

Bernabò Visconti to Two Delegates of Abbot Grimoard

by Daniel Galef

When served his papers of excommunication, Visconti held the messengers hostage and forced them to eat the parchment, silk cord and all.

Yes, every bite. Another glass of wine?
I'm sure it's dry. So Latinate! So dense!
Be glad your liege used silk, not wire or twine
to wrap your meal. Do verbs' tastes change with tense?
Are friendly words more toothsome than tough knavery
(do mind that scrap; you wouldn't want to litter),
subjunctives bittersweet (*O si!*) or savory?
The red *damnātiōnis* must be bitter,
those closing lies—*your servant*—surely sour,
or souring on your tongue, like rancid curds.
And spice! His signature must burn your nose:
the steady hand of one who's tasted power
and found it sweet, of one who, speaking, knows
that someone else will have to eat his words.