

## CHAPTER 7

*A Politico-Communal Reading of the Rose  
The Fiore Attributed to Dante Alighieri**Antonio Montefusco***Introduction**

Of the different adaptations and rewritings of the *Roman de la Rose*, the Tuscan poem named *Il Fiore* by its first editor is one of the most sophisticated and original.<sup>1</sup> The poem, which paraphrases the source text through a series of 232 sonnets,<sup>2</sup> has been the subject of intense debate in Italy, mainly on the question of its possible attribution to Dante.<sup>3</sup> Two new critical editions, prepared at the same time and appearing in 2011 and 2012, do not seek to resolve the question of this attribution, seeing it simply as a possibility among others.<sup>4</sup> Rather than adding another voice to this debate, I would like here to propose a reading of the work that situates it within the context of the circulation of knowledge and of intellectual practice in Dante's time and, accordingly, that understands it as an exceptional text intervening at a very particular moment in Italian cultural history.<sup>5</sup>

Before attempting to propose an interpretation of this *remaniement* of the *Rose*, it is worth pondering the implications of the French poem's presence in Florence at such an early stage and the larger reasons behind such a precocious and original rewriting. The *Fiore* is in fact usually dated to the period between 1285 and 1295,<sup>6</sup> when the *Rose* itself had been in circulation for a mere fifteen years. The appearance of the French poem, with Jean de Meun's 'continuation', must have been a substantial event in Florentine cultural and intellectual life for it to have warranted any sort of interest, let alone a translation/adaptation.

Various elements prepared the ground for this event. During the 1280s, the dominance of the obscure and moralizing style of Guittone d'Arezzo came to an end, gradually displaced by new poetic forms developed with reference to a very different conceptual and philosophical framework. Inaugurated by the judge Guido Guinizelli in Bologna, and then consolidated by the *miles* Guido Cavalcanti in Florence, this new wave of poetry

was dubbed the *dolce stil novo* by Dante. This new generation of Tuscan intellectuals and poets, born around the middle of the thirteenth century, thus emerged during a phase of major cultural renewal and revitalization, due in particular to the influence of recent intellectual traditions developed within the universities, particularly within their Arts Faculties, and adapted in the civic environment of northern Italian cities. It is well known that after Etienne Tempier's condemnations in 1270 and 1277 the exuberance of Aristotelian 'philosophers' in Arts Faculties, and particularly at Paris, was curbed. But it is also important to stress that much of this intellectual exuberance, and the associated sense of corporate and intellectual identity of the *artistae*, was relocated to northern Italy, and particularly to Bologna, Padua, and Florence. Indeed, these cities become the three most prominent intellectual centres that sustained the long and complex evolution of early humanist culture in northern Italy, as recently examined by Witt.<sup>7</sup> Some of the Parisian *maîtres ès arts* actually sought refuge in Italy: as the *Fiore* itself indeed tells us (sonnet 92), Siger of Brabant – one of the principal targets of Tempier's condemnations – was present in Orvieto during the 1280s. In contrast with Padua and Bologna, where the largely Latinate intellectual culture of the respective universities dominated, the absence of a university in Florence enabled the intensified growth and circulation of lay intellectual culture in the vernacular.<sup>8</sup> While it is no longer tenable to label Guido Cavalcanti's poetry as 'Averroist' in a strict sense, it is undeniable that such poetry emerges out of the disruption of older, more traditional, and institutionally sanctioned forms of knowledge and their hierarchies. Here a poetic reflection on human, erotic love provides the starting point for ambitious and sophisticated philosophical analysis, often in close dialogue with contemporary academic debates, in particular around the rise of Aristotelianism.<sup>9</sup>

The intellectual culture of the teachers of Cavalcanti as well as Dante was also profoundly shaped, and even dominated by francophone traditions of cultural production. After all, Brunetto Latini – who was not only an important figure on the cultural scene but also played a central role in the political life of the city and the development of its pedagogical traditions and institutions – wrote his most important work in French.<sup>10</sup> While his *Tresor* follows the model of the academic *summa* by adopting a division into three books, it is evident that the target readership is that of the administrators of the commune and city of Florence, as is confirmed by the nearly ubiquitous references to *podestarile* literature, especially in the third book.<sup>11</sup> This shows that the entire class of notaries and itinerant administrators, who constituted the bureaucratic elite at the time, had thoroughly

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absorbed both French as a language and the associated francophone cultural and intellectual traditions.

In many ways this is not in itself surprising. During the thirteenth century French was, after all, the dominant vernacular culture in Europe, and when Brunetto affirmed that the transalpine vernacular was more *delectable* he was by no means alone. But it must be added that Florence played a particularly important role in affirming this dominance of French language and culture because of its political role and its wider influence in northern Italy. Direct links with France were initially established during the Ghibelline rule between 1260 and 1266, when the leading elites of the people and of the rival Guelph faction lived as exiles in France. Documents reveal how it was precisely during this period of exile in France that Florentine elites began cultivating close ties with merchants and bankers, well established in France and benefitting from privileged access to the French Crown.<sup>12</sup> During the 1260s a number of merchants active in France were also engaged in producing a wide range of vernacular translations on topics relating to the city's political culture, including, for instance, the works of Albertano of Brescia.<sup>13</sup> During those same years the central figure in the development of Italian politics was the Frenchman Charles of Anjou, king of Naples. With the end of Ghibelline rule in 1265, Florence rapidly became the main stronghold of Angevin power in Italy, even as Charles himself became increasingly dependent on the support of Florentine merchants and bankers who funded his expeditions.<sup>14</sup> The publication of Brunetto's *Tresor* in the early 1270s (in any case before 1274) is therefore emblematic for this very specific cultural and geopolitical moment, marking the ascent of Florence as a dominant cultural and political centre in the region, and characterized by a distinctly Francophile outlook.

The precocious interest in the *Rose* on the part of Tuscan readers must be placed within this very specific context. Philologists have repeatedly stressed the absence of any Italian manuscripts of the *Rose* at this particular moment in time, an observation reiterated by Gianfranco Contini and more recently by Lino Leonardi.<sup>15</sup> However, surviving manuscripts provide merely circumstantial and often unreliable evidence, and, as Leonardi himself observes, this paucity of manuscript evidence does not alter the fact that knowledge of the *langue d'oïl* and its literature was extremely widespread in Tuscany at the time.<sup>16</sup> But above all, Jean de Meun's own biography makes the circulation of the *Rose* in Tuscany and in Northern Italy, especially within the orbit of the universities and the communes, not only a plausible hypothesis but one that is almost certain. The publications

of Luciano Rossi – whose conclusions have recently been confirmed by Jean Mesqui’s study – allow us to draw a compelling profile of an itinerant scholar and diplomat that is difficult to dismiss, despite some recent attempts to cast doubt on the documentary evidence.<sup>17</sup> ‘Johannes de Magduno aurelianensis diocesis’ was a *magister* who was fully integrated within the orbit of the University of Bologna during the period 1265–9, where he would have had occasion to witness the preparation of some of the most sumptuous and most valuable decorated manuscripts of legal texts produced in Europe at the time. In 1269 he was part of a diplomatic embassy sent by Charles of Anjou to Alfonso X of Castille, and his career and intellectual trajectory took him through Chartres, Orleans, and Bologna, as well as Paris, where he appears to have completed the *Rose* during the period of Tempier’s condemnations in the 1270s.<sup>18</sup> We are thus looking at a *magister* with close ties to the house of Anjou and active in Bologna precisely during the period of Florence’s rapid rise to cultural and political prominence in the region. It is difficult to believe that such a person would not have had numerous connections with Florence itself, through its international network of bankers, merchants, and intellectuals. It would be natural for such networks to have persisted beyond Jean’s Bolognese period, into the years of Charles of Anjou’s activity as imperial vicar of Tuscany (1268–78), even though no documentary evidence exists to support this contention. Brunetto Latini’s *Tresor* and Jean de Meun’s *Rose*, then, for all their obvious differences, both participate in a larger overarching cultural project of lay vernacularization of scholastic and Aristotelian culture, particularly with reference to the disciplines of ethics, rhetoric, and political thought, but not without engaging equally with earlier, ‘Chartrian’ and/or Neoplatonic thought.<sup>19</sup>

At the same time, however, Jean’s *Rose* also engages in a complex dialogue with other traditions, courtly and Ovidian, and the intertextual multiplicity of Jean’s *Rose* allows it to interrogate and challenge established modes of thought and their associated poetic forms and traditions, usually in Latin. This results in a vernacular allegorical poem that refuses to align itself simply to any one, clearly identifiable intellectual tradition.<sup>20</sup> Far from pursuing any precise and discernible didactic aim, then, the *Rose* as a whole can be seen as a poem that interrogates the very nature of knowledge and textual authority in radical, fundamental ways. Brunetto shows little interest in these sophisticated, playful, yet philosophically challenging problems of epistemology and hermeneutics. Such issues, though, loom large in the work of the next generation of Florentine poets, especially the works of Francesco da Barberino and Dante himself. Both poets are

obsessed with self-commentary and self-exegesis, and it is difficult to resist the temptation to imagine both of them engaged in an attempt to ‘close down’ the intractable hermeneutic and authorial *aporia* that Jean had deliberately opened up at the heart of his *Rose*.

Brunetto Latini, for his part, probably facilitated the circulation of the *Rose* among Tuscan readers. After the *Tresor*, Brunetto in fact produced the *Tesoretto* (1271–4) in Tuscan, an allegorical *prosimetrum* whose protagonist encounters personifications of Nature and of various virtues. Here the model of the *De planctu Naturae* is re-elaborated along the lines of Guillaume de Lorris’s courtly poetics, although Brunetto’s familiarity with Jean de Meun must remain purely conjectural, if only because of the difficulty of establishing a clear chronology.<sup>21</sup> According to Benedetto, echoes of Jean’s *Rose* are in fact to be found in the Italian author’s description of the meadow of ‘Piacere d’Amore’ (Pleasure of Love), described as simultaneously round and square, which Benedetto reads as a dual reference to both Guillaume’s and Jean’s allegorical gardens in the *Rose*.<sup>22</sup> Rossi argues in favour of Brunetto’s familiarity with Jean’s portion of the *Rose*: for him it is precisely the dual structure of the *Tesoretto*, with its Ovidian *reprobatio amoris*, that derives from the bipartite structure of the *Rose*.<sup>23</sup> Apart from such specific points of influence, the wider circumstances – such as Jean’s biography, his intellectual network, as well as Brunetto’s ostentatiously Francophile culture, and his choice of the framework of the allegorical journey for the *Tesoretto* – clearly suggest that Jean and Brunetto worked within a common cultural and intellectual framework. Both writers produce works that helped to define the Florentine intellectual landscape during the late 1270s and early 1280s, transmitting and adapting both scholastic and courtly traditions in the vernacular.

### The Translation

The cultural context outlined in the preceding section helps to explain why, during the 1280s, Florentine poets should choose to measure their own poetic achievements against the encyclopaedic monument constituted by the ‘full’, combined *Rose* of Guillaume and Jean. An abbreviated Tuscan adaptation of Guillaume’s portion of the *Rose*, commonly referred to as the *Detto d’Amore*, had already been produced in the 1280s. The poem is divided into two sections that correspond to Amante’s (cf. Amant’s) meeting with Ragione (cf. Raison) and Ricchezza (cf. Richesse). The first attempts to dissuade Amante from the pursuit of love, but he resists and sings the praises of his lady. It is then Ricchezza’s turn to play an

antagonistic role, before the poem is concluded by the declamation of a series of commandments establishing the social value of human love. Whatever its intrinsic poetic merits, it is important to emphasize that the *Detto* amounts to a new, independent poetic elaboration on the basis of Guillaume's *Rose*, manifesting a striking degree of autonomy with regard to its source.

Turning to the *Fiore* – preserved in the same manuscript as the *Detto*, and very likely produced by the same author (Dante?) somewhat later (c. 1295) – we encounter a poem that asserts its paradoxical independence from its source text even more strongly. The originality of this *remaniement* is achieved not so much by adding glosses, interpolations, or through active rewriting, but rather because of the poet's decision to cut its source-material, selectively resulting in a restricted number of clearly identifiable themes, particularly focused on the political role of rhetoric and counsel. This reorientation is also reflected on the formal level: the rhyming octosyllables of the source text are transformed into a narrative constituted as a sequence of sonnets, a typically Italian poetic form. While the sonnets delineate a narrative trajectory, the formal features of the sonnet necessarily produce a more syncopated narrative rhythm, crystallizing in a series of self-contained fourteen-line formal units that function as discrete allegorical *tableaux*. The Florentine poem also introduces some radical cuts, omitting many of the more doctrinal and theoretical passages of the *Rose*. In the section drawn from Guillaume, the translator eliminates both the prologue and the account of Amant's approach of the Rose, so that the *Fiore* effectively begins with the events narrated from *RR* 1681 onwards, with the arrows fired by the Dio d'Amore (God of Love, cf. Amor). Also the account of the commandments of Love and the descriptions of Amant's suffering are omitted (cf. *RR* 2043–764). Similar cuts also affect the digressions in the Jean de Meun section of the poem, except that here the results are far more radical. The translator eliminates the entire section on Nature and Genius (*RR* 15,861–20,710) and makes major cuts to the speeches of Raison, Ami, Faux Semblant, and the Vieille. The final result is an extremely condensed version of the *Rose*, reduced from its nearly 22,000 lines to just over 3000.

The translated poem is ideologically speaking far more homogeneous than the original, and in what follows I want to concentrate on the distinctive yet unobtrusive originality of this new poem.<sup>24</sup> As already noted, the originality of the poem derives not so much from the introduction of new, extraneous materials but more from the careful and deliberate selection of materials already present in the *Rose*. The Florentine poet

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therefore demonstrates a remarkable degree of control over the heterogeneous and often digressive thematic and narrative structure of his French source. The *Fiore* therefore also achieves a greater degree of continuity between the two parts of the *Rose* by eliminating the contrast between the courtly lyricism of Guillaume and the speculative naturalism of Jean. Most major omissions are, however, compensated for, albeit often very briefly. As Vanossi's important analysis explores in some detail, for instance, the omission of the entire section on Nature and Genius is compensated for by placing a defence of the procreative imperative of Eros in the mouth of Ragione.<sup>25</sup>

But the Tuscan poem is more radical: Amante – who in the *Rose* does not really respond to Raison's lengthy expositions – is given the opportunity to vindicate his right to pursue sexual pleasure in the *Fiore* (sonnet 40). The question of the legitimacy of the pursuit of erotic desire moves into the foreground in this new poem, whose author clearly strives to present his own vision as distinctive, original, and innovative. Where Jean had presented an elaborate, equivocal, and ultimately evasive prophecy of divided authorial agency – split between Jean and Guillaume (*RR* 10,478–560) – the author of the *Fiore* removes the entirety of this puzzling metaleptic architecture and replaces it with an explicit, direct, frontal assertion of authorial agency.<sup>26</sup> Rather than presenting an elaborate poetic genealogy, the Dio d'Amore in the *Fiore* identifies the author in a simple, direct, and straightforward fashion, in a statement concisely framed by a single, neatly self-contained sonnet (82).<sup>27</sup> At the same time, Jean's moral ambivalence about the status of erotic desire is transformed into a more strongly disapproving moral position that Vanossi finds reminiscent of Cavalcanti's poetry. The setting of the narrative is no longer springtime as demanded by convention, but, inauspiciously, midwinter – 'a gennaio' (in January; *Fiore*, 3, 1–2). Amante's desire in the *Fiore* is therefore presented more explicitly as an unseasonal, morally dangerous form of erotic passion.<sup>28</sup> Additional evidence for the wider circumstances of composition comes from the numerous and very precise allusions to contemporary Florentine politics that punctuate the poem.

In the background of the *Fiore* we can therefore discern a variety of important elements that contributed to the choices of its author/translator: the foundational influence of Brunetto Latini's work, especially his interest in the social function of rhetoric; the widespread Francophilia of Florentine culture at the time; the Franco-Italian trajectory of Jean de Meun; the latter's interest in a whole range of problems and cultural forms that overlap and/or intersect with those of Brunetto and his disciples; the

emerging cultural and poetic identity of Florence itself, shaped by very specific sociopolitical circumstances. Rather than proposing a full comparative analysis of the *Fiore* and the *Rose*,<sup>29</sup> in what follows I would therefore like to insist on the most evident cultural and intellectual specificities of the *Fiore* in comparison with its source. I therefore want to present a reading of the *Fiore* as an ‘autonomous’ poem that nevertheless – and somewhat paradoxically – derives its autonomy from materials that are already supplied by the *Rose*. In particular I want to argue that all of the translator’s choices in producing this highly selective abridgement of the *Rose* are clearly motivated, conditioned by the very different cultural, political, and intellectual environment provided by the city and commune of Florence in the closing years of the century. Tuscan readers at the time would have found in the *Fiore* a narrative transposition of urban political culture, presented in a poem whose central theme is, in fact, the important political role played by rhetoric and, more broadly, by the language of political counsel and persuasion.

The poem equally illustrates the transition from an earlier poetic tradition shaped by Brunetto – which placed rhetoric in a privileged position above all other arts – to a new kind of cultural poetics that reconfigures various fields of knowledge in relation to each other. Let us add further precision to Contini’s sketch of the trajectory leading from the *Roman de la Rose* to the *Commedia* via the *Fiore*: instead of simply identifying the poem as marking a stage in the formation of Dante’s literary *œuvre* and his wider poetics, it is possible to see the *Fiore* as signalling the emergence of the new kind of literary and intellectual culture that took place between Brunetto’s and Dante’s generations.<sup>30</sup>

Before beginning my analysis, it will be useful to take a quick look at the plot, which focuses on the adventures of Amante and on his attempts to conquer Bellaccoglienza (cf. *Bel Accueil*). Unlike in the *Rose*, this character is clearly female to fit with the gender-identity of Amante’s love-object. The young man, eager and passionate by temperament, immediately launches an attack on the flower to attempt its defloration, without the courtly preambles we find in Guillaume’s *Rose*. But the intervention of Schifo (Modesty, cf. *Dangier*) prevents Amante from approaching and thus averts the threat to the Rose. This obstacle will be overcome by Venus, who labours in the interest of the lovers. Amante kisses the flower, becoming intoxicated by its smell, but new forces intervene to oppose him, and they imprison Bellaccoglienza in a castle; amongst these are Castità (cf. *Chasteté*) who is woken up by Malabocca (cf. *Male Bouche*), a symbol of the slanders which awake Christian



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moral normativity, in open opposition to the commandments of the Dio d'Amore. Castità must similarly ask for Gelosia (cf. Jalousie) to intervene, the latter becoming the flower's principal guardian. The situation reaches an impasse, and there follow three long speeches made by Amico (cf. Ami), la Vecchia (cf. La Vieille), and Falsembiante (cf. Faux Semblant). In many ways these three speeches constitute the ideological core of the poem.

Amico and la Vecchia's speeches, addressed to Amante and Bellaccoglienza respectively, both advise fraud and the need for secrecy, subterfuge, and concealment (*bencelare*) in order to deceive Malabocca. As in the *Rose*, Falsembiante embodies the deceit necessary to attain erotic satisfaction. The *Fiore* similarly adopts the anti-mendicant satire of the *Rose* developed in relation to Faux Semblant – but also intensifies it and renders it far more topical: the role of the inquisition is evoked, as is the problem of the corruption of testamentary executors. In sonnets 92 and 101–2, especially, mendicant friars become the emissaries of a universe of ecclesiastical deceit and corruption, entirely dominated or 'avviluppato' (enveloped; *Fiore*, 92. 2) by hypocrisy and especially linguistic deception, presented as a perversion of the gift of tongues of the apostles: 'I' sì so ben per cuor ogne linguag[gl]io' (In my heart I know well every language; *Fiore*, 101. 1).<sup>31</sup> As in the *Rose* it is Falsembiante who overcomes the obstacles on Amante's quest by setting a deadly trap for Malabocca, who is assassinated by the friar who is part Dominican, part Franciscan.<sup>32</sup> It now becomes possible to attack Gelosia's castle. The movement to defend the young woman is guided by Paura, Schifo, and Vergogna, against whom the Dio d'Amore assembles his troops and initiates a violent battle. Again, language is used to overcome any resistance, as Ben-Celare speaks about the need for secrecy and concealment to advance the quest for erotic love. As in the *Rose*, this is followed by the intervention of Venus, who burns down the castle with a flaming arrow, finally making it possible for Amante and Bellaccoglienza to consummate their passion.

The *defloratio* is described in a very detailed manner: whether it is ironic or playfully obscene is open to debate, but the ending is clearly irreverent, underlining the contrast between Christian moral strictures and the operation of natural love. As in the *Rose*, Amante is represented as a pilgrim, his posture is that of a devout worshipper at prayer, and finally the sexual act is described by mentioning the pilgrim's attributes (the staff and the scrip for the male sexual organ, the hermit's cell for the female one).

### *Dictamen and Love*

It is above all the *structure* of the *Fiore* that prompts my discussion of it as a rhetorical and political rewriting of the *Rose*. As I mentioned earlier, many of the cuts from the earlier text concern Jean de Meun's philosophical digressions, while the core of the Italian adaptation comprises the speeches of Amico, the Vecchia, and Falsembiante. This choice clearly reduces the *Rose's* digressive encyclopaedism, which is not so much displaced as reorganized and inserted into a new conceptual system in which rhetoric plays a pre-eminent role. By making the often rambling speeches of Jean's various characters more focused and concise, the translator emphasizes the persuasive and rhetorical skill of their speeches as rewritten in the *Fiore*. This rhetorical emphasis is not foreign to Jean's *Rose* – and it must be remembered that Jean had a deep and nuanced knowledge of key texts such as Cicero's *De inventione*, an important source for his description of the Golden Age.<sup>33</sup> But, given the tightening of the plot and the massive reduction in length of the various speeches, the rhetorical and persuasive craft of individual speakers in the *Fiore* acquires much greater prominence. The author's particularly nuanced grasp of the power of rhetoric is also a function of the Florentine cultural context. As in other northern Italian cities and communes, rhetoric was far from being a theoretical and speculative science, but was viewed pragmatically as an integral element of political life within the commune. This idea was developed in particular by the *ars dictaminis*, which had developed in the wake of the Gregorian reform, and rapidly became a dominant and even 'hegemonic' discipline under Frederick II.<sup>34</sup> In the second half of the thirteenth century the teaching and practice of the *ars dictaminis* in northern Italian cities was widespread, and many of the key texts were translated into the vernacular for the benefit of the growing body of local administrators at the service of the *podestà*. Practical rhetoric accordingly plays an important role in the *Fiore*, both at the level of the revisions within the poem itself, and in terms of the poem's appeal to its target readership: on the one hand, the poem's fictional characters demonstrate far greater mastery of persuasive rhetorical strategies, while on the other hand the *Fiore's* early readers could rely on their own familiarity with Florentine rhetorical culture to appreciate the poem's underlying exploration of the political usefulness of rhetoric, counsel, and persuasion.<sup>35</sup>

In order to limit my analysis to just a few examples, I wish to start with Amico. The character addresses Amante to help the latter conquer Bellaccoglienza. His advice is woven together from a specific lexis taken from the Italian developments of the *ars dictaminis*:

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## Sonnet 54

Se-ttu non puo' parlar a quella ch'ami,  
Sì-llè manda per lettera tu' stato,  
Dicendo com'Amor t' à-ssì legato  
Ver' lei, che ma' d'amarla non ti sfami.

E le' dirai: 'Per Gesocristo, tra'mi  
D'esti pensier', che m'ànno sì gravato!';  
Ma guarda che-llo scritto sia mandato  
Per tal messag[g]io che non vi difami.

Ma nella lettera non metter nome;  
Di lei dirai 'colui', di te 'colei':  
Così convien cambiar le pere a pome.

Messag[g]io di garzon' ma' non farei,  
Chéd e' v' à gran periglio, ed odi come:  
Nonn-à fermezz[a] in lor; perciò son rei.

If you cannot speak to one you love,  
Then let her know your state by letter,  
Saying how Love has so bound you  
To her that you will never get enough  
of loving her.

And you will say to her: 'In the name  
of Jesus Christ, free me  
From these thoughts that have  
oppressed me!'

But make sure that the letter is delivered  
By a messenger who will not harm  
your reputation.

But don't use any names in the letter;  
For 'her' you will say 'him' and for  
'you' 'her':  
Thus are pears changed into apples.

I would never use a boy as  
a messenger,  
For there is great danger, and here's why:  
There's no constancy in them; thus,  
they are not good.

Amico advises Amante to send a letter to the woman he loves, whose theme will be 'tu' stato' (his state), i.e. his social and moral standing; he advises him to use the *invocatio* 'per Gesocristo', then to send the letter using a trusted person as an intermediary, and not to allow the names of the correspondents to appear. This sonnet describes in considerable detail all the necessary features of a love letter as codified in the manuals of the *ars dictaminis*, in particular those that limit themselves to letters in the vernacular, including romantic letters. A telling contemporary example can be found in the template love letter that concludes the *Sommetta di componere volgarmente lettere*, aimed at vernacular readers.<sup>36</sup>

The Vecchia's speech similarly references the *ars dictaminis* tradition and its pedagogical context. In sonnet 148, she announces to Bellaccoglienza, whom she now guards, that all the advice that she will give her has come from her own experience; in her youth she was very beautiful and, after a long period of time spent in the school of love, she has acquired the doctrine that she will now explain and offer to the young woman. Experience has made her such an expert that she does not fear the judgement of any reader.

## Sonnet 148

I' era bella e giovane e folletta,  
 Ma non era a la *scuola* de l'amore  
 Istata; ma i' so or ben per cuore  
 La *pratica* la qual ti fie qui detta.

*Usanza* me n' à fatta sì savietta  
 Ched i' non dotterei nessun lettore  
 Che di ciò mi facesse desinore,  
 Ma' ched i' fosse bella e giovanetta:

Chéd egli è tanto ched i' non finai  
 Che-lla *scienza* i' ò nel mi' coraggio;  
 Sed e' ti piace, tu l'ascolterai,

Ma i' no l'eb[b]i senza gran damag[gl]io:  
 Molta pen'e travaglio vi durai;  
 Ma pur almen sen[n]'è [re]mas'e usag[gl]io.

I was beautiful and young and  
 without cares,  
 But to the school of love I'd not yet  
 Been; but now I know by heart  
 The techniques that will be related  
 to you there.

Experience has made me so wise  
 That I would not fear any teacher  
 Who might make me lose face in  
 this subject,  
 If only I were beautiful and young.

I have been studying this subject  
 for so long  
 That I have full knowledge of it in  
 my heart.  
 If you like, you will hear it,

But I did not obtain it without  
 great hardship:  
 Much anguish and suffering  
 I endured;  
 But at least wisdom and experience  
 have remained.

The terms *scuola* and *practica* in particular situate the Vecchia's words within a pedagogical framework; in fact, the introductions of manuals for *ars dictaminis* insist on the centrality of *usanza* and *practica*, far more important than the knowledge of models for developing a clear and effective writing style. In this sense the allusion to the figure of the 'lettore' – a term designating not a 'reader' but a 'lecturer' – mobilizes the pedagogical context in which the rhetorical art would be taught, thus supplementing the original metaphor of 'the school of love/experience' found in the *Rose* with an allusion to contemporary teaching practices of the *ars dictaminis* in Florence.<sup>37</sup> Again the terminology echoes the contemporary developments of the *ars dictaminis*, reflected for instance in the very title of a work from the period, the *Practica sive usus dictaminis* by Lorenzo d'Aquileia.<sup>38</sup>

A further clue comes at the end of her speech, in sonnet 195, when Bellaccoglienza, having listened to her, answers by speaking skilfully (*ben parlante*) to thank her for her teaching:

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## Sonnet 195

Bellaccoglienza la parola prese  
 E sì rispuose, come ben parlante:  
 ‘Gentil madonna, i’ vi fo grazie mante  
 Che di vostr’*arte* mi siete cortese;

Ma ’l fatto de l’amor no-m’è palese,  
 Se non se in parole trapassate.  
 Ched i’ sia di danar ben procacciante?  
 I’ n’ò assai per farne belle spese.

D’avere in me maniera bella e gente,  
 A-cciò vogl’i’ ben metter mia balia,  
 In tal maniera che-ssia soffiiente.

Se voi mi parlate di malia,  
 Ch’ella non può tornar già cuor di gente:  
 Creda ’l chi vuol, ch’i’ la teng’a-ffollia.’

Fair Welcome began to speak  
 And answered with well-chosen words:  
 ‘My noble Lady, I thank you very much  
 for having been generous to me with  
 your art;

but the facts of love are not clear to me,  
 because I know them only through old  
 words.

Why should I be an avid procurer of  
 money?

I have enough to make some nice  
 purchases.

It’s toward acquiring noble and  
 charming ways for myself

That I wish to apply my powers,  
 So that I may be well supplied.

When you say to me that magic powers  
 Cannot change the hearts of people,  
 Let anyone believe it who so desires,  
 but I consider it to be folly!’

To sum up, for Bellaccoglienza, who has no other experience of love other than through *parole trapassate* – the past words of others – the Vecchia’s speech amounts to a genuine *arte*, the *ars* of the manuals and of teaching practice.

**From Rhetoric to Politics**

The Vecchia’s role is essentially that of the go-between who prepares the final assault on Gelosia’s castle with her long, cynical speech to Bellaccoglienza on the nature of love that takes up Amico’s earlier advice to Amante in the section of the text formed by sonnets 47–73 and rewrites it in a female voice. The two speeches are linked, by the author’s own affirmation,<sup>39</sup> but they are defined above all as *consilia* of a deliberative kind, expressed in a coherent, concise, and persuasive way by two figures that the communal culture of the second half of the thirteenth century had raised to the level of the main protagonists of the *costume consiliare* (the customary practice of advice): the *senex* (old man) and the *amicus* (friend).<sup>40</sup> I am referring here to the sonnet with which the Vecchia starts talking to Bellaccoglienza – 144 – but also to the lexis used in Amico’s speech:

## Sonnet 144

Al[l]or Bellacoglienza più non tarda:  
 Immantenente lo spec[c]hi' eb[b]e i-mmano,  
 Sì vide il viso suo umile e piano;  
 Per molte volte nello spec[c]hio guarda.

La Vec[c]hia, che-ll'avea presa en sua guarda,  
 Le giura e dice: 'Per lo Dio sovrano,  
 Ch'unquanche Isotta, l'amica Tristano,  
 [. . . . . -arda]

Come tu-sse', figl[i]uola mia gentile.  
 Or convien che-ttu abie il mi' *consiglio*,  
 Che cader non potessi in luogo vile.

Se non sai guari, no-mmi maraviglio,  
 Ché giovan uon non puot'esser sottile,  
 Chéd i', quanto più vivo, più asottiglio.'

Thus Fair Welcome does not delay.  
 As soon as she took the mirror in  
 hand,  
 She saw her humble and honest face:  
 She looks at herself many times in  
 the mirror.

The Old Woman, who had taken  
 her under her wing,  
 Swears to her saying: 'In the name  
 of God the sovereign,  
 Never did Isolt, Tristan's friend  
 . . .

as you are, my noble daughter.  
 It's best that you have my advice,  
 So that you might not fall into  
 a bad situation.

I'm not surprised if you don't  
 know a lot,  
 For a young person cannot be wise,  
 Because the longer I live the wiser  
 I become.'

In the Italian cultural context of this period, the term *consiglio* recalls the practice of gathering and evaluating the counsel provided by different advisers, by taking into consideration the arguments presented, along with the specific educational background and intellectual formation of each counsellor.<sup>41</sup> Of course the term 'conseil' is present in the *Rose* as well – but there it carries far more general connotations.<sup>42</sup> For Enrico Artifoni, the theme of *consilium* is one of the main subjects of reflection in political culture at the time of the emergence of the figure of the *podestà* – the foreign official through whom the communes tried to find an institutional solution to the violent factionalist conflicts between local elite families. This systematic practice of political counsel is one of the main characteristics of this new civic culture, whose most visible representatives were the judge Albertano da Brescia in his native city and Brunetto Latini in Florence. Such figures were symptomatic of the advent of a new form of political culture that crystallized outside university circles in the local chancelleries. Brunetto's generation managed to systematize a new mode of practical wisdom – which could be termed 'podestarile-consilare' – in a radical rupture from the elitism of the rhetoricians of the generation of Boncompagno da Signa, though

still firmly inscribed in a longstanding tradition of reflection on the purpose of the art of rhetoric.<sup>43</sup>

The place where this slippage from rhetoric to politics is most visible is precisely Amico's speech. This is not surprising: for intellectuals such as Albertano and Brunetto, reflection on *amicitia* is tightly bound up with reflection on the role of communal institutions.<sup>44</sup> In the doctrine of the language arts, the *amicus* is the privileged interlocutor of the act of speaking. In the case of the *Fiore*, he is the spokesman for a veritable *theory* of political rhetoric. Amico's answer to Amante in sonnet 49 – after the latter has described how Malabocca has caused his separation from the flower – is particularly revealing.

Sonnet 49

Com'era gito il fatto ebi contato  
A motto a motto, di filo in aguglia,  
Al buono Amico, che non fu di Puglia;  
Che m'ebe molto tosto confortato,

E disse: 'Guarda che n[on] sie ac[c]et[t]ato  
Il consiglio Ration, ma da te il buglia,  
Ché 'fin'amanti tuttor gli tribuglia  
Con quel sermon di che-tt' a sermonato.

Ma ferma in ben amar tutta tua 'ntenza,  
E guarda al Die d'Amor su' [o]managgio,  
Ché tutto vince lungia soferenza.

Or metti a me intendere il corag[g]io,  
Chéd i' ti dirò tutta la sentenza  
Di ciò che dé far fin amante sag[g]io.'

I told the tale as it had happened,  
Word for word, leaving nothing out,  
To my good Friend, who was not  
from Apulia.

After having consoled me,

He said: 'Make sure you do not accept  
Reason's advice, but keep it far  
removed from you,

Because Reason always troubles  
courtly lovers  
With that sermon she has preached  
to you.

But put all your desire in loving  
properly,  
And keep your pledge to the God of  
Love,  
For long suffering can conquer  
everything.

Now give me your full attention,  
For I will tell you the entire story  
Of what a wise refined lover must do.'

I would like to call attention to this sonnet's lexis. Amico comforts Amante by recommending that he disregard Ragione's 'consiglio', which is dismissed pejoratively as a 'sermon', while Amico gets ready to pronounce a 'sentenza'. In the *Rose*, by contrast, Ami limits himself to declaring, 'Or vous dirai que vous ferez' (Now I will say what you will do; *RR* 7309). Such a development on the part of Jean de Meun would be unthinkable or indeed meaningless: only within the discursive space of the Florentine

*podestarile-consigliare* culture does such a carefully considered distinction between different linguistic forms of *elocutio* acquire its precise resonance.<sup>45</sup>

If Amico announces that he will deliver a ‘sentenza’, it is because he understands this term in the sense of an opinion reached at the end of a debate in which each of the parties has had the opportunity to express a point of view in the form of a *consilium*. The contrast with Ragione’s speech – dismissed as a ‘sermon’ – could not be clearer. Ragione’s intervention is presented as a monologic religious sermon that does not allow for public discussion or dialectical scrutiny, and Amico’s mocking evocation of a ‘sermon di che-tt’ a sermonato’ underlines Ragione’s insistence and repetitiousness. Amico’s advice, by contrast, emerges out of a prolonged dialectical disputation with Amante. Amante, by choosing the best of the *sentenze* expressed in the debate, makes it possible to give this episode almost the form of a *causa deliberativa*. While commentating on Cicero’s *De inventione*, Brunetto Latini had defined such a *causa deliberativa* as

quella che è messa e detta a’ cittadini a contendere il lor pareri et a domandare a lloro che nne sentono, e sopra ciò si dicono molte et isvariate sentenze, perché alla fine si possa prendere la migliore . . . Et così deliberano qual sia meglio e prendesi l’una sentenza.

that which is presented and read to citizens, so as to allow them to debate it and ask questions about it, and so that many sentences may be expressed on the matter, in order to allow everyone to choose the best one in the end . . . And thus they deliberate on the merits of each sentence and choose the best one.<sup>46</sup>

Even if the poem does not lay out in detail the typology of the different forms of deliberation, with the term *sentenza* the Tuscan author certainly adds a public and political dimension to Amico’s *conseil* by flagging its civic connotations.

### From Politics to Philosophy

A ‘Brunettian’ atmosphere can thus be seen to hang over the text; by this I mean an interest in reading, rereading, and refashioning the text along the lines of a series of dominant rhetorical and political themes and concerns. One central figure in the *Fiore*, however, poses additional difficulties in terms of his rhetorical practice: Falsembiante. As in the *Rose*, Falsembiante’s appearance sets the stage for the revelation of the author’s name, given by the Dio d’Amore in sonnet 82. But whereas in the *Rose* the duplicity of Faus Semblant is used to complicate and undermine notions of



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authorial agency and intention – as discussed by Rossi and Nievergelt here – in the *Fiore* Falsembiante's duplicity draws attention instead to the obscene *double entendre* of the new author's name, 'Durante'.<sup>47</sup>

I would like to concentrate on a single, particularly revealing sonnet:

## Sonnet 92

Color con cui sto si ànno il mondo  
Sotto da lor sì forte avilupato,  
Ched e' nonn-è nes[s]un sì gran prelato  
C[h]'a lor possanza truovi riva o fondo.

Co-mmio baratto ciaschedun afondo:  
Che sed e' vien alcun gra-litterato  
Che voglia discovrir il mi' peccato,  
Co-la forza ch'i' ò, i' sì 'l confondo.

Mastro Sighier non andò guari lieto:  
A ghiado il fe' morire a gran dolore  
Nella corte di Roma, ad Orbivieto.

Mastro Guiglielmo, il buon di Sant'Amore,  
Fec'i' di Francia metter in divieto  
E sbandir del reame a gran romore.

Those with whom I pass my time  
have so firmly  
ensnared the world beneath their feet  
that there is no great prelate  
who can set limits to their power.

With my trickery I sink each one of  
them  
And if an important man of letters  
comes along  
Who wants to show my sin for what  
it is,  
I can confound him with the powers  
I have.

Master Siger did not meet a  
happy end:  
With a sword I made him die with  
great pain  
In the court of Rome, at Orvieto.

As for Master William, the good  
man of Saint-Amour,  
I had the prohibition placed on him  
in France  
And had him exiled from the realm  
with great outcry.

Falsembiante claims to be part of a group that totally dominates the world and that no prelate can resist. This capacity for blackmail allows the group to control whoever attempts to denounce Falsembiante's misdeeds, even were he to be the greatest 'letterato' (man of letters) – a word to which I will return. To corroborate this claim, Falsembiante offers two examples: Siger of Brabant, who was assassinated at Orvieto in the Papal Curia, and William of Saint-Amour, a secular master who had led the revolt in the University of Paris during the 1250s in protest against the growing privileges granted to the mendicant orders.<sup>48</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, the insertion of this mention of Siger of Brabant is a hugely important innovation in the *Fiore*.<sup>49</sup> The sonnet thus

links the two major crises that affected the University of Paris during the thirteenth century in a manner that seems to me original and highly significant: the conflict between the secular masters and the mendicants in the 1250s and 1260s and the bringing to heel of the Arts Faculty that Bishop Tempier carried out in 1270 and 1277. The social critique of Faux Semblant's speech in the *Rose* is made far more topical and specific in the *Fiore*, referencing contemporary debates on the role of mendicants in the socio-economic life of the city of Florence, as in sonnet 118, whose final lines function as a sort of denunciation of the friars' dubious practices in their capacity as testamentary executors. The question concerns usurers in particular, whose practices the mendicants were supposed to denounce, but on whose services they often relied in order to enrich themselves. Rather than invoking a simple, general opposition between the mendicants and the 'menuz pueple' (simple folk; *RR* 11,512) as Jean de Meun had done, the author of the *Fiore* invokes a different kind of opposition related to contemporary Florentine legislation, enacted in 1282, intended to curb the usurious practices of the local potentates:<sup>50</sup>

## Sonnet 118

Vedete che danari ànno usorieri,  
Siniscalchi e provosti e maggiori,  
Che tutti quanti son gran piatitori  
E sì son argogliosi molto e fieri.

Ancor borghesi sopra i cavalieri  
Son og[g]i tutti quanti venditori  
Di lor derrate e aterminatori,  
Sì ch'ogne gentil uon farà panieri.

E' conviene ch'è vendan casa o terra  
Infinché i borghesi siar pagati,  
Che giorno e notte gli tegnono in serra.

Ma io, che porto panni devisati,  
Fo creder lor che ciascheun sì erra,  
E 'nganno ingannatori e ingannati.

See how much money the usurers,  
Seneschals, provost, and mayors have!  
All of them are big swindlers,  
And they are very proud and fierce.

Moreover, all of the bourgeoisie, to the  
detriment of the knights,  
Now sell their own goods  
At inflated prices and on credit,  
So that every nobleman will be robbed.

They must sell their house and land  
So that the bourgeoisie can be paid,  
They who day and night keep the  
nobles in tight straits.

But I, who clothe myself in various garbs,  
Make each of them believe the other's  
wrong,  
And I deceive both the deceivers and  
the deceived.

This precise and detailed topical satire of Florentine elites is doubled by a more theoretical point concerning the importance of the freedom of thought exercised by the *philosophi* produced by the Arts Faculty, such as poor Siger of Brabant. The translator thus draws a complex but evocative

analogy between the corrupt practices of the local mendicants and portions of the *bourgeoisie* on the one hand, and the climate of intellectual repression pursued by establishment theologians like Tempier on the other. Also the *Fiore*'s treatment of the figure of Guillaume de Saint-Amour, taken over from the *Rose*, confirms this with its subtle but significant changes. Sonnet 123, for example, can be linked to Guillaume's *Tractatus de periculis*, already evoked in the *Rose*. In the sonnet the friars are explicitly described as the valets of the Antichrist who have conquered land and sea, carriers of disorder and destruction against whom the whole world has declared war.<sup>51</sup>

In similar fashion sonnets 101 and 102 – in which Falsেম্বiante and his feminine counterpart Costrettastinenza list all the religious figures that share their hypocrisy and their capacity to imitate all forms of speech – seem to describe a world that has been wholly *clericalized*, a vision that Guillaume had previously painted in the *Collectiones catholicae et canonicae scripturae*.<sup>52</sup> I want to insist on two elements in particular. The first is the reference to Falsেম্বiante as a speaker of multiple tongues – 'I' sì so ben per cuor ogne linguag[gi]o' (I know every language by heart; *Fiore*, 101. 1): while this provides a parody of the biblical 'gift of tongues', it also functions as a reference to the kind of linguistic adroitness required in a multilingual context such as that of late thirteenth-century Tuscany, where the use of French, Italian, and Latin coexisted at multiple levels. The second is the *Fiore*'s important, indeed seminal role in inaugurating the Italian tradition of antimendicant satire: the tradition was already present in France with Rutebeuf and was transmitted to Italy through the intermediary of the *Rose* and its Tuscan adaptation.

### Conclusion

To conclude, it seems significant to me that the *Fiore* would mark the irruption of this polemic into the Italian poetic tradition, which up to that point had been limited to more localized criticism at the level of the political life of individual cities and communes. The *Fiore* thus constitutes the likely point of origin for the development of this tradition in Italy, which eventually produced texts like Boccaccio's *Decameron*, elaborating what can be called a kind of vernacular ecclesiology.<sup>53</sup> The same can be said about the case of Siger, who also appears to have played a seminal role in Italy. For reasons of space, it is impossible to go into any detail concerning the debts of Italian authors to the master from Brabant.<sup>54</sup> The most significant element is, in a sense, encapsulated in the regretful tone of sonnet 92. Here a particular attitude to Siger and to his destiny can be

discerned, one that corresponds very closely to Dante's later attitude towards Siger in canto 10 of the *Paradiso*: there Thomas Aquinas praises his opponent, widely assumed to be Siger, and the episode is often interpreted as the expression of a utopian longing for doctrinal reconciliation and for an idealized intellectual culture able to transcend all forms of sectarianism.<sup>55</sup> We can equally note that in this sonnet Siger and Guillaume are associated with the *gran letterati* who oppose the mendicants. In Brunetto's canto – canto 15 of the *Inferno* – Dante's master uses the expressions 'chierci e litterati' to single out, among his companions worthy of remembrance, Priscian and Francesco d'Accorso. This association once more points towards the convergence of the different disciplines of grammar, law, and rhetoric in the Bolognese milieu, which provides part of the larger intellectual and conceptual frame of reference for the *Fiore*.<sup>56</sup>

It seems to me then that the *Fiore* represents an important stage of a passage from one cultural model, in which rhetoric and politics are central and dominant, to a new model in which they meet new disciplines and new conceptions, without, however, departing radically from earlier traditions. It is not easy to assign a precise date to this turning point. The poem has traditionally been attributed to the young Dante in the second half of the 1280s, and this dating would make it possible to discern within the *Fiore* a sort of mission statement of the young poet.<sup>57</sup> However, based on a series of elements that I have analysed elsewhere and that point to specific features of the Florentine socio-economic context, it seems possible to push this dating forward to the government of Giano della Bella (1293–5) or slightly later.<sup>58</sup> This hypothesis would remain completely compatible with the idea of a Dante who, after a period of activity shaped by the models of the *Dolce Stil Novo*, becomes involved with the political life of Florence, in a process that both links Brunetto's example but also surpasses it. This happens only in 1295, after the death of Brunetto, and it is at this moment that Dante is engaged in forging new poetic forms to expand his intellectual horizon.

To conclude, it is important to remember that in the *Vita Nova* Dante had used the first part of the *Rose* in particular, notably Guillaume de Lorris's presentation of Amor's commandments.<sup>59</sup> This is a part that the author of the *Fiore* disregards entirely, cutting it without any discernible regret. This shift may well signal the wider significance of this Tuscan translation-adaptation of the *Roman de la Rose* as marking a paradigmatic event in the cultural and intellectual life of Florence at the end of the thirteenth century. This event signals a real turning point in the social and cultural configuration of languages, disciplines, learning, and culture in

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late medieval Tuscany. Just as the emergence of the *Dolce Stil Novo* constituted a definitive move beyond the hegemony of Occitan in chivalric culture (especially in the poetry of the knight-citizen par excellence: Guido Cavalcanti), so the translation of the *Rose* is the Tuscan response to the cultural hegemony of French and francophone literature and culture during the final years of the thirteenth century. At the same time, with regard to Dante's trajectory, the *Fiore* may well have been a text that allowed him to produce a kind of poetry that is interested in matters that go far beyond the erotic.

PROOF