[20] The number of vernacular documents which Gaudenzi and others were able to publish from the Bologna archives is exceedingly small in proportion to the wealth of printed and unprinted Latin documents preserved in those archives. The same holds true for Florence.

[21] For example, in 1401, the republic of Florence wrote to its ambassadors to Bologna in the vernacular, but to Giovanni Bentivoglio in Latin (F. Bosdari, Giovanni I Bentivoglio Signore di Bologna, *Atti e Memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le provincie di Romagna*, Series IV, 5.275 ff., 1915).

[22] In addition to examples from Bologna, already mentioned, the *Avventuroso Ciciliano* in Tuscan prose was supposedly written by Bosone da Gubbio in 1311, but the date has been disputed, and hence the authorship questioned (G. Mazzatinti, Bosone da Gubbio e le sue opere, *Studi di Filologia Romanza*, 1.324 f. 1885). Albertano da Brescia's moral treatises and Guido delle Colonne's *Excidium Troiae* were written in Latin and then translated into Tuscan by anonymous Tuscans.

[23] For example, Marco Polo.

Tuscany. Dante and Boccaccio wrote in Latin as well as in Italian, and the same was done by a host of other writers and scholars.

We might very well ask why the tendency to shift from the literary use of Latin prose to the vernacular was so much earlier and more outspoken in Tuscany than in the other Italian provinces. As for all such questions about the causes of certain historical phenomena, it is difficult to give a simple and clear-cut answer. The Tuscan dialect certainly possesses some inherent advantages in its clarity, beauty, and in its proximity to Latin. Moreover, Tuscany had many political and commercial links with France and may hence have been stimulated to imitate the example given by the French and Provencal literatures. The most important element probably was the fact that Tuscany after the middle of the thirteenth century developed a kind of 'business civilization,' whose literary expression was determined by the intellectual interests of a large class of merchants and craftsmen, and not directed by the traditions of any old native center of higher learning such as Bologna, Padua, or Naples.

The situation thus described persisted without any major changes down to the end of the fourteenth century. During that century, Tuscany produced an increasing amount of prose literature, and also its first major prose classic Giovanni Boccaccio. At the same time, prose literature in the other provinces of Italy was written either in Latin or, less often, in the local dialects.[24] Only toward the end of the century, some of these dialect writers seem to have modified their local vernacular under the influence of Tuscan, and especially of Boccaccio.[25]

The fifteenth century, in which classical humanism first attained a dominating influence, is usually considered as a period of decline for vernacular literature. The humanists who tried to revive the use of classical Latin in writing and in speaking supposedly held a strong prejudice against the use of the vernacular and thus delayed and even threatened the further development of vernacular literature, according to the prevailing opinion.[26] Since the second half of the century produced a number of distinguished vernacular writers, the decline is attributed more specifically to the first four decades of the century. This judgment is based on the absence of great writers during that period, and on a group of polemical treatises in which certain humanists were charged by their opponents with a strong hostility against the vernacular and against its great fourteenth-century writers.[27] However, such charges made for polemic purposes

[24] The treatises of Fra Paolino Minorita of Venice and of Gidino da Sommacampagna of Verona. Petrarch, who was of Florentine descent but never lived in Tuscany, wrote nothing in vernacular prose; the only apparent exception, one of his orations, is hence considered as an anonymous translation of a Latin original.

[25] This claim is made for the Paduan chronists Gatari by A. Medin (La Coltura toscana nel Veneto durante il Medio Evo, *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto*, vol. 82, pt. 1, 83–154, 1922–23. The vernacular chronicles printed by Muratori were all modernized in their language by the editors.

[26] V. Rossi, *Il Quattrocento* (Milan 1933); R. Sabbadini, *Storia del Ciceronianismo* (Turin 1885), 127 ff.; G. Fioretto, *Gli Umanisti* (Verona 1881), 121 ff.

[27] See the polemic treatises of Domenico da Prato and of Cino Rinuccini published by A. Wesselofsky (*Il Paradiso degli Alberti, Scelta di Curiosità Letterarie*, vol. 86, (Bologna 1867), pt. 2.321 ff. and 303 ff. Also the anonymous Florentine protest against the decision

and in a highly rhetorical manner should not be accepted without qualifications. Direct statements of fifteenth-century humanists against the use of the vernacular are not entirely lacking, to be sure, but they are not sufficiently emphatic, consistent, or frequent to reflect a generally hostile attitude. The only major humanist who was insistently charged with such hostility, Niccolo Niccoli, did not write anything either in the vernacular or in Latin, and his attitude apparently was not entirely consistent.[28] However, more important than the theory is the actual practice of the humanists and their contemporaries, which presents an entirely different picture. The fifteenth century, including its earlier phases, shows no interruption or decline in the development of vernacular prose literature, but rather an advance and expansion, and the humanists took an active part in this literature.[29] In order to realize these facts, it is necessary to study the much neglected source materials, and to compare the fifteenth century not with the fourteenth century as it has been imagined in the light of much later developments, but as it actually was. Above all, the sharp distinction in the development of vernacular prose literature which existed throughout the fourteenth century between Tuscany and the other Italian provinces continued to persist during the greater part of the fifteenth century. In Tuscany, the prose literature of the fourteenth century was eagerly copied and read, the various branches of that literature continued to flourish and even new areas of expression were conquered for the vernacular.[30] The fact that none of these authors reached literary distinction of the first order certainly must be noted, but the quantity and variety of this literature testifies to the actual increase in the literary use of the Tuscan vernacular. It has been a dogma of the purists ever since the sixteenth century that the language and style of this fifteenth-century Tuscan literature is inferior in quality to that of the 'golden' fourteenth century, and the neglect of its documents is largely due to this prejudice. The validity of this judgment may reasonably be doubted until it has been confirmed by a more accurate examination of the texts, many of which are still unedited.[31]

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of the papal secretaries at the poetry contest of 1441 (G. Mancini, Un nuovo documento sul certame coronario di Firenze del 1441, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Series V, 9.326-46, 1892), and the first book of Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*. Yet the statements of Wesselofsky and Mancini are greatly exaggerated. Actually the criticism of the vulgar language is not even a major issue in the treatises, and the first book of Bruni's dialogue is refuted by the content of the second book.

[28] G. Zippel, *Nicolò Nicoli* (Florence 1890), 14 ff.

[29] G. Capponi, *op. cit.*, O. Bacci, Della prosa volgare del Quattrocento, *Prosa e Prosatori* (Milan c. 1906), 41-93; D. Gravino, *Saggio d'una storia dei volgarizzamenti d'opere greche nel secolo XV* (Naples 1896), 7 ff.; A. Galletti, *L'Eloquenza* (Milan 1904); E. Santini, *Firenze ei suoi 'oratori' nel Quattrocento* (Palermo 1922) and La produzione volgare di Leonardo Bruni Aretino, *Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana*, 60.289-339, 1912; also V. Rossi, *Il Quattrocento*.

[30] Many Florentine manuscripts containing 'dicerie' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Some are indicated by Rossi, op. cit., p. 166, and by I. Del Lungo, *Dino Compagni e la sua Cronica*, Vol. 1, pt. 2.1037 (Florence 1879). See also Galletti, op. cit.

[31] Capponi, *op. cit.*, Bacci, *op. cit.*

The production of vernacular sermons and of devotional treatises continued and even increased during the fifteenth century. The artistic composition of letters and of speeches of which there had been a few earlier examples was cultivated on a larger scale than ever before. Many works of classical authors and of contemporary humanists were translated from Latin into the vernacular, frequently by writers of considerable humanistic training.[32] Tuscan humanists often made vernacular versions of their own Latin writings, or composed original works in Tuscan prose.[33] Leonardo Bruni, who is often presented as one of the opponents of the vernacular, wrote several works in Tuscan prose,[34] and in his comparison of Dante and Petrarch, he clearly treats Latin and Tuscan as two alternate instruments of literary expression.[35] Fifteenth-century Tuscany produced many Novelle and chronicles, and its personal records and private letters are probably more numerous than those of the preceding centuries. They include such work as the Vespasiano Memoirs, an important source for the humanists of the period. The fifteenth century also shows a marked increase in the use of the vernacular in public documents of a domestic nature, and this development ought to be studied in detail.[36] That the use of the vernacular for foreign correspondence was unusual even among the Tuscan cities themselves is shown by an interesting letter sent in 1453 by the government of Florence to that of Siena. The Florentines begin their letter with a lengthy explanation of the reasons which induced them to reply in the vernacular to the Latin letters they had received. They say that they want to express their thoughts and intentions with complete frankness and to have them understood in their proper meaning without the need of interpretation.[37]

That this vernacular prose language was still considered as a specialty of Tuscany and not as the common property of all Italy seems to result from several facts. Famous Tuscan preachers, such as S. Bernardino of Siena, seem to have delivered their sermons in the vernacular in Tuscan cities only, but in Latin

[32] Gravino, *op. cit.*, Rossi, *op. cit.* Bruni's History of Florence was translated by Donato Acciaiuoli.

[33] Alberti, Palmieri, Manetti, Landino, Ficino, and many others.

[34] See the article of Santini, mentioned in note 29.

[35] *Le Vite di Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio scritte fino al secolo XVI*, ed. A. Solerti (Milan 1904), p. 293.

[36] The vernacular was made mandatory for the courts of trades and crafts in Florence through a decree of 1414 (G. Mancini, *op. cit.* 334). In the *Priorista di Palazzo* and the other lists of Florentine officials, the names are entered in Latin down to 1530 (Florence, Archivio di Stato). The instructions for ambassadors in the fifteenth century were given partly in Latin and partly in volgare.

[37] Quoted in *Anecdota litteraria ex manuscriptis codicibus eruta*, ed. Jo.Christ. Amadutius, Rome 1773, 1.378: 'E perchè noi crediamo che sia utilissimo a voi e a noi dichiarare bene e apertamente senza punto di simulazione ovvero di dissimulazione qual sia la vera intenzione e il puro e sincero proposito di ciascuno de noi, abbiamo deliberato di farvi questa risposta più tosto in volgare che in latino, sì e per soddisfar meglio e più agli animi nostri, sì etiamdio perchè la S. V. non abbia di bisogno nell' intendere di questo nostro così sincero proposito d'altra interpretazione che della nostra propria, nè in altro sentimento si possa interpetrare che in quello che è il naturale e il vero intelletto delle parole volgari.'

when they went to the cities of Northern Italy.[38] The language is called Tuscan by Filelfo and by other contemporary sources.[39] Moreover, during the greater part of the century at least, Tuscan prose was hardly written by any non-Tuscan author. The few apparent exceptions, such as the vernacular orations of Filelfo and of Porcari,[40] are linked with the residence of these authors in Florence, and in the latter case, many scholars assume that a Tuscan, Buonaccorso da Montemagno, had acted as a reviser or ghost writer.

Outside of Tuscany, the fifteenth century witnessed a very important new development, namely, a considerable rise of a vernacular prose literature in the various local dialects. It included not only religious works, chronicles, and Novelle, but also learned treatises and translations of Latin classics.[41] The language of these writers has often been criticized by the purists on account of its non-Tuscan character, and they certainly cannot serve as models of correct language according to the prevailing standards. Yet it seems unfair to blame them for not complying with an ideal that was neither attained nor even recognized in their own time. It would be much more important to analyze the actual characteristics of their language and style and thus to determine whether they merely intended to write in their local dialects, or whether and to what extent they tried to modify those dialects under the influence of the Tuscan model.

During the second half of the fifteenth century, and especially during the last decades, we seem to notice a tendency among non-Tuscan prose writers to approach or even to adopt the literary language of Tuscany. Filelfo wrote many provate letters in 'Tuscan' long after his departure from Florence,[42] and a number of other writers such as Collenuccio, Masuccio, and Sannazaro are praised for their comparatively or completely 'pure' language.[43] The chronology and language of these writings should be carefully reexamined, for they represent the first traces of an important new development that reached its climax with the beginning of the sixteenth century. I mean the emergence of a common literary

[38] Of S. Bernardino's sermons, only those delivered in Florence and in Siena are extant in a vernacular text (Galletti, *op. cit.* 212).

[39] See the letter of Filelfo to Marcus Aurelius of Venice, quoted in C. de' Rosmini, *Vita di Francesco Filelfo da Tolentino*, Milan 1808, 2, 282. In 1496, the envoys of the emperor Maximilian to Florence delivered their address 'aetrusca lingua' (Galletti, *op. cit.* 575).

[40] *Prose e poesie volgari di Francesco Filelfo*, ed. G. Benadduci (*Atti e Memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia patria per le province delle Marche*; 1-262 1905. For the speeches held in Florence by Porcari, see Galletti *op. cit.* 576.

[41] For a group of translators at Ferrara, see G. Fatini, Il volgare prearíosteo a Ferrara, *Le Rime di Ludovico Ariosto, Giornale Storico della letteratura italiana*, Supplement 25, 1934, 3–41. The vernacular works in prose produced in Milan include Corio's chronicle, and several translations of the classics by the humanist Pier Candido Decembrio. Bologna had Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, Venice Marin Sanudo, and Naples Diomede Carafa.

[42] Printed by Benadduci, *op. cit.*

[43] Rossi, *op. cit.* It woule be important to examine the language of Roberto da Lecce's *Specchio della fede cristiana* (Venice, 1495), a work based on sermons delivered in Naples and said to be the only vernacular work of the kind edited by any fifteenth-century author (Galletti, *op. cit.* 276 f.) The author was a pupil of S. Bernardino of Siena. Savonarola's sermons in Florence were probably delivered in the vernacular (*ibid* 335).

prose language for all of Italy on the basis of Tuscan. So far, scholars have taken these facts too much for granted, since they were under the wrong impression that such a language had already existed ever since the early fourteenth century.

The rise of non-Tuscan prose in the fifteenth century might have led to the formation of other literary languages based on the various dialects. This did not materialize, since Tuscan literature had too great an advantage and began to act as a model during the same period. However, the existence of this non-Tuscan prose goes a long way to explain the resistence with which the Tuscan movement was received during the sixteenth century especially in Northern Italy, and the modifications that were finally imposed upon the older Tuscan language after it had been generally adopted by the rest of Italy.

Another fact should be noticed which distinguished the Tuscan prose language of the fifteenth and earlier centuries from the standard Italian prose of the sixteenth century: it had not yet any fixed rules of spelling or of grammar. The old Tuscan prose texts, not regulated by the requirements of verse and rhyme, show in the manuscripts a confusing variety and fluidity of spelling and of grammatical structure, of which the normalized and simplified modern text editions rarely give us an adequate impression. Grammatical regularity long was considered a privilege of Latin, and the attempt to fix rules of Tuscan grammar was not made before the second half of the fifteenth century.[44]

The decisive period in the development of the Italian literary prose language was the sixteenth century. It faced and solved, after the tentative efforts of the late fifteenth century, the problem of a common literary prose language for all of Italy. In the field of prose literature, this was not the return to a situation which had supposedly existed in the fourteenth century, but an entirely new achievement. The first authoritative representative, if not the initiator of this movement was Pietro Bembo, a non-Tuscan, and a humanist. In his *Asolani* (1505) he gave the first outstanding example of a pure Tuscan prose written by a non-Tuscan, and in his *Prose della volgar lingua*, published in 1525, but composed soon after 1500, he defended this practice with theoretical arguments. Thruout this work, Bembo prescribes the use of Tuscan both for poetry and for prose. Curiously enough, the fact that he was thus making an important innovation with regard to prose, escaped his own attention and hence most later writers and scholars. Bembo did notice that practically all older prose writers that could serve as literary and linguistic models were Tuscans, but he believed that Pietro de'Crescenzi of Bologna and Guido delle Colonne of Messina had written their works in Tuscan prose, and thus he could consider himself as their successor.[45] Actually, their works were composed in Latin and translated into the vernacular by anonymous Tuscan authors.

That the problem of a common literary language for Italy was forcefully posed, but not yet definitely settled by Bembo, appears from an interesting remark of the

[44] C. Trabalza, *Storia della grammatica italiana* (Milan 1908).

[45] Bembo, *Opere*, 1810, 10, 62, 275. Bembo's error was corrected by Lodovico Castelvetro in his *Giunte, op. cit.* 348 ff.

Neapolitan Benedetto di Falco,[46] as well as from the famous language controversy which was carried on after the publication of Bembo's treatise, and which continued until the nineteenth century. The discussion between the Tuscans and the anti-Tuscans can be easily understood in the light of the preceding development. There was the large store of old Tuscan prose of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and there was the spoken Tuscan language of more recent times, which had become different from the language of the earlier prose literature and had found its way into the literature of the fifteenth century. When the question of adopting a common literary language for Italy was ripe in the sixteenth century, there were obviously three possibilities: either to imitate the language of the old Tuscan literature of the 'golden century,' or to follow the usage of contemporary spoken Tuscan, or to free these forms of their too antiquated or local flavor and thus to achieve a more neutral language that could be easily learned and used by non-Tuscans.[47] All these possibilities had their advocates in the sixteenth century and afterwards, and all of these schools of thought had some influence on the later history of Italian language and literature. On the whole, the tendency to develop a more neutral standard language free of local flavor seems to have prevailed. However, this does not alter the basic fact that Tuscan was the only dialect which was accepted as the foundation of this common literary language. There was never a choice between the use of Tuscan or of any other dialect, but merely between an orthodox, imitative Tuscan, the contemporary Tuscan, and a modified, standardized Tuscan. The general adoption of Tuscan was accompanied by efforts to normalize its spelling and grammar, and it thus acquired all the characteristics of a fully developed literary language.

The emergence of a common Italian language in prose as well as in poetry gave a strong new impulse to the tendency of expanding its use in the areas hitherto dominated by Latin. Many Italian writers of the sixteenth century took the universal use of the vernacular for granted, whereas others, such as Muzio and Varchi, advocated such a general use against the defenders of Latin. The issue was especially important in the field of learned and scientific literature where the prevalence of Latin remained most notable. The Florentine Academy was founded in 1540 with the express purpose of translating all the sciences into the Tuscan vernacular,[48] and Sperone Speroni in his dialogue on the languages demanded that all the sciences should henceforth be treated in the vernacular alone.[49] Thruout the latter part of the sixteenth century and thereafter,

[46] In his *Rimario* (1535), he expresses the hope that the Signoria of Venice would reform 'l'idioma italiano, componendo una sola lingua comune a tutti, che generalmente si potesse usare senza biasimo, come n'era una latina per tutto il mondo' (quoted from Vivaldi, *op. cit.* 49 f.)

[47] The issue is presented in a similar fashion by Mme. Labande-Jeanroy and by Robert A. Hall.

[48] Decree of Cosimo I, dated Feb. 23, 1541, published in *Notizie letterarie ed istoriche intorno agli uomini illustri dell'Accademia Fiorentina*, ed. J. Rilli, Florence 1700, xxi f.: 'interpetrando, componendo e da ogni bella altra lingua ogni bella scienza in questra nostra riducendo.'

[49] Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo delle lingue*, ed. in his *Opere*, 1. 166–201 (Venice 1740), Cp. L. Olschki, *Bildung und Wissenschaft im Zeitalter der Renaissance in Italien* (*Geschichte der neusprachlichen wissenschaftlichen Literatur*, II, Leipzig 1922), 165 ff.

comedians and satirists ridiculed the type of the pedant and made his obstinate use of Latin one of the points of their attacks.[50] Scholars have hence spoken of a fight against Latin that characterized the later Renaissance and led to the eventual disappearance of that language. This view calls for a few qualifications. The satire directed against the pedant and his Latin was merely one of the many cases in which certain professions were exposed to public langhter and did not necessarily imply that the writers or their audience intended to abolish that profession or any of its particular aspects. Moreover, the statutes of the Florentine Academy, as well as Speroni's dialogue, show that the universal use of the vernacular for scientific treatises at that time was not an accomplished fact, but an ideal to be realized in the future. Even some representatives of this movement were ready to admit that their aim could be better attained by utilizing the achievements of Latin learning rather than by making a completely new start.[51]

Yet the advocates of the vernacular were challenged in their own time by a numerous group of defenders of Latin, and most of these defenders belonged to the class of the humanists, that is, of the professional students and teachers of Latin. Modern scholars have often asserted that the humanists as a class were opposed to the vernacular and even tried to abolish its literary use altogether. This view is certainly exaggerated. Many humanists, beginning with Bembo himself, were among the founders and leaders of the vernacular movement. Those sixteenth-century humanists who did attack the vernacular hardly meant to abolish its use in daily life or even in literature. They were led by th eheat of the argument and by the rhetorical habits of the time to certain exaggerated statements against the vernacular, but their major concern was defensive, and some of their arguments only superficial. Most famous is the case of Romolo Amaseo who in 1529 gave two public lectures at Bologna in which he advocated the continued study and literary use of Latin and rejected the rising claims of the vernacular.[52] Even Varchi who criticizes Amaseo suggests that the latter may not have been quite serious in his slighting remarks about the vernacular.[53] In their original context, Amaseo's orations give the impression that his major concern was to defend the use of Latin as a learned and international language, and to stress the great wealth of intellectual traditions embodies in Latin, of which the exclusive advocates of the vernacular would deprive themselves and their pupils.[54] Similar arguments were used about the same time by Francesco

[50] A. Graf, I Pedanti, *Attraverso il Cinquecento* (Turin 1888), 169–213; Olschki, *op. cit.* 147 ff.

[51] Gelli attributed the recent progress of the vernacular language to the great number of people learned in Latin and Greek and adds that important state documents are now composed in the vernacular (quoted in Vernon Hall, *op. cit.* 35).

[52] *De latinae linguae usu retinendo schola I–II in Romuli Amasaei Orationum Volumen*, Bologna 1564, 101–146. I used the copy kindly made available to me by the Trustees of the Boston Athenaeum.

[53] *L'Ercolano*, in his *Opere*, ed. A. Racheli (Trieste 1859), 2.160.

[54] See especially Amaseo, *op. cit* 104, 127, f., 132. The best information on Amaseo's orations is given by P. Rajna (La data di una lettera di Claudio Tolomei ad Agnolo Firenzuola, *La Rassegna*, Series III, 1. 7 ff. 1916). Other scholars who mention the orations know them only through Varchi or Muzio.

Bellafini[55] and by Francesco Florido Sabino,[56] and several decades later by Bartolomeo Ricci,[57] Carlo Sigonio,[58] and Uberto Foglietta.[59] The controversy obviously was not dead in the later sixteenth century, and it was kept alive by the tendency of the humanists to exalt the value of their professional field in comparison with others.[60] Yet even Amaseo who is so often described as an obstinate enemy of the vernacular praised a contemporary attempt to teach Latin grammar in Italian, and composed a number of letters in the vernacular which are quite an impressive document of his personal feelings and intellectual interests.[61]

If the humanists of the sixteenth century really meant to stop or delay the development of vernacular literature their efforts certainly were entirely vain. However, in so far as they tried to defend the use of Latin as a learned and literary language they were by no means defeated. Latin continued to be used, long after the middle of the sixteenth century, in poetry as well as in prose literature, and especially in university teaching and in learned treatises. This fact is abundantly confirmed by documentary and bibliographical evidence.[62] As late as 1640, a North Italian physician trained at Padua could blame a sixteenth-century Tuscan writer for having treated philosophical subjects in the vernacular rather than in Latin.[63] An eighteenth-century treatise on how to write a book recommends the use of Latin for works that should be read by an international audience of scholars, and praises a contemporary author for his elegant Latin.[64]

[55] V. Cian, Contro il volgare, *Studi Letterari e linguistici dedicati a Pio Rajna* (Milan 1911), 251–97. This article contains much information on the whole question. Bellafini's letter is reproduced on p. 287–91.

[56] R. Sabbadini, *Storia del Ciceronianismo* (Turin 1885), 127–36.

[57] *De imitatione* (Paris 1557), f. 35 sq. and 37 verso sq.

[58] *De latinae linguae usu retinendo oratio quinta* (1556), in his *Opera Omnia*, ed. Ph. Argelatus, 6 (Milan 1737), col. 521–28.

[59] *De linguae Latinae usu et praestantia libri tres* (Rome 1574 and Hamburg 1723). Cf. E. Norden, *Die antike Kunstprosa*, (4th ed., Leipzig, 1923, 2. 771 f.

[60] Varchi (*op. cit.* 160 f) lists as further opponents of the vernacular Pier Angelio Bargeo, Celio Calcagnini, and G. B. Goineo. Fontanini and Zeno (*op. cit.* 1.35) add Lazero Buonamico, Quinto Mario Corrado, Raffael Cillinio, Gabriele Barrio, Girolamo Rorario, Lodovico Nogarola, and Anastasio Germonio.

[61] Many of these letters are published in Flaminio Scarselli's *Vita Romuli Amasaei* (Bologna 1769). A letter of Bembo refers to Amaseo's careful study of the Tuscan language and its grammar (Cian, Contro il volgare, 281 f.) See also V. Cian, Per la storia dello Studio bolognese nel Rinascimento: Pro e contro l'Amaseo, *Miscellanea di Studi critici edita in onore di Arturo Graf* (Bergamo 1903), 201–22.

[62] Fontanini and Zeno's bibliography of vernacular literature, which is quite comprehensive for the sixteenth century, lists few learned works as compared with the great number known to have been produced in Latin.

[63] Joannes Imperialis, *Musaeum Historicum et Physicum*, Venice 1640, pt. 1.81: '... latinae locutionis maiestatem ac studium abdicare, qua ultro utilissima quaeque comprehensa et consignata esse palam est. Hac de causa perpauci eius vestigia secuti, Tuscum sermonem in doctrinarum traditione probarunt, caeteris abunde omnibus Romani decus acriter venustatemque tuentibus.'

[64] 'Serivendo unicamente per le persone dotte, e di materie assolutamente non popolari, dovrebbero usare piuttosto la lingua latina' (C. Denina, *Bibliopea o sia l'arte di compor*

The progress of the vernacular at the expense of Latin was hence much slower than it is usually presented. Moreover, the continued practice on the part of the same authors to employ both languages alternatively shows that their rivalry was not always considered as a matter of philosophical or literary convictions. Furthermore the vernacular, in taking over the literary function of Latin, inherited a good deal from preceding and contemporary Latin traditions. This applied to vocabulary and syntax as well as to subject matter and literary forms. The Latin titles found in so many fifteenth-century manuscripts of vernacular poetry or attached to the chapters of Machiavelli's *Prince* are a symbol of this process through which the vernacular gradually occupied the forms and patterns prepared and developed in the literary traditions of medieval and Renaissance Latin. The final disappearance of Latin from learned and literary usage did not occur before the end of the eighteenth century, and some traces of its use have persisted to the present day, especially in ecclesiastic documents and treatises, and in works of classical scholars.

Let us briefly summarize some of our basic conclusions. The fourteenth century did not create a common literary prose language for Italy, but that was left to the sixteenth century. The sixteenth century did not abolish the literary and learned use of Latin, but that was left to the nineteenth century. The fifteenth century did not interrupt the development of vernacular literature, but continued the slow process that extended from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century and that led the language of Italian literary prose from its modest beginnings in Tuscany to its present role as the exclusive linguistic medium of a highly developed national culture. This slow rise of Italian has its counterpart in an equally slow decline of literary Latin. Literary Latin had its merits and its definite historical importance, and even if we dislike it, we cannot ignore its existence or antedate its disappearance.

The details of this outline are rather tentative, and my intention was merely to state the problem and to indicate the direction in which its solution might be sought. The actual study of the question in all its aspects is still to be undertaken. It is a task in which linguistic and literary historians should join forces. For the subject itself is of a nature to illustrate the link that exists between linguistics and intellectual history. Words and language are not merely phonetic phenomena, but also carriers of thought. Inasmuch as ideas are subject to a historical process of origin and development, the words and languages that serve as media of such ideas also contain a historical element and may hence be subjected to historical analysis and interpretation.

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libri, Turin 1776, p. 53). Facciolati is called 'sì rinomato a' tempi nostri per l'eleganza del suo latino' (ibid. 55).