

Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*
Translated by Steven Botterill

Book 1

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* [grammar]. 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 This, in truth, is our primary language. I do not, though, say 'our' 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 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. Now, if we wish to define with precision what our intention is when we speak, it is clearly nothing other than to expound to others the concepts formed in our minds. Therefore, since the angels possess, in order to communicate their own glorious conceptions, a ready and ineffable sufficiency 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 represent speech. And if it be objected that some angels have fallen from heaven, a twofold answer may be made. First, that when we are discussing 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 demonstrate their corruption to each other, need only to know, of anyone 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 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 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. Moreover, if anyone finds a contrary argument in what Ovid, in the fifth book of the *Metamorphoses*, says about

talking magpies, I reply that this is said figuratively, and means something else. 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' [magpie] 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 [speculationem], as the angels do, because the human spirit is so weighed down 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; 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 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'. 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. 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!', 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. 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? On this account, I think that such an answer is adequate for both this and other questions.

V Thinking, therefore, not without reasonable grounds derived both from above and from below, 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. 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. 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.

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. In this, as in many other matters, Pietramala 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 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 unjustly - 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. 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.

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 evil from the beginning, and never changing your ways! Was it not enough to 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? 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' [the third time works the charm]; 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. Incurable 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'). 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 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 a 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. Later, from this tripartite language (which had been received in that vengeful confusion), 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) to the westernmost shores of England, and which is defined by the boundaries of the Italians and the French, 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 *iò*. 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, 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 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 who say *oc* live in the western part of southern Europe, beginning from the boundaries of the Genoese. Those who say *sì*, 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 *oil* 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 sea 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 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, as I said above: for some say *oc*, some say *sì*, and others, indeed, say *oil*. And the fact - which must first of all be proved - 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 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 ver encusera amor*; [If I felt I were a genuine and accepted lover; I would indeed bring charges against love] The King of Navarre: *De fin amor si vient sen et bonté*; [From true love come knowledge and goodness] Master Guido Guinizzelli: *Né fe' amor prima che gentil core, né gentil cor prima che amor, natura*. [Nor did nature create love before the gentle heart, nor the gentle heart before love] But now we must investigate why the original language should first have split into three, and why each of the three different forms exhibits 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). 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. 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 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.

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 preeminence on the Italians, who say *sì*. Indeed each of the three parts could call significant evidence in its own favour. Thus the language of *oil* 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, and the beautiful tales of King Arthur, and many other works of history and doctrine. The second part, the language of *oc*, argues in its own favour that eloquent writers in the vernacular first composed poems in this sweeter and more perfect language: they include Peire d'Alvernha and other ancient masters. Finally, the third part, which belongs to the Italians, declares itself to be superior because it enjoys a twofold privilege: first, because those who have written vernacular poetry more sweetly and subtly, such as Cino da Pistoia and his friend, have been its intimates and faithful servants; 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. I will refrain, however, from passing judgement on this question, 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-gutter 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. 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, 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 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 uprooting, 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 vernacular 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, quinto dici?' [Sir, what do you say?] After these let us prune away the inhabitants of the Marches of Ancona, who say 'Chignamente state siaté'; [be as you are] 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: *Una fermana scopai da Cascioli, cita cita se'n già'n grande aina.* [I met a woman from Fermo near Cascioli; she hurried briskly away, in great haste] 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: *Enti l'ora del vesper, ciò fu del mes d'ochiover.* [Around the hour of vespers, it was in the month of October] After these let us pass through our sieve the people of Aquileia and Istria, who belch forth 'Ces fas-to?' [What are you up to?] with a brutal intonation. And along with theirs I reject all languages spoken in the mountains and the countryside, 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' [my house] and 'dominus meus'[my master].

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. 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* *Ancor che l'aigua per lo foco lassi* [Although water flees from fire] and *Amor, che lungiamente m'hai menato.* [Love, who long have led me] But this fame enjoyed by the Trinacrian isle, 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. On this account, all who were noble of heart and rich in graces 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. *Racha, racha!* [Thou fool] 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? 'Only Come, you butchers! Come, you traitors! Come, you devotees of greed!' 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: *Tragemi d'este focora se t'este a bolontate*. [Get me out of this fire, if you would be so kind] 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: *Bòlzerà che chiangesse lo quatraro*. [I would like the boy to cry] 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*, [Lady, I wish to tell you] and *Per fino amore vo sì letamente*. [I go so happily for true love's sake] 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, who never even aimed at a vernacular worthy of the court, or Bonagiunta da Lucca, or Gallo of Pisa, or Mino Mocato of Siena, or Brunetto the Florentine, 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'* [Let's eat, since there's nothing else to do]. The Pisans: *'Bene andonno li fatti de Fiorenza per Pisa'* [The business at Florence went well for Pisa]. The people of Lucca: *'Fo voto a Dio ke ingrassarra eie lo comuno de Lucca'* [I swear to God, the city of Lucca is really in the pink]. The Siense: *'Onche renegata avess'io Siena. Chée chesto?'* [If only I'd left Siena for good! What's up now?]. The people of Arezzo: *'Vuo' tu venire ovelle?'* [Do you want to go somewhere?]. 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. 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 'deuscì' [God, yes!] when they wish to say 'yes'; and to seduce someone they say 'oclo meo' [My eye] and 'corada mea' [My heart]. I have heard that some of them depart from their native speech in their poetry; these include Tommaso, and Ugolino Bucciòla, both of Faenza. 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 femininity of any woman who speaks it, but, reader, would make you think her a man. This is the speech of all those who say 'magarà' [If only], such as the citizens 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' [Traded] and 'bontè' [Goodness]. Along with these I will mention the people of Treviso, who, like those of Brescia and their neighbours, abbreviate their words by pronouncing consonantal *u* as *f*, saying 'nof' for 'nove' [nine] and 'vif' for 'vivo' [Alive]. This I denounce as the height of barbarism. Nor can the Venetians be considered worthy of the honour due to the 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 to no verras*. [By God's wounds, you won't come] Among all these peoples I have heard only one individual who tried to break free of his mother-tongue and aspire to a vernacular worthy of the court, and that was Aldobrandino Padovano. So on all the vernaculars that have presented themselves before the 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 remains of the Italian forest. I say, then, that perhaps those are not wrong who claim that the Bolognese 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. So the 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 no one from Ferrara, Modena, or Reggio has written poetry; for, being accustomed 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 'monto' when they mean 'molto' [very]. 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. 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*; [Lady, the true love that I bear you] Guido Ghislieri: *Donna, lo fermo core*; [Lady, the faithful heart] Fabruzzo: *Lo meo lontanogire*; [My distant wandering] Onesto: *Più non attendo il tuo soccorso, amore*. [No longer do I expect your help, love] 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 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. 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. Insofar 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; insofar 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, in plants than in minerals, in minerals than in the basic element, and in fire than in earth; 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, 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 vernaculars 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 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 '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. And this vernacular of which I speak is both sublime in learning and power, and capable of exalting those who use it in honour and glory. That it is sublime in learning is clear when we see it emerge, so outstanding, so lucid, so perfect and so civilised, from among so many ugly words used by Italians, so many convoluted constructions, so many defective 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 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 devotees exceed that of any king, marquis, count or warlord? There is no 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'.

XVIII Nor are we without justification if we adorn this illustrious vernacular with our second epithet, by calling it 'cardinal'. 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' [royal court], on the other hand, is 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 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' [law-court], because the essence of being 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'. Yet it seems contradictory to say that it has been assessed in the most 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 Germany - 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 So now we can say that this vernacular, which has been shown to be illustrious, cardinal, aulic, and 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, 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.