THE HUMANIST ROOTS OF LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM[1]

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Abstract: The paper argues that modern 'linguistic nationalism' has intellectual roots in Renaissance humanist thought. In their study of classical antiquity, the humanists found a powerful model of the relationship between language and politics, one which had eloquence as its central concept and theorized language as a source of social and political power and as a vehicle for glorifying the deeds of statesmen. This model was originally revived by the humanists in the context of their belief that the Latin language had been badly degraded and corrupted since the fall of Rome. Emphasizing the power and glory that would accompany a return to Latin eloquence, they advocated a programme of Latin revival. By the sixteenth century, poets and intellectuals who were immersed in Renaissance humanism, and who were oriented to the political problems of emerging European nation-states, began applying this model to the vernacular. The view eloborated here suggests a factor that is ignored by both modernist accounts of nationalism and their critics: the importance at the threshold of modernity of a specific pre-modern conception of language and politics that had been retrieved and adapted to contemporary circumstances by Renaissance humanists.

This article considers some of the historical origins of a doctrine that I call 'linguistic nationalism'. People who affirm this doctrine believe that the promotion of their national language is an urgent political concern. They hold that an important goal of political activity should be the development, enrichment and standardization of the national language, and they think that political steps should be taken to make the language more dominant by ensuring that it is used in important domains of communication by all members of the community.

The doctrine I wish to consider is typically associated with social and political movements that started to materialize in the late eighteenth century. During the French Revolution, the Abbé Grégoire, Bertrand Barère and other leading Jacobins called upon the revolutionary state to adopt measures aimed at spreading the knowledge of French to all citizens of the new republic. Around the same time, Herder, Fichte and other German intellectuals were formulating an influential theory of nationalism that established language as a crucial condition of individual well-being and political legitimacy. It was in

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the late eighteenth century that a whole series of movements first took shape in the southern, northern and eastern peripheries of Europe, which aimed at reviving, standardizing, enriching and, eventually, making dominant, historically spoken dialects of regional populations — a process that continued through the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth.

My question, broadly speaking, concerns where this doctrine of linguistic nationalism comes from. What currents and developments in the realm of ideas led intellectuals and statesmen to politicize the promotion of their national language? This article will attempt only the first part of an answer to this question. I locate some of the origins of linguistic nationalism in Renaissance thought but then leave for another paper the narrative leading from the Renaissance to the heyday of the doctrine at the close of the eighteenth century. I hope that the account of the origins to be offered here will by itself offer a certain amount of insight into the phenomenon under consideration, enough anyway to warrant a paper of its own.

Although the golden age of linguistic nationalism may have begun around 1780 or so,[3] the major vernacular languages of Europe had been around for much longer. Most of them existed in recognizable form in the Middle Ages and, in some instances, they were not just spoken dialects but were used, on occasion, for state administration and literary production. English and French were established as written languages as early as the nineth century, for instance, and were serious competitors with Latin for official and literary use by the middle of the fourteenth century.[4]

More importantly for this paper, the golden age of nationalism was also not the first period in which political actors consciously sought to promote their national languages. At the very moment when the modern state was coming into existence, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, politically-motivated programmes of language promotion were pursued assiduously in many parts of Western Europe. By the end of this process, the major vernaculars of the region, including English, French, Spanish, German, Italian, Swedish, Danish, Portuguese and Dutch, had become the richly abundant, uniform and standardized written languages of state administration and literary usage with which we are familiar today. Since this first modern wave of efforts to promote the national vernaculars began during the Renaissance, a natural

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[3] The year 1780 is suggested by Eric Hobsbawm's book, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, 1990).

[4] On English, see Albert C. Baugh and Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language* (Englewoods, NJ, 4th edn., 1993); Basil Cottle, *The Triumph of English, 1350–1400* (London, 1969); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge and New York, 1997), ch. 2; and Janet Coleman, *English Literature in History, 1350–1400: Medieval Readers and Writers* (London, 1981), ch. 2. On French, see Ferdinand Brunot, *Histoire de la langue francaise des origins à 1900* (Paris, 1966), Vol. 1; Jacques Chaurand, *Nouvelle histoire de la langue francaise* (Paris, 1999), Parts 1 and 2.

place to begin an intellectual history of linguistic nationalism is with Renaissance ideas about language and politics. It is possible that some wholly new approach to the language/politics relationship supervenes between the Renaissance and the nineteenth-century 'age of nationalism', but it is equally possible (indeed this is the view I would defend in the sequel to this paper) that the later nationalists engaged in some 'pirating' of the models they identified in Renaissance statecraft and that, where they did not, their new approaches grew intelligibly out of, or in reaction to, the earlier one.[5]

My discussion of Renaissance sources of linguistic nationalism will zero in on one particularly important strand of thought for early-modern state-builders, namely *humanism*. In their study of classical antiquity, I will argue, the humanists found a powerful model of the relationship between language and politics. This model, which has eloquence as its central concept, theorizes language as a source of social and political power and as a vehicle for glorifying the deeds of statesmen. We will see that this model was originally revived by the humanists in the context of their belief that the Latin language had been badly degraded and corrupted since the fall of Rome. Emphasizing the power and glory that would accompany a return to Latin eloquence, they advocated a programme of Latin revival.

By the sixteenth century, poets and intellectuals who were immersed in Renaissance humanism, and who were oriented to the political problems of emerging European nation-states, began applying this model to the vernacular. Just as the earlier humanists were dismayed by the state of medieval Latin and worried that it could no longer offer a suitable medium for eloquent speech, the vernacular humanists were concerned that their languages remained too rude and barbarous to provide for eloquence. And just as the early humanists responded to this perceived crisis by embarking on an ambitious programme of Latin revival and reform, the sixteenth-century proponents of the national languages sought to make possible the power and glory associated with eloquence through a project of developing and imposing their own vernaculars. The Renaissance advocates of the vernacular saw in classical Rome the most successful example of a political community that history had produced to date, and they were convinced that the Romans had achieved this success not just through military conquest but by building a total civilization. In emphasizing the importance for politics of culture and language, they sought to apply this same model to the challenges of state-building facing their own societies.

Although I will not pursue all the implications here, it is worth thinking about the relevance of my thesis for the grand debate about the relationship between nationalism and modernity. As anyone acquainted with the scholarship on nationalism will know, many social theorists have regarded

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[5] For the idea of 'pirating', see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1983).

nationalism as a response to specific processes and requirements of moder-
nity. In Gellner's influential version of this view, nationalism answers the
need of industrializing societies for a literate, mobile workforce.[6] In Ander-
son's version, the rise of 'print-capitalism' triggers a re-imagining of commu-
nity along national lines.[7] A variety of other processes and elements
associated with modernity are put forward as candidates by other authors,
including new social classes, uneven economic development and the require-
ments of representative democracy and of the liberal state. Against these
modernist accounts of the rise of nationalism, Anthony Smith has emphasized
the enduring significance of pre-modern ethnic communities as focal points
for nationalist mobilization in the modern world.[8]

The argument of the present article may not imply anything for these
debates about the origins of nationalism as a social phenomenon. One needs
to exercise great caution in drawing any explanatory conclusions about move-
ments or even ideologies on the basis of claims about the genesis of intellec-
tual doctrines. Assuming, however, that doctrine did exert some impact on
nationalism as a social reality, the view I defend here does suggest a factor
that is ignored by both the modernists and their critics: the importance at the
threshold of modernity of a specific pre-modern conception of language and
politics that had been retrieved and adapted to contemporary circumstances
by Renaissance humanists. It was in the context of this backwards-looking
attraction to a model associated with classical Rome that consolidators of the
early-modern state pursued their programmes of nation-building and formu-
lated models of statecraft that would be passed on to, and adapted and imitated
by, subsequent generations.

The article will deliver this argument in three installments. The opening
section introduces some of the most salient features of the classical account of
eloquence by reviewing the version of that account developed by Cicero. In
reading Cicero, who was the most influential and representative of the classi-
cal theorists of rhetoric, special attention is paid to the aspects of his account
that carry the most important implications for the politics of language. In the
second section, we will see how this classical account of eloquence is taken up
and adapted by early Renaissance humanists to justify and guide a programme
of Latin revival. We will pay special attention to the 'civilizational' view of
political success and greatness that the humanists derived from their reading
of Roman history, and we will also see how the Latin humanists exhorted their
readers to revive Latin using language and categories that strongly anticipated
subsequent nationalist thought. Finally, the third section of the paper, turns to
the language development projects of the vernacular humanists. We will see that

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[6] Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983).

[7] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

[8] Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford, 1986). See also
Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood*.

these projects draw on and further adapt the humanist framework explored in the two previous sections.

I
Ciceronian Eloquence

In line with the classical tradition, Cicero understood eloquence as the power that speech possesses of being persuasive. An eloquent speaker is able 'through speech, to have a hold on human minds, to win over their inclinations, to drive them at will in one direction, and to draw them at will from another' (*De Or.* 1.30).[9] By 'rhetoric' or 'oratory', Cicero meant the art of speaking in a persuasive manner. Just as the true philosopher obtains wisdom, the genuine orator achieves eloquence.

Cicero attached the greatest significance to oratory, writing not less than four dialogues on how to achieve eloquence and composing many eloquent speeches of his own. Following Aristotle, he maintained that the capacity for speech distinguishes human beings from other animals. Who, Cicero asked, 'would not think that he should take the greatest pains in order to surpass other human beings in the very thing which especially makes humans themselves superior to beasts?' (*De Or.* 1.33; *De Inv.* I.5). As a form of power, eloquence is a highly useful ability for an individual to possess. Skill at oratory promises a person success in the law courts and in public deliberations, together with the glory and material rewards that achievements in these areas bring (*De Or.* 2.66). Cicero also regarded the ability to speak eloquently as intrinsically glorious (*De Inv.* I.5; *De Or.* 1.59). A community remembers and admires an eloquent speech for a long time and rightly lavishes its best orators with fame and recognition (*Br.* 253–4).[10]

If the personal rewards of eloquence are considerable, the social benefits associated with it are even greater. At the foundation of Cicero's political thought is a distinction between two basic logics of social order. The first regards violence as the ordering principle of social life; the second makes persuasion the key to the social bond. Cicero often emphasized the parallel between these coercive and communicative varieties of social power by using

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[9] Parenthetical references to Cicero are to his four main works on oratory:

(1) *De Or.* = *De Oratore* [*On the Ideal Orator*], Translated, with Introduction, Notes, Appendixes, Glossary and Indexes by James M. May and Jakob Wisse (Oxford, 2001).

(2) *Br.* = *Brutus*, with an English translation by G.L. Hendrickson (The Loeb Classical Library, 1962).

(3) *Or.* = *Orator*, with an English translation by H.M. Hubbell (The Loeb Classical Library, 1962).

(4) *De Inv.* = *De Inventione*, with an English translation by H.M. Hubbell (The Loeb Classical Library, 1949).

[10] See also Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M.T. Griffin and E.M. Atkins (Cambridge, 1991), II.66.

images of weaponry to describe the skills of the orator (*De Inv*. I.1; *De Or.* 3.55, 3.206; *Br.* 7).

In some passages, Cicero implied that the social importance of persuasion is especially pronounced in a context where the state has already been established and is not occupied with war or dominated by a king (*Br.* 7, 45; *Or.* 141), while elsewhere he went further, suggesting that eloquence must have been at work at the founding of states (*De Inv*. I.3; *De Or.* 1.33). He suggested that eloquence possesses sufficient power of its own that it can confront violence directly rather than waiting for it to subside: it is possessed by the man 'who can walk unharmed even amid the weapons of the enemy, protected not so much by the herald's staff as by the title of orator' (*De Or.* 1.202). Based on these assessments of the strength of eloquence, Cicero maintained that 'leadership and wisdom of the perfect orator provide the chief basis . . . for the safety of countless individuals and of the state at large' (*De Or.* 1.34).

In addition to securing social order, the persuasive powers of its orators also enable a community to memorialize itself and thereby to achieve a kind of immortality. 'As to history', Cicero said, 'the witness of the ages, the illuminator of reality, the life force of memory, the teacher of our lives, and the messenger of times gone by, what other voice but the orator's invests it with immortality?' (*De Or.* 2.36). In his speech *Pro Archia*, Cicero broadened this idea of the glory-conferring, memorializing power of eloquence beyond oratory to also include poetry. In a passage that would be paraphrased again and again by the Renaissance writers we will examine later, he recounted a story of Alexander the Great standing by the gravesite of Achilles and remarking 'Lucky young man, to have had Homer to proclaim your valour'.[11]

In Cicero's view, then, eloquence contributes to individual well-being, secures social order and peace, and enables a community to immortalize itself through glorifying speech. Not surprisingly, in light of these claims, Cicero claimed that eloquence is one of the 'supreme virtues' and even allowed Crassus in *De Oratore* to suggest that it ranks first among equals, 'more beautiful and splendid' than all the other virtues (*De Or.* 3.55). Consistent with this estimate of the importance of oratory, Cicero suggested that the introduction of eloquence may have been more significant for his community than some of its greatest military victories: 'for certainly the man . . . who was first to reveal and demonstrate to Rome the resources of eloquence (*dicendi copiam*) has contributed more to the prestige of our people than those who have stormed successfully some Ligurian fortresses . . .' (*Br.* 255). A community's stock of eloquence is as indispensable as its supply of armaments, and its orators as important as its generals (*Br.* 256).

Cicero's theory of eloquence starts from the assumption that an orator must do more than simply instruct if he is to achieve persuasive power. Persuading

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[11] Cicero, *Pro Archia*, in *Defence Speeches*, trans. D.H. Berry (Oxford, 2000), p. 118.

an audience means getting the members of that audience to accept certain beliefs, and this typically requires more than a dry and technical presentation of a series of propositions. To secure the desired beliefs, an orator must, at a minimum, be able to hold the audience's attention while the content of the speech is being developed. In general, this task of capturing the attention of the audience directs the orator to make his speech as lively and vital as possible. This can be done, Cicero emphasized, by entertaining and delighting the audience, but other means are possible too, such as shocking or frightening them. In addition to holding the interest of the audience, the orator should take other measures in order to secure belief. He should present his material in ways that make the quality of his evidence and logic transparent and easy to follow. He should pay attention to establishing his own credentials as a speaker on the subject being considered. He should present himself as a reliable, trustworthy and authoritative expert on the matter at hand by conveying gravity, erudition, dignity, imagination, empathy, and so on.

Besides securing belief, the orator also wants to exhort his listeners to act in certain ways. Indeed, Cicero's examples of the power of oratory almost all involve action rather than mere belief. Through eloquence, the orator provokes people into certain forms of behaviour and, in this way, establishes community, keeps the peace, faces down bullies, and so on. Building on Aristotle and other classical rhetoricians, Cicero held that the most effective way of goading people into action is through 'impressive appeal to the emotions of the listener' (*Br.* 89).[12] To a considerable extent, eloquence consists in the art of using speech to rouse feelings such as pity, anger, envy, outrage and patriotism, and thus relies on 'knowledge of the kind of speech which arouses each set of feelings' (*Or.* 15).

The art of oratory is concerned, then, not just with conveying information and argument, but with maintaining the interest and attention of the audience, establishing the authority of the speaker and stirring the emotions and feelings of the audience — all with a view to securing belief and motivating action. In each of his works on oratory, Cicero set out to describe the qualities that oratory must possess to accomplish these tasks. He dealt with all of the different aspects of oratory, as these were traditionally understood, organizing his presentation in *De Oratore* around the five accepted parts of oratory: invention, arrangement, style, memory and delivery.

Of these five traditional aspects of rhetoric, style lay closest to the heart of eloquence in Cicero's view. Pointing out an etymological connection between 'eloquence' (*eloquentia*) and the verb 'to utter' (*eloquor*), Cicero claimed that the perfect orator excels because of one quality more than any other: his use of language (*Or.* 61; *De Or.* 2.366). As we will see shortly, style is also the most important aspect of oratory from the standpoint of our own interest in the

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[12] Cicero adds: 'The orator who inflames the court accomplishes far more than the one who merely instructs it' (*Br.* 89).

social importance of language. It is via the account of style that Cicero's views about eloquence have specific normative implications for language, implications that loomed large in the Renaissance humanist programme of language reform.

In *De Oratore*, Cicero distinguished four principal elements of style (*De Or*. 1.44, 3.37):

1. the *correct* use of language
2. *clarity* in use of language
3. *ornatu*s (distinction, ornamentation) in use of language
4. the *appropriate* use of language.

Although Cicero attached greatest importance to the third and fourth of these elements, he devoted the most space in *De Oratore* to the first and third, reserving only about one paragraph each for clarity and appropriateness. In fact, Cicero also passed quite briskly through the first element of style, dismissing the proper command of language as something that any 'true offspring of Roman blood' (*Br*. 261) — indeed, he says in one place, any real human being (*De Or*. 3.52) — can be assumed to possess (see also *De Or*. 3.38). Nonetheless, the few remarks that he did make about this first element point to views that are interesting in their own right and fateful for subsequent discussions of language by the Renaissance humanists.

In *De Oratore*, Cicero suggested that the correct use of Latin has several different dimensions. Most basically, it involves a negative requirement to avoid making grammatical mistakes. This means getting the case, tense and number of one's words right and obeying other grammatical rules. Beyond this basic requirement, he pointed to two further dimensions of correct usage: a quality in language use referred to as 'elegance'; and correct pronunciation.

The Latin word for 'elegance', *elegantia*, is linked etymologically with the verb *eligere* ('choose, select') and literally means something like 'carefully chosen'. In some contexts, the word could acquire a slightly pejorative connotation of fastidiousness or fussiness, but by Cicero's time, and in Cicero's own writings, it was typically associated, more positively, with discrimination, refinement and sophistication.[13] The correct use of Latin requires elegance, in Cicero's view, because good Latin involves 'refined diction' or the careful and tasteful choice of words.[14] A typical failure of elegance might consist in the indiscriminate use of a common or 'vulgar' word where a refined and precisely calibrated one might be selected instead. For Cicero, it was the kind of error that someone who had truly mastered Latin would never make.

As should be clear, elegance is not just a matter of obeying certain grammatical rules. It means, in addition, adapting one's speech to a broader norm

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[13] See Brian A. Krostenko, *Cicero, Catullus, and the Language of Social Performance* (Chicago, 2001), pp. 34–9.

[14] 'refined diction' is how May and Wisse translate '*loquendi elegantia*' at *De Or*. 3.39.

of correct usage. Consistent with his somewhat dismissive attitude toward the first element of style, Cicero said very little in *De Oratore* about the content of this norm, noting only that correct usage can be learned through study of the language employed by the ancient orators and poets. Given his remark that any 'true offspring of Roman blood' will know 'good Latin', and the association of *elegantia* with the refined manners of the urban upper class, it is highly likely that he also associated correct usage with the received manner of speaking of the Roman elite.[15]

Cicero also seems to have believed that an elegant speaker of Latin would be circumspect in borrowing words from foreign languages, although his exact view on this question is difficult to pin down. Even though it was common for Romans of Cicero's generation to borrow words from Greek, and Cicero himself was a great admirer of Greek culture and learning who borrowed Greek terms liberally in his philosophical writings, his practice was to avoid Greek words in his speeches. In *Brutus*, Cicero made his interlocutor Atticus say that 'pure Latinity' was a 'mark of the time' in the generation of Scipio. 'Practically everyone', Atticus adds, 'unless his life was passed outside Rome, or some crudeness of home environment had tainted his speech, in those days spoke well and correctly' (*Br.* 258). With the passage of time, however, the quality of Latin in Rome had deteriorated sharply. Atticus, who claims to be reporting the views of Julius Caesar, blames this deterioration on 'an influx of many impure speakers coming from different places' and says 'it has created a situation which calls for a purge of language' (*Br.* 258). It is not clear how far Cicero endorsed this nativist account of correct Latin usage, as the narrator of *Brutus* (Cicero) is not made either to agree or disagree with what Atticus says.[16] In any case, nativism was not a terribly important part of Cicero's overall account of elegance, even if it fitted neatly with the plausible assumption that the persuasive power of oratory would be enhanced through an adoption of the patterns of speech of the most influential and prestigious members of the community, who, in Cicero's society, would be upper-class, native-born Romans.

Nativism *does*, however, get picked up by influential later Roman rhetoricians including Quintilian. In Quintilian's view, 'barbarisms', including those due to 'nationality [*gente*], such as the insertion of a Spanish or African term',

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[15] Cicero's examples of individuals who excelled at elegant speech refer to members of leading Roman families and mention 'family inheritance' as a possible source of this good quality. See *Br.* 211–12, 252.

[16] At *De Or.* 1.155 Crassus is made to say that he had coined new words based on the Greek language. Note that the dialogue is set in 91 BC, when Cicero was still a teenager. It is conceivable that he held that borrowing from Greek was appropriate at that stage but not by the time he had become a mature orator.

must not be allowed to 'intrude their offensive presence'.[17] 'Our words should have nothing provincial or foreign about them.' 'If possible', he added, 'our voice and all our words should be such as to reveal the native of this city, so that our speech may seem to be of genuine Roman origin, and not merely to have been presented with Roman citizenship.'[18] Implying that there is nothing unusual or extreme about this position, Quintilian referred to the 'archaistic grammarian' who praises the merit of those who 'aimed at strengthening the Latin language and asserted that we had no need of foreign practices'.[19] As we will see a little later in the article, what started out as a peripheral theme for Cicero (mouthed only by Atticus) and then gets returned to in a few passages of Quintilian, turned into a major focus of the Renaissance humanists. Again and again they returned to the idea that the 'pure' speech of the community's native ancestors should be taken as a standard of correct usage, and they diagnosed the decline of eloquence in terms of the corrupting influence of foreigners and 'barbarians'.

When he turned to the third aspect of correct Latin usage, pronunciation, Cicero did endorse the nativist position that the pure accent of communal ancestors is regulative for current users (although he did not go quite as far as Atticus and blame a deterioration in pronunciation on an influx of foreigners):

> There is a particular kind of accent characteristic of the Romans who are from the city itself, in which there is nothing that can give offense, nothing unpleasant, nothing to provoke criticism, nothing to sound or smell of foreignness. So let us cultivate this [Roman] accent, and learn to avoid not only countrified roughness, but also peculiar foreign pronunciation. (*De Or.* 3.44; see also *Br.* 171–2)[20]

Thus by a long and fateful series of steps, Cicero managed to connect the protection from foreign contamination of an idealized pure accent of the past with some of the grandest and most important ends of human life: 'pure' pronunciation is an aspect of correct language usage, which in turn is one of the four elements of good style; the elements of style are, along with the precepts relating to invention, arrangement, delivery and memory, conditions of the achievement of eloquence; and eloquence is one of the highest human virtues and a requirement of a free social and political life.

Cicero's treatment of the third element of style, *ornatus*, was equally significant for subsequent understandings of language, eloquence and society. If the first element of style demands a grammatically correct, tastefully chosen

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[17] Quintilian, *The Institutio Oratio of Quintilian*, with English translation by H.E. Butler (Loeb Classical Library, 1921), I.v.8, I.v.5.

[18] *Ibid.*, VIII.I.2, VIII.I.3.

[19] *Ibid.*, I.v.59–60.

[20] See *De Or.* 3.45 for a reference to speaking with the pronunciation of one's ancestors. Cicero adds that 'the old pronunciation is more easily preserved intact by women' since 'they are not exposed to the language of a lot of people'.

and properly pronounced use of language, this third element focused on the use of language to give vitality, colour and emotional power to speech. The orator, Cicero believed, should employ *ornatus* to entertain the members of the audience, to impress them, to move them and to convey to them as fully as possible the content of the speech. By imparting *ornatus* to his speech, the orator will establish his own authority to speak, hold his audience's attention, instruct it, and stir its emotions and feelings. The 'essence' of giving *ornatus* to speech, Cicero said, 'amounts to seeing to it that speech is as pleasant as possible, that it penetrates the audience's feelings as deeply as possible, and that it is as fully equipped as possible in terms of content' (*De Or.* 3.91–2).

In his technical discussion of the devices that lend *ornatus* to speech, Cicero distinguished between the choice of particular words (diction) and the combination of words into phrases (composition). Under the first of these headings, he advocated the use of 'fine and brilliant' words rather than 'commonplace and dull' ones (*De Or.* 3.150). Fine and brilliant words fall into three main categories: unusual words (which are typically archaic), new coinages and metaphors. The first two categories of words are especially useful to a speaker who wants to impress his audience with erudition or imagination or (in the case of archaic words) to call upon the authority of antiquity. Under composition, Cicero considered both the juxtaposition of words and the rhythm that they produce taken together. Words should be juxtaposed to one another in a way that does not sound harsh or grating but is 'well joined and smooth' (*De Or.* 3.171). The overall composition of sentences should pay attention to rhythm and cadence. Rhythms and sounds, Cicero maintained, are 'deeply rooted in our normal instincts' and thus can be deployed to cause delight and to stir up the crowd's emotions (*De Or.* 3.177, 195–6).

To give his speech *ornatus*, then, a speaker must use words imaginatively and artfully arrange sounds and rhythms, to convey his content, capture his listeners' attention, assert his authority, and spark the desired emotional responses. Language that satisfies all of these criteria is brilliant, vigorous and dignified. It kindles the appropriate emotions, without sacrificing precision, elegance or appropriateness to the content being expressed. An accumulation of well-chosen words and artfully constructed sentences would amount to an abundantly rich and varied use of language. Indeed, Cicero believed that the orator must vary his language to avoid tedious repetition and, more importantly, to amplify or diminish the intensity and tone of different sections of the discourse in a way that will more effectively impart particular ideas and trigger particular emotional responses. A good speech, he said, 'should have some areas of shade and some recesses, so that what is highlighted can be seen to stand out more prominently' (*De Or.* 3.100). For these reasons it is natural to associate the achievement of *ornatus* with abundance, variation and richness, and one frequently finds Cicero using terms like *copia* (copiousness, abundance), *varietas* (variety) and *ubertas* (richness, fullness) to convey

the same meaning as *ornatus* and sometimes even to suggest eloquence in general.[21] In a characteristic passage, he captured the connection between eloquence, abundance and power by saying that eloquence 'rushes along with the roar of a mighty stream' (*Or*. 97).

Since an abundant and varied use of language is likely to strike a listener as rich and lustrous, 'ornamentation' would be a possible translation of '*ornatus*' in some contexts. But it is important to keep in mind that *ornatus* did not, for Cicero, connote the mere embellishment or decoration of an otherwise plain content; language, he always insisted, must reflect the content it is intended to express (*De Or*. 3.24). One recent translation of *De Oratore* renders '*ornatus*' as 'distinction', and this perhaps comes closer to capturing the essential unity between a worthy inner content and a fine outer presentation.[22]

One of Cicero's key claims is that, to achieve *ornatus*, the ideal orator must have knowledge — even philosophical knowledge — of the subjects on which he speaks. An orator needs an abundance of material to draw on if he is to be in a position to speak abundantly and hence eloquently (*De Or*. 1.93, 2.6, 3.125). True eloquence can only be achieved, therefore, by someone who has studied history, philosophy, law and other learned subjects. It is ultimately something that can be realized only in a reflective society, one that fosters and

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[21] See the translators' Glossary to *De Or.*, entry under '*ornatus*'. See also Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford, 1979), p. 5. As Cave points out, *copia* also has a connotation of military strength (p. 3), which reinforces the imagery of weaponry that Cicero likes to associate with eloquence.

[22] I.e. the May and Wisse translation referenced throughout in this paper. In his later work, *Orator*, Cicero revised his account of style slightly to bring it more closely in line with the prevailing view that there are three different types of oratorical style: the plain style, the grandiloquent style and the moderate style. The plain style eschews *ornatus* (including rhythm, figurative language, neologisms, archaic words and extravagant metaphors), preferring instead a neat, lean and unpretentious use of language that values both clarity and accessibility to ordinary people. The speaker who employs the grandiloquent style, by contrast, puts on display the full array of stylistic devices that Cicero associated with *ornatus* and *copia* (*Or*. 91). He seeks to impress and astonish his audience with his erudition, his brilliant command of language and his vehement and passionate concern for the subjects he addresses. As its name suggests, the moderate style situates itself at the mid-point between plainness and grandness, showing a willingness to use *ornatus* and *copia* as appropriate but also a concern not to be unnecessarily flashy or affected. Consistent with the argument of *De Oratore*, and his own practice of oratory, Cicero lavished his highest praise on the grand style, saying the grand orator is 'the man whose distinction and abundance (*ornatum dicendi et copiam*) have caused admiring nations (*gentes*) to let eloquence attain the highest power in the state' (*Or*. 97). But his considered view seems to have been that all three types of style have their own place, and the truly eloquent orator is one who masters each and who is able to determine which type is appropriate in a given context ('appropriateness' being the fourth element of style). This view, in effect, qualifies the treatment in *De Oratore* of *ornatus* as an essential (and presumably general) requirement of good style, though it leaves intact Cicero's more important idea that the ideally eloquent orator would have a full command of *ornatus*.

supports the pursuit of knowledge. An adequate infrastructure of knowledge is a pre-requisite of *ornatus* and eloquence.

Cicero paid rather less attention to a different kind of pre-requisite of *ornatus*, which might be called the *linguistic pre-requisite*. By this I mean the orator's command of the language in which he will speak (assumed by Cicero to be Latin) and the state of that language itself. Although he clearly regards the imparting of *ornatus* as a special and particularly difficult skill, Cicero did not devote much attention to worrying about whether his contemporary orators had sufficient linguistic resources to realize the abundant style he prefers or, indeed, whether the Latin language was sufficiently rich to support such a style.[23] As we shall see later, this relaxed inattention to the linguistic pre-requisite contrasts starkly with the anxieties about language of the Renaissance humanists.

In only a handful of passages do we find Cicero hinting at this concern and thus preparing the ground for the later obsession with what the English in the sixteenth century would call the 'insufficiency' of their language. In one passage, Cicero suggested that orators in the age of Cato were handicapped by the poverty of their language. He says of Cato:

> His language is archaic, and some of his words are quite uncouth. Yes, for that was how they spoke in his day; change that, which in his time he could not change, add rhythm and, to fit his language together more smoothly, rearrange his words, cement them as it were together . . . and behold, you will not find anyone to place before Cato. (*Br.* 65)

In another passage, Cicero noted in passing that 'having a great store of the right words that one can employ is the basis, so to speak, the foundation of the whole thing' (*De Or.* 3.151–2). Here he seemed to imply that an orator must have access to a large and rich vocabulary if he is to attain the ornate and abundant style that is being urged. Confident in the Latin vocabulary of the orator he was forming, however, Cicero immediately dropped this concern, saying the important point is 'rather what the orator himself must build on this' (*De Or.* 3.152).

The view that *ornatus* is an indispensable element of eloquence has potentially enormous consequences for one's view of language. Just as speakers need a wealth of material to draw on if they are to be in a position to follow Cicero's stylistic precepts, they also depend on having rich and abundant linguistic resources. Although Cicero barely hinted at these implications of his

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[23] In *On Moral Ends*, ed. Julia Annas (Cambridge, 2001), I.10, Cicero comments that 'my view is, as I have often argued, that, far from lacking in resources, the Latin language is even richer than the Greek. When, after all, have we, or rather our good orators and poets, lacked the wherewithal to create either a full or a spare style in their work . . .?'. Cicero's view in the same text about the linguistic resources available for philosophy in the Latin language is quite different and he excuses himself for borrowing freely from Greek.

account, we shall see later that the sixteenth-century language reformers did not fail to notice them.

II
Humanism and the Revival of Classical Latin

In this section I will describe how the fifteenth-century Italian humanists sought to revive the classical doctrine of eloquence and adapt it to their contemporary circumstances. Unlike Cicero and the other leading Roman rhetoricians, the *quattrocento* writers believed that they could not take the linguistic pre-requisite of eloquence for granted. They judged the quality of the medieval Latin at their disposal to be inadequate to support eloquent usage and thus insufficient for the realization of the goods and values associated with eloquence. At the same time, the Italian humanists were confident that this historical rupture between their own age and that of classical civilization could be repaired and that, through their own painstaking efforts and scholarship, a classical Latin capable of supporting eloquence could be revived. As I will argue in the next section, this 'language revival project' would serve as a model for vernacular humanists of the sixteenth century concerned to promote and develop their own vernaculars.

In developing these points, my main claim will not concern the novelty or originality of the Italian humanists. Instead, I will limit myself, for the most part, to describing the content of their views on eloquence and language revival and (in the section that follows) to tracing the influence of these views on vernacular humanists of the sixteenth century. Although access to, and admiration for, classical culture was a feature of pre-fifteenth-century medieval culture, I do think that something new is introduced by the Italian humanists. They were animated by a sense that the classical ideal of eloquence was something distant from, and at odds with, their own world and thus in special need of recuperation, re-articulation and conscious promotion.[24] To defend such a claim, however, would necessitate a digression on medieval views of oratory, language and the classical world that would distract from the main aims of the article. It is enough for my purposes to argue that it was the views of the fifteenth-century Italian writers that get taken up by later vernacular humanists and exert an influence on language development in the early-modern state.

The most important of the early humanist re-articulations of classical eloquence can be found in the fourteenth-century writings of Francesco Petrarch. Petrarch understood eloquence to be an achievement of the classical world that had become marginalized in his day by the mistaken belief that a true

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[24] For a nuanced presentation of the distinctive contribution of the Italian humanists along these lines, see Quentin Skinner, *Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge, 1978), Vol. I, ch. 4, esp. pp. 84–8, 101–2. For a contrasting view, see Janet Coleman, *Ancient and Medieval Memories* (Cambridge, 1992), esp. pp. 547–67.

Christian should not study the pagan authors (e.g. Cicero) and by the lifeless and overly technical approaches to their subjects taken in the dominant professions, including philosophy, law and theology. His contemporaries, Petrarch thought, treated eloquence as 'an obstacle and disgrace'.[25] Against this scholastic dismissal of eloquence, the great early humanist followed Cicero in arguing for a reunion of philosophy and rhetoric. The orator cannot achieve true eloquence, Petrarch thought, without intellectual mastery of the material about which he is speaking or writing,[26] and to this extent a philosopher or theologian would be right to praise wisdom as the most fundamental virtue. But at the same time knowledge cannot be shared or made a basis for moral reform if it is not communicated effectively to others, and this makes wisdom dependent in the end on the persuasive force of speech. In the generations following Petrarch, a number of humanist writers contributed to this debate, all working within the broadly Ciceronian framework while disagreeing about how precisely the union of the two traditionally antagonistic virtues should be effected.[27]

As Petrarch's response to the scholastics indicates, he strongly endorsed Cicero's view about the personal and social importance of eloquence, even while recasting it in more Christian terms. Petrarch's main objection to Aristotle's moral philosophy had nothing to do with its content. In Aristotle's 'moral books', Petrarch writes in *On His Own Ignorance*, 'I see virtue, and all that is peculiar to vice as well as to virtue, egregiously defined and distinguished by him and treated with penetrating insight'.[28] The problem is that nothing in Aristotle's style of exposition, any more than in that of Aristotle's later scholastic followers, stimulates the reader to embrace the virtues and spurn the vices that are so intelligently discussed. Aristotle's moral lesson 'lacks the words that sting and set afire and urge toward love of virtue and hatred of vice or, at any rate, does not have enough of such power'.[29] The impotence of Aristotle's style compares unfavourably, in Petrarch's opinion, with the persuasive force of 'our Latin authors' (especially Cicero, Seneca and Horace), who 'stamp and drive deep into the heart the sharpest and most

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[25] Francesco Petrarch, *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others*, trans. Hans Nachod, in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago, 1948), p. 103. Quoting *De Oratore*, Petrarch complained that 'only "infantile inability to speak" and perplexed stammering, "wisdom" trying hard to keep one eye open and "yawning drowsily", as Cicero calls it, is held in good repute nowadays', p. 53.

[26] Petrarch, *On His Own Ignorance*, pp. 96, 112.

[27] For good discussions, see Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton 1968); and John Monfasani, *Language and Learning in Renaissance Italy* (Aldershot, 1994), esp. ch. I.

[28] Petrarch, *On His Own Ignorance*, p. 103.

[29] *Ibid*.

ardent stings of speech, by which the lazy are startled, the ailing are kindled, and the sleepy aroused'.[30] This connection between eloquence and moral regeneration holds, in Petrarch's view, not only for the individual but also at the level of institutions. In a later passage of the same essay, he recounted how Augustine became a 'great fighter for the Church' by going into 'battle' with the 'weapons' of eloquence.[31]

Although Petrarch emphasized here the importance of eloquence for religion, subsequent humanist writers did not hesitate to apply the same framework to politics. The power of a principality or republic does not just depend on the size of its military or treasury. Political power also comes, they held, from using language to persuasive effect. An often-repeated anecdote about the late fourteenth-century Florentine Chancellor, Coluccio Salutati, illustrates the pervasiveness of this belief. Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan, whose forces would be defeated by Florence in 1402 shortly after his own death, was reported to have complained on more than one occasion that the eloquence of Salutati's propagandizing pamphlets had done him more harm than a troop of cavalry.[32] Leonardo Bruni, one of Salutati's successors as chancellor, and one of the most important humanists of the fifteenth century, echoed this same theme of eloquence successfully standing up to brutality in his *History of the Florentine People*. He recounted an incident in which the eloquence of Pope Leo's pleas was said to have softened Attila's 'savage ferocity'.[33] Bruni's younger contemporary, Leon Battista Alberti, stated the connection between eloquent language and political power in general terms: 'a prince probably derived . . . from the eminence of that position which he held by fortune's favor, no more power and authority than from his knowledge of the Latin language and familiarity with Latin letters'.[34] Another prominent fifteenth-century humanist, Lorenzo Valla, who defended eloquence as a tool for embellishing the majesty of the House of God (*Eleg.* 623), also saw in the spread of Latin language and culture an instrument for securing public utility and the safety of men (*Eleg.* 595).[35]

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[30] *Ibid.*, pp. 103–4.

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 113–14.

[32] Kristian Jensen, 'The Humanist Reform of Latin and Latin Teaching', in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kray (Cambridge, 1996), p. 63. Jensen attributes the report to Aeneas Silvius Piccolominus, the humanist who subsequently became Pope Pius II. The same anecdote is referred to by Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy*, p. 252.

[33] Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, trans. James Hankins (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 73.

[34] Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence*, trans. Renée Neu Watkins (Columbia, SC, 1969), p. 151.

[35] Parenthetical references to Lorenzo Valla are to *Eleg.* = *De Linguae Latinae Elegantia*, Prefaces reprinted with facing Italian translations, in *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan, [1441–9]). A few pages of the first Preface are

These assessments of the political significance of language and eloquence obviously echoed the views of Cicero that we examined earlier, who was the classical author most admired by the Italian humanists. The same is true of another theme in the humanist appreciation of eloquence: that eloquent language should be lauded not just for its political power but as a medium for remembering and glorifying great political achievements. Cicero's *Pro Archia*, which praises poetry for endowing great men with immortality, was one of the most widely diffused texts of the period; indeed it was Petrarch who had rediscovered a manuscript of the text and made copies for friends.[36] The official act of the City of Florence that made Bruni exempt from taxes (as recognition for his path-breaking *History of the Florentine People*) was obviously persuaded by Cicero's argument when it began: 'Considering what eternal fame and glory have been conferred on peoples and cities by literary talents and the splendor and brilliance of histories . . .'.[37]

The most striking display of respect for eloquence and language could be found, however, in Italian humanist observations about ancient Rome. In the extraordinary preface to Book I of his *Elegantiae* Lorenzo Valla maintained that the greatest achievements of the Romans were cultural and linguistic rather than military or political. 'Our ancestors', he wrote, 'surpassed other men in military affairs', but 'by the extending of their language they indeed surpassed themselves' (*Eleg.* 595). The ancient Romans 'wisely offered very distinguished rewards to the teachers of literature' ensuring that 'no one seemed pre-eminent in military affairs unless he was distinguished also in letters' (*Eleg.* 597). The Latin language served as a vehicle for spreading the liberal arts, Roman law, philosophy, and refined manners and mores. 'Who does not know that when the Latin language flourishes', Valla asked, 'all studies and disciplines thrive, as they are ruined when it perishes? For who have been the most profound philosophers, the best orators, the most distinguished jurists, and finally the greatest writers, but those indeed who have been most zealous in speaking well?' (*Eleg.* 599).

In praising the Latin language, Valla returned to the Ciceronian opposition between communicative and coercive power. The spread of the Latin language, he implied, encouraged some peoples to embrace the Roman Empire for the splendour of its culture rather than under threat of force. This power of language and culture was not only sweeter and more glorious than dominion based on military conquest but also more enduring:

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translated into English in, *The Portable Renaissance Reader*, ed. James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin (New York, 1953), pp. 131–5.

[36] For an account of Petrarch's discovery of this text, and its subsequent diffusion, see Michael D. Reeve, 'Classical Scholarship', in *Cambridge Companion to Classical Humanism*, ed. Kraye, pp. 20–6.

[37] Cited in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, ed. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins and David Thompson (Binghamton, NY, 1987), p. 175.

> The Roman dominion, the peoples and nations long ago threw off as an
> unwelcome burden; the language of Rome they have thought sweeter than
> any nectar, more splendid than any silk, and they have embraced it as if it
> were a god sent from Heaven . . . We have lost Rome, we have lost sover-
> eignty, we have lost authority, not by our own fault but by that of the times,
> yet we reign still, by this more splendid authority, in a great part of the
> world. Ours is Italy, ours Gaul, ours Spain, Germany, Panonia, Dalmatia,
> Illyricum, and many other nations. For wherever the Roman tongue holds
> sway, there is the Roman dominion. (*Eleg.* 597)

In contrasting the sweetness and endurance of linguistic dominion with the
violence and ultimate demise of Rome's military empire, Valla was no doubt
thinking, in part, about the Roman Catholic Church, whose power he regarded
as resting more on moral authority, religious belief and the Latin language
than on military superiority.[38] But the same emphasis on the cultural power of
ancient Rome could be found in authors with a more secular allegiance, for
instance to the Florentine Republic. For Alberti, as for Valla, the cultural
dominion of Rome long outlasted its political empire. 'It even seems to me',
Alberti wrote, 'that our imperial splendor was not wholly extinguished until
the light and the far-reaching influence of Latin and of Latin letters faded
away'. 'The dying out of our ancient, most beautiful Latin tongue', he added,
was a 'greater loss' than 'the fall of our ancient, most extensive empire'.[39]

These humanist authors were articulating what might be termed a *civili-
zational* model of political success and greatness. Political success, they
implied, is realized in civilizational units: units that are defined as much by
the character of their language, culture and arts, as by the strength of their mili-
taries, the form of their political institutions, or the acumen of their leaders.
Culture contributes to political greatness as an instrument, a medium of
inter-generational communication and an end in itself. It is a device for
enhancing the prestige and authority of the controlling group of a society or
empire and hence an instrument of political power. It is also a linguistic
medium in which the lives and actions of the people who exercise power can
be memorialized and glorified. It is seen as an end in itself, something to be
cultivated by any great political leader for its own sake, as an expression of his
status as a reasoning and language-using being. Such was the importance of
language and culture for these authors that they agreed that Rome's dominion
lasted long beyond the political demise of the Roman Empire.

For those who seek political greatness in the contemporary world, the les-
son of the civilizational model is that they must not restrict their attention to

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[38] Biondo probably had the same thought describing in 1446 the thousands of pil-
grims who visited the newly restored buildings of ancient Rome every year: 'Set in a firm
foundation, then, the glory of Roman majesty still thrives, and in blissful reverence,
under no compulsion and with no clash of arms, much of the world bows its head to the
name of Rome.' Biondo, *Rome instaurata*, cited in Reeve, 'Classical Scholarship', p. 38.

[39] Alberti, *The Family*, p. 151.

military innovation or clever institutional design. They must also devote attention to the broader cultural life of the community, including its language, its literature, its art, music and architecture, its philosophy and its forms of education. These cultural elements nourish the spirit and virtue of the people and provide a medium for memorializing and glorifying statesmen and leaders.

The emphasis on culture directed the humanists to return to classical forms and styles, especially to the Ciceronian ideal of eloquence. But, despite their insistence that Rome's cultural dominion had outlasted its political empire, the humanist writers also generally maintained that the cultural legacy of the ancient world had been badly decayed and corrupted in the millennium since the fall of Rome. The historically-minded Italian humanists shared a new 'feeling of radical discontinuity with the culture of Greece and Rome'.[40] They believed there had been a calamitous falling off, a descent into a medieval 'dark age' that had put classical civilization almost out of reach.

This sense of corruption and decay was already articulated by Boccaccio, writing around 1370. After sketching a picture of ancient Rome as a total civilizational unit that combined military triumphs with artistic, philosophical and moral ones, he went on to lament that 'our ancestors' neglected all of these achievements 'with Godlike irresponsibility and allowed them to be defiled, to be snatched away or shamefully destroyed by foreign peoples'.[41] Alberti wondered how this 'calamity' could have occurred: it was, to him, 'the loss of something which no one took from us and no one stole'.[42] Valla, who seemed almost inconsolable, spelt out the full consequences of this loss for literature, rhetoric, philosophy and the public good:

> But sorrow hinders me from saying more, and torments me and forces me to weep, as I contemplate the state which the skill of eloquence had once attained and the condition into which it has now fallen. For what lover of letters and the public good could restrain his tears when he sees eloquence now in that state in which it was long ago when Rome was captured by the Gauls? Everything is overturned, burned, destroyed, so that even the Capitoline citadel barely remains. Indeed, for many centuries not only has no one spoken in plain Latin [*latine*], but no one who has read Latin works has understood them. Students of philosophy have not understood, nor do they understand, the philosophers; nor do public pleaders have orators; nor lawyers [*leguleius*] the jurists; nor the other readers the works of the ancients, as if after the Roman Empire had fallen, it would not be fitting to speak or understand in the Roman fashion, and the glory of Latinity was allowed to decay in rust and mould. (*Eleg.* 599)

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[40] Skinner, *Foundations*, Vol. 1, p. 85.

[41] Giovanni Boccaccio, 'Letter to Jacopo Pizzinghe', in *Portable Renaissance Reader*, ed. Ross and McLaughlin, pp. 125–6.

[42] Alberti, *The Family*, p. 151.

As the passage from Valla suggests, the greatest part of the loss of classical civilization was felt in the area of language. Latin was the primary language of literacy, and was used in ecclesiastical, legal, administrative, scholarly and literary contexts. But, as the humanists saw it, the medieval Latin that predominated in these circles differed dramatically from the Latin of classical Rome. Heavily inflected with words borrowed from the vernacular, and full of technical jargon suitable to the professions in which it predominated, medieval Latin was for the humanists a vulgar bastardization of the elegant language of Cicero or Virgil. Indeed, Bruni thought that Latin had been in decline ever since Cicero and judged that the Latin verse of even so precious a Florentine figure as Dante 'barely comes up to average'.[43]

Even as they lamented the loss of the Latin language and culture of classical Rome, however, the fifteenth-century Italian humanists detected encouraging signs of a revival of *Latinitas*, and believed that, with further effort and struggle, this revival might be sustained. The humanists credited Petrarch in particular with having rediscovered classical Latin and Ciceronian eloquence. In Bruni's words, Petrarch was 'the first with a talent sufficient to recognize and call back to light the antique elegance of the lost and extinguished style'.[44] Naturally, Bruni regarded his adopted city of Florence as the centre of this renaissance, suggesting that the city could be compared with the Roman commander Camillus, the legendary figure who reconquered the city of Rome after it had been occupied by the Gauls in 390 BC: 'Who, if not our city, recognized the value of Latin letters, which had been lying abject, prostrate, and almost dead, and saw to it that they were resurrected and restored?'[45] Valla too saw encouraging signs of a revival of classical culture. After lamenting that the liberal arts, 'such as painting, sculpture, and architecture, had degenerated together with letters for such a long time', he added that in his own time 'they are revived' and 'there is such a growth both of good artists and of good men of letters'. 'At any rate', he continued, 'just as the past time was more unhappy, in which no cultivated man could be found, thus our time is to be praised more, in which, if we make a bit more of an effort, I'm sure that the Roman language, more than the city, and with it all the disciplines, will soon return' (*Eleg.* 599).

From Petrarch onwards, humanist scholars consciously pursued a project of reconstructing and reviving classical Latin. They purged words that could not be found in the classical authors, tightened up sloppy medieval grammar and syntax, and urged reforms in the teaching of Latin that would mean less

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[43] Leonardo Bruni, 'The Lives of Dante and Petrarch', trans. Alan F. Nagel, in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Griffiths, Hankins and Thompson, pp. 93, 96.

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[45] Bruni, 'Oration for the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi', in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Griffiths, Hankins and Thompson, p. 126.

time mastering grammatical rules and more on reading and imitating the works of the canonical ancient writers.[46]

The culmination of these efforts at restoring Latin to its classical splendour was, without a doubt, Valla's *Elegantiae*. For all the polemical and emotive language of its various prefaces, Valla's work was a piece of painstaking scholarship, mostly consisting of technical discussions of correct Latin usage. The background ideal motivating the work, Valla made clear, was the Ciceronian one of eloquence. Against scholastic critics who had accused him of excessive Ciceronianism (echoing a self-accusation of St Jerome), Valla argued that the great Christian theologians and apostles had used eloquence and *ornatus* to give flesh and colour to Christian teachings. Those who care for the language 'decorate the house of God . . . so that those who enter in it are not induced to spite by its misery but are instead induced to reverence by the majesty of the place' (*Eleg.* 622). The *Elegantiae* did not offer a guide to eloquence itself but sought to prepare a refined and corrected treasury of Latin vocabulary and grammar out of which eloquent speech could be articulated (*Eleg.* 620). Whereas Cicero could suggest that he was taking correct and elegant usage of Latin in oratory for granted, Valla's views on the contemporary crisis of Latin made this assumption impossible. The purpose of the work was thus to lay out some of the considerable resources offered by the Latin language in a way that made a grammatically correct and elegant use of the language possible.

Throughout this section, I have been drawing attention to a number of elements of the Renaissance Italian humanist view of language and eloquence. We have seen that the humanists generally shared Cicero's high estimation of the personal and social importance of eloquence, and that they even seemed to endorse what I called a 'civilizational' view of political achievement and greatness, which makes it incumbent on anyone seeking success in political life to pay attention not just to military strength and institutional design but also to cultural and linguistic flourishing. We have also seen that, for all the respect and emphasis they bestow on culture and language, the humanists believed that their own society faced a crisis of eloquence, one that was grounded in the decay and corruption of the Latin language. At the same time they held that man is not helpless in the face of this crisis. With sustained effort and struggle — with an exertion of virtue over fortune — the conditions necessary for eloquence could be re-established. To a considerable extent, this struggle for eloquence consisted in the scholarly linguistic project of restoring Latin to the precise and refined instrument it had been in classical antiquity so that it could once again be used to form eloquent speech.

In the next section, we will see how this basic picture of language, eloquence and politics gets taken over and adapted by early modern nation-builders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Before embarking on this discussion,

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[46] See Jensen, 'The Humanist Reform of Latin'.

however, I want to mention one final theme that was important for the Italian humanists and that also exerted an important influence on their nationalist followers. The humanists, we shall see, consistently characterized their project of reviving classical Latin as a struggle against barbarianism. In their view, foreign invasion and occupation was the cause of the original cultural decline and the effort to reverse this decline would, to a considerable extent, involve purifying the contemporary culture of foreign influences.

The humanist preoccupation with barbarianism can be traced back to classical Greece. The term 'barbarian' is said to be onomatopoeic in origin: to the Greeks, the incomprehensible speech of rival tribes made a noise that sounded like 'bar-bar'.[47] For the Greeks, as for the Romans, 'barbarian' was thus a term that could be deployed to legitimate the conquest and ill treatment of enemy tribes by suggesting that they lacked coherent speech and hence were intellectually and culturally inferior. From a certain point of view, the Romans regarded their entire history as one long struggle against barbarianism, and this theme, as we saw earlier in the paper, found its way into Roman accounts of eloquence.

The humanists thus had ample classical precedent for thinking about political conflict as involving a struggle against barbarianism. They also had the obvious historical fact that it was 'barbarian' Germanic tribes from the north who had brought about the final demise of the Roman Empire. In addition, the Papacy, and the independent city-states of northern Italy, had, since the twelfth century, been embroiled in a long struggle with the German Holy Roman Emperor for temporal power over the Italian peninsula, and they did not hesitate to use the term 'barbarian' to describe their foreign rival. Since some Italians allied themselves with the German Emperor, or found a basis for his authority in Roman civil law, the word 'barbarian' was also applied internally to certain Italians and particular practices and forms of thought. Italian opponents of the German Emperor and his allies frequently returned to the theme of restoring the ancient glories of Rome by ridding Italy of its occupying barbarians. They saw Italy as riven by a fundamental conflict between, in Bruni's words, a faction consisting of 'men who had bound themselves to the imperial cause and had forgotten the liberty and glory of their ancestors — men who preferred to serve foreigners rather than be ruled by their own people' — and another group 'composed of those who were more inclined to embrace the liberty of peoples' and who 'considered it degrading for Germans and barbarians to rule over Italians under the pretext of the Roman name'.[48] The cause of liberty was thus seen by Bruni as demanding, in part, a struggle to purge Italy of unpatriotic, internal barbarianism.

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[47] This etymology is widely mentioned. See, e.g., Anthony Pagden, *Peoples and Empires* (New York, 2001), pp. 12–13.

[48] Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, p. 103.

Against this background it is hardly surprising that the humanist campaign of language reform would become inflected with exhortations to rid Italy of barbarianism. The humanist writers were unanimous in holding Italy's long barbarian occupation at least partly responsible for the decay and corruption of the Latin language. Boccaccio, as we saw earlier, thought that Latin culture had been 'snatched away or shamefully destroyed by foreign peoples'.[49] Alberti seemed to endorse this view, speculating that Italy's contemporary linguistic situation was 'a consequence of the other catastrophes that . . . befell us', in which 'Italy was repeatedly occupied and subjected to various nations: the Gauls, the Goths, the Vandals, the Lombards, and other like harsh and barbarous peoples'.[50]

In Bruni's view, the decline of Latin began with the 'perverse tyrannical [Roman] emperors' and continued with the occupation by the Goths and Lombards after the fall of the Roman Empire. These 'barbarous and foreign nations . . . almost extinguished all understanding of letters'.[51] In his own day, Bruni found abundant evidence of this barbarism in medieval and scholastic Latin. He contrasted the 'purity of the Latin speech', which he found in Cicero and Jerome, with 'the miscegenation of all the languages' and defilement by 'Greek and barbarous dictions'.[52] In one passage, he mocked an older translation into Latin of Aristotle's *Politics* for using the phrase 'for the sake of prolocution'. 'If this word is in use in far-off barbarian lands', he writes, 'explain to me what "to speak for the sake of prolocution" means among the barbarians. I who am a Latin do not understand this barbaric talk of yours.'[53]

But once again it was Valla who went the furthest in deploying the motif of barbarianism to characterize both the contemporary state of Latin as he saw it and his own project of language reform. We have already seen how he compared the contemporary state of Latin language and culture with the devastation of Rome after it was occupied by the Gauls: 'everything is turned upside down, burnt, destroyed, so that even the Capitoline citadel barely remains'. In the Preface to Book Three of the *Elegantiae* he developed this motif further, suggesting that the whole contemporary practice of civil law was compromised by its association with a barbaric form of medieval Latin. 'Are these modern jurists not to be considered Goths and Vandals?', he asked. 'After the arrival of the Goths and the Vandals . . .',

> all the writers [on civil law] ceased to be eloquent and therefore became much inferior to their predecessors. Roman literature diminished to such a

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[49] Boccaccio, 'Letter to Jacopo Pizzinghe', p. 126.

[50] Alberti, *The Family*, p. 152.

[51] Bruni, 'Life of Dante and Petrarch', p. 97.

[52] Bruni, cited in James Hankins, 'The New Language: Introduction', in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Griffiths, Hankins and Thompson, p. 208.

[53] Bruni, 'On the Correct Way to Translate', in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Griffiths, Hankins and Thompson, p. 224.

point that, while the ancients used to mix the Greek language with their own, these writers mixed with theirs the Gothic one. And I don't say this to attack the students of law but rather to exhort and persuade them that without the study of *humanitas* it is not possible for them to acquire the skill they aspire to, if they really want to resemble genuine jurists rather than pettifoggers [*leguilie*].

In Valla's view, the campaign to restore Latin to its ancient glories acquired the status and urgency of a violent struggle for national liberation. 'Out of respect for my fatherland [patria]', he wrote, 'and indeed for all human beings, and because of the magnitude of the enterprise, I want to exhort all the students of eloquence . . . and give them the signal for war.' Paraphrasing the famous opening lines of Cicero's speech on the Catilinarian conspiracy, he continued:

> Until what point . . . shall you suffer our city (I do not mean the seat of the power, but the mother of letters) to be taken by the Gauls? That is, for how long will you suffer *Latinitas* to be oppressed by barbarousness? Until what point will you watch with a cold and almost impious look everything being completely profaned? Perhaps until the remains of the foundations will be barely visible? (*Eleg.* 598–600)

It is not enough to write history, or translate from the Greek, or compose orations or poems. These are illustrious and praiseworthy activities but 'they do not expel the enemies or liberate the patria'. Like Bruni, Valla alluded to Camillus, the legendary liberator of Rome from the occupying Gauls: 'We must imitate Camillus, who, as Virgil said, shall return the standards to the patria and thereby liberate it' (*Eleg.* 600). He even flattered himself, as nationalist poets and philologists of later centuries would do, with the conceit that his own careful intellectual labours of reconstructing Latin grammar and vocabulary could make the same supreme contribution to the struggle for liberation as a military commander:

> Certainly, as far as I am concerned, I will imitate this man. I will propose his enterprise as an example to myself. I shall put together, however small my forces will be, an army which I will lead as soon as possible against the enemies. I will go before the soldiers, I will go first, so as to encourage you. Let's fight, I pray, this most honorable and beautiful fight; not only in order to retake the patria from the enemies, but also to make it apparent who among us has the most capacity to imitate Camillus. (*Eleg.* 600)

To Valla's contemporaries, and to subsequent generations, the *Elegantiae* was a seminal book because of its exhaustive, scientific work of reconstructing classical Latin. For a non-specialist reader today, however, what really stands out about the book is Valla's fusion of the classical ideal of Ciceronian eloquence with the humanist devotion to restoring classical culture using imagery that anticipates the phenomenon of modern nationalism. For Valla, the ideal of eloquence brought with it the promise of moral and political

authority and Christian moral regeneration. It was an ideal that has been pushed almost beyond reach by centuries of decay and corruption of the Latin language. It could be brought back into reach, however, through sustained effort and struggle by scholars like himself. This struggle had the status and urgency of a war of national liberation to be fought primarily against foreign influences that had insinuated themselves into the speech of his fellow Italians.

III
Promoting the National Vernaculars

Already by the fifteenth century, European linguistic practices had changed considerably. For some time a rich variety of vernacular languages had been well established across the continent and were used for everyday communication at home and in public. Many of these vernaculars could claim small bodies of medieval poetry and literature, and some, such as English, were increasingly used for record-keeping, official decrees and other administrative purposes. At the same time, Latin remained a high-status language of culture and literary expression across much of the continent. Knowledge of Latin marked people as refined, educated and well-born, and gave them access to the literate worlds of letter-writing, law and medicine, scholarship, ecclesiastical authority, and government and administration. In comparison with both Latin and their present-day descendants, the vernaculars had small and unstable vocabularies, were characterized by high levels of regional variation, and lacked settled rules of grammar, spelling, pronunciation and punctuation.

Although the shift towards the vernacular had been developing slowly for a long time, it was completed decisively during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the end of the seventeenth century, a small number of the vernaculars had been elevated into national languages and had been developed and amplified into the rich, standardized written idioms that we know today. They had been endowed with greatly expanded vocabularies, settled rules of grammar and syntax, regularized spelling and punctuation, and accepted norms of correct usage. The national vernaculars had been adopted as statewide languages of administration by the major powers of Europe and Latin had been displaced into the liturgical and scholastic margins of society.

Standard accounts of this momentous change emphasize the broader processes of modernization that much of European society was going through at the same time. The shift from Latin to the vernacular is seen as a kind of 'rebellion against Latin' that mirrors the changing balance of power amongst the social classes.[54] In parts of the continent, an urban middle class of merchants and skilled craftsmen had become increasingly powerful and vocal. They

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[54] I borrow the phrase from the title of Armand Gaetano's useful article on the activities and outlook of the mid-sixteenth-century pro-vernacular *Academia Fiorentina*:

needed a degree of literacy to handle their accounts, write contracts and the like, and the cheapest and easiest way for them to acquire this was in their own native vernacular. Members of this group often had limited knowledge of Latin and resented the way in which traditional aristocracies monopolized fields such as law and public administration and used ignorance of Latin as a pretext for excluding and denigrating the popular classes. They tended to regard Latin as an essentially dead language, one that had accumulated most of its vocabulary in the classical and medieval periods and that had long since ceased to be open to new influences and circumstances. By the sixteenth century, some members of this rising middle class were also heavily influenced by the views of Protestant reformers, who thought that the Bible should be made accessible to all believers through translation into the vernacular. With the advent of new, democratizing technologies such as the printing press (introduced in the late fifteenth century), the middle classes were able to force a change in Europe's linguistic practices. They captured elite domains of communication for the vernacular and eventually pushed Latin into the margins.

Proponents of the modernization view of European language change also point to ways in which the projects of enriching and standardizing the vernaculars were rooted in the modernization process. On the one hand, the military-administrative apparatus of the emerging modern state relied on the presence of a fixed and uniform medium of communication, with an up-to-date technical vocabulary, that could be used for issuing commands, collecting taxes, keeping records, and so on. On the other hand, as Benedict Anderson argues, 'print-capitalists' sought to construct large vernacular markets for their books and pamphlets by assembling clusters of spoken dialects into fixed and uniform 'print-languages'.[55] As populations became more mobile, and communication networks denser and more extensive, both of these forces spurring language development gathered momentum.

Although there is much to be said for these modernization explanations of language shift and language development in late medieval and early modern Europe, in the remainder of this article I will make the case that the pre-modern humanist framework we have been exploring also contributed something important. Even as the pressures of modernization encouraged the rise of the vernacular, poets and intellectuals who were oriented to the language question, and who were at the forefront of early nationalism, were consciously looking back to the classical model of eloquence as this had been revived by the fifteenth-century Latin humanists. They developed a political discourse about the vernacular that was fixated, less on the forward-looking needs of their modernizing societies than on the need to create, in their own

'G.B. Gelli and the Rebellion Against Latin', *Studies in the Renaissance*, Vol. 14 (1967), pp. 131–58.

[55] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, ch. 3.

nations, a new civilization on the model of ancient Rome. Latin may have been repudiated during this time-frame, for modernizing reasons. But *the model of Latin revival* associated with Valla and the other Italian humanists was whole-heartedly embraced and adapted to the circumstances of the emerging nation-states of Europe and their vernaculars. In this sense, modern linguistic nationalism can be said to have humanist roots.

As late as the 1860s only a tiny minority of Italians could speak Italian, with the remainder speaking one of the many regional dialects of the country.[56] It is something of a paradox, therefore, that Italy was the first place in early modern Europe where the shift to, and development of, the vernacular received sustained attention from intellectuals and political leaders. Just as Italy was the leading nation during the fifteenth century in the revival of classical arts and learning, it also was the first to articulate a new form of discourse about the development of the vernacular. Poets like Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio led by example, composing some of their best-loved works in the Tuscan dialect that would eventually be developed into present-day Italian; and writers like Alberti, Lorenzo de' Medici, Machiavelli, Bembo and Speroni all wrote in defence of the literary use of the vernacular.

The Italian writers developed a framework for defending the vernacular that had four basic components:

1. a claim about what qualities a language should possess to be a worthy vehicle of literary production;

2. a claim that their own vernacular already possessed these qualities to a significant degree;

3. a claim that, even if the vernacular did lag behind (classical) Latin with respect to some of these qualities, it is feasible to close this gap through a project of developing the vernacular;

4. a claim about why it would be permissible, and perhaps even preferable, to use the vernacular rather than Latin, given the assumption that the former possesses, or could be endowed with, the qualities necessary to be a worthy vehicle of literary production.

In filling in the first of these claims, the Italian defenders of the vernacular drew heavily on arguments made by the humanists who sought the revival of Latin. As we have seen, these arguments start out from the assumption that eloquence is a crucial property of speech and then proceed to make a variety of assertions concerning the linguistic pre-requisites of eloquence. Having adopted eloquence as the standard for making the first of the four claims, the Italian vernacularists then defended the second claim by suggesting that the Tuscan dialect already came close to satisfying the various linguistic pre-requisites associated with eloquence. They defended the third by appealing to

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[56] Jonathan Steinberg, 'The Historian and the *Questione Della Lingua*', in *The Social History of Language*, ed. Peter Burke and Roy Porter (Cambridge, 1987), p. 198.

the precedent of Roman efforts to develop the Latin language in a context where a more eloquent language (Greek) was already available. They argued for the fourth claim on a variety of grounds, including gratitude to the language of one's upbringing, the cross-class communicative reach of the vernacular as compared with Latin, and the fact that the vernacular takes less time to learn and thus leaves students with more time to study other subjects.

The Florentine oligarch and poet, Lorenzo de' Medici ('the Magnificent') typified this Italian approach to the language question. In *A Commentary on My Sonnets*, Medici identified four conditions that 'give dignity and perfection to any dialect or language': (1) the 'copiousness and richness of its vocabulary'; (2) 'its sweetness and harmony'; (3) the use of the language by great writers to discuss 'weighty matters'; and (4) the language's 'estimation' and 'worldly fame'.[57] The first condition, which we have seen is connected with the Ciceronian tradition of eloquence, is the only one that Medici believed to be truly intrinsic to the language. He judged that this condition was already present in the Tuscan vernacular, pointing to the variety, abundance and mix of styles found in Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. Their writing suggests a language that can express 'every nuance of meaning', that has 'copiousness and eloquence' and that is 'well suited to move many men'.[58] The second, third and fourth conditions, he said, are less fully satisfied by Tuscan, but they are more easily changed over time. As time goes by, people will develop an ear for the harmony and sweetness of the language, great writers will treat important subjects in the language and, with the help of fortune, Florence's political power will raise the prestige of Tuscan throughout Italy (just as Rome's political power spread Latin). In Medici's view, then, 'there is rather a deficiency of men to exploit the language than a deficiency of language available to men and their subject matter'.[59] Pointing out that Hebrew, Greek and Latin were at one time mere mother tongues, he suggested that the vernacular is still 'in its adolescence' and 'it could easily achieve in youth or adulthood still greater perfection'.[60]

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[57] Lorenzo de' Medici, 'A Commentary on My Sonnets', trans. Murray Linwood Marshall and Jon Thiem, in *Lorenzo De' Medici: Selected Poems and Prose*, ed. Jon Thiem (University Park, PA, 1991), pp. 109–10.

[58] *Ibid*., p. 111.

[59] *Ibid*.

[60] *Ibid*., p. 112. A little later in the passage Medici suggested that the more developed languages follow 'some basic rules' that allow them to be 'spoken and written more accurately'. According to Cecil Grayson, not only did Medici recognize the need for further regularization and refinement of Tuscan here, but he may have been responsible for producing the first grammar of the Tuscan language. Grayson also speculates that the author of this grammar may have been Alberti. See Cecil Grayson, 'Lorenzo, Machiavelli, and the Italian Language', in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, ed. E.F. Jacob (London, 1960), pp. 410–33, at p. 420.

In another text, a letter to Federigo of Aragon presenting a collection of Tuscan poetry, Medici reiterated his belief that the Tuscan language possessed 'abundance' and 'ornamentation' and expounded more fully his views about why the statesman should be concerned to develop language and literature.[61] His key argument, which is familiar from earlier humanist discussions of Latin, made a connection between literature, memory and glory. The ancients, he argued, were made immortal not just by their glorious deeds, but by the power of the poetic style with which their deeds were memorialized. Medici paraphrased the anecdote from Cicero's *Pro Archia* where Alexander the Great was said to have visited the tomb of Achilles.[62] If not for the poet Homer, Achilles would not be remembered and admired today; and if not for the Athenian prince, Pisistratus, who was said to have encouraged the recovery of Homeric verses, Homer's account would not be available to us. In this way, Medici argued, Pisistratus gave eternal life to the Homeric work and acquired glory and immortality for himself (just as Federigo was now doing by encouraging the collection of Tuscan verse).

In the writings of an early advocate of the vernacular like Medici, then, one is less likely to find confirmation of the modernizing thrust of the vernacular than of Medici's humanist devotion to the standards and values of the classical world. Medici's defence of the vernacular operated within a framework that was largely inherited from Cicero and mediated by Italian Latinists such as Bruni and Valla. The key qualities of a language are its eloquence, richness, ornamentation and copiousness, and the key reason for affirming the vernacular is that it already possesses these qualities, or at least will possess them when 'learned men decide to refine and polish it by zealous and arduous labors'.[63] A statesman should concern himself with the task of developing his nation's language and literature in order to create a literary vehicle that can eloquently record, glorify and thus immortalize his own deeds and those of his people.

Many of these same themes were picked up by the greatest of the Italian writers on the language question, Cardinal Pietro Bembo. Bembo was not only the leading Latinist of his day, and a well-known Ciceronian, but also a keen proponent of using the Tuscan vernacular for literary expression. Like Medici, Bembo thought that, to be worthy of literary use, a language must possess qualities such as eloquence, persuasive power, copiousness, abundance, ornamentation and nobility.[64] These qualities, he maintained, were

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[61] Lorenzo de' Medici, *Epistola a Don Federico D'Aragona*, in Lorenzo De' Medici, Il Magnifico, *Opere*, ed. Attilio Simioni (Bari, 1913), Vol. 1, p. 5.

[62] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

[63] The quoted phrase is from Medici's friend and fellow defender of the vernacular Alberti. See Alberti, *The Family*, p. 153.

[64] Pietro Bembo, *Prosatari della volgar lingua*, ed. Claudio Vela (Bologna, 2001 [1525]), pp. 38–9, 98–100.

already found in the great Florentine vernacular writers, especially Petrarch and Boccaccio. It is true that they were possessed to an even greater extent by Latin, but this same dilemma faced the Romans at one point, who had to choose between Latin and a more developed Greek, and was presumably also faced even earlier by the Greeks, the Hebrews and so on, all the way back to the first human language.[65] Given the success of the Romans at refining and developing the Latin language, Bembo was confident that modern Italians could do the same with the vernacular. In developing their language, he adds, Italians should not adopt popular usage as a standard but should look to the usage of the greatest writers (again Petrarch and Boccaccio are mentioned).[66] Bembo's key argument for this claim returned to the favourite humanist theme of the relationship between language and memory. Whereas popular usage varies sharply from generation to generation, the usage of the great writers offers a timeless standard. By adopting this standard, writers can hope that their accounts of their times will be read and remembered long into the future.[67]

Bembo's views on the language question were aired again in a 1542 dialogue written by one of his followers, Sperone Speroni.[68] In typical humanist fashion, Speroni presented eloquence as the standard for assessing languages and associated this quality with ornamentation, abundance, richness, and so on.[69] Bembo appears in the dialogue as a character and argues that the Tuscan vernacular was not as poor or barbarous as sometimes thought, and that, even if it was not perfect, it could be cultivated further, just as the Romans had done with Latin. All of the participants in the dialogue treat memory as a major function of language, and agree with Cicero's view (quoted earlier) of language as 'a witness of the time' and a 'life of the memory'.[70] The dialogue's Latinist opponent of the vernacular, Lazaro, credits Latin with the 'virtue of rendering men memorable' and, following Valla, argues that the loss of the Latin language would be a greater misfortune than the loss of liberty:

> The Latin language had the power to make men into gods, and to make immortal through fame we who would otherwise be mortal. In this way, the Roman Empire, which was extended everywhere but is now lost, still has its

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

[66] *Ibid.*, pp. 42–8.

[67] *Ibid.*, pp. 44–7.

[68] Sperone Speroni, *Dialogo Delle Lingue*, reprinted with facing 1551 translation into French by Estienne Groulleau, in Joachim Du Bellay, *La deffence, et illustration, de la language francoyse*, Edition et dossier critiques par Jean-Charles Monferran (Genève, 2001).

[69] See, e.g., Speroni, *Dialogo*, p. 221.

[70] The passage from Cicero is paraphrased at *ibid.*, p. 227.

greatness preserved in memory, and the histories of Sallust and Livy endure as long as the world will be the world.[71]

Bembo is made to agree with this principle, that a language should 'make men live a long time after their death',[72] but then to argue that, with a little more cultivation, Tuscan will be in a position to perform this function as well as Latin. Moreover, the vernacular has the advantage of being a living language that is easy to learn, natural to speak, and accessible to the common people.

In Medici's comments on language, as we saw, the role of the prince in promoting language and letters is one of the prominent themes. By contrast, the political and 'civilizational' dimension of the language question received less attention from Bembo and Speroni, perhaps because Italy had entered into political decline by the 1520s as a result of French and Spanish interventions. Not surprisingly, strident nationalist exhortations to rid Italy of barbarianism were also absent from the Italian defences of the vernacular. The Italian writers typically conceded that their vernaculars were descendent from the languages of the earlier barbarian invaders and thus they had little to gain polemically by railing against barbarianism or by insisting on a return to some idealized pure language of the past. Indeed, in Speroni's dialogue, Bembo is pushed to try to counter the objection that use of the vernacular amounts to a kind of 'servitude of the Italians'.[73] He responds, plausibly enough, that, although the origins of the vernaculars may be 'barbarian', after four or five centuries the vernaculars had become Italian inhabitants, and they now assembled diverse voices and words from many nations into a single form and ordering that is properly Italian and belongs to no other.[74]

The political and nationalist dimensions of the language issue become much more pronounced as one moves northwards and westwards to the consolidating states of Spain, England and France. The ideas of the Italian humanists had spread quickly across Europe from the late fifteenth century onwards, as a result of personal contacts between scholars and the circulation of books and manuscripts. Because of their own political and administrative positions, humanists like Bruni, Valla, Medici and Bembo were in contact with leading figures around Europe, and the introduction of the printing press in the late fifteenth century meant that their books were available to a wide European readership. Valla's *Elegantiae* was regarded for decades as the single most authoritative source on the Latin language, going through fifty-nine editions in sixty-five years, according to one reckoning.[75] Northern humanists, like Agricola and Erasmus, spent time studying in Italy and kept in

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[71] *Ibid.*

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 243.

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 225.

[74] *Ibid.*, p. 217.

[75] Reeve, 'Classical Scholarship', p. 40.

close touch with Italian intellectual developments. Erasmus' book *De Copia*, which introduced students across Europe to the classical abundant style, was one of the most widely read educational handbooks of the sixteenth century.

Spain's various interventions on the Italian peninsula in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries exposed it quite directly to Italian humanism. It was not uncommon for Spanish students to spend time in Italy familiarizing themselves with the latest developments in Italian thought, or for Italian humanists to find employment with Spanish occupiers; Valla, for instance, had worked for a while as a secretary to the Spanish King of Naples, Alfonso of Aragon. Antonio de Nebrija (1444?–1522) was a typical Spanish product of this Italian humanist environment. Educated in Bologna, and devoted to the ideas of Lorenzo Valla, he was appalled on returning to Spain at his countrymen's ignorance of Latin and became a leading advocate of the Latin humanist curriculum and the author of a Latin grammar.[76] At the same time, he also followed his Italian contemporaries in applying the humanist ideas about the revival of Latin to the development of the vernacular. The fruit of this latter set of reflections was a foundational text of the Spanish language: the first grammar of the Castilian language, indeed the first grammar of *any* modern European language, published, as it happened, in the historic year of 1492.[77]

In the dedicatory address to Queen Isabella, Nebrija laid out the rationale for this project in terms that strongly echoed the polemics of the Italian humanists. 'When I meditate, my illustrious Queen, and evoke the events of antiquity that are put into writing for our memory and recollection, I discover one thing that I present as a very certain conclusion: language has always been the companion of empire, in such a way that they begin together, become great and flourish together, and fall together.'[78] Like the Italian humanists, and Cicero before them, Nebrija contrasted the coercive power of the monarch's soldiers with the communicative power associated with her language. The soldiers play a crucial role — they went first into Aragon, Navarre and as far as Italy — but then the language spreads in their wake, consolidating the monarch's power.[79] In a culturally disparate monarchy such as Spain, Nebrija emphasized, this unifying, consolidating force is especially crucial.

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[76] Henry Kamen notes the influence of Valla on Nebrija in *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power, 1492–1763* (New York, 2003), p. 4. See also J.H. Elliott, *Imperial Spain, 1469–1716* (New York, 1963), p. 117.

[77] Antonio de Nebrija, *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (Oxford, 1926 [1492]). For the widely-repeated claim that this was the first grammar of a modern European language, see, e.g., Elliott, *Imperial Spain*, p. 117. It is not clear whether Tuscan is being considered a 'modern European language' for the purposes of this statement. See note 60, above.

[78] Nebrija, *Gramática*, p. 3.

[79] *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

Nebrija also rehearsed the familiar humanist argument about language, memory and glory. The Queen will not only be interested in performing great deeds; she will want these deeds suitably recorded and memorialized for posterity. For the glory of the monarch to be communicated to later generations an adequate linguistic medium is necessary. A wise monarch would not want to rely on a foreign language to perform this task, nor on a language that changes so often that it will scarcely be comprehensible to future readers: the risk is that 'either the memory of your great deeds will perish with the language, or it will wander around foreign nations with no house of its own in which to rest'.[80] To reduce these risks, Nebrija proposed his grammar as a handbook for fixing and regularizing the Castilian language.

In England, humanism also became the dominant idiom in which poets and intellectuals discoursed about the vernacular. As Richard Jones showed in his classic book, *The Triumph of the English Language*, until well into the sixteenth century, English writers remained preoccupied with the 'insufficiency' of their language.[81] Influenced by Erasmus, Bembo and other continental authors, the English formulated this judgment of insufficiency relative to a classical standard of eloquence.[82] They contrasted the elegance, richness, copiousness, variety and ornamentation of the classical languages (and to a lesser extent of Italian, Spanish and French) with the poverty, unadorned plainness, rudeness and 'barbarousness' of their own.[83] One could just about manage to formulate any particular idea in the English language, but one could not do so with eloquence, grace or majesty.

By the final quarter of the sixteenth century English writers and critics were dramatically upgrading this assessment, even while remaining loyal to the humanist standard of eloquence.[84] Ignoring puritan opponents of adornment and rhetoric, and nationalist opposition to cultural influences from Catholic Europe, Renaissance English writers had participated in an orgy of borrowing and neologizing, at the same time managing to discipline their language with a greater degree of regularity and fixity. It is estimated that the works of Shakespeare contain approximately 21,000 different words, 'probably a wider range than any other writer'.[85] By 1582, Richard Mulcaster, the foremost Renaissance theorist of the English language, was declaring that English could rival any other language, including Latin, admitting only that his native tongue could still benefit from the nourishment which the Romans provided

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[81] Richard Foster Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language* (Stanford, 1953), ch. 1.

[82] *Ibid.*, p. 9 and *passim.*

[83] *Ibid.*, pp. 7–10.

[84] *Ibid.*, ch. 6.

[85] Harry Levin, 'General Introduction', *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston, 1974), p. 9.

to Latin to bring it to excellence. 'I do not think that anie language', he wrote, 'be it whatsoeuer, is better able to vtter all arguments, either with more pith, or greater planesse, then our *English* tung is.'[86] Other authors went further and praised the copiousness, variety and ornamentation that now characterized English.[87] The poet Samuel Daniel summed up the prevailing consensus by calling English 'our best glorie'.[88]

   Unlike many countries on the continent, there was never a serious movement in England to set up a state-sponsored academy with overall responsibility for direction of the language. Mulcaster stressed that all languages are subject to unplanned change and accounted for this in terms of the 'prerogatiue and libertie, which the peple hath to vse both speche and pen at will' the exercise of which predictably leads to dissent from 'well ordered rule'.[89] But, although they avoided calls for central planning, the orientation of writers who commented on the progress of English in the sixteenth century was consistently political and nationalist and was so in ways that remained within the framework laid out by earlier humanist authors.

   Mulcaster's political and nationalist motives came out most strongly in the opening Epistle and the closing Peroration to his *Elementarie*. The Epistle sought to capture the interest of his sponsor (the Earl of Leceister) by reminding him that great statesmen like Caesar and Cicero had taken a keen interest in language 'and thereby did win both credit to themselves and countenance to their countries'.[90] In both the Epistle and the Peroration he stressed the association between learning and language, on the one hand, and peace and peaceable government on the other. More strikingly, Mulcaster, who earnestly proclaimed himself a 'servant of my country',[91] understood the political imperative to develop the vernacular in the strongest nationalist terms. The use and development of the English language was a matter of 'libertie and freedom', whereas Latin reminds us 'of our thraldom & bondage'. 'I love Rome', he added, 'but London better, I favor Italie, but England more, I honor the Latin, but I worship the English'.[92] Mulcaster was not unaware of the enormous amount of borrowing from foreign sources that had been going on in England for some time. But even this borrowing he sought to cast in a positive light, by associating it with the power and self-assertion of the English people. Borrowing did not compromise the sovereignty of England, since no word could be introduced without a process of incorporating it into the language

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[86] Richard Mulcaster, *The First Part of the Elementarie which Entreateth Chefelie of the Right Writing of Our English Tung* (Menston, 1970 [1582]), pp. 258–9.

[87] Jones, *The Triumph*, pp. 197–9.

[88] Cited in *ibid*., pp. 184–5.

[89] Mulcaster, *Elementarie*, pp. 159–60.

[90] *Ibid*., p. viii.

[91] *Ibid*., p. 253.

[92] *Ibid*., p. 254.

that Mulcaster called 'enfranchisement', a process that he thought could be compared with the ancient Roman practice of incorporating conquered peoples into Roman citizenship.[93]

Writing around the same time as Mulcaster, Gabriel Harvey urged his fellow English poets to develop their language by noting how Italy, Spain and France had been 'ravished with a certain glorious and ambitious desire . . . to set out and advance their own languages above the very Greek and Latin' and now repose a 'great part of their souraigne glory and reputation abroad in the world in the famous writings of their nobblist wittes'. Continuing in the same vein, he offered a formulation of the civilizational model:

> it hath universally bene the practice of the floorishingist states and most politique commonwelthes, from whence we borrow our substantialist and most materiall precepts and examples of wise and considerate government, to make the very most of their vulgar tongues, and together with there seignioryes and dominions by all meanes possible to amplfye and enlarge them, devising all ordinary and extraordinary helps, both for the polishing and refining of them at home, and also for the spreading and dispersing of them abroad.[94]

Writing a few years later, William Webbe made the case for language development by appealing to the standard humanist argument about language, memory and glory. Citing the story of Achilles, Homer and Alexander, the Cicero–Petrarch–Medici trajectory of which we have traced, he observed 'that Kings and Princes, great and famous men, did ever encourage, maintain, and reward Poets in all ages, because they were thought only to have the whole power in their hands of making men either immortally famous for their valiant exploits and virtuous exercises, or perpetually infamous for their vicious lives'.[95]

Some of the most important foundational texts urging the development of the French language also followed closely in the footsteps of the Italian humanists. The best-known exhortation to use and develop the French language of the sixteenth century was Joachim du Bellay's *La Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Francoyse* (1549). Like his close friend and more famous fellow Pléiade-member Pierre de Ronsard, Du Bellay was a student of the French humanist Jean Dorat, who maintained strong connections with Italian humanist circles. Most of the arguments of Du Bellay's essay were lifted directly from the Speroni dialogue discussed earlier (although Du Bellay drops the dialogue format and draws indiscriminately from the

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[93] *Ibid.*, p. 155.

[94] Gabriel Harvey, 'Letter-Book', in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (Oxford 1904), Vol. I, p. 123.

[95] William Webbe, *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, ed. Smith, pp. 232–3. See also pp. 255 ff.

interventions of different speakers) and in places the debt to Speroni bordered on plagiarism.

More than any other single text discussed in this paper, Du Bellay's *Deffense* reveals the humanist roots of early modern linguistic nationalism. Drawing as he did from Speroni, Du Bellay put all of the standard Italian arguments on behalf of the vernacular into the service of his own French vernacular. Thus from the very start, the essay equated the task of defending the French language with the challenge of showing that French possesses, or could be brought to possess, enough eloquence, copiousness, ornamentation and elegance to serve as a worthy instrument of literary expression. Du Bellay repeatedly referred to Homer, Demosthenes, Cicero and Virgil as models, the quartet of ancient writers who Renaissance humanists thought of as most perfectly exemplifying the qualities of eloquence.

Du Bellay admitted that French was not yet as copious as Greek or Latin.[96] He responded, in part, by turning this into a virtue of his people rather than a defect. Echoing a passage in Sallust about why Latin is less rich than Greek, he suggested that his ancestors were more concerned with performing heroic deeds than with celebrating them in language.[97] But his main response was the familiar Italian one that pointed to the precedent of the Romans. Although French may be less well equipped for eloquence than classical Latin, the same was true, at a certain point in Roman history, of Latin as compared with Greek. Just as the Romans were 'bon agriculteurs' of their language, cultivating it by imitating the best Greek authors, French poets should extend and promote their own language by imitating the best classical and modern (e.g. Italian) authors.[98] As the 'wise men of our nation' enhance the French language through the labours of imitation, ordinary people will be freed from the need to learn ancient languages and it will be harder for learned speakers of those esoteric languages to claim a monopoly on knowledge.[99]

The 'civilizational' view of political success is a prominent feature of Du Bellay's *Deffense* borrowed from the humanists. The cultivation of the language is a task for poets and intellectuals, but much more is at stake than good poetry or prose. In one passage reminiscent of Valla, Du Bellay suggested that Rome's language was ultimately a more effective and glorious kind of fortification than all its buildings and palaces:

> The glory of the Roman people is not the less . . . in the amplification of its languages beyond its borders. For the highest excellence of their republic, indeed of the time of Augustus, was not strong enough, with the Capitol, the baths, and magnificent palaces, to defend against the injury of time, without the benefit of their language, for which alone we praise them, admire them,

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[96] Du Bellay, *Deffense*, p. 79.

[97] *Ibid*., pp. 78–9.

[98] *Ibid*., pp. 80–2.

[99] *Ibid*., pp. 103–8.

adore them. Are we now inferior to the Greeks and Romans, that we would
do so little in the case of our own?[100]

Du Bellay also returned in several places to the standard humanist theme of
language, memory and glory. A thousand years after the fall of Rome, he
complained, the Romans are celebrated around the world and preferred to
other nations, despite their unnatural ambition and insatiable lust for glory.
By contrast, the heroic deeds of the Gauls are hardly remembered or rewarded
with glory. The explanation of this injustice, in Du Bellay's view, could be
found in the relative levels of development of the Latin and French languages.
Whereas a great multitude of Latin writers devoted their energies to praising
the Romans and rendering 'all other nations vile and abject, especially the
Gauls', hardly any Gallic writers bothered to collect the stories of their own
compatriots.[101] Later in the essay Du Bellay cites the story of Alexander at
Achilles' tomb and remarks how fortunate Achilles was to have been memori-
alized by Homer.[102] He advises 'Kings and Princes' to 'remember the great
Emperor Augustus, who preferred to see the venerable power of the laws bro-
ken than to see the works of Virgil burnt because of the dying wishes of the
author'.[103] The glory conferred by language and literature, he added, offers
immortality: it is 'the only ladder on the steps of which light-footed mortals
climb to heaven and make themselves companions of the Gods'.[104]

Du Bellay injected expressions of nationalistic devotion to France and its
language into all of these arguments.[105] In the opening dedication to his uncle,
Du Bellay suggested that he was stimulated to write his defence and illustra-
tion of French by his 'natural affection towards my *patrie*', and he reiterated
this sentiment several times in the course of the essay.[106] Replete with refer-
ences to 'our language' and 'our nation', the essay assigned to the poet the
duty not just to bring glory and honour to himself but to bring it to France as
well. Echoing Valla, Du Bellay described the poets who embraced this duty as
'arming' for the campaign and challenged them to 'dare endure the sun, the

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[100] *Ibid*., p. 172.

[101] *Ibid*., pp. 77–9.

[102] *Ibid*., pp. 142, 178.

[103] *Ibid*., p. 142.

[104] *Ibid*., p. 144.

[105] Between the opening Epistle and the start of the main text of the *Deffense* (p. 71),
Du Bellay inserted an epigram by his teacher Jean Dorat in which, among other things,
Du Bellay's authorship of the *Deffense* is asserted (the original title page contained only
his initials). Echoing Valla's parallel between the military conquest of territory and the
struggle to promote one's native language, Dorat's epigram proclaimed: 'there is no
greater glory than to fight for the language of the *patrie*. Du Bellay, just as your ancestors
incontestably acquired the renown of good patriots in struggling for the earth of the
patrie, you yourself, when you plead for the language of the *patrie*, you obtain forever
the renown of a great patriot.'

[106] *Ibid*., p. 68.

powder, and the dangerous labor of combat'.[107] In a closing chapter of the essay, Du Bellay developed an extensive comparison between France and Italy. Alluding to France's participation in the 1527 sack of Rome, as well as its praiseworthy climate, prosperity, cultural achievements and religious piety, he concluded that 'France, whether at rest or at war, has for a long time been preferable to Italy'. 'Why then', he asked, 'are we such great admirers of the other? Why are we so hostile to ourselves? Why do we beg for foreign languages, as if we were ashamed of using our own?'[108]

Du Bellay's most interesting polemical twist came in his treatment of the question of barbarianism. Near the start of the essay, he noted the etymology of the term and accused the Greeks of 'arrogance' for trying to legitimize themselves and bastardize their enemies as cruel and brutal through the use of this label. He also complained, as we saw earlier, that Roman writers conspired to construct the ancient Gauls as vile and abject by characterizing them as 'barbarian', contributing in the process to the French sense of shame in their own language and history. If 'barbarianism' means 'uncivilized', Du Bellay argued, then the label is entirely inapt: the France he knew was characterized by a civility of mores, equity of laws and magnanimity of spirit that rivalled any nation. In a final rhetorical flourish that turns Valla upside down, however, Du Bellay symbolically embraced France's barbarian identity and even revelled pugnaciously in the possibility of a new Gallic plundering of Rome:

> There at last, my fellow French, march courageously towards the superb Roman city: and clear way her spoils [as you have already done more than once], adorn your temples and buildings. Don't be afraid any longer of the sacred birds, of proud Manlius, or of the traitor Camillus, who under the pretence of good faith surprised you counting the ransom of the Capitol.[109]

The French should not feel ashamed at enriching their language through imitation of the ancients. They should think of this linguistic appropriation as a new form of pillaging, one that asserts and confirms the rising power of the French nation.

Epilogue

Just over eighty-five years after the publication of Du Bellay's *Deffense*, Louis XIII founded the *Académie Francaise*, the state-sponsored body charged with overall responsibility for promoting the French language in France. Accounts written by contemporaries confirmed how central the humanist model of language and politics was to the rationale and mission of the *Académie*. The aim of the new academy was to 'carry the language that we

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[107] *Ibid.*, p. 167.
[108] *Ibid.*, p. 174.
[109] *Ibid.*, p. 179.

speak to its fullest perfection and to indicate a road to lead it to higher elo-quence'.[110] One participant in the founding of the body even proposed that it should be called the *Académie de l'Eloquence*.[111]

The promotion of eloquence was associated with improving the 'ele-gance' of the language and with embellishing it with greater ornamentation (with the first of these tasks involving the protection of the 'purity' of the language, so that it does not get 'depraved by communication with other lan-guages with which our conquests oblige us to mix').[112] The precedent of Roman efforts to develop their language in a context where Greek was the richest and most elegant of the world's known languages made the French confident they could do the same in a context where Latin was still praised for its intrinsic merits.

The rationale for this politicization of language was provided by the humanist's civilizational view of political success. The development of the French language was necessary for 'the good and glory of the state'.[113] A developed vernacular would be a symbol and marker of France's self-asserted preeminence amongst the nations of earth and could also help to embellish the authority of the monarch and so insure him against any return to the civil wars of the previous century. The King of France could add to his many titles that of 'father and founder of his maternal language' and thus compare himself with Julius Caesar, who also took an active interest in his language.[114]

The men advising the monarch also followed the humanists in regarding language as a vehicle for recording, remembering and glorifying acts of public virtue. Their interest in eloquence followed, in large part, from a con-cern to furbish this vehicle with the qualities of eloquence, permanence, richness and ornamentation that it needed to do full justice to its task. Just as the rich Latin literature of the Romans meant that their exploits would be studied and admired a thousand years after the fall of Rome, the monarchs of France were encouraged to hope that their own virtues would be preserved for future generations through the medium of their developed national ver-nacular. As Du Bellay had argued, France had been home to valiant men in the past but they had lacked the art of writing in a way that could render their deeds illustrious for later generations and instead had to rely on their ene-mies the Romans to attest to their characters. Now France had attained great power and prominence in Europe and nothing remained to cap the

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[110] Paul Pellison-Fontanier, *Histoire de l'Académie Francaise* (Paris, 1858 [1652]), pp. 3–4.

[111] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[112] Nicolas Faret, *Projet de L'Académie pour server de Préface à ses Statuts*, edition de Jean Rousselet (Saint-Etienne, 1983 [1635]), p. 7.

[113] Pellison, *Histoire*, p. 21.

[114] Faret, *Projet*, p. 8.

achievement of the French monarchy but the perfection of a language and literature that could 'publicize its glory' for future generations.[115] Writing two centuries after Valla, the proponents of the new academy were thus still arguing within the framework set out by the Italian: 'it is really by arms that Kings make their names known and assert their power; but without the help of the sciences and arts the lustre of this reputation gradually fades and is extinguished, in the end, by barbarism or the long passage of centuries'.[116] It is the 'works of eloquence' that 'preserve themselves the best' and thus would be best positioned to serve the monarch's drive for eternal glory.[117]

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[115] *Ibid.*, p. 8.
[116] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[117] *Ibid.*