

Language and Identity in Vittorio Alfieri's *Vita*

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Abstract

In this essay I read Vittorio Alfieri's autobiography, his Vita, with a focus on his linguistic transition from his original French/Piedmontese bilingualism to Tuscan monolingualism, which he narrates there.

I address the traditional depiction of Alfieri as a 'man of Italy', which his linguistic choice seems to reinforce. Specifically, I argue that he acquired Tuscan as a foreign language and he viewed it as being prestigious precisely because it was foreign. Moreover, I read his Tuscanization in the context of Alfieri's own views on languages and the role they play in the construction of his identity. My reading of his Vita is supported by the historical context in which it was written, namely that of eighteenth-century Piedmont, and by Elio Gioanola's psychoanalytical interpretation of Alfieri's dichotomous self.

I suggest that Alfieri's adoption of Tuscan was not a return to his true origins but rather reflected his desire to construct a new identity for himself. Tuscan is the language of the 'other', that is, the illustrious literary canon to which he strives to belong. Furthermore, the transition reflects Alfieri's peculiar duality between his negative 'self' and the positively perceived 'other'. Alfieri's linguistic journey as described in his Vita represents both his conquest of 'otherness' and the acquisition of a monolingual identity.

The problem of language is a recurrent theme in Vittorio Alfieri's autobiography. Alfieri describes his linguistic switch from the French/Piedmontese vernacular bilingualism of his childhood and education to Tuscan monolingualism as a story of 'conversion'. According to Gianfranco Contini, Alfieri belongs to, and initiates, the line of the non-Florentine contributors to the 'fiorentinita'.¹ Moreover, Alfieri struggles to 'dislocate' himself linguistically in order to adopt and master the Tuscan language, which was initially almost completely foreign to him. With the exception of Tuscany, Tuscan was primarily known only

¹ Gianfranco Contini, *Varianti e altra linguistica. Una raccolta di saggi (1938-1968)* (Torino: Einaudi, 1970), p. 629. Contini acknowledges the role played by those native speakers of Tuscan who helped non-native writers develop their competence and oral fluency in this language. Alfieri is counted among those who, despite being from other regions of Italy, stressed the importance of acquiring Tuscan as a spoken language.

as a written language elsewhere on the Italian peninsula, and only by cultivated people as it was the language of the Italian literary tradition. In the case of eighteenth-century Piedmont, the local vernacular — a vernacular that was lexically and phonetically very similar to French² — was widely spoken in everyday situations, although French was the language of cultivated conversations and high society. French was also considered easy to learn, so that many of the most widely read books were in French, whereas only the more traditional literary genres adopted Tuscan.³ Vittorio Alfieri was born and raised in a bilingual, if not trilingual, environment consisting of vernacular, the French of his daily life as a cosmopolitan aristocrat, and the very poorly taught Tuscan of the schools in the kingdom of Sardinia.⁴ Thus, of the three languages, Tuscan was certainly the most ‘artificial’ and unnatural for him to have spoken.

In this essay I suggest that Alfieri’s choice is not only representative of his identification with the Italian literary tradition but also of his recasting himself in a new role, that of a ‘man of Italy’ thus rejecting his Piedmontese origins. In particular, I argue that such a new identity is perceived as prestigious precisely because it is marked as being ‘foreign’.⁵ Moreover, I show how the problem of language is embedded in Alfieri’s personal dilemma of identity.

An alternative interpretation to the one I present here is suggested by Antonio Porcu. Porcu maintains that Alfieri’s view on languages reflects the ideas of an anti-French movement in eighteenth-century Piedmont, which fought for the complete Italianization of the kingdom of Sardinia.⁶ In fact, around 1750 King Vittorio Amedeo II was also promoting a policy of Italianization and centralization of his state.⁷ In these same years, Piedmontese intellectuals were debating the problem of giving their country its own cultural characterization so as to remove the influence of France. Porcu connects Alfieri’s story to this cultural background, in particular to the ideas of Gian Francesco Galeani Napione. In his book entitled *Dell’uso e dei pregi della lingua italiana* [*On the Use and Qualities of the Italian Language*] Napione argues that Tuscan, as a cultivated language, was more ‘natural’ for

² Juergen von Stackelberg, ‘Galophilie, Gallomanie, Gallophobie. Anmerkungen zur Vita Vittorio Alfieris’, *Romanische Forschungen*, 105:3/4 (1993), 384-91 (p. 386).

³ Antonio Porcu, ‘La Vita dell’Alfieri come vicenda linguistica’, *Lingua e stile. Trimestrale di linguistica e critica letteraria*, 11 (1976), 245-69, (p. 262).

⁴ Giuseppe Ricuperati, ‘Intelletuali e istituzioni della cultura dello Stato sabaudo della seconda metà del Settecento’, in *Vittorio Alfieri e la cultura piemontese fra illuminismo e rivoluzione. atti del convegno internazionale di studi in memoria di Carlo Palmisano, San Salvatore Monferrato, 22-24 settembre 1983, a cura di Giovanna Ioli* (Torino: 1985), pp. 3-15, (p. 5).

⁵ Vittorio Alfieri, *Vita* (Milano: Garzanti, 1977), IV, I, p. 152. All translations are my own.

⁶ Porcu, p. 262.

⁷ Ricuperati, p. 7

Piedmont.⁸ He also tried to prove that Piedmontese vernacular was very similar to Tuscan, conveniently overlooking the fact that for the people in Piedmont ‘Italian (Tuscan) was, amongst other dead languages, the most difficult to learn’.⁹ According to Porcu, Alfieri returns to Tuscan, which he had learned in his early life and temporarily forgotten during the years of his debauched youth, as it was his true and natural language, a process which reflects Napione’s theory. Two passages of Napione’s book are invoked to justify this interpretation:

Di fatti quelli che abbandona l’uso della lingua propria per adoperarne una straniera, rinuncia in certo modo alla patria, prende la divisa, abbraccia i costumi e le idee e le opinioni di quella nazione di cui affetta l’idioma.¹⁰

[In fact, whoever abandons the use of his own language to speak a foreign one in a way gives up his home country to wear the uniform, embrace the customs and the ideas and the opinions of the nation whose language he adopts.]

E non v’ha che la nausea delle cose proprie, la tirannia della moda, l’affettazione, la svogliatezza, il poco amore, anzi l’avversione a’ costumi nazionali, che spinger ci possa a spogliare in questa parte l’indole nostra per vestirne una straniera, lasciano, a dir così, le armi appropriate alle nostre forze per impugnarne altre che d’impaccio ci riescano, mai di difesa.¹¹

[And there is nothing more powerful than the disgust of one’s own things, the tyranny of fashion, laziness, lack of love, or, worse, the hostility to one’s national customs to push one to undress one’s own character to wear a foreign one. Those things provide the necessary weapons for our forces to embrace new ones that do not defend us but inconvenience us.]

According to Porcu, these passages describe the process by which Alfieri came to ‘forget’ Tuscan during his ‘eight years of uneducation’ and ‘the almost ten years of travels and debaucheries’, that is, his childhood and youth.¹² While I agree that Napione’s theories apply to the case of Alfieri, I argue that they describe a much later linguistic ‘conversion’, which took place when Alfieri abandoned ‘the use of his own language[s]’, Piedmontese and French,

⁸ Gian Francesco Galeani Napione, *Dell’uso e dei pregi della lingua italiana* (Firenze: Magheri, 1840). All translations are my own.

⁹ Porcu, p. 263.

¹⁰ Galeani Napione, p. 62

¹¹ Galeani Napione, p. 94.

¹² Porcu, p. 267.

and gave up his own country to move to Tuscany, precisely because of a peculiar ‘disgust of his own things’ and his ‘hostility’ towards his national customs, which are recounted in the pages of his *Vita*.

One interesting observation concerns another aspect of the relationship between language and identity in Alfieri’s autobiography. Guido Santato notices that at the origins of Alfieri’s linguistic dislocation there is a deeper internal ‘scission of the I’,¹³ that is also visible in many of his literary works. My analysis is much informed by Elio Gioanola’s psychoanalytical reading of Alfieri’s life and works in his essay ‘Alfieri: la melancolia e il doppio’.¹⁴ Gioanola’s analysis reveals a twofold phenomenon: on the one hand, Alfieri projects an idealized self-image that embodies entirely desirable characteristics and on the other, he creates his negative ‘double’ with the opposite aspects. In fact, it is precisely this negative double that allows the idealized self to be completely ‘good’. This mechanism is perfectly enacted in the dynamics between hero and tyrant in many of Alfieri’s tragedies, where the latter is the negative image of the former. These observations shed new light on the relationship between language and identity. In fact, the same mechanism of projection is at work in Alfieri’s perception of Tuscan, on the one hand, as being the most beautiful of all languages, and of French and Piedmontese on the other, which he caricatures and rejects.

The narration of Alfieri’s linguistic journey can be divided into three phases. The first concerns his childhood and youth in Piedmont, where the use of Tuscan was very limited in spoken language. Alfieri describes Turin as an ‘amphibious city’, where people spoke ‘a barbaric jargon’ and where the use of Tuscan was a ‘*contrabbando*’ (a ‘transgression’), as shown in this episode concerning his uncle:

Mi compiaccio ora moltissimo del parlar di quel mio zio che sapea pur fare qualche cosa; ed ora soltanto ne conosco tutto il pregio. Ma quando io era in Accademia egli, benchè amorevolissimo per me, mi riusciva pure noiosetto anzi che no; e vedi, stortura di giudizio, e forza di false massime, la cosa che di esso mi seccava di più era il suo benedetto parlar toscano, ch’egli dal suo soggiorno in Roma in poi mai più non aveva voluto smettere; ancorchè il parlare italiano sia un vero *contrabbando* in Torino, città anfibia. Ma tanta però è la forza del bello e del vero, che la gente stessa che al principio quando il mio zio rimpatriò si burlava del di lui toscaneggiare, dopo alcun

¹³ Guido Santato, *Lo stile e l’idea. L’elaborazione dei trattati alfieriani* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 1995), p. 24.

¹⁴ Elio Gioanola, ‘Alfieri: la malinconia e il doppio’, *Vittorio Alfieri e la cultura piemontese fra illuminismo e rivoluzione. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi in memoria di Carlo Palmisano* (Torino:1985), pp. 131-144.

tempo avistisi poi ch'egli veramente parlava una lingua, ed essi smozzicavano un barbaro gergo, tutti poi a prova favellando con lui andavano anch'essi balbettando il loro toscano.¹⁵

[I very gladly now move on to talk about my uncle, who really knew a thing or two; and it is only now that I recognize his real value. But when I was in the Academy, even though he was very dear to me, he ended up being rather annoying, and, you see — failure of judgment and force of false maxims! — the thing that bothered me the most was his blessed use of the Tuscan dialect, which he, since his stay in Rome, had never again wanted to leave off, even though speaking Tuscan is a real transgression in Turin, that amphibious city. But such is the force of beauty and truth, that the very people who, when my uncle first moved there, used to mock his use of Tuscan, after a while becoming aware that he was really speaking a language, and that they were muttering a barbaric Creole, all of them from then onwards, when chatting with him, went along, even they, stuttering their own kind of Tuscan.]

The pages of Alfieri's autobiography which concern his years in the *Accademia* in Turin show how he learned Tuscan only as a written language and with great difficulty: 'Comunque accadesse dunque questa mia acquisizione, io m'ebbi un Ariosto. Lo andava leggendo qua e là senza metodo, e non intendeva neppur per metà quel ch'io leggeva.'¹⁶[However this acquisition of mine came about, then, I got myself an Ariosto. I went around reading it here and there unsystematically, and I didn't understand even half of what I was reading.]

The second phase of Alfieri's linguistic story coincides roughly with the third *Epoca* of his autobiography, where he narrates his restless travels through Europe. Those were the years when French became his dominant language, both because it was used to communicate in various countries and, more importantly, because the only books Alfieri read were in French:

Del resto, essendo io partito per quel viaggio di un anno senza pigliar meco altri libri che alcuni *Viaggi d'Italia*, e questi tutti in lingua francese, io mi avviava sempre più alla total perfezione della mia inoltrata barbarie. Coi compagni di viaggio si parlava sempre francese; onde quel pochino pochino ch'io andava pur pensando e combinando nel mio povero capino, era pure vestito di cenci francesi; e alcune letteruzze ch'io

¹⁵ Alfieri, *Vita*, II, III, p. 32.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, II, II, p. 29.

andava scrivendo, erano in francese; ed alcune memoriette ridicole ch'io andava schiccherando su questi miei viaggi, erano pure in francese.¹⁷

[Besides, having left for that journey for one year without bringing any books except a few *Italian Journeys*, all of which were in French, I was slowly advancing an already mature barbarity. My traveling companions always spoke French, so that the little thoughts that I was forming and combining in my poor little head were dressed in French rags; and some little letters I was writing were in French; and some ridiculous little memoirs I was putting down about my travels, they were in French too.]

If one reads in between the lines of Alfieri's ironic belittling of his writings, one sees that French is the language in which he used to think and in which he attempted his first literary expressions. In those years he also read important French authors such as Montaigne, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Voltaire and Helvetius. Alfieri chose to write his *Giornali* and his first two tragedies, *Filippo* and *Polinice* in French:

E in questa spiacevole e meschina lingua le aveva io stese, non già perche` io la sapessi, nè punto ci pretendessi, ma perché in quel gergo da me per quei cinque anni di viaggio esclusivamente parlato, e sentito, io mi veniva a spiegare un po' più, ed a tradire un po' meno il pensier mio [...].¹⁸

[And in this unpleasant and ugly language I wrote them [the two tragedies], not because I could master it well, never have I claimed so, but because in that jargon, that was the only language I had spoken and heard for the five years of my travels, I managed to explain myself a bit more and to betray my thoughts a bit less.]

The critical work of Ezio Raimondi on those first literary attempts has nonetheless shown that Alfieri's competence in French was quite high.¹⁹ Alfieri the narrator rearranges his memories in order to project an idealized image of his linguistic switch. In other words, Alfieri wants to show how he moved from a mixture of two 'jargons', as he labels Piedmontese and French, none of which was spoken well, to the solid mastery of one 'true' language, Tuscan. In fact, Alfieri views his local vernacular as having no prestige, and French is regarded as being particularly hateful. It is clear that Alfieri's choice not to adopt French or Piedmontese was

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, III, I, p. 61.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, I, p. 153.

¹⁹ Ezio Raimondi, 'La giovinezza letteraria dell'Alfieri. Dalla prosa francese ai primi esercizi italiani', *Memorie dell'Accademia delle Scienze dell'Istituto di Bologna*, 4-5 (1952-53), 319-344.

due to his personal distaste for the languages, rather than an inability to master them. In this phase of his journey Alfieri seems to despise everything that concerns Italy. For example, while traveling there he finds Parma and Bologna totally uninteresting²⁰ and although he notices the beauty of the local pronunciation in Tuscany, he decides to learn English:

Ed io sempre barbaramente andava balbettando l'inglese, ed avea chiusi e sordi gli orecchi al toscano. Esaminando poi la ragione di una sì stolta preferenza, ci trovai un falso amor proprio individuale, che a ciò mi spingeva senza ch'io pure me ne avvedessi. Avendo per più di due anni vissuto con Inglesi; sentendo per tutto magnificare la loro potenza e ricchezza; vedendone la grande influenza politica: e per l'altra parte vedendo l'Italia tutta esser morta; gl'Italiani divisi, deboli, avviliti e servi; io grandemente mi vergognava d'essere e parere italiano, e nulla delle cose loro non voleva nè praticar, nè sapere.²¹

[And I was always going around barbarically mumbling English, and my ears were closed and deaf to the Tuscan dialect. Afterwards, examining the reason for such a silly preference, I found in me a false individual self-love, which was driving me to this without my even becoming aware of it. Having lived for more than two years with English people; hearing their power and wealth exalted everywhere; seeing their vast political influence; and on the other hand seeing Italy quite dead; the Italians divided, weak, degraded and enslaved, I felt greatly ashamed of being and seeming Italian, and of their practices I wanted neither to do, nor to know, anything.]

What drives Alfieri to learn English is, on the one hand, his anger at seeing the Italians in a condition of inferiority, and on the other, his admiration for a country that everybody appears to consider 'superior'. However, such statements are to be read in the same context as the many rather critical and spiteful judgements on the ugliness of Piedmontese pronunciation, which we find in his *Vita*, in as much as those judgements illuminate more the frame of mind of Alfieri than the reality of Italy or the phonetics of Piedmontese vernacular. Alfieri seems to elect one element, in this case a language or a country, and make it the model of perfection, in comparison with which all the others are deficient. This is especially true for his aesthetic judgements on languages, because the phonetic characteristics of a language, as well as its 'beauty' or 'ugliness', emerge only when filtered by the phonetic system of a foreign speaker.

²⁰ *Vita*, III, I, p. 62.

²¹ *Ibidem*, III, I, pp. 63-64.

Alfieri considers the positive model as being embodied by the 'other', be it England when he views himself as a member of the Italian population or be it Tuscan when he compares it with his own languages, French and Piedmontese. In addition, the more Alfieri distances himself physically and culturally from Italy and from the Tuscan language the more these two are seen in a positive light. Alfieri himself informs us that he needed distance in order to appreciate the beauty of Tuscan:

Si partì per Livorno e per Siena; e in quest'ultima città, benchè il locale non me ne piacesse gran fatto, pure, tanta è la forza del bello e del vero, ch'io mi sentii quasichè un vivo raggio che mi rischiarava ad un tratto la mente, e una dolcissima lusinga agli orecchi e al cuore, nell'udire le più infime persone così soavemente e con tanta eleganza proprietà e brevità favellare. Con tutto ciò non vi stetti che un giorno; e il tempo della mia conversione letteraria e politica era ancora lontano assai; mi bisognava uscire lungamente d'Italia per conoscere ed apprezzare gli Italiani.²²

[We left for Livorno and for Siena; and in this last city, though I did not like the place very much, such is the power of beauty and truth that I felt as if a bright ray were clearing my mind again and a sweet charm entering my ears and heart when I heard the most lowly people speak so sweetly and with such elegance, propriety, and brevity. Nevertheless, I only stayed there one day; and the time of my literary and political conversion was still quite far off; I needed to stay out of Italy for a long time to know and appreciate the Italians.]

In this passage Alfieri tells us that Tuscan had to become the language of the 'other' so that it could become his own language. Subsequently he embraced it with the enthusiasm of a neophyte, as we can detect from the terms 'conversion' and 'beauty and truth'. In fact, when he talks about his linguistic 'conversion' Alfieri makes use of religious terms and often refers to the time before such conversion as a time of 'deafness' and 'ignorance', as if he had been a pagan before encountering the Good News. Interestingly, the more he distances himself from Italy, the more Tuscan becomes a model of euphony, in comparison with which all the other languages sound unpleasant. For example, in Paris Alfieri criticizes the Alexandrine verse used in French drama: 'quel verseggiare a pariglia a pariglia di rime, e i versi a mezzi a mezzi, con tanta trivialità di modi e sì spiacevole nasalità di suoni'²³ ['those verses in rhymes of

²²*Ibid.*, III, I, p. 64.

²³*Ibid.*, III, IV, p. 78.

two and two and half and half, with such vulgar modes and ugly nasal sounds’]. Furthermore, in Denmark, while speaking Tuscan with the Neapolitan ambassador, Earl Catanti, Alfieri finds this language incredibly beautiful in comparison with the local one, Danish:

Mi dilettaua molto il parlare e la pronunzia toscana, massimamente paragonandola col piagnisteo nasale e gutturale del dialetto danese che mi toccava di udire per forza, ma senza comprenderlo, la Dio grazia.²⁴

[I liked very much the Tuscan language and its pronunciation, especially if I compared it with the nasal and guttural whine of Danish that I was forced to hear, thank God, without understanding it .]

It is important to remark that all of Alfieri’s linguistic judgments invariably concern the phonetic aspect of a language rather than the lexical one. This is mainly because it is precisely the phonetics that carry an aesthetic or affective connotation, so that even amongst speakers of the same language tiny variations of pronunciation and accent may conjure up either appreciation or rejection. Interestingly, while Alfieri progressively idealizes Tuscan, he simultaneously purges from his own pronunciation of Piedmontese precisely those phonetic elements that distinguish it from the dialects of central Italy. In other words, the encounter with the ‘other’ language estranges him from his own, which he regards with sarcasm and contempt:

Io malamente mi spiegava col prefato conte Catanti, quanto alla proprietà dei termini, alla brevità e alla efficacia delle frasi che è somma nei Toscani; ma quanto alla pronunzia di quelle mie parole barbare italianizzate, ell’era bastanta pura e toscana; stante che io deridendo sempre tutte le altre pronunzie italiane, che veramente mi offendevano l’udito, mi era avvezzo a pronunziare quanto meglio poteva e la *u* e la *z*, *gi* e *ci* e ogni altra toscanità.²⁵

[With the aforementioned Earl Catanti I would speak badly, as for the appropriateness of terms, brevity and the efficiency of phrasing which is consummate among Tuscans; but as for the pronunciation of those Italianized barbaric words of mine, that was pure enough and Tuscan; this was because in making fun of all other Italian accents, that really offended my hearing, I had grown accustomed to pronouncing as best I could

²⁴ *Ibid.*, III, VIII, p. 96.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, III, IV, p. 96.

the *u* and the *z*, *g* and *c* and every other distinctly Tuscan sound.]

Earlier in the text, while narrating his first stay in Florence, Alfieri states:

Con tutto ciò io mi ero subito ripurgata la pronunzia di quel nostro orribile *u* lombardo o francese, che sempre mi era spiaciuto moltissimo per quella sua magra articolazione, e per quella boccuccia che fanno le labbra di chi lo pronuncia, somiglianti in quell'atto moltissimo alle scimmie, allorchè favellano. E ancora adesso, benchè di codesto *u*, da cinque o più anni ch'io sto in Francia ne abbia pieni e foderati gli orecchi, pure egli mi fa ridere ogni volta che ci bado...²⁶

[Nevertheless, I had immediately purged my pronunciation from that horrible Lombard [Northern Italian] or French *u* of ours, which has always displeased me greatly because of its narrow articulation, for the funny little mouth that the lips of whoever pronounces it make, looking very similar in that act to monkeys, when they speak. And even now, although of that *u*, from the five or more years that I have been in France, I have had my ears stuffed full, nonetheless it makes me laugh every time that I come across it...]

Alfieri perceives Piedmontese and French as being phonetically similar. Thus, when he detaches himself from French he also detaches himself from the phonetic system he was accustomed to. Moreover, when Alfieri makes fun of the French pronunciation, it is he himself whom he is looking at, as though through a transforming and rather deforming mirror. In comparison, when describing Tuscan he only underlines how sweet and elegant it sounds.

The third phase in Alfieri's linguistic voyage narrates his tenacious effort to eradicate his 'amphibious' linguistic condition in order to become monolingual and to acquire Tuscan. Thus, the more natural French became to him the more 'unnatural' was his attempt to become a 'man of Italy'.²⁷ The vocabulary in these pages of Alfieri's autobiography describes the acquisition of Tuscan by referring to the semantics of 'dressing and undressing' and through the frequent use of the prefixes '*s*', that in Italian indicate separation, see for example 'spensare', 'spiemontizzarsi', 'sfuggire', and '*ri*', 'to do something anew', and 'to start again from the beginning', see 'ristudiare', 'ricompitare', 'ricollocare', 'rifare' and 'rivestire'.

²⁶*Ibid.*, III, I, p. 63.

²⁷See note 5 above.

Questi furono i miei santi protettori nella feroce e continua battaglia in cui mi convenne passare ben tutto il primo anno della mia vita letteraria, di sempre dar la caccia alle parole francesi, di spogliare per così dire le mie idee per rivestirle di nuovo sotto altro aspetto, di riunire insomma nello stesso punto lo studio di un uomo maturissimo con quello di un ragazzo delle prime scuole.²⁸

[These were my guardian angels in the fierce and continuous battle in which I had to spend the whole of the first year of my literary life, always to be chasing away French words, always trying, in a manner of speaking, to strip my ideas in order to clothe them anew under another aspect, to reunite, that is, the studies of a man of advanced maturity with those of a boy at elementary school.]

In other words, to ‘convert’ to a new language implies the death of the old self and the rebirth of a new one, who has to repeat the process of language acquisition that occurs in childhood. Moreover Alfieri repeatedly describes this effort as being tremendous. To adopt Tuscan means to adopt a new identity (the ‘man of Italy’ and the writer) and to force a mask upon oneself. Interestingly, the linguistic and literary conversion coincides with two other important ‘dislocations’, a geographical as well as a political one. Firstly, Alfieri decides to expatriate himself from the kingdom of Sardinia and to reside permanently in Tuscany. Secondly, he gives up the revenue derived from his aristocratic title in order to make his living as a writer.

I can now draw the following conclusions. By choosing Tuscan, Alfieri does not return to his true origins, neither does he follow the ideas of the anti-French movements of his time, but he adopts the language of the persona whom he wants to be, that is the writer who belongs to the illustrious literary tradition of Italy. Furthermore, such a linguistic choice reflects Alfieri’s inner dichotomy between his self, which he perceives as being inadequate, and the ‘other’, which is idealized, as shown by Gioanola. Devoting himself to literature, with an eye on eternal glory, Alfieri creates another self who lives in the atemporal dimension of artistic creation and who writes in the language of the illustrious Italian literary tradition. Alfieri expends tremendous effort to free his new identity from the chains of the old self — the negative persona who speaks French and Piedmontese, and who is an aristocrat of the Sabaudian kingdom. As Santato notices, ‘to achieve his own transcendence Alfieri must exist, that is, locate himself out of himself. To live becomes to live for death.’²⁹ Adopting a

²⁸ *Vita*, IV, I, p. 158.

²⁹ Santato, p. 38.

foreign language and the language of literature *par excellence* is for Alfieri one of the ways of distancing himself from the ghost of his ‘double’, whose way of speaking is grotesquely caricatured. Moreover, from Alfieri’s perspective, speaking two languages equals ‘speaking no language at all’ and having no identity.³⁰ On the other hand, monolingualism is the sign of a solid self-image and of a definite identity.

³⁰ *Vita*, II, X, p. 57.