
Political Oratory and the Public Sphere in early Quattrocento Florence¹

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Introduction

My intention in this paper is to examine broadly the political importance of public rhetorical performance within Florence during the first half of the fifteenth century. This type of political oratory has received relatively little attention from scholars, partly as a result of the nature of the orations themselves, and partly owing to their neglect by historians of political ideas in favour of more formal humanistic and Latin writings. The fact that orations in the *volgare* were commonplace within the Florentine ritual calendar has been overlooked. Instead such orations as rhetorical exercises learnt by young students and transcribed into their *zibaldone*, the pedagogical aspect of rhetoric taking precedence over its public practice. By examining the location and timing of such orations and their relation to the socio-political culture of the time, I hope to illustrate that they should be considered alongside the other ritual events that helped generate Florentine civic identity and re-enforced the central tenets of republican civic ideology within a consensus based constitution. I also wish to suggest that although such oratory preached disinterest, it was itself interested. Its political importance lay in its justification of a certain form of republican constitution. As the ruling elite in Florence began to cluster around the Medici later in the century, the content of these orations altered, in much the same way as traditional political and judicial structures were gradually modified. There is little evidence of such a strong oratorical tradition continuing during the pre-eminence of Lorenzo *il Magnifico* de' Medici post 1470.

These suggestions are made on the basis of work in progress, and are forwarded in the spirit of a research paper as a starting point for

discussion and consideration of the issues involved, not just for Florentine specialists, but for all interested in the relation between language, politics and performance.

Concepts of social harmony

Broadly stated, the traditions of both republican and signorial political thought in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries were concerned with the issues of peace and tranquillity, internal divisions being seen as inimical to the public good or *bene comune*. According to these traditions, an harmonious unity was the ideal state of civil life, to be maintained and protected against the potent threat of degeneration and factional violence.² These threats were more likely to materialise within a republican form of government than a princely or monarchical form where power was concentrated within the hands of a single leader. Signorial political thought, in the shape of advice books to princes, were full of paternalistic analogies which likened the prince to a father, shepherd, teacher or ship's captain whose duty was the well being of his charges. This involved the sublimation of his own particular interests to those of his principality.³

The situation of a republic was different in this respect. It had no figure head, the reins of power were shared by those within the governing class as defined by the rules concerning political eligibility.⁴ The task of combating individual or collective interests that were not shared by the totality of the citizen body had to be undertaken differently. The difficulty of this task is illustrated by the experiences of many of the city-republics of the Trecento which fell into the hands of signorial masters. The political credentials of a republic had to be established through the remembrance of the greatness of the Roman Republic, the centrality of the concept of freedom and a constitutional make up that prevented any one interest from dictating policy and subverting liberty.⁵ The diffusion of sovereignty in Florence between a multitude of councils based upon neighbourhood, profession, and political tradition meant that responsibility was divided and not located in any one particular group. The administration of justice by impartial outsiders seemingly ensured the longevity of such a system. The justification for this custom lay in the desire to avoid internal

dissent that it was felt might follow upon the administration of justice by officials whose ties of family and friendship impinged upon their impartial execution of the rule of law.

This fact was, and is, viewed both positively and negatively by both contemporaries and modern day historians. While Goro Dati saw it as evidence of a remarkable lack of trust in fellow citizens, Bruni rebutted the charge praising the practice for preventing 'mutual hatred and enmity among the citizens', justice being dealt with more fairly by a foreigner *super-partes*.⁶ For Trexler, an historical anthropologist, these officials were bound to the Republic by a complex of oaths and rituals which tied them to the spectrum of political ideas with which Florentine society identified. In a Republican form which had no legitimate head, radiated distrust and lacked honour, the importation of judicial officials from outside and their binding to the comune through civic and religious ritual rendered them legitimate.⁷ For others, at least at an ideological level the legitimacy of the sovereign people was never in doubt, based as it was upon Roman precedent and the legal authority of Bartolus da Sassoferrato and Baldus de Ubaldis and the concept of *sibi princeps*.⁸ However, as Florence developed into a territorial state with an increasingly centralised bureaucracy there was a gradual shift away from Trecento corporate politics to a more oligarchic and consensus based government.⁹

This civic ideology, however, was not itself impartial. As an idealised description of the nature of a perfectly formed republic it ministered to an elite. It justified them in their pre-eminence; it engendered trust in them from the remainder of the populace. It was itself political. Any acts of self description, whilst providing civic identity, were also the responsibility of someone within that society.¹⁰ Although the reality of political life sometimes bore scant relation to the idealised portraits presented in political rhetoric, that rhetoric still conditioned what was considered socially acceptable activity, providing a paradigm of social harmony for emulation. The resurgence of interest in oratory's affective powers went hand in hand with alterations in the perception of the nature of political rule in the second decade of the fifteenth century. The emergence of a more narrowly defined ruling elite, or *reggimento*, initially resulted in

greater stability. As Brucker has shown, the increase in both the number of meetings and the number of citizens taking part in the *Consulte e Pratiche* reflected a change in the style of government. Here people who were not office holders could air their views concerning communal policy. However, whereas previously they had spoken on behalf of a corporate entity, they were now free from such ties and sought rather to persuade co-citizens of their beliefs.¹¹ To a greater degree than before verbal skill became equated with political success. Speech was gradually and increasingly becoming for the Florentines a means to power, for in a social and political context where consensus was thought to be paramount, it was becoming essential to be able to convince rather than coerce. The extent to which Florentines were conscious of this development is witnessed by evidence that Palla Strozzi was collecting, with the aid of a notary, copies of orations made elsewhere in Tuscany in the late fourteenth century.¹² In addition the reinstatement of the moral value of feelings by the humanists of the early Quattrocento, in contrast to the stoical ideal of the negation of passion, provided an environment in which the affective power of rhetoric was justified and considered morally important.¹³

According to the Florentine civic republicanism of the early Quattrocento, therefore, citizens had a moral obligation to behave virtuously while actively involving themselves in the civic life of the state, for it was the state of liberty that allowed them to enjoy the rewards of their own work and feel secure in their possessions. To forget this debt was to endanger the very basis upon which their well being and prosperity were founded. Factions were perceived as one of the main threats, as was false friendship, for such things prioritised localised interests over the common good. The setting aside of personal interest for the greater benefit of the whole was seen as fair payment of the debt owed to the republic. The alternative scenario involving the dangers of continued selfishness to civic peace were graphically illustrated with historical examples. These examples sought to depict a sort of negative community in which particular interest, personal ambition and greed predominated, and everybody pursued their own interests. In this context particular attention was paid to the vice of avarice and the virtue of liberality.¹⁴

This matrix of values constituted a civic ideology which presented an idealised portrait of civil life where citizens worked one for all and all for one. The necessity of presenting this portrait in a ritual civic context, of reinforcing it with orations, festivals and sermons, was a response to the perceived need to keep what was in effect the most abstract of a citizen's obligations constantly before his eyes. Other competing interests were far more tangible and potentially profitable. In assuming theological terminology, this ideology promoted a quasi-religious mentality where citizens were called upon to collapse their identity into that of their Country.¹⁵ Love of country was illustrated, drawing on classical sources, by citing those who had sacrificed themselves for their fatherland, a sacrifice which bestowed eternal glory upon them.¹⁶

What it also sought to accomplish was the collapse of any distinction between the public and the private realm. Civic morality, like Christian morality, was concerned with the leading of a virtuous life on a daily basis. How one acted in relation to one's peers and co-citizens in business, in the home and in the parish all had a bearing on the health of the body politic, one's actions in the private sphere having repercussions on the health and vitality of the state. Morality was a public and private concern, the very conduct of one's day-to-day business a political and moral act. According to this ideology, therefore, all aspects of a society's social-intercourse lay in the political realm. The political realm and the moral realm were one and the same, the conduct of any citizen being both a political and moral act according to this civic ethic.

The Reality of Political Life in Florence

These conceptualisations of social harmony and shared interest were in stark contrast to the very organising principles of social and political life in Renaissance Florence as they have come to be understood. The culture of *preghiere*, requests, and the dynamics of power as seen through the construction and exploitation of patronage networks have proved that this ideal community was far removed from the exigencies of day to day life.¹⁷ That patronage networks were based on the mutual exchange of favours, and that Florentines from all social strata were aware that the reality of day to day life

was concerned with the pursuit of personal interests and the exploitation of influence is beyond doubt. An interest in the common good was always more distant and abstract than the more pressing and potentially profitable personal interests. It is the interpenetrating of the ideology of republicanism with the practice of day to day political and social life that requires further examination.

Individuals were located within a whole matrix of institutions, all of which made demands upon them and periodically required a show of loyalty in the form of a request being satisfied. Family, relations, friends, neighbours, parishioners, representatives of the quarter, fellow confraternity members, were all capable of calling on the influence of individuals in accordance with their own particular interests. The political and social position of the individual within society, no matter how humble, carried with it a degree of influence or at least access to power which endowed that individual with some authority or political leverage.¹⁸ A tax collector, a customs officer, the cook of a leading family, all these people held positions which involved them in standing in a particular relation to their fellow men and women. Within this competitive market place individuals sought to calculate the extent of their market worth, based on a consciousness of their potential sphere of influence, and maximise their returns in terms of the realisation of their interests. Daily life was governed by the exploitation of connections, the whole culture of *clientelismo* was based as much upon who you knew as what you knew. Social standing, therefore, was evaluated not only in terms of positions held - not necessarily a political post by any means - but also in terms of friends and patrons.¹⁹ The scramble for office and pursuit of *onori* was a function of the desire to widen spheres of influence and extend the network of potentially useful *amici*.

In an attempt to prevent the conglomeration of shared private interests into groupings or factions capable of undermining the republic and thereby depriving Florentines of their liberty, a whole range of laws and provisions were built into the city's statutes. Political offices were only to be held for a specific quantity of time, limits were placed on the number of family members allowed to hold positions within the same governmental offices at the same time, and a set period established before an individual could hold the same

office again. Monks were entrusted with the task of overseeing elections to prevent irregular practices or charges of cheating, and the Priors were to remain in isolation during their period of office to prevent them being lobbied and to symbolise the suspension of their private selves and their incarnation as embodiments of the republic. Under these conditions, acts of speech were deliberately guarded. The regulations governing the secrecy of governmental deliberations were stringent and the penalties for anybody leaking official governmental business heavy. This illustrates an important point about the conflation of the political and moral realm in republican civic ideology, for the individual represents nobody. He is to vote according to his conscience, as he sees right. In this context freedom of speech was synonymous with liberty.²⁰ The republican civic ethic would have it that the politically active citizen should always have the interests of the republic as a whole in his mind rather than those of a personal, familial or corporate nature. Consequently, when an individual represented his office before another council it was always noted in the minutes on whose behalf he spoke, whether the Otto di Guardia or the Dodici Buon Uomini, for example. Such statutes and council minutes all address the same anxiety concerning the danger of partiality and internal division. Other texts concerned with institutions within the republic reveal something of the reality of political and social life as it was actually conducted by citizens: advice books to sons on family management, collections of aphorisms, private letters, and personal diaries.²¹

Political rhetoric, the performance of orations to a wider audience as a part of civic ritual also addressed these same problems and sought consensus through persuasion. Not surprisingly, therefore, provision was also made for such public rhetorical performances in the Florentine statutes of 1415. Such ritualised rhetorical pronouncements were to be made on the assumption of office by the new Priors every two months. They were to be in Italian and include citations from holy scripture, the poets and legal sources. Evidence suggests that this statutory rubric was adhered to at least until the 1470's.²²

The Importance of Rhetoric

There is no doubt that the belief in the power of rhetoric to move an audience to virtuous behaviour remained strong. Although there was a constant medieval interest in rhetoric, that rhetoric provided one of the bridges between what have conventionally been seen as the Medieval and Renaissance periods seems to be one of the contentions of recent discussions concerning the origins of so-called Renaissance Humanism. As Florence in the early part of the '400 was evolving as a republic based on consensus, so speech and the ability to forward one's point of view persuasively before those who wielded the political and executive power to form policy underwent something of a renaissance. Some have seen the origins of Renaissance humanism itself in the medieval *ars dictaminis*, the rhetorical act of letter writing for officials of the Italian city-states, normally the Podestà.²³ These early rhetorical manuals, designed to provide models for letters to deal with a whole range of possible scenarios that such officials might face, were themselves closely allied to the less studied *ars arengandi*, the art of composing orations for the self-same officials when they were required to hold forth in public. Tracts such as the *Oculus Pastoralis*, Giovanni da Viterbo's *Liber de Regimine*, Book IX of Latini's *Tresor*, and Fra Paolino Minorita's *De Regimine Rectoris* all provided rhetorical exempla for different public occasions in which the Podestà would be called upon to hold forth within the setting of municipal government²⁴. The overt political and practical orientation of these works is in keeping with Latini's contention that rhetoric although subordinate to politics constituted its most valuable part.²⁵ Latini was here quoting Cicero's *De Inventione* which, although disowned by Cicero in his *De Oratore* as a crude work, enjoyed widespread diffusion throughout the medieval period. In it Cicero provided a fictive account of the origins of civil life in which eloquence was responsible for stimulating the natural inclination within man to form civil associations and, when combined with wisdom, provided the foundations upon which political life was founded and the common good and justice observed. In much the same way as the better known manuals teaching the *ars predicandi*, these tomes were practical in orientation, directed towards improved performance in the public sphere. It is this performative

element that has been neglected.²⁶

Pier Paolo Vergerio in his educational tract *De Ingenuis Moribus* of 1404, while noting the decay into which the art of rhetoric had fallen, argued for its reintroduction on the grounds that it secured consensus, 'By philosophy we learn the essential truth of things, which with eloquence we so exhibit in orderly adornment as to bring conviction to differing minds.'²⁷ Vergerio later adds that eloquence, 'takes the third place amongst the studies specially important in public life. It is now, indeed, fallen from its old renown and is well nigh a lost art. In the Law-Court, in the Council in the popular Assembly, in exposition, in persuasion, in debate, eloquence finds no place now-a-days: speed, brevity, homeliness are the only qualities desired. Oratory, in which our forefathers gained so great glory for themselves and for their language, is despised: but our youth, if they would earn the repute of true education, must emulate their ancestors in this accomplishment.'

The rediscovery of Cicero's Orations and Quintillian's works, and their widespread diffusion provide evidence of a heightened self-consciousness concerning rhetoric's affective powers and its usefulness when applied in public assemblies like the Florentine *Consulte e Pratiche* mentioned above.²⁸ The similarity between the advisory roles of the *Consulte e Pratiche* and the Roman Senate are marked, for both were subject to strong ties of family and personal friendships. That rhetoric could influence decisions despite these ties can be seen as symptomatic of the climate of consensus politics that emerged in Florence in the early part of the Quattrocento.²⁹

Rhetoric, and instruction in the art of rhetoric, were therefore keystones in this programme of producing civic ideology. The virtuous orator was idealised as the perfect citizen. Language itself, therefore, requires examination in this context, given that the political potency of the pen and the persuasive capacity of the orator, although perhaps exaggerated at the time, were considered effective and regularly deployed. But rhetoric also had its place within the halls of government.³⁰ Rhetorical performance has recently been the focus of attention in other contexts, for example, the studies on rhetoric in the papal curia and the rhetoric of consolation in funeral orations, but no systematic study exists for political rhetoric.³¹ Such an

examination, in turn, could be set within the wider context of civic ideology, both written and figurative. Rhetorical performances of both a secular and religious nature, when held in the public sphere, defined what was considered morally correct conduct in relation to one's fellow citizens and one's duty to God and the state. Language and morality were inextricably interlinked in this instance. Citizens had a moral obligation to master the art of rhetoric in order to defend the state against those whose eloquence was shorn of ethical considerations.³²

Rhetoric once again took its place in the educational programmes of Renaissance pedagogues. Whether these programmes produced virtuous and selfless citizen leaders or a pliant executive sub-class to service burgeoning nation-states stands at the centre of recent debates over Renaissance education generally.³³ What is quite clear and quantifiable, however, is the fact that as the century progressed and the *reggimento*, the ruling group, within Florence narrowed, the new form of *governo stretto* effectively denied a voice to a whole segment of society whose forebears had taken an active part in council meetings and policy formation. The number of people empowered by speech diminished under the Medici, while the role of officials like the Podestà, far from ensuring judicial impartiality, became solely ritualistic.³⁴ The ruling elite increasingly encroached upon the jurisdiction of the *ufficiali forestieri* via the establishment of new internally managed offices and the manipulation of existing structures. The *Otto di Guardia*, for example, became a permanent policing body identified with the interests of the ruling elite and gradually assumed many of the functions of the traditional *ufficiali*, leaving them to rubber stamp decisions made elsewhere.³⁵ Humanists within Florence were usually closely allied with the political elite and held leading administrative positions, resulting in a strengthening of the relationship between rhetoric, ideology and power within the emerging territorial state.³⁶

The message of the civic ideology they generated and propagated was necessarily conditioned by their projected audience. The audience, for its part, stood in a particular relation to the person or institution by which it was being addressed. In the case of the multitude in the piazza being ceremonially harangued by the incoming

Priors, the relationship is one of ruled to ruler. Whatever the roles and the voices assumed, each speaker as representative of the republic spoke with the degree of authority invested in him by that position combined with whatever associated status he might have brought from outside. The relative power of speaker to audience was defined by their positions within a tacitly accepted social scale of importance. Political rhetoric was premised upon a belief in the power of man's imitative disposition. Just as children learnt through imitation, so rhetoric and rhetorical composition, in presenting both positive and negative role models, encouraged morally correct behaviour as defined by the civic ideology. Such a strategy was a central concern of epideictic rhetoric, the language of praise and blame, which took for granted a polarised view of the world and the presentation of issues in an either/or of binary opposites. Given the choice of either exhortation or defamation, epideictic rhetoric sought emulation or aversion in its audience. Its concern was less with the search for truth than in effecting individual action.³⁷ In theory its purpose was moral and civic, in practice its use tied to interests.

Examples of Orations

One of the foremost occasions on which orations occurred regularly in a public arena was upon the entry of the new Priors into office. Every two months traders shut up shop and people gathered in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence. Subsequent to the entry of the Priors, Gonfaloniere di Giustizia and Podestà, the latter mounted the *ringhiera*, or balcony, of the Palazzo della Signoria and recited a brief oration reminding them of their duty and their role as representatives of the civic body. The notary of the *tratte* then called upon the new priors to swear upon the Bible, and the statutes of the *comune* before consigning the banner to the new gonfaloniere who then led the assembled company into the palace. As well as defining the form and timing of such orations, the 1415 statutes also stipulated that fifteen days after their entry into office, one of the new Priors was obliged to make a *protestatio de iustitia* on behalf of his fellow priors in which he promised to observe the statutes and administer his office justly. The Capitano or Podestà, or both, would then also

make an oration on the same theme by way of reply, promising impartiality and equality in their execution of the law.³⁸

The law, therefore, was seen as the instrument that maintained just civic association. As instruments of the law, so these proteste maintained, magistrates should subordinate their private concerns to the service of the public good. In this vein, Bernardo Canigiani, citing Justinian, stated that the difference between a good and a bad magistrate is the same as that between a shepherd and a wolf: for while the former directs all his actions to those over whom he cares the latter merely seeks his own welfare.³⁹ Similarly, Filippo Pandolfini in another proteste, quoting Plato's Republic, states that those who govern should comport themselves like good teachers, namely do everything for the benefit of those under their tuition.⁴⁰ It should be added that although later proteste are markedly Platonic in character they do not argue for the superiority of the contemplative life, rather they foster the image of the philosopher-king, an image commensurate with Medicean hegemony. The theme of putting aside one's own interest in the execution of one's office is a central theme of all these proteste. Palmieri summarises the sentiment succinctly,⁴¹

Seek to conserve together the whole body of the Republic and direct your every word and deed to the well-being of all, putting aside divisiveness and personal concerns.

In keeping with the statutory requirements that a range of classical religious and legal sources are used, definitions of justice were generally drawn from the fifth book of Aristotle's *Ethics*, Justinian's *Institutiones* or Ulpian's *Magna Moralia*, Cicero's *De Inventione* and, as they believed, Solomon's *Book of Wisdom*. All these references were then distilled into the maxim, 'iustitia essere abito d'animo disposto alla conservazione della utilità comune, la quale distribuisce a ciascuno il merito suo.'⁴²

Justice as a virtue was seen as being pre-eminent as it contained within it all the other virtues, the term 'just' being applied to anything that produced and preserved the happiness, or the component parts

of the happiness, of the political community. According to these orations, man was so constituted by nature that he shared a sense of justice and, through the gift of reason, the gift of law which as Cicero defined it, was 'right reason applied to command and prohibition'.⁴³ Written human laws, therefore, were a reflection of the natural law which was inherently just. Many of the later proteste, including a much cited one by Donato Acciaiuoli, cite the analogy made in Plato's Republic that as the soul inhabits our body so the soul of the republic is justice. For while the body lives for the soul, the republic lives for justice.⁴⁴

The orations of Stefano Porcari, who was Capitano del Popolo in Florence between 1427 and 1428, were the most popular of the genre, and it was Porcari's oratorical prowess and its affective success that was noted by contemporaries rather than his policing skills. Traversari remarked how he calmed the enraged spirits of the Bolognese with his speeches, while Bruni, then Chancellor of Florence, wrote in a letter of recommendation that Porcari was a, 'virum ornatissimum eloquentissimum ac dignissimum'. That these orations were all in the *volgare* was also noted, Platina calling him, 'quidem in dicendo materna lingua eloquentissimus' and Landino placing him with Boccaccio, Bruni and Palmieri as a champion of the Florentine tongue. By the time of Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*, noting Porcari's oratorical skills had become commonplace.⁴⁵

In the course of four orations in particular, he discusses what constitutes a Republican form of government and how it is to be conserved.⁴⁶ The political climate in Florence during these years was characterised by internal dissent and unrest as the Medici began to organise and build the substructure upon which their political hegemony was subsequently founded. Porcari's appointment and his orations can be placed in the context of what Brucker has termed, 'a veritable orgy of civic celebration' instituted to tackle the moral problem of civic strife.⁴⁷ These four particular orations he made as Capitano to the incoming Priors were not hidebound by legislative provisions and, from a humanistic point of view, are Porcari's most interesting. They almost constitute a rhetorical manifesto of civic republicanism. He was speaking to the Priors at the moment they made a symbolic transition from private individuals to public servants.

Standing at the intersection of the public and the private sphere he acted as mouthpiece and guardian of Republican civic ideology. In his third oration Porcari actually illustrates how the ritual setting conditioned his discourse by saying, 'questo luogo pubblico mi convita a parlare prima della Repubblica che della privata.'

It is in this third of these orations that he launches a particularly poignant attack on what today would be termed social patronage. He clearly recognises that there are other bonds within society in addition to obligations to country. Within the state exist ties of family, relations, friendships, profession, religion and shared interests. But if one gives precedence to these ties over and above bonds to country, only ruin will ensue. The body politic will cease to function in a coordinated and unified fashion and the very structure to which man owes his safety and bodily strength, and which enable him to enjoy his riches, will crumble,⁴⁸

E questo corpo civile, nel quale è infusa la Repubblica come forma ed anima movente, così come di molti uomini congregate, per similitudine è come un corpo umano, il quale tutt' i suoi studi, esercitazioni e fatiche dee prestare ed obbedire all'anima, dalla quale esso corpo riceve il suo vigore, movimento e vita.

This civil body composed of many men together, in which the Republic is infused as though it were a living soul, is like a human body, which in all its studies, exercises and exertions must obey the soul, from which it, the body, receives its vigour, movement and life.

Later in the same speech he adds,

Togliete gli esempi di molte provincie e regni non che città distrutte, quando le private utilità hanno sottratto l'aiuto alla Repubblica necessario quando i cittadini non hanno usato la verità nei consigli, la fede nell'esecuzione delle cose, e l'amore universale.

Take the example of many provinces and realms or of destroyed cities where private bodies have failed to

offer the necessary support to the Republic not having followed truthful advice, not having exercised faith and universal love in public matters.

There is little doubt that Porcari's appointment was based upon the perceived need to address publicly the question of internal division and sectional interests within Florence at that time. His role, therefore, was that of Cicero's ideal orator, a civilising man seeking to maintain a society of free men in peace and freedom through the gift of learning and eloquence. Porcari made extensive use of Cicero, Aristotle and Bruni's own works and translations. It is noticeable, however, that after the consolidation of Medicean hegemony, subsequent orations and protests became more Platonic in character. How political such alterations were, and the extent to which the increasing interest in Platonic ideas under Lorenzo had a political dimension in placing renewed stress on the contemplative rather than the active political life is a vexed question.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Despite assertions to the contrary, much writing on Renaissance political thought has, to date, concentrated on a restricted canon of mainstream and formal political texts. However, in considering texts such as the orations and any writings concerning how to behave as political (and by extension moral), the realm of what constitutes political thought widens considerably. Further, a contextual reading of any political statement can only really be effected if that political statement is placed within the culture which produced it, and more precisely if the specific nature, place and perspective assumed by the author in making that statement is clearly examined. Bearing in mind the expanded field of reference and showing a sensitivity to the located nature of articulation, the role texts like the orations performed in the political culture within which they were written can be analysed.

Viewing public utterance in such terms involves considering language as a social-historical phenomenon whose meaning lies embedded within the condition of its production and reception.

Understanding such language requires an examination of the ways in which meaning, or signification, serves to sustain power relations and how contested meanings battle for legitimacy within the public sphere.⁵⁰ It is in this context that the work of anthropologists is of interest, based as it is on the observation of how the use of language in everyday situations contains some indication concerning the social structure which it describes and reproduces, and how interlocutors are empowered by their social role and capabilities. The authority that these performative acts carry is given to them by factors outside the language itself, institutional factors which give them their potency. They do not create their own power, but derive it from those institutions they represent. The political field is probably the most contested of all, and the one in which political parties and interest groups form their visions of the world and present them to others for legitimisation which in turn leads to political control. Their energy, therefore, is directed towards producing representations of the world, representations they hope will be recognised by others and accepted, for it is upon this acceptance that their ultimate power lies.

If we combine these observations with civic republicanism's conflation of the public and the private realm, then political thought in the context of Quattrocento Florence includes any description, inscription or narrative concerning the organisation, the principles and the conventions governing the running of daily life. For all such statements are reactions to and engagements with the reality of social interaction. To interpret these texts/speeches/images requires that they are located: such political rhetoric was not solely a theoretical debate between humanists keen to demonstrate their erudition and knowledge of the ancients, but a constant process of self-description and justification. The generation of these readings, the representations produced of what society should look like was not itself an impartial exercise, just as encoding a city's past within a narrative history commissioned by the state was a political and value laden exercise. Given that such activities were responsible for how Florentines perceived themselves and were thus formative in constructing a collective identity, more attention should be paid to the nature, even governance, of such conceptualisations and the conditions under which they were contested.⁵¹

NOTES

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² N. Rubinstein, 'The Beginnings of Political Thought in Florence: A Study in Mediaeval Historiography', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, I (1942), 198-227 (pp. 218-24). Such sentiments lie at the core, for example, of the native Florentine Remigio de' Girolami's *De bono pacis*, ed. C.T. Davis, *Studi danteschi*, 36 (1959), 123-36.

³ For general introductions to these aspects of late Medieval and Renaissance political thought see J.P. Canning, 'Law, sovereignty and corporation theory, 1300-1450', in J.H. Burns ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought c.350-c.1450* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.454-76 and Q. Skinner, 'Political Philosophy', in C. Schmitt et al. eds., *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1988), pp.389-452. The section by R. Tuck, 'Humanism and Political Thought', in A. Goodman and A. MacKay, *The Impact of Humanism on Western Europe* (London, 1990), pp.43-65 is also informative in this regard.

⁴ R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1980), pp. 19-33. Trexler argues that the Florentine Republic was essentially an illegitimate form of government that radiated distrust.

⁵ Of the extensive literature on this theme see H. Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* (Princeton, 1966), pp.47-75, N. Rubinstein, 'Florentina Libertas', *Rinascimento*, 26 (1986), 3-26, R. Witt, 'The Rebirth of the Concept of Republican Liberty in Italy', in A. Molho and J.A. Tedeschi eds., *Renaissance Essays in Honour of Hans Baron* (Florence, 1977), pp. 175-199 and F. Gaeta, 'Sull' idea di Roma nell' Umanesimo nel Rinascimento', *Studi Romani*, 25 (1977), 169-86. Gaeta sees humanists' views of Rome in Florence at this time as ethical and political, focusing on the question of tyranny versus liberty as represented by Caesar and Scipio. This debate altered later to a discussion of the relative merits of monarchy and republicanism at the time of the Mediccan hegemony. See J.W. Oppel, 'Peace vs. Liberty in the Quattrocento: Poggio, Guarino and the Scipio Caesar Controversy', *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 4 (1974), 221-65.

⁶ L. Bruni, *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, text in H. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), pp.232-263. English trans in G. Griffiths, J. Hankins, D. Thompson eds., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (New York, 1987), p.118.

⁷ R.C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, pp.19-33 and Id., 'Honor among Thieves: The Trust Function of the Urban Clergy in the Florentine Republic', in S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus eds., *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore* (Florence, 1978), pp.317-334.

⁸ N. Rubinstein: Review article of Trexler's *Public Life*, in *Italian Studies*, 38 (1983), 87-92.

⁹ The bibliography on this subject is enormous. Major contributions include J. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics 1280-1400* (Chapel Hill N.C., 1982) and Id., 'Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence: The Successes and Ultimate Failure of Corporate Politics', *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), 53-71. M. Becker, *Florence in Transition II: Studies in the Rise of the Territorial State* (Baltimore 1968) and Id., 'The Florentine Territorial State and Civic Humanism in the Early Renaissance', in N. Rubinstein ed., *Florentine Studies* (London, 1968), pp. 109-140. In addition G. Chittolini, *La Formazione dello stato regionale e le istituzioni del contado: secoli XIV-XV* (Turin 1979), pp.292-352 and Id., 'La Crisi delle libertà comunali e le origini dello stato territoriale', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, 82 (1970), 99-120.

¹⁰ The recent concern to identify the extent and composition of the ruling elite within Florence during the fifteenth century enables a more precise identification of those in charge of the legislative and ritualistic machinery of state. See D. Kent, 'The Florentine Reggimento in the Fifteenth Century', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28 (1975), 575-638 and M. Fubini ed., *I ceti dirigenti nella Toscana del Quattrocento* (Florence, 1987), a collection of pieces concerning this issue.

¹¹ G. Brucker, *The Civic World of early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, 1977), pp.283-302.

¹² For example see Archivio di stato di Firenze, *Carte Stroziana*, I, 139, cc.128r-133r.

¹³ H. Baron, 'La Rinascita dell'etica statale Romana nell'umanesimo fiorentino del Quattrocento', *Civiltà Moderna*, 7 (1935), pp.15-23 and

J. Seigel, "'Civic Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni', *Past and Present*, 34 (1966), p.27.

¹⁴ On subject of specific virtues and vices see J.W. Opper, 'Poggio, San Bernardino of Siena, and the Dialogue "On Avarice"', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), 564-87.

¹⁵ G. Tognetti, 'Amare la patria più che l'animo: Contributo circa la Genesi di un Atteggiamento Religioso', *Studi sul medioevo cristiano*, 2 (1974), 101-26. The bond binding each individual to his country was described as a 'santo legame', whilst disinterested action was permeated by the 'fiamma di carità', a secularised version of Christian charity.

¹⁶ See E.H. Kantorowicz "'Pro Patria Mori" in Medieval Political Thought', *The American Historical Review*, 56 (1950), 472-492.

¹⁷ Much of this work has been carried out by historical anthropologists and social historians who have drawn their inspiration from the works of other anthropologists and sociologists, for example E. Gellner and J. Waterbury, *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London, 1977), J. Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions* (Oxford, 1974) and F.C. Jaher, *The Rich, the Well Born and the Powerful: Elites and Upper Classes in History* (Urbana, 1973). For the application of these methods to the Florentine case see G.F. Lytle and S. Orgel, *Patronage in the Renaissance* (Princeton, 1981), pp.3-23 and pp.47-64, F.W. Kent and P. Simmons eds., *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford, 1987). For a clear introduction to the dynamics and structure of patronal relations in Renaissance Florence see R. Weissman, *Ritual Brotherhood in Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1982), pp.1-41, and R. Trexler, *Public Life*, pp.1-44.

¹⁸ C. Klapisch-Zuber, 'Parenti, amici, vicini', *Quaderni storici*, 33 (1976), 953-82, provides a clear exposition of these contradictory expectations. See also R. Weissman, 'Taking Patronage Seriously', in F.W. Kent and P. Simmons, *Patronage, Art and Society*, pp.25-45.

¹⁹ See the excellent study of F.W. Kent, *Bartolomeo Cederni and his Friends. Letters to an Obscure Florentine* (Florence, 1993).

²⁰ A.P. McCormick, 'Freedom of Speech in Early Renaissance Florence: Salutati's "Questio est coram Decemviris"', *Rinascimento*, 19 (1979), 235-40.

²¹ See P.J. Jones, 'Florentine Families and Florentine Diaries in the Fourteenth Century', *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 24 (1956), 183-205. For examples of the genre see G. Brucker ed., *Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence* (New York, 1967), V. Branca ed., *Mercanti scrittori: ricordi nella Firenze tra medioevo e rinascimento* (Milan, 1986), and A. Perosa ed., *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo zibaldone* (London, 1960).

²² *Statuta Populi et Communis Florentiae publica auctoritate collecta castigata et praeposita, anno sal. MCCCCXV*, II (Friburg, 1777-81), p.501, '...volgare sermone cum autoritatibus divinae scripturae, vel legum, prout libuerit ad commendationem...offiti dominorum priorum et vexilliferi iustitiae et totius status popularis et guelfi.' These legislative provisions are outlined in G. Guidi, *Il governo della città-repubblica di Firenze del primo quattrocento II* (Florence, 1981), pp.153-94. E. Santini, 'La "Protestatio di Iustitia" nella Firenze medicea del secolo XV', *Rinascimento*, 10 (1959), 33-106 includes eleven copies of such protests. See also G. Belloni, 'Il "Protesto" di Matteo Palmieri', *Studi e Problemi di Critica Testuale*, 16 (1978), 28-48. A. Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala 1430-1497, Chancellor of Florence: The Humanist as Bureaucrat* (Princeton, 1979), pp.153-58.

²³ See James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley 1974), pp.89-132 and R. McKean, 'Rhetoric in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, 17 (1942), 1-32. See also R. Witt, 'Medieval "Ars Dictaminis" and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 35 (1982), 1-35. On the speeches and advice books to Podestà see E. Artifoni, 'I podestà professionali e la fondazione retorica della politica comunale', *Quaderni storici*, 63 (1986), 687-719.

²⁴ Andr Wilmart, 'L'Ars arengandi de Jacques de Dinant avec un appendice sur ses ouvrages "De dictamine"', in Id., *Analecta Reginensia, Studi e Testi LIX* (Vatican City, 1933), pp.113-51. For a collection of such pieces see F. Hertter, *Die Podestà literatur Italiens im 12. und 13. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig-Berlin, 1910). For critical discussion see Helene Wieruszowski, "'Ars Dictaminis" in the Time of Dante', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, I (1943), 95-108; Hanna H Gray, *Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence, Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24 (1963), 495-514; P.O. Kristeller, 'Rhetoric in Medieval and Renaissance Culture', in J.J. Murphy ed., *Renaissance Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Renaissance Rhetoric*

(Berkeley, 1983), pp. 10-11; A.Sorbelli, 'I teorici del reggimento comunale', *Bullettino dell' istituto storico italiano per il medioevo e archivio Muratoriano*, 59 (1944), 31-136 and A. Medin, 'Frammento di un antico manuale di dicerie', *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, 23 (1894), 163-177. For ancient Greek models see D.A. Russell and N.G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* (Oxford, 1981), pp.181-95.

²⁵ F.J. Carmody, *Li livres dou Tresor de Brunetto Latini* (Berkeley, 1948), p.317.

²⁶ See for other periods S. Farmer, 'Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives', *Speculum*, 61 (1986), 517-43, and M.F. Carter, 'The Ritual Functions of Epideictic Rhetoric: The Case of Socrates' Funeral Oration', *Rhetorica*, 9 (1991), 209-32.

²⁷ See W.H. Woodward ed., *Vittorino da Feltre and Other Humanist Educators*, 2nd.ed., (New York, 1970), pp.106-7.

²⁸ Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1988), pp.254-93. M.Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators. Humanist Observers of Painting in Italy and the Discovery of Pictorial Composition, 1350-1450* (Oxford, 1971), p.4. and Gene Brucker, *The Civic World*, pp.284-93.

²⁹ See G.Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World (300 B.C.-A.D.300)* (Princeton, 1972), pp.20-1.

³⁰ G. Brucker, *The Civic World*, pp.284-293 and B. Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, pp.254-93.

³¹ J. O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome: Rhetoric, Doctrine and Reform in the Sacred Orations of the Papal Court c.1450-1521* (Durham N.C., 1979), and G.W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton, 1991).

³² Cicero, *De inventione*, I.II. 2-4, trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge Mass., 1976), pp.4-11, and C.J. Nederman, 'Nature, Sin and the Origins of Society: The Ciceronian Tradition in Medieval Political Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 49 (1988), pp.3-26.

³³ For an evaluation of the recent debate on the issue see R. Black, 'Italian Renaissance Education: Changing Perspectives and Continuing Controversies', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52 (1991), 315-37.

³⁴ For the reduction in the administrative authority of such externally appointed judicial officials see A. Zorzi, 'Aspetti e problemi dell'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella repubblica fiorentine: I. La transizione dal XIV-XV secolo', *Archivio storico italiano*, 145 (1987), 424-53.

³⁵ G. Antonelli, 'La magistratura degli Otto di Guardia', *ASI*, 112 (1954), 15-24, A. Zorzi, 'Aspetti e problemi dell'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella Repubblica fiorentina: I. La transizione dal XIV-XV secolo', *ASI*, 145 (1987), 424-53, M. Becker, 'Changing patterns of Violence and Justice in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Florence', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (1976), 281-296. The Giudice degli Appelli was abolished in 1412, and his job handed over to the Capitano who himself had come increasingly under the sway of the elite, being extensively used in the later years of the fourteenth century when granted special powers as Capitano di Guardia e del Popolo, a practice revived by the Medici in years of crisis. On a more practical level both the work load and the famiglia of the Capitano were consistently pared down over the course of the century until abolition in 1477. By 1477 it had shrunk to one judge, two cavalieri, two notaries, six donizelli, and four horses worth 4,500 libras. Cuts took place in 1425, 1448, 1473 and 1474.

³⁶ E. Garin, 'I cancellieri umanisti della repubblica fiorentina da Coluccio Salutati a Bartolomeo Scala', in his *La Cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano* (Florence, 1961), pp.3-37. See also Antony Grafton, 'Humanism and Political Theory', in J.H. Burns and M. Goldie eds., *The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700* (Cambridge, 1991), pp.9-29. That this was similarly the case outside Florence, see for example G. Ianziti, 'Storiografia come propaganda: il caso dei "Commentari rinascimentali"', *Società e storia*, 22 (1983), 914 ff.

³⁷ In his *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia* of 1368, Petrarch stressed the voluntaristic aspect of rhetoric above the more scholastic concern for knowledge: "The subject of the will is to be good, that of the intellect is truth. It is better to will the good than to know the truth." Translated in E. Cassirer et al eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago, 1948), pp.47-133. On the role of epideictic see the classic study of O.B. Hardison, Jr., *The Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice* (Chapel Hill N.C., 1962), pp.25-42.

³⁸ Emilio Santini, *Firenze e i suoi 'oratori' nel Quattrocento* (Milan, 1922), pp.92-101.

³⁹ E. Santini, 'La "Protestatio"', p.64 '...Ma chi con brevità lo vuole intendere attenda la sententia d'Anaxagora, il quale, domandato che differentia fussi tra'l vero el falso magistrato, rispuose quella che è tra el pastore [e] il lupo, perch, l'uno ogni cosa fa pel comodo di quelli e quali regge, l'altro niente se non è el proprio utile.'

⁴⁰ E. Santini, 'La "Protestatio"', p.74, '...coloro che sono preposti al governo delle repubbliche debbono fare chome e buoni tutori, cioè fare ongni cosa a utile et comodo et riposo di colloro che da lloro [h]anno a essere governati senza avere alcuno rispetto alla propria utilità'..

⁴¹ G. Belloni, 'Il "Protesto"', p.48, 'Tutto il corpo della republica v'ingegniate insieme conservare et ogni vostro detto e fatto alla universale salute di tutti si dirizzi, dimenticando la spezialità e proprio commodo.'

⁴² G. Belloni, 'Il "Protesto" di Matteo Palmieri', p.48.

⁴³ Cicero *De Legibus*, I.XII.33 trans. C. Walker Keyes, (Cambridge Mass., 1988), p.332 '...lex, quae est recta ratio in iubendo et vetando.'

⁴⁴ E. Santini, 'La "Protestio"', p.51. Donato Acciaiuoli: 'chome nel cor,io nostro è l'anima, cosi l'anima dela città è la iustitia: vive el corpo per l'animo, vive la rep[ublica] per la iustitia'.

⁴⁵ A. Traversari, *Hodoeporicon*, in A. Dini-Traversari, *Ambrogio Traversari e suoi tempi* (Florence, 1912), Appendix p.80, '...oratione suavi animos concitatos mulcens.' For Bruni's letter see Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Panciatichi 148, and for Platina's comments, *Platynae historici Liber de Vita Christi ac Omnium Pontificum*, ed. G. Gaida, *RIS*, III I (Città di Castello, 1930-32), p.336 and for Landino see R. Cardini ed., *C. Landino: Scritti critici e teorici*, II (Rome, 1974), p.44. N. Machiavelli, *Istorie Fiorentine*, ed. F. Gaeta (Milan 1962), pp.433-435, '...parendogli, per eloquenzia, per dottrina, per grazia, e per amici, essere superiore ad ogni altro romano.'

⁴⁶ Sixteen of Porcari's Orations were published in the nineteenth century, but wrongly attributed to Buonaccorso da Montemagno. See G.B.C. Giuliani, *Prose del Giovane Buonaccorso da Montemagno*

inedite alcune, (Bologna, 1874). For the four in question see pp.1-60. Orations to the incoming Priors are orations I, II, III and IV, pp.1-60. 'The proteste are orations VII pp.69-74, X pp.81-84, XIII pp.91-94, XIV pp.95-101, XV pp. 102-05, and XVI pp.106-11. See also M. Miglio, "'Viva la libertà et populo de Roma". Oratoria e politica: Stefano Porcari', in *Palaeographica diplomatica et archivistica: studi in onore di Giulio Battelli* (Rome, 1979), pp.381-428. Porcari was a professional Podestà and orator, who worked not only in Florence, but also Siena, Bologna, Orvieto, prior to his execution in 1452 for seeking to establish a republican government in his native Rome and kill Pope Nicholas V. See L.B. Alberti, *De Porcaria conjuratione*, ed. L. Mehus, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 25 (Milan, 1751).

⁴⁷ G. Brucker, *The Civic World*, p.481.

⁴⁸ G.B.C. Giuliani, *Prose*, pp.31-4.

⁴⁹ For the increasing Platonic element in these protests under the Medici see A. Brown, 'Platonism in 15th Century Florence and its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought', *Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986), 383-413.

⁵⁰ See P. Bourdieu, 'The Social Conditions for the Effectiveness of Ritual Discourse' and 'Political Representation: Elements for a Theory of the Political Field', in *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. J.B. Thompson, trans G. Raymond and M. Adamson (Cambridge, 1991), pp.107-116 and 171-202, where he discusses how the authority of ritual linguistic performance is derived from factors outside the language itself, namely from the institutions the speakers represent. Anthropologists have long taken an interest in this field, for example, M. Bloch ed., *Political Language and Oratory in Traditional Society* (New York, 1975), pp.1-28, P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans R. Nice, (Cambridge, 1977), C. Bell, *Ritual Theory Ritual Practice* (Oxford, 1992), and J.B. Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁵¹ That the effective communication of political visions to the public is still a priority is witnessed by a Labour party pamphlet by P.Coyle and N. Kinnock, *How to Speak in Public* (London, 1980), p.4, which states, 'If we are to "educate, agitate and organise" for the victory of democracy and socialism we must do it with conviction with clarity and with confidence. This booklet provides essential weapons for the fight.' A modern day rhetorical *zibaldone*.