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*The Uses of the Past in Quattrocento Florence:
A Reading of Leonardo Bruni's Dialogues*

Carol Quillen

Although Leonardo Bruni's (1370–1444) *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* have long occupied a central place in the study of Italian Renaissance humanism, scholarly interpretations of them differ markedly. Such differences attest to the formal complexity of this text, the uncertainty about its date of composition, and the obvious contradictions between the arguments offered at different times by its main interlocutor. This essay first briefly describes the scholarly debates that have surrounded Bruni's *Dialogues*, particularly as these illustrate competing definitions of Florentine humanism. I then argue that the text juxtaposes citation to chronological narration as it explores one central theme in Bruni's humanism, how best to represent the past in and for the present.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TRADITIONS¹

Written in the early Quattrocento (probably between 1406 and 1408), the *Dialogues* purport to record two conversations that took place in Florence among Bruni, Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Niccolò Niccoli (1364–1437), and Roberto Rossi, another humanist about whom we know little.

¹ For a recent historiographical review, see Mark Jurdjevic, "Hedgehogs and Foxes: The Present and Future of Italian Renaissance Intellectual History," *Past and Present* 195 (2007): 241–67.

Piero Sermini, who served after Salutati as Chancellor of Florence from 1406 to 1410 before taking religious orders, appears in the second conversation. A prologue introduces the two conversations in which Bruni dedicates the *Dialogues* to Pier Paolo Vergerio (1368–1444), author of the influential humanist educational tract *De ingenuis moribus*.² According to this prologue, Bruni wrote the *Dialogues* both to acknowledge the possibility for literary revival in the uniquely equipped city of Florence—a possibility to which the recorded conversations attest—and to allow Vergerio to benefit from the learned discourse of his friends.³

Salutati opens the first conversation by urging his younger friends, who have come to visit him with nothing to say, to practice “disputation,” or face-to-face debate about the literary and ethical questions central to humanistic study. According to Salutati, such debates, in which individual speakers each argue a point of view, both insure that important topics are investigated fully and allow participants to develop their oratorical skills as they demonstrate their knowledge of ancient literature, history, and moral philosophy. Niccoli, who will be the main speaker throughout the *Dialogues*, concedes that such debate is important but, with so much ancient learning lost and replaced by scholastic nonsense, he doubts that disputation firmly grounded in knowledge is even possible. Salutati replies that while many books from antiquity have indeed been lost, learning and disputation can still flourish, and he cites as examples the three most illustrious figures of the Trecento: Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio.

Nonsense, Niccoli retorts, these men were not learned. Dante did not know Latin and misread Virgil; Petrarca’s supposed epic masterpiece *Africa* is practically unreadable; and why even discuss Boccaccio? The first conversation ends after Salutati reiterates his position but defers his defense to another time. When the men reconvene the next day, Niccoli agrees to rebut his own words about the Trecento Florentines. Thus in the second conversation, he argues that Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio indeed deserve praise:

² Latin text and English translation (“The Character and Studies Befitting a Free-born Youth”) in *Humanist Educational Treatises*, ed. and trans. Craig Kallendorf (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

³ Leonardo Bruni, *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* ed. Stefano Ugo Baldassarri (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1994), proemium, esp 1 and 4 (235–36). Subsequent references include book (proemium, I, or II), paragraph number, and page number in parentheses. Italian translation in *Opere letterarie e politiche di Leonardo Bruni*, ed. Paolo Viti (Turin: Unione Tipografica Editrice Torinese, 1996), 78–143. English translation: *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, ed. and trans. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies / Renaissance Society of America, 1987), 63–84.

Dante was a great poet and his use of Virgil indicates not ignorance but the interpretive freedom claimed by artists; Petrarca's *Africa* would have been better had he been able to finish it, and Boccaccio achieved much. Moreover, given the deteriorated state of literary culture and the limited opportunity for achievement, these men deserve admiration.

Scholars generally agree that Bruni's *Dialogues* both depict the kind of private literary circle in which humanism first flourished and illustrate practices and priorities central to the movement in early Quattrocento Florence. For example, the *Dialogues* revive a classical genre and in particular imitate the structure of the first two books of Cicero's *De oratore*.⁴ Furthermore, Bruni's text illustrates many of the themes that came to characterize humanist literature: the rejection of scholasticism; the importance of eloquence; and the preference for open debate. Finally, in their celebration of Florence as the city potentially able to sustain a genuine literary revival, Bruni's *Dialogues* express the imbrication of humanistic activity and civic life that distinguished this city during the Quattrocento.

Beyond these basics, scholars have understood the *Dialogues* very differently. In an article published in 1986, Lars Boje Mortensen divided then existing readings of the *Dialogues* into two main groups: those that focus on the contradictions between its two books; and those that understand the work as a single, coherent whole.⁵ The most influential of all of these readings, that of Hans Baron, belongs to the first group. In *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, Baron suggested that Bruni wrote the two books of the *Dialogues* at different times. He cited the contradictions between

⁴ For Bruni's imitation of Cicero, see esp. Lars Boje Mortensen, "Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus*: A Ciceronian Debate on the Literary Culture of Florence," *Classica e Mediaevalia* 27 (1986): 259–302. Other important discussions of this point include: Remigio Sabbadini, Review of E. de Franco, "I *Dialoghi* al Vergerio di Leonardo Bruni," *Annuario del R. Liceo-ginnasio M. Cutelli di Catania* (1929): 97–119, in *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 96 (1930): 129–33; Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 229ff; Eugenio Garin, "A proposito di Coluccio Salutati," *Rivista critica di storia della filosofia* 15 (1960): 73–82; Jerrold Seigel, "Civic Humanism or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni," *Past and Present* 34 (1966): 3–48; David Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue: Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 24–37; David Quint, "Humanism and Modernity: A Reconsideration of Bruni's *Dialogues*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 38 (1985): 423–45, esp. 433–35; Stefano Ugo Baldassarri, "Introduzione" in Leonardo Bruni, *Dialogo ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*, 29ff; Riccardo Fubini, "All'uscita dalla scolastica medievale: Salutati, Bruni, e i *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*," in his *L'umanesimo italiano e I suoi storici: Origini rinascimentali, critica moderna* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2001), 75–103, 82–83. For Bruni's use of Vergerio, Salutati, and other "moderns," see Baldassarri, "Introduzione," 36–61.

⁵ Lars Boje Mortensen, "Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus*," 260–64.

them as evidence of the impact that political events exerted on the Florentine humanist movement. Baron particularly emphasized the victory of Florence over Milan that followed the death of the Milanese ruler, Giangaleazzo Visconti. Prior to the Milanese crisis, Baron argued, Florentine humanists had focused on emulating the aesthetic standards expressed in ancient literature. Book one of the *Dialogues*, written according to Baron in 1401, reflects these literary concerns. As the Milanese crisis progressed however, Leonardo Bruni and others increasingly adopted the republican political framework that they found in ancient texts to describe their own situation as a battle between liberty and tyranny, between a republic defending freedom and autonomy and a tyranny bent on territorial expansion through conquest. Book two, written according to Baron in the immediate aftermath of Giangaleazzo's death, attests to this new orientation in its praise both for Florence and for the great Florentine writers of the Trecento. In short, Baron saw a close causal relation in early fifteenth-century Florence between a political event and a cultural movement; the event shaped the development of Bruni's thinking and writing. Baron also argued that after 1402, a commitment to political liberty and republicanism became a central aspect of Florentine humanism.⁶

Whereas Baron approached the two books of the *Dialogues* as distinct works, taking the first as basically an accurate account of an actual event and the second as fictional literary imitation written to express Bruni's new political commitments, more recent scholarship almost universally rejects arguments for two different dates of composition. Even those who do not directly challenge Baron generally read the text as a coherent whole. These newer readings also see at best only a tenuous relationship between the events of 1402 (or, for that matter, any specific political event) and Bruni's *Dialogues*. As a result, they invite and sometimes undertake a reconsideration of the humanist movement itself.

Among the newest interpretations, those of Lars Boje Mortensen, David Quint, and Riccardo Fubini stand out as particularly insightful analyses both of Bruni's text and of early Florentine humanism. Mortensen builds on Jerrold Seigel's 1966 critique of Baron to demonstrate Bruni's multi-leveled use of Cicero's writings, especially *De oratore*. He then shifts attention away from the question of which interlocutor represents Bruni's

⁶ Baron, *Crisis*, 225–69. See also Hanan Yoran, "Florentine Civic Humanism and the Emergence of Modern Ideology," *History and Theory* 46 (2007): 326–44; Kay Schiller, "Hans Baron's Humanism," *Storia della storiografia* 34 (1998): 51–99 and her *Gelehrte Gegenwelten: über humanistische Leitbilder im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2000).

own views towards the meaning of the text as a whole, which Mortensen sees as distinct from the position taken by any single speaker. Like *De oratore*, Mortensen argues, the *Dialogues* explore the relationship between *studia* and *civitas*; Bruni's position on this relationship is expressed in premises either mutually accepted or collectively demonstrated over the course of the two conversations. From this perspective, the *Dialogues* illustrate a sophisticated awareness of the conditions required for literary imitation across a vast expanse of time. Such awareness distinguishes humanism from earlier classical revivals.

Like Mortensen, David Quint highlights the complex ideas about temporal distance at work in Bruni's text. Quint sees in the initial positions taken by Niccoli and Salutati alternative stances towards a distant yet exemplary culture and thus towards the humanist project of revival. By asserting the possibility of disputation among his contemporaries, Salutati implies that, in spite of the loss of much learning and many books, the gulf between distant past and present remains bridgeable. Moderns can rival the ancients. Niccoli, however, rejects such optimism as naïve. For him the conditions that sustained the culture of the ancients remain elusive and their achievements beyond emulation. According to Quint, Bruni's *Dialogues* explore the options available to moderns who recognize a distant past as simultaneously alien and exemplary. Through this exploration Bruni's text seeks some understanding of the meaning of modernity itself.⁷

Similarly, Riccardo Fubini focuses on a temporal dimension of Bruni's *Dialogues* to argue that the text depicts competing conceptions of humanist culture. Fubini, however, emphasizes the generational tension between Salutati, long the Chancellor of and the dominant literary figure in late Trecento Florence, and a younger Leonardo Bruni eager to succeed and surpass him. In the *Dialogues*, Fubini argues, Bruni contrasts the historical Salutati's eclecticism—an appreciation for strains of scholastic thought, allegorical interpretations of pagan poetry, an openness to medieval political frameworks—with his own more staunchly secular orientation. That is, Bruni rejects scholasticism to imagine for Florence a culture based on a ciceronian conception of disputation; new and more accurate translations of Aristotle and other Greek writers; and a historical and literary (rather than allegorical) approach to poetry. From this perspective, Salutati's discussion of disputation; Niccoli's attack on scholasticism; and Niccoli's defense of Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio in terms of their qualifications as

⁷ Quint, "Humanism and Modernity," esp. 423–25 and 442–45.

poets all serve to refashion Florentine humanist culture in accordance with the author Bruni's secular, classicizing orientation.

By finding in the text an exploration of the conditions required for literary study (Mortensen); a debate about the possibility of emulating antiquity (Quint); and a blueprint for a new culture based on rejecting scholasticism in favor of new translations of Aristotle and a classical understanding of philosophy and poetry (Fubini), these interpretations all identify temporality and the problem of temporal distance as central themes in Bruni's *Dialogues*. The question of how and when texts from a distant past can be brought to bear on the present runs throughout this text even as its imitative, allusive structure provides one possible response. Here I analyze Bruni's *Dialogues* as an argument for the relevance of the ancient past and more specifically as a sustained exploration of how two representational forms, chronological narration and citation, can meaningfully represent that past in the present.⁸ I then suggest resonances between the *Dialogues* and Bruni's historical works. Such an analysis points to the contemporary significance of Bruni's humanism.

COMMON GROUND: THE CONTEXT OF HUMANIST PRACTICE

Although the *Dialogues* primarily address temporal distance, they begin with the problem of place. Bruni writes his work so that Vergerio, though away from Florence, might share in and benefit from a discussion he could not attend. Furthermore, as Stefano Baldassarri has argued, the *Dialogues* also include Vergerio by occasionally recalling his writings. Scholars have, for example, long noted an echo of the opening of Vergerio's *De ingenuis moribus* in Bruni's first sentence.⁹ Such allusions make Bruni's physically

⁸ For a discussion of citation see Jacques Derrida, "Signature, Event, Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 307–30.

⁹ Baldassarri, "Introduzione," 29–39. Baldassarri notes sixteen allusions to Vergerio's writings, making Vergerio, along with Cicero, Salutati, and Petrarca, one of the principal voices in the text. Cesare Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'umanesimo: "Invenzione" e "metodo" nella cultura del XV e XVI secolo* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968), 23–37, highlights thematic links between Bruni's *Dialogues* and Vergerio's *De ingenuis moribus*. For the allusion to Vergerio in Bruni's opening, see among others: Paolo Trovato, "Dei "Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum" alle "Vite di Dante e del Petrarca," *Studi Petrarqueschi* n.s. II (1985): 263–84, 270 (Trovato quotes Garin); Fubini, "all'uscita della scolastica," 83; and Paolo Viti's edition of the *Dialogues*, 78n.

distant contemporary a kind of interlocutor in the text. They also suggest a point of identification in humanist writing between absent friends and ancient authors: both are made present through citation, allusion, and direct address. The dedication and references to Vergerio attest to the desire, expressed in much humanist writing, to overcome temporal and spatial distance such that meaningful exchange between ancient and modern authors can occur.

Bruni's *Dialogues* create a discursive space for such exchange by imitating basic structural elements of Cicero's dialogues, especially the first two books of *De oratore*. Both *De oratore* and Bruni's *Dialogues* begin with a general statement that relates happiness to political conditions and to study. Both recreate conversations about oratory among men of different generations and both situate these conversations specifically in a time and place. In both, different interlocutors express conflicting opinions and both claim a kind of reconciliation.¹⁰ Furthermore, Bruni imitates certain ciceronian rhetorical structures, most notably argument on both sides of a question.¹¹ These structural similarities make clear Bruni's debt to *De oratore*. They should not, however, loom too large. Attempts to interpret Bruni's text exclusively through Cicero's dialogue by, for example, equating interlocutors (Crassus and Salutati, Antonius and Niccoli) or authorial positions generally yield unsatisfactory readings. More importantly, such attempts obscure the overall effect of Bruni's imitation, which works not to reproduce *De oratore* but to create a literary context where the dead and living can find common cultural ground and where the words of ancient writers can have relevance for his contemporaries. By representing in his present the kind of situation he found in Cicero's dialogues, Bruni makes citation of and allusion to ancient writers intelligible. His imitation is an argument as well as an aesthetic.

Bruni's *Dialogues* also establish common ground between ancients and moderns through the definitions given by Salutati and Niccoli of "disputatio" and "philosophia." Salutati describes disputation as inquiry through debate during which every aspect of a topic is laid bare and analyzed by speakers competing for victory. Such discussion reinvigorates minds tired by long hours of solitary reading. It is, Salutati suggests, the culminating

¹⁰ Mortensen, "Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus*," 285–96; Baldassarri, "Introduzione," 32–36.

¹¹ Seigel, "Civic Humanism or Ciceronian Rhetoric?" 13. For another example of Bruni's imitation of classical rhetorical devices, see Francesco Bausi, "Nota sul precedente antologico nei *Dialogi* di Leonardo Bruni," *Interpres* 12 (1992): 275–83.

practice of humanistic studies.¹² These descriptions of disputation focus on educational and intellectual factors (rather than, for example, on historically specific political or legal contexts) to identify what Bruni's contemporaries can share with ancient authors while simultaneously excluding methods and genres associated with scholasticism.¹³ It is important to note that, although Niccoli doubts his generation's capacity for disputation, he never challenges Salutati's description of this practice. Similarly, the historical sketch given by Niccoli of philosophy finds common ground between ancient authors and modern humanists by linking philosophy to eloquence and by making Cicero this discipline's Latin progenitor and master. Such a conception—leave aside the questionable accuracy of Niccoli's historical claims—makes breadth or familiarity with all the schools of philosophy central and emphasizes philosophy's capacity to inflame a love of study generally. It is “omnium bonarum artium parens [the parent of all liberal arts]” rather than their culmination. This is not a conception of philosophy that all would accept. Again, the common ground between ancients and moderns that Niccoli here delimits comes at the expense of the scholasticism that dominated university faculties of philosophy in the early fifteenth century.

Within this congenial discursive space constructed through imitation and careful definitions, Bruni explores a variety of ways of mapping temporal distance. One such way is chronological narration. Some of the narratives implied in the *Dialogues* stress change over time or even rupture. In the preface, for example, Bruni illustrates the capacity of Florence to nurture a literary revival by describing this city as the repository of the few seeds of cultural activity to survive a preceding barren era.¹⁴ Both Niccoli

¹² For example, *Dialogues* I, 8 (237–38): “Nam quid est, per deos immortales, quod ad res subtiles cognoscendas atque discutiendas plus valere possit quam disputatio, ubi rem in medio positam velut oculi plures undique speculantur, ut in ea nihil sit quod subterfugere, nihil quod latere, nihil quod valeat omnium frustrari intuitum? Quid est quod animum fessum atque labefactum et haec studia longitudine otii et assiduitate lectionis plerumque fastidientem magis reparet atque redintegret quam sermones in corona coetuque agitati, ubi vel gloria, si alios superaveris, vel pudore, si superatus sis, ad legendum atque perdiscendum vehementer incenderis?” I, 13 (240): “. . . his sive disceptationibus sive collucutionibus, quas disputationes appello. . . :” and I, 37 (252): “Est autem exercitatio studiorum nostrorum colloctio, perquisitio, agitatioque earum rerum quae in studiis nostris versantur, quam ego uno verbo disputationem appello.”

¹³ Fubini, “All'uscita dalla Scolastica medievale,” 88; Marsh, *Quattrocento Dialogue*, 32–33. Marsh identifies the preface to the *Tusculan Disputations* as the source for the definitions of *disputatio* and *philosophia* given in Bruni's text.

¹⁴ *Dialogues*, proem. 1 (235): “Nam cum frequentia populi, splendore aedificiorum, magnitudine rerum gerendarum civitas haec florentissima est, tum etiam optimarum artium totiusque humanitatis, quae iam penitus extincta videbantur, hic semina quaedam

and Salutati will later recall, with varying degrees of optimism, aspects of this story of cultural decline and potential recovery. Similarly, in the first book, when Niccoli recounts a brief history of the study of philosophy, he emphasizes discontinuity: Cicero first brought philosophy to Italy from Greece, nourished it with eloquence, and wrote books that both define this foundational discipline¹⁵ and explain its different schools. Such books enabled the study of philosophy. Now, however, they have been lost or mutilated, and contemporary philosophers know nothing of the very art they claim to teach. Indeed Aristotle, whom these men cite as their master, would not recognize as his own the teachings now attributed to him.¹⁶ Here a chasm marked by forgotten knowledge and lost books separates the present from the past.

At other times, the narratives suggested in the *Dialogues* emphasize continuity or equate temporally distant phenomena. Early in the first book, Salutati urges his younger friends to engage in disputation as he had done with his teacher Luigi Marsili, thereby encouraging the transmission of humanist practice from one generation to the next.¹⁷ As he praises his teacher's intellect and eloquence, Salutati further links the modern humanist community with the ancients: "Semper ille [Marsili] Ciceronem, Vergilium, Senecam aliosque veteres habebat in ore; nec solum eorum opiniones atque sententias, sed etiam verba persaepe proferebat, ut non ab alio sumpta sed ab ipso facta viderentur [He was always talking of Cicero, Vergil, Seneca and the other ancients: he often cited not only their opinions and sayings, but also their very words in such a way that they seemed not drawn from another but rather his own productions]."¹⁸ Because Marsili had not only read but absorbed ancient texts, the exemplars of the culture that humanists sought to emulate could speak through him as if they were present, or as if he were they. In this account, the repetition of certain practices and the identification of Marsili's voice with that of the ancients render temporal distance inconsequential.

These straightforward, potentially reductionist stories of either rupture

remanserunt, quae quidem in diem crescunt, brevi tempore, ut credimus, lumen non parvum elatura." The sources for this interesting image are discussed below.

¹⁵ Niccoli calls philosophy the parent of all liberal arts and the source of our very humanity: "que [philosophia] est omnium bonarum artium parens et cuius ex fontibus haec omnis nostra derivatur humanitas." *Dialogues* I, 18 (243).

¹⁶ *Dialogues* I, 17–23 (243–46).

¹⁷ For a discussion of the generational tension in the *Dialogues* and its relationship to arguments for historical continuity see Quint, "Humanism and Modernity," 431–33. For conflicts between Bruni and Salutati, see Fubini, "All'uscita della scolastica," 82ff.

¹⁸ *Dialogues* I, 12 (240). Translation in Hankins, *Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 65.

or continuity present equally unsatisfying alternatives. Their juxtaposition signals a need for more precise questions and a less totalizing means of representing the past in and for the present. Citation provides one such means. Where narration is often univocal, citation is dialogic. Narration is usually linear, moving from past to present; citation goes in many directions. And whereas the logic of chronological narration is causal, citation can depict mutual influences, affinities, and other more subtle relationships.

MAKING THE PAST PRESENT THROUGH CITATION

Citation—when humanists invoke the name of, quote from, or echo another author—can reflect different assumptions about why the past is relevant to the present. Most often, these assumptions authorize identification. We in the present are similar to those in the past, hence their words have meaning for us. Identification downplays temporal distance in an effort to foreground what has stayed the same. Such efforts legitimized the humanist desire to recover antiquity and sustained their fantasy—expressed by Petrarch, Bruni, and others but made famous by Machiavelli—of a community composed of great intellects able to converse across the boundaries of time and space and death.

Strategies of identification make up much humanist citation. However, sometimes the original context of a particular passage intrudes on its reuse to mark the gap between ancient and Renaissance text. In Bruni's *Dialogues*, this kind of citation functions as an alternative to narration, that is, as another, indeed a better, way to map temporal distance. Some examples clarify this point. First, Bruni cites stories grounded in classical texts but meaningful and illuminating in modern situations. Niccoli, for example, uses a story about Pythagoras during his initial argument with Salutati: if, at a time when learning was much more accessible, Pythagoras, a man known for wisdom, urged his students to study in silence for five years, how can we moderns be expected to dispute?¹⁹ Similarly, when Salutati refutes Niccoli's argument that disputation is impossible, he refers to a line found in Cicero but written by the poet Ennius (239–169 BCE). In one of Ennius's plays, a character named Neoptolemus says that he would philosophize in a few areas, not in everything. Salutati uses this line as evidence that even in the best of times, many chose to pursue only aspects of philoso-

¹⁹ *Dialogues* I, 29 (249). Baldassarri identifies the probable sources for this story as Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 1, 9, 4.

phy, not all of it. Nothing, Salutati notes, keeps us from using what we have to do the same.²⁰ In both of these instances, Bruni's citations demonstrate the relevance of specific ancient stories to defined modern situations while acknowledging the differences between the present debate and the circumstances in the past from which these stories derive.²¹

Second, Bruni's use of citation builds a textured, polysemous vocabulary among ancient and modern writers. The term "ridiculus mus" with which Niccoli describes Petrarca's *Africa* takes its general meaning from a passage in Horace. Niccoli, however, uses it not as Horace did, for a poem that cannot measure up to an overly pompous first line, but rather for a poem that had been overly hyped prior to its appearance.²² This same repetition in a different context, in which a citation's source informs but does not determine its meaning, characterizes Bruni's use of other expressions from ancient authors, for example, "homo dignus pistrino" and the ciceronian "versutus et callidus."²³

Bruni also uses syntactical structures found in ancient authors. For example, after Niccoli's initial argument about disputation, as Salutati asks Niccoli and Rossi what they think, Salutati notes of Bruni, "Nam ego de Leonardo non dubito: ita etiam video illum in omni sententia cum Nicolao convenire, ut iam arbitrer potius cum illo errare velle quam mecum recta sequi."²⁴ In the context of Bruni's structural imitation of Cicero and dedication to Vergerio, this construction, as both Mortensen and Baldassarri have suggested, recalls two passages, one from the *Tusculan Disputations* and one from a letter Vergerio wrote to Salutati. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, the main interlocutor M. describes how, after arriving in Italy, Plato had

²⁰ *Dialogues* I, 37 (252): "Nec tamen tunc, cum hae artes florebant, omnibus placebat ad cacumen evadere, pluresque erant qui paucis, ut Neoptolemus, quam qui omnino philosophari vellent; quod item nunc ut faciamus nihil prohibet." Baldassarri notes that Cicero uses this story from the poet Ennius several times (in *Tusculan Disputations*, *De republica*, and *De oratore*) and that it is also told in *Attic Nights*. The line from Ennius is quoted in *De oratore* II, 37, 156 as, "Paucis: nam omnino haud placet."

²¹ For another example, see the use of the story of Acteon (from Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3, 198ff.) in *Dialogues* I, 24 (247–48).

²² *Dialogues* I, 48 (257); Horace, *Art of Poetry* 139: "parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus."

²³ For homo dignus pistrino, *Dialogues* I, 47 (257). For versutus et callidus, *Dialogues* I, 8 (238): "Quid est quod ingenium magis acuat, quid quod illud callidius versutiusque reddat quam disputatio, cum ibi necesse sit ut momento temporis ad rem se applicet, indeque se reflectat, discurrat, colligat, concludat?"

²⁴ *Dialogues* I, 31 (250). Translation in Hankins, *Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 70: "I have no doubts about Leonardo: I see his every opinion so accords with Niccolò's that I think he would rather be wrong with him than right with me."

learned Pythagorean sentiments on the immortality of the soul and, because he agreed with these, had given them a logical foundation. M. then proposes to move on to a new topic without fully discussing Plato's specific ideas on immortality. The interlocutor A. objects, saying that he would prefer to err with Plato and his approach than simply to believe the truth with others. Vergerio's letter notes that Plato and Cicero offer different accounts of the Athenian statesman Themistocles' (537–460 BCE) words when a man from Seriphus attributed Themistocles' fame primarily to Athens, his glorious city, rather than to his personal merit. As Vergerio acknowledges the differences between the versions of Plato and Cicero (who took the story from Plato), he notes that he preferred Cicero's even if it was inaccurate.²⁵

By echoing these two passages, Bruni highlights the structural similarities among several textual disputations: Plato's *Republic* (the source of the original story about Themistocles); Cicero's *On Old Age* (the text in which Cicero repeats the Themistocles story); Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* (where Cicero's interlocutor expresses his preference for Plato in language echoed by Bruni), and Vergerio's letter to Salutati (where Vergerio echoes Cicero's language from the *Tusculan Disputations* to defend his preference for Cicero's version of the Themistocles story). With all these texts in play, common ground emerges on which Bruni can suggest the illusion of conversations across temporal and spatial distance: Plato, Cicero, Salutati, and Vergerio can debate the Themistocles story. At the same time, Bruni constructs a genealogy that acknowledges change over time, one that moves from Plato's encounter with the Pythagoreans to Cicero's encounter with (and differences from) Plato to the current debate between Niccoli and Salutati. This genealogy reinforces the definition of philosophy that Niccoli had given earlier and confirms Cicero's place as that discipline's Latin master. In other words, Bruni here uses citation to represent the past in its relationship to the present on many levels at once. This is a highly refined, distinctive historical sensibility to which narration alone is inadequate.

As a simpler example, consider Niccoli's indignant reaction to Salu-

²⁵ Mortensen, "Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus*," 277; *Dialogues* I (31), 250 n.37. Compare *Tusculan Disputations* 1, 17, 39; "Errare mehercule malo cum Platone, quem tu quanti facias scio et quem ex tuo ore admiror, quam cum istis vera sentire;" and Pier Paolo Vergerio, *Epistolario*, ed. Leonardo Smith (Rome, 1934), 258, 260: "Noveram enim extare aliter dictum Themistoclis apud Platonem quam penes Ciceronem legeretur. [. . .] in hoc tamen, si error est, da veniam, Plato; errare cum Cicerone malim." Plato's version of the Themistocles story is in the first book of the *Republic*, 329e. Cicero refers to the story in *On Old Age* 3, 8.

tati's praise for the Trecento poets: "'Quos tu mihi Dantes,' inquit, 'commemoraras? Quos Petrarchas? Quos Boccacios?'" ['Why,' he said, 'do you bring up Dante to me? Why Petrarca? Why Boccaccio?']" Niccoli here recalls the moment in *De Oratore* when, after Crassus threatens to enlist a handy Greek, Staseas the Peripatetic, to satisfy his interlocutors' desire for a speech on oratory, Mucius impatiently insists that Crassus himself speak, saying "Quem tu mihi staseam, quem Peripateticum narras?" Furthermore, as Baldassarri suggests, Niccoli's contemptuous words both echo and contest Salutati's *Invectives against Antonio Loschi*, in which, as he is praising Florence as the homeland of the most famous men, Salutati names Dante, Petrarca, and Boccaccio.²⁶ By crafting allusions that echo an ancient text and a modern author who himself has recalled that ancient text, Bruni contributes to the emergence of a common tradition and of a common yet polysemous language that links humanists to antiquity without subverting their authorial independence. From this perspective, allusion and citation establish textual relations and then use them to map temporal relations.

A particularly intricate instance of this kind of citation occurs in the prologue of the *Dialogues*. As he praises the city of Florence, Bruni uses a distinctive metaphor of seeds producing light.²⁷ As Baldassarri notes, Vergerio had used the phrase "bonarum artium semina" in a letter that addressed (among other things) the relations between parents and children, a topic similar to that taken up at the beginning of *De ingenuis moribus*, to which Bruni alludes in the opening sentence of his *Dialogues*. Vergerio names Cicero as his source. Here are the relevant passages from Cicero, Vergerio, and Bruni:

[from Bruni's *Dialogues*] Nam cum frequentia populi, splendore aedificorum, magnitudine rerum gerendarum civitas haec florentissima est, tum etiam optimarum artium totiusque humanitatis, quae iam penitus extincta videbantur, hic semina quaedam remanserunt, quae quidem in diem crescunt, brevi tempore, ut credimus, lumen non parvum elatura" (proem 1 235). [This city is eminent for its numerous inhabitants, its splendid buildings and its great undertakings; and, in addition, some seeds of the liberal arts

²⁶ Bruni, *Dialogues* I, 41 (253); *De Oratore* 1, 23, 105; Salutati, *Invectiva in Antonium Luschum vicentium*, in *Prosatori Latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan: 1952), 34: "Ubi Dantes? Ubi Petrarca? Ubi Boccaccius?"

²⁷ On seed metaphors, see Maryanne Cline Horowitz, *Seeds of Virtue and Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

and of all human culture, which once seemed completely dead, remained here and grow day by day and very soon, I believe, will bring forth no inconsiderable light (Hankins, 63; slightly modified to make this excerpt clear).]

[From Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*] Nunc parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinionibusque depravati sic restinguimus, ut nusquam naturae lumen appareat. Sunt enim ingeniis nostris semina innata virtutum, quae si adolescere liceret, ipsa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret: nunc autem, simul atque editi in lucem et suscepti sumus, in omni continuo pravitate et in summa opinionum perversitate versamur, ut paene cum lacte nutricis errorem suxisse videamur (3, 1). [As things stand, [nature] has given us small flickers of understanding, which through bad habits and corrupt opinions we so quickly reject that no light of nature remains apparent. For there are seeds of virtue innate in our dispositions; if they were allowed to develop, nature itself would lead us to the good life. As it is, however, as soon as we have seen the light of day and have been acknowledged, we immediately find ourselves amidst the utmost depravity and the worst perversity of opinion, such that it almost seems that we have drunk in error with our wet nurse's milk.]

[From Vergerio, *De ingenius moribus*] Franciscus senior avus tuus, cuius ut exstant plurimae res magnifice gestae, ita et multa passim sapienter ab eo dicta memorantur, dicere, ut accepimus, Ubertine, solebat tria esse in quibus bene consulere suis liberis parentes, ut facile possunt, ita jure meritoque tenerentur. Primum, uti honestis illos nominibus appellent. [. . .] Alterum, ut in egregiis urbibus eos statuunt. [. . .] Tertium autem erat, uti bonis artibus liberos erudirerent (praef., 1).

[We understand, Ubertino, that Francesco the elder, your grandfather—whose many magnificent deeds are on record just as his many wise sayings are remembered everywhere—used to say there were three ways that parents could easily serve the interests of their children, and were with good reason obliged to do so. One was to call them by honorable names. [. . .] Second, parents should settle their children in renowned cities. [. . .] The third point was that parents should instruct their children in the liberal arts (Translation by Craig Kallendorf, 3).]

[From Vergerio, *Epistolario*] Aut enim artes suas fructuosas experti, easdem liberos agere volunt, aut longa consuetudine eas fastidentes, que in se nequiverunt, in liberos tentant experiri.

Quo plerunque fit ut adolescentes bene dispositi et ad verum inclinati parentum errore devii agantur. Quare in hac electione peroptimum iudico ut, quid agere cuique potissimum rei insistere velint, dummodo a bonis artibus non discedant, eorum arbitrio stetur. Ea enim natura que animo rationem dedit, eidem bonarum artium semina indidit. Que si adolescere paterentur, ut his ferme verbis vult Cicero, nos ad beatitudinem ipsa natura perduceret. (59, pp. 133–34)

[For either they [parents] want their children to pursue the profitable arts that they themselves practiced or, contemptuous of these from long familiarity, they try to experience through their children what they could not do themselves. From this it very often happens that well-disposed young people who are inclined to truth are led astray by the error of their parents. For this reason, I think it best that—as long as it does not depart from the liberal arts—what young people do is decided by their choice of whatever thing they most want to pursue. For that nature that gave reason to the soul also implanted in it the seeds of the liberal arts; if they were allowed to grow, as Cicero concludes in almost these very words, nature itself would lead us to the good life.]

Here again, Bruni's references to Vergerio and Cicero establish relations between texts and subtexts that represent a historical sensibility far more subtle than the stark alternatives of continuity or rupture offered in the beginning of the first book. First, all four texts share certain themes: relationships between generations, the interplay between inborn nature and education, and the importance of the liberal arts. Yet these themes play out differently in each text and in the parts of each text to which Bruni refers. Take the theme of relations between generations: the opening of *De ingenuis moribus* discusses the most important things parents can do for their children; Vergerio's letter 59 warns against parental interference, which can corrupt the "bonarum artium semina" implanted by nature; the passage from Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* defines the acknowledgment of children by their fathers as the moment when they enter a world of false and perverse opinion; Bruni's *Dialogues* here address the transmission of the liberal arts over time. Thus Bruni has chosen to cite texts whose themes

relate to his own without at the same time effacing the differences among them. Instead of stark identification—as when Marsili became one with the ancient writers whose words he spoke—Bruni connects without collapsing the texts and authors he cites.

The image of *semina* functions in a similarly complex way. The citations here lead from Bruni's "semina," seeds sown in Italy when culture had flourished but that are now mostly barren, first to Vergerio, already established by the dedication as an interlocutor in the *Dialogues*, and to the expression "bonarum artium semina"; then through Vergerio to Cicero, Vergerio's acknowledged source. Cicero's use of *semina* guiding humans to the good life is both preceded and followed by but not bound up with images of light: nature implanted flickers within us whose light is extinguished by bad habits soon after we come (out of the womb) into the light of day. These images in turn lead back to Bruni and to *semina* planted in the ground producing light. Only by reading the allusions does the image of seeds producing light make sense. Moreover, the influences among texts go in both directions, and over the course of their trajectories the image itself is transformed into another that nonetheless carries with it remnants of its multiple contexts. Citation links without collapsing texts produced at distinct moments, simultaneously illustrating how those texts and moments resemble and are different from each other, how they shape and enrich each other.

NICCOLI'S TWO DANTES

If we recognize citation in the *Dialogues* as an alternative to narrative historical representation, we can read aspects of Niccoli's opposing positions about Dante differently. In the first book, Niccoli begins his argument by distinguishing his own process of reasoning from that of the majority. Don't expect me, he says, to mirror public opinion. He then moves to an evaluation of Dante's learning, arguing first that Dante erred in his interpretation of two passages from Virgil. Any learned man, Niccoli argues, reads "Quid non mortalia pectora cogis/auri sacra fames" as a description of avarice, yet in *Purgatorio* XXII Dante inexplicably applied it to extravagance. This misreading attests to his ignorance. Furthermore, although learned men know that Marcus Cato died relatively young, Dante depicted him with a flowing white beard, a historical error that also attests to his ignorance. Most egregiously, Dante had praised Junius Brutus, who slayed the Tarquin

king and founded the Roman republic, while damning Marcus Brutus, the virtuous man who had killed Julius Caesar to defend it. Dante thus revealed both his ignorance and his inconsistency. What learned man would praise a regicide who slew a legitimately established king (as Tarquin was) while condemning the killer of Caesar, a usurper? Finally, Dante did not base his Latin on that of ancient writers. We cannot call such a man a poet.

Niccoli's judgments here define the learned person as someone who accurately represents historical facts, who rigorously follows classical standards of Latinity, and whose citations painstakingly ventriloquize ancient authors. From this perspective, humanistic study aims to eliminate temporal distance such that classical texts and the values they express can be (re)produced in the present by both ancient and modern authors. At the same time, Niccoli suggests, the perspective on the past that leads to real learning also engenders a relentlessly consistent moral outlook presumably made possible by the consistent moral outlook expressed in classical texts, such that the same crime receives similar punishment no matter what the circumstances: "Quamobrem, si sceleratus Marcus, sceleratiorem esse Iunim necesse est; sin autem Iunius laudandus, quod regem exegerit, cur non Marcus in caelum tollendus, quod tyrannum occiderit?"²⁸

In his recantation, Niccoli speaks from different assumptions. Instead of evaluating Dante's learning according to how accurately he respects authorial intention or historical fact, he states in general terms the attributes of a great poet: imagination, eloquence, and knowledge of many things. Dante possessed all three. This conception of poetry is, to be sure, grounded in classical discussions of poetry, rhetoric, and oratory but as stated here by Niccoli it can embrace writers in different languages, styles, and genres. Within this framework, what matters most is not the painstakingly accurate (re)production of the classical past but rather the creative representation of its specific significance for a defined present. Thus, according to Niccoli, Dante's depiction of Cato violates fact to better illustrate what remains most notable about him, namely a mind worthy of an older man: "mens ipsa Catonis, rigidi servatoris honesti et tanta vitae sanctimonia praediti, etiam in iuvenili corpore canissima erat."²⁹ Similarly, in

²⁸ Bruni, *Dialogues* I, 44 (255). Translation in Hankins, *Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 73: "Therefore, if Marcus is wicked, Junius must necessarily be more wicked; but if Junius is to be praised for driving out a king, why should not Marcus be exalted to heaven for driving out a tyrant?"

²⁹ Bruni, *Dialogues* II, 74 (267). Translation in Hankins, *Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 80: ". . . the mind of Cato, who was a strict guardian of virtue and endowed with great moral purity, was very old even in a youthful body."

his use of Virgil's figure of speech, Dante strove not to replicate another poet's intention but rather to signify something different that nonetheless depended on, drew richness from, and enriched earlier contexts. Extravagance (what Virgil's words mean in *The Divine Comedy*) and avarice (what these words mean in the *Aeneid*) are related as opposing, extreme corruptions of the virtue of generosity.³⁰ This approach to the past and to past texts and authors, Niccoli's discussion suggests, nurtures a less rigid moral outlook, one that can acknowledge inconsistencies even among exemplary texts (Caesar, Niccoli points out, had his contemporaneous defenders) and that can, therefore, define standards of value that do not derive solely from antiquity. Dante knew literature though he did not write classical Latin.

Although scholars have long debated the meaning of Niccoli's position in Book 2, most read it as a direct, though not persuasive or sincere, refutation of his earlier speech. If, however, as I have suggested here, the two arguments are based on different assumptions, then in Book 2 Niccoli redefines learning and the approach to the past that cultivates it, advocating a dynamic relationship between ancient and modern authors that can acknowledge both the heterogeneity of "antiquity" and its distance from moderns without precluding meaningful, legitimate appropriations of it.³¹ Furthermore, as Niccoli's analysis of Dante's use of Virgil makes clear, there are contexts in which relationships between ancient and modern authors can be genuinely dialogic, such that the meaning of an ancient text is enriched through later allusions to it: after reading the *Purgatorio* we read the *Aeneid* differently. In this sense, Niccoli's defense of Dante mirrors what the author Brunni accomplishes throughout the *Dialogues* with his complex references to other authors, present and absent, living and dead. Citations represent the past as simultaneously like and not like, close to and distant from, the present with a precision that chronological narration cannot match.

BRUNNI AND HISTORY

I have argued that Brunni's *Dialogues*, though not a work of history, express a subtle historical sensibility by using citation to represent multi-dimen-

³⁰ *Purgatorio*, XXII, 40–41; *Aeneid* III, 56–57.

³¹ Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 55–57, suggests that Niccoli's change of position here can be read in relation to the historical Niccoli's shift from harsh and pessimistic critic to sought after editor for those seeking to write classical Latin. See, for example, Helene Harth, "Niccolò Niccoli als literarischer Zensor: Untersuchungen sur Textgeschichte von Poggios *De Avaritia*," *Rinascimento* ser. 3, v. 7 (1967): 29–53.

sional relationships among the present moment and discrete moments in the past. As a means of representation, Bruni's citation highlights common ground among different times while simultaneously acknowledging the irreducible historical specificity of each moment in the past. My analysis, I think, invites comparison with recent discussions of Bruni's histories, in which scholars have found an equally sophisticated historical sense. If in the *Dialogues* citation predominates, Bruni's historical works explore the possibilities for narrative in an analogously nuanced way, one that similarly emphasizes not simply knowing facts but rather the capacity to represent connections among distinct phenomena and events in a way that serves a particular audience in the present.

Scholars have long noted Bruni's parenthetical distinction, in the first book of his *History of the Florentine People*, between poetic and "purer" narrative accounts of the past, through which he juxtaposes Virgil's description of the Etruscans (and of Aeneas' relationship with them) to that of Livy.³² This distinction has attracted notice partly because Bruni himself debunked then popular legends about Florence's early history. Thus aspects of his work—the juxtaposition between poetic and more purely historical accounts and the use of primary evidence—point towards modern professional historical practice. Yet, these aspects of Bruni's work are not the whole story.³³ While the critical reading of sources and a clean boundary between fact and fiction may ground our conception of history, Bruni did not distinguish starkly, as some later historians would, between primary documents and secondary accounts, nor did he understand the historian's task primarily in terms of excavating new documents or weighing evidence.

³² Leonardo Bruni, *Historiarum Florentini Populi Liber XII*, 1–288, ed. Emilio Santini, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, v. 19, 3 (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1914), 8, lines 38–40; Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, v. 1, books I–IV, ed. and trans. James Hankins (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001), 22. It is important to note, following Anna Maria Cabrini, that Bruni's main point in citing these two authorities is not to contrast poetry to history but to show how Livy and Virgil agree that the Etruscans flourished before the Trojan War. See Anna Maria Cabrini, "Le *Historiae* del Bruni: Risultati e ipotesi di una ricerca sulle fonti," *Leonardo Bruni, Cancelleria della Repubblica di Firenze*, ed. Paolo Viti (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1990), 247–319, 252.

³³ On Bruni's histories see: Cabrini, "Le *Historiae* del Bruni"; Riccardo Fubini, "Osservazioni sugli *Historiarum florentini populi libri XII*," *Studi di storia medievale e moderna per Ernesto Sestan* (Florence, 1980), 403–48; Gary Ianziti, "Bruni on Writing History," *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 367–91, and his "Writing from Procopius: Leonardo Bruni's *De bello italico*," *Rinascimento* s. 2, 37 (1997): 3–28. Also important are Nancy Struener, *The Language of History in the Renaissance: Rhetorical Consciousness in Florentine Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970); and Donald J. Wilcox, *The Development of Florentine Humanist historiography in the Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

Indeed, the comparison between Livy and Virgil referred to above aims primarily to show how poet and historian *agree* on the antiquity of Etruscan civilization. Furthermore, as Gary Ianziti has argued, Bruni often defined history in opposition not to poetry but to translation. In the preface to his *Cicero Novus* (1415), a work that began as a translation from Plutarch (Bruni had previously produced a Latin version of Plutarch's life of Mark Antony), Bruni explains that Plutarch's biography inadequately represented this great man, leaving out too much and structuring the story so that, in a comparison between Cicero and Demosthenes, Demosthenes would look better.³⁴ Because of these weaknesses, Bruni writes his *Cicero novus* "non ut interpres, sed pro nostro arbitrio voluntateque."³⁵ This distinction is important. Bruni was, after all, a translator who wrote thoughtfully about how to transform a text written in one language into another. A translator, he explains in *De interpretatione recta*, should turn "his whole mind, heart, and will to his original author" so that he can effectively preserve that author's voice.³⁶ Bruni compares a translator to a painter copying an existing picture produced by someone else. Such an artist does not look at the thing depicted but only at its existing representation, because he seeks to communicate neither "the real thing" nor his vision of it but rather the image of it wrought by another.³⁷

For Bruni, translation required an approach and skills completely different from those required of historians. Whereas translators reproduce in another language a representation made by someone else, historians use their judgment about relationships among events and causes to create from evidence a representation of the past that is distinctively their own. Thus although at times in his histories Bruni relied primarily on a single, earlier

³⁴ Leonardo Bruni, "Praefatio," *Cicero Novus seu Ciceronis Vita*, in *Leonardo Bruni Aretino, Humanistisch-Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans Baron (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1928), 113: "[. . .] ne ipse Plutarchus desiderium mei animi penitus adimplevit, quippe multis praetermissis, quae ad illustrationem summi viri vel maxime pertinebant, cetera sic narrat, ut magis ad comparationem suam, in qua Demosthenem praeferre nititur, quam ad sincerum narrandi iudicium accommodari videantur." Ianziti, "Bruni on History," 374.

³⁵ Bruni, *Cicero Novus*, 113; Ianziti, "Bruni on History," 375: "Not as a translator but according to my own judgment and will."

³⁶ Leonardo Bruni, *De interpretatione recta*, in Baron, *Schriften*, 81–96 and (with Italian translation) in *Opere letterarie e politiche di Leonardo Bruni*, 150–93; English translation of much of the text by Hankins as "On the Correct Way to Translate," in *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 217–29. This quotation at Viti, 160: ". . . interpres quidem optimus sese in primum scribendi auctorem tota mente et animo et voluntate convertet. . . ." Translated by Hankins, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 220.

³⁷ *De interpretatione recta* in Viti, 160.

historian for his material, these works in his view were not translations because they clearly display his (and not another author's) interpretation of the past.³⁸ Of his *De bello italico adversus gothos libri IV* (1441), which takes material almost exclusively from Procopius' *De bello gothico* (ca. 550 CE, Greek), Bruni wrote: "Scripsi vero illos [IV libros *De bello italico*] non ut interpres sed ut genitor et auctor; quemadmodum enim, si de praesenti bello scriberem, noticia quidem rerum gestarum ex auditu foret, ordo vero et dispositio et verba mea essent, ac meo arbitratu excogitata et posita; eodem item modo ipse noticiam tantum rerum gestarum de illo sumens, in ceteris omnibus ab eo recessi, utpote qui hoc unum habeat boni, quod bello interfuit. Cetera illius sunt spernenda [translation in note]."³⁹ Procopius (if we take Bruni's comparison seriously) provided the facts (noticia rerum gestarum) but the interpretation and its textual representation (ordo, verba, dispositio) were worked out (excogitata) by Bruni. It is these latter qualities rather than source-collecting or source criticism that substantiate his claim to authorship.

Bruni here distinguishes between historical facts and the representational structure through which a specific interpretation of the past is created. Data taken from existing accounts (for example, those of Livy or Procopius or Giovanni Villani, to name a few of Bruni's sources) could, in new hands, produce a new story, one structured according to a different sense of causation, organized to highlight different themes, and aimed at a different audience. Many of the innovations that scholars see in Bruni's histories, even in his *History of the Florentine People*, follow not specifically from new evidence but from these other dimensions of his work. Thus Bruni rejects conventional Christian periodization, according to which the Roman Empire, the last in a series of earthly kingdoms, was ordained by God to dominate much of the world in order to prepare humankind for the Incarnation and the spread of Christianity, in favor of story focused specifically on Italy that begins with the Etruscans and that consistently

³⁸ Gary Ianziti, "Writing from Procopius: Leonardo Bruni's *De bello italico*," *Rinascimento* s. 2, 37 (1997): 3–28.

³⁹ Bruni to Giovanni Tortelli, *Epistolarum libri VIII*, ed. L. Mehus (Florence, 1741), II, 156–57, quoted in Ianziti, "Procopius," 6–7. "But in fact I wrote those books not as a translator but as an author and creator, just as, if I were to write about a present-day war, information about what happened would come from reports I heard, but the order, the argument, and the words would be mine, arranged and worked out according to my judgment; in the same way here, taking information about what happened from Procopius, I departed from him in everything else, inasmuch as he had only one thing to recommend him, namely that he was present at the war. Everything else about his work should be rejected."

associates human virtue and achievement with republican, not imperial, rule.⁴⁰ This radically different perspective led Bruni to read known facts, the facts contained in the works of other historians, differently. Such differences between Bruni and the earlier historians who are his sources are evident as well when those sources are classical. For example, the description of the battle that follows the expulsion from Rome of Tarquin the Proud given in the *History of the Florentine People* echoes Livy's language while also relying on certain formulations and interpretive gestures from Dionysius of Halicarnassus. The resulting new account, however, departs from Livy and Dionysius to highlight Etruscan bravery at the expense of the Romans.

This theme of Etruscan bravery recurs throughout the first book of Bruni's *History*, notably in his description of Porsenna, an Etruscan who attacked Rome, and of Horatius Cocles, the Roman who thwarted Porsenna's invasion by destroying the only bridge over the Tiber River. Again, Bruni's version differs from his source: Livy's account allies Porsenna with Tarquin as a defender of monarchy and an enemy of liberty; Bruni simply states that Porsenna wanted to restore Tarquin to the throne. Livy makes much of the heroism of Horatius Cocles, calling him the bulwark of Rome; Bruni states that the real hero was not Roman virtue but the raging river. Similarly Bruni downplays the heroism of Mucius Scaevola, the man sent to assassinate Porsenna, calling it instead an instance of Roman craftiness made necessary by Porsenna's military superiority.⁴¹ Such interpretive emphases in Bruni's *History* point to the nobility of the Etruscans and substantiate his claim that the Romans sought to imitate them.⁴²

In his *History*, Bruni consistently (though not exclusively) focuses on how human beings, motivated by complex psychological and social factors, shaped political events. That is, he stresses some kinds of causes over others. Likewise, scholars who have compared Bruni's narrative accounts to those of his likely sources have illumined his distinctive historical claims: the foundational status of Etruria for modern Tuscan history; the long, uninterrupted nature of Florentine history and its republican origins; the superiority of republican to imperial forms of government; the centrality of liberty to the good life. It is tempting, and not wrong, to read these claims

⁴⁰ Hankins, "Introduction," in Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, xiv. See also Wilcox, *The Development of Florentine Humanist Historiography*, 32–66.

⁴¹ Cabrini, "Le *Historiae* del Bruni," 254–55; *Ab urbe condita* 2, 12; *History of the Florentine People* I, 25. See also James Hankins, "Introduction," Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, ix–xxi, xiv–xv.

⁴² *History of the Florentine People*, I, 20.

ideologically, as motivated by some political agenda or by the demands of Bruni's patrons. However, these claims can also be read historiographically, in the light of Bruni's approach to doing history, particularly in the light of his attentiveness to authorial autonomy and to the representational dimensions of historical narrative: ordering, word choice, connections and transitions, causation. Bruni, I would argue, recognized that the same facts can be related to each other in different ways and thus can give rise to multiple stories. He and Livy or he and Villani might, from the same raw material, produce different narratives whose differences are not reducible to ideology or politics or authorial agenda or historical truth precisely because the facts themselves can sustain multiple representations of the past. From this perspective, Bruni's approach to history resonates powerfully with contemporary questions about historical representation: From whose point of view is history written? What is the relationship between the past and representations of it? What kind of truth claims can historians make for a single account of the past? Indeed Bruni's work may shed more light on these very current questions than it does on the emergence of scientific history in the nineteenth century.

While they are obviously of different genres, Bruni's *Dialogues* share with his histories a sophisticated historical sensibility, one that understands any account of the past in terms of the connections—among events, eras, authors, or texts—that an individual author has worked out and represented in language. I would argue that this historical sensibility characterizes many Italian humanist writings, irrespective of genre, from Petrarca's *Secretum* to Machiavelli's *Discourses* to Poliziano's poetry. Furthermore, such humanist writings, like Bruni's *Dialogues*, claim to and, I would suggest, can communicate a kind of truth about the past even when they are not histories, and even when, again like Bruni's *Dialogues*, they are fictional. This aspect of humanist writing might, I think, be brought to bear on our own discussions of the nature of historical representation without jeopardizing the imperative distinction between historical truth and historical falsehood. Indeed by exploring in this context the kinds of truths about the past that genres other than history can represent, we might clarify, in a theoretically responsible way, the kinds of truth claims that histories proper can put forth.

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