

## Anton Maria de' Conti

Anton Maria de' Conti (1514–1555), later known by his professional name of Marcantonio Maioraggio, was born in Milan. After having begun his education in Como in 1532, he returned to Milan where he studied mathematics and logic between 1534 or 1535 and 1540. He taught rhetoric in his native city for a while before going to Ferrara in 1543 in order to study law and philosophy, although he then returned to Milan in 1545, where he helped found the *Accademia dei Trasformati* and where he occupied the chair of rhetoric until his death. His publications were primarily legal and literary, including several interventions in the debate over Ciceronianism, a translation and commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, and several commentaries on rhetorical works by Cicero. The *De eloquentia dialogus* (*A Dialogue on Eloquence*) translated here was published posthumously in 1582 and is the counterpart to Conti's *De arte poetica* (*Art of Poetry*); both are apologies for the arts they discuss. Its interlocutors include two of Conti's relatives, Primo de' Conti and his brother Antonio de' Conti, as well as the unidentified Angelo Appiano. Primo de' Conti was a scholarly man who edited and published Anton Maria de' Conti's translation and commentary on Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in 1571. For the *Dialogus*, I have used the text in *Trattati di poetica e retorica del Cinquecento*, edited by Bernard Weinberg (Bari: Laterza, 1970), 3: 101–34.

### FROM A Dialogue on Eloquence

It is often the case that our listless spirits can be revived by contemplating the variety of nature: the heavenly sphere inlaid with widely scattered stars that are like a kind of mosaic; the earthly sphere crowded with diverse animals and plants; the charm of growing meadows; the variegated colors of the flowers; and the great richness of the farms. Thus, when men who have been educated in the liberal arts assiduously cogitate about the vicissitudes of the material world and of history, they are easily led to experience the

greatest wonder, with the result that the thought frequently occurs to them to seek out the causes of things, or at least, on the basis of what has been placed before their eyes, to hypothesize about celestial causes that they can in no way perceive while they are still alive.

We had retired into the garden of Saint Ambrose in which they say that famous African, Augustine, the light and ornament of Christendom, once bowed his spirit to belief in Christ and in that place, having been sprinkled with holy water, washed away the filth of original sin and his wicked mind.<sup>1</sup> Present there together with me at that time was Angelo Appiano, the head of the monastery, a man of the sweetest temperament, whose equal you will not easily find because of his exceptional moral integrity, the holiness of his life, and his enormous erudition in all the liberal arts. Also present was my most learned teacher Primo de' Conti, whose praiseworthy qualities I do not have the ability to unfold, although I hope that sometime a more suitable place will be found to speak of them. For who could describe in a brief oration how, in the classic authors who wrote in the three languages, there is almost nothing to be found that he has not diligently investigated, nothing in the liberal arts that he has not taught in the best way, nothing worthy of being remembered that he has not learned perfectly by heart?<sup>2</sup> I pass over in silence his most holy behavior, the strictness of his life, his continual thinking and talking of divine matters.

When we had seated ourselves beneath a certain leafy tree and were just planning to discuss our common studies, before anyone could begin, Primo's brother Antonio appeared. He was a young man filled with an intense thirst for learning and most knowledgeable about all the more refined kinds of writing. He was tied to me by a bond tighter than that which linked Pylades and Orestes, inasmuch as we were occupied by similar studies, had lived together practically since the time we started them, and served under the same master, Primo. If the same mother had given birth to us at the same time, we could not have been joined together by greater goodwill. When I saw him, I was marvelously cheered, for I had not seen him for almost twenty days, which had seemed to me longer than twenty years.

*(Angelo opens the dialogue by asking the young Antonio to share his knowledge with them, but Antonio politely refuses and asks Primo to speak instead. The latter compares the garden they are in to paradise, declares that meditation on it should lead one to consider the joys of heaven and to practice virtue, and laments how much time men waste on base pursuits instead. Angelo praises Primo's speech and then switches the subject to eloquence.)*

1. The Church of Saint Ambrose (Sant' Ambrogio) is one of the principal churches of Milan and contains the body of the saint for whom it is named. A Benedictine monastery was founded there in 784, though it was taken over by Cistercians in 1497. Both before and after his conversion, Augustine was taught by Ambrose; in his *Confessions*, IX.6, he recounts his baptism, which took place in this church in 387.

2. The "three languages" are Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.

"But I was really hoping that you would also say something about the study of the liberal arts and especially about eloquence. For I see these adolescents really laboring with all their strength in order to achieve just a little of it, a labor that seems to me to be unnecessary. Why it appears thus I will say later, after I have heard your opinion on the subject. Therefore, although you might talk about many other matters, you should unfold this one, so that these adolescents know what it seems they should be doing."

Then Primo said, smiling: "I know what you are up to, Angelo. You want to force me to say something about eloquence so that, using eloquence itself, which you say you do not approve of, you can reject all the reasons and arguments I use to defend it. For I have never known anyone more ardent than you in speaking or sharper in making refutations. Nevertheless, since you seem to want it, I will tell you my opinion. If you say something to the contrary, eloquence will still display itself in all its glory, for you cannot reject eloquence in any way without using it. You, however"—he indicated me and Antonio—"continue to go forward just as you have begun, applying all your energies to the study of eloquence, for of all things (excepting always divine matters) it is incontrovertibly the most excellent, and do not let Angelo throw you off balance and turn things upside down if he says anything to the contrary. Nay, rather, press forward. Of all things, only that one should be judged truly excellent and outstanding that is able to adorn and refine our better part, our mind, is capable of making men marvel, and offers the greatest utility to a great many people. For these reasons we esteem learning and the liberal arts and, finally, all the virtues, because by their means the human mind is perfected. Are gems, pearls, chrysolites, diamonds, and all the rest considered precious for any other reason than that men are accustomed to marvel at them? Indeed, silver and gold are esteemed so highly for the very reason that, thanks to the conventional arrangements and practices of men, they seem most suited to buying and selling. But no greater ornament of the mind can be found than refined and prudent speech, nothing capable of exciting greater wonder, nothing, finally, more useful for humankind.

"For what can be more beautiful than an individual who surpasses others in this one single thing by means of which men excel all the other animals?<sup>3</sup> What more honorable and becoming than to be able to govern your speech in such a way that you should seem to say nothing that is not elegant, prudent, and polished, nothing base and vulgar, but rather everything noble and splendid? What more marvelous than to be able to direct the minds of your auditors by means of speech in whatever direction you might wish? Although almost everyone knows how to speak, you alone would speak in

3. Cf. Cicero, *De inventione*, Liv.5. The rest of this paragraph elaborates Cicero, *De oratore*, Liviii.32, and Tacitus, *Dialogus*, v.4–6.

such a way that the others would seem to know nothing at all. You would keep the minds of your auditors hanging and amaze them, so that you would force them, even unwilling, to cast their votes in favor of your opinions. Well, then, what is more useful than eloquence? What more liberal? By its means legal defense is offered to the accused, those who are afflicted are raised up, safety is given to the wretched, defendants are freed from dangers, cities are governed in the best manner, sedition and discord in the populace are calmed, and people are led to worship in holy religion. Now, if something is a real ornament of the mind, fills all men with wonder, and produces the greatest benefits, then that thing will be the most excellent of all. And since we have demonstrated that eloquence is no mediocre ornament of the mind, is particularly wonder-producing, and is most useful, no one can doubt that it is the most excellent of all things." When he had said these things, he stopped.

Angelo, however, said, "You have certainly handled me cleverly, seeking to alienate our listeners so that they will have no confidence in my words even before they have heard anything from me! Although I only asked for your opinion about eloquence, you yourself have so dazzled our eyes, despite their keen sight, with your arguments, or rather with certain juggling tricks, that you seem to have changed base lead into pure and, as they say, unalloyed gold. But I will get even with you, not indeed that I should wish to hide what is true, which is what you seem to me to have done, but more so that, once your tricks have been exposed, the truth will shine out on its own accord. But now we will clash in open war: although I could finish you off right away by cutting your throat—and even a dull sword, as they say, would suffice to do it—first let me unfold my position. If it were the case that great skill in speaking, obtained through study, could help a Christian to live well and blessedly, I would never really undertake to show how greatly I disapprove of it. For what can be thought or said with greater impudence than to condemn that which is not merely suited to our religious faith, but also most useful to it? But when I see that from the study of eloquence there derives not only no utility for Christians, but the greatest harm, why should I agree that so much labor ought to be devoted to it? Or rather, why should I not greatly disapprove of doing so? For what can one do that would be more pernicious than, having forsaken more serious studies, to use up good hours in learning by heart an empty hodgepodge of words? Especially since Christ himself, the founder of our religion, wanted us to be forbidden under his laws to speak much, for the reason that it is always possible for some sort of crime to occur when there is a lot of talk.<sup>4</sup> Not only are we not striving to the best of our ability to cut back in some

4. Angelo is most likely alluding to Matthew 6:5–7, a passage in which Christ tells his followers how not to pray and which precedes the one in which he teaches them the Lord's prayer.

way this vice of superfluous speech, which has come to possess almost all mortals, but—good lord!—we are actually sustaining our talkativeness by means of our studies.

“As for the fact that you say eloquence is marvelous because it fills your auditors with amazement, the same thing can be said about a rope-dancer, a juggler, or even a mountebank, and yet, such kinds of men are not said to be truly excellent for that reason. But when you claim that defendants are freed, cities governed, and people led to religion by means of eloquence, you seem to me to have argued more speciously than the facts warrant. For, first of all, who would concede to you that eloquence is useful on the grounds that it frees defendants from dangers? If they are bad, does it seem useful to you to free them? And if they are good, shouldn't they be freed because they are protected by their innocence rather than by someone's eloquence? Who freed that Hebrew woman Susanna from a false accusation? Was it not her silence (if we believe Ambrose)?<sup>5</sup> If, to defend herself, she had sought to employ an orator, she would not have seemed innocent at all, though she was. Should I bring up Socrates, the wisest of men in Apollo's judgment? To him, when he was in prison, the most eloquent orator Lysias is said to have brought an oration by means of which it seemed that the unfairly accused Socrates could be rescued, but that incredibly wise man preferred to be condemned unjustly than to be freed by the help of eloquence.<sup>6</sup> If eloquence defends the innocent and the guilty, although the former are not afraid because they are conscious of having done nothing wrong, while the latter seek legal protection, urged to it by their consciousness of their wicked deeds, then not only is eloquence not useful, but it is even pernicious since it defends those who ought to be suppressed.

“Moreover, as for the fact that you say cities are governed by eloquence, in my opinion you seem to have said that more for the sake of debate than because you think it to be the case. For I don't think you are ignorant of the fact that cities are ruled by the best laws and by the prudence of men, not by eloquence, which has been found to harm cities much more frequently than to benefit them. Who is ignorant of the great tumults in the Roman republic that the eloquence of the two Gracchi stirred up? of how many were caused by that of Saturninus? and of how many by that of Pisistratus in Athens?

“Your claim that people are drawn to religion through eloquence is by no means to be endured. For just what is that eloquence that you are praising? Is it really the one we find in Sacred Scripture? Who does not know that eloquence has been expelled as useless from it? Or are you talking about that

5. According to the thirteenth chapter of Daniel (a chapter considered apocryphal by Protestants), the beautiful and devout Susanna was spied on in her bath by two Jewish elders, then accused of adultery by them and condemned to death. She was saved by the intervention of Daniel who cross-examined and convicted the two men. Ambrose praises Susanna for remaining silent and depending on her modesty to protect her in his *Exhortatio virginitatis*, xiii.87.

6. This anecdote appears in Diogenes Laertius, *Socrates*, in *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, II.40–41.

eloquence by which Paul boasted he had converted the Corinthians when he says: ‘And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, [but] declaring unto you the testimony of God.’ And a little later: ‘And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.’<sup>7</sup> Does it seem to you that Paul is praising eloquence here, and not rather rejecting it? Then, it is not eloquence that draws men to religion, but the manifestation of the Spirit and the proclaiming of the Gospel.

“As for the fact that you say that eloquence is the greatest, most praiseworthy ornament of our minds, I will be absolutely consistent and flatly deny it. I will never say that there is any ornament of the human mind except virtue and an honest life, or that one should aim at anything beyond religion and knowledge of the One God through Sacred Scripture, which contains no eloquence. For what is to be aimed at except that which is useful? And indeed, what is useful to a Christian that is not likewise honorable? And yet no one will judge something honorable if it can be the common property of even the most wicked person—and eloquence is such that even the worst man can possess it. Therefore, eloquence is not honorable, and if not honorable, then not useful, and if truly not useful, then it seems that it should not only not be pursued, but actually avoided. Moreover, because it is to be avoided, it is necessarily pernicious. Therefore, not only should a Christian not conclude that eloquence is a really excellent thing—a conclusion you reached with anything but the best arguments—but actually that it is most pernicious.”

After he had said these things, we waited in silence to see what Primo was going to say in opposition. The latter finally remarked: “Angelo, if I thought that your real views resembled your words, I would urge you with the greatest diligence to abandon such perverse opinions. Or, if you would not listen, I would brand you with the mark of ingratitude, you who, although owing so much to eloquence that no one, or perhaps very few, can match you at this time, nevertheless dare to attack it with its very own weapons. But since I know that you have said these things not from your heart, but for the sake of arguing and only in a superficial manner, I will say nothing about you or your ingratitude. I will simply strive, with my shield held on high, to protect and defend eloquence itself, so that you will seem to have been beating the air with your arguments. First, therefore, I will try to refute your statements, and then I will strive to assemble and unfold all those arguments useful for confirming my case.

“And so, let me begin right here and ask: what is more defective than that logical conclusion you maintained in your peroration as though it were

7. 1 Corinthians 2:1, 4–5. I have cited the King James Version, but have added the “but” needed to make better sense in the first verse cited.

absolutely valid? Indeed, on first hearing it, I was not a little confused; it seemed to me I was listening to one of those inexplicable sophistic arguments or logical conundrums of Chrysippus. However, after I had considered it more carefully, nothing seemed more inane to me. I believe you reasoned in this manner: nothing is useful that is not at the same time also honorable, and nothing is honorable that can be the common property of a wicked person. I might easily grant you these propositions, although that first one is not probable in many instances, but let's see what is connected to them: eloquence is such that even the worst man can possess it. What are you saying, Angelo? You should see that it is not sufficient for a dialectician either to be ignorant of definitions or to fail to consider those that are commonly known. The worst man can possess eloquence? Don't you see that this is as if you were saying, 'The most foolish man can be the wisest'? For what is eloquence other than wisdom speaking copiously? What is the orator other than a good man skilled in speaking?<sup>8</sup> Can a wicked man be either wise or good? Who in his right mind would dare to say this? And yet you, either in ignorance or perhaps actually knowing what you were doing, reached this conclusion. For whoever is eloquent must necessarily also be a wise and good man if in fact eloquence is defined as wisdom and the orator as a good man. On the contrary, if a wicked man is eloquent, will he likewise be wise and good? Who does not know that this can never be the case? Therefore, eloquence can never have any connection to an evil man. With this notion taken away, do you see how quickly you have been cut down in your argument? But it seems that these things need to be shown more clearly.

"What you think eloquence to be is of great importance, Angelo, for if you think it is only an empty hodgepodge of words, as you said, then you are right in condemning it, although you clearly err greatly in your definition. If, on the contrary, you really believe, as I think you do, that eloquence is something greater than a farrago of words, and that no man can be eloquent at all without knowing many things, both divine and human, how can I describe your actions when you blame such a praiseworthy thing—except to say you are acting very badly indeed? Insofar as you say it is not fitting to forsake weightier studies [in order to pursue eloquence], just what are those weightier studies, or what is it that we take pains with in our studies other than to increase our eloquence and, having assembled a multitude of arguments, to be able to help both ourselves and as many others as possible to live well and happily? Is there anyone who learns something who does not desire, once he has mastered it, to spread it abroad as much as possible? After all, nature has instilled in everyone the desire to know and to teach others what they know, and when they do so, who is he who does not

8. Conti's definition of the orator as a "good man skilled in speaking" repeats the classic phrase from Cato, which Quintilian quotes in the *Institutio oratoria*, XII.1.1.

desire to speak as well as possible? Thus, all our studies and all our zeal are directed to the end of becoming eloquent, for learning that is hidden away is worth little or nothing. In short, there can be no study that is weightier than the study of eloquence.

"But Christ, you say, has ordered us to speak little. For what reason, I ask you, do you assume that this was said against eloquence? Beware lest you also provoke the theologians by badly distorting the Gospel when you just want to make eloquent men into your enemies. You will not be equal to that battle, although you are very capable of dealing with the subject of theology, for if the Scotists once come down on you, you would not be able to extricate yourself very easily from their dark snares, nor will that really marvelous learning of yours be of any use to you against the clamoring of the Thomists and the Occamists.<sup>9</sup> But let me return to the point from which I digressed. In the passage alluded to earlier, Christ is blaming the long prayers of the heathen by means of which they trust they will be able to obtain what they desire from God. You, however, are quite the original interpreter and twist Christ's words against eloquence. For if it is bad to speak, why are we not perpetually silent? But if it is good, why shouldn't we strive to speak as well as we can whenever we do speak? For thus we would eliminate the vice of talkativeness, which you rightly say has come to possess almost all mortals, and we would say only those things that are worthy, utilizing speech that is most polished and at the same time most useful.

"And how wittily you joked about the rope-dancer and the juggler, as if a rope-dancer had anything to do with oratory or as if this comparison were not, as they say, 180 degrees off the mark! It seemed to me that, since you had nothing that you could say against eloquence, you invented such an absurd comparison just out of a desire to contradict. For what similarity does a tightrope walker have to eloquence? Although he performs certain quite ridiculous things that may seem marvelous, still he is not useful to himself or others, he is despised by all, and he is watched merely for the sake of amusement. By contrast, eloquence seizes and transforms the minds of men, forcing even the unwilling toward the most useful ends, and for this reason it seems absolutely divine. Indeed, it is inevitable that when someone has once heard an eloquent man, he will admire him greatly and revere a certain something in him that transcends the human. What sedition arising among the most ferocious people could be so great that an eloquent man, should he come upon it, could not calm it on the spot and bring enemies together in peace? And what is more savage than the sedition of the common people? Menenius Agrippa won over the plebeians, who were angry at the patricians, merely by means of a fable eloquently recited and wisely interpreted: how much more easily would he have accomplished that feat, if he

9. Conti here manifests a typical Renaissance disdain for the forms of argumentation and the Latin style of the followers of the Scholastic philosophers Duns Scotus, Thomas Aquinas, and William of Occam.

had reached down to the very fountainhead of eloquence?<sup>10</sup> What about the time when all of Greece rushed together for the debate between Demosthenes and Aeschines?<sup>11</sup> Do you think that those Greeks who came there did so for the sake of seeing jugglers? Or when certain people used to come from the farthest reaches of the world to hear Livy of Padua, don't they seem to you to have been admiring his eloquence, not treating it as an empty matter, which is what you call it, but as something really marvelous and almost divine?<sup>12</sup>

"But these things that you said on your own authority are easily refuted because they are slight, whereas what you quoted from Paul seems to create more of a difficulty for my argument. We will see about Susanna and Socrates afterward. Nevertheless, even that which Paul says is very easy to refute, since he does not attack eloquence, but seems merely to prefer instead the manifestation of the Spirit and power of God. For at the beginning when the Church was first being born, I confess that miracles were more necessary, since men could not be compelled to change their worship of the gods and the deeply rooted religion of their ancestors by means of eloquent persuasion alone, unless miracles were also present that proclaimed that what was happening was necessarily divine, not human. But after they had been converted to Christ, then eloquence alone was sufficient on a daily basis to strengthen the spirits of the weak and the infirm, to rouse the idle, to correct those who erred, and to inflame the fervent to even greater displays of zeal.

"Moreover, we also see that Paul wrote with great art, for although you pretend that he condemns eloquence, he is in fact most eloquent himself. To this fact, leaving aside what Paul's epistles reveal, Augustine bears witness, as he strives to display the embellishments of subject matter and style and the power of eloquence in Paul's writings.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, those words of Paul, which you cited just now, are not to be interpreted in the way you think and should not lead us to believe that he condemns the eloquence with which he was overwhelmingly endowed. But when he writes to the Corinthians, many of whom were being seduced by false prophets, he skillfully leads them to recall the manifestation and miracles of the Spirit to make them remember that they accepted the faith of Christ not so much through Paul's

10. Menenius Agrippa's fable, known as the fable of the belly, is a political allegory of the body in which the supremacy of the patricians in the state and their receipt of food during a time of scarcity are justified by their identification with the belly, which does not just receive the food, but distributes it to the other members, including the plebeians. Livy recounts the story and explains how it did indeed pacify the Roman plebeians; see his *Ab urbe condita*, II. xxxii.8–12.

11. The debate between Aeschines and Demosthenes is probably the one that took place in 330 B.C. over the proposal to award a crown to Demosthenes in recognition of his services to Athens.

12. Livy's fame for eloquence was so great that a man from Gades in Spain supposedly traveled to Rome just to hear him speak.

13. See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, IV.vii.11–14.

words as through the power and miracles of the Gospel. Nor has eloquence really been expelled from Sacred Scripture, as you say. Nay rather, it is more credible to believe that it had its beginning there and then gradually increased because of the studies of the wisest men. For it cannot be the case that such a divine thing took its origin from any other place than Sacred Scripture, especially since we see many speeches in the Holy Bible that we surely know are most eloquent in the Hebrew language and that even in translation display a kind of image of elegance. One has to believe that those whom we call prophets, whose eloquence I admire in greater measure when I read their writings in Hebrew, were nothing other than the most fluent orators whom God elected out of the multitude to be the ones who would lead the people to religion.

"When one of them, Daniel, saw that the innocent Susanna was being led to punishment, he freed her by means of his eloquence, and although, as you say, Ambrose thought it right that she proved her own innocence by her silence, nevertheless, if she had not been aided by Daniel's speech, which God admonished him to make, there would have been no impediment to have prevented her from undergoing the most unworthy punishment. Moreover, you say Socrates preferred to perish rather than to be saved by the speech of Lysias. Let me grant that, to be sure. Did Socrates thereby condemn eloquence? He said that that oration seemed to him unworthy of the man because it was perhaps insufficiently eloquent. He did not make a judgment about the whole of eloquence—unless perhaps you believe that one who scorns the gold that covers copper also rejects gold that is pure and refined. But what Socrates thought about eloquence his disciple Plato intimates when he brings him on everywhere discoursing most eloquently. Thus, you see that you have adduced these examples in vain.

"Moreover, there's no point in speaking about the Gracchi, Saturninus, and Pisistratus, since these were seditious citizens, whereas we declare that no one is eloquent unless he is a good man. Even though those men had a certain amount of eloquence, nevertheless such a great virtue does not seem worthy of condemnation for that reason, nor should the vices of wicked men be entirely transferred to it, for not it, but their evil deeds fall into the category of vice.

"As for the fact that you say it seems to you that cities are governed by laws and prudence, not by eloquence, I would say, by your leave, that you yourself separate eloquence from these things in a manner that is not sufficiently prudent and lawful, for you are not ignorant of the fact that laws and prudence can in no way exist without eloquence. After all, who do you think first found out the laws—let us trace things back to their roots here—by means of which cities are ruled, or who persuaded the people that they should not refuse to obey the laws? Does it seem to you that it was someone totally incapable of speech and entirely unequipped with eloquence? Does it make sense that they would have obeyed a person who, because of his

inability to speak, could not supply an explanation as to why the laws might seem good? Or did an uncivilized people, most desirous of living freely, place the laws like a yoke on its own neck? It really seems to me more likely that it was a most eloquent man who explained why it was best to live in one city together and to use laws as the best means to do so, thus softening the spirits of the people with most eloquent speech and transforming them so that he forced them to obey his will.<sup>14</sup>

"And yet, after they came together in a single town, they surely began to be ruled no less by eloquence than by the laws they had accepted. For when they listened to the most prudent men discoursing on equity and justice, they were seduced by eloquence and judged that they ought to obey those things that seemed best to them. And so, I think that if we had not had eloquence first, we would not have had laws at all. Nor is eloquence, like a limb from its body, to be separated from prudence, for that is said to be the part of eloquence to which all liberal studies are devoted. And if it is the role of a prudent man to embrace liberal studies, why would it not seem to you the role of a prudent man to master eloquence, which is, as it were, the light and adornment of all studies? How much more easily and advantageously might the rulers of cities impel their people to embrace justice and avoid wickedness if they also joined great eloquence to prudence!

"What is to be said about the publishing of Christ's message, for which I think eloquence is as necessary as knowledge of Sacred Scripture? And why? Don't we frequently see that the most learned men on the theological faculty preach so insipidly, because they are destitute of eloquence, that they do not move their listeners at all, although they pour out a great many words. Instead, shouting at the top of their lungs, they waste almost the entire time they are speaking on empty, trifling questions, which should really have been buried under a great silence. For, of what use to the people are those things that Scotus and fellows of his ilk have dreamed up, by means of which people are not in the least inspired to religion, but when they have listened to them, are made much more reluctant to embrace divine matters? How much better would it be for men to apply themselves with all their energy to eloquence, after having studied Sacred Scripture, and, having rejected the sophisms of the dialecticians in which they will drown as if they had just crashed on the rocks of the Sirens, to obtain through study such great eloquence that they can transform, propel, drag, and force the minds of their auditors to pursue what is honest? They will be able to pursue, condemn, defeat, and exterminate the worst vices there are, place future punishments before the eyes of the wicked, scare the life out of people with threats, reveal to them the region of the damned, and bring to light the torments, tortures, and punishments of the wicked. But virtue, since it is most

14. In this paragraph and the one that follows, Conti rehearses the myth of the orator as civilizer found in Cicero, *De inventione*, I.ii.2-4; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, II.xvi.9; and Horace, *Ars poetica*, 391-401.

worthy, they will praise to heaven, describing in detail its rewards, beauty, immortality, glory, and blessedness. Thus, they will speak in such a way that the minds of their auditors will be inflamed in greater measure by a desire for those things; they will be made to grieve, fear, hope, and complain bitterly about the time that has passed by them in vain; they will decide to reject all lusts and passions in the future and to expend all their efforts on virtue alone.

"If anyone follows this method persistently, how much burning desire for what is honest will he awaken, how much marvelous, fiery striving for virtue will he arouse in the minds of mortals, how easily will vices seem to vanish like smoke while the purer flame of virtue is pursued! But I would run out of time if I tried to unfold the universal power of eloquence. I think you see—unless you don't wish to see, or have been made blinder than Hipsaea—how much utility eloquence possesses.<sup>15</sup> Lack of time (for I see evening approaches) forces me to be brief, but unless you abandon your opinion, you should expect a much longer and more elegant speech at some other time in the future."

Here Angelo smiled and said: "Today we have seen Primo speak extemporaneously beyond all our expectations. What if he had come prepared? What if he should happen to speak a second time about eloquence? But that is not really necessary, for I have already voted in favor of your opinion." These things having been said, we departed a short while later.

15. For the phrase "blinder than Hipsaea," see Horace, *Sermones*, I.ii.91, where it is used for a lover who cannot see the defects of his beloved. We do not know who Hipsaea was.