

CURSES AND LAUGHTER: THE ETHICS OF POLITICAL INVECTIVE IN THE
COMIC POETRY OF HIGH AND LATE MEDIEVAL ITALY

by

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My dissertation examines the ethical engagement of political invective poetry in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. Modern criticism tends to treat medieval invective as a playfully subversive but marginal poetic game with minimal ethical weight. Instead, I aim to restore these poetic productions to their original context: the history, law, and custom of Tuscan cities. This contexts allows me to explore how humor and fury, in the denunciation of political enemies, interact to establish not a game but an ethics of invective. I treat ethics as both theoretical and practical, referring to Aristotle, Cicero, and Brunetto Latini, and define ethics as the pursuit of the common good in a defined community.

Chapter I introduces the corpus, its historical and cultural background, its critical reception, and my approach. Chapter II discusses medieval invective in Tuscany and surveys the cultural practice of invective writing. Chapter III approaches invectives

written by Rustico Filippi during the Guelph and Ghibelline wars. Chapter IV explores invectives by Cecco Angiolieri set in Siena, which polemicize with the Siennese government and citizenry. Chapter V examines invectives in Dante's *Commedia* (*Inf.* 19, *Purg.* 6, and *Par.* 27), focusing on his unexpected humor and his critique of the papacy, the empire, and Italian city governments.

My conclusion examines the ethical function of slanderous wit in wartime invective. These poems balance verbal aggression with humor, claiming a role for laughter in creating dialogue within conflict. Far from a stylistic or ludic exercise, each invective shows the poet's activism and ethical engagement.

This dissertation includes previously published material.

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CHAPTER I
 THE MEDIEVAL INVECTIVE IN ITALY:
 HUMOR, CONFLICT, AND ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

The high and late Middle Ages in Italy offer a wealth of vernacular poetic invectives—insulting verses aimed at blaming specific wrongdoings of an individual, group, city or institution—that show the interaction between what I call curses and laughter: the coexistence of a serious and a playful side. The relationship between curses and laughter is visible in the double-edged ethics of blaming specific human faults of individuals and collective groups while using ridicule and humor to cast such blame. Although medieval invectives create a dynamic tension between historical and invented facts, and between savage blame and humor, modern critics generally view this poetry as disengaged from concrete issues, interpreting it as a marginal form of subversive recreation with minimal ethical weight.¹ This dissertation takes a new approach to

¹ I discuss this hermeneutic tendency in greater detail later in this chapter. This tendency is evident in recent studies and anthologies of medieval Italian literature, such as for example Paolo Orvieto's "La poesia d'amore e il suo rovescio. I vituperia e le tenzoni poetiche" in *La poesia comico-realistica dalle origini al Cinquecento* (2000) (especially 13-44), as well as Steven Botterill's "Minor Writers" (115-17). These and many other studies present comic medieval texts either as stylistic exercises of subversion and reversal, or as mere reactions against the 'higher' poetic form of the *Stilnovo* and courtly poetry. This predominant critical approach has been recently questioned by Claudio Giunta in *Versi a un destinatario, saggio sulla poesia italiana del Medioevo* (2002) 268-73. In line with Giunta's study is the essay collection edited by Stefano Carrai and Giuseppe Marrani, *Cecco Angiolieri e la poesia satirica medievale* (2005).

invective and comic poetry in Italy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, emphasizing the ethical project of medieval political invective. I argue instead that these comic texts are both rooted in and actively engaged with the social relations, civic chaos and violence, and political and religious conflicts of their time. I see this political invective poetry as featuring a strongly ethical orientation mediated by a humor that disarms excessive hostility against the individual targets, providing an opening for dialogue. In examining invectives by Tuscan poets Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, and Dante Alighieri, I consider both their formal dimension (convention and comedy) and their status as authorial productions specific to a lost historical and geopolitical context, which I use evidence from historical documents and manuscripts to retrieve. Overall my dissertation seeks to examine the ethical engagement of political invective poetry in medieval Italy, placing it within a well-defined social, historical, and political frame.

My research has been inspired by the long tradition of invective poetry—which dates back to the Bronze Age, the Biblical period, as well as to classical antiquity—and its importance in relation not only to medieval Italy but also to modern invective literature worldwide. Any time an individual, group, or institution has committed an abuse which brings instability and injustice upon another individual, community, or country, the abused have taken a stand against it by voicing their opposition, and above all by providing possible solutions to the crisis caused by the initial wrongdoing. Poetry has proven to be an enduring and effective means to confront and overcome a wrongdoing. Through an invective rhyme delivered orally or in writing, an author can denounce and ridicule specific crimes, impute them to individuals and groups, and foster

a dialogue with an entire community. Invective verse creates a call to all its members to be responsive and responsible to each other. Invective poetry thus emerges from and reflects an ethical engagement in practical issues that affects a great many people. I believe that it emerges not simply as an exercise in a rhetorical tradition, or as a subgenre of either comedy or satire, but rather as one of the most important tools of communication available to us. Invective enables immediate communication with others, offering ways to express an expectation that a situation can and should be different from the present status quo; a vision of how things can improve; and a horizon of concrete possibilities for the benefit of all.

In this introductory chapter, I shall first survey theories of humor and laughter proposed by prominent theorists to show how humor research can help us understand the complex interaction of curses and laughter in medieval invective poetry.² Throughout my dissertation I employ the terms *humor*, *laughter*, *comic*, and *satire* not in a commonsensical way, as though they were transparent. On the contrary, critics have provided various definitions and theories of humor, comedy, and laughter, showing that they are indeed intricate categories. Humor has been approached from different disciplines from the social sciences (such as sociology, anthropology, and linguistics), the natural sciences (such as brain biology, medicine, and mathematics), and the humanities

² The term “humor research” refers to the field of studies that examines humor through a multidisciplinary approach. The relatively recent term dates from the 1980s, when Don and Alleen Nilsen, Mahadev Apte, and John Morreall founded and promoted the International Society for Humor Studies, which sponsors humor research worldwide. The society sponsors annual conferences and publishes the newsletter *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* (since 1988). The ISHS first used and promoted the concept of “humor research” which—to my knowledge—does not appear as an official field of study before the 1980s.

(such as literary criticism, philosophy, and history).³ Scholars have examined humor in different periods from classical antiquity (with Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero) to modernity (with Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud) until recent years, when the topic of wit and laughter has not ceased to spark the interest of psychologists and linguists (such as Fabio Ceccarelli and Salvatore Attardo).⁴ The many studies on the topic suggest that approaching humor can be a complex task as difficult as trying to define it. I shall briefly survey these theories because humor and laughter play a crucial ethical role in medieval invective poetry and, although they apparently connote cheerfulness and frivolity, we must approach them as seriously and critically as possible.

I will then explore the genre of invective in juxtaposition with humor and laughter, showing how this relationship must be considered when approaching medieval invective poetry. From a modern perspective, the association between laughter and aggression seems problematic, perhaps because for us laughter is often linked to practical jokes that have no intention to harm. However, if we consider the etymology of the Italian term “battuta” [joke, literally “hit”]—or even its English equivalent “punch line”—we can see the interplay between humor and aggression. This association is also visible in the term “invectiva” which originated in classical antiquity (ca. fourth century)

³ See <http://www.degruyter.com/journals/humor/detailEn.cfm> (accessed April 9, 2010).

⁴ See Plato, *Philebus* 45a-50a; Aristotle, *Poetics* 1449a; Cicero, *De oratore* II, 216-289; Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900); Freud, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905); Ceccarelli, *Sorriso e riso* (1988); and Attardo and Victor Raskin, “Script Theory Revis(it)ed: Joke Similarity and Joke Representation Model” (1991).

from the verb “invehi” [to inveigh or attack], and was linked to a kind of speech which ridiculed an opponent using mordant wit.⁵

Having discussed theoretical approaches to humor and laughter and their link with invective poetry, I shall outline the origin and tradition of invective from its earliest manifestations (which date to the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman traditions) and then to the Middle Ages. In continuity with this early tradition, medieval invective poetry played an important role during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In medieval Italy, different authors employed invective in a variety of circumstances in order to confront and resolve pressing problems that affected them and their communities; invective was a versatile and practical tool used in many contexts. I shall survey how modern critics have approached invective poetry, neglecting to consider medieval invective within its historical and geopolitical context, both in continuity with and distinct from the past invective tradition. Modern critics have also often overlooked the interplay between humor and blame when approaching the invective poems of Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, and Dante Alighieri, and have neglected to examine in depth the relation between the author and the target readers of these invectives. Having addressed the connection—but also the distinction—between ancient and medieval invective, the role of blame and humor, and the relation between author and target audience in medieval invectives, I will conclude by comparing medieval comic texts with modern literature. By examining modern invectives through a political and historical lens, we can see their continuity with medieval texts.

⁵ On the source of this etymology see Merrill 5; Rao 103-04; and Novokhatko 12-13; on the relation between humor and invective see Rutherford 6 and Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter* 7-8.

Humor and Laughter: Theories and Applications

Humor and laughter have been the complex subjects of studies from ancient times to the present, and any attempt to approach them constitutes a serious challenge. This complexity is evident by the overwhelming number of studies variously devoted to laughter, “the comic,” or more broadly to humor, as particularly visible in recent studies.⁶ As Robert Provine notes, the popularity of humor and laughter as objects of inquiry suggests not only their complexity but also their value throughout different disciplines; prominent scholars have been trying to define and examine them for more than 2,000 years: “The undeniable importance of the topic is immediately revealed by the caliber of those who have sought to understand it, a group that includes Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Kant, Schopenhauer, Darwin, Freud, and Bergson” (12).⁷ Provine suggests that we must approach the the variety of humor theories with great circumspection, given the intricacy of the concepts and the importance of their expositors. I shall survey the major theorists and theories of humor and laughter, considering first the definition of humor and laughter and then a general overview of the dominant theories. By doing so, I would like to show not only the complexity of humor but also the relevant questions about the theoretical and methodological applications of these theories to medieval invective poetry in Italy.

⁶ As Salvatore Attardo observes, “Goldstein and McGhee (1972) quote about 400 works concerning humor published between 1900 and 1971. . . In its first four years of existence (1988-91) the journal HUMOR published 85 article and reviewed 70 books, all of which had humor as their major topic” (*Linguistic Theories* 15). James Evans includes in his 1987 annotated bibliography a total of 3,106 items on the theory and criticism of comedy.

⁷ This list can be made even more impressive by adding Cicero, Quintilian, Croce, and Pirandello.

Before sketching a general overview of humor theories, we must consider the question of definition. In other words, what is humor? The original etymology goes back to the medical term of Greek and Latin physiology that described the four humors or fluids of the human body responsible for the physical and mental disposition of individuals: blood, phlegm, yellow bile or anger, and black bile or melancholy (Santarcangeli 11). This explanation also coincides with medieval medicine, as evident from Brunetto Latini's definition of "umore" which suggested that the term was originally conceived as an emotional disposition (cited in Pirandello 15-16). As Pirandello illustrates in his *Umorismo*, the meaning of the term "umore" evolved from this specific physiological concept to the modern understanding of "umorismo" as an expression of feelings: "quella delicata affezione o passione d'animo" (16). As Pirandello notes, the term "humor" is not easily defined because it is culturally and historically based, and thus cannot simply be described in association with laughter (17) though to define humor we must explore its implied connection with laughter. Salvatore Attardo summarizes Pirandello's discussion of humor and laughter, noting that even if humor is commonly defined as synonymous with laughter, the relationship between the two is not symmetrical:

The assumption behind this identification of humor and laughter is that what makes people laugh is humorous, and hence the property is incorrectly seen as symmetrical—what is funny makes you laugh and what makes you laugh is funny. This leads to the identification of a mental phenomenon (humor) with a complex neuropsychological manifestation (laughter). (10)

Attardo warns that humor and laughter are not interchangeable because humor is a mental phenomenon not commensurate with the reaction of laughter. Furthermore, as Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca notes, laughter follows patterns according to situations which are not necessarily amusing, such as for example embarrassment or bewilderment, as well as physiological laughter caused by hallucinogens (cited in Attardo, 11). Patricia Keith-Spiegel also observes that “laughter may be forthcoming as a reaction to any sort of emotional state, not solely amusement. . . and to attempt a listing of what can give rise to laughter is a hazardous undertaking, since man apparently laughs at just about everything” (17). Thus, even if laughter is traditionally linked with humor—and indeed plays an important role in identifying its presence—it is not a valid criterion by which to define humor. Nonetheless, laughter cannot be completely dismissed from humor, because humor without laughter would be, paradoxically, humorless. Overall, even if laughter is not a sufficient index of humor, it is indeed one of its essential elements and must be acknowledged though not overstated. All of these reflections show that defining humor conclusively is a complex task which becomes even more problematic if we consider that each discipline has approached it through the filter of different categories and terms which have often obscured the understanding of humor.

As Attardo illustrates, each discipline approaches humor differently by studying either its manifestations (as in psychology) or its genres (as in literary criticism) (5). Thus various disciplines may juxtapose humor with other elements such as amusement and wit, thus conceiving it more loosely, while others may distinguish it on a formal level from specific genres such as comedy or satire, thus conceiving it more rigorously:

Linguists, psychologists, and anthropologists have taken humor to be an all-encompassing category, covering any event or object that elicits laughter, amuses, or is felt to be funny. . . In other fields the importance of clear subdivisions is more keenly felt. Literary criticism is a good example. Sinicropi (1981) clearly expresses the need for a rigorous definition of humor . . . referring to the differences among such literary models as parody, irony, satire, etc. (4) ⁸

Attardo illustrates how various disciplines perceive humor differently because they seek their own objectives in studying the phenomenon. These divergences suggest that we must be cautious when juxtaposing elements such as laughter and amusement (as well as literary genres such as comedy and satire) with humor. To avoid using the terms interchangeably, throughout this study I will distinguish humor from laughter, referring to the former as an expression and to the latter as a reaction.⁹ I shall also acknowledge the distinction of literary genres such as comedy (and its subdivision of the comic) and satire which like humor are not transparent categories, because both are framed within a precise historical and cultural environment (as their respective Greek and Latin etymologies suggest).

The difficulties of defining humor, and the importance of distinguishing it from laughter, are reflected in some prominent theories of humor and laughter. Humor scholarship has provided useful theories to explain the essence and mechanisms of what is laughable and humorous. In sketching this outline, I will follow the general

⁸ The need for distinction between humor and other genres is also clearly stated in Pirandello's *Umorismo*, which outlines the taxonomical distinctions between humor and other rhetorical expressions such as irony, *facetia*, *burla*, and the comic (17-20).

⁹ Attardo exposes the tendency to use the terms "humor" and "laughter" interchangeably in various scholars, such as Bergson and Freud: "Bergson clearly considers laughter and humor to be interchangeable, as can be seen from the complete title of his 1901 book '*Laughter. Essay about the meaning of humor*' and so does Freud" (10). Pirandello is more precise than Bergson and Freud in defining and distinguishing humor from other phenomena.

classification employed recently in humor research, acknowledging the chronology of each theorist. Modern scholars generally employ a threefold classification in approaching the vast literature on humor, a taxonomy which is indeed helpful although, as I will show, it must be used with caution. In 1969 Jacob Levine grouped three general tendencies in approaching humor:

three research models are used to explain the motivational sources of humor; one is basically positive, one negative, and one mixed. These are: (1) cognitive-perceptual theory . . . (2) behavioral theory. . . and (3) psychoanalytical theory. (2)

Each category refers to a separate phenomenon such as (1) a specific human perception of reality, (2) a performance toward others, and (3) an internal mechanism for coping with oneself. Victor Raskin further associates this threefold classification with three groups of theories: “The first class is usually associated with incongruity; the second one with disparagement; the third with suppression/repression” (31).¹⁰

The incongruity theory proposes that humor and laughter originate in the juxtaposition of incongruous elements in a given situation. As Attardo summarizes:

the first authors generally associated with incongruity theories of humor are Kant (1724-1804). . . and Schopenhauer (1788-1860). . . Kant’s famous definition of laughter reads: ‘Laughter is an affection arising from sudden transformation of a strained expectation into nothing’ . . . Schopenhauer’s definition of laughter mentions ‘incongruity’ explicitly. (47-48)¹¹

¹⁰ See also Morreall, *Taking Laughter* 3. In *Linguistic Theories*, Attardo summarizes these three theories: “incongruity theories (a.k.a. contrast) . . . hostility/disparagement (a.k.a. aggression, superiority, triumph, derision) theories. . . and release theories (a.k.a. sublimation, liberation)” (47). Raskin notes that Darwin first sketched this threefold classification (31).

¹¹ Pirandello can also fit into the category of incongruity theory of humor because he defines it as “un sentimento del contrario” (*L’Umore* 78).

According to the incongruity theory, humor is based on a perception of an unexpected clash between two contrasting elements, which stirs laughter in individuals. These elements can be an “object, event, idea, social expectation and so forth” (Keith-Spiegel 6). As Attardo notes, the recent humor theories of prominent scholars of linguistics, such as “Arthur Koestler’s (1964) bisociation theory,” even if they are labeled as “cognitivist,” follow the classification of incongruity theories (46).

Unlike the incongruity theory, the disparagement theory (more commonly known as superiority theory) is more morally oriented because it is based not on a perception but rather on human behavior. According to the superiority theory, humor originates from an act of aggression which stirs an ill-natured laughter at the wrongdoings of other individuals considered morally inferior, and thus bestows a sense of superiority. Proponents of this theory are Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Baudelaire, and Bergson.¹² Of these, Hobbes is the most frequently acknowledged because he explicitly evokes the concept of superiority, as for example in his 1650 treatise *Human Nature*: “the passion of laughter is nothing else but sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves, by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly” (54). Hobbes uses the well-known term “sudden glory” to express the feeling of superiority that an individual experiences over others’ infirmity, and how such feelings

¹² See Morreall, *Taking Laughter* 4-5; Attardo 49-50. Although scholars usually do not include Baudelaire in the superiority theory, I would argue that his theory of laughter, illustrated in his 1855 essay “De l’essence du rire,” is clearly based on a sense of superiority: “laughter has a satanic origin: it is the expression both of man’s sense of superiority to the beasts and of his anguished sense of inferiority in relation to the absolute”(109). Baudelaire’s essay also emphasizes the sense of inferiority, thus suggesting an ambivalent approach to humor and laughter.

stir laughter.¹³ Bergson is also listed as “the most influential proponent of the superiority theory” because for him “humor is a social corrective, i.e., used by society to correct deviant behavior” (Attardo, 50). The superiority theory emphasizes the aggressiveness of humor and has been recently employed in sociology and anthropology.¹⁴

As Attardo illustrates, the third and last category, i.e., the suppression/repression theory (more commonly known as the relief theory), suggests that “humor ‘releases’ tensions, psychic energy, or that humor releases one from inhibitions, conventions, and laws. The most influential proponent of a release theory is certainly Freud (1905)” (50). As Morreall also suggests, Freud’s theory is greatly indebted to Herbert Spencer’s and Theodor Lipps’ concepts of psychic energy and discharge as a way to explain the mechanism of laughter (*Taking Laughter* 26-27). Like Spencer and Lipps, Freud proposes that laughter emerges as a release; however, Freud expands the concept by providing a more detailed description of the mechanics of laughter than his predecessors did. Thus according to Freud, laughter arises as a release not simply of nervous energy (as advanced by Spencer) or of a general psychic force (as Lipps suggests), but rather through the devices of “lifting” and “discharge” (Freud 146-48) or “condensation and displacement” (cited in Attardo 55). In *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud

¹³ A closer examination of Hobbes’ theory of laughter will show that he conceived it not simply as an expression of superiority over the infirmity of others but also—as he explicitly elaborates later in the chapter—as an act of self-criticism of our own infirmities. Hobbes’ concept of self-mockery is later restricted to cases when it does not harm the individual who laughs at himself (55). At the end of his section on laughter, Hobbes introduces the idea of social laughter. Overall, Hobbes’ theory of laughter is more complex than a superiority theory, because it is centered not merely on a sudden reaction of personal triumph and glory over others, but also as an act of self-criticism against our own infirmities. George Bertram Milner also notes that Hobbes’ “statements on laughter. . . have not always been quoted accurately” (4n).

¹⁴ See Attardo 50; Fine 174-75; and Apte 128-130.

examines various examples of jokes, considering the communication between the person who tells the joke and the beneficiary, and concluding that the latter laughs through a complex process which involves pleasure, inhibition, and relief: “The process in the joke’s first person produces pleasure by lifting inhibition and diminishing local expenditure; but it seems not to come to rest until, through the intermediary of the interpolated third person, it achieves general relief through discharge” (158). Freud’s theory of wit contains various notions, such as the “economy of psychical expenditure” (42-44, 185-88), which make his theory far more complex than a general expression of a “relief theory.”

The taxonomy of these three categories recurs in humor research and is indeed an important and useful tool that we can apply to medieval comic invective. More specifically, each theory could apply to different poets because, as we shall see, each author deploys humor according to his own personal sensibility. Rustico Filippi’s invectives seem to exemplify the release theory, as they defuse excessive hostility toward political enemies. Through a process of dialogue, Rustico elaborates an exchange of jokes through ridicule, thus condensing and displacing excessive aggression and inhibition between him and his target audience. On the other hand, Cecco Angiolieri’s invectives seem to follow the model outlined by the incongruity theory. Through hyperbole and irony, Cecco provides contrasting and incongruous scenarios to stir and provoke the amusement of his readers. Finally, Dante’s invectives from the *Commedia* often exhibit the model of the superiority theory. Dante openly ridicules his targets of attack, deriding

them from his higher position as the satirical poet-censor, thus revealing the wickedness and weaknesses of his enemies.

Even though the incongruity, superiority, and relief theories of humor can be useful and indeed illuminate the individual poets, they nonetheless constitute an excessively monolithic classification that—as evident from the cases of Hobbes and Freud—tends to reduce the complexity of the single theorist and inaccurately simplifies them for the sake of providing a comprehensive theory. Furthermore, if we use and apply any one of these theories without proper caution, we may do less than justice not only to the various theorists of humor but also the poets, because we risk reducing invective poetry to a mere reflex of a theoretical category. For this reason I will not systematically apply any of the abovementioned humor theories to my selected texts; instead, I shall examine their humor on a more practical level. My principal aim is to reconcile the ethics of invective with the aggressiveness of its verbal surface, and to understand its mordant humor not simply in theoretical terms. In fact, I approach humor within an historical and sociological frame, in order to comprehend its application to an ethics of invective.

Furthermore, the complexity of humor and laughter outlined thus far must also be approached comprehensively not only on a theoretical but also on a more distinctively cultural and historical level. Even though scholars have surveyed various theories on the field of humor research, focusing on renowned thinkers and covering virtually all historical periods from classical antiquity (Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian), the Renaissance (Vincenzo Maggi and Lodovico Castelvetro), the Baroque Period (Descartes and Hobbes), Restoration and Romanticism (Kant, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard), to

modernity (Bergson, Freud, Pirandello, and Frye), they have consistently overlooked theories of humor during the Middle Ages. Attardo provides a very comprehensive survey of the literature of humor theories in his *Linguistic Theories of Humor* (1994), yet he does not examine any significant theorists in the Middle Ages and scornfully labels the period as the “dark ages” of humor research: “The Middle Ages were really the ‘dark ages,’ because there was little theorizing on humor (33).¹⁵ Other humor scholars, like John Morreall and Paul Lauter, share this view, as evident from their collections of humor theories where they mention no theories advanced by medieval thinkers.¹⁶ However, as I will show in this and the next chapter, humor and laughter were dynamically present both in theory and practice in the Middle Ages. As Franco Porsia has noted: “Il Medioevo ha avuto anch’esso teorie generali sul ridere, psicologiche, mediche, umorali, morali, tendenti all’organicità dottrinale e religiosa” (12).¹⁷ Porsia’s statement is

¹⁵ Attardo only includes a rapid annotation on John Tzetzes (1110-1185), a few translators of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and a gloss on Dante’s *Commedia* (33-34).

¹⁶ See Lauter, *Theories of Comedy*; Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*.

¹⁷ Porsia’s statement is from his introduction to Felice Moretti’s *La ragione del sorriso e del riso nel Medioevo* (2001). Recent studies have refuted the misconception that humor and laughter was not prominent in the Middle Ages; see Michael George, “An Austere Age without Laughter” (2008); and Jacques Le Goff, “Laughter in the Middle Ages” (1997). See also the collection of essays *Il Riso: Atti delle I Giornate Internazionali Interdisciplinari di Studio sul Medioevo* (2002) edited by Francesco Mosetti Casaretto. Other recent studies focus on a specific literary genre or aspect of humor in the Middle Ages; see Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages* (1996); Massimo Bonafin, *Contesti della parodia. Semiotica, antropologia, cultura medievale* (2001); Lisa Perfetti, *Women and Laughter in Medieval Comic Literature* (2003); Valerie Allen, *On Farting. Language and Laughter in the Middle Ages* (2007). See also the very comprehensive volumes edited by Guy Halsall, *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (2002); and Albrecht Classen, *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, its Meaning, and Consequences* (2010). Even though all these studies are crucial for an in-depth understanding of the topic of humor and laughter in the Middle Ages, they do not focus on providing a systematic survey of theories of humor in the Middle Ages. A comprehensive study that would gather all the significant humor theories in the Middle Ages will be an invaluable addition to medieval studies. However, undertaking such a study will be very challenging because in the Middle Ages various theories of humor were not systematically recorded in treatises, yet

indeed confirmed by the prominent place that invective had as a practice in the culture of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. In order to fully understand the theoretical, cultural, historical, but also ethical implications of invective poetry in Rustico, Cecco, and Dante, I will first define invective in general, and then show how the genre is linked to humor. Even though modern critics do not usually link the genre of invective to humor and laughter, I will show how in the Middle Ages such a link was both evident and important. To understand the important ethical role that humor plays in medieval invective poetry, we must improve our understanding of medieval invective and medieval humor, considering them not on an abstract level, but also through an ethical, historical, and political lens.

Invective: Definition and Connection with Humor and Laughter

Invective is a term derived from “*oratio invectiva*,” the practice of verbally insulting, attacking and ridiculing an opponent either orally or in writing (Novokhatko 12). In general, invectives are launched to demolish the image of an opponent, which could be identified with an individual, but also with a group, a city, or an institution.¹⁸ However, as we shall see, both the theoretical definition of invective and its settings vary in different periods. I relate invective to its etymological and historical significance as it refers to the past participle of the Latin verb *invehi* [to inveigh against] and the noun

they can be found in a wide variety of sources, which span from encyclopedic works such as Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies*, to chronicles such as Salimbene de Adam’s *Cronica*.

¹⁸ Dussol 164; Bàrberi-Squarotti 430.

invectiva [vituperation, reproach]. The use of the term *invectiva* as both a noun and adjective is first documented in the fourth century to describe polemical writings and is equivalent to “the Latin rhetorical tradition of *vituperatio*, paired with its antithesis *laus* (‘praise’)” in “the epideictic mode of speaking.” (Corbeill, “Ciceronian Invective” 199).¹⁹ The term *invectiva* is then widely used during the early and late Middle Ages for a speech that blames and is linked to Latin expressions such as *invectivus* [abusive], *vituperatio* [blame], or *exclamatio* [apostrophe], in situations of controversy and dispute, as evident from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the influential rhetorical manual commonly attributed to Cicero and widely in use during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.²⁰

People and societies from different ages conceived and practiced invective according to their own sensibilities and personal needs, but also based upon their own “mores and ethical preconceptions” (Watson 762). In classical antiquity, invective was chiefly employed publicly *ad hominem*, “to denigrate a named individual” (Watson 762),

¹⁹ For more details see Ricci 406; Novokhatko 12; and Rao 103-104.

²⁰ See *Ad Herennium* I. 2; II. 7; and IV. 15. The rhetorical treatise *Ad Herennium* (ca. 85 B.C.) was very influential during the high and late Middle Ages; see Curtius 66. In Italy it was the standard text in use for the discipline of epistolography or *ars dictandi* (Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought* 239). Harry Caplan notes that from late antiquity on, scholars believed that Cicero was the author of *Ad Herennium*, so that throughout the Middle Ages it was known as *Rhetorica Secunda* or *Rhetorica Nova* and juxtaposed to Cicero’s *De inventione* (called *Rhetorica Prima* or *Rhetorica Veta*) (viii). Italian Humanists such as Lorenzo Valla and Raphael Regius first questioned Cicero’s authorship of *Ad Herennium*, and adduced valuable evidence that Cicero probably did not write it. Although Valla and Regius did not settle the question of Cicero’s authorship conclusively, they influenced the reception of *Ad Herennium*; modern editors—although they do not completely reject the idea that Cicero was the author—are now generally cautious and do not attribute the work to Cicero: “Although the belief in Ciceronian authorship has still not entirely disappeared, all the recent editors agree that the attribution is erroneous” (Caplan ix). Although settling the authorship of *Ad Herennium* is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I shall ascribe the work to Cicero for two reasons. First, even though modern critics still question Cicero’s authorship of *Ad Herennium*, they have not yet identified an alternative author: “Who finally was the real author? We have no evidence to determine that question” (Caplan xiv). Furthermore, for medieval authors the importance and influence of *Ad Herennium* still remain firmly bound up with Cicero’s *De inventione* and the Ciceronian Latin tradition of rhetoric. Thus, instead of assigning *Ad Herennium* to an unknown author, I shall ascribe it to Cicero in agreement with the medieval tradition.

for the primary purpose of persuading an audience “for forensic or deliberative purposes” (Rutherford 6) in a courtroom, or to debase individuals through grievance delivered in verse in an open area.²¹ During the Middle Ages, invective was employed in a variety of settings and applications: in courts through forensic speeches; in city councils through harangues; in centers of learning through the practice of *disputatio*; in public squares through sermons or songs. Ambassadors and notaries also used invective at the diplomatic level through epistolography (Kristeller, “Matteo de’ Libri” 288-89). Lawyers, notaries, professors, theologians, and poets launched invectives against different targets during debates and controversies (Rao 113; Dussol 160-73). In the Renaissance, the so-called “humanist invective” (Rutherford 2) is characterized by the use of verbal attacks in both poetry and prose composed to “reprehend or accuse an adversary, dead or alive, or to answer charges received against one’s person, family, country, or any other object of personal affection” (Rao 115).

During all these periods, the importance of using humor in the attack is consistently stressed in rhetorical and grammatical treatises. As Lindsay Watson observes, the elements of both aggression and humor coexisted during the classical period when “invective aimed to give pleasure to the listener” (762). The practice of blaming and insulting individuals occurred through hyperbolic and malevolent caricatures in which “wit and humor were used in poetic invective to foster ridicule” (Rutherford 6). The influential rhetorical manuals of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian illustrate the structure and theme of vituperative speech and establish a solid connection

²¹ David Rutherford further distinguishes between rhetorical invective and poetic invective; the Romans practiced the former in a courtroom and the latter in public settings (6-7).

between blame and humor, confirming that ridicule was the basic component of invective.²² In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle documents that the pre-socratic philosopher and rhetorician Gorgias (ca. 485-c.380 B.C.) was the first theorist to stress the relationship between humor and rhetoric:

As to jest. These are supposed to be of some service in controversy. Gorgias said that you should kill your opponents' earnestness with jesting and their jesting with earnestness; in which he was right. (III 1419b)

Aristotle demonstrates that the purpose of humor in vituperative speech was to discredit earnest discourse. Mary Grant points out that humor binds with invective and highlights its practical purpose: "This first connection between wit and oratory was, as is natural, a purely practical one. The use of wit against the opponent might help the orator defeat him" (18). Like Aristotle, Cicero presents wit and humor as essential to the ideal orator (*De Oratore* I.17), and emphasizes their importance by exploring them at the end of book II of *De Oratore* (II. 217-332).²³ The author of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, who was generally believed to be Cicero, explains that laughter plays a crucial role especially at the beginning of a speech; he then provides a comprehensive list of examples of how a speaker can provoke laughter in the target audience:

Si defessi erunt audiendo, ab aliqua re quae risum movere possit, ab apologo, fabula veri simili, imitatione depravata, inversione, ambiguo, suspicione, inrisione, stultitia, exasperatione, collectione, litterarum

²² See Aristotle, *Poetics* 48b37; Cicero, *De Oratore* II, 216-289; Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VI.3.

²³ In *De Oratore*, Cicero partly translated and commented upon the *Poetics* of Aristotle. He treats the subject of laughter, jest, and mockery using terms such as "iocus," "facetiae," "urbanitas" or "ridiculus" (II.216-217). Although he does not translate Greek terminology directly into Latin, Cicero adapts the Greek lexicon broadly to Latin terminology; for example, instead of using the adjective comic he often uses *urbanitas* and *facetia*. Cicero uses the term *risus* to express laughter in general (see I.217-34).

mutacione, praeter expectationem, similitudine, novitate, historia, versu, ab alicuius interpellatione aut adrisione (I.iv.10)

[If the hearers have been fatigued by listening, we shall open with something that may provoke laughter—a fable, a plausible fiction, a caricature, an ironical inversion of the meaning of a word, an ambiguity, innuendo, banter, a naïvety, an exaggeration, a recapitulation, a pun, an unexpected turn, a comparison, a novel tale, a historical anecdote, a verse, or a challenge or a smile of approbation directed at some one.] (Caplan 20-21)

As in *De Oratore*, Cicero emphasizes the importance of humor in speech and shows how its use is strictly linked to mockery.²⁴ This is evident from the terms “imitatione depravata” [caricature] and “inrisione” [banter] which explicitly show that humor is united with vituperative speech and that the most successful invective is the one which incorporates derision and amplification. Quintilian later developed Cicero’s discussion on humor in oratory in his *Institutio Oratoria* and confirms the crucial role played by “risus” [laughter] by devoting an entire chapter to the subject (VI.3). He also focuses on the same connection between laughter and verbal attacks, pairing “risus” with “vituperatio” (VI.3.37). These passages confirm that in classical rhetoric, humor was perceived not simply as a crucial component of oratory, but also in constant combination with mockery. An invective without mordant wit and humor might not even have been considered invective at all; in fact, an abusive speech without wit would very likely have been liable to legal sanctions.²⁵

²⁴ See also Aristotle, who in his *Rhetoric* 1415a “also discusses the place of laughter in the Proem” (Caplan 18).

²⁵ See Plato’s *Laws* VII, which restrict the use of ridicule in comedy (202). Aristotle too restricts the use of obscenity in invective; see Plebe, *La teoria del comico* 12-13. For laws against invectives during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries see Forest-Hill 13-24; for a specific discussion of this topic in relation to

The connection between vituperation and humor is better explained if we consider the varieties of laughter and mockery within the tradition of invective. In his *De Oratore*, Cicero draws a clear distinction between two types of teasing when he lists two categories and links them to two types of laughter:

Etenim cum duo genera sint facetiarum, alterum aequabiliter in omni sermone fusum, alterum peracutum et breve, illa a veteribus superior cavillatio, haec altera dicacitas nominata est. Leve nomen habet utraque res! quippe leve enim est totum hoc risum movere. . . est plane oratoris movere risum; vel quod ipsa hilaritas benevolentiam conciliat ei, per quem excitata est; vel quod admirantur omnes acumen uno saepe in verbo positum maxime respondentis, nonnumquam etiam lacescentis; vel quod frangit adversarium, quod impedit, quod elevat, quod deterret, quod refutat; vel quod ipsum oratorem politum esse hominem significat, quod eruditum, quod urbanum, maximeque quod tristitiam ac severitatem mitigat et relaxat odiosasque res saepe, quas argumentis dilui non facile est, ioco risuque dissolvit. (*De Oratore* II.218-19; 236)

For, there being two sorts of wit, one running with even flow all through a speech, while the other, though incisive, is intermittent, the ancients called the former 'irony' and the latter 'raillery.' Each of these has a trivial name, but then of course all this business of laughter-raising is trivial. . . It clearly becomes an orator to raise laughter, and this on various grounds; for instance, merriment naturally wins goodwill for its author; and everyone admires acuteness, which is often concentrated in a single word, uttered generally in repelling, though sometimes in delivering an attack; and it shatters or obstructs or makes light of an opponent, or alarms or repulses him; and it shows the orator himself to be a man of finish, accomplishment and taste; and, best of all, it relieves dullness and tones down austerity, and, by a jest or a laugh, often dispels distasteful suggestions not easily weakened by reasonings. (Sutton 359; 373-74)

Here Cicero distinguishes between two types of wit, one more lighthearted (*cavillatio*) and the other sharper and more unexpected (*dicacitas*). Both aim to raise laughter. Cicero emphasizes that almost no orator would succeed in both kinds of humor, and thus

thirteenth-century Spain see Lanz 1-4; for laws in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy see Suitner *La Poesia satirica* 55-57.

indirectly praises the orator who would be able to do so: “Non enim fere quisquam reperietur praeter hunc in utroque genere leporis excellens” (II.220) [For scarcely a single other speaker is to be found, who is outstanding in both kinds of humor, Sutton 361].

Invective likewise aimed at eliciting in the audience two different types of laughter based on insult. The first is a good-natured laughter (*risus*) which, through a benevolent mockery, serves the positive function of conciliating the audience and winning their favor by poking gentle fun at an opponent through clever and refined wit; the speaker thus stirs in the audience positive feelings (such as goodwill and compassion, II.216) in order to reveal “the cultured and kindly nature of the speaker” (Grant 75). This type of laughter is designed to defuse hostility against the speaker by persuading the audience that the speaker has good and harmless intentions even if he uses mordant wit. The second type of laughter is the dark, ill-natured *derisio* that inflames the audience’s aversion and rage against the target by maliciously denigrating and exposing his wickedness, thus revealing the speaker’s skill and effectiveness. This kind of bitter laughter, grounded within the verbal aggression of the invective, has been described as “tinged with anger” (Grant 75). As Grant notes, Cicero cautions against an excessive use of mordant wit, thus suggesting that violent attacks were somehow limited; “the emphasis was placed rather on good-natured laughter, yet it is clear that there was in oratory a place for both good-natured and ill-natured laughter” (76). This evidence corroborates the thesis that humor and laughter were elements equally important in oratory, and their association with invective must be considered when approaching medieval invective poetry.

The medieval Latin translation—by William of Moerbeke (1278)—and commentary—originally written in Arabic by Averroes (1175) and translated into Latin by Herman the German (1256)—of Aristotle’s *Poetics* contributed enormously to revitalizing the importance of these theoretical parameters in relation to poetry. Furthermore, alongside Aristotle’s treatises and commentaries, teachers and students of rhetoric continued to employ Cicero’s and Quintilian’s theoretical manuals in the school curriculum, further establishing the connection between blame and humor in medieval society and culture. Invective poetry was a central phenomenon in both the aesthetics and the ethics of the late Middle Ages. In order to better grasp an ethics of medieval invective poetry, we must consider its precursors and evaluate whether medieval invective was continuous with or distinct from them. I shall first outline the Judeo-Christian literary tradition of curses, and then the rhetorical tradition of invective from classical antiquity. By investigating the precursors of Rustico’s, Cecco’s, and Dante’s vituperative poetry, we will be able to better evaluate these poets’ relation to the early traditions, to assess if an ethical engagement truly exists in their texts, and if so, to see how it functions through humor and conflict.

Precursors of Medieval Invective: The Judeo-Christian and Classical Antecedents

I shall examine first the earliest precursors of invective (such as the Sumerian and biblical traditions) and then the classical traditions, outlining their relationship with medieval invective. Each of these traditions can be approached independently as a few scholars have done, providing valuable studies on the subject of vituperation and focusing either on the Judaic and Judeo-Christian imprecatory tradition or on vituperation in classical antiquity.²⁶ Even though they constitute two separate corpora set in different times and geopolitical contexts, both the biblical and classical materials played a crucial role in the medieval period as they merged and strongly influenced the development of invective in the high and late Middle Ages.²⁷ As we shall see, medieval invective did not merely absorb these earlier traditions; it rather reinvented them according to different needs and circumstances, thus influencing subsequent traditions such as the so-called “humanist invective” in the Renaissance (Rutherford 2).

Though loosely defined as abusive speech, invective must be distinguished from imprecation, insult, curse, or malediction. Like invective, these forms of polemical

²⁶ For a comprehensive study on the tradition of the imprecatory Psalms in Biblical times, see John N. Day's *Crying for Justice: What the Psalms Teach Us About Mercy and Vengeance in an Age of Terrorism* (2005). For a general overview of invective in classical antiquity, see Severin Koster's *Die Invektive in der griechischen und römischen Literatur* (1980), and Norman Merrill's *Cicero and Early Roman Invective* (1975).

²⁷ The merging of both traditions has been documented and discussed in numerous studies of the Middle Ages. The coexistence of biblical and classical tradition during the late Middle Ages is evident if we examine the school curriculum of Rustico, Cecco, and Dante. Their curriculum comprised biblical and exegetic readings from Church doctors, as well as literature from classical antiquity (see Curtius 48-54). Even though an in-depth examination of the relationship between these two early traditions and medieval invective is beyond the scope of this dissertation, we must acknowledge the two traditions of biblical and classical vituperative speech when approaching thirteenth- and fourteenth-century invective poetry.

speech seek to blame a target and circulated through epigraphs, treatises, and manuscripts;²⁸ however, their meaning and function differed significantly from those of invectives. Curses or maledictions were generally aimed at admonishing target readers about a set limit by invoking a supreme power and expressing an imminent threat, often in the form of punishment. A curse thus functioned as a deterrent, since its author claimed that a calamity would afflict the target readers if they did not follow the inscribed warning. Unlike the case of invective, humor did not generally play a significant role in curses and imprecations; despite a few exceptions, it is likely that a curse functioned as a warning, not as a means of fostering shame, ridicule, and laughter.²⁹ In other words, a curse aimed at denouncing a particular wrong by stirring—in an Aristotelian sense—the more tragic sentiments of pity and terror, rather than humor, because it used reproach to persuade the audience to respect a stated limit established by a higher power.

The tradition of the curse and imprecation could go back as early as the Bronze Age, as is evident from the Sumerian treaty (c. 2900 B.C.) between the two enemy cities of Lagash and Umma. The Sumerian treaty is expressively inscribed “on a piece of clay shaped like a hunter’s net” (Wooley 403). The net picturesquely enhanced the dramatic

²⁸ The practice of writing curses occurred in the ancient Near East as well as in medieval manuscripts, which often included curses in ownership inscriptions. For a comprehensive overview of curses in the ancient Near East see Day 36-45; for general information on curses in medieval manuscripts, see Clemens and Graham’s *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* 124-25.

²⁹ A few examples from the Bible demonstrate that perhaps there was a connection between humor and curses. See for example Psalm 37: “The Lord will laugh at the wicked, for he sees that their day of Judgment is coming” (13). See also Gen. 17-18 where the ninety-year-old Sarah laughs at God after hearing from Him that she will have another son; God rebukes her when he imposes upon her and Abraham the name Isaac for her forthcoming son. As Le Goff notes, the name Isaac means “laughter” and this name is a consequence of Sarah’s irreverent laughter at God (see Le Goff “Laughter in the Middle Ages” 48). The entire episode shows the ambivalent value of mockery between God and His chosen ones.

effect of the curse, acting as a provocation because “the inscription called on the god Ningirsu to capture the people in his great net and punish them if they should ever dare to cross the boundary contrary to the treaty terms” (Wolley 404):

If the men of Umma ever violate the boundary-ditch of Ningirsu or that of Nina, in order to lay violent hands on the territory of Lagash. . . then may Enlil destroy them, and may Ningirsu cast over them his net, and set his hand and foot upon them (Hill 444).³⁰

This example shows that a curse or malediction could be a ritual practice expressed in epitaphs and peace treaties.³¹ Other examples, such as the lamentation to the Sumerian gods from the Hilprecht Collection, show that one of the first recorded maledictions was originally written in verse (Kramer 270). Samuel Kramer explains that the prayer (c. 2300 B.C.) was staged in a fictional setting where eight Sumerian gods launched a verbal attack against the citizens of Agade, “the city which destroyed Nippur,” vowing that their city “will itself be destroyed like Nippur” (Kramer 270). The malediction contains vivid and violent attacks in a parallel rhetorical structure, and could be regarded as a forerunner to the biblical Psalms:

Your slaughtered oxen—may you slaughter your wives instead,
Your butchered sheep—may you butcher your children instead,
Your poor—may they be forced to drown their precious children

³⁰ Leonard Woolley calls this document the “World’s oldest peace treaty” and notes ironically that its shape as a net “was a sinister bit of diplomacy” (403). For other Sumerian curses see Samuel Noah Kramer 265-75).

³¹ The connection between curses and rituals is also present in the practice of the ceremonials of oral insult, as evident in the ritual of debate in various cultures; see Mahadev Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*, especially 108-148. This relation could also apply to music practices such as rap music, as well as the tradition of the so-called “Yo Mama jokes” (see *African American Communication: Exploring Identity and Culture*, 150-52).

Agade, may your palace built with joyful heart, be turned into a depressing ruin. (Kramer 270)

This example confirms that cursing was not simply a symbolic exercise, but occurred within a specific historical and political circumstance—here the setting of war.

Furthermore, as John Day has recently noted, imprecation represented a well-defined cultural practice that “played a significant role in the daily life of the ancient Middle East” and arose “out of a cultural milieu in which cursing was an integral part of life—both domestic and international, personal, and covenantal” (36).

The curses of ancient Sumeria help us to better frame the imprecations of the Bible, which continued the Sumerian tradition and in turn influenced medieval invective. The Bible contains numerous imprecations, but the Psalms, traditionally ascribed to David, show a particular link with invective poetry because they are written in verse. Day examines the so-called “imprecatory Psalms” defining an imprecation not as a simple expletive, but as a more specific speech act:

Imprecations in the Psalms, as in the rest of Scripture, are not limited to “formal curses.” J. Carl Laney ably represents the breadth of definition involved in the use of the term: “An ‘imprecation’ is an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curse uttered against one’s enemies, or the enemies of God.” (Day 123 n. 2)

This definition clearly applies to numerous Psalms which vividly invoke judgments and calamities against enemies. Even though their aggressive language may challenge “modern Western sensibilities,” they are an integral part of the Biblical tradition (Day 36). For example, Psalms 58 and 137 feature powerful curses against the wicked: “O God, smash their teeth in their mouths. . . Like a miscarriage, let him melt away; like a woman’s abortion, let them not see the sun!” (Ps. 58:6-9) and “Blessed is he who seizes

and shatters your little ones against the cliff!” (Ps. 137:9).³² Despite their explicit contentious language, the curses played an important ethical and religious role in the Judaic tradition, especially given that they were sung during religious ceremonies. Furthermore, they became prominent during the entire Middle Ages because

for medieval men and women the Psalms were divinely inspired songs written by King David. . . seen as a true compendium of Christian theology, words of praise for the Triune God, a sure guide for an upright life, and a vast collection of poetic texts that could become one’s own personal words of prayer in all seasons and conditions of the human pilgrimage through this life. (Zinn xii)³³

The popularity and pervasiveness of the Psalms in medieval culture also fostered a deep appreciation of poetry, which was perceived as a practical performance throughout the Middle Ages because it applied to personal needs. As Joseph Nagy shows, the Irish vernacular poetic tradition put into practice “the model of the Psalms” in liturgy and secular settings by performing songs of both praise (“the eulogy”) and curses (“*aer*, or satire”) (32). Furthermore, he clarifies that “in (the) medieval Irish tradition, poets are not the only ones who generate destructive verse; saints have their *salmu escaine*, ‘psalms of maledictions,’ which they can and do use against their enemies” (32). As Nagy illustrates, the tradition of the Psalms merges in medieval Ireland with vernacular satirical poetry, as is also the case in Italy.³⁴ If we consider the powerful presence of these texts in medieval culture, we are better positioned to understand the pervasiveness and popularity

³² For more Biblical curses and imprecations see Leviticus 26; Deuteronomy 28:15-68; and Jer. 51:56.

³³ Grover Zinn’s citation is from the introduction to *The Place of the Psalms in the Intellectual Culture of the Middle Ages* (xi-xv). The volume, edited by Nancy Van Deusen, contains essays by authors who focus on different roles of the Psalms within medieval culture.

³⁴ See also Tomás Ó Cathasaigh, “Curse and Satire,” who examines the “parallels between Christian curse and native satire in medieval Irish literature” (Cited in Nagy 41).

of invective in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. Furthermore, by examining both the continuity and distinction between the imprecatory Psalms and invective during medieval times, we can better grasp the ethical and political implications of Rustico's, Cecco's, and Dante's invectives. As we shall see in the subsequent chapters, each of these poets evoked and personalized the biblical and prophetic traditions of the curse in their invective poems.

The practice of the biblical curse should be juxtaposed to the invective tradition that emerged from ancient Greece and Rome. This tradition originated before Aristotle's time and was incorporated into ancient Roman culture throughout the first centuries of the republic until it reached the threshold of the Middle Ages. Even though invective is continuous with, and developed from, the tradition of curses grounded in the Sumerian and Biblical tradition, we must distinguish curses from invective poems, which are grounded in a rhetorical tradition and follow "well-articulated rhetorical guidelines" (Watson 762). Although invective writing maintains the imprecatory flavor of the biblical material, it also embodies the rhetorical structure of classical invectives as evident from the rhetorical manuals of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian.

As Aristotle documents in his *Poetics*, invective—which he defines as insulting verse which aimed to blame specific wrongdoings of individuals and groups—constituted the earliest (if not the first) stage in the development of poetry alongside hymns and praise-poems, which commended the virtues of gods or individuals:

Poetry was split up according to their particular characters; the grander people represented fine actions, i.e., those of fine persons, the more ordinary people represented those of inferior ones, at first composing invectives, just as the others composed hymns and praise-poems. We do

not know of any composition of this sort before Homer, but there were probably many [who composed invectives.] (148b24-29)³⁵

Aristotle suggests that invectives emerged as the first examples of comic poetry developed by “ordinary people” who engaged in oral improvisation. Even though Aristotle’s *Poetics* does not provide a comprehensive historical frame for invective, he links it to scurrilous traditions such as phallic processions (Aristotle, *Poetics* 149a10-11).³⁶ Aristotle’s suggestions have been confirmed by modern scholars such as Armando Plebe who, drawing on evidence from Byzantine prolegomena, discovered that the first practice of comic poetry in ancient Greece was indeed invective and was delivered orally by ordinary people. His analysis supplies the historical circumstances from which invective emerged, i.e., from the social practice of peasants who publicly denounced to their community that they were victims of a wrongdoing:

Alcuni contadini, offesi da parte di cittadini potenti, volendo rimproverarli, si recarono in città e li ingiuriarono di notte, costringendoli alla vergogna (...) ciò avrebbe portato ad un ravvedimento dell’offensore. La commedia sarebbe stata introdotta in città e avrebbe determinato una riduzione o diminuzione delle offese. (...) si parla addirittura non solo di una diminuzione ma di una sospensione dei delitti operata dalla commedia antica. (*La teoria del comico* 11)

Plebe’s analysis stresses the coexistence of verbal aggression with the intent of denouncing an injustice, and shows that invective played an important social role in a

³⁵ The English translation is by Richard Janko. The term “invective” is equivalent to Aristotle’s “ψόγους.” As Ingram Bywater notes, “ψόγους has the same concrete sense of ‘invectives’ in Plato *Laws* 829 c” (129).

³⁶ As Bywater suggests, Aristotle only sketches “a general view of the historical development of early Greek poetry” because he aims to frame it not historically but theoretically: “the intention of the *Poetics* is to give us a theory of the Epic and the Drama. . . not a treatise on the history and archeology of Drama” (134).

community. This is confirmed by the fact that the practice of invective was initially framed as a ritual of grievance and appeared rooted in a civic setting because peasants voiced their opposition by moving from rural to urban areas. Offended “contadini” likely performed invective in verse and effectively disclosed a wrongdoing, and by publicly humiliating the offenders they successfully achieved justice. Plebe’s analysis also documents that invective was so successful that it even caused a decrease in personal offenses and murders based on abuse and vengeance (Plebe 11 n 20). Peasants denounced the wrongdoings so forcefully that the offenders, out of shame, eventually repaired the damage inflicted upon the offended (Plebe 11 n 19) perhaps in order to avoid public outrage or the likelihood that judges would eventually take legal actions against them. Thus it is probable that in classical antiquity invective was used by victims of abuses who through oral performances were able to secure the restoration of justice thus providing stability in their own community. Invective poetry aimed at discouraging offenders from committing abuses and sought to help the abused to find justice so that the latter would not seek personal revenge against the wrongdoer.

The link between oral invective and performance from this early Greek matrix finds its way into the Italian peninsula by way of the Etruscans through the *fescennini versus*, a “sort of rustic poetry consisting of unbridled puns and obscene abuse which, it is said, the peasants formerly sang ‘to a rude and clumsy [*sic*] metre’” (Heurgon 241). The *Fescennini* were thus “abusive verse-dialogues,” i.e., exchanges of insults which occurred during harvest or wedding festivals and originated at the town of Fescennium (an Etruscan town near what was once called Falerii, now Civita Castellana; Heurgon

241-42).³⁷ The fact that this tradition emerged in Tuscany is curious, given the medieval Tuscan poets I will examine in the next chapters.

The Greek tradition of ψόγους or invective (as explained by Aristotle) and the Etruscan traditions of the *fescennini* became the principal precursors of the Roman invective as described by Cicero and Quintilian. Roman invective was mainly practiced in courtrooms and included the elements of “personal attacks of Old Comedy, insulting songs at weddings, . . . political caricatures, and also the origin and existence of the iambic genre itself, which was originally based on the urge to rebuke and scold” (Novokhatko 14). The combination of these elements suggests that the invective of classical antiquity was mainly characterized by verbal attack *ad hominem*, i.e., against a specific individual target. Invective was set under the *genus demonstrativum*, the third genre within the discipline of rhetoric applied to the practice of praise and blame.³⁸

As noted earlier, then, invective must be distinguished from curse because it follows specific rhetorical guidelines detailed by both Cicero and Quintilian. In *Ad Herennium*, the targets of invective are divided “under three headings: external circumstance (*res externa*), physical attributes (*corpus*), and mental traits (*animus*)” (Rutherford 5). *Res externa* refers to the birth, education, power, fame, citizenship, and friendship of the person targeted. The *corpus* implies the person’s physical appearance as a reflection of his or her morality. The *animus* is the person’s character. In addition to this

³⁷ William Beare notes that the *fescennini* was “an annual event and was at first inoffensive; then it began to attack members of the noble houses. A law was passed which forced the performers to observe proper limits” (12). For a comprehensive overview of the *fescennini* see Beare 11-18.

³⁸ See Ricci, “La Tradizione” 405; Rao 111-113; and Rutherford 4.

fundamental distinction, we must also consider the fact that invective is linked to humor and laughter. Quintilian succinctly illustrates the same threefold distinction highlighted by Cicero in his *Institutio oratoria* when he describes “methods of arousing laughter:”

Risus igitur oriuntur aut ex corpore eius in quem dicimus, aut ex animo, qui factis ab eo dictisque colligitur, aut ex iis quae sunt extra posita; intra haec enim est omnis vituperatio: quae si gravius posita sit, severa est, si levius, ridicula. Haec aut ostenduntur aut narrantur aut dicto notantur. (6.3 37)

[Laughter arises then either (1) from the physical appearance of our opponent, or (2) from his mental attitude, which is inferred from his actions and words, or (3) from external circumstances. All forms of invective fall under these heads; if it is uttered seriously it is brutal; if more light-heartedly, it is funny. The absurdity may be either (1) physically demonstrated, or (2) told in a narrative, or (3) characterized by some clever remark.] (Russel 81)

Quintilian follows the same structure outlined in *Ad Herennium* by distinguishing various levels of attack; however, he emphasizes the important role of ridicule in invective applied to the physical, mental, and exterior qualities of an opponent. As Anthony Corbeill suggests, throughout Roman times invective was not merely a rhetorical exercise; as early as 60 B.C. Cicero viewed it as a tool to educate future generations: “In addition to serving a specific function at the time of delivery, Cicero foresaw the value that these types of composition possessed as moral lessons for posterity” (“Ciceronian Invective” 211). The moral value of invective as Cicero expressed it is demonstrated by the fact that his

greatest works of invective—the speeches *Against Verres* and *Against Piso*, the *Second Philippic* against Marcus Antonius—were to survive well beyond their original historical purpose as examples for study and emulation. (Corbeill, “Ciceronian Invective” 211)

More specifically, as we shall see in Chapter Two, during the late Middle Ages Cicero's invectives survived in Tuscan manuscripts and almost certainly served the purpose of teaching moral lessons and preparing students for professional careers as notaries, ambassadors, lawyers, clerics, and rhetoricians, thus forming them for prominent positions within their respective communities.

Invective in the Middle Ages

The practice of invective, framed within the rhetorical art of blaming or *vituperatio* and the practice of accusing or *accusatio*, was well established throughout the Middle Ages. Many examples show that “rhetoricians, grammarians, and scholiasts used the adjective *invectivus* since the fourth century (Novokhatko 12).³⁹ As Novokhatko notes, Tyrannius Rufinus of Aquileia (ca. 345-410) and Ammianus Marcellinus (ca. 330-ca. 395) were the first authors to explicitly use the term *invectiva* in the fourth century (12). Like many fourth-century authors, Rufinus and Jerome (c. 347-420) exchanged verbal attacks, which they both called invectives, with each other. As Ennio Rao notes, Jerome shows “a real talent for the invective,” including sharp and shockingly slanderous attacks (105). Jerome's Letter CXXV addressed to Rusticus, the Bishop of Narbonne, contains a particularly insulting and derisive description of Rufinus—referred to as “Grunnius, the grunting pig” (Wiesen 229):

Testudineo Grunnius incedebat ad loquendum gradu et per intervalla quaedam vix pauca verba capiebat, ut eum putares singultire, non proloqui. Et tamen, cum mensa posita librorum exposuisset struem,

³⁹ See also Ricci, “La Tradizione” 405.

adducto supercilio contractisque naribus ac fronte rugata duobus digitulis concrepabat hoc signo ad audiendum discipulos provocans. Tunc nugas meras fundere et adversum singulos declamare; criticum diceres esse Longinum censoremque Romanae fecundiae notare, quem vellet, et de senatu doctorum excludere. Hic bene nummatus plus placebat in prandiis. Nec mirum, qui multos inescare solitus erat factoque cuneo circumstrepentium garrulorum procedebat in publicum intus Nero, foris Cato, totus ambiguus, ut ex contrariis diversisque naturis, unum monstrum novamque bestiam diceres esse compactum, iuxta illud poeticum: 'Prima leo, postrema draco, media ipsa chimaera.' (CXXV.18)

[When the Grunter came forward to address an audience he used to advance first at a snail's pace and utter a few words at such long intervals that you might have thought that he was gasping for breath rather than making a speech. He would put his table in position and arrange on it a pile of books, and then frowning and drawing in his nose and wrinkling his forehead he would call his pupils to attention with a snap of his fingers. After this prelude he would pour out a flood of nonsense, declaiming against individuals so fiercely that you might imagine him to be a critic like Longinus or the most eloquent of Roman censors, and putting a black mark against anyone he pleased to exclude him from the senate of the learned. He had plenty of money, and was more attractive at his dinner-parties. And no wonder; he hooked many with this bait, and gathering a wedge of noisy chatterers about him he would make public progress, Nero at home, Cato abroad, a complete puzzle, so that you might call him one monster made up of different and opposing natures, a strange beast like that of which the poet tells us: 'In front a lion, behind a dragon, in the middle a very goat.'] (Wright 431-33)

This lively attack shows that Jerome, although a member of the clergy, did not shy away from violent and aggressive verbal language. Furthermore, as evident from hyperbolic associations Jerome draws between his target and various animals and monsters (pigs, snails, lions, goats, and dragons) and specific vices (such as for example pride, egotism, and opportunism), his attacks contain a generous dose of humor.⁴⁰ The presence of humor

⁴⁰ As David Wiesen notes, Jerome also alluded to the *Testamentum Porcelli*, a nursery rhyme that was popular among children in the fourth century (229).

and satire is also confirmed by certain allusions such as “testudineo gradu,” a reference to the comic play *Aulularia* by Plautus (Wiesen 230).⁴¹ In this invective, Jerome aimed to foster ridicule and perhaps even elicit an ill-natured laughter in his reader Rusticus. The fact that the entire letter includes abundant biblical references also suggests that Jerome conceived his invective within the biblical tradition.⁴² Finally, Lucretius’s verse, which Jerome notably cited at the conclusion of his attack, shows that poetry also played an important role in early medieval invective (Wright 432 n1).

If we examine other invectives by Jerome, such as *Contra Rufinum* or *Contra Vigilantium*, we consistently see this tendency to include the biblical, classical and comic-satirical traditions (Wiesen 223-228). Rao emphasizes the important connection between these previous traditions and Jerome’s invective:

Besides his own powerful rhetorical arsenal, Jerome, a great admirer of the classical pagan authors, deployed the satirical material of Terence, Cicero, Horace, Persius, and Juvenal. In addition, he quarried the vast invective elements from the Bible, for he always enlisted God as his second in his private quarrel. This peculiar combination of pagan and Christian elements is the trademark of Jerome’s invectives. (105)

With Jerome, we can also juxtapose other early Christian apologists who wrote similar invectives and were either his precursors (such as Tertullian, Arnobius, and Titus of Bostra) or his contemporaries (such as Rufinus, St. Augustine, and Orosius). Other authors not only read and revered Jerome but also imitated him; these include Peter Damian, Peter Lombard, Peter Abelard, Bernard of Clairvaux, Alain de Lille, Thomas

⁴¹ For a comprehensive study on the satirical elements in Saint Jerome’s works, see David Wiesen’s *St. Jerome as a Satirist*.

⁴² The first part of the letter contains references to Luke, 23:43, Colossians, 4:6 and Matthew 5:13 (XIII.1).

Aquinas, and many others who cultivated the medieval invective tradition in their writings between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries.⁴³

The output of the early medieval authors outlined thus far illustrates that Latin invective gained a prominent position in letters and religious treatises. The tradition of invective developed further in the following period with the establishment of the *ars dictaminis*, the discipline of writing letters and speeches. As Paul Kristeller explained in 1951, “the *invectiva* had been known as a separate class of letters (and of speeches) to the *dictatores* of the thirteenth century”; thus “the epistolography of the dictators was the direct antecedent of that of the humanists, and the medieval Italian tradition of the *ars dictaminis* was one of the roots from which Renaissance humanism developed” (“Matteo de’ Libri” 288-89).⁴⁴ Invective thus developed into a separate genre during the high and late Middle Ages and gained authority through the practice of letter writing, becoming a crucial reference point in subsequent movements, such as Renaissance humanism.

Furthermore, as James Murphy has summarized, the process of transformation from classical to medieval rhetoric created not only the *ars dictandi* but also the disciplines of poetry (*ars poetriae*) and sermon (*ars predicandi*):

three medieval rhetorical genres evolved in response to a particular set of needs. The *ars dictaminis* appeared first, in the 1080s; the *ars poetriae* came in the 1170s; and the *ars predicandi* began to develop about 1200 (13).

⁴³ Rao 108; Ricci, “La Tradizione” 407-08.

⁴⁴ Kristeller’s groundbreaking study also supplies a generous list of sources that document the flourishing of invective as a separate genre within the *ars dictaminis* of thirteenth-century Italy; see among the many Boncompagno da Signa’s *Rhetorica Novissima*, Thomas of Capua’s *Summa dictaminis*, and Matteo de’ Libri’s *Summa dictaminis* (“Matteo de’ Libri” 288 note 23). In the next chapter, I survey the connection between these authors and the invective poetry of late medieval Tuscany.

Each of these genres puts into practice the principles cultivated in the previous period and establishes invective in a remarkable variety of situations, so that by the late Middle Ages invective was not a practice restricted to epideictic speeches in judicial settings. Instead, authors began to employ vituperative speeches in a more systematic way than in the early Middle Ages, employing it in teaching and harangues in universities and municipal settings. As Étienne Dussol succinctly illustrates, invective thrived in late medieval France, and this is confirmed by the variety of invective forms which flourished there. Dussol distinguishes between four categories of invective: (1) literary invective, evident in different genres such as the *sirventès*; (2) university invective; (3) political-religious invective; and (4) socio-political invective (163-172). While Dussol's brief overview of medieval invective is limited to France, it shows that invective was an established practice which circulated in a wide variety of settings, and his results apply to Italy as well. In relation to Italy, Vittorio Cian in *La Satira* provides supplementary evidence to corroborate the thesis that invective was pervasive in late medieval Italian society. Cian focuses on both Latin and vernacular satirical poetry and provides for the latter a generous list of examples to show that medieval Italian invective poetry continues the lyric tradition of the Provençal troubadours through the adaptation of the poetic forms of the *sirventese* (126-127). Furthermore, Cian emphasizes that invective poetry develops as a reaction to war and political tensions, as evident by the early thirteenth-century poetic attacks of two Genoese authors, Perceval Doria and Calega Panzano, who wrote *sirventes*. Many Florentine authors also practiced invective through the exchange of political debate poems or *tenzoni* in the second half of the thirteenth century, during the

Guelph and Ghibelline wars and the political struggles between the Church and the empire.⁴⁵

As Cian notes, in the fourteenth century many authors launched satirical attacks within Tuscany and more specifically in localized *comuni*, Guittone d'Arezzo perhaps the most prominent among them: "Ormai nell'ultimo quarto del sec. XIII, anche per l'autorità. . . di Guittone e dei guittoniani, l'egemonia della Toscana nella coltura e nelle lettere, si veniva affermando sempre più risolutamente. . . ciò avveniva nel campo della poesia satirica" (*La Satira* 129). Guittone's contemporaries Rustico Filippi, Ruggeri Apugliese, and Jacopone da Todi, as well as subsequent authors such as Cecco Angiolieri, Folgore da San Gimignano, Dante Alighieri, and Pietro dei Fattinelli, are prominent for the originality of their rich comic and vituperative poetic productions (*La Satira* 127-140).

In order to gain both a theoretical and an ethical understanding of their invective poems, we must I think link them to the theoretical subdivision of the *ars poetica* that emerged in the twelfth century. As Aubrey Galyon illustrates, numerous manuals of the *ars poetica* divided poetry between *ars rithmica* and *ars metrica*, i.e., "treatments of rhythmical composition and metrical composition"(4).⁴⁶ Rhythmical composition comprised "accentual or qualitative verse of popular songs," while metrical composition included "verse of classical poetry. . . based upon the quantity or length of the syllable,"

⁴⁵ These Florentine authors include Monte Andrea, Palamidese di Bellindote, Orlanduccio Orafo, Ser Cione, Ser Beroardo, Schiatta di Albizzo Pallavillani, Federico Gualtierotti, and Lambertuccio Frescobaldi. Cian refers in particular to the political tensions between Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen and his son Manfredi and King Charles I and II of Anjou.

⁴⁶ Galyon's citation is from the introduction of his translation of Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria*.

which later became the standard poetry taught at school in the thirteenth century (Galyon 4). The first and most influential manuals of *ars poetica* are Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria* (c. 1175) and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (c.1208-1214). These manuals emphasized the distinction between *laus* [praise] and *vituperatio* [blame], echoing not only classical rhetoricians but also early medieval authors such as Isidore of Seville, who outlines the same distinction in his influential *Etymologies* (II.iv.5). However, differently from these previous traditions, Matthew and Geoffrey articulate the distinction between praise and blame in relation to the representation of individuals, emphasizing mainly the practice of blame in an ethical frame (I.59). This is evident in the fact that Matthew seems to privilege vituperation over eulogy, as he frequently attacks his opponents on a personal level. As Galyon explains, "Matthew's book is often personal, abusive, and obscene. The personal tone of his work is shown" by his "repeated references to his detractors, especially his redhead rival Rufus" (16). Matthew taught and used invective poetry to serve a practical purpose, and conceived it as an ethical performance relevant to his own historical, social, and political environment.

A few years after Matthew's and Geoffrey's manuals, the medieval commentary—by Averroes—and the translation—of William of Moerbeke—of Aristotle's *Poetics* contributed enormously to the prominence and pervasiveness of invective in medieval poetry, and thus in medieval society and culture, because both developed and centralized

the connection between vituperation and humor on both rhetorical and ethical terms within the Christian—and also Arabic and Hebrew— tradition of late medieval Italy.⁴⁷

Overall, medieval invective shows its roots in the preceding biblical and classical traditions but also its connection with the comic and satirical tradition developing from the early to the high Middle Ages. Invective endured in medieval Italy, combining all these different elements through a complex process of reception and renovation to yield a phenomenon that has implications not only theoretical (as evident in various manuals) but also historical (evident in factual wars and controversies) and ethical (evident in the condemnation of specific wrongdoings).⁴⁸ In addition to the theoretical frame, in order to fully understand medieval invective poetry we must also connect it to its original geopolitical settings because, as we shall see, the invectives of Rustico, Cecco, and Dante explicitly evoke specific wars and political struggles between individuals, factions, and cities. Having articulated how I propose to approach medieval Italian invective poetry, I

⁴⁷ See William of Moerbeke's *De arte poetica*, which focuses on a rhetorical distinction: "primo vituperia facientes, sicut alii hymnos et laudes" [first they compose invectives, just as others (compose) hymns and praise poems, translation mine] (1448b25:). Averroes instead discusses the distinction between praise and blame in more explicitly ethical terms, using the terms vices and virtues respectively; see Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (19). Besides the Biblical and Greco-Roman tradition it is also possible that the invective of Rustico, Cecco, and Dante was influenced by or developed parallel with the traditions of both Arabic and Hebrew vernacular poetry. Even though no critics, to my knowledge, have discussed this possibility with Rustico and Cecco, scholars have examined the relations between Dante's *Commedia* with Arabic and Hebrew poetry; see M. Asin Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*; and Giorgio Battistoni, *Dante, Verona e la cultura ebraica*. For a general overview of medieval Arabic invective see Geer Jan van Gelder's *Attitudes toward Invective Poetry (Hijā') in Classical Arabic Literature*; for Hebrew invective see Angel Sáenz-Badillos "Hebrew Invective Poetry: Debate Between Todros Abulafia and Phinehas Halevi."

⁴⁸ By focusing on vices and moral corruption, invective poetry confirms that during the late Middle Ages the genre was mainly concerned about the effects of a wrongdoing upon a community rather than the wrongdoer. In other words, medieval invective poetry shares with classical invective an equally violent and sarcastic language, but it also focused more on actions rather than individuals and thus it was less *ad hominem* than classical invective. If we consider these important distinctions, we see medieval invective both in continuity with and distinguished from its past traditions.

shall now turn to surveying how modern critics have tended to treat it so far. With very few exceptions, they have generally ignored the existence of a tradition of medieval invective, and, in the specific case of Italian medieval poetry, have reduced the invective of Rustico, and Cecco to examples of a rhetorical exercise or game. They have denied to these invectives any real ethical charge, overlooking the function of the two dimensions of blame and humor, and sidelining the issue of the relationship between authors and readers in the practice of exchanging invective poetry.

Medieval Invective and Criticism: A Literature Review

The many Italian poetic invectives are, unfortunately, both understudied and rarely juxtaposed. Modern critics generally prefer to examine the rhymes of spiritual and erotic love, and with only few exceptions, they usually employ the comic tradition of invective merely to juxtapose it with the more dignified tradition of the *Stilnovo*. This has led critics to view invective poetry as *a priori* a subversive or a marginalized form of recreation, one moreover with minimal ethical weight. This current critical assessment, based on a formalist reading, is a reaction against the excessively biographical interpretation of Post-Romantic critics who treated poets' works as a nearly-transparent reflection of their lives.⁴⁹ One of the main advocates of the formalist approach is Mario Marti, who established this interpretation with his influential *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi* (1953). In his "Variazioni sul tema dei giocosi: per un libro di F. Suitner" (1984),

⁴⁹ For an overview of these two critical approaches and of recent studies, see Fabian Alfie, *Comedy and Culture* 115-22; Joan Levin, *Rustico di Filippo* 15-21. Bruno Maier 19-3.

Marti expressively describes the post-Romantic interpretation as “romanticume” [Romantic garbage] (586).

Despite the gains of the formalist approach, the Romantics were not entirely wrong: invectives do often contain references both biographical and historical, to dimensions such as interpersonal and social relations, civic unrest and violence, and current political and religious tensions. Political invectives also expose a double-edged ethics suggested in the coexistence of both sides: one somber and polemical, the other lighthearted and humorous. This duality thus challenges an excessively generalized and simplistic approach to the poems, encouraging instead a more in-depth examination of the practical function of invective forms articulated through the ridicule and blame of explicit faults.

Unfortunately, critics have not treated thoroughly these two aspects of comic and vituperation, especially in Italy, where comic and invective poetry have been approached in various ways. The earliest critical studies on the topic of national literature either neglected or devalued the invective poetry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Girolamo Tiraboschi’s *Storia della letteratura italiana* (first published in 1772), the first comprehensive anthology of Italian literature, does not examine in detail either invective or any expression of vernacular comic poetry.⁵⁰ This approach of exclusion is later confirmed by the fact that no major studies of comic Italian poetry⁵¹ were initiated

⁵⁰ Tiraboschi does mention the poets Sordello (IV. 290-303), Jacopone da Todi (V. 486), and Cielo d’Alcamo (IV. 308) as well as of course Dante Alighieri.

⁵¹ Nella Bisiacco-Henry and Sylvain Trousselard’s *Bibliographie de la poesie comique des XIIIème et XIVème siecles* (1997) lists three studies on comic poetry before De Sanctis. These, published in the mid-

immediately after Francesco de Sanctis' derogatory comments on the comic invective poetry of central-northern Italy, in his *Storia della letteratura italiana* first published in 1870.⁵²

Post-Romantic and Risorgimento-era scholars such as Alessandro D'Ancona, Aldo Francesco Massera, Vincenzo Federici, and Isidoro del Lungo undertook, at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, the first specialized studies of Italian vernacular comic poetry, bringing to light many medieval manuscripts and records pertaining to the life and works of Rustico, Cecco, and Dante.⁵³ They typically espouse a psychological and biographical reading of comic poetry as a mirror of the poet's life and of his society. Such interpretations, motivated by the ideological agenda of constructing a united national literature based on folk culture, were more inclusive of comic poetry than previous studies had been; however, post-Romantic scholars reinforced the isolation of comic poetry from the rest of Italian literature by stressing the comic poets' individual subversive attitudes and discontent toward their own time. This critical appraisal, upon which Luigi Pirandello also constructed his theory of humor, was subsequently reinforced

eighteenth century, were mainly historical and refer to the first revival of comic poetry that follow Allacci's pioneering work published in 1661 (37).

⁵² Francesco De Sanctis, in the chapter "I toscani," briefly mentions a comic tradition of invective during the late Middle Ages in Tuscany, describing it as "grossolana ingiuria" (98) and mentioning Rustico Filippi as the main example. In his opinion such poetry, though abundant in Italy, represents a "forma primitiva dell'odio politico (...) così sventuratamente feconda tra noi anche nei tempi più civili, non esce mai dalle quattro mura del comune, con particolari e allusioni così personali, che manca con la chiarezza ogni interesse: prova ne siano i sonetti di Rustico" (98). Overall De Sanctis labels the whole tradition of invective medieval poetry as historically and artistically insignificant, in part because it is highly personal and/or contextual.

⁵³ See D'Ancona, "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo XIII" (1874); Federici, *Le rime di Rustico di Filippo* (1899); Del Lungo, *Dell'esilio di Dante: Discorso e documenti* (1881) and "Un realista fiorentino de' tempi di Dante." also Massera, "La patria e la vita di Cecco Angiolieri" (1901).

theoretically in more rhetorical terms by authoritative critics such as Natalino Sapegno and Benedetto Croce.

Mario Marti's study *Cultura e stile dei poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (1953) represented a breakthrough from the previous naturalistic and post-Romantic tradition that was oriented mainly toward that subjective, even biographical approach, which mainly mined the individual comic poets' corpora for information about their lives and personalities. Marti by contrast articulated a more objective analysis of Italian comic-realistic poetry, proposing a reading focused upon the poems' form and style. According to Marti, comic poetry is mainly an act of intentional subversion of a poetic style (such as the "dolce stil novo") referred to as "aulica" (1) for its refined style and dignified tone. The subversive act of comic poetry is motivated by a "costume letterario" (5) that is generally understood as a "gioco libero da ogni vincolo escatologico, vuoto di ogni problematica morale" (49). Overall, Marti generally assesses the *poesia giocosa* as playful, a recreational stylistic and rhetorical exercise devoid of any ethical program.

Today, Marti's approach is generally accepted by contemporary scholars and critics, and has been assimilated into scholastic manuals of literature. Recent critics have developed the study of comic poetry along the lines of Marti's formalist emphasis and have dissociated themselves from the earlier critical tradition launched by D'Ancona and other post-Risorgimento scholars. Recent works on comic poetry, such as Paolo Orvieto and Lucia Brestolini's *La poesia comico-realistica: dalle origini al Cinquecento* (2000), pursue an approach that emphasizes what I would call an "objective" and subversive value for comic poetry, tending to downplay or even minimize the authors' insight into

their own time. This approach is clear in Orvieto's description of comic poetry as "un repertorio che si alimenta secondo un processo oppositivo, negativo e differenziale" (9). The main focus of recent criticism is thus upon the stylistic and subversive qualities of the texts in their intertextual relations, their interplay, that is, with other texts.

Even though Marti and the recent criticism he inspired proposes a valuable reading of comic poetry that highlights its independent comic tradition as historically rooted in antiquity and within a wider European setting, his critical assumptions have been questioned by Gianfranco Contini, Giorgio Petrocchi, and more sharply by Claudio Giunta. In *Versi a un destinatario* (2002), Giunta notes that Marti's criticism, even though it counteracts the excessively psychological and biographical, post-Romantic interpretation of comic-realistic poetry, relies on a subversive model that might not be the intention of the poet and of the poetry. He poses the following question: "Ogni testo comico-realistico è certo anticortese nei fatti, ma perché pretendere che lo sia anche nelle intenzioni?" (293). Giunta proposes to reconsider Marti's emphasis on poetic subversion by distinguishing between an "anticortese" attitude (that emerges from the narrative of comic poetry) and an "anticortese" poetic *intention*. In addition, Giunta suggests that Marti's reading of comic poetry might be both manichaeistic and anachronistic. Marti endorses a form of dualism in his critical interpretation by positing a contrasting and competing dichotomy between two traditions in which one seems to be labeled as "official" (i.e., the erotic and quasi-spiritual poetry of the "dolce stil novo") and the other

as “unofficial” (i.e., the comic tradition).⁵⁴ Such a critical approach is potentially anachronistic since the “dolce stil novo” does not seem to be an established tradition before or during Rustico Filippi’s time (ca. 1230-60), but instead emerged *during* the time of Cecco Angiolieri’s poetry (ca. 1276-1312) and presumably not in rhetorical opposition. After Giunta, a few scholars, such as Stefano Carrai and Corrado Calenda, have mildly criticized Marti’s formalistic approach and his tendency to present the medieval comic corpora in conflict with other stylistic traditions, and have described comic medieval poetry as a phenomenon in harmony with the “stil novo.”⁵⁵ Even though these recent studies have the merit of challenging the rigidity of Marti’s formalistic approach, they have not proposed new hermeneutical approaches to comic poetry; instead, they continue to examine invective poems mainly in stylistic terms—as evident by the fact that they privilege their intertextual relations—and continue also to neglect their overall ethical charge.

Marti’s interpretation of comic poetry as stylistically subversive is also in line with one of the most prominent approaches to humor in medieval literature. Mikhail Bakhtin construes the comic as “Carnavalesque,” a form of ritual rebellion that folk and secular cultures (i.e., the unofficial lower class) supposedly employ against a humorless

⁵⁴ Marti’s concept of dualism is evident in the following description: “la nostra poesia giocosa si affianca alla poesia aulica, in antitesi ed in concorrenza con essa” (*Cultura e stile* 2).

⁵⁵ In line with Giunta’s study, see also the collection of essays edited by Stefano Carrai and Giuseppe Marrani, *Cecco Angiolieri e la poesia satirica medievale* (2005) and Corrado Calenda, “Tra inosservanza e trasgressione: Poeti giocosi e realistici tra Due e Trecento” (2005).

and oppressive religious authority (i.e., the official upper class).⁵⁶ Bakhtin's formulation illuminates the active role played by folk culture in late medieval and Renaissance literature, but, as noted by Umberto Eco, Martha Bayless, and Claudio Giunta, it is problematic because of the complexity of human interactions within the very heterogeneous medieval culture and society.

Eco, in "The Frames of Comic 'Freedom,'" contests Bakhtin's concept of subversion in carnival and parody, referring to the observance of a rule that applies to both the "oppressed" lower class and the "oppressor" upper class. In Eco's view, carnivals confirm the established order because their performances "are not instances of real transgressions: on the contrary, they represent paramount examples of law reinforcement. They remind us of the existence of the rule" (9). Bayless, in *Parody in the Middle Ages*, challenges Bakhtin's carnivalesque, and chiefly his paradigm that posits medieval culture as rigidly divided between two groups: the lower class / folk (the oppressed and rebellious social class that exclusively produces the comic and parody) and the upper class / religious authority (that restrains the former category to stabilize the social order). Bayless documents numerous medieval Latin parodies that allow her to examine the relationship between religious humor and the medieval Church. She concludes that "structural similarities (between religious humor and Christian belief) made medieval parody less subversive than it often appears to the modern eye" (177). Finally Giunta, in his challenge to Bakhtin's carnivalesque, questions the lower social

⁵⁶ The term "carnavalesque," referring to an historical phenomenon and a literary tendency, was first theorized by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (1965).

class folklore as the general source of all comic traditions, noting the cultivated and upper-class origin of comic-realistic authors.⁵⁷

The tendency to privilege a formalistic reading applies not only to studies on Italian comic and invective poetry, but also to specialized studies on medieval European invective poetry more broadly. Scholars of medieval invective poetry in France and Spain also tend to interpret them as exercises of stylistic subversion, focusing mainly on a philological/rhetorical approach, as Marti and his followers do.⁵⁸ Eukene Lacarra Lanz represents clearly this tendency in her recent study “Entre injuria e ingenio, burlas y veras: Abadesas en el punto de mira de las cantigas de escarnio y maldecir” (2008), where she labels the Iberian medieval corpus of the *cantigas de escarnio y maldecir* [poems of insult and slander] as “un juego literario a través del cual poder mostrar el ingenio y la agudeza compositiva, en una suerte de competición por ser el mayor y mejor escarnecedor y maldecidor” (4). Lanz denies that the invective poetry of medieval Iberia played any social or ethical role in thirteenth-century Iberia. Furthermore, by emphasizing the ludic and competitive nature of the production she seems to assess the *cantigas de escarnio y maldecir* as a literary game or exercise for the benefit of the author.

⁵⁷ Giunta says that the comic-realistic poetry derives from a “poesia colta e di scuola che come tale non potrebbe essere assorbita nell’onnipresente (in Bakhtin) e sfuggente tradizione popolare (*Versi* 323). In addition, Giunta disputes the carnivalesque’s qualities expressed by the scatological performances of the corporeal, the grotesque, and the banquet projected toward positive and joyous inversions (as they appear in literary examples of the comid such as in Rabelais); he poses the cases of Rustico’s which, unlike Bakhtin’s model, are oriented “non alla gioioga raffigurazione della realtà (*Versi* 324).

⁵⁸ See the collection of essays from the special issue of *Atalaya* 5 (1994): L’invective au Moyen Âge France, Espagne, Italie, which treats the subject of invective in medieval comic texts within different geographical areas. The study approaches invective poetry on mainly a philological and rhetorical level—although sometime on a more historical and sociological level; see also Sylvain Trousselard, “Le vituperium comme forme inversée de la Lauda chez da la Chitarra d’Arezzo et Rustico” (2006) 21-36 which privileges a formalistic approach as well.

Furthermore, if we survey more general studies on invective, we can also see that critics—with only a few exceptions—have both instinctively overlooked and consciously dismissed the significance of the tradition of medieval invective.⁵⁹ Modern scholars of invective have focused predominantly on authors of ancient Rome (Catullus, Sallust, Cicero, Ovid, Martial, and Juvenal) or the Renaissance (beginning with Petrarch's well-known invectives).⁶⁰ This is evident in recent specialized reference sources such as *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*. For the entry "invective," Terry V.F. Brogan provides a survey of invective poetry from its Latin tradition to Petrarch, but surprisingly supplies no information on medieval invective: "In Latin i[n]vective] is written, though in a wider variety of meters, chiefly by Catullus, Ovid, Martial, and Varro. In the Middle Ages, Petrarch's i(nvective) *contra medicum* is notable" (627-28). Brogan's list exemplifies the current gap that exists in criticism in the study of medieval invective. Even though the study mentions the term "medieval invective," it does not describe it in any way and lists Petrarch's invectives as models of medieval invective.

Other studies on Petrarch's invectives are all framed within the tradition of Humanist and

⁵⁹ The exceptions are Pier Giorgio Ricci's "La Tradizione dell'invettiva tra il Medioevo e l'Umanesimo" (1974); Étienne Dussol's "Petite introduction à l'invective médiévale" (2006); and Davide Luglio's "*Ex eloquentia prophetarum: remarques sur les origines de l'invective chez Pétrarque*" (2006). To my knowledge, these are the only studies that provide a very general historical approach to medieval invective. No study has attempted to outline a comprehensive historical approach to medieval invective.

⁶⁰ See Juan de Dios Luque, Antonio Pamies, and Francisco José Manjón, *El arte del insulto* (1997), a general philological and sociological study of invective in Spain and popular culture. While this volume contains references to contemporary, classical, and Renaissance times, it makes no reference to the Middle Ages. Robert Eisenhauer's *Archeologies of Invective* (2007) provides a valuable study of the main themes and motifs of invective in literature, but its main focus is the modern period and the study lacks reference to medieval literature. David Marsh's *Francesco Petrarca: Invectives* (2003) is the first comprehensive collection in English of all Petrarca's invectives. In his introduction Marsh outlines the rhetoric of vituperation but does not explore the previous tradition of invective in the Middle Ages. Finally, *Esthétiques de l'invective* (2008) edited by Marie-Hélène Larchelle examines modern invective, drawing numerous parallels with invective in classical antiquity, yet mentions no medieval authors.

Renaissance invective.⁶¹ On the other hand, other critics (such as David Rutherford) take an overtly negative approach toward medieval invective. Rutherford dismisses any possibility that medieval invective could be in continuity with the classical tradition:

Throughout the Middle Ages, to be sure, people did not shrink from attacking, insulting, cursing, and otherwise verbally abusing their enemies. The word “invective,” coined in late antiquity, was variously used right through the Middle Ages. Yet Peter Lombard’s invective . . . indicates just how little affinity this work has with classical invective. Hence, few studies of medieval invective attempt to portray it as a continuation or revival of a classical genre, and they make virtually no reference to classical authors and to surviving invective orations from antiquity, either genuine or spurious. (1)

Rutherford denies any continuity between classical and medieval invectives.

Furthermore, by simply labeling Peter Lombardo’s invective as a “work” rather than as a “medieval invective,” he reinforces his preconception that medieval invective neither belongs to nor is comparable with other invective traditions; indeed, he does not even find it necessary to provide any additional evidence to confirm his statement.

Scholars have recently focused on the verbal aggressiveness of invective and have linked it to physical violence in medieval society.⁶² Very few, however, have explored the dimension of humor in invective, and the link between blame and amusement in

⁶¹ See for example David Marsh’s *Francesco Petrarca: Invectives* (2003).

⁶² Dussol’s 2006 essay on medieval invective defines invective as a form of verbal violence projected to demolish the image of an individual opponent, an institution, or a social group (164). This definition coincides with that provided by Brogan in *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (627). Other definitions restrict invective to *ad hominem* attacks, emphasizing the dimension of aggressiveness and violence in invectives such as in Florence Garambois-Vasquez’s *Les invectives de Claudien, Une poétique de la violence*; the special issue of *Atalaya* on *L’invective au Moyen Age: France, Espagne, Italie*; and Albrecht Classen’s *Violence in Medieval Courtly Literature: A Casebook*. A very few have recently emphasized the link between amusement and invective from antiquity to the Renaissance, such as Lindsay Watson in *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1996 ed.); Philip Harding “Comedy and Rhetoric” in *Persuasion: Greek Rhetoric in Action*; and David Rutherford’s *Early Renaissance Invective and the Controversies of Antonio da Rho*.

poetry, as expressed in the distinction between “language intended to harm and the same language which is intended to amuse” (Forest-Hill 9). This distinction is attested not only in the previously noted manuals by Geoffrey of Vinsauf and Matthew of Vendôme, but also in the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas distinguishes between the sins of *contumelia* [defamation] and detraction, associated with anger and envy respectively, and their relation with the practice of *derisio* [mockery], associated with both a lighthearted and a serious laughter (Forest-Hill 7-9). Aquinas further elaborates on the relation between blame and humor, justifying their mixture on special occasions, such as when dramatists employ it in theatrical performances for the purpose of both entertaining and instructing their audience.

These recent challenges to Marti’s and Bakhtin’s interpretation of the comic as subversive, as well as critics’ denial or neglect of medieval invective poetry, require serious consideration for two reasons. First, they all seem to go unnoticed by the majority of critics, who when they do approach medieval invective continue to favor a reading of medieval comic texts centered on transgression and subversion and do not propose or entertain alternative readings.⁶³ Second, it is time to revisit the critical assessment of comic medieval poetry by Marti and recent scholars because, motivated in part by a

⁶³ Besides the studies cited above by Marti, Suitner, Orvieto, and Brestolini, numerous scholars base their critical interpretation of comic medieval texts on the concepts of subversion and transgression. Some examples are: G. Caravaggi’s *Folgore da San Geminiano* (1960), A. Quaglio’s *La poesia realistica e la prosa del duecento* (1970), P. V. Mengaldo’s *Rustico Filippi, sonetti* (1971), N. Bisiacco-Henry’s “Les effets de la parodie dans un sonnet comico-réaliste de Rustico Filippi” (1988), T. Barrett’s “Cecco Angiolieri: A Medieval Italian Humorist” (1991), D. Brewer’s *Medieval Comic Tales* (1996), F. Alfie’s “The Violent Poetics of Inversion, or the Inversion of Violent Poetics: Meo dei Tolomei, His Mother, and the Italian Tradition of Comic Poetry” (2004). Several recent surveys, such as F. Brioschi and C. Di Girolamo’s *Manuale di letteratura italiana* (1993), G. Bellini and G. Mazzoni’s *Letteratura italiana storia, forme, testi* (1990), and J. Usher’s “Origins and Duecento” in *The Cambridge History of Italian Literature* (1999), present comic medieval texts either as stylistic exercises of subversion and reversal, or as mere reaction against the ‘higher’ poetic form of the *Stilnovo* and courtly poetry.

conscious reaction against the excessively subjective reading of post-Romantic critics, it has consequently elaborated an interpretation that is itself now excessively objective. Marti's interpretation is excessively objective because it focuses primarily on the playful side of these texts, presenting them on a merely formal level and reducing them to stylistic exercises in inversion or reversal. By following this lead, current criticism of comic medieval poetry does not provide a thorough discussion of the ethical weight of these texts in their double-edged ethics of blame and humor, and does not focus on either their historical background or the network of interpersonal social and political relations of the time.

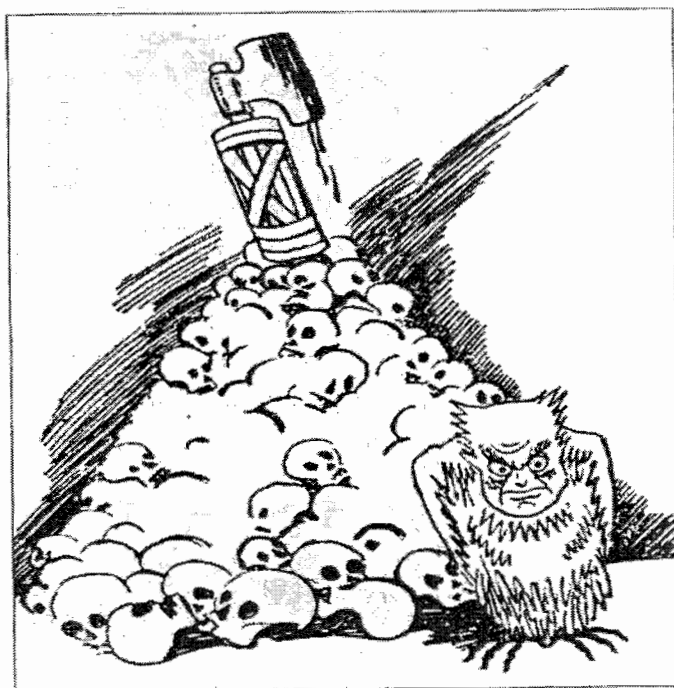
My choice to focus here on medieval Tuscan invective, specifically by Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, and Dante, is motivated by two factors. First, I seek to explore the underexamined relationship between invective, humor and medieval Italian poetry within a historical and political framework. The Tuscan context is both amply documented (though that documentation is not often brought to bear on the corpus) and undeniably important in Italian literary history. Second, while exploring the relations between the verbal aggression of invective and its readers' response of ill-natured laughter, I seek to examine the cultural and historical phenomenon of medieval invective within an ethical frame, addressing the interaction between violent verbal aggression and humor as well as the dialogic relation between an author and his readers. This second issue raises important questions in regard to the role of humor and ethics in Italian invective poetry during the Middle Ages. I shall now provide a few examples from modern invective to show that a formalistic approach like Marti's misses core elements

that are crucial to the understanding of the poems on both an ethical and historical level. Furthermore, by providing modern examples, I seek to demonstrate how the mordant humor of invective poetry does not function merely as an act of literary subversion but is rather a multifaceted phenomenon which follows different models grounded in a well-defined sociopolitical and historical frame. The following modern invectives dramatize just how complex the relation between author and addressee of invective is when it involves mordant humor and controversial political events.

Invective in Modern Times

No matter how thoroughly we try to immerse ourselves in the lived reality and mentality of our medieval objects of study, we never respond as instinctively, as spontaneously, as we do to prompts from our own time. Modern satirical cartoons and invective poetry composed during wartime provide a useful point of comparison with medieval invective poetry and suggest multiple ways of approach. I have argued that the two interpretative extremes that single out either blame or humor limit our understanding of invective poetry. Instead, the following examples show how both blame and humor form a binding unit. Before and during the Second World War, a great many critics wrote numerous invectives (in cartoons or poetry) to both ridicule and reprehend the *Duce* Benito Mussolini and his Fascist regime. During the early 1930s, criticism was often exposed outside Italy in satirical publications such as *Il Becco Giallo*, especially after

their suppression following the Royal Decree of November 1926.⁶⁴ A cartoon drawn by an Italian cartoonist who used the pseudonym Roger Chancel provides an example of the coexistence between aggressive criticism and humor. The cartoon circulated sometime between 1927 and 1930 in the *Becco Giallo*:



«L'impero e l'imperatore». Disegno di Chancel da *Il Becco Giallo*, numero 67 dalla clandestinità.

Fig. 1. *The Empire and the Emperor*. Cartoon by Chancel from *Il Becco giallo* (67, 19--?); rpt. in Rossana Arzone, *Satire del Ventennio* (Rome: Rendina, 1997) 39.

This drawing (see fig. 1) criticizes the war waged by Italy against Africa, which was pursued to create an Italian empire; it almost certainly refers to the bloody repressions that the Italian army perpetrated against Somalia in 1926-27 when the military invasion was concluded (Aruffo 92). The Fascio, symbol of the Fascist regime, is prominently

⁶⁴ Bonsaver 20, Gianeri and Rauch 159.

depicted as a bloody axe atop a pile of skulls, representing victims of the war. The caption of the cartoon, “L’impero e l’imperatore,” blends both cynical sarcasm and vitriolic condemnation of the Italian “emperor and empire” established from the early 1920s to the late 1930s (Paoletti 158). The “Emperor” Mussolini is depicted as a squat and ridiculous owl, a petty bird of prey and not a royal eagle, unrepentant before the skulls that symbolize a mass grave—evidence of his wrongdoing. The shape of the shadow cast by the heap of skulls evokes the African continent, and the mound of skulls implies a reference to the biblical Golgotha. The caption adds information to the image as it sarcastically identifies the pile of skulls as “the empire,” implying the “empire of death” or the empire as graveyard. The cartoon shows that black humor serves as a means to provoke disapproval in readers and stir them to question the legitimacy of Italy’s war against African tribes. If we also consider that the war was presented as a march of civilization over savagery, the cartoon serves to displace the savagery from the African nations to the invading Fascists.

This cartoon is one of many examples of graphic invectives created in satirical newspapers outside of Italy. Cartoons such as Chancel’s circulated underground and were illegal in Italy, where the possession or circulation of *Il Becco Giallo* was a punishable crime as early as 1926. If we were to assess such vignettes as stylistic exercises in artistic caricature, or as a way to provoke laughter, we would miss both the ethical weight of the caricature and also its contestatory value. By framing this example within its specific historical and political context, we are better equipped to approach both blame and humor

as commentators deployed them and readers perceived them during the early 1930s in Fascist Italy.

The humor and criticism of Ettore Petrolini (1884-1936) and Carlo Alberto Salustri (1871-1950), known as Trilussa, follow a model that, while polemical, is not as subversive as “Chancel’s” political cartoon. On the contrary, their satirical works were written and circulated both inside and outside Italy during the Fascist years, gaining such popularity that they were legally published and appreciated even by members of the Fascist regime and Mussolini himself. Italian audiences accepted the actor and comic playwright Petrolini and his popular *Nerone*, a satire on dictatorship. Mussolini’s son Romano recalls what his father once said about Petrolini:

He was a genius. His *Nerone*, an original satirical “pastiche” on dictatorship, was especially entertaining. But who knows why the journalists avoided mentioning that I was seated in the first row of the Valle Theater in Rome when it opened. (93-94)

From the post-unification period to the Fascist years, Trilussa wrote numerous poems and fables that are regarded as political satire (Pancrazi 957-58). Guido Bonsaver shows that Trilussa’s satirical poems were both controversial and appreciated:

There is no doubt that Trilussa’s satirical eye had been cast upon the current rulers and rhetorical vagaries of Fascist Italy. Individual poems from collections such as *La gente* (1927), *Libro 9* (1929), and *Giove e le bestie* (1932), all published by Mondadori, were often discussed for their implicit satire of Fascist Italy. At the same time, Trilussa’s bland and tolerant critique was well liked by some fascist leaders . . . and Mussolini too had revealed his admiration of the poet on more than one occasion. (62-63)

Bonsaver illustrates that even though Trilussa through poetry launched mordant criticism against a political authority, the same authority that was attacked appreciated the quality

and resourcefulness of vituperative humor. This example suggests that humor does not always follow the model of subversion, nor is it solely circumscribed within the category of the “oppressed,” as theorized by Bakhtin. Instead, in this specific case humor becomes an ambivalent phenomenon which affects both the author and the target of the attack. Although modern authors such as Trilussa and Petrolini expressed their opposition to war and indirectly criticized specific individuals high up in the Fascist hierarchy, prominent leaders of the Fascist Party—even Mussolini himself—did not perceive their humor as either sedition or harmless jest. Rather, their humor was viewed as an artistic expression, even though both Trilussa and Petrolini made political statements about Fascism and war through their works.

The antiwar poem “La ninna-nanna de la guerra” [War Lullaby], more than any other by Trilussa, contains direct attacks against specific political leaders. The poem was first published during the First World War (1915), circulated from 1917 to 1921, and was reprinted in 1939 and 1943 during Italy’s involvement in the Second World War.⁶⁵ The targets of attack are the Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria and other advocates of the First World War (Pancrazi 500). All are blamed as opportunistic, cruel, corrupt, and deceptive:

Ninna nanna, tu nun senti	17
li sospiri e li lamenti	
de la gente che se scanna	
per un matto che commanna;	
che se scanna e che s'ammazza	21
a vantaggio de la razza	
o a vantaggio d'una fede	
per un Dio che nun se vede,	

⁶⁵ See Bermani 81-84; and Wohlgemuth 118.

ma che serve da riparo
ar Sovrano macellaro.

26

Chè quer covo d'assassini
che c'insanguina la terra
sa benone che la guerra
è un gran giro de quatrini
che prepara le risorse
pe li ladri de le Borse. . . . (Pancrazi 17-32)

[Lullaby, you do not hear / the sighs and laments / of the people who
slaughter one another / for the sake of a madman who commands; / who
slaughter and kill one another / for the sake of the race / or for the sake of
a faith / for a God who is not visible, / but who is useful as a shelter / for
the butcher king. / Because that pack of murderers, / which stains the earth
with blood, / knows well that war / is a big business / which prepares the
resources / for pickpockets [Stock Exchange thieves] (my translation).

This powerful poem employs bitter humor to criticize highly-placed political figures responsible for the deaths of innocent people in Italy and worldwide during the Great War. Its particularly caustic humor emerges in the pun “ladri de le Borse” [both thieves of purses and thieves of the Stock Market], which associates theft with the “legitimate” investment mechanisms of the stock market. Trilussa sardonically attacks those individuals who benefited from the First World War to the detriment of the victims, and accuses them of cynically fueling the war with ideological mystifications for their own financial interest. The poem is thus an invective rooted within a specific historical frame and including serious allegations against those who initiated and extended the conflict worldwide.

If we consider that it was reprinted and circulated during the years of Italy’s involvement in the Second World War, it is clear that Italian readers were able to apply its antiwar message to both World Wars. Nonetheless, critics have often approached

Trilussa's corpus emphasizing a strictly formalistic reading. Pancrazi and Dell'Arco, for example, call attention to how Trilussa's poetry could be related to the satirical tradition associated with authors from ancient Rome, such as Horace and Juvenal, and linked to satirical forms such as the fable and the epigram.⁶⁶ In recent studies, critics have also underscored Trilussa's humor and explored the connection between humor and satire (Limongi 119).⁶⁷ If we independently privilege either a formalistic reading or humor per se, Trilussa's invective poetry would seem to be either a mere exercise of style that only parrots an established literary tradition, or an empty comic performance. In either case, the criticism and play evident in such caustic poems as "La ninna-nanna de la guerra" would be overlooked and a formalistic reading would ultimately downplay the antiwar message and aggressive humor that emerged from Trilussa's verbal attacks.

In recent times, invective poetry has been employed in contemporary tensions and wars such as the "anni di piombo" [Years of Lead] in Italy and the Iraq War. In 1972 Roberto Benigni, affiliated with the communist party, launched a powerful invective against the notorious political leader Giorgio Almirante, head of the far right party in Italy and founder of the neofascist party MSI (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*). Benigni's invective explicitly evokes the lyric poetry of medieval Tuscany, in particular Cecco

⁶⁶ See Pancrazi xxi; Dell'Arco 57-61. Because Trilussa wrote in dialect, his contribution to Italian literature has often been reduced to a mere example of *poesia dialettale*. This is evident if we examine anthologies of Italian literature where his corpus appears solely in relation to texts written in dialect; see for example Carlo Bo in *Storia della letteratura italiana* (169-178). Recently Giacomo Noventa in *La scrittura e l'interpretazione* (1999) confirms this critical interpretation when he underrates Trilussa's poetic corpus: "una produzione . . . risolta quasi sempre in bozzetto di costume, in facile moralismo, in ingenua allegorizzazione sociale" (863).

⁶⁷ Limongi clearly underscores Trilussa's satirical humor when he writes that "Trilussa, infatti, sa scandagliare il profondo dell'animo umano, evidenziando vizi e virtù, difetti e pregi, con piacevole umorismo" (119).

Angiolieri's invective "Maledetta sie l'or'e 'l punt'e 'l giorno" (Lanza 106), as is evident in the opening of the poem:

Maledetta l'ora il giorno il secondo
 in cui du' merdaioli ti misero al mondo.
 Maledetta l'ora il giorno e l'annata
 che la tu' mamma ti dette la su' prima poppata.

Maledetta l'ora buia ancor di più la notte cupa
 che un finocchio ti convinse a esser figlio della lupa (1-6)

.....

Ti venisse la febbre, ti venisse un ascesso,
 ti scoppiassero in culo tutte le bombe che tu ha' messo.
 Ti chiavassero la moglie tutti i morti delle guerre,
 e ti nascesse un figliolo che assomiglia a Berlinguerre. (25-28)⁶⁸

[Cursed be the hour, the day, the moment / in which two shit-heads
 brought you into this world. / Cursed be the hour, the day, and the season /
 when your mother gave you the first feed. / Cursed be the dark hour, even
 more the gloomy night / that a faggot convinced you to be son of the she-
 wolf /

.....

May you get a fever, may you get an abscess / may all the bombs that you
 have planted explode in your ass / may all the dead of all the wars screw
 your wife, / and may she bear a son that looks like Berlinguer] (my
 translation).

Although Almirante is not specifically named in the poem, he is disclosed as the main target of attack from the dedication, "Ad Almirante." The invective charges Almirante through explicit reference to his adherence to Fascism (line 6) alongside accusations of responsibility for terrorist bombings (line 26) orchestrated by secret organizations from the far right.⁶⁹ This example is sharper than the previous ones because it more directly

⁶⁸ Source <<http://termometropolitico.wordpress.com/2008/05/22/dedicato-a-giorgio-almirante>> (accessed March 31, 2010).

⁶⁹ These terrorist bombings began in the late 1960s and had their most critical moments with the Piazza Fontana and Peteano bombings. More specifically, Benigni's invective follows the assassination of the

attacks an individual *ad hominem* through curses which condemn Almirante's entire existence from its earliest stage, i.e., his birth (1-2) and first feed (3-4), to his boyhood when he joined the Fascist Party (6) and maturity when he became involved in terrorist bombings (26). Benigni's invective employs hyperbolic, vivid imagery such as "merdaioli" (2) [shit-heads] and "finocchio" (5) [faggot] which slanders, respectively, Almirante's parents and likely Mussolini who inspired him to join the Fascist party. Clearly, Benigni's invective contains the ethical message of reprehension while ferociously mocking and ridiculing the target of attack. Humor, in this case, operates to entertain and shock the audience by launching fierce criticism against Almirante during the *anni di piombo*, one of the most challenging times in recent Italian history.

Furthermore, Benigni's invective could also be associated with a well-defined rhetorical tradition of *vituperatio*. From its opening, Benigni's invective conforms to the rhetorical tradition of classical invective: it addresses the target of attack by denigrating first his birth, family, and upbringing (*res externa*) and then his character (*anima*), concluding with a series of curses reminiscent of both the imprecatory Psalms and the medieval invective tradition. Benigni explicitly evokes the well-known literary tradition of Cecco and the *comico-realistici* as well as Dante's *contrappasso*, as we can see from the description of Almirante's wrongdoings and the intended punishments which are hyperbolically weighted according to the nature of his sin (25-28). Even though it is useful to draw this parallel between Benigni and the rhetorical tradition of classical and

anarchist Franco Serantini, whom neofascists beat to death during a demonstration in Pisa on May 7, 1972. See Strajano's *Il sovversivo: vita e morte dell'anarchico Serantini*.

medieval invective, it would be tone-deaf to approach this stirring invective through a formalistic analysis alone and ignore its vibrant cargo of denigration grounded in the political turmoil of 1970s Italy. Benigni's poem is a clear example of how the threads of blame and humor intertwine over a well-known literary tradition which is not merely reiterated or evoked, but rather employed to make a serious denunciation of contemporary tensions.

Benigni's invective, unlike Trilussa's, has not been as well received by Italian audiences, especially after an anonymous poster revived it on YouTube in early March 2009.⁷⁰ The release of the 1972 invective on the internet was perhaps timed to coincide with Giorgio Almirante's twenty-year remembrance—thus serving as a calculated reply from the Italian communist party. On March 25, 2009, Almirante's widow brought charges of slander against both Benigni and the various networks that posted the video; the case is still in progress.⁷¹ Various blogs and discussion fora reveal that Italians are deeply divided on Benigni's invective, which some consider too excessive and disrespectful and others praise.⁷² Benigni's invective causes such controversial reactions

⁷⁰ The user who posted the video on YouTube cannot be identified because the post is no longer available. He or she was probably from the left, since the video was posted during Almirante's memorial, which thus suggests that the poster intended to launch a polemic against the members of the extreme right who were organizing the tribute.

⁷¹ The video of Benigni is no longer available on YouTube. The charges and the case, to my knowledge, have neither been dropped nor resolved. See <<http://www.padovanews.it/content/view/47482/101/>>

⁷² See Adeblog, <http://aspiblog.blogspot.com/2009/03/roberto-benigni-almirante_4160.html>. Some bloggers praise Benigni's invective and condemn its removal from YouTube. Pierprandi, among many, expresses his positive appraisal of the invective, "Un vecchio pezzo ma attualissimo!" Numerous anonymous posters evaluate the invective quite negatively: "La "poesia" di Benigni è a dir poco squallida; è un vomito di volgarità e di odio. Non è certo così che si fa politica; non è certo così che si difende la democrazia né l'antifascismo. Perché "ripescare" delle bischerate di trent'anni fa? Forse una certa sinistra ci tiene tanto a diventare un sepolcro imbiancato?" or Gianni Vassalli: "Benigni è il solito arrogante idiota borghese capace di turpiloquio fine a se stesso senza alcun impegno sociale o politico." This last comment denies to Benigni's invective any social or political freight or serious intention. This echoes recent critics of

because it raises the question of whether it should be considered humorous at all when the target of attack, ridiculed with such harshness, is now dead. This example shows how the poem's humor—which emerges from its content, lexicon, and literary frame of reference—is not universally perceived or appreciated, and its aggression overshadows the more playful elements despite the fact that Benigni is one of the most prominent comedians in contemporary Italian culture.

The medium of the internet allowed a vibrant interaction between Benigni's invective and a wide audience. This interaction is comparable to, but also distinct from, the previous example of Trilussa. Like Trilussa, Benigni composed his invective for specific target readers within a precise time frame, yet both were recovered in a subsequent period. The republishing of Trilussa's poem revived its anti-war message, reaching a new generation of readers who applied it to a different war and different targets. Benigni too composed and recited his invective in a precise historical period (1972) but when it was also revived through YouTube thirty years later, it spoke to a new generation of Italians. Its anti-fascist message was thus revived but due to its crudity and irreverence it caused a more controversial response than Trilussa's "Ninna nanna." Through the internet and the blog mechanism, we can document the reader response of the invective more directly and clearly see how the controversial message of criticism and humor contained in the invective can cause a complex, divisive reaction in its audience. The phenomenon of the internet and the blog is thus more complex than

medieval invective, and unfairly overlooks both the historical / political frame of Benigni's original invective and its ethical message of reprehension of the turmoil of the *anni di piombo*. Polisblog too features nearly 100 comments on Benigni's invective and thus shows how its interaction of blame and humor stirs strong contrasting views; see <<http://www.polisblog.it>>.

Trilussa's example: in Benigni's case readers intervened directly alongside the original text, expressing their approval or disapproval and responding directly to the author by posting comments on a blog and glossing the ongoing polemic. By doing so, Benigni's readers are able to revive the invective more dynamically than Trilussa's, and thus prolong its controversial message.

Even though the phenomenon of the internet blog is relatively a recent phenomenon, it is a method of communication that could be compared with other networks that existed in the past. The blog model is particularly relevant for the issue of the interaction between an author and his readers during the Middle Ages. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the practice of exchanging and circulating invective poetry reached a high level of sophistication and dynamism in a way that is perhaps comparable only to the computer age. As Hugh Hewitt notes, a blog is

a diary of sorts maintained on the Internet by one or more regular contributors. Usually just one, sometimes two or three . . . the first blog appeared in 1999. . .there are now more than 4,000,000 blogs. (ix)

The phenomenon of the blogs—called the blogosphere—is vast because of the different types of blogs that exist, from commercial to personal blogs (Barlow ix-x). By offering a lively interaction between bloggers (individuals who write in a blog), the Internet blog functions similarly to a medieval *canzoniere* or a collection of poetry. Before the *canzoniere* was produced and circulated, the exchange of invectives or *tenzoni* between poets followed three stages: “(1) un testo missivo, (2) un corriere che lo consegna, (3) un testo responsivo talvolta scritto sullo stesso foglio, un nuovo corriere” (Giunta, *Due saggi* 25). Many texts, from various *comuni* and by different authors, were then finally copied

and recorded by a scribe(s) in a *canzoniere* on single folios alongside one or more sonnets written as replies.

The *canzoniere*, like the blog, records a sophisticated level of interaction between individuals belonging to different social and political backgrounds. However, the medium of blogs and Internet videos offers immediate communication and response between individuals living far from each other—replacing the *corriere* who carries the text to the intended addressee(s). In addition, the blog is not limited by the physical size of a folio because a large amount of text can be posted digitally on the internet and thus be read a few seconds after its posting.⁷³ I offer this comparison to illustrate the continuity of invective poetry from the Middle Ages to the present day. Although recorded in different media, invective poetry from both medieval and modern times opens a communicative link between authors and readers. This parallel confirms the complexity, resourcefulness, and wide-ranging development of this genre—especially for invectives that refer to war—established by various authors throughout history. My final examples will illustrate how invective poetry could reach a wide variety of target readers and, through the poles of criticism and sarcasm, create a call to them. Such a call to readers shows that invective poetry is not simply the passive mirror of a rhetorical and stylistic tradition, or a cathartic act of carnevalesque subversion which functions as a mechanical ritual. Instead, by creating a thick, complex call to readers, and denouncing and ridiculing a particular wrongdoing, invective and comic poetry directly address serious ethical and political problems, also proposing possible solutions. Invective poetry reaches readers directly

⁷³ For recent sources on blogs see Hugh Hewitt's *Blog: Understanding the Information Reformation That's Changing Your World* (2005) and Aaron Barlow's *Blogging America: The New Public Sphere* (2008).

because of its humor and provocation, and because both the author and its readers share a set of common beliefs and goals.

American political poet Calvin Trillin (1935-) elaborates his own distinctive model of vituperation which further illustrates the persistence of invective poetry in more recent times. Perhaps on a larger scale than the previous examples, Trillin has a sustained record of published invective: since 1990, he has composed and published invective verse each week in the “Deadline Poet” byline in *The Nation*. Trillin’s popularity is also due to the fact that he often associates his satiric verse with songs drawn from popular culture, as well as employing a basic poetic style characterized by short lines with relatively simple lexicon and rhyme, packed with content, humor, and furious blame. His accessible style allows him to reach a wide variety of readers, as confirmed by his two publications *Obliviously On He Sails: The Bush Administration in Rhyme* (2004) and *A Heckuva Job* (2006) which immediately became *New York Times* best-sellers.⁷⁴ The poem “Wars,” published first in *The Nation* (2003) and subsequently in *Obliviously On He Sails* (2004), exemplifies how elements of blame and humor interrelate, as well as how Trillin uses allusions to familiar sources well-established in American popular culture.

“Wars” denounces the Iraq war by comparing it to the previous devastating Vietnam Conflict; Trillin introduces the poem with the lines “(*A preventive-war anthem sung to the tune that Joyce Kilmer's "Trees" was set to, with piano accompaniment*)” (89). He thus already sets the humorous tone of his invective through a “tune” written for Kilmer’s “Trees.” By doing so, Trillin uses a literary source which originally promoted

⁷⁴ See http://www.thenation.com/directory/bios/calvin_trillin (last accessed April 1, 2010).

peace and prayer to launch his antiwar message against President George W. Bush and his administration:

We think that God has never made
 A country we should not invade.
 Some evil tyrants go unchecked,
 And bombing them gets us respect.
 The more small countries we destroy 5
 The more respect we can enjoy.

La-da-dee-dee, bomb-bomb.
 La-da-dee-dee, bomb-bomb.

And rulers who may seem okay?
 It's smart to bomb them anyway, 10
 So others fear us like the Hun.
 That Vietnam disease is done.
 Our country had it wrong before:
 There's nothing better than a war. (89)

The poem begins with a collective “we” that speaks directly to readers in a solemn tone that seems to echo the phrasing of an official legal document such as the Declaration of Independence (“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal...”). The phrasing suggests it will articulate a universal belief held by American society and bestowed by God. However, unlike the Declaration, Trillin’s poem expresses a cutting irony: the pronoun “we” does not coincide directly with the American people but rather with a group that indirectly represented them when the poem was written (2003), and pompously claims to speak on their behalf. As evident from the dedication of Trillin’s volume in which this poem is published, the “we” of the poem is none other than “the Bush administration” (Trillin 3). By sardonically impersonating Bush and his administration, Trillin launches an implicit invective against them as he presents them as

an irreverent “we” who hyperbolically boast that the United States has the god-given right to invade any country in the world. This initial provocation is paired with sarcastic humor, as “Bush” declares his willingness to bomb any allegedly wicked oppressor, an action that would bring honor to the U.S. and global “respect” (4). In the second part of the poem, Trillin continues this mocking and ironic declaration of war(s) when he exposes Bush’s “smart” justification for war. This justification involves not only attacking “evil tyrants” (3), but also—perhaps reaching global proportions—“rulers who may seem ok” (9). The poem concludes with the bold analogy between the Iraq war and the Vietnam war, which from Bush’s perspective is intended to be an apology for the Iraq conflict (still ongoing, seven years later). Through the Vietnam-Iraq parallel, the speaker states that there is no lesson to be learned from the past because the Vietnam war was merely a “disease,” an anomaly, which differed greatly from the current situation in Iraq, which is different because it is a reasonable and honorable war. Trillin concludes his ironic tirade by stating that “there's nothing better than a war” (14). This last verse suggests hyperbolically that there should be no questions about the Iraq war because the most favorable option for all American citizens is indeed war in a general sense.

Trillin’s direct criticism and ridicule of Bush, and particularly of Bush’s staunch support of the Iraq war, stirs a controversial poetic attack which is fully as effective as the previous examples. Like Benigni, Trillin makes a contrafact of another poem, Kilmer’s “Trees” (with its “piano accompaniment”); the debt is evident from the poem’s opening (“I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree,” 1-2) and closing (“Poems are made by fools like me, / But only God can make a tree,” 11-12) (Ravitch 387-88).

Trillin's allusion to "Trees" is certainly crucial to understanding the parodic nature of his poem, which uses a literary icon like "Trees" to connect with readers. Again, however, if we limit our reading of Trillin's "Wars" to a formalist comparison with Kilmer's poem, we would miss the important political message of Trillin's poem, overemphasizing a stylistic technique above its vigorous content.

"Wars" shows that invective can have a simple yet powerfully sarcastic language and reach a wide number of people. It also shows that modern invectives, like their medieval equivalents, circulate in a variety of ways, encouraging readers' response. This is evident if we consider that Trillin's popular rhymes circulated not only through newspapers and books, but also through weekly blogs. The following example shows how Trillin's invective not only reached readers on a superficial level but inspired them to create similar poems, so that by composing other invectives they opened other channels of communications with new readers. Trillin's legacy shows how an author can be spurred to write an invective not simply as a reaction to a controversial event but after encountering another invective poem. Thus Trillin contributes to the creation and distribution of other political invective poems whose anti-war message can now travel across various means of communication, from print to digital production, from bookstores to the blogosphere.

On October 27, 2007, humor columnist Madeleine Begun Kane launched on her website *Mad Kane's Political Madness* a series of invectives against former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. Kane explains that her invectives against Rice were

inspired by specific events pertaining to the war in Iraq.⁷⁵ If we visit her blog, we can see that these invectives were popular enough that she created the subcategory “Condi Rice Humor” specifically to attack the former secretary of state.⁷⁶ Kane’s invective, unlike Benigni’s, is unanimously well received in her blog and thus seems a successful form of entertainment for an enthusiastic Internet community which shares similar criticisms of the former Bush administration and the Iraq war.

Without a doubt, the style of her invectives echoes Trillin’s; Kane faithfully duplicates his direct and short lines, his fairly plain lexicon, and his simple rhymes. In “Fabulosa Condoleezza,” Kane also follows that model of invective poetry using simple yet heavily sarcastic language and calquing the poem on the popular song “Mona Lisa,” written by Jay Livingston and Ray Evans and made famous by Nat King Cole. Kane thus immediately conveys the humorous irreverence of her invective as she sets it to a pop music tune:⁷⁷

Condoleezza, Condoleezza, Dub adores you.
 You're so fine at saying falsehoods with a smile.
 Is it cause you're female, Condi, that they've blamed you
 For your fabulosa fakery and guile?

 How you smile to mask your motives, Condoleezza.
 Oh but what you say is rarely from the heart.
 Many dreams have been lost by your war schemes,
 While you lie here,
 As they die there.

⁷⁵ See < <http://www.madkane.com/madness/category/condi-rice-humor/> > (accessed April 1, 2010).

⁷⁶ See < <http://www.madkane.com/madness/2007/10/27/pondering-condi/#comments> > (accessed April 1, 2010). The blog features 13 comments.

⁷⁷ Kane also includes a midi link where readers can listen to the tune while reading the invective, thus facilitating the reception and enhancing the catchy quality of “Fabulosa Condoleezza;” see <http://www.madkane.com/condi.html> (accessed April 2, 2010).

Misinformed? Let's get real, Condoleezza.
 You're just a cold mendacious gal who should depart.

Kane's poem cleverly expresses the idea of the ambiguity of the "smile," referring to the well-known attribute of the Mona Lisa painting—the unsettling charm of her smile. But Kane paints a different Mona Lisa, a well-defined political figure. Rice's smile, like the original Mona Lisa's, is ambiguous, but her ambiguity is clearly exposed not as attractive but rather as a subtle metaphor for treachery, "fakery and guile."

To better appreciate the derisive tone of Kane's invective, we need to reflect on the fact that "Fabulosa Condoleezza," in a way similar to Benigni's and Trillin's invectives, is actually a contrafact, meant to be sung to the tune of "Mona Lisa." This imposes both parameters (on the piece) and expectations (in readers). The piece has to mimic the meter, rhyme scheme, apostrophe, and general structure of the original song, and its humor and effectiveness depend on its resonating with a reader's knowledge of the original music and lyrics. For example, the line "While you lie here, as they die there" deliberately changes the meaning of the word *lie* from the sense of "to rest" or "lie down" that it had in the original song "Mona Lisa," to "tell lies:" "Many dreams have been laid upon your doorstep / they just lie there / and they die there."⁷⁸ It is essential that the word *lie* occupy the same place in the poem / song, and it is a place of considerable emphasis. Kane takes the original "Mona Lisa" song—a yearning, admiring and ultimately despairing address to a mystery woman—and turns it into a bitter indictment of someone she considers to be a war criminal hiding behind femininity and charm.

⁷⁸ Kane's invective also echoes Calvin Trillin's pun on the same words "laid" and "lie;" see his poem "A Silver-Lining View of George Bush's not Attending Military Funerals, Lest he become Associated with Bad News:" "It's better that they're *laid* to rest / Without another *lie*." (111, emphasis added).

Like other invective authors, then, Kane employs a recognized scheme and rhetorical structure to appeal to her readers, rendering her message of condemnation more effective but also entertaining. Kane chooses to mimic a well-known song and evoke one of the most famous artistic icons of femininity to ironically pillory Rice as infamous and wicked. Kane is thus exposing her to the reader on an ethical—rather than a merely aesthetic—level. The ethical charge of this poem must be considered in relation to the historical background of the war in Iraq. If we were to interpret this poem solely in relation to its overt parody of the song “Mona Lisa,” and thus as a portrait of a monstrous woman (as opposed to the feminine charm and mysterious appeal the song character shares with the Leonardo painting), we could conclude that Kane’s Condoleezza/Mona Lisa is simply an inversion or a parody of Leonardo’s. In other words, from a solely formalistic perspective, we can simply conclude that Kane crafts a clever attack against a named woman for the purpose of subverting an abstract category; or perhaps we might go so far as to say that Kane destabilizes a familiar topos to show off her literary skills and to provide a model of a misogynist poem.

However, such a reading is just too reductive and even incorrect, because the poem has wider implications and does not attack women or femininity in general. Instead, Kane clearly condemns the behavior—not the femininity—of her target and more specifically the fact that she is using femininity for her own (as well as Bush’s) political gain in a way that is deemed unfair and deceiving. A reading of Kane’s invective that focused only on the elements of inversion, parody, and subversion would indeed limit the scope of the poem, and also miss the connection it creates with a wide audience

which is comprised not of misogynists, but rather—according to the comments from Kane’s blog—by an heterogeneous group of both male and female readers. This conclusion should also apply to medieval invective poetry and in particular to thirteenth-century poets such as Rustico Filippi. As we shall see in Chapter 3, Rustico has often been approached as a misogynist poet because of evidence that documents that he wrote invectives against noblewomen.⁷⁹ However, I believe that if we examine Rustico’s poems against named women from a political and social perspective we can arrive at a reading which would shed some light on a precise historical episode rather than on a rhetorical tradition. By doing so, we would be able to more appropriately emphasize the historical peculiarities which most likely influenced the composition of Rustico’s invective poetry, providing a comprehensive reading of these texts.

Kane’s invectives, like Benigni’s, were disseminated through the Internet, and thus we have immediate evidence on how they were received. Various blogs provide comments posted by viewers who read Kane’s satirical poems on her website. Furthermore, other blogs posted Kane’s invective against Condoleezza immediately after she posted it, while other authors initiated different blogs where they posted similar invectives, thus creating a sort of legacy, though often not acknowledged.⁸⁰ This shows

⁷⁹ See Francesco da Barberino’s *I Documenti d’Amore* (II 58).

⁸⁰ Immediately after Kane posted “Fabulosa Condoleezza,” other blogs posted her poem adding various comments from their own bloggers; see for example “Annie Annals” http://dialager.blogspot.com/2003_08_01_archive.html (last accessed April 2, 2010); see also <http://www.biography.com/> (last accessed August 2009, the site is no longer available). See also Mikael Rudolph’s 2006 poem which echoes Kane’s: http://www.opednews.com/articles/opedne_mikael_r_061118_with_apologies_to_na.htm (Last accessed April 2, 2010). In April 2007, the DJ Neil Rogers received media attention when he released a song against Condoleezza Rice based on the Nat King Cole’s “Mona Lisa;” <http://www.rbr.com/epaper/pages/nov02/02->

how an invective can, through the means of the blog, inspire readers who can also approach the invective from indirect sources. Kane's example also applies to contemporary Italian comedian Beppe Grillo, whose blog contained daily invectives against Berlusconi and various prominent Italian politicians in the form of poetry, prose, and videos. As Lorenzo Mosca and Daria Santucci have recently noted (2009):

Beppe Grillo is a famous Italian comedian well known for political satire, he also created a very popular blog at the beginning of 2005 (<http://www.beppegrillo.it>). According to Technorati, the blog is ranked among the most visited blogs in the world. Grillo's blog launched some significant campaigns like *Clean Up the Parliament* and *Citizen Primaries*. (137 n 9)

That Grillo's blog is one of the most visited blogs in the world confirms that denunciation through humor reaches a wide audience, even traveling beyond national borders to reach global proportions. Even though humor is a context-sensitive phenomenon, set within a specific culture and language, Grillo's example suggests that political invective can stir the interest of a wide public not necessarily involved in Italian politics but sharing with the author(s) a common set of values. Such common values could include the denunciation of outrageous, unlawful activities that affect the political and social life of twenty-first-century citizens.

These modern examples, which span from the First World War to the Iraq War and contemporary Italy, show how diverse invectives coupled with humor reflect distinctive models and are framed within specific historical circumstances. Their readers' reactions are as diverse as the controversies depicted in these invectives. In these modern cases,

[90_news.html](#) (Last accessed April 2, 2010). Even if Rogers does not mention Kane, his parody is most likely indebted to her 2003 poem.

humor functions in various ways. Humor in invective can be a subversive force that is hostile to an existing *status quo*, which considers it illegal and thus censors it (as in the example of the *Becco Giallo*), or as an appreciated form of expression endorsed by the same power structure (as in the examples of Petrolini and Trilussa). The practice of invective stirs contrasting responses from readers who react either disapprovingly, denigrating the poem and its author (as in the case of Benigni), or approvingly, showing appreciation for both the author and the intended message of the invective (as in the case of Trillin and Kane) and taking it as a model for creating more invectives or reaching a global audience (as in the case of Grillo). Overall, both blame and humor are equally important and must be considered together when assessing and understanding political invective poetry against a wartime backdrop. Furthermore, humor is not a simple phenomenon; depend on the historical situation, its political message, its audience, and last but not least its author, it can cause opposite effects in different readers, affecting them in different ways.

Conclusion

Having outlined examples of invectives grounded in modern wars, I would like to bring the question back to the medieval Italian invective corpus. I have tried to show why we cannot ignore the political and historical frame of reference at the core of medieval invective poems. We would hardly interpret Benigni's and Kane's invectives without mentioning, or at least considering, the Years of Lead and the Iraq War; likewise, how can we underestimate the importance of the Guelph and Ghibelline wars, the practice of political exile, and the general tensions and instabilities within various Tuscan *comuni*, when we find references to them in medieval poetry? The findings and examples provided in this chapter, I hope, substantiate the need for a new course of interpretation which would enable readers to understand and apply the cultural, historical, and political reality behind these texts, as well as their ethical dimension articulated by each author.

My dissertation will explore the ethical weight of medieval comic poetry in the primary texts I have outlined. I will examine the striking coexistence of both critique and play—of blame and humor—that seems to recur in medieval invective poetry in Italy during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I shall limit my focus to the cultural and literary phenomenon of “curses” (words expressing anger, insult, and blame) in reference to the social, historical, political, and religious context of the time. I limit my selection to texts deploying political, social, and religious references, because I do not seek to impose a specific normative and monolithic ethical reading on all comic medieval poetry. Instead, I have three objectives. First, I wish to examine the role played by ethics culturally,

historically, and philosophically in these selected invectives, within their own geopolitical and historical realities. Second, I plan to explore whether there is a relation or coexistence between the ethics of blaming (in the practice of invective) and joking in these texts, and to highlight their placement and value in the modern critical discussion of writing poetry during the high and late Middle Ages. Third, I seek to develop a metadisciplinary focus that can juxtapose and in some cases integrate the medieval comic materials of Italy in several contexts (i.e. historical, political, religious, and social) along with a metacritical study that spans from post-Romantic to modern times. This focus will allow me to foster a critical assessment of the relationship between blame and humor in medieval Italian comic poetry. It will also allow me to develop an alternative reading of these texts that would contest the predominant depiction of medieval comic literature as an *a priori* subversive or marginalized form of recreation.

To meet these three objectives, I shall elaborate a new critical reading of these texts that will examine the practice of curses and laughter in association with ethics in literature and history. By “ethics,” I refer to the behavior and relationship between individuals, groups, or institutions that existed in the historical reality of the Middle Ages and are represented in literary fictions. I shall discuss ethics both as a theoretical and as a practical concept in relation to medieval moral philosophy (as it connects to the thought of Aristotle and successive thinkers such as Cicero, St. Thomas Aquinas, Averroes, and Brunetto Latini) and the reality of the time (as it refers to actual interactions among human beings in civic society with its values, laws and regulations). This concept of ethics is based upon an idea of ‘good’ expressed by the Greek term *agathos* and the Latin

term *summum bonum* in reference to the idea of utility and well-being practiced in political life and society.

The ideological framework of writing and reading invectives emerges from medieval commentaries and introductory glosses, scholastic manuals, and grammar textbooks that are all contemporary with my selected comic corpus. These documents, put into writing for various reasons,⁸¹ provide modern readers with useful tools for evaluating the philosophy of invective in Italy. Studies by Judson Boyce Allen, Alastair Minnis, Robert Hollander, John Dagenais, Fabian Alfie, and Claudio Giunta refer to several of these witnesses to emphasize that poetry in general, during the late Middle Ages, was frequently considered to be married to ethics. These primary documents and recent secondary studies could be applied more specifically, as most critics rarely have done, to comic poetry as well. Comic poetry, pertaining to ethical reading, was often paired ideologically with concepts such as utility, practicality, morality, and edification.

Allen, in *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages* (1982), has commented on these concepts, suggesting a link between comic poetry and the thirteenth-century Neo-Aristotelian and Averroistic thinking on comedy: “in Averroes’ theory tragedy is the art of praising, and comedy is the art of blaming” (19). Dagenais, in *The Ethics of Reading*, elaborates on this ethical definition of comic poetry, discussing the ideological expectations of medieval readers oriented toward a Christian ethics. He concludes that during the Middle Ages texts, engaged readers “in praise and blame, in judgment about

⁸¹ These texts were written for various purposes: to collect and document poetic writings; to provide models of reading and writings for students, authors, instructors, and researchers at the academic level; to prepare people for various professional careers as ambassadors, diplomats, legal notaries, judges, politicians, and religious or political leaders.

effective and ineffective human behavior (...) and required the readers to take a stand about what he or she read” (xvii). Dagenais’ study encourages a critical approach to comic poetry in connection to the active role of medieval readers in the production, reception, and circulation of poetry.

Giunta, in *Codici* (2005), emphasizes more generally the ideological difference between modern and medieval poetry, concluding that in contrast to modern poets, “i poeti medievali sono piú espliciti, dicono a chiare lettere ciò che vogliono dire, oppure (così Dante nella *Commedia*) danno al lettore indizi che dovrebbero essere sufficienti per comprendere l’allusione” (31-32). Giunta offers numerous examples of medieval poetry in different genres (such as the invective) which confirm the dialogic dimension between medieval authors and a wide heterogeneous readership. This dimension suggests a strong possible link between the esthetics of imaginative fiction and an ethical freight of medieval poetry to serve practical purposes such as instructing readers about morals and values to apply to their lives. In *Versi a un destinatario*, Giunta concludes that in the poetic production of the Middle Ages the concept of “realismo non significa semplicemente descrizione della vita nella sua verità immediata e materiale (...) ma volontà di intervenire sulla realtà, di mutarla attraverso la poesia” (514). According to Giunta, both the medieval authors and the medieval readers presumably shared this concept of poetry (513). After the Middle Ages, the ethical dimension of poetry became underrepresented; modern poets are inclined toward “il lirismo introspettivo” (513) that diminishes the role of practicality in art so prominent in medieval poetry. Giunta argues that modern critics endorse this modern tendency and are reluctant to consider the link

between literature and practicality, because literature that serves a practical purpose is generally defined as naïve or “popolare” (515) [folksy].

All these considerations regarding the ethical reading of invective poetry, intended as the art of blaming and as a didactic tool to teach readers, should not be underestimated. A generous inventory of moral misconduct (such as adultery, rape, disloyalty, cowardice, and egoism) emerges from the invectives in Italy. The evidence of wrongdoing within the texts solicits readers to respond to and be responsible for the misbehavior represented in the fictional actions of characters of the poem. The reader could respond also to its possible references to the misconduct of individuals, groups, and institutions of his or her own time.

The ethical reading of comic poetry outlined is, however, challenged by the presence of humor in the text and corpus. The presence of humor seems to discourage a reading that is excessively serious and condemnatory of immorality, suggesting the possibility of an interpretative model of invective based on a less rigid expression of an abstract “art of blaming.” Alastair Minnis, in reviewing Allen’s *Ethical Poetic*, warns readers against a kind of “interpretative determinism”(365) that overrates the presence of ethics in medieval poetry and broadly assesses it “as the only secure and valid method of reading” (364). The array of blame and humor present in comic medieval poetry, through references to ethics, provokes in the audience a call toward the “good men” who “take the morality if they want to. But only if they want to” (365). To reach the most comprehensive and historically accurate interpretation possible, I shall pursue an assessment that would carefully balance the ethical weight of blame and humor in

invectives. It is for this reason that, along with the ideological framework provided by these written documents, I must also seek a complementary comprehensive historical perspective.

This perspective emerges from a socio-historical study that analyzes the economic, political, and cultural systems of medieval Italy through documents that approach invectives on a legal, political, and religious level. To complement the glosses and rhetorical manuals, I will explore the connection between interpersonal relations and the practice of blaming. I shall examine laws, legal documents, economic and political agreements in secular and religious settings. I shall consider the legal implication of public slanders, disputes, the politics of talk and reputation, the policies and penalties for adultery, rape, disloyalty, and cowardice, in reference to the municipal *comuni* of Florence, Siena, and more generally *comuni* in northern Italy.

This dissertation consists of five chapters and an epilogue. Chapters III, IV, and V focus on specific primary texts that center on invective in their own historical and geopolitical setting. Each chapter will present a condensed historical background for the primary texts and a metacritical survey of their treatment by modern critics as marginal works and “light.” I will discuss the terminology used to classify these works, taking into consideration their authors and original audiences in their historical, political, and cultural environment. I will then provide a close reading of the comic corpora informed by the historical and literary documents previously outlined. Although each chapter constitutes a semi-autonomous study within its own time and background, it will connect to the others through the main theme of the study, the tension between the comic and the

ethical. Chapter II discusses invectives set in Tuscany, and provides an overview of the cultural practice of invective writing in different environments and media of expression (oral or written) during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Chapter III approaches selected invectives written by Rustico Filippi, focusing on the Guelph and Ghibelline wars of late thirteenth-century Tuscany.⁸² Chapter IV explores selected invectives by Cecco Angiolieri set in late thirteenth-century Siena, in which the author invokes his exile and expresses a polemical attitude toward his own government and fellow citizens. Chapter V examines prominent invectives in Dante's *Commedia* (*Inf.* 19, *Purg.* 6, and *Par.* 27), focusing on his unexpected humor and his polemical attitude against wrongdoings of specific popes and emperors and conflicts among citizens in northern and central Italian cities. The Epilogue will pan back and synthesize my analysis that spans from the thirteenth to the fourteenth centuries. My findings might illuminate other contemporary medieval texts, in their measured negotiation between the objective value in its ethical and comic freight, and the subjective perspective that leans toward the biographical and historical reality of existing interpersonal relations.

The invectives treated in this study balance their verbal aggression with humor, claiming a role for laughter in creating dialogue within conflict. Far from a stylistic exercise or playful pirouette, each invective shows the medieval poet's activism and ethical responsibility in wartime. The scenario of wartime and the practice of blame and laughter situate invective poetry within a complex frame made up of the historical, social,

⁸² Part of this chapter has been published in the volume *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times : Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, its Meaning, and Consequences*, edited by Albrecht Classen.

political, and cultural background of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. My research, which takes all these elements into consideration, contributes to a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions of invectives as expressed by their authors and received by their original audiences. This interrelation between authors and readers could be defined as an act of exchange and a dynamic expression of an “encounter with the other,” as posited in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas. Each invective poem strongly suggests an opening toward the other, who is called to be responsible and take charge for a specific wrongdoing, becoming engaged in a “face to face encounter” with the author.

CHAPTER II

THE ROLE OF INVECTIVE IN MEDIEVAL TUSCANY

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I defined and outlined medieval invective in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy, and juxtaposed it with examples of modern invectives grounded in contemporary wars. The parallel I drew between medieval and modern invective poetry suggests that a continuity exists between the two corpora, because the practice of verbal attack, when expressed in poetry, possesses a dialogic and ethical value that addresses all readers. The ethical weight of invective can best be understood if we foreground the political and historical background within which each diatribe originated, as well as the specific community that shaped its values and ideology. Within this general overview, I also discussed the poetic exchange that occurs between poets and readers in the presence of common ethical beliefs which, in selected invectives, are mutually shared, performed, and recognized. Overall, the first chapter highlights a productive connection between the two elements of blame and humor, on the face of its discordant elements, in invective poetry, and confirms the vibrant exchange that existed between poets and readers in medieval Italy.

In this chapter, I introduce the form and practice of invective in its original geopolitical, cultural, and historical context in medieval Tuscany. I intend to delineate this practice by focusing on its applications and functions in specific Tuscan

communities. Throughout this overview, I explore relevant background material that will enable me to highlight the ethical weight of Tuscan invective poetry in relation to the tension it sets up between blame—which is launched against individuals, groups, or institutions—and humor—which is expressed by ridiculing and exaggerating specific wrongdoings of an opponent.

I consider both the theory and practice of medieval invective, examining first its rhetorical foundation in continuity with classical antiquity, and then its various applications in settings both formal (such as academic, ecclesiastical, diplomatic, and official surroundings) and informal (such as urban squares and streets). In addition, I seek to explore different means of invective expression in its written form (via archives containing chronicles and diplomatic and legal texts) and oral transmission (preserved in forensic, political, and religious speeches as well as everyday exchanges). I then explore the teaching and practice of invective as it relates to humor in high medieval Tuscany, employing a few examples of invectives set in wartime. My principal aim is to frame the practice of Tuscan thirteenth- and fourteenth-century invective poetry, whose selected authors and texts will be studied more closely in chapters III and IV, within a well-defined political and historical context. The examples in this chapter also foreground the dynamic interaction between theory and practice, suggesting various interpretative approaches to the tension of condemnation and amusement that emerges in medieval vituperative attacks. I conclude by showing how my findings delineate possible ways to approach the ethics of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century political invective in Tuscan comic poetry during wartime.

A Historical and Cultural Overview of Invective in Theory and Practice

Invective is well documented in Tuscany throughout the tumultuous thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The frequent eruption of armed conflict gave rise to many lively verbal debates, originating from various sources and directed against various targets. Numerous manuscripts record evidence of a dynamic exchange of insults and verbal attacks in both written and oral forms within the geographical boundaries of what today we call Tuscany.¹ Authors such as Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, Folgore da San Gimignano, and Pietro dei Fattinelli are credited with producing several models of verse invective, rooted in political intrigues and in battles such as Montaperti (1260), Benevento (1266), Tagliacozzo (1268), Colle (1269), Meloria (1284), Campaldino (1289), and Montecatini (1315). To understand the complexity of the phenomenon of invective, modern readers must take into account its cultural and historical valence and thus examine where each invective originated, how it was delivered, and against whom and what it was directed.

In thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscany, verbal attacks often emerge as a rhetorical device employed within a defined structure to prompt a specific effect. According to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century rhetoricians such as Boncompagno da Signa, invective was methodically taught at the University of Bologna under the *genus demonstrativum*, which was applied to the concepts of praise and blame (Ricci 405).

¹ I use the terms “Tuscany” and “Tuscan” as they were used in the Middle Ages. The medieval vernacular term “Toscana,” though linguistically similar to modern English and Italian, differs in many ways from our modern perception. Although Tuscany had a recognizable cultural and geographical identity, it was not an autonomous and united political entity. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the term included the modern region of Tuscany and part of northern Umbria and Lazio (Zorzi 100-102; Villani I.5).

Many medieval rhetorical manuals paraphrased the following passage on criticism and blame from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, commonly attributed to Cicero²:

Exponemus quas res laudaturi sumus aut vituperaturi; deinde ut quaeque quove tempore res erit gesta ordine dicemus, ut quid quamque tute cauteque egerit intellegatur. Sed exponere oportebit animi virtutes aut vitia; deinde commoda aut incommoda corporis aut rerum externarum quomodo ab animo tractata sint demonstrare. Ordinem hunc adhibere in demonstranda vita debemus: Ab externis rebus: genus...In vituperatione: si bono genere, dedecori maioribus fuisse; si malo, tamen his ipsis detrimento fuisse . . . Deinde transire oportet ad corporis commoda...In vituperatione, si erunt haec corporis commoda, male his usum dicemus quae casu et natura tamquam quilibet gladiator habuerit; si non erunt, praeter formam omnia ipsius culpa et intemperantia afuisse dicemus. Deinde revertemur ab extraneas res, et in his animi virtutes aut vitia. (III. 7, 13-14)

[We shall set forth the things we intend to praise or censure; then recount the events, observing their precise sequence and chronology, so that one may understand what the person under discussion did and with what prudence and caution. But it will first be necessary to set forth his virtues or faults of character, and then to explain how, such being his character, he has used the advantages or disadvantages, physical or of external circumstances. The following is the order we must keep when portraying a life: External Circumstances: Descent . . . In censure: if he is of illustrious descent, he has been a disgrace to his forebears; if of low descent, he is none the less a dishonour even to these . . . Next we must pass to the Physical Advantages . . . In censure, if the subject has these physical advantages, we shall declare he has abused what, like the meanest gladiator, he has had by chance and nature. If he lacks them, we shall say that to his own fault and want of self-control is his lack of every physical advantage, beauty apart, attributable. Then we shall return to External Circumstances and consider his virtues and defects of Character.] (Trans. Caplan 179-81)

² One of the earliest and most influential medieval manuals of *ars poetica* is that of Matthew of Vendôme, c.1175 (3-4). His *Ars versificatoria* often refers to invective and echoes the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (I. 41-48, 59). The connection between Cicero's writing and medieval rhetorical manuals that circulated in Tuscany is evident in Latini's "La rettorica" and Fra Guidotto da Bologna's "Fiore di rettorica," vernacular adaptations of Cicero's *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, respectively. As Marti notes, "la *Rhetorica ad Herennium* che egli volgarizza, costituisce una delle fonti più utilizzate nelle Artes dictandi" ("La prosa," 629). In Italy beginning in the late thirteenth century, "we have also documentary evidence that courses on these texts were given at Bologna. Giovanni di Bonandrea seems to have lectured on the *Ad Herennium*, and we know for sure that his successor Bertolinus de Canulis did" (Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought* 239).

Here Cicero illustrates that an author of invectives should attack his target through a threefold distinction. He thus instructs apprentices of invectives to follow a specific order in which the condemnation of external circumstances (*res externa*) precedes the criticism of the defects of the body (*corpus*) and character of the individual attacked (*animus*) (Rutherford 5). The existence of an established rhetorical model suggests that the practice of verbal insult was part of the teaching and learning of the *Trivium*, i.e., the disciplines of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic (Curtius 37). Apprentices of invective were expected to apply these rules in a variety of situations within both secular and religious settings.

As James Murphy emphasizes, students of all disciplines were expected to recognize and analyze standard forms and genres of dispute from given models both in prose and verse (for example, letters, sermons, and poetry) so that they could elaborate and reconstruct their own original creations:

European youths learned the rudiments of language through a coordinated process of reading, derivation, recitation, imitation, and memorization . . . there are verse models being analyzed, and the students are asked to present compositions based on the models. (VII, 169; 171)

Such practice is documented from the early years of schooling to the later years in institutions of higher education. According to the testimony of the late eleventh-century biographer William Fitzstephen, twelve- or fourteen-year-old boys from different schools practiced the *genus demonstrativum* in the schoolyard through exchanges of insults in verse (Murphy 169). Likewise, at the university level, Florentine *dictatores* (masters of rhetoric and dialectic) Boncompagno da Signa and Brunetto Latini created collections of sample letters (called *Epistolaria*) that contained invectives. Such practice, as Kristeller notes, flourished in the late Middle Ages when there existed “an increasing tendency to

define and distinguish special categories of letters that were of special interest, such as letters of recommendation or consolation, letters of praise and letters of blame (*invectivae*)” (*Renaissance Thought* 236).³ Such a tendency to scientifically organize and categorize the composition of letters suggests that invective had its own prominent place amongst other forms of letters.

In Tuscany, these epistolary collections display a wide range of letters written by both established authors (such as Cicero, Cassiodorus, Guittone d’Arezzo, and Pier della Vigna) and appointed teachers (Segre, “Le forme” 96-98).⁴ Though predominantly written in Latin, starting from the thirteenth century these examples were also in the vernacular (Gaudenzi 142). Holloway notes that Latini’s *Epistolarium* includes letters written both in Latin and in Tuscan vernacular “to be copied out in turn by chancery students” (*Twice-Told* 3). This type of collection was shared with students who could copy the letters (through the *pecia* system) and use them as examples for the creation of original compositions.⁵

³ See Gaudenzi 85-174 and Holloway *Twice-Told* 3.

⁴ Gaudenzi notes that an *Epistolarium* contained letters never sent because they constituted mere stylistic examples and could not be considered as historical documents (88-89). He supposes that the master rhetoricians most likely exposed the apprentices to “non ciò che era stato veramente scritto, ma ciò che essi avrebbero scritto in un dato caso” (88). However, Gaudenzi’s speculation should not be applied wholesale to all of the letters contained in the *Epistolaria*. Although some letters were fictitious, others were copies of letters truly sent, as the letters by Cassiodorus and Brunetto Latini show. It is almost certain that their letters, which were contained in various Tuscan *Epistolaria*, were sent to real addressees and, thus, could be considered historical as well as teaching documents. For more information on Latini, see Holloway, *Twice-Told* 35-36. For Cassiodorus, see *Variae* xxx-xxxiii, 3. As Vittorio Franchini notes, Giovanni da Viterbo’s *Liber di regimine civitatum* (c.1264-65) mentions “il costume fiorentino di ritener copia delle lettere inviate” (252). Kristeller provides a more accurate illustration of the practice of the *Epistolarium* than Gaudenzi when he writes that it comprised “model letters partly historical and partly fictitious” (*Renaissance Thought* 234).

⁵ The word “*pecia*” means “part” or “piece.” The *pecia* system originated at the University of Bologna during the 1200s. “Under this system the university’s authoritative copies of textbooks consisting of

This pedagogical practice not only established specific rhetorical models of vituperation, but also encouraged their application and integration within the academic environment to prepare students for real-life situations. For this reason, master rhetoricians Guido Faba (c. 1190-1243) and his pupil Matteo dei Libri (c. 1232-1276) of Bologna wrote various collections of letters and harangues in vernacular Italian.⁶ These compilations support the hypothesis that their authors intended to apply them in civic settings. The harangues were written specifically to train students to become ambassadors, city councilmen, chief magistrates, or governors: “Gli oratori sono in prevalenza ambasciatori, poi ‘consiglieri comunali’, podestà e capitani, e infine. . . privati” (Vincenti ix-x). Numerous harangues contained invectives as a means to reinforce the condemnation of evil deeds. Matteo dei Libri’s XI *Arringa*, for example, shows how *consiglieri comunali* [city councilmen] should address the *podestà* [chief magistrate] to denounce an evil deed, such as murder, perpetrated by a prominent member of a community (38). The charge against the offender is expressed in this harangue by using a series of invectives taken from the Bible (Num. 25.4). One of these tirades is particularly eloquent because it is used to justify an opposition against an abuse of power; its use within the harangue is also legitimized by the fact that God Himself is the author of the verbal attack:

unbound quires or *peciae* could be hired out for the purpose of making copies for students . . . They could either make copies themselves or pay a professional scribe to copy for them before returning the *peciae* to the stationer” (Clemence and Graham 23). From Italy, the system reached France, Spain, and England. For additional information see Raymond Clemence and Timothy 22-25; and Louis Bataillon, et al. *La production du livre universitaire au Moyen Age: Exemplar et Pecia* (1988).

⁶ The dates provided refer to d’Agostino 131-132. See also Quaglio, “Retorica” 96-99; Ward 191; Kristeller “Matteo” 285 n 10; and Skinner 124.

E trovase ke'l nostro segnor Deo, quando lo populo d'Israel avesse peccato, del populo taque e contra li principi del populo accessu de gran furore dise a Moysè: "Tolli tuti li principi del populo, et apiccali contra'l sole in tormenti, açò ke'l furor meo se parta da Israel". E questo dixè e fece fare per dare a nui exemplo de punir plui vaço li grandi ka li minori; e ki cotal vindete prende, gracia e gloria aquista da Deo. (40)

[And we find written that our Lord God, when the people of Israel sinned, spoke not of the people but rather, inflamed by great anger against the leaders of the people, He said to Moses: "Seize all the leaders of the people and burn them alive in torment under the sun, so that my fury may turn away from Israel." And He said this and had it done in order to give us the example of how it is more productive to punish important, rather than common, people; and whoever executes these vengeance will gain from God grace and glory] (translation mine).

Invective functions within a specific political frame to solve practical problems; by using invective, offended members of a specific community seek to stir a reaction from the chief magistrate to redress specific offenses, which in this case involve violence and murder perpetrated by influential citizens of the *comune*. Invective emerged in a wide range of contexts against different targets. Medieval documents from Tuscan archives, such as the *Archivio di stato di Firenze*, suggest that invective was not confined to a theoretical exercise, but rather served a specific practical function that students would apply later in their lives to the advantage of a whole community.⁷ I would argue that each condemnation in verse of a notary, ambassador, preacher, teacher, commentator, or poet could be traced to a controversial historical event that motivated the author to initiate his or her verbal attack in order to achieve a particular goal.

From the thirteenth century on, several chronicles written in the vernacular could be found alongside records written in Latin (Quaglio, "Retorica" 164). This phenomenon

⁷ See Papaleoni 149-150; and Davis 416.

is evident above all in Tuscany, where almost every major *comune* had its own commentators and chroniclers: “la produzione storiografica che ci è giunta in lingua volgare è quasi esclusivamente Toscana” (Marti, *La prosa* 620). In each *comune*, various commentators crafted vituperative attacks against other hostile *comuni*. Some examples, as Andrea Zorzi has recently noted, are both in Latin (e.g., “contra perfidos Lucanos et Guelfos,” in the *Chronicon aliud breve pisanum*) and in vernacular (e.g., “Pisa sempre è stata camera d’Imperio,” from *Storie pistoresi*) (114).

Diatribes like these appear in chronicles composed in various Tuscan cities, such as Lucca, Pisa, and Florence. This localized phenomenon suggests that chroniclers employed invective in order to announce to their community—and possibly to other communities—the flaws of specific individuals as well as the chronicler’s personal position on important political events. Chroniclers acted as narrators of history and as moral denouncers of offenses; they also played the role of judge, directing blame to the accused. Through this documentation, they recorded their perspective and historical analysis to promote a present political goal. This blend of narration and reprehension in medieval chronicles shows an approach to history that differs dramatically from the attempt at a neutral predisposition adopted by modern historians.⁸

⁸ Chronicles written during the Middle Ages have generally been approached negatively, if not with contempt (Kezierski 99). Wojtek Kezierski notes that modern historiographers, such as Gabrielle M. Spiegel, have a tendency to approach scornfully the partisanship of historians who wrote during the Middle Ages (99). Spiegel describes medieval historiography as “inauthentic, unscientific, unreliable, ahistorical, irrational, and worse yet, unprofessional” (quoted in Kezierski 100). The objectivity of historians who wrote chronicles during the Middle Ages has recently been evaluated by Dean Trevor (2007) and Wojtek Kezierski (2008). Trevor underlines the reliability of these chronicles, intended as historical documents, for reconstructing the history of law in the Middle Ages: “Italian urban chronicles are rich sources for social history, because of the great miscellany of the information they contain” (*Crime* 52). Kezierski approaches medieval chronicle “in a more theoretical frame concerning identity formation and creation of historical tradition” (99). He notes that the partisanship of medieval historiographers had a significant political aim

An anonymous medieval commentator depicts a striking scenario during the 1378 Revolt of the *Ciompi* (wool carders). While describing the uproar, the commentator attacks noble Florentine Guelph judges (sardonically defined as “grandi”) and condemns them as fraudulent (Gherardi, “Dei tumulti” 377-78). He then associates them with negative symbols of immorality and treachery: “grandi, falsi giudici, mignatte e botte e scarpioni e tarantole e bisce velenose d’ogni ragione” (Gherardi, “Dei tumulti” 380) [Eminent, bogus judges, bitches and whores and scorpions and tarantulas and poisonous snakes of every kind] (translation mine). In this passionate verbal attack, the commentator feels compelled to enlighten readers about the corruption of Florentine judges. He then adds a note to honor the integrity of his local diplomats, expressing gratitude for their prompt emergency service on behalf of all the Florentine families (Gherardi, “Dei tumulti” 380). The note of appreciation explicitly mentions the Gonfaloniere of Justice Salvestro di messer Alemanno de’ Medici and his followers, who include citizens from the lower class “anno discelti i lupi dale pecore . . . ch’anno diliberata Firenze da lupi” (Gherardi, “Dei tumulti” 380) [who have distinguished the wolves from the sheep . . . who have freed Florence from the wolves] (translation mine). This direct verbal assault, constructed upon a standard rhetorical template, might have aroused both aggression and awareness in medieval readers, since it recalls a controversial uprising. Furthermore, it shows the political standpoint of the commentator, who denounces the revolt by casting blame on prominent members of the community believed to be responsible for the discords of fourteenth-century Florence.

that must be considered and studied by modern historians interested in having a comprehensive overview of medieval history (108-09).

During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, notaries from various Tuscan *comuni* recorded many insults and verbal threats made during trials. These insults pertain to private disputes between individuals in specific communities. As Franco Suitner notes, trial records from Lucchese archives display a rich list of verbal offenses from street fights (163).⁹ Similar records are available in numerous other city archives in Tuscany, including those of Arezzo, Todi and Chiusi, as well as in other cities throughout Italy such as Bologna, Savona, and Palermo (Trevor, *Crime* 114-121). Judges prosecuted the authors of the insults, and their invectives were announced in court during hearings (Marcheschi 8). According to local statutes, the authors of these invectives had to pay a fee to the *comune*: “The local statutes prescribed a certain penalty for every insulting word” (Trevor, *Crime* 116). Often jurists were “asked for guidance on how to define and count insulting words: when several words with the same meaning were uttered, did this count as one words or many words?” (Trevor, *Crime* 116). As Trevor notes, though each *comune* had its own definition of insults and various penalties, offensive utterances shared common “archetypes—sex, defecation and rottenness” (*Crime* 114). One example from Chiusi, near Siena, shows how oral invectives uttered by a man named Niccolò against a married woman follow a sequence of categories that could be traced back to the *genus demonstrativum* taught in schools and practiced in real life settings:

Soza ydola malfata incendiosa putana cheio theo tratte tre herede del corpo sozo amalato mendico che tua madre se cercava e faceva figlioli per le stalle . . . Tua sorella e pur puttana e la figliola. Va che maledecta sia l’anima tua e del tuo padre e tanti diavoli habiano l’anima sua quanti furono li cani che se meno dereto. (Trevor, *Crime* 116-117)

⁹ Suitner mentions the study of Salvatore Bongi first published in 1890; Daniela Marcheschi recently published a revised edition of Bongi’s study (1983).

Dirty, deformed woman, provocative whore, I've had three children by you, you dirty sick beggar. Your mother walked the streets and gave birth to children in the stables . . . Your sister is a whore, and her daughter too. May your soul be accursed, and your father's, may as many devils have his soul as he had dogs following him.] (Trevor, *Crime* 116)¹⁰

This insult follows the three categories of the *genus demonstrativum*, attacking first the victim's physical appearance (*corpus*), then her upbringing (*res externa*), and finally her character (*animus*). As Trevor explains, "the insult aimed first to lower the victim to the level of something dirty, and then to expel the victim from the community" (*Crime* 117). The offender followed a specific pattern to verbally attack the victim in front of the community in order to cast her out for her alleged immoral behavior. The result of the trial shows that he was prosecuted instead. His invective was recorded during the trial, and the judge sentenced him to a fine of "8 *lire*, evidently 1 *lira* for each insult" (Trevor, *Crime* 117). In this case, the composer of the oral invective was considered a threat to the community and was obliged to pay a fine.

Besides recording oral insults at trials, notaries were also responsible for filing official documents which listed various wrongdoings perpetrated by rival cities, individuals, or political groups to advance the interests of their own *comune*. One of these documents is the *Memorialis offensarum* contained in the *Liber census ad reddituum*

¹⁰ I retouched Trevor's translation in several places. First, he does not render the sexual allusion of the expression "se cercava" which he simply translates as "went begging" (116). For the sexual allusion of "cercare," intended as the act of requesting sexual favors, see the *Tesoro della Lingua Italiana delle Origini* "Richiedere sessualmente. . .Boccaccio, *Ameto*, 1341-42, cap. 18, par. 23, pag. 727.37: Io, sì come la più bella di monte Parnaso, sono più volte da molti dei stata *cercata* (Istituto del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche). The verb used is reflexive, thus the charge implies the act of prostituting oneself or walking the street. I also added "too" translating the adverb "pur" that Trevor does not translate. I also translated the insult launched against the woman's father using the verb to have [habiano] present in the original text. The term "cani" [dogs] metaphorically implies men or animals who are parasites: "predatore e spazzino affamato" (Istituto del Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche).

[Book of Tributers, c.1223] in which Sieneese notaries recorded major offenses that other *comuni* committed against Siena.¹¹ The *Memorialis offensarum* also reported specific contentions between Siena and the neighboring *comuni* of Poggibonsi, Colle, Montalcino, and Montepulciano (Gardner 7). The offenses recorded pertained mainly to the seizure of castles, to border disputes between Siena and neighboring *comuni*, and to various economic limitations imposed upon Siena by other *comuni* (Banchi 199-201). The sheer number of misdemeanors listed, though they were not recorded in the customary form of invective, shows how the Sieneese valued the documentation of offenses and abuses. The standard form of such documentation was through a notary, which helped to guarantee compensation for damages.

The opening of the *Memorialis offensarum* sets a severe tone which sheds light on why the *comune* of Siena considered it important to record and condemn specific wrongdoings:

Memor esto tamen semper eorum qui tibi deserviunt, te sequuntur, tuis mandatis obtemperant, et pro te facultates et vitam exponere non evitant. Item, ex adverso, eorum qui te abnegant et obsequia debita subtrahunt et tibi resistant pro viribus; qui cives et obnoxios tuos cotidie opprimere non formidant; qui dispartitis linguis tendunt insidias, spoliis tuorum et multiplicibus vexationibus et obbrobriis inhiantes, non obliviscaris in eternum, sed redde retributionem superbis. (Banchi 203)¹²

[But ultimately always remember those who serve you, follow you, submit to your commands, and do not shy away from offering you their resources

¹¹ See Banchi 199-201; Heywood and Olcott 29.

¹² See also Gardner, who translates a portion of this passage: “Do not forget through eternity those that deny thee, that withdraw themselves from the homage they owe thee, that plot against thee and bring shame against thee” (7). The passage cited refers to Isaiah 54:4: “noli timere quia non confunderis neque erubescas non enim te pudebit quia confusionis adulescentiae tua oblivisceris” [Fear not, you will not be put to shame; do not be downcast, you will not suffer disgrace. It is time to forget the shame of your younger days]. See also Psalms 93:2: “exaltare qui iudicas terram *redde retributionem superbis*.”

and their lives. Likewise, contrariwise, (always remember) those who deny you and withdraw the obedience they owe you, and resist you by force; who do not fear to oppress your citizens and subordinates daily; who plot a trap by divisive speeches, yearning for the plunders and the multiple persecutions and disgraces against yours, do not forget through eternity, but repay the proud with vengeance.] (Translation mine)

In this example, the practice of recording offenses had political and economic implications. Luciano Banchi, the first to publish the *Memorialis*, believes that such a practice was not limited to Siena, but extended throughout other various Tuscan *comuni* (199). Thus far, to my knowledge, no such records have been found in other Tuscan communities.

Comparable to the *Memorialis* is the *Libro del Chiodo*, a chancery document preserved in the *Archivio di Stato di Firenze* that was filed by Florentine notaries who recorded all the individuals who were politically opposed to the Guelph government of Florence and their resulting banishment, from 1268 to 1379: “La raccolta cancelleresca canonizzata delle proscrizioni dei ghibellini e guelfi ‘bianchi’ nella Firenze degli anni di Dante” (Fubini ix). As Ricciardelli has noted, the document features an iron nail placed on its cover and was called “Libro del Chiodo” [Book of the Nail] because it symbolically—and, for the exiled, sarcastically—alluded to the practice of recording the enemies and rebels of the Guelph government who were so “nailed” or emblematically exposed before the community: “‘inchiodati’ alle loro colpe politiche e in conseguenza di ciò indimenticabili nemici per il comune guelfo” (xi).¹³ The opening of the document restates the official sentences against the banished and shows how notaries played an

¹³ As Fubini recently noted, the *Libro del Chiodo* is notorious for having recorded Dante’s two convictions of bribery and graft: “Come ben si sa, esso ci preserva il testo della condanna di Dante nel 1302, ed ha avuto per questo un posto di onore nelle varie celebrazioni dantesche, a partire dal centenario del 1865” (ix).

active role in voicing the contrast between the Guelph government—introduced as protector of the *comune*'s interest—and the exiled or insurgents—described as promoters of discord—thus employing their personal verbal aggression within their chancery records:

Cum iniqua pastoris rapacitas circa gregem disperdendum convertitet, non est ibi lupina maior offensio nullaue pestis efficacior ad nocendum sic evenit. (Ricciardelli 3)

[Turn away from scattering the flock with the rapacity of the evil shepherd; there occurs no greater wolfish attack and there is no more effective harmful scourge than this]. (Translation mine)

Il Libro del Chiodo shows that invective was well placed within a political frame. By using language that echoes the Bible, such as Matthew 15:1-19, notaries employed invective to create a contrast between the government, presented as the good shepherd of the Florentine citizens, and the rebels, presented as the wolf in shepherd's clothing. The Guelph party meticulously preserved the record of Florentine exiles in order to serve the practical function of "*damnatio*" or condemning their enemies (Ricciardelli xvi). As Isidoro Del Lungo has noted, other similar documents have survived from Florentine archives and like the *Libro del chiodo* have colorful appellations, such as *Libro della Luna*, *Libro della coppa*, and *Libro delle Quattro Stelle* (Del Lungo "Il libro" 204).

As these examples show, invectives were not perceived as mere figures of speech; on the contrary, invective was a vital method of communication practiced in various communities within Tuscany. The standard rhetorical templates of invective constituted the pattern or model to apply to important conflicts. In general, notaries regularly recorded offenses of any kind in order to impose sanctions upon the offenders, regardless

of whether the wrongdoing was committed orally or in writing, or whether it involved a single individual or a feud between individuals, groups, or even neighboring cities. Invective served the function of defending oneself or attacking others during private or public disputes. In cases of public dispute, invectives were used in harangues during council meetings or in chronicles. The insults that emerged from private disputes instead were scrutinized and punishable by law if they were judged to be threats to the *comune*. Councilmen also employed invective to stir a general response from chief magistrates or members of an offended community. In other cases, invectives served the purpose of persuading civic authorities to respond to offenses through legal or military means. If we attend to such historical particularity and place each vituperative attack within its own cultural and historical context, we can better understand not only its specificity but also its continuity with a theory and practice of invective throughout thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscany.

Facets of Invective: Oral and Written Verbal Assaults

Because of the volatility and mutability of relations among different *comuni* in Tuscany, invective was practiced in a variety of settings, from public squares to secular and religious centers of learning, and performed in a variety of ways: orally through speeches and in written form in both prose and verse. Invective was also expressed through the visual arts, in mural paintings, epigraphy, and inscriptions on tombstones. I will not address these iconographic expressions specifically because they have been

examined thoroughly in recent studies.¹⁴ I will instead offer examples of invective both oral and written, to illustrate the fortune and resourcefulness of this form of expression in high and late medieval Tuscany.

The *Archivio di stato di Firenze* preserves official documents that contained vituperative attacks from different *comuni*. These legal documents, usually written by professional notaries, illustrate the practical function of attacking and denouncing an abuse through a specific rhetorical structure. Stipulations of pacts among political leagues involving a group of *comuni*, and declarations of war by one *comune* against another, are among the most prominent sources of invective. The same notaries who recorded the verbal offenses previously mentioned were also responsible for producing these legal documents. One such document is the Guelph League Treaty, *Instrumentum pactorum inter Comune Florentie Ianue et Luce, de sotietate*, composed by Brunetto Latini on October 13, 1284.¹⁵ During this time, the Tuscan Guelph League, which included Florence, Genoa, and Lucca, was established to confront the belligerence of the city of Pisa. Brunetto, who wrote and signed the document when war with Pisa was imminent, follows the standard rhetorical structure, attacking first the external circumstances and then the moral traits of Pisa and its citizens. The opening words of the pact violently reprehend Pisa and its neighboring cities. Pisa is reprimanded as “zizania de terra

¹⁴ See Ortalli's *La pittura infamante nei secoli XIII-XVI*; Franco Suitner's *La poesia satirica e giocosa nell'età dei comuni* 179-212; and Trevor Dean's *The Towns of Italy in the Later Middle Ages* (45-46). For a more comprehensive comparative study, see Samuel Y. Edgerton's *Pictures and Punishment: Art and Criminal Prosecution during the Florentine Renaissance*; and Mathias Lentz's "Defamatory Pictures and Letters in Late Medieval Germany: The Visualization of Disorder and Infamy."

¹⁵ The document survives in the Florentine and Genovese archives. It was published in Isidoro Del Lungo's "Appendice prima" to Thor Sundby's *Della vita e delle opere di Brunetto Latini* (206-211), and Julia Holloway has republished it in *Twice-Told Tales* (385-95).

radicitus extirpanda” (Del Lungo, “Appendice” 207) [the evil weed that must be uprooted from the earth] (translation mine). The image of Pisa as an evil weed continues with the attack against the Pisanese: “dudum sua contagione corrumpere incohavit, et ipsorum perfidia refrenanda” (Del Lungo, “Appendice” 207) [just now its contamination has started to damage us; the wickedness of these men must be stopped] (translation mine).

Invective survives also in letters and declarations of war written in response to intimidation and to rebuke the citizens of hostile *comuni*. This type of invective is found in a letter written in 1258 by the citizens of Pavia against the Florentines, following the public decapitation of the Abbot Tesauro of Vallombrosa.¹⁶ Brunetto Latini, on behalf of Florence, responded to the harsh insults from Pavia with a text full of biting wit and humorous puns:

Magne prudentie viris, Potestati, Consilio, et Communi Papie; Potestas Capitaneus, Anciani et Comuni Florentie, quam non misere, Salutem. Si transmissa nobis Epistola, forsitan iracundie semine gravidata, concepit dolorem et peperit iniquitatem, prout illius series continebat, non ideo nostram responsionem a furore vel fletibus exordiri nec vobis consimili vicissitudine respondere, set mente pacatissima et quieta . . . Ecce Thesaurum vestrum, qui sibi non thesaurificabat in celis, Valumbrose congregationis abbatem, de honestate, religione ac sanctitate maxima commendastis: ad quod potest verius respondere quod erat impudicus, nequam pessimus, nephandus, et omni crimine infamatus. (Holloway, *Twice-Told* 36)

[To the great and prudent men, the Podestà, the Council and the Comune of Pavia. The Podestà, the Captain, the Anziani, and the Comune of Florence, which is not to be pitied, salute you. If the letter sent to us contained what is perhaps pregnant with the seeds of anger, conceived in grief and weighted in injustice, according to what had been sown, it should not therefore be fitting that our response should be out of anger or spoken swiftly nor that you similarly respond in turn, but from a most tranquil and

¹⁶ As Holloway notes, the abbot “was beheaded in the square of Florence, amidst the shouts of approval by the Florentine crowd” (*Twice-Told* 203).

calm mind . . . Here is your Treasure—which is not treasured up in heaven—the Abbot of the Monastery of Vallombrosa, whom you remember as being of the greatest honor, religion, and sanctity; to which it could more truly be replied that he was shameless, even worse, unspeakable and infamous in all criminality.] (Holloway, *Twice-Told* 37)

Holloway comments shrewdly on the letter (preserved in both Latin and vernacular versions), noting that

Brunetto's epideictic, blaming-though-praising, letter written in the style of Pier delle Vigne, the Ghibelline chancellor of Frederick II, told the Pavians they should not be concerned about laying up their treasure on earth, but should, rather, lay up treasure in heaven. (*Twice-Told* 203)

Besides the overt biblical reference to Matthew 19.16-24, Brunetto's invective "sarcastically [puns] upon Tesauro's name, which means Treasure" (Holloway, *Twice-Told* 203) and very subtly implies that the Abbot needs his compatriots' assistance with prayers, since he is now in hell.¹⁷ Through a very sophisticated rhetorical structure, which as Holloway suggests evokes Pier delle Vigne's style, Latini violently attacks the murdered Abbot, following the standard targets of external circumstances (*res externa*) and mental traits (*animus*).¹⁸ In the expanded Tuscan vernacular version, he describes Tesauro as "luxurioso, malvasio et infammato da ongne peccato" (Holloway *Twice-Told* 204) [lustful, evil and inflamed by every sins; translation mine] and concludes that he had been justly condemned for plotting against Florence because Florentine clerics and women witnessed his lust and thus resented him:

¹⁷ Indeed Dante seems to share Brunetto's contempt when decades later he mentions Tesauro in *Inf.* XXXII.

¹⁸ Holloway also notes that Brunetto Latini evokes Pier delle Vigne's chancery style—and particularly his "blasphemous biblical punning"—to mock "the Ghibellines by mirroring back to them the imperial Ghibelline style" (*Twice-Told* 35). During these years, the city of Pavia was indeed a Ghibelline stronghold.

lo chiericato di firenze grida contra lui e'l'uomini la dici cridando quel medesimo ancora le femine anco se ne poson riposare . . . non dovete per che defendere quell malvasio il quale se mille volte fosse resusitato mille volte conviena essere uciso. (*Twice-Told* 204)¹⁹

[The clerics of Florence cry out against him as do the men, and the women too have no peace . . . you must not therefore defend that wicked man who, even if he were to be resurrected a thousand times, would still have to be killed a thousand times.] (Translation mine)

This bitter invective confirms the hostility of Florence toward the abbot and clarifies the motives for his execution. By directly accusing the abbot on a personal level, Brunetto cleverly and tactfully avoids attacking directly the city of Pavia and the Papacy, which were Tesauro's civic and religious sponsors respectively. Brunetto's letter originated as a reply to—and justification against—Pavia's initial attack and achieved its purpose of diplomatically forestalling any further aggressive acts from Pavia, since no other invective letters, to my knowledge, were ever sent from Tesauro's native city against Florence. However, Brunetto's letter prompted Pope Alexander IV to respond with another invective that resolved the standoff in Pavia's favor since it included an official indictment and interdict against the city of Florence; these tensions against Florence eventually escalated into the battle of Montaperti (1260).²⁰

¹⁹ In the letter Brunetto supports the allegations of treachery by declaring the abbot's conspiracy with Florentine expatriates Guido Novello and Farinata Degli Uberti. See Holloway, *Twice-Told* 203-205, and Davidsohn II.1, 655.

²⁰ As Holloway argues, the interdiction fueled the credibility of the Ghibelline expatriates Guido Novello and Farinata degli Uberti, who immediately organized a revolt against Florence with the help of Siena and other *comuni*. The revolt finally favored the Ghibellines, who with the battle of Montaperti defeated the Guelph government involved in Tesauro's murder, forcing Brunetto into exile (1260): "The murder of Tesauro of Vallombrosa caused the Pope to continue the interdict against Florence and the plotting, exiled Ghibellines, now in Siena, to use this crime as their 'just war' excuse. Giovanni Villani notes that the execution was to cause the disaster of Montaperti and that for many years Florentines would experience commercial difficulties in Lombardy because of it" (*Twice-Told* 37).

Verbal offenses flourished not only in legal documents but also in the academic context through the practice of both oral and written insults. Schools in Florence and Siena had strong links with the University of Bologna, and prepared students to become judges, notaries, doctors, merchants, and bankers (Davis 416). Schools in Florence (with the spirituals Peter Olivi and Ubertino da Casale, and secular teachers like Remigio de' Girolami and Brunetto Latini) and in Siena (with Pietro Giuliani, Tebaldo, and Guidotto da Bologna) are major sites where invective was almost certainly taught at the university level.²¹ Arezzo, "the seat of the first Tuscan university," and San Gimignano also had important centers of learning, such as schools of law, medicine, and grammar (Black, *Education* 67).²² All had ties to the prominent University of Bologna through a mutual exchange of students and teachers. Several masters of law and rhetoric were active either in Bologna or in their native Tuscan cities where they encouraged the practice of *disputatio* or debate, teaching how to defend oneself and attack others with words through the disciplines of oratory and epistolography.²³ The master rhetoricians Boncompagno da Signa and Bene da Firenze are two significant examples.

²¹ See Davis 416-21; Black *Education and Society* 67-68, 182-83.

²² See also Davidsohn, VII 255. Black's *Education and Society* documents teachers and curricula as early as the thirteenth century in both Arezzo (67-79) and San Gimignano (97-103, 245-46).

²³ Some examples of masters of law native to Tuscany are Dino Rosoni and Accorso da Firenze. Some of the most prominent masters of rhetoric are *dictatores* and grammarians like Mino da Colle, Boncompagno da Signa and Bene da Firenze. On the distinction between church education and lay schools, see Black *Education and Society* 191-205. A recent source on the practice of academic *disputatio* is James J. Murphy's *Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (2005).

Boncompagno is the author of the influential *Boncompagnus* or *Candelabrum eloquentie* (which perhaps influenced Bene's homonymous work) and *Rhetorica novissima*.²⁴

Probably used as teaching manuals, both works focused considerable attention on invective, confirming it as a common and important practice for students of rhetoric. As Rao observes, medieval *dictatores* such as Boncompagno evoke the term "invectiva" to designate both "a kind of speech and . . . a particular type of letter, leaving several examples of both" (112). In Boncompagno's *Rhetorica novissima*, invective emerges at the core of his teaching of *ars arengandi*, the art of composing speeches.²⁵ In this work, Boncompagno introduces two examples of invective at the beginning of the prologue. The first, labeled "Invectiva contra Boncompagnum," features a fictional invective launched by the text against its own author (I. 2). The second invective follows immediately and constitutes the author's counterattack against the text (I.3-9). Boncompagno also includes a lengthy chapter with the heading *De invectivis* (10. 1-16, Rao 112), which provides nearly twenty examples of invective:

Invectiva contra glosatores . . . Invectiva actoris contra reum . . . Contra delinquentem in Latino . . . Invectiva contra verbosum . . . Invectiva syndici contra iudices . . . Invectiva per fabulam contra illos qui pro re modica non desinunt litigare. (10.1-14)

[Invective against glossators. . . invective of a plaintiff against a criminal . . . against a delinquent in Latin . . . Invective against a windbag . . .

²⁴ See Gaudenzi 109-112; Marti "La prosa" 560-62; and Black *Education and Society* 390n.

²⁵ *Ars arengandi* was distinguished from *ars dictaminis*, the art of composing letters. Kristeller clarifies that "*Rhetorica novissima* has nothing to do with *dictamen*, but it is a textbook, with models, for the benefit of lawyers, teaching them how to compose pleas and forensic speeches" (*Renaissance Thought* 237). Boncompagno's earlier work, *Boncompagnus*, is instead an instruction manual for *ars dictaminis*. *Boncompagnus*, like the *Rhetorica novissima*, also features various invectives incorporated into models for various kinds of letters. See Boncompagno's *Boncompagnus* "Invectiva oratorum contra scriptores" (1.1.12).

invective of a syndic against judges . . . Invective by means of a tale against those who do not refrain from litigating even about a minor matter.] (translation mine)

Apprentice lawyers were expected to apply Boncompagno's many examples of invectives to various lawsuits. The explicit use of the term "invective" suggests that it indicated a recognizable and well-established genre in academic and legal environments.

As noted earlier, Brunetto Latini was an active practitioner of polemical writing in his treatises and letters. He was also active as a teacher of rhetoric, most likely in both Florence and Bologna (Dante indeed suggested that Latini was his master). As Ennio Rao has emphasized, Brunetto Latini in his *La rettorica* (c.1262) might have been the first to consecrate the application of rhetoric to the writing of vernacular love poetry, as he clearly "insists that Cicero's teaching not be limited to forensic speeches, but also to epistolography, to diplomatic embassies, and even to *canzoni amoroze*" (113). Brunetto frames the connection between the theoretical aspect of rhetoric and the practical exchange of *canzoni d'amore* [love songs] during situations of conflict and debate (164-65). The purpose of these texts, which reflect a *controversia* and *tenzone*, was to weaken or persuade the person contested or courted. This noteworthy link also connects a well-established theoretical tradition of rhetoric dating back to ancient Greece with the newer practice of vernacular poetry, which began to emerge during the thirteenth century in Italy.

Based on Brunetto's teaching, vernacular invective poetry can be perceived as more than just a tool in a circular process of creating more rhetoric; instead, rhetoric was the tool for the practice of invective. Brunetto emphasizes this "revolution" with the

concept of poetry as the art of exchange. In *La rettorica*, he illustrates to his apprentices how to craft a letter or poem from a given model in order to successfully persuade an intended audience:

Ma chi volesse bene considerare la proprietá d'una lettera o d'una canzone, ben potrebbe apertamente vedere che colui che la fa o che la manda intende ad alcuna cosa che vuole che sia fatta per colui a cui e' la manda. E questo puote essere o pregando o domandando o comandando o minacciando o confrontando o consigliando; e in ciascuno di questi modi puote quelli a cui vae la lettera o la canzone o negare o difendersi per alcuna scusa. Ma quelli che manda la sua lettera guernisce di parole ornate e piene di sentenzia e di fermi argomenti, sí come crede poter muovere l'animo di colui a non negare, e, s'elli avesse alcuna scusa, come la possa indebolire o instornare in tutto. (165)

[But whoever wanted to carefully consider the meaning of a letter or a poem, could clearly see that the one who writes it or sends it seeks to achieve something that he wants the recipient to do. This could be [expressed] either by entreating, or requesting, or commanding, or threatening, or confronting, or advising. And in each of these approaches, the addressee who receives the letter or poem can either refuse, or excuse himself somehow [from doing it]. But he who sends the letter decorates it with ornate words full of meaning and strong arguments, such as he thinks will allow him to persuade the mind of the addressee not to refuse, or, if he had some excuse for refusing, to undermine that excuse or completely obliterate it.] (Translation mine)

Here Brunetto emphasizes the nature of exchange in poetic invectives and the importance of a rigorous and careful rhetorical structure customized according to its purpose and its target. In order to achieve the desired effect through a letter or a poem, an author must carefully craft his composition by employing the appropriate dose of ornament, blame, reproach, and verbal attack.

This passage suggests that the medium of vernacular invective poetry, which is paired with epistolography and oratory, started to gain substantial importance in the late Middle Ages, and was by no means merely an exercise of style. Brunetto teaches that the

art of poetry is not intended as a display of affectations or a literary tradition absorbed abstractly into the practice of a given form. On the contrary, poetry—and specifically *invettiva*—is a concrete form of expression and exchange intended to affect an audience and a specific target, thus invoking a change of position and a positive resolution of a controversy.

Archival records suggest that invective was also exercised orally in forensic, political, and informal settings. In most cases, the oral delivery of denigration and reproach was paired with humor. Medieval historians recorded several Latin and vernacular poems or songs composed to ridicule specific preachers criticized for being boastful performers rather than traditional clerics.²⁶ Master Boncompagno da Signa composed and publicly delivered in Bologna a declamatory poem to defame and mock the friar Giovanni da Vicenza.²⁷ As the medieval commentator Salimbene de Adam narrates, Boncompagno composed and delivered this song of mockery in response to a rumor which claimed that the friar Giovanni miraculously rose up from the Church of Santa Maria in Monte and flew up in the air (*Cronica* I 112). As a reaction to this dubious miracle, Boncompagno announced to the people of Bologna that he was going to perform the same wonder at the same site of Santa Maria in Monte; Boncompagno was wearing two gigantic wings in front of the crowd gathered at the site and recited a song of mockery at the top of the mountain. Salimbene provides a few examples of his verses:

²⁶ Berardo Rossi mentions that Pier delle Vigne may have composed satirical poems against such preachers (108). Dante, in the *Commedia*, especially with the term “ciance” (*Par.* 29), criticizes over-the-top Franciscan preachers. In the *Decameron*, with the novella of Frate Cipolla, Boccaccio deftly ridicules and blames fanciful sermonizing (VI.10).

²⁷ See Cian 64; Salimbene, *The Chronicle* 54.

Et Iohannes iohanniçat
 et saltando choreisat.
 Modo salta, modo salta,
 qui celorum petis alta!
 Saltat iste, saltat ille,
 resaltant cohortes mille,
 Saltat chorus dominarum,
 saltat dux Venetiarum. (*Cronica* I 112)

[Old John John enhances
 as he leaps and as he dances.
 All of you who seek the sky
 must dance, and dance, and fly!
 This one leaps and that one dances,
 every boy and maiden prances,
 the young men dance with all the girls,
 even the duke of Venice whirls.] (Baird et al. 54)²⁸

After these verses, Boncompagno did not of course fly above the mountain, but dismissed the crowd sarcastically, declaring that the people should now be content after seeing his face:

Cumque se diu mutuo aspexissent, protulit istud verbum: "Ite cum benedictione divina, et sufficiat vobis vidisse faciem Boncompagni." Et recesserunt cognoscentes se derisos. (*Cronica* I, 112)

And after they had been gazing at each other for a long period of time, he shouted down to them audaciously, "Go, with God's blessing, and let it suffice that you have looked upon the face of Boncompagno." Then they all departed, realizing full well that he had been mocking them the whole time. (Baird et al. 55)²⁹

²⁸ All original Latin quotation of Salimbene de Adam's *Cronica* refers to Scalia's edition. All English translations, unless otherwise noted, are from *The Chronicle of Salimbene De Adam*, ed. and trans. by Baird et al. I also consulted Rossi's Italian edition and translation of Salimbene's *Cronica*.

²⁹ Although this is the only extant evidence of Boncompagno's song of mockery, other sources confirm not only friar Giovanni da Vicenza's arrogance and deception but also his strong political influence in Bologna. The influential Forlivese astronomer and astrologer Guido Bonatti (c.1210-1300) in his *Astronomia* discloses a strong personal disagreement with him. Giuseppe Saitta offers a modern translation of Bonatti's negative remarks against Giovanni da Vicenza: "Fu parimento un certo frate dell'ordine dei Predicatori chiamato Giovanni, vicentino...il quale era ritenuto un santo da tutti gli italiani che professavano la fede della Chiesa Romana, ma a me sembrava che fosse un ipocrita. Egli venne in così alta riputazione che si diceva che avesse risuscitato diciotto morti, nessuno dei quali fu visto da alcuno. Si diceva che egli curasse

These verses show that invective was also executed as a theatrical performance in a public setting in order to ridicule a prominent member of a community, but also to denounce certain popular convictions about the friar which were unfounded yet shared by the majority of the community. As Salimbene documents, the outcome of the performance was a success since all of the Bolognese citizens assembled to watch the spectacle: “Venit dies statuta, congregata est tota civitas” (I, 112) [on the appointed day the entire populace congregated] (Baird et al. 55).

Overall, Boncompagno’s poetry served the double function of both condemning and ridiculing the unconventional practice of Brother Giovanni da Vicenza (and perhaps of histrionic Franciscan preachers in general) of improvising dances and jokes in his sermons. It also suggests that it reached a large municipal audience who likely included individuals from different social groups. This example shows that invective was performed orally through recitation and perhaps even through singing before a live audience.

Several chronicles record a religious controversy and narrate the exchange of insults in the Franciscan monastery of Assisi before a chapter meeting. The former Minister General of the Friars Minor, Brother Elias (deposed and excommunicated by

ogni malattia e che scacciasse i demoni, ma io non potei vedere alcuno liberato da lui sebbene adoperassi ogni mezzo per vederlo, nè potei vedere alcuno liberato da lui sebbene adoperassi ogni mezzo per vederlo, nè potei vedere alcuno che con sicurezza affermasse d’aver veduto qualche miracolo fatto da lui. . . I Bolognesi armati lo accompagnavano, e intorno gli costruivano uno steccato di legna convesso, perchè nessuno gli si potesse avvicinare; e se alcuni gli si avvicinavano erano maltrattati da loro; taluni uccidevano, tal’altri ferivano, tal’altri bastonavano; ed egli godeva e si rallegrava nel vedere gli uccisi, i feriti, i malconci, e non ne risanava alcuno. . . Nè il Podestà ebbe il coraggio di opporsi a lui, nè alcuno ardiva di resistere a ciò che egli voleva, tranne io solo” (quoted in Saitta 68).

Pope Gregory IX in c.1239), clashed with Friar Bonaventura of Forlì, who launched a powerful oral invective against Brother Elias because he had publicly slandered the Franciscan order:

Quod timet impius, veniet super eum; desiderium suum iustis dabitur. . . Ordinem tuum vituperasti et personam tuam infamasti et malum exemplum secularibus dedisti et totum mundum turbasti. . . Egredere, egredere, vir sanguinum et vir Belial! Reddidit tibi Dominus universum malum tuum, et ecce premunt te mala tua, quoniam vir sanguinum es et vir Belial. (*Cronica* I 248-49)

[That which the wicked feareth, shall come upon him: to the just their desire shall be given . . . you have railed against your order, you have defamed your own character, you have set a bad example before the people, you have shaken the whole world... ‘Come out, come out, thou man of blood, and thou man of Belial! The Lord hath repaid thee’ for your evil, ‘and behold thy evils press upon thee, because thou art a man of blood and a man of Belial’.] (Baird et al. 153)

Frair Bonaventura further strengthens his invective through a song of mockery that country people composed against Brother Elias:

Tu, qui dimisisti religionem tuam et vadis vagabundus per mundum; et ideo rustici de te cantant: ‘Hor atorno fratte Helya / ke preso hà la mala via.’ Vade ergo viam tuam, frater musca. (*Cronica* I 249)

[You, who have dismissed your religion and go as a vagabond through the world, so that peasants sing about you: ‘Here he comes, Brother Elias / who has taken the evil way.’ Henceforth go your way, Brother Fly.] (translation mine)³⁰

This invective employs harsh condemnation supported by biblical quotations, examples taken from vernacular oral tradition, and disparaging epithets. The expression “Brother Fly,” coined by Francis of Assisi, refers bitterly to the “frate ozioso, maldicente e amante

³⁰ The English translation of this quotation is mine. The translation provided by Baird et al. distorts the original meaning of the phrase “Ke preso hà la mala via” as “Not too good and not too pious” (154).

del cibo” (B. Rossi 233n). The Friars Minor listening to this verbal attack would have recognized such expressions of denigration as a borrowing from St. Francis.

Besides chapter meetings, forensic and governmental meetings were also the settings of oral invective. Brunetto Latini delivered numerous invectives in his public denunciations and diplomatic missions on the behalf of the *comune* of Florence. As records from the *Archivio dello stato* in Florence show, in his 1289 public harangue during the *Consiglio generale del Capitano* (the General City Council) in Florence, Brunetto Latini’s was the decisive voice in persuading the citizens of Florence to condemn and declare war on Arezzo, starting the battle of Campaldino: “nel 1289 si rinviene Brunetto fra gli *arringatori*, o oratori pubblici, cui fu commesso dal Podestà di proporre e consigliare nell’adunanza pubblica la Guerra contro Arezzo. . . La proposta fu accettata, la Guerra dichiarata, e gli Aretini sconfitti nella battaglia di Campaldino, l’11 giugno 1289” (Sundby 13-14).³¹ Both Boncompagno and Brunetto provide crucial models for understanding the theoretical and practical dimensions of written and oral invective during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in Tuscany.

³¹ Unfortunately, no record of Brunetto’s speech seems available. At the Archive in Florence, there is a provision written by Brunetto Latini describing this occasion, only mentioning who was present at the General City Council meeting and what was deliberated that day. His own closing address is mentioned only briefly. On this occasion Villani’s *Cronica* (VII 130) discloses that the militia from Arezzo insulted the Florentines, saying that they were not afraid of them “perché dicevano che si lasciavano come donne, e pettinavano le zazzere, e gli avevano a schifo” (161) [because they were saying that (the Florentines) preened themselves like women, and were combing their hair and that they despised them] (translation mine). See the provision in Del Lungo’s “Appendice” 233-239. Contrary to Sundby’s opinion, Del Lungo does not believe that the harangue played a significant role in the battle of Campaldino and curbs Sundby’s enthusiasm, “sicché per poco il vincitore di Campaldino avrebbe a dirsi qui il nostro ser Brunetto; se quella sua arringatura fosse altra cosa che un aver detto semplicemente la propria opinione, nè più nè meno” (“Appendice” 201-202).

As we can see from these examples, invective was pervasive in Tuscany during this period; indeed, its use was on the rise in almost every aspect of civic life, in both written and oral forms.³² In order to be persuasive, notaries from numerous Tuscan *comuni* employed vituperative attacks in declarations of war, treatises, and diplomatic letters. Rhetoricians also gave considerable importance to invective in their teaching manuals, which were designed to assist apprentices in composing verbal or written invective. Starting with Brunetto Latini, the practice of invective becomes strictly linked to the writing of vernacular poetry. However, verbal attacks in verse were also delivered orally in various settings, ranging from public piazzas to religious houses. Lastly, invectives were often incorporated in harangues and thus played a crucial role in civic council meetings, influencing perspectives especially during times of warfare.

³² The thirteenth-century Tuscan friar Guittone d'Arezzo wrote several polemical texts in both prose and verse, following the established invective models and setting them in a well-defined political and religious context. See in particular the letters 2, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 19 in Margueron's edition. Jacopone da Todi, who lived close to Tuscany, also wrote several invectives; see Menestò's *La vita e l'opera di Iacopone da Todi* 8-11.

Invective and Humor: The Odd Couple

Although the aggressive aspect of insult seems predominant in the majority of the examples examined so far, ridicule and humor are often equally present. Humor is not always noticeable in invectives and in some cases seems absent; for example, Guittone d'Arezzo's invectives could be considered as severe and solemn rather than amusing. However, in other cases humor is as important as the hostile language itself. The master rhetorician Geoffrey of Vinsauf, who taught in Rome and composed the influential *Poetria nova* (c.1208-1214), discusses the use and role of humor in poetry (Gallo 135):

. . . Res comica namque recusat
 Arte laboratos sermones: sola requirit
 Plana
 Hac ratione levis signature sermo jocosus:
 Ex animi levitate jocus procedit. Et est res
 Immatura jocus et amica virentibus annis;
 Et leve quid jocus est, cui se jocundior aetas
 Applicat ex facili. Res tertia sit levis. Ergo
 Omnia sint levia. Sibi consonat undique totum
 Si levis est animus, et res levis, et leve verbum. (1890-92, 1915-21)

[. . . Comic material rejects discourse reworked by art, and requires only plain speech . . . Humorous discourse is called light because jokes proceed from lightness of soul. A jest is an immature thing, the friend of green years. It is something light, to which a merrier age easily applies itself. Let the third light element be the subject matter: thus let all be light. Everything is in mutual agreement if the spirit, the matter and the expression are equally light.] (Gallo 117)

Geoffrey lays out for his students the general quality of humorous discourse, a clear illustration of its specific structure that explains how it functions, and, finally, possible strategies on how to produce it. By doing so, he acknowledges the importance both of

using humor in compositions and of a well-defined structure that approaches humor through the concept of lightness. As Ernest Gallo notes, “to successfully produce humor, you must see that the subject matter matches the words in lightness (*levitas*); and both must match the inner disposition” (219). Geoffrey clearly states that humor emerges as neither an unrefined creation nor a coarse expression of an instinct. Instead, humor functions within both a specific subject matter and a particular emotional predisposition, which are both in equilibrium with each other.³³ In another passage, Geoffrey explicitly links blame and humor:

Contra ridiculos si vis insurgere plene,
 Surge sub hac specie: lauda, sed ridiculose;
 Argue, sed lepide gere te, sed in omnibus apte;
 Sermo tuus dentes habeat, mordaciter illos
 Tange, sed irrisor gestus plus mordeat ore. (431-35)

[If you wish to bestir yourself against ridiculous men, begin in this manner: praise, but with ridicule; discourse, but bear yourself facetiously—although always appropriately. Let your discourse have teeth; speak of the ridiculous biting, but let your mocking attitude bite more than your words. (Gallo 37)

Again, Geoffrey encourages his readers to balance ridicule with blame through a carefully constructed humorous discourse. More specifically, he advises the use of irony in association with proper gestures, providing instructions for a successful confrontation against “ridiculous men;” as Gallo comments “irony, combined with appropriate gestures, can be of help in effecting ridicule” (Gallo 218). Both ridicule and humor are thus standard elements that collaborate closely in invective poetry. The following examples

³³ As Gallo notes, Geoffrey’s discussion of humor refers to Cicero’s *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria* (217-219).

illustrate how invective was coupled with humor through performance and occurred in various contexts, and in diverse written sources.

In Tuscany, alongside the legal and academic background of invective outlined in the previous section, several sources address the common practice of verbal insult aimed at provoking laughter by ridiculing the stupidity and faults of others. As several thirteenth-century chronicles demonstrate, the presence of humor often distinguishes or defines an entire community. For example, in his *Cronica*, the Franciscan friar Salimbene de Adam documents the historical events of his time. His commentary, covering the years 1212 to 1289, dedicates a large section to the practice of joking and ridicule, and features a lengthy discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of jesters and pranksters.³⁴ He states that humorous invective was widespread during the thirteenth century: “Fuerunt etiam tempore illo truffatores et illusores quam plures, qui *maculam in electis* libenter *imponere* conabantur” (*Cronica* I, 112) [There were also during the time of Halleluia just as many rascals and tricksters who wilfully sought to ‘lay a blot on the elects’] (Baird et al. 54). Salimbene focuses on individuals from Tuscany such as Boncompagno da Signa and Brother Detesalve of Florence. While narrating the deeds of Brother Detesalve, Salimbene resumes his emphasis on Florentines already outlined with Boncompagno, calling them masters of pranks and derision: “frater Deustesalvet de Florentia ex Ordine Minorum, qui more Florentinorum magnus truffator erat” (*Cronica* I, 113) [Brother Detesalve of Florence, a Friar Minor . . . was a great prankster, as Florentines naturally

³⁴ See *The Chronicle of Salimbene* edited by Baird et al. 54-64.

are] (Baird et al. 56).³⁵ He then offers several examples of what he describes as Brother Detesalve's "truffae" [pranks]; one in particular is significant because it illustrates the association between humor and reprehension, including also the reaction of the individual verbally attacked:

Cum autem quadam die tempore yemali per civitatem Florentie ambularet, contigit ut ex lapsu glatiei totaliter caderet. Videntes hoc Florentini, qui truffatores maximi sunt, ridere ceperunt. Quorum unus quesivit a fratre qui ceciderat, utrum plus vellet habere sub se? Cui frater respondit quod sic, scilicet interrogantis uxorem. Audientes hoc Florentini non habuerunt malum exemplum, sed commendaverunt fratrem, dicentes: "Benedicatur ipse, quia de nostris es." (*Cronica* I, 114)

[On another occasion when Detesalve was walking in Florence during the winter, he slipped on the ice and fell flat, upon which those great pranksters, the Florentines, gathered round him and began to laugh at his expense. And one of them derisively inquired whether he would not like something more underneath him, to which Detesalve retorted, "Yes, your wife." The gathering of Florentines, far from taking this reply amiss, as one might have expected, commended him, saying: "He should be blessed, for he is one of us."] (Baird et al. 56)

In this anecdote, Brother Detesalve responds to ridicule with a mordant joke launched against the Florentine who mocked and directly addressed him. The sexual allusion contained in Detesalve's retort is immediately understood by the target audience but surprisingly does not cause further tension between him and the Florentines gathered around him. The concluding sentence, "He should be blessed, for he is one of us," suggests that through such a humorous verbal assault Brother Detesalve identifies himself as a Florentine and as such he is accepted among his fellow citizens. Such recognition could be understood more clearly if we consider that this exchange originally occurred

³⁵ He repeats this claim after his long digression on Brother Detesalve: Florentines are "solatiosi et maximi truffatores" (*Cronica*, I 119 [witty men and great pranksters] Baird et al. 59).

not in Latin but in Florentine vernacular, a language closer to the common people and easily understood by all members of the Florentine community.³⁶

This example shows that ludicrous verbal attacks often contain the two poles of humor and criticism, and their pairing was effective in dissipating mockery or antagonism. It also affirms the reputation of Florentines as recognized authors of such humorous invectives. By dedicating a large section of his *Cronica* to the topic of ridicule and blame, Salimbene shows that this subject was regarded as worthy of careful evaluation because witty verbal attacks were not easily overlooked, but were rather well-known and remembered by chroniclers. Moreover, at the end of the section on jokes Salimbene goes so far as to excuse Brother Detesalve's pranks. As Martha Bayless notes, such a surprising conclusion, especially if we consider the nature of the sexual jokes from the previous example, shows Salimbene's tolerance on the subject of humor:

Salimbene is greatly concerned by the jokes of one Brother Detesalve . . . [and] discusses the propriety of such witticisms at length and finally arrives at eight reasons for their condemnation, supported by no fewer than seventy biblical quotations. Despite this muster of authority, Salimbene exonerates Detesalve in the end. (206)

Salimbene's exoneration, preceded by a long review dense with biblical quotations, suggests that the practice of blaming through humor was not ultimately rejected but instead both laymen and clergymen could appreciate and use it as an important tool to take the heat out of various quarrels.

³⁶ Salimbene reports this anecdote in Latin but he later clarifies that Brother Detesalve communicated with his fellow citizens in Florentine vernacular: "concivibus suis locutus fuit" (*Cronica* 1 119) [he spoke with his own fellow citizens] (Baird et al 59). Later, Salimbene explicitly confirms it: "Et valde bene sonant verba Florentinorum in ydiomate suo" (*Cronica* 1 121) [it must be admitted that such words in the Florentine dialect have a splendid ring to them] (Baird et al. 59, 61).

Often employing political derision and ridicule, Dino Compagni in his *Cronica* (1280-1312) also confirms the many exchanges of insults and violent reprisals in thirteenth-century Tuscany. His well-known tirade at the beginning of the second book addresses the Black and White Guelphs and is infused with both irony and blame:

Levatevi, o malvagi cittadini pieni di scandoli, e pigliate il ferro e il fuoco con le vostre mani, e distendete le vostre malizie. Palesate le vostre inique volontà e i pessimi proponimenti; non penate piú; andate a mettere in ruina le bellezze della vostra città. Spandete il sangue de' vostri fratelli, spogliatevi della fede e dello amore, nieghi l'uno all'altro aiuto e servizio. Seminate le vostre menzogne, le quali empieranno i granai de' vostri figliuoli. (83-85)

[Arise, O wicked citizens, full of discord, take sword and fire in your hands, and spread abroad your evil doings. Disclose your iniquitous desires and abominable purposes; delay no longer; go and lay waste the beauties of your city. Shed your brothers' blood, strip yourself of faith and love, deny one another help and service. Sow your falsehoods, which shall fill the granaries of your sons.] (Benecke and Howell 78)³⁷

Compagni condemns the Florentine Guelphs, calling them “malvagi cittadini” [evil citizens] and listing his charges against them through irony. By his paradoxical exhortations to destroy Florence, Compagni indirectly mocks and criticizes his own compatriots, applying irony to politics and morality. It is open to question whether this specific type of mockery is aimed at stirring laughter in Compagni’s contemporaries. Irony, however, plays a significant role in humor, by declaring the opposite of what one really means.

³⁷ See also the conclusion of Compagni’s *Cronica*, which features a harsh invective against the Florentines: “O iniqui cittadini, che tutto il mondo avete corrotto e viziato di mali costumi e falsi guadagni. Voi siete quelli che nel mondo avete messo ogni malo uso.” (III.XLII, 265) [Oh, unrighteous citizens, who have corrupted and defiled all the world with evil customs and false gains! Ye are they who have put every evil habit into the world, Benecke and Howell 259]

More explicitly jocular, the Tuscan rhetorician Boncompagno in “Notula in qua doctrina datur de consuetudinibus et naturis cantorum” [little note which gives instruction on the habits and nature of singers] (translation mine) contained in his *Boncompagnus* (c.1215) lays out various derisive diatribes about singing traditions spread worldwide (I.19). Although the “Notula” does not actually qualify as an invective, it is a useful example of the practice of blame and humor in the thirteenth century. It also constitutes further evidence that derision and ridicule often circulated via humor and such association was widespread and mutually shared among various individuals, groups, and nations. In this particular example, Boncompagno reports various denigrations that were most likely shared throughout the thirteenth century in Europe—and beyond—by Italians, French, and Germans:

Mirandum est non minus quam notandum, quod diverse nationes et dispares gentes diversimode sibi displicent in cantando. . . Asserunt Gallici quod Ytalici semper in crebra vocum fractione delirant, unde illos dedignantur audire. Ytalici e contrario perhibent, quod Gallici et Teutonici ad modum febricitantium tremulas voces emittunt, et cum per immoderatam vocum emissionem celum propulsare nituntur, aut arbitrantur Deum esse surdum, aut illum posse aliqua vocum rabiditate placari. (I.19.3 4-5)

[It is no less remarkable than it is noticeable, that diverse nations and different people in different ways dislike each other’s way of singing . . . French people say that Italians are delirious in an extreme fragmentation of the voice, so that they scorn to listen to them. conversely the Italians assert that the French and Germans emit tremulous sounds as if they were feverish, and strive to pierce the sky through an excessive emission of the voice, either thinking that God is deaf, or that they can placate Him somehow with an enraged voice.] (Translation mine)

This example shows that on a larger scale diverse populations launched humorous and aggressive remarks about other nations' singing outside Tuscany.³⁸ The target of criticism is larger than cities or institutions; in this case a whole nation, understood not as a political but as a linguistic and geographical unit, propagates negative stereotypes that demarcate another through humor and ridicule.³⁹ This example shows that during the late Middle Ages, invective was regularly linked to what modern anthropologists define as ethnic humor, "a type of humor in which fun is made of the perceived behavior, customs, personality, or any other traits of a group or its members by virtue of their specific sociocultural identity" (Apte 10).⁴⁰ By offering a list of witty complaints, Boncompagno shows how different medieval societies developed their own perceptions of other countries and used ethnic humor to parody or satirize them. In addition, as Daniela Folena notes, Boncompagni introduces this example through irony, thus distancing himself from this global criticism:

Boncompagno sembra divertirsi quanto noi di fronte a questo vero e proprio ballo delle nazioni; ma nello stesso tempo, distribuendo in pari modo le sue riserve e i suoi toni ironici, suggerisce nel lettore l'idea di una

³⁸ In addition to the examples provided, Boncompagno's "Notula" also includes Greek and Latin speakers, Saracens and Christians: "Greci Latinos dicunt ut canes latrare et Latini dicunt, quod Greci gannunt sicut vulpes. Sarraceni quidem Christicolos non cantare, sed delirare fatentur. E contrario referunt Christiani, quod Sarraceni voces transglutiant et cantus in faucibus gargarizant" (I.19.1-3) [Greeks say that Latin speakers howl like dogs and Latins say that Greeks grumble like foxes. Saracens say that Christians do not sing but rather rave. On the other hand, Christians testify that Saracens swallow their voices and gurgle a melody in their gullets] (translation mine).

³⁹ Because the evidence refers to the thirteenth century, we cannot talk about stereotypes applied to nations in the modern sense. However, Boncompagno specifically uses the term "nations," most likely implying, as Dante does in *De vulgari eloquentia*, delineated linguistic and geographic areas: "diverse nationes" (I.19.1).

⁴⁰ See Apte's "Humor, Ethnicity, and Intergroup Relations," and Davies' *Ethnic Humor around the World: A Comparative Analysis*.

pari dignità di tutti i popoli, senza pregiudizi sociali, ideologici e morali.
(13)

Like Salimbene, then, Boncompagno shows his open-mindedness toward witty jokes. In addition he also acknowledges the reality of diversity and the tendency to ridicule and attack different societies evenly and reciprocally.

Like Boncompagno's previous example, almost a century later Dante's essay *De vulgari eloquentia* (c.1305) shows the endurance of the blend of condemnation and humor—or more specifically ethnic humor—in verbal attacks as he provides a general overview of Italian vernaculars. In the first book, Dante argues that no Italian vernaculars can aspire to the title of illustrious. In Chapter XIII, devoted to Tuscany, Dante supports this claim by denigrating and mocking his compatriots' boastful claim of linguistic excellence through a series of quotations consisting of various Tuscan localized vernaculars. He lists examples of Tuscan vernaculars from Florence, Pisa, Lucca, Siena, and Arezzo which are grammatically incorrect and which depict unrestrained behaviors:⁴¹

Locuntur Florentini et dicunt *Manichiamo introcque, che noi non facciamo altro*. Pisani: *Bene andonno li fanti de Fiorenza per Pisa*. Lucenses: *Fo voto a Dio ke in grassarra eie lo comuno de Lucca*. Senenses: *Onche renegata avess'io Siena. Ch'ee chesto?* Aretini: *Vuo' tu venire ovelle?* (I.13)

[When the Florentines speak, they say things like: 'Let's eat, since there's nothing else to do.' The Pisans: 'The business at Florence went well for Pisa.' The people of Lucca: 'I swear to God, the city of Lucca is really in the pink.' The Siennese: 'If only I'd left Siena for good! What's up now?' The people of Arezzo: 'Do you want to go somewhere?'] (Botterill 31, 94-95)

⁴¹ I quote Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* in the edition translated by Steven Botterill. For a brief discussion of humor in *De vulgari eloquentia*, see Ragg 43-45.

Vittorio Coletti notes in his edition that critics have interpreted Dante's examples of localized vernaculars as either extracts of folk verses and songs or proverbs from the oral folk tradition. He further notes the link between grammar and ethics that is recurrent in Dante (119). Steven Botterill focuses on the linguistic, poetic, and political concerns at the heart of Dante's work (xxiii). However, many critics fail to notice the comic connotation of the entire passage and do not render in their translations some of Dante's humorous expressions. This is clear from both Botterill's Italian and Coletti's English translations of the passage when Dante directly addresses the Tuscans using the vibrant expression "ebrietate baccantur": "Et quoniam Tusci pre alis in hac *ebrietate baccantur*" (I.13, emphasis added) [And because Tuscans more than anyone rant in drunkenness] (translation mine). Botterill chooses to translate "ebrietate baccantur" with "mental intoxication" (31) while Coletti opts for "in questa folla strepitano" (35). However, both translations miss the parallel between the noun "ebrietas" [drunkenness] and the verb "bacchari" [to party and be loud]. Dante clearly crafts such a humorous Latin expression to set Tuscans in the context of the "Bacchanal," a festival held in honor of the God of wine—Bacchus—which involved orgies and wine. Hence Dante ridicules his compatriots' claim of linguistic superiority, describing the Tuscans as rowdy drunkards who produce irrational outbursts as though in a wine festival. Dante adds other comic expressions to support his claim that Tuscans remain stubborn in their own absurdity, stating that they are "in suo turpiloquio . . . obtusi" [steeped in their foul jargon] (Botterill 33). If we consider the link between blame and humor suggested by Dante's colorful phrases, then this passage may refer to common stereotypes. Some of these stereotypes

(such as the one that depicts Florentines as gluttonous and selfish, and Sienese as sacrilegious and mentally unstable) appear consistently in various other medieval sources and would have been recognized by Dante's own contemporaries.

The contemporaneous sonnet "Pelle chiabelle di Dio, no ci arvai" confirms the existence of prominent stereotypes employed in poetry to ridicule specific Tuscan communities (Lanza 275-78).⁴² The sonnet portrays a vivid exchange of insults expressed in different localized vernaculars, in the setting of a marketplace. The localized vernaculars expose unidentified individuals from Rome, Lucca, Arezzo, Pistoia, Florence, and Siena. The insult provided by an anonymous *fiorentino* is particularly striking and could also be read as a caricature of a cultural stereotype of Florentines: "De' che ti dea 'l malan, fi' de la pitta" (v.9) [May God give you misfortune, you son of a bitch] (translation mine). Besides being a linguistic parody of different vernaculars, "Pelle chiabelle" blends invective and humor through a series of episodic dialogues constructed (as in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*) through common idiomatic expressions. These examples show how the aim of criticism in verbal attacks was often harnessed to humor, employing recognized stereotypes that qualified and promoted numerous comic Tuscan personae.

Although many of the examples provided refer to Florence, other documents demonstrate that the phenomenon of denunciation was not restricted to this particular area. If we consider the poetic corpora of Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, Folgore da San Gimignano, and Pietro dei Fainelli, we find a variety of settings for the practice of

⁴² Although critics have attributed it to either Cecco Angiolieri or Lapo Gianni, this sonnet is still in search of an author. See Lanza 275.

invective, such as Siena, San Gimignano, and Lucca. The references to local battles and addressees—all confined to a small area but in close proximity to a distinct author—demonstrate the originality of each of the selected sonnets. In addition, their personal style and content further confirms that each of these texts is a unique expression of various types of invective poetry. The poetic practice of vituperative attack had different forms of expression and distinct geographical origins.

The existence of such a wide assortment of invectives challenges an excessively generalized and simplistic approach to them. Indeed, such variety encourages a more in-depth interpretation of the practical function of invective articulated through the ridicule and blame of explicit faults. In all the examples provided, the practice of attacking with words seems to have been a valuable tool utilized by individuals and groups with specific objectives in times of conflict. These goals might include denouncing offenses to provoke a response within the offended community, or protecting an individual or a community from an immediate or impending danger, either by pacifying conflicts or by uniting the community to defend against imminent threat. Frequently, the poles of blame and humor coexist in theory and in practice. This twofold dynamic discourages a one-sided approach to invective that may privilege one element at the expense of the other. It is reductive to approach the medieval comic corpora of Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, and Dante by considering only the element of blame as it emerges from the semantic content. Such an approach would focus exclusively on a formalistic reading of invective and overrate its rhetorical parameters of verbal assault. It would also circumscribe the practice of invective within a production of mere rhetoric, or a circular process. Equally

problematic would be to approach invective as a simple ludic exercise aimed at provoking laughter as an end in itself. Such a reading would reduce the practice of invective to an abstract game and thus would dismiss the reality of its historical and ethical valence. What is needed is an interpretation that balances these two aspects of rhetoric and humor, approached not in isolation but rather in continuity with each other. In this way, we would better understand the practical function of these texts as originally delineated by their authors as well as appreciating their serious ethical engagement.

Conclusion

Invective poetry of the high and late Middle Ages features a combination of humor and reprehension that in various expressions, forms, and contexts was dynamically operative in Tuscany. The Florentine poet Rustico Filippi makes specific references in his sonnets to the Guelph and Ghibelline wars of late thirteenth-century Tuscany. Cecco Angiolieri often refers to his exile from Siena and expresses a polemical attitude toward his own government and fellow citizens between the end of thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century. Like those illustrated throughout this chapter, the invectives of these medieval poets are grounded in contemporary events. The manuscript tradition also confirms the continuity between texts and their historical context, since some of these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century poems were recorded in manuscripts alongside rubrics which introduced them, stated their dates of composition, and described the event at their core (Giunta, *Due Saggi* 19-20). As Claudio Giunta underlines, these rubrics could go back to their original sources and authors suggesting that *tenzoni* or debate poems “si riferiscono ad eventi politici contingenti, e non possono essere compresi se non tenendo presente questo sfondo” (*Due Saggi* 21n 19). Modern readers must consider the various political and historical references at the core of each medieval invective poem in order not to underestimate the importance of the Guelph and Ghibelline wars, the trauma of political exile, and general tensions and instabilities within various Tuscan *comuni*. I hope to encourage an interpretation which would enable readers to understand the cultural, historical, and political reality behind these texts as well as their ethical dimension personalized by each author.

The question of authorship and subjectivity in medieval texts must also be taken into consideration when approaching invectives. An author's political and ideological standpoint is often evident especially when we examine each invective through a political and historical lens. Medieval invective poetry draws its style from a recognizable rhetorical tradition, but it is also an authorial production. As such, it emerges first and foremost from an individual author who discloses to readers his personal disagreement with and criticism of a specific event or interlocutor. The author initiates his verbal attack using a familiar rhetorical tradition not for its own sake (as Marti implies) but rather to provoke a response from readers. Medieval readers of poetry most likely recognized the established tradition and structure of an invective, but placed higher value upon the content as it applied to events during the time in which the invective was written and circulated. Even though these thirteenth- and fourteenth-century events are not current for modern readers, we cannot afford to overlook them. The ideological stance of various authors is as essential an element of medieval poetry as the humor that spoke to original readers.

This humor emerges from medieval poetry through hyperbolic expressions, subtle allusions, and political jokes and comic appellations. As in the examples examined in this chapter, medieval humor is articulated and balanced by the author's own sensibility in the face of a specific event. Such sensibility deploys the humor that is thus designed to stir amusement, laughter, and/or a response. Rustico, Cecco, and Dante initiate a dialogue with readers through their condemnation and ridicule because they offer readers the perception that something is not going well, that someone is not acting according to a

dominant ethical code, and that accordingly they cannot condone the violence, disaster, and confusion that emerge from a war.

On these grounds, we must be careful not to approach invective humor as a monolithic phenomenon, because to do so would limit the readers' understanding of the true purpose and value of the poems. Laughter is not always the primary intended response. On the contrary, humor in combination with reprehension serves a wide variety of functions, and displays the richness, complexity, and inventiveness of the genre of invective as a poetic expression developed through a tradition that is lively and still relevant today. These various functions, as we have seen throughout the chapter, demonstrate that invective is a multifaceted phenomenon which is far from well understood, and which requires a complex interpretation. The presence of humor in invective indeed suggests that a wide range of interpretative possibilities exist, and encourages a closer analysis of various artistic expressions of humor in medieval sonnets. Various authors wrote directly to a target audience about the historical occurrences that prompted their invective poetry, and modern readers should consider this relationship when analyzing invective poetry. Each political invective serves a different purpose, causes different effects, and is delivered in an individualized style according to the conflict or historical event that is at its core.

This individualized style also suggests that each text should be approached in association with its own original author, when we know who that is. A variety of lyrics dated from the second half of the thirteenth century to the first half of the fourteenth have been attributed to Rustico Filippi and Cecco Angiolieri based on the studies of the post-

Romantic and Risorgimento-era scholars who were the first to undertake specialized studies on the lives and works of these poets. As I noted in Chapter I, Alessandro D'Ancona, Aldo Massera, Leone Del Prete, Tommaso Casini, Vincenzo Federici, and Giulio Navone were the first to formulate the procedure of systematically extracting biographical information from archives and extrapolating historical references from the poems, approximately dating their composition and circulation. These critics also analyzed archives that contain notarial documents, personal purchases and sales, births and deaths, and wills, as well as manuscripts from probate court practices concerning the distribution of deceased persons' estates. It is due to their crucial contribution that we currently have a record of the lives and works of Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, Folgore da San Gimignano, and Pietro dei Fattinelli. The findings of these critics should be expanded with new scholarship so that we can apply more evidence to the task of evaluating their poetry.⁴³

If we approach the entire poetic corpus of each of these authors, by no means can all of their sonnets be described as invective poetry, but they provide a generous number of invective models. Although many of these invectives, often labeled as political, burlesque, satirical, realistic, jocose, or comic-realistic poems, have survived anonymously in different manuscripts, specific authors have been assigned to these texts because they feature recurring forms and themes that have allowed scholars to establish distinctive authorial styles and topics of vituperation. These different styles can be

⁴³ See D'Ancona's "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo XIII" (1874); Del Prete's *Rime di Ser Pietro dei Fattinelli detto il mugnone* (1874); Navone's *Le rime di Folgore da San Gimignano e di Cene da la Chitarra d'Arezzo* (1880); Casini's "Un poeta umorista del secolo XIII" (1890); Federici's *Le rime di Rustico di Filippo* (1899); and Massera's "La patria e la vita di Cecco Angiolieri" (1901).

distinguished philologically by linguistic and geographical parameters. The themes vary from attacks against concrete targets such as old women, political enemies, friends, and family members to abstract targets such as poverty and various misfortunes.⁴⁴

The authorship of these texts is significant, as each author provides his own individual style and poetic version of various themes of invectives. Exemplary of the personalized style and content employed by each author are the distinctive qualities of the invectives of Cecco Angiolieri and Meo dei Tolomei. The Codex Esc.III.23, discovered in 1914, attributes to Meo dei Tolomei sonnets previously ascribed to Cecco Angiolieri in all other known manuscripts. Scholars such as Adele Todaro (1934) and Mario Marti (1950) compared the content and style of Angiolieri's authenticated sonnets from all manuscripts (including the Esc.III.23) with the sonnets attributed to Meo in the Codex Esc.III.23, and they were able to convincingly determine that Meo dei Tolomei authored the sonnets from the Codex Esc.III.23. In doing so, they acknowledged the artistic particularity of each author and emphasized that Cecco's and Meo's invectives had different styles and contents. The poems by Meo dei Tolomei, for example, are distinguished in style by an extensive use of dialogue and in content by a tendency to attack his mother and brother (instead of his father and girlfriend, as in Cecco) (*Alfie Comedy* 126).

The personalized nature of these invectives confirms the significance of the connection between authors and their texts. Modern scholars have acknowledged this association in anthologies of Italian literature and surveys of comic poetry by placing

⁴⁴ See Marti's *Poeti* (12-19); Vitale (18-26); Suitner (30-41); Furio Brugnolo (27-36).

biographical information on the authors prior to their texts. However, more study is needed to connect biography and style so that we can gain a better understanding of these relationships and thus appreciate more thoroughly the link between these texts and the events they reference. If we explore and interpret medieval invectives only formally and abstractly, we miss the fact that they are authorial productions. In addition, if we overemphasize the form of a given poem, we will underrate its content. A comprehensive reading must include a discussion of the biography of the medieval author in order to better connect and give meaning to both the form and content of these texts.

Currently, the biographical information on an author supplied in modern anthologies or surveys seems to serve the purpose of an introductory reference or even a footnote to the texts. A discussion on the life of the author is thus not only physically separated from its corpus but also theoretically independent. Such a discussion is usually superficial and is not used to better understand the relation of authors to their texts on either a formalistic level (i.e., how each author offered his own contribution to an invective poetics) or an historical one (i.e., how authors and invectives functioned within their history, society, and culture as well as political and artistic life). It is essential not to isolate the biographical information from the actual texts, but rather to study the purpose and content of each text by examining carefully how each author could be placed in relation to his own or other texts, contemporaneous authors, and target audience.

In the following chapters, I propose a reading of invective poems that carefully balances their verbal aggressiveness and humor within the historical, political and cultural dimensions originally articulated by their authors. I shall introduce Rustico

Filippi and Cecco Angiolieri and their texts in parallel chapters. Each chapter will provide the biographical information on one author, followed by a close reading of his selected poems. I will examine invectives set in wartime, which reveal substantial political tensions during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I shall anchor the poems and their context in the poet's historical time to better understand their ethical weight and the tension of blame and humor. The scenario of wartime and the practice of blame and laughter situate invective poetry within a complex frame made up of the historical, social, political, and cultural background of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Tuscany. Taking all these elements into consideration contributes to a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions of invectives as expressed by their authors and received by their original audiences. Once these multiple dimensions become more visible, we can better understand and assess the ethical engagement and dialogic value of these texts. Invective poetry stirs specific emotions in its audience and calls for a response. This response often occurs with the act of writing back to the author, crafting another invective poem and engaging in the poetic practice of *tenzone*. In manuscripts like the MS Vat. 3793, we can clearly see this ongoing poetic dialogue at work.⁴⁵ However, on many occasions we are left with a single invective poem and we do not possess the poems that were written in reply, so that we can only speculate on what the replies might have been. Despite the lack of such data, it is fundamental to keep in mind that each invective poem strongly suggests

⁴⁵ See Massera "Tenzoni politiche fiorentine" in *Sonetti burleschi e realistici dei primi due secoli*, 39-56. In Chapter Three I examine the ideological practice of invective and *tenzone* writing.

an opening toward the other, who is called to be responsible and take charge for a specific wrongdoing, becoming engaged in a face to face encounter with the author.

CHAPTER III
ON COWARDS, OPPORTUNISTS AND OTHER FINE FELLOWS: HUMOR AND
POLITICS IN THE INVECTIVES OF RUSTICO FILIPPI DURING THE GUELPH
AND GHIBELLINE WARS¹

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I surveyed the practice of invective in Tuscany in the high and late medieval period. This chapter will introduce the Florentine poet Rustico Filippi, focusing specifically on his life, his most overtly political invectives, and the thirteenth-century Florentine environment. In the first part of this chapter, I will explore the data available in the literary and historical records, in order to provide a more comprehensive biographical section on Rustico and his contemporaries. With the biographical and historical frames of the poet in place, we can better approach the complex political context of his poetry as it reflects the personal ideology of its author. I will also examine the political ideology behind the practice of invective writing as reflected in contemporary political treatises, such as Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* and *Li livres dou Tresor*, and within Rustico's manuscript tradition. I shall scrutinize the specific position of his poems within the codex and with other sonnets that are juxtaposed with Rustico's in the MS Vaticano Latino 3793. Such investigation brings to light the dialogic and

¹ Part of this chapter was published in *Laughter in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: Epistemology of a Fundamental Human Behavior, its Meaning, and Consequences*, edited by Albrecht Classen.

political nature of Rustico's invectives in association with their rhetorical structure that finally illustrates the practice of exchanging poetry through *tenzoni*.

I will then engage in close readings of three of Rustico Filippi's invective sonnets. My reading of these sonnets stresses their historical, political, ethical, and ideological frame of reference of specific battles and conflicts during the second half of the thirteenth century. Each sonnet attacks and criticizes a target individual or group (affiliated politically with the Guelph and Ghibelline parties, as well as socially with members of the nobility or *popolani*) blamed for specific excesses. The presence within the poems of both the poet-speaker and the addressee creates a dynamic tension between historical facts and poetic convention, stimulating a historically and politically oriented reading. The historical facts, which emerge through references both pointed and allusive to battles and political contention, are harnessed to poetic conventions as articulated by the author. This dual dimension of creativity and reality sheds light on the practice of invective writing and the complex relationship between poets and readers during this period.

Rustico's invectives should not be detached from their municipal tradition; indeed, that connection should be revalorized. Although Dante does not mention Rustico directly, in *De vulgari eloquentia* he notably criticizes the strong municipal ideology expressed by Tuscan poets, such as Guittone d'Arezzo and Brunetto Latini, as well as their violent verbal language; he expresses this scorn clearly when he writes that Tuscan poets craft a type of poetry which is "non curialia sed municipalia. . . quanquam fere omnes Tusci in suo turpiloquio sint obtusi" (*De Vulgari* I, 13) [fitted not for a court but at best for a city council. . . almost all Tuscans are steeped in their own foul jargon] (Botterill 31-33). In

his *Storia della letteratura italiana* (1870), Francesco De Sanctis was the first modern critic to condemn the municipality and vulgarity of Rustico and his Tuscan contemporaries, thus reprising Dante's negative appraisal:

Questa forma primitiva dell'odio politico, amara anche nel motteggio e nell'epigramma, e così sventuratamente feconda tra noi anche ne' tempi più civili, non esce mai dalle quattro mura del comune, con particolari ed allusioni così personali, che manca con la chiarezza ogni interesse: prova ne siano i sonetti di Rustico. (99)

From De Sanctis on, the majority of modern critics still agree with Dante and underrate Florentine municipal and political poetry by denying it any ethical value: "Rustico's jocose poetry is not only amoral, but devoid of any clerical references, with the exception of 'A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura' (Joan Levin, *Rustico* 26).² Even though Levin is careful not to label Rustico's entire comic corpus as "amoral," she does not offer any discussion of the potential ethical charge of "A voi, che ve ne andaste," approaching it only through a political perspective and labeling it as an exception because she assesses it as "his only extant political sonnet" (*Rustico* 37). Furthermore, the term "amoral" places Rustico's comic poetry outside the sphere to which moral judgements apply and thus implies that his entire comic corpus—with few exceptions—lacks any moral sensibility.

Contesting this long-standing critical position, I argue that Rustico's invectives do indeed have an ethical value, and should be reappraised. The three invectives analyzed here are not poetically inferior, amoral, obscure, or trivial: instead, they play an important role in debating ideas, expressing a civic ideology through poetry in a time of heightened political tensions and accelerated political developments. Rustico expresses through his

² See also Gallarati, who negates any moral value in Rustico's sonnets ("Onomastica" 75).

invectives, although restricted to his urban environment and not placed in a wider political setting, a valuable ethical stance on such ideals as public unity and peace, applying his poetic language to a practical ideology and suggesting an opening for dialogue. His poetry does not promote a biased hatred within limited borders; on the contrary, each invective communicates a rich ideology of activism and serves the purpose of expanding a vast range of principles which are vibrantly projected from the municipal microcosm of Florence onto the macrocosm of war. This is evident especially if we consider the standpoint of the poet, who consistently denounces individual opportunism, cowardice, and political irresolution. By addressing his own compatriots, and indiscriminately ridiculing both Guelphs and Ghibellines, Rustico fosters a dialogue with both sides beyond party lines, and at the same time articulates the position of the militant poet well-established in his own native city and community. For this reason, Rustico's militant political activism supports and serves a positive model, in contrast with other thirteenth-century Tuscan poets, such as Guittone d'Arezzo, as well as fourteenth-century poets, such as Cecco Angiolieri and Dante, who all took a polemical position against their own government and compatriots because of their exile.

Rustico's political and ideological stance emerges in respect to complex questions, so that his invectives constitute powerful and stirring attacks that ultimately announce a strong political and ethical position. Modern critics have not yet explored the political and ethical value of Rustico's invective, and often either neglect them or assimilate them to the jocular comico-realistic tradition without proper examination. By recuperating the

link between the poet and his poetry, we can better understand the coexistence of art, ethics, and ideology in the content and style of his texts.

Rustico Filippi (c.1230-c.1299): Life, Works, and Political Ideology

Traces in the Literary Record

The Florentine Rustico Filippi, known as *il barbuto*, lived earlier than the other Tuscan authors in this study. His birth has been dated in the first half of the thirteenth century, based on the fact that Brunetto Latini dedicated and sent his *Favolello* to Rustico. The *Favolello* is a short letter in verse that consists of 162 *settenari* rhyming complets; it contains moral teachings on friendship, and features illustrations of types of true and false friends (Armour 128).³ The great majority of critics agrees that it was written when Brunetto was exiled from Florence (c.1260-67).⁴ At its *congedo*, or close, Brunetto greets Rustico directly:

³ Brunetto based the *Favolello* on Cicero's *De amicitia* and Boncompagno da Signa's *Amicitia*. See Ceva 99; Latini *Il Tesoretto* xiv. All quotations from the *Favolello* are from Giovanni Pozzi's edition in Contini's *Poeti del Duecento*. I also consulted Zannoni's 1824 edition of the *Favolello* which, as Holloway has noted, is "an excellent, learned critical edition of the text" mainly because he "used all manuscripts" from previous editions except MS. Chigiano L.V. 166 (*Brunetto* 47).

⁴ In the *Favolello*, Brunetto suggests that at the moment of its composition he had been residing for several years in a foreign land, outside of Italy: "E lunga dimorata / né paese lontano / di monte né di piano / non mette oscuritate / in verace amistate" (12-16) [And a long absence / in a distant land / either upon a mountain or in a plain / does not place in obscurity / a true friendship] (translation mine). For "dimorata" as absence, see Contini *Poeti* II 278n. Peter Armour recently confirms that Brunetto Latini wrote the *Favolello* during his exile "in answer to a poem by Rustico Filippi (now lost). It expounds a doctrine of true moral and civic friendship based principally on Cicero's *Laelius on Friendship* and its medieval successors" (128). Bianca Ceva also dates it during Latini's exile (97-100). However, a few critics disagree with this date of composition; Reginald Hyatte, Peter Bondanella, and Arielle Saiber date the *Favolello* after 1282 (see Hyatte 208; Bondanella 79; Saiber 1635). Ascribing the composition of the *Favolello* to the period after 1282 is incompatible with its content and is not supported by any documentary evidence. Hyatte, Bondanella, and Saiber translate the *Favolello* (Hyatte uses the outdated and dubious spelling *Favolelto*) as

Or, che ch'i' penso o dico, 135
 a te mi torno, amico
 Rustico di Filippo,
 di cui faccio mi' ceppo.
 Se teco mi ragiono,
 non ti chero perdono, 140
 ch'i' non credo potere
 a te mai dispiacere:
 ché la gran conoscenza
 che 'n te fa risedenza
 fermat' a lunga usanza, 145
 mi dona sicuranza
 com'io ti possa dire
 e per detto ferire.
 E ciò che scritto mando
 e cagione e dimando 150
 che ti piaccia dittare
 e me scritto mandare
 del tuo trovato adesso:⁵
 ché 'l buon Palamidesso
 mi dice, ed ho creduto, 155
 che se' 'n cima saluto;
 ond'io me n'allegrai.
 Qui ti saluto ormai:
 e quel tuo di Latino
 tien' per amico fino 160
 a tutte le carrate
 che voi oro pesate.

[Now whatever I think or say, / I turn to you, friend / Rustico di Filippo /
 whom I make my support. / If I talk with you, / I do not ask your
 forgiveness, / since I do not think that I can / ever displease you: / because
 the great knowledge / that resides in you, / fixed upon a long practice, /
 gives me security / that I can speak to you / and through speaking offend. /
 And what I send in writing / with the purpose of requesting / that it might

“Little Poem” instead of “Little Fable.” “Favolello” is the Italian term that corresponds to the Old French
 “Flabel” (as “*Tesoretto*” corresponds to the Provençal “*Trésor*”) used for short didactic letters. See Galvani
 229; Nannucci 470; Sundby 29; Holloway *Brunetto Latini* xxi.

⁵ Contini notes that “adesso” is a “gallicismo” and interprets it as “sempre.” See *Poeti* II 283n. Silvia
 Gallarati agrees with Contini but also adds “sempre, o ‘ora, nella situazione presente,’ durante cioè l’esilio
 di Brunetto” (*Rustico* 21). I translated “adesso” as “now” to reflect the tone of urgency that Latini seems to
 imply in the letter.

please you to compose / and send to me a copy / of your poetry now /
 because good Palamidesso / informs me, and I believe him, / that you have
 climbed to the top; / and I was glad of it. / Here now I say goodbye to you;
 / and your friend of Latino / keep him as a loyal friend / by all the carats⁶ /
 that you weigh as gold.] (translation mine)

Since the *Favolello* dates to the years of Brunetto's exile from Florence, and since in it Brunetto requests that Rustico send him some of his poetry, it seems clear that by 1260 Rustico must have been an established poet, at least twenty years old, though very likely older. Brunetto further confirms this possibility by stating that Rustico has "n cima saluto" [reached the top] (v.156). Critics have interpreted this specific reference in various ways, using it to infer either Rustico's probable date of birth or his influence within thirteenth-century Florence.⁷ Because of the ambiguity of this verse of the *Favolello*, critics are divided as to whether it emphasizes Rustico's artistic or political importance in Florence. Most critics interpret the verse as evidence of Rustico's growing importance as a poet during the 1260s, because Brunetto specifically asks to receive his

⁶ In Zannoni's edition (1824) the term is spelled with one "r" as "carate" [carats] and is the feminine noun of the original masculine "carato." Zannoni adds that "questo verso e il seguente debbono intendersi del fiorino d'oro della Repubblica fiorentina ch'era a tutta bontà, cioè a 24 carati" (248). Zannoni's interpretation is confirmed also by *Il Tesoro della lingua italiana Italiana delle Origini* which lists "carrata" as "ciascuna delle ventiquattro parti nelle quali è divisa la proprietà di un bene [1] *Stat. sen.*, 1301-1303, cap. 11, pag. 12,25: La soma de la vena, IIJ denari kabella; et passaggio J denaio. De la carrata de la vena del ferro, J soldo kabella" (Istituto del Consiglio Nazionale) "Carrate" could also be small wagon or cart; see Luigi Cibrario's *Dell'economia politica del Medio Evo*, 350, 361.

⁷ Regarding his date of birth, Ireneo Sanesi argues that Rustico was most likely born in 1240 (193). Vittorio Cian opts instead for 1230, because he thinks that Latini's allusion renders it explicit that Rustico was an established poet in 1260 (Review of Federici 153). See also Levin: "The *Favolello*, which seems to address not a fledgling twenty-year-old, but a well-established poet, points towards 1230 as a more plausible proposal" (*Rustico* 5n). In my view Cian's supposition is more persuasive than Sanesi's: "La data di nascita non può ritardarsi fino al '40, ma forse deve ritirarsi più indietro del '30, perchè non è possibile che fosse ventenne, o poco più, il nostro rimatore che Brunetto diceva già *salito in cima* pel suo trovato e a lui fido amico per 'la grande conoscenza—fermata a *lunga usanza*' (Review of Federici 153). Rustico's birth should not be dated before 1220 because he most likely was a peer of Brunetto Latini, born in c. 1220.

“trovato” (v.153) (Gallarati, *Rustico* 21).⁸ Other critics, such as Isidoro del Lungo, suppose that Brunetto might have meant that Rustico had ascended politically in Florence as a Ghibelline after the Battle of Montaperti: “in cima, par da intendere, non tanto di quel ‘trovato’ poetico, quanto dello stato civile occupato da’suoi Ghibellini” (“Un realista” 197).⁹ In my opinion both senses are possible: Brunetto likely wrote the verse to congratulate Rustico on his poetic *and* political success. Moreover, Brunetto’s appreciation of the connection between rhetoric and politics, as it emerges in *La rettorica*, *Li livres dou Tresor*, and *Il tesoretto*, further supports this possibility. In addition, the Ghibellines ruled Florence in the 1260s; as Del Lungo suggests, Rustico’s political orientation seems to have leaned more toward the Ghibelline rather than the Guelph party. However, such a claim needs proper examination. While we might assume that Rustico

⁸ See Gallarati, *Rustico* 21. Critics have been divided on Brunetto’s reference to Rustico’s “trovato” (v.153). Representing a minority of critics, Mengaldo believes that the term “trovato” implies courtly poetry because Rustico was supposedly a well-known author of love poetry (17). The majority of critics, such as Vitale, Marti, and Suitner, interpret the allusion as a reference to Rustico’s comic corpus (Vitale 104-105; Marti, *Cultura* 45-46; Suitner 30). As noted by Giovanni Galvani, the title *Favolello* refers to the poem-letter *Flabels* written a few decades earlier in Provençal by the nobleman Aimeric de Peguilhan, and sent to the satirical poet Sordello (230). By choosing to call his letter *Favolello*, Brunetto might have evoked the relationship between Peguilhan and Sordello. If we consider such allusions, we could discern with more certainty the question of what type of poetry Brunetto requests from Rustico. Brunetto, wanting to emulate Peguilhan, might have implied that Rustico’s “trovato” (v.153) is comparable to Sordello’s and thus requests some samples of Rustico’s satirical—not courtly—poetry. More specifically, considering the fact that both Peguilhan and Sordello exchanged invectives and Brunetto was an enthusiast of Cicero’s invectives, Rustico’s *trovato* could refer specifically to his invective corpus. For information regarding the invective exchange between Sordello and Peguilhan, see De Lollis 7. Galvani was the first to note the association between the *Favolello* and the *Flabels* in *Osservazioni sulla poesia de’ trovatori* (1829). Subsequently, Vincenzo Nannucci in *Manuale della letteratura del primo secolo* (1874) illustrates with convincing examples that Brunetto knew and cited passages from Peguilhan’s *Flabels* in the *Favolello* (470-71). In *De vulgari eloquentia*, Dante quotes Aimeric de Peguilhan, which suggests that Brunetto might have introduced Peguilhan’s work to Dante (II. 6). Simon Gaunt and Sarah Kay’s recent book *The Troubadours: An Introduction* (1999) discusses the importance of Sordello and Aimeric de Peguilhan (132).

⁹ See also Avalle: “Rustico, notoriamente ghibellino, era allora (dopo la vittoria di Montaperti) *in cima saluto* (v.156) era insomma sulla cresta dell’onda” (89). Gallarati discusses Avalle’s unpopular interpretation which differs from the mainstream “interpretazione vulgata” (*Rustico* 21 n 31).

had political influence in Florence during the 1260s, this does not necessarily mean, as we shall see, that he was a Ghibelline.

Recent scholars have rarely examined in depth the content of the *Favolello* as it relates to Rustico's biography, but have mentioned it only briefly to support the evidence of a "deeply-felt friendship" (Levin 4) or a "stima" (Gallarati, *Rustico* 19) between the two.¹⁰ However, closer scrutiny of the text shows that Brunetto uses explicit expressions to address Rustico, thus suggesting that the *Favolello* could have been written with other goals than to emphasize a friendship between the two or to request poetry from Rustico. Instead, Brunetto's letter suggests that mutual interests existed between both authors, interests which could have been both artistically and politically based. Brunetto went into exile from Florence in 1260 because of his allegiance to the Guelph party (Ceva 22). During this time, Florentine Ghibellines seized power in the city and forced many Guelphs into exile. During 1260-67, Brunetto had political ties with Pope Clement IV and King Charles of Anjou because he collaborated with them by composing two legal documents.¹¹ Before 1267, when the *Favolello* was almost certainly written, Brunetto was possibly seeking help from Rustico, who likely enjoyed a growing political influence

¹⁰ See for example Mengaldo 17 and Levin *Rustico* 4-5. Marrani's 1999 anthology includes no discussion or mention of Rustico's life. The only exception is Gallarati's *Rustico Filippi: Sonetti satirici e giocosi* (2005) 19-21. Gallarati includes a general discussion of the content of Brunetto's *Favolello* and offers an excellent overview about scholars' agreements and disagreements on how to interpret specific verses of the *Favolello* in relation to Rustico, though she only deals with verse 156 (21).

¹¹ As Holloway notes: "there are two legal documents penned and signed by Brunetto Latino," the first is a letter "written to the Roman Curia from Arras about notarized events on September 15 and 24, 1263, and it promised the loyalty of the exiled Florentine bankers in Arras and in Paris to the Pope's cause against Manfred" (*Twice-Told* 55-56). The second document was a letter written on the behalf of King Charles "from Bar-sur-Aube to England, April 17, 1264, [which] directly concerned England's payment of the crusading decima" (*Twice-Told* 56). Brunetto most likely made his return to Florence with the King on May 7, 1267. See Davidsohn, III 18; Ceva 29; *Il Tesoretto*, edited by Ciccuto 24.

after Montaperti: “è lecito pensare che dalla vittoria ghibellina presso Montaperti (1260) egli traesse gioia e vantaggi” (Marti, *Poeti* 29). Through Rustico, Brunetto could have sought a way to safely return to Florence around the time of the battle of Benevento (1266) when the Ghibellines were defeated and Florence was deeply divided between the Guelphs and Ghibellines (Najemy, *A History* 74).

Brunetto discloses such concerns at the beginning of the *Favolello* when he reproaches Rustico for forgetting him: “Dunque pecca e disvia / chi bono amico obria” (17-18) [So he sins and goes astray / who forgets a good friend] (translation mine). This admonition serves to remind Rustico that Brunetto hopes that he can count on him: “Rustico di Filippo, / di cui faccio mi' ceppo” (137-38) [Rustico di Filippo, / whom I make my support]. As Giovanni Zannoni notes, the expression “ceppo” (137) refers to “la base, e il piede dell'arbore, eziando quand'è tagliato da esso arbore. Qui per traslato vale sostegno” (246).¹² Brunetto indicates that he needs Rustico as “ceppo” or support and, therefore, the *Favolello* could also be intended as a formal request to maintain positive relations between the two. The close of the letter, by switching from the single pronoun “te” (136) to the plural “voi” (162), suggests that Brunetto is also changing his target

¹² Zannoni's quotation, which is also used by other critics such as Nannucci, might refer to a rubric in Laurenziano Plut.40.45. See also Nannucci 476n. The term “ceppo” could also be a sexual allusion, since Florentine merchants used the term to refer to the backing tool used during the process of “incannare” [to pierce with a stick] the silkworm during the first stage of producing the silk. See the fifteenth-century manual *L'arte della seta in Firenze*: “e alquanto adestratoti saratti adattato il *cieppo*, dentrovi due cannoni di seta cruda . . . e recati a sedere dirimpetto a detto *cieppo* mostrando a' cannoni alquanto la spalla manca” (Gargioli 5, emphasis added). Since Rustico was involved in the silk industry, he would have been familiar with such an allusion. The possibility of a sexual reference alongside the concept of friendship would strongly suggest that the relationship between Latini and Rustico was more than a simple friendship. D'Arco Avalor has also shown how Latini might have employed sexual allusions with another male poet, i.e., Bondie Dietaiuti (who corresponded also with Rustico) in his poem “S'eo son distretto jnamoratamente” (91-100). Dante probably knew more details on Brunetto's private life, and disclosed them publicly through *Inf.* XV.

addressee from an individual to a collective group. By distinctively alluding to the carats “del fiorino d’oro della Repubblica fiorentina” (Nannucci 477n 5), Brunetto is almost certainly addressing Rustico and other Florentines—more specifically other Florentine poets such as the Guelph Palamidesse di Bellindote—who were likely residing in Florence during 1260-67: “Palamidesse . . . rimasto in Firenze negli anni turbinosi della prevalenza ghibellina, aveva riferito a Latini novelle intorno alla fama poetica di Rustico di Filippo” (Ceva 99-100).¹³ Brunetto proposes to Rustico and other Florentines that they should recognize him as a true friend and, as such, weight him as fine gold (162). In other words, Brunetto requests some poems from Rustico but also takes advantage of Rustico’s influence to secure his safe return to Florence after his exile. He thus indirectly speaks to the Florentine Guelphs and Ghibellines who were residing in Florence in order to appeal to their benevolence. As Sergio Raveggi has noted, among the Guelphs who remained in Florence after the battle of Montaperti,

c’erano senza dubbio persone legate ai fuggitivi da vincoli di sangue, di consorterìa, di interessi; tra non molti mesi lo svolgersi degli eventi avrebbe fatto assumere a costoro il ruolo di quinte colonne all’interno della città nella macchinosa trama guelfa per la riconquista del potere. (21)

The fact that Brunetto mentions the Guelph Palamidesse suggests that he likely wrote the *Favoletto* to reach a mixed group of Florentines living in Florence and maintain ties with them for a potential return to his homeland.

¹³ Palamidesse, as Ruggero Palmieri shows, was almost certainly a Guelph: “I suoi voti erano dunque, come ognuno vede, per l’Angioino. Di spiriti guelfi, Palamidesse rintuzza bravamente l’avversario” (140). See also Folena 38-39; Holloway *Twice-Told* 56 and 69-71.

Overall then, the *Favolello* provides us with a great deal of information about Rustico: first, it testifies to his political and artistic prominence in late thirteenth-century Florence; second, it helps us narrow Rustico's date of birth to c.1230; third, it suggests that the poet was residing in the city during the Guelph and Ghibelline wars of the late 1260s; finally, it documents the relationship between Rustico and Brunetto, a Guelph expatriate seeking his help—as well as his poetry—in order to safely return to Florence.

In addition to the *Favolello*, Francesco da Barberino's *I Documenti d'Amore* [Teachings of Love, c.1309-1316] mentions Rustico directly in the Latin gloss which accompanies the main text in the Florentine vernacular.¹⁴ As most recent critics note, this document offers additional evidence of Rustico's prominence among his contemporaries: “written within two decades of Rustico's death, the commentator mentions Rustico and provides a brief description of his comic works” (Alfie, “The Morality” 48). Although Rustico scholars have often mentioned Francesco's literary evidence, they have rarely examined in detail how *I Documenti* relates to Rustico and Francesco da Barberino's specific social and political framework. A close examination of Francesco's text through a political and social lens offers a different interpretation of the passage in question, and suggests that the allusion to Rustico was far more politically charged than modern readers might expect. I shall briefly introduce Francesco's work, articulating its social and

¹⁴ *I Documenti d'Amore* was written in the vernacular “accompanied by Francesco's own translations and glosses in Latin” (Allaire 365). As Gloria Allaire has recently noted, “the dates of composition have been much disputed, but the text was probably begun before 1309 and finished by 1315” (365). Allaire's speculation agrees with most scholars. See Crane: “The *Documenti d'Amore* was probably composed during the author's stay in Provence, from 1309 to 1313, although it was not completed until his return to Italy in 1313” (360). Ciociola also confirms that Francesco da Barberino completed and published the work in Florence: “*I Documenti d'Amore*, pubblicati tuttavia non prima del 1314” (424). I would extend the possible date of publication of the *Documenti* based on Ortiz's evidence. Ortiz persuasively suggests that Barberino returned to Florence in 1316 because on that year “il nostro Francesco trovò comodo approfittare dell'indulto concesso ai fuoriusciti dal Conte Guido di Battifolle” (20).

political significance in fourteenth-century Florence, to interpret the passage that mentions Rustico in a different perspective and propose a more politically based reading of the gloss. If we approach Francesco's passage from this perspective, we will be able to gain more understanding of the political and social role that Rustico played in Florence during the late Middle Ages.

I Documenti is a didactic and allegorical treatise written to provide men of the noble class with precepts on how to behave properly in social situations, as for example “per la conversazione, per il modo di salutare, per i tornei, e con delle precise ‘cortesie da desco’” (Segre, “Le forme” 95). As Cesare Segre notes, the addressees of this work were almost certainly the rich upper bourgeoisie: “nonostante che egli mostri di rivolgersi soprattutto a signori e cavalieri (paradigmi di vita cortese), . . . il suo orizzonte continua a essere quello dell’alta borghesia notarile, commerciale e professionistica” (“Le forme” 95). The fact that the addressees were putatively nobles and rich bourgeois is significant, because they were the political and social elite who ruled Florence during the time Francesco wrote *I Documenti*. Furthermore, it suggests not only Francesco's prominent role in the Florentine society of early fourteenth-century Florence, but also specifies his political allegiance to the Florentine élite. Francesco was trying to restore his reputation during the time *I Documenti* was published (c.1314-16), since he was recently readmitted to Florence after his banishment from the city.¹⁵ If we consider this specific

¹⁵ Like Dante, Francesco wrote a letter to Henry VII; Francesco was probably banished because this letter singled him out as a Ghibelline. As Ortiz comments “il 1313 il nostro Messer Francesco . . . se ne tornava a Firenze. . . ebbe però la non gradita sorpresa di vedersi chiudere le porte in faccia da’ suoi concittadini, che lo cacciarono in bando per le sue idee troppo Ghibelline” (20). In the *Documenti* he was most likely trying to prove himself loyal to the Guelph government of Florence.

sociopolitical context, then Francesco's mention of Rustico in *I Documenti* gains a political connotation which would help us to add more pertinent information about Rustico's importance as a political poet during this time.

The passage in question mentions Rustico in connection with those who circulate writings against women of the nobility. Erasmo Percopo summarizes Francesco's reference to Rustico's invectives against noblewomen and observes how it clarifies a distinction between two types of women:

Messer Francesco . . . non parla in quel luogo delle malvage e volgari donne, né di quelle che s'amano carnalmente; ma delle nobili e gentili signore, delle oneste morigerate mogli e figliuole dei principi e dei padroni, di quelle, cioè che amino secondo le leggi dell'amor cavalleresco.
(Percopo "Il Fiore" 51)

Recent critics such as Mengaldo generalize too broadly from Francesco's evidence and conclude that Rustico was renowned for his poetry against *all* women, thus labeling his poetry as misogynist in a general sense: "Francesco da Barberino lo nomina nei suoi *Documenti d'Amore* come autore *vituperia* contro le donne" (Mengaldo 17).¹⁶ However, a closer look at Francesco's text shows that Rustico is mentioned not as a misogynist in a general sense, because the gloss draws a clear distinction between women of the nobility ("dominas") and lusty females ("quas quidam amant carnaliter"), as well as ridiculing women from low social status ("vilibus mulierculis"). As we shall see, the sentences that

¹⁶ Most critics accept this interpretation, beginning with Marti, who interprets Francesco's quotation as a charge of misogyny launched against Rustico. However, Marti neither clarifies the nature of this charge against Rustico nor provides any examples to support it. Marti goes so far as to make Rustico the main spokesman of misogynist literature: "Rustico vi è presentato, a dir poco, come principale esponente della letteratura misogina" (*Cultura* 46). See also Vitale: "Francesco da Barberino . . . attesta l'appartenenza di Rustico alla tradizione antifemminista" (104). More recently, Gallarati too defines Rustico as a vituperator of women, one who has been deceived: "Nel secondo decennio del Trecento Francesco da Barberino ricorda Rustico come vituperatore delle donne e misogino pentito e beffato" (*Rustico* 23).

precede Barberino's direct reference to Rustico make such a distinction clear, but scholars often overlook these loci when they quote Francesco's gloss and analyze only the short passage that mentions the poet's name.¹⁷ Unfortunately, by examining such a limited amount of text, they fail to frame Francesco's important evidence in its entirety and miss its social and political dimension.

Shortly before the passage that mentions Rustico Filippi, Francesco introduces the example of Saint Augustine, who is employed to illustrate how a man should address noblewomen and exactly what type of women should be praised and addressed with benevolence:

Sed super lictera ista (Augustinus) loquitur non de dominabus quas quidam amant carnaliter, sed de coniuntis et de illis que presunt nobis, scilicet quia viri eorum sunt domini nostri. (II, 58)¹⁸

¹⁷ Alfie's recent study "The Morality of Misogyny: The Case of Rustico Filippi, Vituperator of Women" (2004) addresses at length the issue of misogyny in Rustico's writings. Alfie provides an exhaustive overview of the link between love and comic poetry based on misogynistic motifs and explores the moral value of poetry written against all women as it relates to the didactic practice of "praising the virtuous or of condemning the sinful" ("The Morality" 50). By associating Rustico's comic poetry with a "long tradition of misogynistic, or misogamous, texts," Alfie emphasizes the intertextuality with other medieval texts and their relations to ethical models ("The Morality" 59). Overall, he is very persuasive in his exploration of the morality of misogyny in Rustico and provides an excellent gloss of the quotation that mentions the poet; however, his study is based on only three lines of Francesco's *I Documenti d'Amore* ("The Morality" 48). Alfie's study should be supplemented by an examination of the gloss in the wider context of *I Documenti* to specify what types of women Francesco was referring to, and investigate possible ways in which Rustico's vituperative poetry could have been construed in a social and political context by his contemporaries.

¹⁸ All quotations from Francesco da Barberino's *I Documenti d'Amore* are from Marco Albertazzi's edition (2008). This edition is the most recent one available of Barberino's gloss and corrects Francesco Egidi's previous semidiplomatic edition (1905-1927) which does not include any modern punctuation in the Latin gloss and contains many errors of transcriptions and misunderstandings of abbreviations (see Albertazzi vol. 1 xiv). Albertazzi changes the spelling of a few words in transcribing the passage that mentions Rustico, thus providing a reading that slightly differs from Egidi's; see for example his "corum" and "laudiam" instead of Egidi's "eorum" and "laudis;" cfr. Egidi's edition, 190-91. Albertazzi's is the only recent edition (2008) after Egidi's to include the entire work by Barberino. To my knowledge, there is no English translation of this text, so all English translations are mine.

[But also in this letter (Augustine) does not speak about women who love lustfully, but about spouses and about those who govern us, that is whose men are our masters.] (translation mine)

Here Francesco issues explicit guidelines on how to address women, and so this section should be understood in the larger context of the “documentum sextum” (II, 77) where he illustrates general teachings on how to speak with people: “Insegnamenti intorno al parlare con la gente” (Egidi, IV 102). The gloss employs the example of Augustine in order to counsel male readers on how to speak to a woman, so it seeks to provide a positive model of behavior.

However, Francesco does not generally say that a man must avoid condemning *all* women; rather he makes clear that especially honorable women with a good reputation should be addressed with kindness because they are well established in society and married to highly regarded men well placed in the government. In the context of Barberino’s addressees, these men were almost certainly the rulers of Florence. Francesco specifically directs men to praise women of a distinct social group and indirectly admonishes his readers to respect the husbands of these women, i.e., political leaders of Florence. Such a position is further confirmed and endorsed by Francesco himself, who declares—disclosing his political stance—his agreement with Augustine: “Credo consilium Augustini” (II, 58) [I believe Augustine’s advice] (translation mine). Francesco is prompt to disclose his support of the current Florentine government because he was promoting his name during the time *I Documenti* was published (c.1314-16), as

previously mentioned.¹⁹ After this precept and political statement, Francesco then offers to readers the countermodel of blame and introduces those who, instead of praising such noble and worthy women, write poetry against them. The commentator identifies first a generic symbolic countermodel, described with the epithet “viro indecens” [indecent man], and then more specifically associated with poets such as Rustico:

Sed presertim viro indecens comprobatur ut presentibus et etiam absentibus dominabus te ad loquendum dirigas contras eas. Et quidam sunt qui nituntur cotidie ut auctoritates que faciant contra eas [dominas] exquirant, et eorum fame detrahant et honori hos enim tales sepe vidi magis quam alios etiam a vilibus mulierculis decipi et ligari. Quid enim Rusticus Barbutus et alii quidam laudiam, ex vituperiis per eos impintis contra dominas reportarunt ? Videant quot et qui eorum super hiis scripta honorant. De hiis quidam que ad ipsarum laudem pertinent habes supra documento secundo satis plene, et quid etiam contra malas (II, 58)

[But especially for a man it is confirmed by the noblewomen as indecent that you direct yourself towards speaking against them, whether they are present or absent. And there are those who strive every day as authorities, who make it so as to cause enquiries to be made against them [noblewomen], whose reputation and honor they disparage. Indeed, I have often seen such individuals, more than others, deceived and tied up in knots even by vile worthless women. Why did in fact Rusticus the bearded and some others receive praise for the insults imposed against noblewomen ? Let them see how many and who, superior to them, honor their writings. Of these certain individuals (or writings) you have more than enough in the second document some of these refer to the praise of

¹⁹ The fact that he specifically evokes the name of Rustico could also imply that he wanted to distance himself from his past political legacy that caused his banishment from Florence—and especially distancing himself from the legacy of Rustico’s sons—who during the years *I Documenti* was published were exiled from Florence because of their polemical attitude against the Guelph government. See also Ciociola: Francesco da Barberino “confidò nell’imperatore Arrigo VII, al quale indirizzò un’epistola latina. Qualche tempo dopo la morte dell’imperatore fu riammesso in Firenze” (424). As Mario Alessandrini notes, Francesco gained recognition and acceptance in the Guelph government and was later in charge of the Florentine Inquisition and responsible for the burning at the stake of Cecco d’Ascoli in 1327: “Francesco da Barberino. . .resse l’ufficio dal 1326 al 1329, tristemente famoso per la condanna e il supplizio di Cecco d’Ascoli, avvenuto il 16 settembre 1327” (22).

these women, and you also have something against the bad ones.]
(Translation mine)²⁰

Overall, the *Documenti d'Amore* allows us to better frame Rustico and his poetry within his social and political context. Francesco clarifies that Rustico's invectives do ridicule some women, but not a generic and abstract group; instead, he narrows the focus of Rustico's target of attack by mentioning that his poems clash with a well-defined social and political circle that includes not only noblewomen but also their respective husbands and family members. In such a context, Rustico's poetic attacks on the honor and reputation of "dominas" and upper bourgeoisie could be perceived less as an expression of a literary tradition of "misogyny" (hatred of women) and more as a political threat to the reputation of Guelph governors. In other words, this passage could also be interpreted as a statement against Rustico and his followers who are remembered because they cast blame on highly regarded wives of influential politicians. The criticism that emerges from this evidence contains strong political connotations directed against Rustico and his poetic legacy which are both said to subvert the high rank of society. Thus, they are used as a countermodel of honest men and, as such, should be reprehended by the target readers of *I Documenti*.²¹

²⁰ I would like to thank professor Cristina Calhoon, Martha Bayless, Mary Jaeger, and Phebe Lowell Bowditch for their helpful insights and comments on my translations. Any remaining errors are mine.

²¹ Francesco might also indirectly imply that Rustico's writings are not models to follow because they represent a threat both to noblewomen and, most importantly, to their husbands' reputations. The notoriety of Rustico's writing shows that it could effectively have brought instability and uproar in Florence, especially if Rustico's slanders were received positively by a portion of the Florentine population. As we shall see later in this chapter, the charge of sedition against Rustico seems to run in his family, as it is also confirmed by the exile of his two sons from Florence in c.1308-1313. Rustico might have targeted only noblewomen for specific political purposes. His sonnets indeed attack noblewomen such as "Monna Nese" "Madonna Tana" or "Chierma" see Gallarati, *Sonetti* 154, 178, 200.

By drawing such a clear distinction between Rustico and the nobility of Florence, the gloss also helps us to frame the poet socially in his Florentine environment. Francesco suggests that Rustico was detached from the nobility and associated more with Florentine citizens of low social birth, or *popolani*, who by implication are neither the intended audience of Francesco's work nor the bourgeois citizens who belonged to Francesco's social class.²² The *popolani* constituted almost an independent group within the political arena of thirteenth-century Florence and gained formal political recognition in 1293 with the Ordinances of Justice: "Side-by-side with the elite was the class that sometimes cooperated with it, sometimes challenged it, and which, in Florence as elsewhere, was called the "popolo" (Najemy, *A History* 35). As Najemy concisely defines it, the term *popolani* referred "to non-elite citizens, sometimes including the laboring classes of artisans and salaried workers" (*A History* 35). Rustico's social association with the *popolani* is further confirmed by a clear reference in Francesco's text. Francesco recalls that he had seen frequently such slanderers of dignified citizens being ironically punished by "vilibus mulierculis" (worthless women), suggesting that baseborn women had often confronted these poets publicly, and deceived and publicly humiliated them.²³ The dismissive expression "vilibus mulierculis" could be intended both in a moral sense, as an expression of scorn launched against women of low integrity, but also in a social sense,

²² As Ortiz notes, evidence shows that Francesco da Barberino was part of the elite bourgeoisie and was not associated with the *popolani* (19).

²³ As previously noted, Gallarati interprets this reference as directed to Rustico who is "beffato" by women (*Rustico Filippi* 23). To my knowledge, only Contini raises doubts about this sentence, questioning the assumption that it refers to Rustico: "non è affatto detto che l'allusione vada anche a Rustico" (*Poeti* II 353).

to define women of low social status.²⁴ Francesco suggests an association between these types of women and poets like Rustico, stating that through these “mulierculas,” poets often receive their retribution. However, Francesco does not evoke this curious episode to provide a model of justice, because in the following sentence he clarifies that only the prominent individuals in the social hierarchy, i.e., the men above these authors (“qui. . . super hiis”), are entitled to appropriately punish Rustico and his followers.²⁵ The sentence “Videant quot et qui eorum super hiis scripta honorant” [They shall see how many and who, superior to them, honor their writings] contains a sarcastic undertone that critics have rarely noticed. Barberino sardonically declares that the men above Rustico and his fellow poets would show them how they would properly “honor” them. These individuals “super hiis” are most likely the men addressed earlier as “domini nostri” (our masters), i.e., Guelph governors of Florence. It is likely that these powerful noblemen would not have looked kindly on slanderous remarks against their wives.

²⁴ The term “muliercula,” a diminutive of “mulier” or woman, could be translated as “little woman” or “woman of little value.” Augustine often uses this term. See for example Augustine’s *Confessions*: “Utrum hoc mulierculae sinerent” (Book VI, 24, emphasis added). The tenth-century dramatist and poet Hrotsvitha uses the same term “vilis mulierculae” in an epistle to describe herself and her work and presenting the term in a strict moral sense: “Hrotsvitha designates herself a *vilis muliercula* as regards her writing; she knows she can be censored as *lasciva* for her fascination with Terence and for some of her own choices of subject-matter” (Dronke, *Women Writers* 78). Francesca L’Hoir notes that the term could designate both women of low social birth as well as of immoral character: “Tacitus uses the diminutive *muliercula* as *meretrix* or *concupina* (121 n 7). The term also could refer to a working woman: “In early medieval Latin, however, the term generally seems to imply lowly social status” (Nelson 203 n 17).

²⁵ Alfie translates “super hiis” as “beyond themselves”: “let them see how many—and who—honor their writings *beyond themselves*” (“The Morality” 48, emphasis added). However “hiis” is not a reflexive pronoun and cannot be translated with “themselves.” The reflexive pronoun “themselves” would have been expressed in Latin with “iisdem.” “Hiis”—ablative form of “is”—is a preposition of location indicating in this context someone placed higher than someone else. Dante, in *De monarchia* uses the same expression to place the institution of empire above all institutions: “Est ergo temporalis Monarchia, quam dicunt Imperium, unicus principatus et super omnes in tempore vel in hiis et *super hiis* que tempore mensurantur” (I.2) [‘Temporal Monarchy,’ which is commonly called ‘empire,’ is the political supremacy of one, and it is over all things temporal, or more precisely, among and over all things that are measured by time”] (Kay 7).

Overall, Francesco's *I Documenti d'Amore*, like Brunetto's *Favolello*, confirms that although Rustico was not associated with the nobility or the Guelph party, he was an influential poet who expressed his views in the political arena of thirteenth-century Florence. As a prominent citizen-poet, Rustico was almost certainly an influential voice whose invectives could have contained controversial sociopolitical messages that were possibly well received by a good portion of his contemporary *popolani*. His invectives might also have caused him serious harm, given his criticism of elite members of the Guelph nobility highly placed in the Florentine government, after 1267, following the battle of Benevento.

Traces in the Historical Record

This initial evidence offers us only a general portrait of Rustico; to establish a more detailed account of his life, we must turn to the archives. Unfortunately, as we shall see, the evidence currently available is surprisingly scarce and pertains not to Rustico directly but rather to his father and sons.²⁶ Tommaso Casini, the first scholar to research the poet, has documented that Rustico was not of aristocratic lineage; his father, Filippo di Rustico, had worked in the textile business producing silk in the neighborhood of

²⁶ Casini speculates that the reason why we possess so little evidence on Rustico's life is probably that Rustico belonged to a low social class, so no notaries or chroniclers recorded his deeds because he was considered socially inferior: "non si trova il nome suo nelle croniche ove sono rassegnati gli esuli guelfi e ghibellini delle varie proscrizioni e cacciate succedutesi fino al 1267; poichè è noto che i cronisti registrarono pur le principali casate, e il nostro Rustico, sebbene domestico dei nobili magnati e dei cittadini grandi, par che fosse popolano, di quell ceto cioè nel quale non si ha diritto al ricordo della storia se non si compie qualche singolarissimo atto" (230).

Santa Maria Novella from 1226 (230).²⁷ Vincenzo Federici has uncovered evidence that in 1286 Rustico's son, Lapo, joined the silk guild: "Lapus Rustici . . . nel 1286 giura nell'arte della seta" (xv). The information provided by both scholars strongly suggests that Rustico was an artisan or merchant as well, since he inherited the silk trade from his father and passed it on to his son.²⁸ Because he was not of noble origin, did not rank high among the *arti maggiori*, and had some seven children, he experienced some economic difficulties.²⁹ The notarial document *Protocollo di Ser Lapo Gianni* confirms such a possibility as it records several lawsuits against Rustico's sons, Lippo and Guccio, who on two occasions in 1299 failed to pay their debts. First, "Lippus quondam Rustici Filippi . . . fecit Guccionem eius fratrem . . . licet absentem . . . ad agendum et defendendum recipiendum et petendum debita sua" (Federici 58) [Lippo of the late

²⁷ Federici also adds that Rustico's father joined the guild of the cloth industry: "giura . . . in quella della Callemala nel 1238" (xvi).

²⁸ Casini and Federici consulted the *Matricole dell'arte della seta* from Florentine archives. However, Ireneo Sanesi criticized Federici's conclusions because "non è sicuro (benchè il F. creda esser probabile) se egli fu iscritto, oppure no, all'arte della seta o a quella dei mercanti" ("Review of Federici" 194). The *Matricole dell'arte della seta* may not provide documentation on Rustico. However, since both Rustico's father and his son were registered in the guild of silk, there is a strong possibility that Rustico too was involved in this trade. The Florentine historian Benedetto Varchi, in his *Storia Fiorentina*, described the prerequisites needed to be part of the Florentine guilds during the time of the *Comuni*: "Burghers were obliged to rank in one of the twenty-one arts, (...) 1. Judges and notaries. 2. Calimala, or cloth industry. 3. Banking. 4. Wool. 5. Silk. 6. Physicians and apothecaries. 7. Furriers. 8. Shoemakers. 9. Blacksmiths. 10. Butchers. 11. Linen drapers and clothesmen. 12. Masons and stonecutters. 13. Vintners. 14. Innkeepers. 15. Oil sellers, rope makers. 16. Hosiers. 17. Armorers. 18. Locksmiths. 19. Saddlers. 20. Carpenters. 21. Bakers. The last fourteen were called the Lesser Arts" (qtd. in Thompson, *Economic* 27). For primary documentation pertaining to the 1295 *Ordinamenti di giustizia*, see Salvemini 385.

²⁹ "È probabile che . . . non riuscì, o per incuria o per la numerosa prole, a procacciarsi una condizione agiata, se prestiamo fede a Jacopo da Leona, che gli fa dire di non poter maritare le figliuole, perchè non potrebbe dotarle neppure di una culla" (x). For Rustico's family tree see V. Federici xvi. Vitale succinctly lists Federici's findings: "I figli di lui Guccio e Lippo. . . Lapo detto pentolino . . . di un altro figlio ci dà testimonianza Rustico stesso nel son. XVII: 'ed in ischiera v'è Lippo e Cantino'; di alcune figlie parla pure il poeta stesso nel medesimo sonetto: 'le mie fanciulle gridano a vivanda' e conferma Jacopo da Leona" (105).

Rustico Filippi . . . appointed Guccione his brother . . . while absent . . . to act, preserve, return, and petition his debts] (translation mine). In another occurrence Lippo and Guccio failed to return money loaned by Puccino Iacobi:

Puccinus quondam Jacobi. . . fuit confessus se, ex causa mutui, habuisse a Lippo, quondam Rustici Philippi populi S. Marie novelle, dante et prestante pro se ipso et Guccio, eius fratre, ex utroque parente, tres florenos auri, quos promisit quilibet in solidum-dictus ut fideiussor, eidem Lippo et Guccio et cuilibet eorum reddere, hinc ad sex menses proximos. (Federici 57)³⁰

[Puccino of the late Jacobius . . . avowed, for the lawsuit of the loan, that he had given and loaned to Lippo, of the late Rustico Filippi of the district of Saint Maria Novella, to him in person and Guccio, his brother, of full blood, three gold Florins, which he promised to return the entire amount as guarantor, for the aforesaid Lippo and Guccio and for any of them, hence within the next six months.] (translation mine)

Rustico's other son, Lapo Filippi, also experienced pecuniary embarrassments during the time his father was alive and before joining the silk industry in 1286. As documented by a letter composed by merchants from Piacenza addressed to the Consuls of the Calimala Guild, he was in Lagny, France in 1278 as the "fattore e socio della compagnia Grisi e Adimari di Firenze" (Peruzzi 184). The business partnership took an unexpected twist when Lapo supposedly took from his associates a large sum of money and ran away from France to Florence: "*Lapus filius Rustici, mercante fiorentino, era fuggito con danari altrui*".³¹ The money that he allegedly stole consisted of a large sum of "lire tornesi 1065

³⁰ I modified the expression "in solidum-dictus" from Federici's original transcription (which originally reads "in solida fides") following Vittorio Cian's correction; see Cian, "Review of Federici" 154. Cian notes and corrects some of Federici's errors of transcriptions from the *Protocollo di Ser Lapo Gianni*; see Federici 57.

³¹ Federici mentions this evidence hesitantly in a footnote because he is not sure whether it should be attributed to Rustico's son (xv n 10). Critics have not explored or mentioned this suggestion in any subsequent studies on Rustico. The exception is Isidoro Del Lungo who mentions this evidence while

di Ottone Agnelli e Guglielmo e Gherardo Clapacci mercanti piacentini, e di lire 56 tornesi di Bernardo Landi pure mercante di Piacenza” (Peruzzi 184). In 1279, because the complaint was unsuccessful, the former partners of Lapo appealed to the captain and chief magistrate of Florence (Peruzzi 185). Since no document records any compensation or repossession after 1279, it is likely that Lapo never returned the amount stolen. This evidence shows that Rustico’s family experienced some controversial moments due to economic difficulties, which is also confirmed by some of his poems (Federici x).

Although Lapo Filippi experienced some difficulties during his youth, it is possible that he gained political recognition in Florence in his maturity. In the *Consulte della repubblica fiorentina*, I found a further reference to Rustico's son Lapo Filippi which does not seem to have been noticed before. The reference could be very likely attributed to Rustico's son because it coincides with other evidence also found by Federici.³² This new evidence refers to an individual from the neighborhood of Santa Maria Maggiore, not Rustico’s official residence of Santa Maria Novella. However, other sources documented by Federici indicate that Lapus switched residence from Santa Maria Novella to Santa Maria del Campo: “Lapus, filius Rustechi, popule sancte Marie in

commenting Jacopo Da Leona’s poem “Signori, udite strano malificio” which was sent to Rustico: “Questa testimonianza a Rustico . . . la si adatterebbe invece a uno di quei quattro figlioli suoi, Lapo di Rustico vocato Pentolino, se proprio fu lui un Lapo di Rustico che i custodi della fiera di Sciampagna denunziavano nel 79 ai consoli dell’Arte di Calimala siccome fuggitosene con denari altrui” (“Un realista” 437). In the sonnet, the poet Jacopo da Leona mentions Rustico’s sons and seems to explicitly allude to Lapus Filippi when he accuses Rustico of stealing from his friends or business associates; see line 13 of Jacopo’s poem “torre a’compagni non mi comparisce” (13); (Marti *Poeti* 97). See also Del Lungo, “Un realista” 436-37.

³² See the references to “Lapus Rustici” and to “Lippus quondam Rustici Filippi” (Federici xv).

campo” (xv).³³ The evidence I found, if it indeed refers to the poet’s son, refers to the years 1295-96 and mentions that Lapus was elected one of Florence’s mayors during the time of the uprising of the *popolo* against the Magnati (though no source is available to calculate for how long he was a mayor):

Constituti fuerunt syndici ser Testa Iohannis populi Sancti Benedecti et
Lapus filius Filippi populi Sancte Marie Maioris. (Gherardi *Consulte* 559)

[Appointed mayors were Sir Testa Iohannis from the district of Saint
Benedict and Lapus son of Filippi of the district of Saint Mary Major.]
(translation mine)

This reference could plausibly be to Rustico’s family because the Lapus in question is not a nobleman, being addressed without the title “ser” in contrast to the other elected mayor, *Ser Testa Iohannis*. This finding further supports the claim that Rustico and his family were politically active in Florence. Though the document does not mention Rustico directly, it constitutes an important addition to Rustico’s biography because it will more securely date his life: Rustico was most likely still alive in 1296 since there is no reference to “quondam” [deceased] in the document. There is a gap to fill, since no documents have been found between 1291 and 1300 to confirm exactly when Rustico died.³⁴ If confirmed, this discovery would support the claim that Rustico was still alive in 1295-96 but no longer living after 1300.

³³ Federici also notes: “la diversità di popolo non farebbe grave difficoltà, sapendosi che, anche a quei tempi, gli scambi di abitazione da popolo a popolo erano comunissimi, come sempre, anche a Firenze” (xv).

³⁴ Based on his findings, Federici concludes: “il rimatore viveva ancora nel periodo che corre dagli anni 1286 al 1291” (xv) because the name of Rustico’s sons Guccio and Lapus “ricorre in atti dell’Archivio fiorentino nel 1290 e 1291, mentre ancora viveva Rustico (‘Lapus filus Rustechi, populi S. Marie in campo’ e ‘Guccio filio Rustechi’)” (Vitale 105).

As previously noted, after the Battle of Montaperti (1260) Rustico may have enjoyed political influence in Florence. It is the popular belief that Rustico sided with the Ghibelline party (Gallarati, *Rustico* 18-19). To my knowledge, Vittorio Cian is the only critic who believes that Rustico was a Guelph: “Rustico, pur essendo a quanto pare, guelfo, ma temperato, non nascondeva certe sue simpatie per la causa ghibellina” (*La satira* 137). Mario Marti, along with the majority of critics, believes that Rustico “era fieramente ghibellino” (*Poeti* 29). However, critics have not provided concrete evidence to support this claim.³⁵ Marti declares that Rustico expresses his political affiliation obviously and openly through his sonnets (*Poeti* 29). This assertion is still unsatisfactory because it relies on literary evidence rather than historical and factual documents, which is probably why there is some disagreement. Unlike all the other authors in this study, for whom we have evidence of their direct involvements in battles, no archival documents mention that Rustico undertook any action in Florence during his life. All evidence bearing on his life is scarce and mentions him only indirectly, through his sons. From these few and indirect references, scholars have reconstructed Rustico’s life and political affiliation. However, because all the information regarding him has been reconstructed from indirect sources, any conclusion drawn therefrom must be handled with extreme caution until we find further evidence that mentions his direct involvement in the *comune*. This caveat should also be applied to any speculation about his political orientation.³⁶

³⁵ Sanesi is accurate when he writes that “non è neppure sicuro se e quale parte prendesse alle vicende politiche di Firenze” (“Review of Federici” 194).

³⁶ Unfortunately, modern critics do not often display such prudence, especially when providing entries for encyclopedias. Joan Levin in *Medieval Italy: An Encyclopedia* (2004), for example, takes it for granted that “Rustico was an ardent Ghibelline” (993).

The documented Ghibelline affiliation of Rustico's two sons, Guccio and Lippo, might indirectly indicate that Rustico was a Ghibelline or even a White Guelph. Federici has noted that the *Libro dei Guelfi e dei Ghibellini* registers in 1313 that Lippo and Guccio were Ghibellines who were "eccettuati e non riammessi cogli altri banditi e ribelli l'anno 1311 a tempo di Arrigo VII, imperatore" (Federici 58). The *Libro del chiodo*, compiled by prominent Guelph leaders of the government of Florence, contains "copie di documenti trecenteschi relativi alle vicende della guerra contro Arrigo VII e gli accusati di ghibellinismo" (Ricciardelli xiv). A provision confirms the banishment from Florence in 1311 of Rustico's sons together with Dante: "Lippus et Ghuccius R(ust)icchi Barbuti Populi Sancte Marie Novelle . . . Dante Allegherii" (Ricciardelli 300, 305).³⁷ Though this 1311 stipulation absolves a number of Ghibellines previously exiled, it confirms the banishment of Rustico's sons, whose exile from Florence most likely dated back to 1308. They were probably banished in 1308 because the document states that all the individuals mentioned were expelled from Florence "pro aliquo mallefitio reali vel personali conmisso de mense octubris millesimo trecentesimo octavo" (Ricciardi 294) [for any criminal activity either public or private committed during the month of October 1308] (translation mine). As Fabrizio Ricciardelli notes, this provision, "pur assolvendo dalle precedenti condanne molti proscritti reitera il bando contro un consistente gruppo di

³⁷ I extended the abbreviation in parenthesis since Fabrizio Ricciardelli transcribed it diplomatically as "Ricchi Barbuti" (300). It is evident that it refers to Rustico Filippi's sons as the terms "barbuto" and "Sancte Marie Novelle" match Rustico's nickname and district respectively. See the photographic reproduction of the document in the appendix to this chapter. Many Ghibelline and White Guelph refugees were in Verona during 1308-1313 with Dante among them from 1312 to 1319 (Mazzotta 8). It is possible that Rustico's sons were residing in Verona as well and thus could have met Dante who shared their political views and was also both their compatriot and peer. Rustico's sons could both have been either Ghibellines, White Guelphs, or even insurgents against the Florentine Black Guelph government.

avversari giudicati irriducibili . . . di chi risultò aver militato nelle file dell'imperatore Arrigo VII e altro ancora" (x). Rustico's sons were among the pro-Ghibellines and insurgents belonging to the list contained in this provision. Thus they were unyieldingly opposed to the government, had ties to the Emperor Henry VII, and were considered traitors and rebels; as a result, they were banished from Florence. Overall, this evidence clarifies that Lippo and Guccio were both exiled from the Guelph government of Florence from 1308, and their banishment was reconfirmed in 1311 and 1313 due to their support of Emperor Henry VII.³⁸ This fact suggests that like Dante they were considered a reasonable threat to the *comune*, first because their banishment was irrevocable, and second because their exile lasted beyond the death of Henry VII (Ricciardi 294). Their political activism, considered a real threat to the stability of the Florentine government, provides further evidence that their father Rustico was almost certainly active as well. As we shall see, the possibility that Rustico was active does not equal that he was a devoted

³⁸ No critics seem to have employed this evidence in Rustico's biography, using instead Federici's findings published in 1899. However, Federici states incorrectly that Lippo and Guccio were "condannati da Arrigo VII, nel 1313" (x, xi). The *Libro del Chiodo* clearly states that the condemned were Ghibellines and rebels against the Guelph government of Florence. After he was crowned in Rome, from 1312 to his death in 1313, the emperor Henry VII marched against Florence and the Guelphs of Tuscany with all the Ghibellines (Bowsky, *Henry VII* 164-65). Rustico's sons, as Ghibellines and/or rebels, were on the side of the emperor rather than on the Guelph *comune* of Florence. The *Libro del Chiodo* does not state that the Emperor ever condemned those banished in the list, mainly because they were actually supporting him and conspiring with him against Florence. It is almost certain that Federici mistakenly reported the data from the *Libro dei Guelfi e dei Ghibellini*, which does not seem surprising judging from Vittorio Cian's review of Federici's study. In his review, Cian highlights Federici's errors of transcription: "Debbo dire tuttavia che a dubitar forse dell'esattezza della lettura e delle trascrizioni fatte dal F(ederici) m'induce il confronto d'uno dei documenti da lui pubblicati in appendice" ("Review" 154). Federici's error is unfortunately present in some sources, especially encyclopedias of Italian literature. See for example Arielle Saiber's "Rustico Filippi," in *The Encyclopedia of Italian Literary Studies* (2007), which inaccurately states that Rustico "had . . . at least two sons of whom may have been exiled by Henry VII of Luxemburg" (1637, emphasis added). Instead, this encyclopedia entry should read that Rustico's sons have been exiled during Henry VII's arrival in Italy. Also, the date of their banishment should be rectified in order to avoid errors like that of Giorgio Inglese, who writes in the *Dizionario bio-bibliografico* that they were banished in 1313 instead of 1311 or almost certainly since 1308: "risulta che Guccio e Lippo di R(ustico) fossero banditi nel 1313" (1553).

Ghibelline, a White Guelph, or an insurgent like his two sons. His invectives express only sympathy for the Ghibellines, rather than an ardent loyalty, and often adopt a position of political moderation as some of them question and ridicule individual Ghibellines. In addition, the fact that no evidence exists to document that he was ever exiled from Florence in 1260 or 1267 (when Florence was first ruled by the Ghibellines and then by the Guelphs respectively) suggests that he was never considered a serious threat to either the Guelph or Ghibelline parties. On the contrary, as Latini and Francesco da Francesco suggests, he had a prominent position in Florentine civic affairs. Overall, Rustico could be perceived as a political moderate who was not excessively loyal to the ideals of either the Guelphs (like Brunetto) or the Ghibellines/White Guelphs (like his two sons). As we shall see, his poetry adopts a much broader political perspective, and is not restricted to a single party but rather the common civic interest of his native *comune*.

Most recent critics, such as Gallarati, have relied on the poems “A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura” and “Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza,” to evaluate Rustico’s political affiliation, as they seem to favor the Ghibelline party (*Rustico* 19). However, a careful examination of his poetic corpus shows that Rustico deliberately addresses both Guelphs and Ghibellines, attacking and ridiculing both: “ma non solamente ai guelfi rivolgeva i suoi motti e le arguzie il nostro Rustico, sì spesso e volentieri anche ai Ghibellini” (Casini 248). This is evident from “A voi, messer Iacopo comare” where Rustico ridicules a Ghibelline and fellow poet. Thus, Rustico could be perceived as a flexible Ghibelline—perhaps even a nonpartisan—and militant poet. Some scholars confirm this suggestion by positing Rustico as a political and moral activist in the

numerous struggles and tensions of mid-thirteenth-century Florence. As Isidoro Del Lungo notes, Rustico “rinfaccia ai Guelfi la viltà ingenerosa di dare addosso ai caduti” (“Un realista” 195). Tommaso Casini also believes that “il rimatore fiorentino . . . ha un intendimento molto serio e del riso si vale come di uno strumento alla correzione del costume corrotto e del sentimento traviato” (244).³⁹ Even though Rustico’s political affiliation is not currently the object of debate among scholars, we should restore in the modern debate the arguments proposed by Del Lungo and Casini, reevaluate the conclusion about Rustico being a hardcore Ghibelline, and approach his invective through a political and ethical lens.

However, Rustico’s political ideology should not be framed within the simplistic dichotomy of the Guelphs and Ghibellines, but instead within a larger socio-political context. Erasmo Percopo in *La poesia giocosa* notes the complex political situation that existed in Florence during Rustico’s time (70). Alongside the Guelph and Ghibelline parties, he mentions the third group of the *popolani* or common citizens who, though of non-noble origin, yet gained wealth and political influence in Florence and were affiliated neither with the Guelph nor with the Ghibelline parties. Such a party was “un partito popolare che non era nè guelfo nè ghibellino, ma nettamente distinto da tutt’e due, — costituiti principalmente dalla nobiltà, — soltanto dopo il 1260 diventan guelfi” (Percopo, *La poesia* 70). Rustico’s political activism and non-partisan ideology, as evident from his

³⁹ Gallarati neatly summarizes the interpretations of both critics: “Del Lungo (1899) pensa Filippi impegnato nelle lotte municipali, fustigatore dei suoi concittadini; Casini (1913) insiste invece sul valore morale e civile della sua satira” (*Rustico* 15n).

poems, should be placed in relation to these various social and political groups that had coexisted in Florence since 1260:

Rustico che mostra qualche simpatia per i nobili ghibellini . . . prende di mira . . . questo nuovo partito dei nobili guelfi e dei popolani grassi, alleatisi tra loro. Ma probabilmente, egli non partecipò nè per i guelfi nè per i ghibellini, e neppure per i popolani grassi, perchè alcuni dei personaggi messi in ridicolo da lui appartengono a tutt'e tre quelle fazioni. (Percopo, *La poesia* 70)

The party of the *popolani* consisted of citizens who were not noble (whereas members of the Guelphs and Ghibellines parties belonged to the Florentine nobility) but nevertheless were an important political voice in Florence. Although they later merged with the Guelph party, the Florentine *popolani* maintained their autonomy and distinctiveness from the long-established Guelph and Ghibelline parties.

Furthermore, each political party was not a monolithic unit but was also divided within itself by neighborhood and family disputes. The formation and clash between the groups of White and Black Guelphs (which occurred after the Battle of Campaldino in 1289) in the late thirteenth century show that the Guelph party did not represent an homogeneous political entity during Rustico's time. Rustico's political activism and non-partisan position should be placed in relation to these various social and political groups which coexisted in Florence since 1260.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For a general socio-political overview of thirteenth-century Florence, see Sergio Raveggi et al., *Ghibellini, guelfi e popolo grasso: I detentori del potere politico a Firenze nella seconda metà del Duecento* (1978).

Political Poetry and Rustico's Politics

Other evidence also supports the hypothesis of a militant yet non-partisan poet, because Rustico corresponded with other Florentine poets, both Guelphs (such as Brunetto Latini and Palamidesse Bellindotte) and Ghibellines (such as Iacopo da Leona and Bondie Dietaiuti).⁴¹ Maurizio Vitale comments on these relationships, acknowledging that the poet's likely prominent role in Florence is a "segno dell'impegno serio e della piena partecipazione del fiorentino all'ambiente letterario del suo tempo e del riconoscimento rispettoso che in tale ambiente riscuoteva" (104). Despite this evidence, some critics, such as Giorgio Petrocchi, claim that "Rustico è un isolato" (725).⁴² On the contrary, Rustico very likely belonged to a circle of poets and was active

⁴¹ As previously mentioned, Brunetto Latini in the *Favolello* mentions that Palamidesse knew Rustico personally. On Palamidesse as Guelph see Palmieri 140, Folena 38-39, and Holloway *Twice-Told* 56. Iacopo da Leona had direct correspondence with Rustico and sent him the sonnet "Signori, udite strano malificio" (Rossi 119). Iacopo was likely a Ghibelline (see Luciano Rossi who explained that Iacopo's patron was the Bishop Ranieri II Ubertini "di salde radici ghibelline;" 114, emphasis added). As attested by the MS. Vat. 3793, Rustico wrote the tenzone "Due cavalier valenti d'un paraggio" to Bondie Dietaiuti who replied with the sonnet "Dachè ti piacie ch'io degia contare" (Avalle 87; see also Levin, *Rustico* 8). Other manuscripts, such as the Magliabechiano VII, attribute the tenzoni to different poets; the Chig. L. VIII records the two sonnets as anonymous (Monaci 265). Because Bondie was a nobleman and was not exiled from Florence after the battle of Montaperti, he was likely a Ghibelline; Armour notes that Latini wrote "'S'eo son distretto innamoratamente' ('If I am constrained by Love') . . . to Bondie Dietaiuti in Florence. It is probably an expression of the author's love for Florence, the 'white lily,' now under Ghibelline control, and a request to his friends there to intercede for him so that he may return" (128). See also Avalle 87-88; Jensen *Tuscan Poetry of the Duecento* (xxvii-xxviii, 83-91).

⁴² Most critics, such as Joan Levin, argue the poet's influence and importance during his generation and beyond (*Rustico* 119); see also Marti, *Poeti* 30. Still, these critics propagate the idea that Rustico was a maverick because his comic corpus was unique in respect to the corpora of other contemporary poets. For example, Levin presents Rustico as a "special case" because he was the isolated pioneer responsible for the birth of comic or jocose Italian poetry: "Rustico di Filippo enjoys a certain renown in the history of medieval Italian lyric for having introduced a new genre, the jocose lyric, to those experimenting with the vernacular" (*Rustico* xiii). Mengaldo labels him a "caposcuola" (5) The possibility that Rustico created a whole poetic genre by himself, is too broad and dubious especially if we consider the manuscript tradition of Rustico's sonnets and his more politically oriented comic poems. Even though the MS. Vat. 3793 records a large number of Rustico's jocose lyrics, which surpass the comic production of any other poets

between the years 1260 and 1280.⁴³ As Gianfranco Folena notes, this circle of poets included a miscellaneous group comprised of both Guelphs and Ghibellines—most likely members of various social classes—who corresponded with one another through *tenzoni* that were strictly political and referred mainly to Florence: “La poesia politica del Duecento è per larga parte di iniziativa fiorentina” (Folena 39-40).⁴⁴ Folena emphasizes that this poetic practice functioned as

una specie di tribuna sulla quale salgono congiunti guelfi e ghibellini. A giudicare dalla poesia si direbbe che la lotta politica si svolgesse nei termini di un corretto se non amichevole dibattito concordato ed equamente ripartito intorno ai temi generali di politica estera, un pubblico contraddittorio con l’uso di temi propagandistici fissi anche se sapientemente variati e rinnovati. Sono manifesti politici e vanno giudicati anzitutto in rapporto alla loro efficacia oratoria. Guelfi e Ghibellini si scambiano sonetti, sonetti per le rime. . . (40)

The poetic exchange between Florentine poets who belonged to opposing political parties suggests that poetry certainly could have served as a means of advancing party positions. However, it could also have served to communicate various ideas, if not specific personal concerns, concerning urgent political issues during the thirteenth century: “these poems served as diplomacy and helped dissipate the rage between the two parties while at the same time both sides discussed their anxieties concerning Charles of Anjou” (Holloway

present in the manuscript, it is the *only* manuscript we currently possess to record Rustico’s poetic production. To my knowledge, no other manuscript confirms that Rustico ever invented or was a recognized author of comic poetry. Instead, evidence suggests that Rustico most likely did not invent or initiate a comic vernacular genre because he was not an isolated poet.

⁴³ See Marti *Poeti* 30; Holloway *Twice-Told* 80.

⁴⁴ Beside the poets already mentioned, others include: Orlanduccio Orafo, Monte Andrea—who was a Guelph: “Carlo gli appare come il grande protettore della parte Guelfa” (Barbero 39)—Ser Guiglielmo Beroardo, Ser Cione, Chiaro Davanzati, Messer Lambertuccio, Federico Gualterotti, Schiatta di Messer Albizzo Pallavillani (Massera *Sonetti Burleschi* 39-56, Folena 39-40, Barbero 38-46). Guittone d’Arezzo could also be added to this circle of poets (Holloway *Twice-Told* 80).

Twice-Told 80). The practice of writing invective poetry could also have served as a means to foster a constructive dialogue between poets from opposing parties. The fact that some of these poets were exiled from their *comuni* suggests that they might have sought to hear and discuss, from and with other fellow poets currently residing in their native lands, news and important developments occurring in Tuscany during their banishment.

However, such a constructive dialogic practice existing between various poets should not be understood too broadly and simply as a general exchange of political ideas. Each poet takes a personal stance on a particular historical event and either condemns or supports a prominent political figure, thus disseminating and defending his own opinion in each composition to other fellow poets. As Giunta comments, “la grande maggioranza della poesia politica medievale è, tuttavia, *partitica*: cioè volta a sostenere la causa di una determinata fazione, o a celebrare le imprese di un principe che è spesso anche il committente dell’opera” (*Versi* 468-69). The fact that the poet’s partisanship was shared with various poets from different political beliefs suggests that there was a common ground upon which these exchanges could have been founded. Such common ground might be located on recognized and mutually accepted political and ethical models shared by all poets. In the case of the exchange of invectives or *tenzoni* between Florentine poets, each sonnet suggests that it is based on an interest in the communal good of all Florentine citizens and, therefore, contributes to bind authors living far away from one another. Giunta’s *Versi a un destinatario* highlights how medieval poets bestowed a practical value upon the practice of writing poetry intended as a dialogic means of exchanging

ideas about political and ethical issues with recipients from diverse social groups: “a leggere e a scrivere poesia sono nel Medioevo, uomini di livello sociale e culturale molto vario” (516). As Giunta recalls, poetry in the late Middle Ages was not produced exclusively to represent subjectively the poet’s introspective dwelling on emotions and existential problems, but rather more objectively as a tool to construct and represent certain political ideals and ethical models; poetry in Rustico’s time expressed a “sforzo diretto a far valere la letteratura al di fuori della letteratura . È il caso per esempio . . . delle rime politiche di tenore non commemorativo ma militante” (*Versi* 514). The poet of the thirteenth century was therefore not an entity separated from the social reality of his hometown, but was fixed within his own *comune* both as an artisan (a practitioner of a specific trade that identified him politically) and as a citizen-poet (thus belonging to a particular circle of poets within or outside his city walls).

To understand better the intersection of poetic and civic ideology, we must consider the political environment of the *comune*, especially in reference to invective poetry with political references to wartime. Brunetto Latini’s *Rettorica*, *Tresor*, and *Tesoretto* emphasize the civic responsibility of citizens toward their own *comune* by proposing the Aristotelian connection between ethics and politics. In the *Tesoretto* Brunetto eloquently emphasizes this position by declaring that each man

. . . nasce primamente
 Al padre e al parente,
 E poi al suo comuno;
 Ond’io non so nessuno
 Cu’i volesse vedere
 La mia cittade avere
 Del tutto a la sua guisa,
 Né che fosse divisa;

Ma tutti per il comune
 Tirassero una fune
 Di pace e di ben fare,
 Chè già non può scampare
 Terra rotta di parte. (166-179)

[. . . first he is born / To parents and relations, / And then to his city-state; /
 So that I know none / Whom I would wish to see / Have my city / Entirely
 in his control, / Or that it be divided; / But all in common / Should pull
 together on a rope / Of peace and of welfare, / Because a land torn apart /
 Cannot survive.] (Holloway *Il tesoretto* 11)

In the same context outlined by Brunetto, Rustico's invectives reflect a position that refers not only to an abstract friendship between poets, but also to the concept of being tied to a compatriot. As a resident of Florence, Rustico almost certainly shared with his fellow citizens a common cause and fostered a mutual collaboration with them in order to achieve the common good of his own *comune*. Invective poetry can be linked to this ideology of responsibility that is articulated by a sense of unity and by the desire to attain peace. As Brunetto illustrates, the common good is best attained through various virtues, beginning with prudence and extending to magnanimity and justice so that in times of peace political rulers "soient currieus de tout les choses de la cité, & que il gardent la chose chomune & les possessions & les rentes dou comun au besoing de tous, non pas d'aucun homes privé" (*Li livres dou Tresor* II.85) [should be concerned with all things pertaining to the city, and protect the community and its common belongings and income for the benefit of all people, not for one man alone] (Barrette and Baldwin 234).⁴⁵ As Francesco Mazzoni notes, a model citizen reaches justice by understanding that "non é

⁴⁵ The primary source of Brunetto's *Li livres dou Tresor* is Baldwin and Barette's edition (2003). English translations of Brunetto's *Tresor* are from Barette and Baldwin (1993 ed.).

mai lecito anteporre la Parte alla Patria” (Mazzoni 358). Brunetto further discusses justice and the concept of impartiality in the third book of the *Tresor* when he discusses the role of the *podestà* in the government of the city.⁴⁶ As Lauro Martines eloquently summarizes:⁴⁷

The work as a whole gives voice to three urgencies: (1) that the *podestà* adhere strictly to the laws of the commune, almost to the point of being a stickler; (2) that he be absolutely impartial in the handling of political affairs; and (3) that he cleave to justice in his courts of law. . . . Brunetto Latini, therefore, could hardly escape the feeling that the essence of good government resided in impartiality. (118)

The issue of impartiality was not a generic ideal because Florentine citizens selected political leaders based on that principle. Starting from the twelfth century, in order to ensure impartiality, the city council of Florence elected officials who were non-Florentine. In thirteenth-century Florence, both the chief magistrate and the chief military and judicial official or *Capitano del popolo* were by law foreigners, thus ideally representing the quintessence of neutrality because they did not have any ties with local political parties or social groups.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The term *podestà* refers to the imperial office established by Frederick I in the twelfth century (Barni 603). During Rustico’s time, the *podestà* served the role of the administrator of the comune: “alla fine del secolo XII e al principio del XIII il podestà si presenta invece come funzionario comunale” (Barni 603). The office of the *capitano del popolo* was established after the *podestà* in 1250 and served the important role of chief military official who controlled and limited the power of the *podestà*: “The Capitano del popolo, a non-Florentine appointed for one year with the responsibility of sounding the bell and summoning the neighborhood militias whenever necessary, replaced the podestà as the commune’s chief military and judicial official” (Najemy, *A History* 67).

⁴⁷ As Skinner specifies: “the cities were generally controlled by chief magistrates known as podestà, so called because they were vested with supreme power or *potestas* over their citizens under their charge”(121).

⁴⁸ As Gianluigi Barni has noted: “il podestà dunque doveva essere di un’altra città, ma doveva però non essere di città nemica o di città dominate da partiti contrari . . . forestiero sì, ma politicamente non contrario alla situazione della città che veniva ad amministrare” (603). The impartiality of the *podestà* was thus the foundation upon which a chief magistrate would qualify for future appointments in other cities, since he

The friendship and mutual citizenship shared by Rustico and other poets suggests that we should interpret invective poetry not as a general attack by a Ghibelline poet against Guelph poets, or a mere exercise that seeks to invoke an abstract literary tradition or specific comic topoi. Instead, the practice of writing invective poetry could be linked to a personal exchange of both poetics and political philosophy. By exchanging ideas on specific events which occurred during the battle of Montaperti and Benevento, Rustico communicates both his own vision of poetry and his own attachment to the common cause of the *comune* of Florence. His invectives become more than a political manifesto or tools of personal propaganda of his own party; instead, they reflect a vision of poetry and civic responsibility which encompasses art, ideology, and politics. This poetic vision differs from our modern sensibility in which art, ideology, and politics do not often constitute a combined unit. Giunta illustrates clearly and at length the difference—but also the continuity—between medieval and modern poetry:

Ma l'attualità della poesia oggettiva, dei versi scritti per un destinatario presente e prossimo all'autore non può risiedere nè in una forma che, come abbiamo visto, oscilla tra i due estremi del dimesso e dell'artificioso nè in un contenuto che sentiamo talvolta come troppo contingente (è il caso dei *testi politici*), talaltra come ideologicamente estraneo e distante dal nostro concetto dell'arte (è il caso delle poesie religiose). A riguardarci ancora è la sua funzione, cioè la posizione che essa ha occupato nel sistema dei generi letterari, e il grado e il modo della sua incidenza sulla realtà: realtà non sentimentale ma per l'appunto oggettiva, esterna alla coscienza e, nella più larga accezione del termine, *sociale*. . . . una posizione sensibilmente diversa da quella che di solito dopo il Medioevo, alla poesia è stata attribuita; e di un'incidenza più profonda ed estesa. Ma

held office for a limited time: “La deliberazione del 1207 di chiamare da fuori il capo della città . . . ebbe per effetto che si richiedessero nel nuovo podestà attitudini pari di amministratore . . . Un podestà che si era acquistato buon nome dirigendo gli affari di un Comune, poteva star sicuro che un'altra cittadinanza si sarebbe ben presto rivolta a lui” (Davidsohn I, 1032-33). Skinner specifies, “A podestà normally held office for a period of six months or at most a year, and conducted his administration by means of a series of executive councils” (121).

se in questo modo noi constatiamo, da un lato, la distanza che separa questa componente della poesia medievale dalla poesia moderna, dall'altro vediamo con chiarezza il nesso che la avvicina a quei testi novecenteschi nei quali *il linguaggio artefatto dei versi é messo al servizio dell'ideologia*. (*Versi* 521-522; emphasis added)

By emphasizing the close tie between art and ideology, Giunta describes the general functionality of medieval poetry as it diverges from but also anticipates that branch of Italian modern poetry which emerged in the twentieth century and articulated a closer connection between art and ideology.⁴⁹ Giunta's illustration of medieval poetry, though generally applied to various poetic genres, could fittingly exemplify Rustico's political invective poetry and the author's tendency to express the municipal ideology of thirteenth-century Florence. As we shall see, Rustico's invectives expose this link between art and ideology through their carefully crafted style and provocative content. However, if we seek a more comprehensive interpretation of Rustico's invectives, we must supplement Giunta's suggestion about the general objectivity of a poetic ideology in medieval poetry with a close analysis of the poet's own personal vision (and thus the subjectivity of Rustico's poetry). Such an approach would highlight the dialogic value of invective as it emerges first from the author's personal concern about a particular event and second from the author's criticism of individuals who do not meet expected ethical models. Both of these elements are thus at the foundation of invective—perhaps the author's concern could be perceived as a more prominent element over the objective

⁴⁹ Although Giunta does not provide specific models of modern poetry to compare to medieval poetry, the examples of Giovanni Pascoli's *Myricae*—as a model of introspective poetry—and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Le ceneri di Gramsci*—as a model of poetry more ideologically oriented—come to mind.

ideology of medieval poetry—and of the poetic dialogue which dynamically occurs between Guelph and Ghibelline poets.

The dialogic practice between Rustico and various Guelph and Ghibelline poets is also confirmed if we consider Rustico's poetic corpus in MS. Vaticano Latino 3793. The codex preserves all fifty-eight of Rustico's existing sonnets, which critics have separated into two main groups: love poems and jocose lyrics. Of the twenty-nine jocose-burlesque sonnets, critics such as Cian, Marti and Vitale have emphasized the satirical and political qualities of three: "A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura," "A voi, messer Iacopo comare," and "Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza."⁵⁰ All three contain elements of both blame and humor directed against Florentine Guelphs and Ghibellines, and grounded in the battles of Montaperti (1260), Benevento (1266), Tagliacozzo (1268), and Colle (1269).

One of the principal elements that qualify these sonnets as invectives is their aggressive language and content that denounces but also mocks specific faults of individuals or social groups. Each of the sonnets expresses ridicule and criticism by featuring a dialogic and political exchange visible in the way each composition addresses a specific audience within a well-defined historical frame. The fact that each sonnet opens with an apostrophe suggests the existence of a specific target audience. Although we are not certain who the implied audience was, the practice of exchanging sonnets with

⁵⁰ See Cian, *La satira* 137; Marti, *Poeti* 31; Vitale 121. All of Rustico's sonnets are taken from Silvia Gallarati's critical edition *Rustico Filippi: Sonetti satirici e giocosi* (2005). Gallarati's edition, though based on Giuseppe Marrani's *I sonetti di Rustico di Filippi* (1999) which maintains the original meter and spelling of MS. Vat. 3793 (all modern spelling variations are in square brackets), provides the variants from the later codex Vaticano Latino 4823. I use the order and number of the sonnets as they appear in the original manuscripts, following the editions of Federici (1899) and Marrani (1999). English translations of Rustico's sonnets are mine.

real individuals or groups is a cultural practice that has been recently highlighted by critics such as Giunta. Giunta underscores that “una percentuale soprendentemente alta di testi si rivolge (...) a destinatari in carne ed ossa, ed é stata scritta insomma perché qualcuno di molto prossimo all’autore la leggesse” (63). As previously noted, Giunta emphasizes the dialogic value of medieval poetry chiefly within the poetic practice of the *tenzoni*, but he also considers other genres such as love, comic, and invective poetry (*Versi* 340-45).⁵¹ The verbal surface and content of medieval poetry do indeed connect to an identifiable rhetorical tradition, but they could also reflect real-life exchanges of ideas. Through a close examination of the larger medieval Italian love lyric tradition, Giunta concludes that late medieval poetry had a dialogic value discernible not only in the language and style used, but also culturally in the poets’ concept of poetry intended as a means to communicate ideas associated with the political, moral and religious life of their time. For example, love poetry could have been approached not

come un puro esercizio formale che non insegna nulla. Se quest’ultimo è, evidentemente, il modo in cui il lettore moderno guarda a quegli antichi testi, l’atteggiamento dei contemporanei poteva essere molto diverso. Per costoro, il valore di un testo amoroso poteva risiedere non nella verità o nella novità dei sentimenti, né nel buon uso dello stile, e insomma non nell’eccellenza estetica ma, per esempio . . . nella capacità dell’autore di orientarsi tra concetti filosofici o teologici o fisici. (*Versi* 517)⁵²

⁵¹ Although Giunta separates the genre of *tenzone* from invective, some thirteenth-century authors refer to these terms as interchangeable; the anonymous author of the *Fiore e vita di filosafi* uses the expression “tenzoni o invettive” (*Prosa* 526). On the possibility that Brunetto Latini could have been the author of *Fiore e vita di filosafi*, see footnote 70.

⁵² Giunta’s observation is subtle and innovative because modern critics tend to emphasize the style and overlook the content of medieval poetry, so they overemphasize a poem’s rhetorical and esthetical value and neglect its ethical weight. However, Giunta seems to place so much emphasis on the content of the poetry that he assumes that the style might have been irrelevant for readers. Medieval readers would have also appreciated the style, especially if combined effectively with meaningful content; both style and content could have been appreciated equally in a poem since they represent the blend between theory and practice. In addition, Giunta’s illustration is restricted to medieval love poetry. As previously noted, Giunta

In the case of political poetry, medieval poets were politically committed to the civic life of their own *comune* and expressed this commitment through the exchange of verse.

The dialogic and political value of these invectives can also be confirmed by the manuscript tradition in which Rustico's invectives are embedded. A codicological examination of the positions of his invectives within MS. Vat. 3793 confirms their dialogic and political nature associated with the poetic genre of the *tenzone*. MS. Vat. 3793, which was composed by a Florentine merchant and a notary between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, comprises twenty-four fascicles, numbered I to XV and XVIII to XXIV, followed by two fascicles without numeration.⁵³ The *tenzone* is the dominant poetic genre of the second half of the manuscript, which primarily utilizes the sonnet form. This codex records several *tenzoni* from fascicle XVIII to the first unnumbered fascicle, which critics such as Roberto Antonelli designate as fascicle XXV (35). The numerous *tenzoni* in the second portion of the manuscript offer an array of polemical exchanges on conceptual, didactic, and political levels, among various poets associated with the municipal environment of Florence:

also generally extends the idea of the practical and ethical value of medieval poetry to other poetic genres, such as political and religious poetry from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. He also analyzes the tendency of medieval authors to use realism in poetry and discusses how the term "*realismo non significa semplicemente descrizione della vita nella sua verità immediata e materiale (che è lo stadio al quale si fermano i poeti comico-realistici) ma la volontà di intervenire sulla realtà, di mutarla attraverso la poesia*" (*Versi* 514, emphasis added). Although Giunta provides great insight into medieval poetry, in this sentence we see his negative stance toward comic poetry, which he labels as a representation of a primordial material reality that does not develop any further and lacks substance. See also his allusions to these texts as "joc partit" or "tenzoni fittizie," (*Versi* 259-60).

⁵³ Antonelli 27-28; Levin, *Rustico di Filippo* 5-6. Roberto Antonelli explains that there were possibly two scribes who were "entrambi fiorentini; il copista principale deve aver lavorato a cavallo tra la fine del XIII e gli inizi del XIV secolo. Sono tutte e due scritture riferibili a scribi non professionisti: la prima mano è di base mercantile: di alta cultura, rimanda probabilmente ad una delle grandi famiglie della borghesia mercantile e finanziaria fiorentina; la seconda è di minuscola cancelleresca, scrittura appunto amministrativa di *curia*" (28).

Firenze, proprio nell'epoca dei maggiori rivolgimenti politici e sociali, si mostra capace di iniziative e di distinzioni e articolazioni culturali più nette, di esperimenti locali decisivi, con personalità come Brunetto e anche Rustico, pur di risonanza ancora locale. . . con l'indirizzarsi della poesia verso interessi conoscitivi e pratici, didattici e politici. (Folena 6-7)

Rustico's extant comic or jocular corpus starts at the beginning of the first unnumbered fascicle and is juxtaposed with a series of political *tenzoni* by various Tuscan authors, both Guelph and Ghibelline: "Il fascicolo XXV (non numerato) é aperto da Rustico di Filippi (già introdotto in una lontana tenzone) . . . Tolti alcuni esemplari, il resto del quaderno XXV è occupato anch'esso da tenzoni, fra le quali notevole e fitto dibattito politico, in diciassette sonetti"(Antonelli 35). All of Rustico's extant invectives (which could also be considered invective-*tenzoni*), besides being physically associated with political *tenzoni* in the manuscript, could also be historically linked to the circle of Tuscan poets who lived during the late thirteenth century, such as Monte Andrea, Brunetto Latini, Bondie Dietaiuti, and Palamidessa di Bellindote (Folena 38). As Antonelli notes, the dominance of these political *tenzoni* in MS. Vat 3793 shows to modern readers "la partecipazione corale di un intero ambiente sociale alle lotte politiche italiane ed internazionali. Si veda la tenzone politica . . .(che) è una fotografia quasi collettiva degli scontri ma anche dell'orgoglio del ceto dirigente municipale (le Arti maggiori)" (42). The manuscript tradition suggests that these invectives represent a complex and assorted variety of poetic voices in thirteenth-century Florence intended also as a display of the ideal of political unity.⁵⁴ Each poetic voice represents a specific

⁵⁴ Antonelli also notes that such collective participation of various poets could have served a political agenda initiated by whoever commissioned the Vat. 3793. Antonelli suggests that the codex operates as a connection between two cultures and political ideologies, such as the courtly model of Frederick II and his heirs alongside the one based in municipal Florence, in order to display an ideal of unity between poets

social class and documents a lively exchange in which Rustico too almost certainly played an important role both poetically (with his personal style) and politically (with his nonpartisan and militant ideology).

Silvia Gallarati's *Rustico Filippi: Sonetti satirici e giocosi* brings up pointed codicological questions related to the positioning of Rustico's invectives, such as "A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura," in Vat. 3793. She recalls that Santangelo and Panvini noted that fascicle XXV starts with this well-known political invective, assigned to Rustico by the heading "Rustico Medesimo."⁵⁵ The phrasing "Rustico Medesimo" indicates that when the scribe originally compiled the manuscript, before Rustico's invective there must have been a previous sonnet, perhaps more than one, that he also authored. Since in Vat. 3793 Pietro Morovelli's sonnet "Come l'arciento vivo fugie il foco" precedes "A voi, che

belonging to various social and political environments: "Al colto mercante, gran conoscitore di poesia, che ordinò o copiò il Vaticano era comunque possibile esaltare le linee portanti della propria cultura, antologizzare notai, giudici e banchieri e riallacciarli al Regno e alla cultura sveva" (42). In addition, as Justin Steinberg has recently noted, "The Vatican anthology reproduces in microcosm the shifting political power of the Italian peninsula and foregrounds the new cultural and political prominence of Florence's mercantile oligarchy through a sophisticated history of early Italian lyric poetry. The anthology begins with the poets of Frederick II's court and continues through the poets of the emergent Emilia and Tuscan communes (Pisa, Lucca, Siena, Arezzo) before finally culminating with the socially prominent Florentine poets Chiaro Davanzati and Monte Andrea." (14). Both Antonelli's and Steinberg's observations suggest that the commissioner and scribes of Vat. 3793 could have been Ghibelline sympathizers of Frederick II's legacy who wanted to provide written evidence of such political allegiance creating a connecting link between the poetry associated with Sicily and poetry authored in Tuscany. Because he was from Florence and a merchant, it is possible that the main scribe of MS. Vat. 3793 could have been a poet himself wanting also to promote his own work. The Guelph Nicolò De' Rossi from Treviso compiled the Codex Barberino 3953 in the mid-fourteenth century and included, not by chance, at the end of the codex a large number of his own poems divided, like Rustico's, into jocose and love poetry (Brugnolo 1, viii). For evidence of Nicolò as a Guelph see Brugnolo 1, 3-4. To my knowledge, such a high concentration of Nicolò's poetry is not found in any other *canzoniere*. If we examine the MS. Vat. 3793 we notice a parallel with Barberino 3953. Almost identically to Nicolò's *canzoniere*, Vat. 3793 includes Rustico's own poems at the end and no other existing manuscript records such a high number of poems by Rustico. Rustico was likely a merchant and a Ghibelline sympathizer, which match both the manuscript hand of one of the scribes and the Ghibelline political ideology of the scribe who compiled the codex. All this might imply that Rustico, like Nicolò for Barberino 3953, could have played a key role in compiling the Vat. 3793.

⁵⁵ See Santangelo 39-41; Panvini 16.

ve ne andaste per paura,” Rustico’s invective could have been originally transcribed together with a series of other satirical and political invective-tenzoni (by Rustico and other poets) in a fascicle that is unfortunately now lost (Gallarati *Rustico* 131).⁵⁶

By scrutinizing the rhetorical structure of Rustico’s vituperative poetry, we can find further evidence that it contains a dialogic charge. The apostrophes that open Rustico’s invectives could be interpreted as opening vocative greetings of the *Exordium* (used in judicial speech) or *Salutatio* (used in letters).⁵⁷ According to thirteenth-century rhetorical manuals, the *Salutatio* was placed at the beginning of letters or judicial

⁵⁶ Santangelo and Panvini hint at a lost fascicle in Vat. 3793 as the result of an error in page order when the manuscript was bound (Santangelo 40, Panvini 16). Thirty or even sixty sonnets (either political invectives, jocose, or comic sonnets) could have been lost from the codex. Joan Levin (1986) and Claudio Giunta (1995) have discussed this issue. Gallarati summarizes the recent discussion on Rustico’s missing poems (*Rustico Filippi* 58-75) and infers that “l’allegore di V abbia seguito un ordine cronologico risalente all’autore” (*Rustico Filippi* 74). Levin suggests that the scribe placed Rustico’s comic poems at the end of the manuscript since he was “the most recent lyric voice in Florence” (*Rustico* 10). Giunta thinks instead that the original order of the manuscript followed a stylistic division based on a “tripartizione del codice in canzoni, sonetti e tenzoni” (“Un’ipotesi” 53). The possibility that the scribe arranged the poems in the manuscript chronologically by author could reinforce the relationship between biography and poetry, a relation also confirmed by the arrangement of the *canzoni* in the first half of the codex. Guittone d’Arezzo’s poems, for example, are ascribed first to “Guittone” and subsequently to “Fra Guittone”; the scribe ordered the poems biographically, following the chronological change of his name due to his conversion (Antonelli 32-33). As modern readers, we too should consider these poems as both representation of the poets’ biography and fiction.

⁵⁷ From a rhetorical perspective, each invective could be divided into specific parts, following the system derived from the Ciceronian six-part *oratio* that later became the standard format for a five-part letter as established in the thirteenth century at the University of Bologna (Murphy 14-15). Boncompagno da Signa in his *Retorica novissima* (c.1215-35), chapter 2.5, “De instrumento rhetorice,” stresses that three parts only should be included in the deliberative discourse: the *Exordium* or *Salutatio* (the formal vocative greeting to the addressee), the *Narratio* (narration of circumstances leading to a petition), and the *Conclusio* (a final part that substantiates and concludes the speech). As Murphy notes, in the very first treatise of the *ars dictaminis*, the *Breviarium de dictamine* (c. 1087), Alberico of Monte Cassino “stresses the importance of the greeting (*Salutatio*) based on the person to whom and the person from whom a letter is sent” (14). The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* confirms the theoretical significance of addressing the audience through the figure of apostrophe (*exclamatio*) because it enhances the importance of the subject matter of the speech. However, on a practical level, its use is essential for expressing “grief or indignation by means of an address to some man or city or place or object” in order to “instill in the hearer as much indignation as we desire” (*Ad Herennium* IV, xv 22; the translation is by Caplan). See Giunta, *Versi* 210-213.

speeches as a strategy for *captatio benevolentiae*.⁵⁸ However, apostrophe has another rhetorical function: it can communicate *indignatio* and is thus a means by which an author can address and persuade a specific intended audience.⁵⁹ Brunetto Latini's influential *Li livres dou Tresor* devotes an entire section to disdain:

Ce que li parleor dit par desdeing, il le doit dire au plus grie que il puet, si que il mueve [les corages] de l'oïans contre son aversaire; car ce est une chose qui mult profite a sa chausa, quant les oïans, sont commou par corrous contre son aversaire. (*Li Livres dou Tresor*, III. 68)

What the speaker says through disdain, he must say with as much gravity as possible, in order to move the hearts of the listeners against his adversary; for this is a matter which is very advantageous to his cause, when the listeners are moved to anger against his adversary. (Barrette and Baldwin 346)

Brunetto suggests that the poet who employs *indignatio* in invective seeks to provoke specific reactions in his addressees. This prominent rhetorical gesture constitutes evidence of an established practice in use during the Middle Ages, as well as the existence of a target audience. Rustico almost certainly uses apostrophe to reach multiple targets across party lines, as we shall see in specific sonnets examined below. One of these invectives addresses either a well-defined political group such as the Guelphs or a single unspecified Guelph: "A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura/ Sicuramente potete tornare," [O you who fled for fear / you can return safely, 1-2]. Rustico also launches invectives against his fellow Ghibellines. One of these is Iacopo, addressed by his proper

⁵⁸ Latini *La Rettorica* 164-65, Cicero *Ad Herennium* I.v.

⁵⁹ See Armando Plebe's *La nascita del comico* (116) for a general overview of *indignatio* in oratory from ancient Greece to ancient Rome. Primary sources employed from the Middle Ages are Cicero's *Ad Herennium* (197-99, 359), Suplitii Victoris' *Institutiones Oratoriae* (314-15), and Fortunatiani's *Artis Rhetoricae* (119-20). These primary sources are all in K. Halm's *Rhetores Latini Minores*.

name and, as in the previous example, with the pronoun *voi*: “A voi, messere Iacopo comare, / Rustico s’acomanda fedelmente” (1-2) [To you, Mr. Iacopo godmother, / Rustico commends himself faithfully].⁶⁰ Another is the unspecified Ghibelline addressed informally as “tu,” as Rustico scoffs at the Guelph Fastel:

Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza,
dibassa i ghebellini a dismisura.
.....
Ond’io `l ti fo saper, dinnanzi assai
ch’a man vegni de’ tuo’ nemici guelfi
s’è temp’ e se vendetta non ne fai. (1-2, 9-11)

[Fastel, Mister Pain in the Ass, / debases the Ghibellines excessively. / ...
So I inform you, well before / you fall into the hands of your Guelph
enemies / if in time you do not take vengeance on him.]

Rustico, though considered a Ghibelline, chastens and ridicules both his Guelph opponents and his fellow Ghibellines through individual and collective attacks. He combines hostility with ridicule by crafting a complex model of invective that rewards careful examination.

Modern scholarship has not yet offered an in-depth assessment of the relation in Rustico’s invectives between rhetoric and ethics, both of which are expressed through the comic style and the direction of indignation at specific moral faults. In the case of “A voi, che ve ne andaste,” critics have specifically identified sarcasm (Marti, *Poeti* 35; Levin 35) and irony (Massèra, *Sonetti* 402; Mengaldo 26; Marrani 147). The sonnets “Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza” and “A voi, messere Iacopo comare” have been considered

⁶⁰ The term “comare” has both literal and figurative meanings. Literally, it means godmother and it is used as such in various fictional sources (see for example Boccaccio *Decameron* VII.10). Figuratively, since the term is applied to a male, instead of a female, it gains strong comical connotations. Gallarati summarizes possible readings of the term in its figurative sense: “vale, come già notato: a) ‘donnicciola’, ‘imbelle’, ‘chiacchierone’ . . . b) ‘omosessuale’, c) ‘ruffiano’” (“Sull’organizzazione” 193).

ironic (Marti *Poeti* 34, Marrani 182) and derisive (Marti, *Poeti* 44; Gallarati *Rustico* 145). In general, the humor in these invectives, discernible in the opening lines and in their overall content, has been recognized and associated by these critics with the goal of blaming specific faults. But we need to go further, and to examine in detail how Rustico employs humor to convey an ethical message articulated through that irony, sarcasm, and ridicule. In a series of close readings, I will examine the relative ethical weight of blame and humor, evaluating Rustico's poetics and ethics in light of the specific ideological, political, and historical references contained in these poems. Each sonnet condemns the faults of specific individuals and groups, faults which, through allusion and exaggeration, gain a comic valence expressed through sarcasm or irony. They also reveal the indignation of Rustico, who reprehends and mocks the addressees.

“A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura ”

Following the original order of the manuscript, the first of the three most overtly political sonnets is “A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura” [O you who fled out of fear]. One of Rustico's most renowned invectives, it is exemplary in reproving certain grave faults while employing both *indignatio* and ridicule. The placement of the noun “paura” (1) at the end of the opening line immediately launches a straightforward attack. Such an emphatic term, unequivocally qualifying the verb “ve ne andaste” (1), gives a derisive tone to the opening statement and constitutes a double allusion to a cowardice both blameworthy and laughable.

che voi ci trovereste ancor cagione;
però del papa nonn-ho gran conforto. 11

Ma io non voglio con voi stare a tenzone,
ca-llungo temp'è ch'io ne fui accorto
che 'l ghibellino aveste per garzone. 14

[O you who fled out of fear / you can safely return; / since fortune has turned for us, / now you can start war. / And no need to stay tough anymore, / because there's no one to excommunicate there, / though you consider it a great misfortune / that you have no more cause to make trouble. / But I know well, if [King] Charles had died, / that you would still find cause; / so I do not find much reassurance in the Pope. / But I do not wish to go on arguing with you, / because I realized a long time ago / that you took the Ghibelline for a servant.]

According to most critics, Rustico's poem can be understood as a direct attack against a generic group of Guelphs who could be identified with the ones who fled from Florence after the battle of Montaperti (in 1260) "i guelfi fuggiti da Firenze dopo Montaperti" (Mengaldo 26). Vittorio Cian is more specific when he proposes that the Guelphs who fled from Florence "erano fuggiti, per paura, a Lucca, ed ora, passato ogni pericolo, erano ritornati a fare la voce grossa per le piazze, mostrandosi spavaldi e millantatori contro i Ghibellini, scorati e fiaccati dopo Benevento (1266)" (*La satira* 137).⁶² Rustico addresses them with both scorn and sarcasm, reminding them that they fled ("andaste," 1) from Florence out of fear ("per paura," 1). Due to the change in their fortunes ("ventura," 3), the exiled Guelphs can now make their comeback to Florence after their banishment from the city (2), and once safely returned, they can start another war (4). They should not be on the defensive because there is no one left to excommunicate in Florence, since

⁶² For more information on the Guelph expatriates in Lucca, see Davidsohn, II.1 730. Holloway seems to be the only critic to propose that Rustico wrote "A voi, che ve ne andaste" to Brunetto Latini: "Rustico di Filippo wrote, perhaps in reply, though it appears more to be addressed in connection with Charles of Anjou, a *tenzone*" (*Twice-Told* 79).

all the Ghibellines are defeated (5-6). This fact saddens the Guelphs only because they cannot bring any further grief to the Ghibellines (7-8). Rustico then intervenes in the first person to state that he knows well that if the Guelph protector King Charles of Anjou had died in the battle, instead of the Ghibellines' champion Manfredi, the Guelphs would keep complaining and would encourage the pope to issue a global excommunication of all Ghibellines (9-10). Rustico then turns his criticism on the present pope who, in his opinion, was not a fair leader (11). He concludes his invective by declaring that he does not wish to engage them in a poetic *tenzone* or debate, because the arrogant Guelphs will only treat the Ghibellines as their subordinates (12-14).

This broad paraphrase, whose sense is endorsed by a majority of the critics, clearly describes the polemical content of the invective and its general historical frame, but it does not clarify the relation between the text and its specific historical and political context. Furthermore, it does not identify the Guelphs in question in this poem, or their ideological and political position in the war. This is because we do not know much about the social network that linked the various poets who wrote and exchanged invectives during this time. Moreover, we know very little about the general philosophy behind the practice of writing political invective poetry, and consequently very little about this particular poem's ethical charge.⁶³ The elements of condemnation and ridicule contained in each invective, and addressed to specific target readers, remain at the margin. If we start by examining the interaction of reality and fiction in the background of the poem, and try to identify the target of these invectives within their ideological and political

⁶³ These conclusions could also be applied more generally to Rustico's other invectives, which are not strictly political.

environment, we can reach a better understanding not only of Rustico's invectives but also of the practice of invective in thirteenth-century Tuscany.

Supplying a more precise historical background allows a modern reader to gain a richer understanding of the two poles of blame and humor contained in this invective. The references to an imminent war (4), excommunication (6), and the pope (11) can be linked to specific historical events documented between 1266-1267. To my knowledge, the last verse of the first quatrain, "ormai potete guerra inconinzare" (4) [now you can start war], has not been linked to any specific historical event, but I believe that I can identify one: the invasion by the shared forces of Guelphs and Angevin troops which occurred in Florence not long after the Battle of Benevento. This invasion was in the collective thoughts of many Florentines a year before it actually occurred (and even before the Battle of Benevento) because of a significant episode which occurred in January 1266. This episode is relevant because it constituted a significant event for the build-up to war between Guelphs and Ghibellines. In January 1266, a month before the Battle of Benevento, King Charles of Anjou was crowned emperor in Rome and the expatriate Guelphs began their reprisal against the Ghibellines in the crucial battle of Castelnuovo di Valdarno (Villani 116). During this battle the Guelph chief of Castelnuovo, Uberto Spiovanati Pazzi, concocted an apocryphal letter that he purposely caused to fall into the hands of the Ghibellines. The letter claimed the imminent arrival of an Angevin army of 800 French soldiers to defend the Guelphs in Castelnuovo, seize Florence, and expel all the Florentine Ghibellines (Villani vii, 12; Davidsohn II, 801). Based on this false information, the Ghibellines immediately retreated from Castelnuovo,

abandoning their siege. The episode significantly discredited the Ghibellines, not only morally—in that the deception caused them great loss of face—but also politically, since it encouraged further Guelph uprisings in various Tuscan Ghibelline strongholds. The integrity and political authority of the Ghibellines thus began to be questioned.

The news of the defeat of King Manfredi at Benevento and the Guelph conspiracy to invade Florence soon reached both the Ghibellines and the Florentine people, so that considerable turmoil erupted in the city (Villani vii, 12). Although the letter was a forgery, the idea of the imminent arrival of King Charles' forces constituted a reasonable threat for the Ghibellines, especially because the precise number of 800 French soldiers coincided with King Manfredi's 800 soldiers who had defeated the Guelphs at the Battle of Montaperti in 1260 (Davidsohn II, 692). The putative arrival of the Guelph and Angevin troops was more than plausible as a calculated vendetta, and indeed it actually occurred (with the exact number of 800 French soldiers) in April 1267.

I would suggest, then, that the expression “ormai potete guerra inconinzare” (4) could refer to the “imminent” invasion by the shared forces of Guelph and Angevin troops. If so, this phrase—directed toward an undisclosed Guelph or Guelphs—assumes not merely a tone of abstract irony or sarcasm, but one of both condemnation and derision in a specific historical context. As he stands in the soon-to-be-invaded Florence, Rustico sardonically seems to note how the tables are now turned against him, “da che ci è dirizzata la ventura” (3) and, as in a game of “zara” or dice, the Guelphs now have won

their bet.⁶⁴ Their imminent victory over the Ghibellines is thus simply a matter of luck (“ventura,” 3), not merit. The verb “drizzare” (3) implies a change of course which leads to the correct path (as in the compound verb “addrizzare” or “indirizzare”). Consequently, it also implies adapting oneself opportunistically to the new course of action that has changed for everyone. Rustico therefore derisively blames a group of Guelphs (or a single Guelph) for taking advantage of the positive outcome of the battle of Benevento. He thus ironically criticizes this change of course, since fortune is not described as “diritta” [straight or just], but rather “dirizzata” [set straight].⁶⁵ Both Guelphs and Ghibellines, “ci è” (3), are not necessarily heading toward destiny via a secure right path (“diritta”), which will lead all to peace; instead, Rustico seems to imply that they are venturing toward an adjusted version of justice (“dirizzata”), which only fits the moment and will inevitably lead to more war, confusion, and destruction for all Florentines. If the “guerra” (4) in question refers to the imminent factual Angevin invasion of Florence, instead of an unspecified war that might be begun by the Guelphs, the verse, from Rustico’s perspective, would become more historically pointed and thus more aggressively irreverent toward the Guelphs. These historical events brought devastation to the Ghibellines and crucial changes in favor of the Guelphs. However, these victories were not direct consequences of the Guelphs’ merit or courage, but were rather products of treachery (i.e., the battle of Castelnuovo) and opportunism (the 1267 Angevin invasion

⁶⁴ See also Dante’s *Purgatorio* where the imagery of the dice game opens Canto VI and parallels the pilgrim’s political invective launched against Italy and its citizens who have abandoned it in a situation of chance and division.

⁶⁵ See Giuseppe Bonghi’s *Arcaismi del Due-Trecento*: “dreçar,” correggere [Uguccione da Lodi, *Il libro*, 250: pregai lo Re de Gloria / qe ve degne dreçar], raddrizzare.
<http://www.classicitaliani.it/glossari/glossario_medioevo_01.htm> .

of Florence, successful only thanks to King Charles' aid). With the first quatrain, then, Rustico launches an attack both grave and derisive against a target which—although indefinite—is well defined within an historical frame.

The verb “scomunicare” (6), linked to the pope and King Charles in the second quatrain, may help us add more specific and historically relevant referents to the existing critical interpretation. Before the Battle of Benevento, Pope Clement IV, worried about King Manfredi's advance in Tuscany and the presence of German troops in Florence, took harsh measures against the Florentine Ghibellines. He first revived the office of the inquisition (headquartered in the Church of Santa Croce in Florence), declared all of King Manfredi's followers to be heretics, and reinstated the previous pope's excommunication of prominent Ghibellines in Florence, who were thus barred from receiving the sacraments and a proper Christian burial (Davidsohn II, 794-96). After the Ghibellines' defeat at Benevento in 1266, King Charles of Anjou, also solicited by the Pope, ordered that King Manfredi be buried on a riverbank under the Benevento bridge, away from papal land, since he was excommunicate.⁶⁶ This disrespect was also paired with harsh vituperation, as documented in a letter by Pope Clement IV that refers to Manfredi's body as the “puzzolente cadavere dell'uomo pestilenziale” [stinking corpse of the pestilential man] (Cited in Davidsohn II, 804). The pope's strategy was successful indeed: he brought the Ghibellines to retreat and “convert” to Guelphism (Massera, *Sonetti* 403) and became “Signore supremo della città” (Davidsohn II, 817). These events, which occurred between October 1266 and January 1267, show how the pope used

⁶⁶ See Villani 115; Compagni 12; Dante, *Purg.* III.

excommunication as both a religious and a political weapon to favor the Guelphs, to facilitate the rise of King Charles in Tuscany, and to secure the Church's position of leadership in the *comune* not only over the Ghibellines but also over the party of the *popolani*.⁶⁷

In this context, then, the lines “E più non vi bisogna stare a dura, / da che nonn-è chi vi scomunicare” (5-6) could be a precise reference to the period between October 1266 and January 1267. The reason why Guelphs should not be on the defensive (“non vi bisogna stare a dura,” 5) is that there is no one to excommunicate in Florence.⁶⁸ Rustico might imply, jokingly, that now all the Florentines (including Ghibellines and *popolani*) are like pseudo-Guelphs, and thus the pope cannot excommunicate anyone anymore. This allusion could also be a subtle attack on Rustico's own Ghibelline compatriots who have

⁶⁷ The alliance of prominent Ghibellines, such as Guido Novello, with the Pope lasted until January 1267. During this time, the *popolo fiorentino* revolted against the government and a new magistracy was created. Thirty-six citizens (including some former Guelphs who had never expatriated and representatives from the people) constituted this magistracy, and popular rule was restored (Villani vii, 14; Green 487). These developments yielded a truce between Guelphs and Ghibellines. The truce was a time of relative peace sealed by many marriages between both Guelph and Ghibelline party members (Compagni 12), but political tensions between noble Guelph and Ghibelline families still existed in the city. Finally, on April 17 1267, the troops comprised of exiled Florentine Guelphs and Angevin soldiers led by Count Guglielmo di Monforte approached and seized the city; all the Ghibellines departed from Florence permanently. Noble Guelphs revoked the magistracy of the *popolo* and reinstated their aristocratic government in association with the papacy (Davidsohn II.1, 845-48). “The Guelfs got their revenge, exiling Ghibellines and confiscating their property, which was sold and divided among the Guelf party” (Najemy, *A History* 74-75).

⁶⁸ Almost all critics, such as Vitale and Marrani, agree that the “vi” in verse 5 is an unstressed pronoun identifiable as a “dativo etico” (Marrani, “I sonetti di Rustico,” 148) or as a “particella pronominale in funzione avverbiale” (Vitale, *Rimatori comico-realistici* I, 117). Both critics interpret it as used merely to emphasize the verb and thus translate the sentence as “non vi è chi dobbiate scomunicare” [there is no one you need to excommunicate] (Marti, *I poeti*, 35). Mengaldo, in *Rustico Filippi*, suggests that “vi” could refer to the Guelphs instead, and thus it could be read as “who excommunicate you” (26). However, since the verb is in the infinitive (“scomunicare”), I think that the preferable interpretation would be the one that does not rearrange the word order and avoids linking the pronoun “vi” to the verb “è” [to be], which are not contiguous in the original sentence. Instead, “vi” is contiguous to the verb “scomunicare” and as such should be intended as a locative adverb, i.e., *there*, dependent on the infinitive verb and indicating a location (avverbio di luogo): there's no one to excommunicate *there* (“nonn-è chi vi scomunicare”), almost certainly the site where Rustico launches his invective, i.e., Florence.

“converted” their political faith and changed position to effect an opportunistic alliance with the Pope. Such “conversion” is confirmed by historical evidence, especially in the induction ceremony of the new Guelph government established in April 1266 (Davidsohn, II.1 811). During this time, the excommunication of prominent Ghibellines was publicly withdrawn by Cardinal Ottaviano degli Ubaldini who was solicited to do so by Pope Clement IV:

Dopo che la città fu riconsacrata dal cardinale . . . i singoli Ghibellini personalmente scomunicati si affollarono per ricevere l’assoluzione; tra i primi fu quel farmacista Omodeo, che ogni rivolgimento si trovava alla testa di tutti, insieme con suo figlio Jacopo che vestiva l’abito ecclesiastico. (Davidsohn, II.1 811)⁶⁹

Such a scenario of opportunism was further enhanced—reaching a level of amusing irony—by the fact that the man in charge of performing such conversion was Cardinal Ubaldino, who in earlier times had publicly declared his political Ghibelline faith so hyperbolically that he caused great uproar in Florence.⁷⁰ The fourteenth-century scholar Benvenuto da Imola narrates vividly how the cardinal once described his loyalty to the Ghibellines in not strictly religious terms:

nam cum semel petiisset a ghibelinis Tusciae certam pecuniae quantitatem pro uno facto, et non obtinisset, prorupit indignater et irate in hanc vocem: si anima est, ego perdidit ipsam millies pro ghibelinis. (qtd. in Singleton 160)

[Once, when he asked the Tuscan Ghibellines for a certain sum of money he needed for something, and did not obtain it, he burst into these

⁶⁹ See also Del Lungo, “Un realista” 195-196.

⁷⁰ As Sedgwick has noted: “Ottaviano degli Ubaldini, a Florentine, who had been made cardinal twenty-five years before by Innocent IV, was famous for his sympathy with the Ghibellines . . . It was also said that he had rejoiced openly over the Guelph defeat at Montaperti” (74).

indignant and angry words: ‘if there be a soul, I have lost it a thousand times for the Ghibellines.’⁷¹

Rustico’s allusion to conversion to Guelphism in Florence also denigrates the current Pope Clement IV, who exhibits the same opportunism: “Però del papa nonn-ho gran conforto” (11) [so I do not find much reassurance in the Pope]. The Guelphs are now ironically in an unhappy predicament, “sciagura” (7), because they cannot deliver their vendetta [cagion che dare, 8] against their new “brothers” the Ghibellines. The oddity of this circumstance becomes comical, and Rustico’s accusation of opportunism, which seems now universally projected upon all parties and social groups, blends with humor.

The current friendship between Guelphs and Ghibellines is ironic—and almost prophetic—if we consider the conclusion of the invective. Having mockingly invited the Guelphs to come back to Florence in the opening lines (“ora potete tornare,” 2), Rustico concludes:

Ma io non voglio con voi stare a tenzone,
Ca-llungo temp’è ch’io ne fui accorto
che ’l ghibellino aveste per garzone. (12-14)

[But I do not wish to go on arguing with you,
because I realized a long time ago
that you took the Ghibelline for a servant.]

The practice of Guelphs and Ghibellines writing invective poetry and debating, i.e., “stare a tenzone” (12), could be intended as an open exchange of ideas between members of opposing political parties. The association of *tenzoni* and invectives is evident in the

⁷¹ The English translation is also by Singleton (160). Dante places the cardinal Ubaldini in hell as an epicurean. Like Rustico, Dante could have mocked the once-Ghibelline cardinal’s opportunism and that of Florentine Ghibellines in general, as also evident by the fact that Dante places the cardinal with other prominent, hardcore Ghibellines such as Farinata degli Uberti. See *Inf.* X, 120.

treatise *Fiore e vita di filosafi ed altri savi ed imperadori*, written during Rustico's time and recently attributed to Latini, though always considered anonymous (Holloway, *Twice-Told* 530).⁷² This work narrates the importance of philosophers and their teaching and underlines the importance of responding sagely to verbal attacks through *tenzoni*, also called *invettive*:

Al tempo di Tulio era Salustio, uno grande filosofo maldicente; e voleva grande male a Tullio. E fecero *tenzoni* insieme, che si chiamavano *invettive*, e biasimò l'uno l'altro. (Segre "I fiori" 522)

[During the time of Cicero lived Salust, a great slanderous philosopher; and he hated Cicero. And both wrote *tenzoni* to each other, which were called *invectives*, and each blamed the other.] (translation mine)

The evidence of other *tenzoni* written by Rustico and other Tuscan poets, and recorded in Vat. 3793, confirms a situation of mutual correspondence and dialogue between poets associated with traditional political archenemies. In the closing tercet, however, Rustico again brings forward the reality of wartime and unmasks this pseudofriendship, crudely invoking his addressee. He shows that the conflict between the two parties is far from resolved. Poetry is paradoxically useless, because not even through writing or diplomatic means can the clash between Guelphs and Ghibellines be discussed and resolved. Now that the tables are turned in favor of the Guelphs, the gap between them is doomed to widen. The relations between the defeated "Ghibelline" Rustico, now treated as "garzone" (14), and a haughty Guelph winner can only degenerate, since the latter will

⁷² Segre "Fiori e vita" 522, and Holloway *Twice-Told* 239-40. Holloway believes that Latini wrote *Fiore e vita di Filosafi ed altri savi ed imperadori* (*Twice-Told* 239). She provides persuasive evidence to support this alleged authorship confirmed in the manuscript tradition: "We know of Brunetto's authorship of this work from reference in Vatican L. VII. 267 to Brunetto as author of *tenzone* between Sallust and Cicero and also from names of Latino children on flyleaves, 'Questo libro e di Giovanni. . . Latino'. . . probably commissioned by Brunetto for his family's use, 1268. Dante likely knew this manuscript." (*Twice-Told* 530).

not hesitate to humiliate and topple the former. This final note could also refer to the rumor of the coming of the Angevin troops to Florence, and the anticipated Ghibelline defeat that caused the permanent separation between the two parties.

The final tercet could also be intended as an explicit attack launched by Rustico against Guelph poets. Rustico could sardonically declare that what is ineffective and useless is not poetic exchange in general but more specifically the poetry of his adversaries; in this context, the refusal to engage in a *tenzone* might more explicitly aim to ridicule the bad faith of the Guelph addressees. Due to their pride they are not able to produce a fair reply “per le rime,” so Rustico declines in advance to reply to any further invective written and received from any Guelph. Rustico could be referring to prominent Guelph exiles such as Brunetto Latini or Guglielmo Beroardi (Holloway, *Twice-Told* 79). Ser Beroardo, in particular, went into exile in 1260 while on ambassadorial duty, like Brunetto, and exchanged *tenzoni* with various Florentine poets, both Guelphs and Ghibellines (Massera, *Sonetti* 46-56).⁷³ One of his sonnets, in particular, seems to echo Rustico’s “A voi che ve ne andaste” as it launches a sardonic remark positioned at the last tercet as well:

Le battaglie non son come sonetti,
 chè pugnono li ferri più, che spine;
 Però non son sentenze li tuo’ detti. (12-14)

[Battles are not like sonnets

⁷³ See also Frede Jensen’s *Tuscan Poetry*: “Guglielmo Beroardi (was the) son of Ruggerino Bero(v)ardi; Guglielmo is identified by Folena as a Guelf judge and lawyer. . . In 1260, he is sent as ambassador of the Guelfs to Corradino to solicit help to weaken or destroy the power of Manfredi and his ally Siena. While on a mission to Corradino’s uncle, the powerful Duke Ludwig of Bavaria, he received word of defeat of the Guelfs at Montaperti and went into exile” (xxv). He also returned in his homeland after the Battle of Benevento in 1266 and “resumed his political activities in Florence” (Jensen xxv).

because swords hurt more than thorns;
so your words are not sentences.] (translation mine)⁷⁴

By pairing war and poetry, Ser Beroardo underlines the difference between the reality of wartime and sonnet writing, and also questions the poetic ability of his addressees to respond successfully to his political *tenzone*.

In a similar context, Rustico's concluding attack could be interpreted not only as a bitter criticism of the current relations between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Florence, but also (besides its strictly historical and political implications) as a provocative call issued by Rustico to another recipient poet(s) expected to react and respond to the invective. In this perspective, the poem as a whole offers a glimpse into the culture of writing and exchanging invective poetry in thirteenth-century Tuscany. Although Rustico declares an immense discrepancy between Guelphs and Ghibellines, he does not necessarily apply it to himself and to his addressees. "A voi, che ve ne andaste," by denouncing a specific historical circumstance, does not necessarily serve as a political statement or propaganda *in favor* of the Ghibellines. In fact, Rustico shares with the addressee of the invective a common interest (being a poet who writes to other poets), as well as a common concern (the good of the *comune* of Florence now undergoing grave strain). Although Rustico and his addressee are affiliated with opposing political parties, the ethos of civic responsibility and unity that emerges (although through irony) in the creed of the *comune* confirms the existence of a shared belief expressed between poets from enemy parties.

⁷⁴ Massera, *Sonetti*, 47. Although the term "sentenza" has a broad semantic field, such as judgment, aphorism, decision, etc.,---see for example Pietro Lombardi's *Sententiae* or sayings, I translate the term as "sentence", i.e., judicial sentence, because it better fits in the context of the invective and verbal attack launched in a court setting.

The battles of Montaperti and Benevento inspired several Tuscan poets who wrote various thirteenth-century invectives comparable to Rustico's, such as Guittone d'Arezzo's "Ahi lasso, or è stagione de doler tanto" and Chiaro Davanzati's "Ahi dolze e gaia terra fiorentina."⁷⁵ If we compare the content of these two poems, it is clear that in the vein of Rustico's "A voi, che ve ne andaste" they reach both Guelphs and Ghibellines. Like Guittone and Davanzati, Rustico expresses the link between poetry and ethics through the condemnation of warfare and opportunism. However, Guittone and Davanzati's invectives emerge as more severe accusations of the Florentines than Rustico's sonnet, because they contain far less—indeed very little—humor and employ the more lofty poetic form of the *canzone*.⁷⁶ Instead, by using the sonnet form, Rustico conveys more briefly and unceremoniously his ethical message through a vibrant mockery and sarcastic humor that distinguish his own invective and political voice.

⁷⁵ Guittone's *canzone* was written most likely after the Battle of Montaperti, and Davanzati's after the battle of Benevento. For Guittone, see Contini, *Poeti* I.20-23; for Davanzati, Contini, *Poeti* II 228-30.

⁷⁶ Cécile Le Lay's recent study "Invective et ironie chez Guittone d'Arezzo" (2006) examines the role of irony and sarcasm in Guittone's "Ahi lasso" and confirms the grave tone used by Guittone which suggests that humor does not play a significant role in the poem: "Le register initial du *planh* (lamentation) annoncé au premier vers ("Ahi lasso, or é stagion de doler tanto") se transforme progressivement en une dénonciation des abus et de la folie des Gibelins . . . puis le poète finit par interpeler directement ces Florentins" (14); and "Grâce au contexte ironique, les invectives politiques de Guittone n'atteignent donc pas la violence verbale des modèles provençaux, ou des poètes comico-réalistes de son époque" (15). Levin briefly discusses "Guittone's bitter sarcasm against the Ghibellines" in the same *canzone* (35).

“A voi, messer Iacopo comare”

In the original MS. Vat. 3793, “A voi, messere Iacopo comare” (n.854) appears two sonnets after “A voi, che ve ne andaste per paura” (n.851) and four sonnets before “Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza” (n.859). Although there is no explicit connection between these three sonnets, not contiguous in the original manuscript, critics such as Massera, Marti, Vitale, and Mengaldo have re-arranged and juxtaposed them based on similarities in theme and content. Their anthologies (confirming Massera’s rearrangement) combine these three sonnets at the opening of their collections.⁷⁷ Massera, who began the process of reorganization, believed that they formed a series, a sort of triptych (Marrani 147), which he considered a uniform sequential unit of politically-based poetry written in chronological order close to the battle of Benevento: “per l’ordine dei sonetti . . . ho messo in principio (I-XXIX) i sonetti burleschi e lasciato ultimi gli amorosi, informandomi per l’ordinamento di ciascun gruppo alle analogie di contenuto o agli eventuali indizi cronologici” (*Sonetti* 321).

Roncaglia (1945), Levin (1986), and more recently Marrani (1999) note that any rearrangement of Rustico’s corpus constitutes a significant distortion of the original order

⁷⁷ Massera lists in order “A voi, che ve ne andaste,” “Fastel, messer fastidio,” and “A voi, messer Iacopo” (*Sonetti burleschi* 1-2). Instead, Marti rearranged the order following his study “Revisione” and places “A voi, messer Iacopo comare” before “Fastel, messer fastidio” and “A voi, che ve ne andaste” because “risultano disposti secondo un ordine più strettamente logico e cronologico” (*Poeti* 31). See Marti *Poeti* 33-35. Vitale lists first “A voi, che ve ne andaste” and follows Marti’s rearrangement listing “A voi, messere Iacopo” before “Fastel, messer fastidio.” See Vitale, vol. 1 117-122. Mengaldo’s anthology also follows Marti’s reorganization (23-27). All these anthologies, though they slightly differ from one another for the ordering of the three poems, consider these sonnets as a triptych.

from Vat. 3793.⁷⁸ In addition, as Casini (1890), Federici (1899), and more recently Luciano Rossi (1997) have shown, it is likely that the Iacopo to whom “A voi, messer Iacopo” is directed is neither Iacopo Rusticucci, named by Dante in *Inf.* XVI (Massera *Sonetti* 369), nor Iacopo di Attaviano dell’Acerbo (Marti *Poeti* 33).⁷⁹ He could be identified instead with the notary and judge Iacopo da Leona (c. 1220- c. 1277), active during the years 1274-77, with whom Rustico had poetic correspondence (Federici 47, Rossi 118).⁸⁰ Such a hypothesis would reinforce the possibility that “A voi, messer Iacopo,” was written after “A voi, che ve ne andaste” and thus contains reference to episodes prior to 1277 and associated with the battles of Tagliacozzo (1268) and Colle (1269), during which tensions between Guelphs and Ghibellines were recharged in Florence.⁸¹ However, Marti’s hypothesis that this sonnet was written before the battle of Benevento requires scrutiny, given that it is based on Massera’s questionable re-

⁷⁸ Roncaglia *Correzioni* 201-205; Levin, *Rustico* 12-14; Marrani 59-66.

⁷⁹ As Rossi notes, the fact that Iacopo Rusticucci was Guelph makes him unsuited to be the Iacopo cited in the sonnet: “L’interlocutore del Barbuto è stato identificato, ma senza troppa convinzione, da Massera 1916 col dantesco Iacopo Rusticucci (*Inf.* XVI, 43), il quale era però di parte guelfa; o con Iacopo di Messer Attaviano dell’Acerbo . . . sembra, invece, ancora valida l’ipotesi dubitativamente avanzata nel 1899, da Vincenzo Federici, per cui *Messere Iacopo comare* sia da identificare proprio con Iacopo Tancredi” (Rossi 121). See also Marrani 153. No evidence is available to document a relationship between Rustico and Iacopo di Attaviano dell’Acerbo. Marti’s evidence of the three sonnets written by Rustico and sent to Iacopo dell’Acerbo’s sons is not convincing. Although a relationship between Rustico and Iacopo dell’Acerbo’s sons existed, this does not confirm any direct relationship between Rustico and Iacopo dell’Acerbo, who was much older than Rustico and probably died shortly after the Battle of Benevento (Chiamenti 9-10).

⁸⁰ Rossi also supports this supposition by providing convincing evidence from Guittone d’Arezzo, who corresponded with Iacopo da Leona as well: “L’allusione al troppo frequente ‘parlare e ridere’ (vv. 5-6) di Iacopo ben si accorda, naturalmente in chiave satirica, colla definizione di *parlador piacente*, datane da Guittone, al v.24 di *Comune perta* e colla bonaria critica della sua eccessiva loquacità della lettera XXXV. Qui inoltre Iacopo è accusato di svelare segreti inconfessabili” (121).

⁸¹ Casini 243; Rossi 120; Gallarati, *Rustico* 152; Stanghellini, *Rustico* 19-20.

arrangement of the original manuscript order.⁸² “A voi, messer Iacopo,” should be therefore considered independently of “A voi, che ve ne andaste” and “Fastel, messer fastidio,” as it is directed against another target, within a different referential frame (Casini 243; Massera 369).

“A voi, messer Iacopo” also alludes to the tensions between Guelphs and Ghibellines, though less pointedly than “A voi, che ve ne andaste.” It has been considered a political sonnet written against the Ghibelline Iacopo, who is exhorted by Rustico to perpetrate a just vengeance against his enemies.⁸³ The main theme of the sonnet is indeed vendetta, or more precisely the failure to undertake a just vendetta; the speaker’s offer to take vengeance on Iacopo’s behalf is the comic key that opens the mockery of Iacopo’s (Marrani 153)⁸⁴:

A voi, messer Iacopo comare
Rustico s’acomanda fedelmente
e dice, se vendetta avete a fare,
ch’e la farà di buon cuor lëalmente. 4

Ma piaceriagli forte che 'l parlare
e rider vostro fosse men sovente,
ché male perdere uom, che guadagnare,
suole schifare più la mala gente. 8

E forte si cruc[ci]ò di monna Nese
quando sonett’e’udi di lei novello;
e credel dimostrar tosto in palese. 11

Ma troppo siete conto di Fastello,
fino a tanto ch'egli ha danar da spese:
ond'e' si crede bene esser donzello. 14

⁸² Russo 120-122; Marti *Discussioni*, 163; Marrani 147.

⁸³ Marti *Poeti* 33; Vitale 119; Stanghellini *Rustico* 20.

⁸⁴ See also Levin: “Vendetta is also the theme of a sonnet articulated in the form of an epistle” (*Rustico* 95).

[To you, Sir Iacopo “godmother,” / Rustico commends himself / and says that if you have vengeance to take, / he will gladly do it faithfully. / But he [Rustico] would greatly appreciate it/ if you would limit your chatting and laughter, / because a bad loser, not a winner/ is usually what the enemies hate./ And he [Rustico] was greatly upset about Lady Nese / when he heard a new sonnet about her / and thinks he will show that openly right away./ But you are too intimate with Fastello, / as long as he has money to spend; / so he firmly believes that he’s a young hunk.]
(translation mine)

The sonnet features the structure of the *ars dictaminis* by opening with the *salutatio*, “A voi, messer Iacopo comare” (1), which also identifies Rustico as the writer of the message (“Rustico s’acomanda,” 2). As Levin notes, “the formulae prescribed by the various *artes dictandi* for the composition of epistles are recognizable . . . the salutation . . . indicates both the receiver and the writer of the letter” (Levin, *Rustico* 96-7). This formula is strikingly similar to other sources contemporary to Rustico in the opening of didactic works such as Latini’s *Tesoretto*: “Io, burnetto latino . . . a voi mi raccomando” (I, 70, 73) [I, Brunetto Latini . . . Commend myself to you] (Holloway 7) or in formal letters such as the one written in June 1305 by Sienese merchants: “Messere Ghorò e Ghontieri; Ghuccio e Franciesco vi si racomanda e salute” (Paoli, Piccolomini 71) [messers Goro and Gontieri; Guccio and Francesco commend themselves to you and greet you] (translation mine).

The opening line not only introduces the target of the invective but also establishes *indignatio* through an irreverent tone by associating the masculine proper noun “Iacopo” with the feminine common noun “comare.” The term “comare” usually designates a godmother or female acquaintance (e.g. Boccaccio *Decameron* 7.10), but is here instead applied to a male figure and placed strategically at the end of the opening

verse to sardonically qualify the addressee, in a comic and allusive way, as effeminate, loquacious, indecisive, and irresolute. Though jokily applied to a masculine noun, it also might imply a political partnership between Iacopo and Rustico, since both were affiliated in some way with the Ghibelline party.

These implicit accusations are explicitly revealed in the second quatrain. Here critics such as Vitale have stressed the strong political undertone: “Il sonetto è diretto, dunque, a un tale *messer Iacopo* . . . considerato ironicamente come difensore della parte ghibellina” (119). The reference is introduced by the term “mala gente” that denotes the Guelphs, i.e., Iacopo’s enemies.⁸⁵ Rustico seems to encourage Iacopo to take more direct political action (or more generally just more initiative) because if he persists with his excessive chatting and joking (5-6), he will act just like a Guelph loser (8). Guelphs, as followers of the Tuscan proverb “é meglio non acquistare che perdere” (Marrani 154), prefer to avoid losing badly [male perdere], so they do not risk danger. Because they are

⁸⁵ See Marti: “la ‘mala gente’ sarà da intendere come gli avversari politici del messere, che troppo li deride” (*I poeti giocosi* 33); see also Vitale 120; Mengaldo 22). To my knowledge, the only critics who disagree with this interpretation are Marrani and Rossi. Marrani interprets the term more generally as “malparlieri” (154), i.e., slanderers, avoiding any political connotation. Similarly, Rossi proposes the term “malfattori” (121), i.e., wrongdoers, thus intending the term as more morally oriented. The term could also refer to sodomites and derisively imply that Iacopo follows sodomitic practices: “un ulteriore livello allusivo è però imperniato sul significato metaforico di *guadagnare*, che valeva ‘prostituirsi sodomiticamente’” (Rossi 121). Other critics, such as Gallarati, agree, showing how this interpretation would give a gloss to the term *comare*: “Iacopo è *messere e comare* . . . per i costumi sessuali” (*Rustico* 147) In my opinion, the political reference would supplement all these interpretations as it fits in the dispute between Iacopo and the Guelph Fastello, employed as a countermodel and symbol of “mala gente” and a bad influence for Iacopo. Stanghellini warns readers against any interpretation of the term “mala gente” devoid of any political connotation and subtly stresses the link between the term and the political tensions between Guelphs and Ghibellines prominent in Rustico’s political invectives: “se si interpreta ‘mala gente,’ come fa il Rossi, con ‘malavitosi’ e non con ‘nemici guelfi,’ si oscurano le lotte fra guelfi e ghibellini, di cui nei sonetti di Rustico rimane un’eco nitida” (*Rustico* 19-20).

afraid to lose their own lives, they flee from the battlefield.⁸⁶ By doing so, the Guelphs take no risks in the face of danger and, while avoiding any commitment, they neither earn any profit nor have to fear any loss (7-8). As Rossi notes, this proverbial declaration which ridicules a lack of determination could have been easily recognized by Rustico's original readers because revenge was often the expected response to disputes involving crimes: "uno dei *topoi* più frequenti, nella serie d'improprie registrate nei libri criminali medievali, è quello della mancata vendetta d'un offesa grave, che per vigliaccheria, il 'vituperato' ha mancato di compiere" (Rossi 121).

In the two tercets, which serve as a *conclusio*, Rustico elaborates and confirms his criticism of Iacopo by introducing Monna Nese and Fastello. Monna Nese, the diminutive for Madonna Agnese, was perhaps Iacopo da Leona's wife: "riferito, con ogni probabilità, alla moglie dello stesso messer Jacopo" (Rossi 121). Although some critics, like Mengaldo, propose that the grammatical subject of the tercet is Iacopo, the original manuscript reads "e forte si cruca di Madonna Nese" (Marti *Poeti* 33) and not "crucciò" as in modern editions. The verb "cruca" (9), modified by modern editors to *cruca*[*ci*]ò, is in the third person and syntactically parallel to the following verb "credel" (11) from the same tercet and to the previous verbs "s'acomanda" (2), "farà" (4), and "piaceriagli" (5), where the subject is in all cases Rustico. Rustico, who speaks in the third person, first sarcastically offers himself as a friend to honor Iacopo's vendetta in his place (1-4), expresses his displeasure at his triviality and irresolution (3-8), and finally shows his exasperation at a scandal (perhaps involving an accusation of unchastity) surrounding

⁸⁶ See also Compagni's saying—inspired by Cicero's *Tusc. Disp.*: "l'uomo savio non fa cosa che se ne penta" (III.42) [The wise man does nought of which he may repent] (Ferrers, Howell 259).

Madonna Nese. As Rossi notes, in Iacopo da Leona's invective "Signori, udite strano malificio" written against Rustico, in the final tercet, Iacopo ridicules him by using his wife in an analogous way (while also accusing him of being a cheapskate, beggar, sodomite, and thief) (Rossi 121).⁸⁷ With "A voi, messer Iacopo," Rustico almost certainly responds to Iacopo da Leona and reinforces his criticism at the close of the poem, adding a political reference in the following tercet.

In the last tercet, the verb "siete" (12) marks a switch from the third person to the second person, i.e., from Rustico as the subject to Iacopo. Iacopo is associated with an individual named Fastello, perhaps a reference to the Guelph Fastello de' Tosinghi, whose house was damaged by the Ghibellines in 1266, or to the Guelph Fastello Rustichini who was exiled after the battle of Montaperti.⁸⁸ Other critics, such as Mengaldo, stress the possibility that it could be a nickname for "fascio di legna o d'altro," a common expression in medieval Florentine vernacular which, if referred to a person, could be intended as a metaphor for excessive obesity, "grassezza squinternata" (22).⁸⁹ Fastello, depicted as an excessive eater, is accused of being a spendthrift and an

⁸⁷ For Iacopo da Leona's poem, "Signori, udite strano malificio," see Marti, *Poeti* 104.

⁸⁸ See Casini 242; Federici 50; Massera *Sonetti* 369; Rossi 122. The possibility that he was a Guelph is confirmed by Rustico's sonnet "Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza" where he is presented clearly as a Guelph when he "dibassa i ghebellini a dismisura" (2). There is a strong possibility that he was Fastello de' Tosinghi, especially because Rustico names the family in "Il giorno avesse io mille marchi d'oro" (11), further ridiculing his *casato*: "Fra gli altri partiremo li casati: / Donati ed Adimar sian del Capraccia; / di Donaton, *Tosinghi* e Giandonati (9-11, emphasis added) (Marrani 180).

⁸⁹ Mengaldo consulted Olof Brattö's "Studi di antroponomia fiorentina" 97. I also found the term in Arrigo Castellani's *Nuovi testi fiorentini* which confirms that "fastello" was used in 1295 to refer to a bunch of canes employed in economic transactions between Florentine merchants: "Anne dato lb. Vj e s. x, che nn'avemmo trentotto *fastella* di channe" (449, emphasis added) [they gave us six pounds and ten sacks, for we had thirty eight bundles of canes] (my translation). The term *fastello* or bundle indeed implies thickness and thus fatness, if a nickname. Other critics, such as Gallarati, speculate that the term might also contain sexual references. The noun "fastello"(12) could be a phallic metaphor: "Il nome—o meglio soprannome—

egotist (13-14). He also aspires, as the phrase “ond’e’ si crede bene esser donzello” (14) suggests, to become a knight and thus wrongly believes he should be recognized as *messer* (Vitale 120). The term “donzello,” if intended as “ragazzo giovane e piacente,” could also be intended ironically if associated with the term “fastello,” which identifies esthetic qualities in an individual that are quite the opposite of *piacente*: “probabilmente Fastello tanto giovane e piacente non era” (Gallarati, *Il discorso* 194).⁹⁰

The hypothesis that the term “Fastello” might be a symbol or a generic nickname is plausible, but should be supplemented by other possible readings based on actual individuals and events. Historical references to individuals who lived during Rustico’s time should not be overlooked, at the risk of missing potential relevant political interpretations. It would be equally valid to interpret “Fastello” as both a symbol of overindulgence and a real person, especially if we consider the expression “troppo siete conto” (12). This particular expression, which refers to the ambiguous relationship between Iacopo and Fastello, implies being too closely associated with someone. Critics unanimously recognize the equivocal tone of the expression that alludes to an intimate sexual relationship, an “allusione ad oscuri rapporti fra i due” (Marti, *Poeti* 33). Both possibilities—either that Iacopo or Fastello are accused of being sodomites, or that Fastello and Monna Nese are adulterous—are equally plausible. However, the references

Fastello è a sua volta fortemente allusivo in senso burlesco e satirico. Va collegato a ‘fastello’, fascio di legna o d’altro, da leggersi però non solo come indizio di ‘grassezza squinternata’ . . . ma anche quale chiara metafora fallica” (*Rustico* 148).

⁹⁰ Contini and Mengaldo read between the lines and qualify Fastello as an opportunist to the detriment of Iacopo, because mere economic (13) and social (14) interests motivate his friendship with Iacopo: “Fastello si crede nobilitato dalla relazione . . . con Jacopo . . . (che) ci trova solo l’interesse del parassita” (Contini *Poeti*, II 359). See also Mengaldo 22. Fastello’s aspiration to be perceived as a knight refers to his desire to advance in social rank. However, despite his aspirations, Fastello is wasting the riches that Iacopo is giving (or lending) him.

to “conto” (13) (associated with tallying) and “danar” (13) strongly suggest some economic relation between the two: “Iacopo . . . uomo leggiere e sfrontato, Ghibellino paziente e marito pazientissimo, a cui soprattutto preme conservarsi l’amicizia guelfa che gli frutta denari...e qualche altra cosa” (Del Lungo, “Un realista” 200).

If we consider, in addition, that the individuals in question are affiliated with opposing political parties, a political implication emerges from this final tercet. Rustico accuses Iacopo of acting foolishly and of delaying a vendetta against the “mala gente,” the Guelphs. Rustico further elaborates on Iacopo’s lack of political initiative by disclosing an ambiguous relation between the Ghibelline Iacopo and a Guelph Fastel (depicted comically as a countermodel of virtue—perhaps gluttonous, spendthrift, narcissistic, and opportunistic). The close of the sonnet, therefore, further discredits Iacopo who, alongside the accusation of being limp and irresolute, is also ridiculed as an opportunist because he associates with Fastello and has both economic—perhaps even sexual—ties with a political adversary.

In “A voi, messer Iacopo comare,” Rustico discloses reprehensible behaviors such as opportunism, cowardice, and indolence, while combining them with vices pertaining to excesses, perhaps even hinting at sexual perversions. In doing so, Rustico employs subtle allusions through carefully chosen expressions that challenge modern readers because they involve so many possible interpretations. As a whole, this poem exemplifies Rustico’s distinctive style, his complex humor, and his particular ethical and political stance toward his own contemporaries. If we seek to explore and assess Rustico’s humor, we will be challenged even further. The humor that emerges from such a complex range

of allusions and comic epithets suggests that the political and ethical message of the invective can also be linked to the lighter component of laughter. As modern readers, we cannot claim that “A voi, messer Iacopo,” was written with no comic intention, its allusive language and double entendre support the possibility that laughter was at least one of the intended reactions not only of Iacopo, but also in the implied audience of this text. On the other hand, it would be equally problematic to claim that the comic dimension of the invective is the only objective of the poem. Humor does not seem to function as a generic game that seeks laughter for its own sake. Though it is not stated explicitly, the sonnet lays out a message of moderation that is also applied to laughter (“piaceriagli . . . che ¶l parlare e rider vostro fosse men sovente,” 5-6).

For this reason, when we evaluate the humor of this sonnet we must be careful not to overemphasize the possible sexual references, as most recent critics do. For example, Gallarati’s recent study (2005) thoroughly explores Rustico’s ambivalent and multifaceted allusions in his comic corpus, but interprets the great majority of them as examples of a consistent jargon that is mainly sexually oriented. Although in my view her study is weakened by this generalization, it also reaches some important conclusions concerning Rustico’s originality and the dialogic nature of his poetry as it interacts with target readers.:

Ho mostrato. . . una serie di esempi che chiariscono dal punto di vista dell’onomastica l’originalità di Rustico comico. . . Nei sonetti comici Rustico, inoltre, è spesso il destinatario stesso, esplicito o implicito, a dare con il proprio nome/soprannome la chiave di lettura di tutto il componimento, di cui diviene protagonista da ruolo più o meno rilevante. (74-75)

Gallarati approaches these complex allusions as sexual and obscene jokes which serve a merely stylistic agenda useful to the poet himself, who seeks to demonstrate his poetic ability to readers in order to entertain them and gain their positive reception; Rustico then utilizes “ai suoi fini e . . . in modo originale l’istanza dialogica’ proprio dell’epoca, ponendola al centro del *gioco spregiudicato* del gergo erotico equivoco qui alle sue prime sostanziose prove” (“Onomastica” 75, emphasis added). Gallarati concludes that for this reason, poems like “A voi, messer Iacopo comare” are not meant to communicate any ethical or serious stance to readers, but rather to stimulate a criticism against a general concept of inflexibility:

Non colgo in questi testi un atteggiamento moralistico. Rustico sembra sbeffeggiare e condannare non tanto presunti difetti, atteggiamenti, comportamenti sessuali e non (a seconda del piano di lettura), quanto l’irrigidimento, la fissità in determinati difetti, atteggiamenti e comportamenti. (“Onomastica” 75)

Gallarati’s study of the sexual connotations of Rustico’s allusions should be seriously considered in any critical interpretation of the poet that seeks to be comprehensive. However, it should not be understood as the definitive reading, because to do so would limit an understanding of any potential didactic and serious value of Rustico’s invectives and would also fail to appreciate the complexity of Rustico’s humor. Although Gallarati clearly delineates the ludic value of humor, she restricts it to a form of expression centered upon sexual references and amounting to a “gioco spregiudicato” (75), i.e., a boundless game. In other words, Gallarati suggests that Rustico crafts a highly sophisticated lewd jargon without reservation because he does not seek to achieve any serious purpose. In my opinion, the humor employed by Rustico is very complex but also

flexible and as such it must be construed more seriously. Far from being a mere expression and provocation of amusement, Rustico's humor is deeply rooted in its own concrete environment since the targets of attack, as Gallarati also notes, are "persone che potrebbero aver realmente fatto parte della cerchia delle sue conoscenze o delle sue amicizie" ("Onomastica" 53).

Alongside sexual allusions, Rustico's mockery contains specific political allusions, which to be fully understood must be placed within the original historical and social context of the sonnet as well as within the intended ethical message of reprehension as originally articulated by its author. In order to reach the most comprehensive reading, we must explore other dimensions of Rustico's humor, which include a political, ethical, and historical perspective. Being aware of such nuances equips us better to appreciate both the ethical weight and the humor of this invective, as they are both equally important and come into view through the fertile expressions of allusions which open instead of closing off the dialogue that existed and still exists between the poet and his readers.

“Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza”

The sonnet “Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza” can be considered a political invective like the other two, because it launches a verbal assault against a specific target within the well-defined political setting of the Guelphs and Ghibellines. Though constructed in the familiar three-part structure of deliberative discourse with *Exordium* or *Salutatio*, *Narratio* and *Conclusio*, it varies their order slightly from traditional invective writing. Beside being an invective, “Fastel, messer fastidio” could be intended as a pseudo-petition because it makes a request to an anonymous Ghibelline friend (9-11):

Fastel, messer fastidio de la cazza,
dibassa i ghebellini a dismisura,
e tutto il giorno aringa in su la piazza
e dice ch'e' gli tiene 'n aventura. 4

E chi 'l contende, nel viso gli sprazza
velen, che v'è mischiato altra sozzura,
e sì la notte come 'l di schiamazza.
Or Dio ci menovasse la sciagura! 8

Ond'io 'l ti fo saper, dinanzi assai
ch'a man vegni de' tuo' nemici guelfi,
s'è temp' e se vendetta non ne fai. 11

Ma tu n'avrai merzé, quando il vedrai.
Fam[m]i cotanto: togligli Montelfi,
così di duol morir tosto il vedrai. 14

[Fastel, Mister Pain in the Ass, / debases the Ghibellines excessively / and harangues all day in the public square / and says that he endangers them.⁹¹

⁹¹ Contini provides a philological analysis of the expression “tiene n'avventura,” interpreting it as being in danger: “Si tratta del ben noto *in avventura* ‘in rischio, in pericolo’ (di cui sono da cercare esempi così sotto *avventura* come sotto *in avventura*): espressione che s’incontra, prevalentemente ma non esclusivamente, e lo stesso accade in francese e in provenzale di dove certo muove, col verbo *mettere* (o *porre*)” (“Schede” 65). Contini paraphrases the verse as “e dice di vederli in imminente pericolo”

/ And on whoever contradicts him, he spits / venom, mixed with other filth,
 / and he squalls both night and day. / May God free us from this curse! /
 So I inform you, very soon / that you will fall into the hands of your
 Guelph enemies / if in time you do not take vengeance on him. / But you
 will have pity on him, when you see him. / Do this for me: seize Montelfi
 from him, / so that you'll see him quickly die of anger.]

The opening of this poem has puzzled critics, because it does not identify the addressee with a standard *salutatio* as expected in invective writing: “(l’) improvvisa ed inaspettata ‘entrata’ di quel *ti*, non sostenuto da un precedente vocativo dedicatorio . . . è cosa del tutto inusitata e straordinaria” (Marti *Revisione* 27). Instead, the addressee is introduced beginning only in l. 9 with the informal pronouns “ti” (9), followed by “tuo” (10) and “tu” (11). Although most critics now believe that the “messer” (1) of the opening line is a *salutatio* referring to the Iacopo of “A voi messer Iacopo,” I find this assumption problematic since these two invectives are not contiguous in the original manuscript.⁹² Though it is possible that they both feature the same Fastel de’ Tosinghi, this does not necessarily mean that they both have the same addressees, since they are similar in content but are technically and tonally independent. The term “messer”(1) in the opening line is not a vocative noun independent of the sentence and addressing messer Iacopo; instead it should be read within its original syntax, in reference to the proper noun “Fastel.” The order of the words “Fastel,” “messer,” and “fastidio” seems intentionally

(“Schede” 65). Marrani provides a gloss of this interpretation by suggesting “minaccia loro sventura” (163).

⁹² The following critics interpret the sonnet as addressed to the Iacopo of Rustico’s previous sonnet: Marti *Poeti* 33, Vitale 121, and Gallarati *Rustico* 179. Although in his edition he is very careful to follow the original order of the manuscript, Marrani too links “Fasel, messer fastidio” to “A voi, messer Iacopo”: “Ancora un sonetto rivolto al Ghibellino Iacopo” (163).

arranged so that instead of “Messer Fastel” it reads “messer fastidio,” hinting sarcastically at Fastel de’ Tosinghi (mentioned also in “A voi, messer Iacopo”) who aspires to be and believes he is a *messer* (or a *donzello*), when in reality he is not. This sardonic *incipit* qualifies Fastello disparagingly, pairing the proper name with the designation “messer fastidio.” This negative epithet, reminiscent of the expression “messer Iacopo comare,” immediately qualifies Fastello negatively as a boastful pest, adding a comic note with the alliterative pun Fastel-fastidio. The final expression “de la cazza” (1) that marks the end of the verse further reinforces the denigration of Fastello, adding a vulgar and harsh tone immediately perceptible both in the “z” sound, and in the reference to the trowel, i.e., the male organ.⁹³ The opening line then introduces Fastello as an intolerable braggart, and could be translated as “Fastello, or Mister Pain in the Ass.” This could also be rephrased in modern Italian, maintaining the original effervescent comic alliterative tone as “Fastello signor fastidio del cazzo.”

If we limit the interpretation of this first line to a reading that privileges strictly obscene sexual references, however, we will miss relevant political and historical references: “è forse opportune intendere, in questo linguaggio quasi furbesco di Rustico, non solo il senso scabroso e traslato di *cazza*, ovvio e in primo piano, ma anche quello reale” (Vitale 121). Del Lungo, Massera and Vitale agree that the term “cazza” refers to masonry.⁹⁴ If so, it could slyly depict Fastello as “un muratore rifatto e risalito” (Vitale

⁹³ See Contini: “l’interpretazione ‘oscena’ che oggi politamente tradurremmo con ‘rompiscatole’ *Poeti* II 361; See also Vitale 121; Marrani 165.

⁹⁴ See Vitale 121; Del Lungo rephrases the sentence as “fastidio della mestola” (“Un realista” 199); see also Massera, *Sonetti* 403.

121).⁹⁵ The Guelph mason Fastello is not of noble origin and is thus a *popolano*, yet he believes he has ascended to a higher social rank. By implication, this could also mean that he loftily and comically pretends to be in a position of superiority, both socially and politically, over his Ghibelline compatriots. Hence he demeans them through aggressive harangues in the public square for the purpose of intimidating them with threats of future calamity (1-4). Fastello's lack of respect for the Ghibellines is further established in the second quatrain where he is depicted as a furious demon who disseminates conflicts by spitting rancor (*velen*, 6), and continuously squalling (5-7) in the public square (8).

If we consider the reference to "Montelfi" (13) in the close of the sonnet, these two quatrains gain a specific geographical setting and a precise historical frame. As Casini notes, the sonnet was almost certainly written after the battle of Benevento, and more specifically after the battle of Tagliacozzo (1268), when prominent Ghibelline families established strongholds and castles in the Mugello hills in Valdarno Superiore near Florence, i.e., in the cities around Montelfi: "gli Ubaldini, i Guidi, gli Ubertini, i quali anche dopo Benevento e Tagliacozzo proseguirono, incastellati nel Mugello e nel Casentino, l'opposizione al comune guelfo nel nome dell'impero" (Casini 243). In this area, they continued their opposition to the Guelphs in Florence. Fastello, as a Guelph, was almost certainly affiliated with the Guelphs in the Church of S. Quirico in Cura, residing in the diocese of Montelfi "cui appartiene Fiesole" (Repetti II, 105). Fastello is therefore in an awkward position because although he boasts his political and social superiority, he ironically represents both a political minority in the area—a Guelph in a

⁹⁵ Vitale quotes Luigi Russo: "è l'interpretazione di L. Russo, *Note aggiunte* a Mass, p.403" (121 n 1).

Ghibelline retreat—and a social inferior—a mason among such prominent and noble Ghibelline expatriates such as the Guidi, Ubertini, and Ubaldini families.

The target of this invective-petition, introduced in the first tercet, is an unnamed Ghibelline, as evident from the phrase “de' tuo' nemici guelfi” (10), where the political affiliation of the addressee is clearly stated. The target of “Fastel, messer fastidio” cannot be the same Iacopo of “A voi, messer Iacopo,” not only because the name Iacopo does not appear in “Fastel, messer fastidio” (and it seems that there is no allusion to him), but more importantly because the addressee of this poem is addressed informally as “tu” instead of with a formal “voi,” suggesting that the addressees of the two invectives differ in rank. “A voi, messer Iacopo” is addressed to a prominent noble Ghibelline, plausibly the judge Iacopo da Leona, while “Fastel, messer fastidio” is addressed instead to a close Ghibelline friend of Rustico, a *popolano* of comparable social rank. “Fastel, messer fastidio” also features a lower register (with a more vulgar lexicon, such as “cazza” (1) and harsher rhymes); “A voi messer Iacopo” contains a more allusive lexicon and softer rhymes and sounds, further reinforcing the autonomy of the two sonnets.⁹⁶ “Fastel, messer fastidio” seems to have been sent to an unnamed Ghibelline reproved for not honoring a vendetta against the Guelph Fastello.

The political reference to the struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines is more evident here than in “A voi messer Iacopo.” Rustico informs his addressee that Fastello publicly debases the Ghibellines, threatening to compromise and endanger them (“tiene

⁹⁶ “Fastel, messer fastidio” in its structure and register resembles “El Muscia si fa dicere e bandire.” “El Muscia si fa dicere” is structurally divided in two parts. The first two quatrains feature a description of the disproportionate actions of an individual who is ridiculed; the two tercets introduce a petition addressed to a receiver who is encouraged to intervene against the individual ridiculed in the first part.

‘n aventura,” 4). Contini was the first to suggest that the expression “tenere in avventura” could refer to a future calamity and paraphrased the verse as “e dice di vederli in imminente pericolo” (“Schede”65). Marrani glosses this interpretation by suggesting: “minaccia loro sventura” (163). Other critics, such as Marti, add an historical interpretation and believe that the poem was written in 1266: “in imminente pericolo . . . allusione all’esito della battaglia di Benevento” (*Poeti* 34). However, the verse does not actually mention any impending danger. Boccaccio in his *Decameron* uses this same expression to refer to compromising someone in a sexual sense: “e ciò veduto, chetamente la ricoperse, come che, così bella vedendola, in disiderio avesse di *mettere in avventura* la vita sua” (II.9, emphasis added) [and having seen that, he recovered her quietly, as though, seeing her so beautiful, he had the desire to compromise her life] (translation mine). In my view, Contini’s interpretation adds too much content to the original phrase, using expressions such as “vederli” and “imminente” (“Schede 65). The pronoun “gli,” (*gli* tiene ‘n aventura) clearly refers to the Ghibellines while the verb “tiene” refers to Fastello, as it is in the third person singular and parallel to the previous verbs from the same quatrain, “dibassa” (2), “aringa” (3), and “dice” (4). Overall, considering the wartime setting, the expression could be intended more simply to mean that Fastello threatens the specific group of Ghibellines mentioned in the poem, that he would compromise them (e.g., by revealing to the Guelphs confidential information about them). Hence the expression could be paraphrased “e dice che lui mette loro in pericolo” [and says that he endangers them].

The reference to Montelfi also indicates that Rustico wrote the poem not immediately after the Battle of Benevento (1266), but rather during or after the crucial battle of Colle di Valdelsa in the lower Valdarno, not far from Montelfi, where after the battle of Tagliacozzo (1268) tensions reached their peak between Guelphs and Ghibellines. More specifically, Fastello is said to address those Ghibellines who resided in the Valdarno area. This could also be perceived as a prophetic sonnet since they indeed experienced a raid from Guelph forces in 1269. During the battle of Colle, waged on June 17, 1269, the Florentine Guelph forces, guided by messer Aldobrandino de' Pazzi, defeated the Sienese Ghibelline army of Captain Provenzano Salvani in the final stroke against the Ghibelline forces in thirteenth-century Tuscany. Overall, this battle constituted a momentous victory for the Florentine Guelphs: “I Fiorentini considerarono la vittoria di Colle la rivincita della sconfitta di Montaperti” (Davidsohn, II.2 65-66). After the Battle of Colle, other fierce battles continued between the Angevin-Guelph army, led by Guido de Montfort, and the Ghibellines in the area of the upper Valdarno, which includes Montelfi (Davidsohn II.2, 68, 81). The fourteenth-century chronicler Marchionne di Coppo Stefani recounts violent battles between Florentine Guelphs and Ghibellines surrounding the Valdarno area during this period:

Li ghibellini usciti di Firenze entrarono nel castello d'Ostina, e presero a fare Guerra colla gente de' Pazzi di Valdarno a' Fiorentini; di che il Comune e popolo di Firenze non volendo sostenere oltraggio v'andò ad oste⁹⁷, e stettonvi più d'un mese ogni di battagliaando insieme, ultimamente l'ebbono per forza e disfecionla infino a' fondamenti e la maggior parte

⁹⁷ The expression “andare a oste” means to wage war or to camp: “*Andare Ad Oste, Ad Oste*, che più com. Dicesi Andare A Campo. Guerreggiare, Accamparsi” (Tommaso 431). See also Villani: “onde molta gente fedeli si crucciario, e andarono ad oste contra loro” (VI.89 2, emphasis added).

furono morti e tagliati a pezzi; e ciò fu negli anni del signore 1269.
(Marchionne 54)

[The Ghibelline expatriates from Florence entered the Castle of Ostina, and waged war with the people of the Pazzi Family of Valdarno against the Florentines; the *Comune* and the people of Florence did not want to submit to the outrage and made war against them, and remained there more than a month fighting every day against each other, finally they seized [Ostina] by force and destroyed it to the foundations and most of them (the Ghibellines) were killed and cut into pieces; and this occurred in AD 1269] (translation mine)⁹⁸

If we date Rustico's poem in the years between 1268-69, we can provide a more consistent interpretation not only of l.4, "e dice che gli tiene 'n avventura", but also of the entire poem, placing it in a more concrete and historically relevant background.

As Casini notes, Montelfi most likely refers to a castle which constituted Fastello's holding (242). Del Lungo specifies its geographic location and identifies Montelfi as a "castellucolo del Valdarno di sopra, fra l'Incisa e Figline" ("Un realista" 189). Other critics agree with Casini's interpretation but underscore the ambiguity of the allusion: "Montelfi: castello del Valdarno superiore, ma l'allusione non s'intende" (Mengaldo 24 n 13).⁹⁹ Beginning with Marti, critics have hinted at a sexual allusion, interpreting the term as a metaphor for a sexual relation between the Guelph Fastello and the Ghibelline receiver of the sonnet: "allude ad inconfessabili relazioni?" (*Poeti* 34 n 5).¹⁰⁰ Marrani interprets the term as an allusion to "pratiche sodomitiche (indicando le

⁹⁸ See also Dante, *Inf.* XXXII 68-73 where he mentions the Ghibelline Camicion de' Pazzi of Valdarno who betrayed his relative Ubertino de' Pazzi. Both resided in this area until 1302 and were related to the Ubertini family and in particular to Guglielmo degli Ubertini de' Pazzi di Valdarno; see Del Lungo's footnotes in his edition of *La Cronica di Dino Compagni* (419n). See also Villani, viii 53.

⁹⁹ See also Contini "Montelfi: nel Valdarno superiore, presso Figline. Allusione oscura" (*Poeti* 361).

¹⁰⁰ See also Vitale: "O Montelfi allude solo ai rapporti innaturali?" (122).

natiche) non diversamente dal boccaccesco *Monte Morello*” (164 n 13). Finally, Gallarati has recently explored the possibility that the term could refer both to the toponym and to the practice of sodomy as expressed by “monte [che] corrisponde a ‘natica’ o rappresenta più in generale una metafora degli orifizi” (“Onomastica” 58).

However, based on the evidence of medieval chroniclers, such as Marchionne and Villani, “Montelfi” was neither a generic modest castle nor a sexual allusion to “natica” or buttock but rather an important passageway which was known as the “passo a Montelfi” (Marchionne 109).¹⁰¹ As a strategic location by Incisa, Montelfi represented a vital transit from the hills of Saint Donato—located on the right side of the Arno River—directly to the city of Florence:

Dall’incisa si diramava sulla riva destra dell’Arno dalla strada di Roma una via molto disagiata verso Firenze, dove si svolgeva tutto il traffico e che solo nel XVIII secolo fu allargata nell’attuale via Aretina. La via romana conduceva a sinistra dell’Arno alla collina di San Donato e, oltrepassandola, giù al piano di Ripoli, dinnanzi alle porte di Firenze. (Davidsohn III 667)

In 1312, Montelfi played a crucial role during the battle of the Incisa between the Ghibelline forces of Henry VII and the Florentine Guelph army, facilitating the victory of the Emperor over Florence:

L’imperatore . . . su per le colline intorno all’Incisa, poté sotto Montelfi giungere di nuovo sulla strada di Firenze. Il maresciallo Enrico di Fiandra e il prode Amedeo di Savoia con i loro armati avevano preceduto gli altri e occupato la difficile posizione di Montelfi. . . il combattimento ebbe breve durata e terminò con la piena sconfitta dei Fiorentini, che si rifugiarono al riparo delle mura dell’Incisa . . . I Ghibellini di Toscana e i Bianchi gioirono del successo dell’Imperatore. (Davidsohn, III 667)

¹⁰¹ See also Villani ix. 46: “il passo, sotto a Montelfi” (230).

During Rustico's time, the battles that occurred in the upper Valdarno were crucial for Florentine Guelphs because they successfully seized Montelfi from the Ghibellines and thus secured an important tactical position that rendered Florence less vulnerable to future attacks. If we consider this historical context, we can better understand the allusion to Montelfi at the close of the sonnet. The Ghibelline receiver of Rustico's poem might witness Fastello's death by anger, "duol morire" (14), if he seizes Montelfi from Fastello and—by implication—from the Guelphs.¹⁰² However, sadly for the Ghibellines and for Rustico's friend, Fastello's harangues actually predict the Battle of Colle which constituted the official end of the Ghibelline resistance and the formal beginning of Guelph dominion and rule in Florence and in the Valdarno region.

Like the previous invectives, "Fastel, messer fastidio" contains significant political and historical references. In addition, Rustico's allusive language expresses both criticism and mockery of both Guelphs and Ghibellines. Thus it confirms both the poet's militancy and his status as an independent thinker who directs his criticism against both the arrogance of the Guelph Fastello and the idleness of the Ghibelline addressee of the sonnet. The sonnet's ethical charge is evident through Rustico's criticism, which exposes these specific wrongdoings and highlights how they hinder the achievement of a goal for both individuals and parties. The "terrorism" of Fastello and the apathy of the addressee are condemned as failings because both are signs of the hypocrisy and selfishness of individuals and parties, which ultimately damage not only Guelphs and Ghibellines but

¹⁰² Cian draws an interesting parallel between this verse and Dante's *Commedia*: "Un verso codesto che sembra fratello maggiore di quello che l'Alighieri porrà in bocca a Vanni Fucci: 'E detto l'ho, perchè doler ten debbia'; a quella guisa che l'altro fa pensare alla terribile terzina contro Buondelmonte (*Parad.*, XVI, 142-40" (*La Satira* 138).

also, considering the historical implication of the Battle of Colle, the citizens of Florence threatened by the ongoing tensions in the Valdarno area.

Conclusion

The dialogic value of Rustico's invectives, as expressed in their rhetorical structures and manuscript tradition, suggests that his comic corpus should be studied not in isolation but rather in conjunction with other contemporary texts and poets who wrote comparable sonnets. These poets are located in Tuscany—both in and outside Florence—and tied to the “produzione prestilnovistica . . . i cui nuclei fondamentali sono offerti dai poeti toscani occidentali, da Guittone, dai Fiorentini” (Folena 7). According to Vat. 3793, Brunetto Latini and Francesco da Barberino, Rustico corresponded mostly with Florentine poets, almost certainly Brunetto, Monte Andrea, Palamidesse Bellindotte, Iacopo da Leona, Bondie Dietaiuti, Guglielmo Beroardo, Chiaro Davanzati, and many others.¹⁰³ If we explore the correspondence of *tenzoni* between these poets and Rustico, we will be able to understand more clearly the distinctiveness and continuity of their personal styles and contents of invectives as they function within the civic environment of Florence.

The variety of Rustico's, as well as his contemporaries', *tenzoni* or invectives could be understood as the stylistic repertoire of both comic and political poetry, and it could be better framed in its own historical and poetic context if we juxtapose it to what

¹⁰³ See Massera's “Tenzoni politiche fiorentine” in *Sonetti burleschi* (39-56).

recent critics still describe as the “tradizione comico-realistica” (Giunta, *Versi* 267). As Folena notes, political invective poetry was linked to a comic tradition beginning with Massera’s *Sonetti burleschi* (1920, 1940) but subsequent studies and anthologies, such as Marti’s influential *Poeti giocosi* (1953), removed the link by excluding the section of “Tenzoni politiche fiorentine” which in Massera’s edition featured more than thirty political invectives contemporary to Rustico (39-56): “Uno dei pregi della vecchia raccolta di ‘burleschi e realistici’ del Massera era quello di unire alla poesia giocosa quella politica, al genere del *vituperium* privato il pubblico diverbio” (39). I believe that we should restore and indeed further explore the association between these political *tenzoni*, Rustico’s invectives, and the tradition of other comic-realistic poets, thus further investigating the two elements of the *comico*—or the “satirico”— and the *political* in late medieval Italian poetry.¹⁰⁴ In this way we will be able to appreciate this stylistic continuity between Rustico’s invectives and other political *tenzoni*, avoiding the exaggerated and excessively generalized focus on an abstract comic literary tradition often juxtaposed with the more “serious” courtly poetry (Giunta, *Versi* 326-328). In other words, political invective, even when comic, is serious and has an urgent and dynamic ethical charge.

Each invective is crafted with a clear and cohesive use of metrical and rhetorical parameters according to the tradition of invective writing. In the three examples examined here, Rustico condemns and ridicules his targets by using irony, biting sarcasm,

¹⁰⁴ Suitner uses the term “satirico.” For a recent discussion on the terminology of “comico-realistic” or “satirical” poetry, see Suitner 2-3.

and indignation. However, he never assumes the solemn and authoritative tone discernible in Guittone d'Arezzo and Chiaro Davanzati. As Levin shows, in "A voi, che ve ne andaste" "there are no traces of Guittone's *planctus*" because the sonnet, "incisive, concentrated, direct, devoid of figural imagery, contrasts with Guittone's discursive and moralizing *canzone*. . . and even more so with a *canzone* written a few years after the battle of Benevento by Chiaro Davanzati" (*Rustico* 36). By using the clear, compact, and direct sonnet form, Rustico places himself in the diplomatic stance of a poet between party lines, writing neither poetic lamentation (as Guittone does) or an elegy (as Davanzati does). Through his succinct, nearly-brutal, unswerving sarcasm, Rustico creates a distinctive poetic language that qualifies as his own personal style. His invective corpus is characterized by complex allusions and common themes which emerge in the narrative contents of the sonnets. These allusions can be interpreted as references to historical and political events, but they can also be intended in a more ludic sense, as recently highlighted by critics such as Gallarati. The presence of such a rich allusive language suggests multiple levels of interpretations and confirms Rustico's craftsmanship. His carefully selected lexicon suggests that he intended to arouse specific effects in his target readers. These effects comprise not only his readers' entertainment (if we consider the vulgar and obscene sexual references) but also their engagement, which could be understood on a sociopolitical and historical level (if we consider the background of war and the denunciation of individuals who harm a party or social class). Rustico's ideology, poetics, and humor all finally coexist within this intricate blend of personal poetic language.

In order to reach the most comprehensive reading of Rustico's invectives, we should consider the aforementioned stylistic elements framed within the theory and practice of invective. As this study shows, any theoretical exploration of Rustico's texts should be accompanied by a double focus upon their conventional contents and the author's personal stance toward his own time and environment. In this way, we can identify the concrete applications of invective poetry and move toward an analysis more conscious of the factual exchanges, battles, and political tensions that—on a personal level—affected Rustico and his fellow contemporary Florentine poets.

Furthermore, the grave tone of each of the invectives is leavened with a substantial dose of humor. The humor that emerges in these sonnets defuses hostility against their target, thus setting the ground for the possibility of dialogue between individuals from opposite parties and social groups. Rustico's invectives do not simply generate blind accusations for the sake of mere personal resentment and ridicule, nor relish a generic theoretical comic tradition for the sake of abstract intellectual enjoyment. Instead, because he shares common goals with his addressees concerning other fellow Florentines, Rustico directs his attacks across party lines through humor. Humor, therefore, serves as a vehicle for ethical discourse because it moderates an excessively aggressive stance against the individuals and groups attacked.

To conclude, Rustico's charges against the enemies of peace, unity, and stability in Florence finally invoke the ethos of civic responsibility and the value of dialogue and unity. This dialogue emerges through irony and sarcasm, confirming the existence of a shared ideological belief expressed between poets from enemy parties but attached to the

municipal ideology of the same *comune*. Rustico's invectives show us that in controversial times opposition presented with humor could bring a constructive and creative dialogue among enemies. Through creativity and humor he tries to build on the foundation of mutually shared beliefs while at the same time confronting with acid frankness those intransigent obstacles that are always the most pervasive and difficult to overcome.

Having examined Rustico Filippi's model of political invective within distinct rhetorical and stylistic parameters and a specific historical and political context, I shall now introduce and study the vituperative poetry of Cecco Angiolieri of Siena, another poet who is regarded, after Rustico, as the most prominent Italian medieval comic author. Many studies have been devoted to Cecco and his comic corpus, but none to my knowledge has scrutinized the political and ethical weight of his invective poetry within his original Sienese environment. The next chapter will engage in an analysis of Cecco and three selected sonnets which show the ethical weight of vituperative verse. Like Rustico, Cecco too expresses his own ideology and humor through his poetry; however, unlike Rustico, Cecco takes a far more polemical position against his own government and fellow citizens, providing a valuable model of comic and political invective poetry.

CHAPTER IV

EXILE AND POLITICS IN CECCO ANGIOLIERI: BLAME AND HUMOR UNDER
THE *GOVERNO DEI NOVE***Introduction**

Having examined Rustico Filippi and his invectives within his own historical and geopolitical Florentine background, the present chapter shifts to late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Siena. Here I will study the significance of the poet Cecco Angiolieri, providing a close reading of three of his sonnets which are prominent in his rich poetic corpus as his most aggressive and irreverent verbal attacks launched against his contemporaries. Cecco Angiolieri of Siena is the most studied poet of the so-called *comico-realistici*, primarily because numerous manuscripts record more sonnets by him than any other poets in this study.¹ If we inspect the abundant literature review of Cecco's texts, a significant change of course is visible from the earliest scholarly tradition to the most recent one.² As a reaction to the excessively biographical reading of late nineteenth-century scholars, modern critics tend to focus more on the form and style of Cecco's

¹ Alfie calculates thirty-four manuscripts in total (*Comedy* 9); see also Massèra *Sonetti burleschi* 331-33.

² As Alfie recently notes, Alessandro D'Ancona first framed and researched Cecco's life and texts in "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo decimoterzo" (1874) promoting a biographical reading of his corpus which was later contested by critics such as Mario Marti (*Comedy* 3-4, 20). For a detailed and comprehensive overview of the early criticism of Cecco's comic corpus from D'Ancona to early twentieth-century scholars (1874-1943) see Bruno Maier's *La personalità e la poesia di Cecco Angiolieri*, 19-36.

poetry and less upon his life and historical environment. However, as a recent study by Fabian Alfie shows, this modern critical turn has not yet solved the important question of the convoluted relation between fact and fiction that emerges in Cecco's comic corpus (*Comedy* 165-192). The present chapter does not aspire to solve this dilemma, but rather to propose a possible third path that would examine the relationship between the Sienese poet and his corpus from an historical and political perspective. Overall, this chapter deals with an issue that has been largely neglected by critics, that is, the political and ethical value of Cecco's most aggressive vituperative poems. Once this ethical and political value becomes more evident, we will be better equipped to assess the poet's personal stance on important political events and the role his poetry played within his time and among his contemporaries. Furthermore, we will be able to describe in more detail Cecco's individual humor and how it functions alongside the verbal aggression of his invectives.

In order to understand Cecco's original environment, I will first introduce and inspect available biographical records pertaining to Cecco and his family. Cecco's family—on both his father's and mother's sides—was highly influential in early thirteenth-century Siena. However, when the oligarchic regime of the *Governo dei Nove* was established in the late thirteenth century, Cecco and his family experienced a significant loss of political power which also had a negative economic impact on them and the noble class in general. I will examine these political and social implications employing archival evidence from Sienese statutes and chronicles which clarify Cecco's relationship with the *Governo dei Nove*, and the issue of the poet's banishment from the city.

I will then provide a general overview of how modern critics have interpreted Cecco's comic corpus while ignoring—for the most part—Cecco's Sieneese environment and favoring a formalistic approach to his corpus. Because of the neglect of Cecco's political and historical background, we not only have a significant gap in the poet's critical tradition—surprising since he is one of the most studied comic medieval poets in Italy—but we also do not possess the tools to adequately address the issue of politics in any of his sonnets. Contrary to the majority of modern critics, I argue that *some* of Cecco's comic poems do indeed project a political and ethical stance that critics have unfairly disregarded.³ These sonnets express a noticeably polemical attitude toward the government of the Nine, toward major institutions such as the empire and the papacy, and toward prominent political and military leaders. In my analysis, an ethical and political message emerges from Cecco's corpus that provides modern readers with a sense of how much serious social commentary these comic invectives can contain.

Having examined the data on Cecco's life and society, works, and critical reception, and articulated my own approach, I will propose a series of close readings of three of his vituperative sonnets. I argue that by examining the political context from which these

³ I emphasize "some" because I do not aim to attribute an ethical and political value to Cecco's entire comic corpus. The majority of his invectives do not pertain to a public sphere, as they attack a woman named Becchina, his father, and more abstract targets such as poverty; see Marti, *Poeti* 116. Fabian Alfie has recently shown that even the sonnets that Cecco addresses to Becchina could be interpreted in a sociopolitical context: "his mock-amorous verse repeatedly illustrates how passion reverses the 'normal' hierarchies of the genders and classes" ("Men on Bottom," 25). In a previous study, Alfie proposes that Cecco's sonnets against his father and poverty employ a lexicon that openly evokes and satirizes Franciscan ideology (*Comedy* 135-37). Although these recent studies have considerable merit, their main concern is the literary value of the texts (as they represent medieval literature and stylistic conventions) and they do not explore the relation between Cecco's poetry and factual political and historical events: "Angiolieri uses the reversal of the cultural hierarchy of gender to force his readers to question their assumptions about the literature of love" (Alfie, "Men on Bottom" 40). Alfie encourages an approach to all of Cecco's invectives more oriented toward the poet's environment, but also confirm the need of engaging in a more historically and politically oriented reading.

texts emerged, we can better understand the ethical and social message contained within Cecco's invectives and examine closely how his carefully crafted style, humor, and poetic sensibility serve to engage his readers. Internal political tensions within the Sienese government significantly influenced Cecco's poetry, but at the same time these conflicts constitute the raw material that the poet evokes to address and communicate with his original readers. Although we are not sure who his target readers might have been, it appears evident that Cecco does not craft his sonnets merely to entertain or to replicate an established rhetorical or comic convention. Instead, he speaks to actual individuals through his poetry and makes his addressees aware that they are called to be responsible and to respond to the wrongdoings that are by turns hyperbolically performed by, or openly denounced, by the poetic-I. The serious intentions at the foundation of some of his sonnets are also confirmed by an evaluation of the historical Cecco. As this chapter will show, knowing and reconstructing more evidence on the life and society of the poet will revitalize the relationship between the historical author and his texts, and show how both the poet and his works interacted with real individuals. The restoration of the historical Cecco also provides modern readers with some of the missing pieces that can be used to better understand the important yet unresolved question pertaining to the relation between biography and poetry in Cecco and late medieval Italy.

Cecco Angiolieri of Siena (c.1261-1312): His Life and Exile

Cecco's Family and Political Affiliation

Unlike Rustico Filippi—for whom we possess no direct evidence in the historical record—archival documents such as deeds, papers for sales of properties, and wills refer directly to Cecco. These data allow us to reconstruct the life of the poet and the political role he played among his contemporaries and society. Alessandro D'Ancona was the first to provide a wealth of biographical and historical information on Cecco in his pioneering study "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo XIII" (1874). Aldo Massèra's "La patria e la vita di Cecco Angiolieri" (1901) contributed further biographical information on Cecco. However, more than a century after these early studies, virtually no modern critic, to my knowledge, has expanded D'Ancona's and Massèra's findings and provided new additional biographical data on the Siennese poet.⁴ In this section, I shall examine the findings of these previous critics and add more information on the poet's life and society. My principal aim is to frame and understand the relationship between the historical Cecco and the *Governo dei Nove* as well as discussing his banishment from Siena. A more defined and factual portrayal of the historical Cecco would allow modern readers to assess the political weight of his sonnets and appreciate why—either openly or indirectly—Cecco placed in his poems significant episodes from his life and specific historical events.

⁴ The only exception is Elvira Nannetti in *Cecco Angiolieri: La sua patria, i suoi tempi e la sua poesia* (1929) who discusses the etymology of Cecco's grandfather "Solafica" and adds relevant information about his family (50), his exile (166-67), and his impact on his contemporaries (159-60).

A contemporary of Dante, Cecco lived during the second half of the thirteenth century and died in the first decade of the fourteenth. Massèra proposed that the poet's birth could be dated to sometime before 1260 because the earliest evidence on Cecco dates to 1281, when he was most likely of age, since he served in—and later fled from—the Sienese armed forces during the siege of the Castle of Turri, undertaken by Siena against Ghibelline refugees: “la nascita deve porsi a qualche anno avanti il 1260” (“La patria” 446). However, if this is the first time that Cecco served in the military, he must have been at least twenty years old, and likely even older, since according to the Sienese Statute nobody was allowed to “mandare alcuno overo alcuni pedoni⁵ al detto servizio del Comune di Siena, minore overo minori di XX anni overo maggiori di LX anni” [send anyone, that is, men on foot in service of the Comune of Siena, not of age, i.e., younger than twenty years old, or older than 60,] (translation mine) (Dist. V. 499).⁶ According to this evidence, Cecco's probable date of birth could be extended to some years before, but not after, 1261.

Other evidence shows that unlike Rustico, Cecco belonged to a very wealthy Sienese family. Cecco's grandfather Angeliere Solafica, who died before 1236, engaged in trade with Pope Gregory IX and became “one of the earliest of Siena's capitalists,”

⁵ The term “pedoni” refers to foot soldiers or infantry: “an army of soldiers (*milites*) [were] composed of men on horseback (*equitus*) and men on foot (*pedites*)” (Flori 149).

⁶ Els Sheikh Dist. II, 518. See also Dist. I.103, Els Sheikh I, 101. The statute I consulted is the official document published in Siena during 1309-10 and written in Sienese vernacular. This and all quotations of the fourteenth-century Sienese *Statuto* are taken from Mahmoud Salem Els Sheikh's edition (2002). As Gianluigi Barni notes, each *comune* had its own age limits for military service: “A Pisa si era tenuti all'obbligo del servizio militare dai 20 ai 60 anni, a Genova dai 18 ai 70, a Milano dai 17 ai 65, a Modena dai 14 ai 60.” (861). Florence had perhaps the broadest age limits: “Ogni fiorentino, dai 15 anni d'età sino ai 70, seguì ad essere obbligato al servizio militare in guerra” (Davidsohn IV.1, 433).

thus establishing the prosperity of Cecco's family (Thompson 470).⁷ A physical sign of his wealth is still visible in Siena today where the following inscription can be read in a memorial tablet placed on the wall of Cecco's house in Via Cecco Angiolieri, formerly Via dei Re (Orwen 25):

HANC DOM(U)S CEPIT HEDIFICARE ANGELERIUS SOLAFICHE
 QUANDO ERAT CAMPSOR D(OMI)NI P(A)P(AE) GREGORII VIII. IN
 A(NNO) D(O)M(INI) MCCXXXIII. (Stanghellini, *Cecco*)⁸

Angiolierio di Solafica began building this house when he was banker of Lord Pope Gregory IX in the year 1234. (Translation mine)

This inscription served to assert and promote the wealth and prestige of the Angiolieri family among Sienese citizens, and illustrated the Guelph affiliation of the poet's ancestors (specifically paternal) who by tradition were loyal to the papacy. In addition, the inscription also shows that Cecco's family, and likely the poet as well, was a member

⁷ See Massera, "La patria" 444n; Schevill 110-11; Senigallia 152-53 and 164-65; Vitale 262; and Lanza. xlv. Joan Levin (in "Cecco Angiolieri" 202) and Gifford Orwen (25) erroneously write that Solafica was Cecco's father. Instead, "Solafica" was the surname of Cecco's grandfather: "Il vecchio Angioliero, cognominato *Solafica* o *Sulafica* . . . non dev'essere confuso co' 'l figlio dello stesso suo nome, cavaliere" (Massera, "La patria" 444-45). Some critics believe that the term "Solafica" alluded to his love affairs with various women and thus his reputation as a womanizer (D'Ancona, "Cecco Angiolieri" 167; Massera, "La patria" 444; Vitale 262). This interpretation is still employed as evidence by modern critics (Lanza xlv), who however provide no evidence to support such an assertion. Elvira Nannetti provides valuable evidence to support that the surname was not meant to describe Cecco's grandfather as a womanizer because it was likely a patronymic (51-53). Furthermore, the fact that the name Solafica appears engraved in Cecco's house alongside the name of Pope Gregory IX suggests that the term was not an irreverent insult but rather a family name: "se... 'Sòlafica' era un soprannome ingiurioso, come avrebbe potuto Angioliero farlo scrivere a titolo di ricordanza sulla facciata della sua casa, proprio accanto alla sua carica onorifica, di banchiere di Papa Gregorio IX?" (Nannetti 52). The *Libro del Biccherna* uses Solafica or Solafiche, suggesting that Solafiche is the genitive form of a feminine proper noun, thus reinforcing the likelihood that it refers to "un paese di provenienza dell' Angiolieri . . . oppure il nome proprio della madre. . . del resto se ne hanno esempi: ps. si dice pure Giano della Bella, Pier della Francesca, e l'uso del nome materno esiste tuttora nel senese, specie se la madre rimane presto vedova" (Nannetti 52). For alternative spellings of "Solafica," see Élie Berger, who uses "Solaficii" (112n).

⁸ Cecco's house still stands today in Siena in front of the Albergo La Toscana, which was formerly a palace of the Tolomei. I transcribed the inscription placing in parenthesis the letters abbreviated in the original inscriptional capitals. I used the photographic reproduction of the inscription from Stanghellini's *Cecco Angiolieri* (2); Nannetti also transcribes the inscription in full but her *lezione* contains errors (51).

of the *arte del Cambio*, the guild that involved the lending and collecting of money (D'Ancona "Cecco" 168). Such an influential political and economic status is also confirmed by evidence pertaining to Cecco's father.

Cecco's father Messer Angioliero, who was a knight and financier involved in banking and trade, married the noblewoman Lisa Salimbeni. He was a politically active and highly influential citizen in mid-thirteenth-century Siena. As Massera documents, he was among the Priors of the *Comune* of Siena in 1257 and 1273; in 1258 the comune appointed him as one of the officials "deputati a rivedere le ragioni degli operai della strada di Paterno e del Ponte d'Arbia" and in 1262 he was involved with building the church of Saint George ("La patria" 445). Furthermore, he was in charge of tax collection both in 1258 ("Angelierio quodam Angelerii . . . ad recolligendum datium") and 1275: "eletto pe'l Comune *ad recolligendam gabellam*" (Massera, "La patria" 445).⁹ Lastly, the partnership of Cecco's father with the government includes military service, as evident in his participation—alongside his son Cecco—in the war of Siena against Arezzo in 1288 (Massera, "La patria" 445).

As D'Ancona shows, in 1280 Cecco's father abandoned all political and administrative participation in the *comune* and joined the lay group of the Friars of Santa Maria known as *Fрати Gaudenti* ("Cecco" 169).¹⁰ The record preserves no explanation for

⁹ I found the evidence pertaining to 1258 in the *Libri del Biccherna*, 1258, c.3: Item xxii.libri (Morandi 9). There is also another datum on c.3 Item L. sol. which records that Cecco's father collected more government taxes from Siennese citizens in the same district of Terzerio Camollie (Morandi 95). To my knowledge, no critic has adduced these data in Cecco's biography.

¹⁰ See also D. Federici, who shows evidence that Cecco's father was appointed *frate gaudente* in 1280: "In Siena si celebrò un Capitolo generale all'anno 1280" and among the name of the Siennese appointed *gaudenti* there was "Fr. Angeliero, è questo è il padre di Cecco Angioliero" (246). The fraternal order of the

this decision. The order allowed significant autonomy from the government and was restricted to rich lay noblemen who were able to be—and stay—married and live in their houses while fulfilling the obligations set by their order (Turley 380).¹¹ This surprising volte-face led to the gradual estrangement of Cecco's father from municipal politics and reinforced his involvement with members of the aristocracy and the papacy. This incident might have had a significant impact on the poet's life, especially if we consider that Cecco often evokes his father in his poetry—criticizing his extravagant lifestyle, presenting him often as disconnected from the poet's life and the reality of the time, and thus depicting him as an hypocrite and in negative terms.¹² Indeed, the nickname "Fрати Gaudenti" refers to their reputation for lavish apparel and a libertine lifestyle.¹³ On a more personal level, the abrupt departure of Cecco's father from governmental responsibilities might also be interpreted as an act of repentance for his practice of lending money. A similar case of repentance is evident in Cecco's uncle, Iacopo Angiolieri, who was among the richest men in Siena and in 1259 decided to donate all his

"Cavaliere della Gloriosa Vergine Maria" [Knights of the Glorious Virgin Mary] was a military order founded in Bologna c. 1267 based on a similar order from Parma (Davidsohn IV 106-07); Turley 380-81.

¹¹ These obligations were: to assist widows and children, fight heretics in the city, act as negotiators in family and civic disputes, foster peace among political groups at war, and fight usury (D. Federici I, 47-63). As Federici shows, the *Fрати Gaudenti* were also loyal to the Pope; Pope Urban IV prescribed the rule of the *Militi Gaudenti* on December 23, 1261 with his Bull *Sol ille verus* (D. Federici I, 50).

¹² Indeed Dante places two prominent founders of the *Fрати Gaudenti* in hell in the circle of the hypocrites (*Inf.* 23.82-109); see for example Cecco's "Il pessimo e 'l crudele odio ch'i' porto" (156), "Non potrebb'esser, per quanto Dio fece" (120), and "Chi dice del suo padre altro ch'onore" (167). Alfie has recently examined the tension between fact and fiction in these and other antipaternal sonnets focusing upon literary conventions and Franciscan ideology (*Comedy* 130-43); see also Tracy Barrett's "The Poetic Persona."

¹³ See D. Federici who describes their luxurious apparel (II. 94-96); D'Ancona "Cecco" 169-174; Massera "La patria" 441.

possessions to several Sieneſe parishes, denouncing his diſhoneſt earnings from uſury.¹⁴ As we ſhall ſee, by the end of the thirteenth century the relations between the lay order of the *Gaudenti* and the Sieneſe government had gradually become confrontational. This ſuggests that Cecco’s father probably developed a difficult relationship with Sieneſe rulers, ſince he dramatically ſhifted from the poſition of leader to that of ſubject. The political activism and ſubſequent withdrawal of Meſſer Angioliero moſt likely affected the poet and could be employed to better underſtand the political and hiſtorical role that Cecco played in his ſociety.

Cecco’s mother, the noblewoman Madonna Liſa Salimbeni, alſo had a prominent political and economic role in the government of Siena. The Salimbeni family, along with other notable *casati*, was one of the moſt prominent in Siena.¹⁵ A financial contribution of the Salimbeni family to the government of Siena was crucial both to ſuſtain the coſt of war during a time when the *comune* was undergoing economic difficulties, and to ſubſidize the Ghibelline army of 800 German ſoldiers that thus was able to march againſt Florence and defeat the Florentine army in the famous Battle of Montaperti.¹⁶ According

¹⁴ The will of Cecco’s uncle (or perhaps great-uncle) is in Zdekauer, *Il mercante senese* 77-84. Davidsohn eloquently ſummarizes the content of the will: “Iacopo Angelieri Solafichi, certo in quel tempo il piú danaroſo uomo di Siena, fece ſcrivere al ſuo notaio che tutti i ſuoi beni non baſtavano per riſarcire quanto egli ſi era procurato con l’uſura, e che perciò tutta la ſua eredità doveva venir impiegata a riparare, per quanto era ancora poſſibile, i danni arrecati” (IV.2, 447). See alſo Maſſera, “La patria” 442-43; D’Ancona, “Cecco” 251n.

¹⁵ The moſt prominent Sieneſe families were “the Salimbeni, Tolomei, Malavolti, Piccolomini, Buonsignori, Forteguerrì, and Squarcialupi. Theſe houſes had frequently been active in the government ſince the twelfth century. They poſſeſs numerous city palaces, towers, ſquares, and ſhops as well as vaſt contado holdings. Often they included directors of imposing international banking and mercantile enterpriſes” (Bowsky, “The *Buon Governo*” 372).

¹⁶ See Niccolò di Ventura 39-41; Muratori “Cronaca ſeneſe” 15.6. 1, 57.

to the chronicler Niccolò di Ventura, on the eve of the battle of Montaperti (1260) messer Salimbene Salimbeni—likely a cousin or brother of Cecco’s mother—loaned to the government of Siena

centodiciotto migliaia di fiorini d’oro, che furono posti in sur una carretta tutta coperta di scarlatto e ammaiata d’olivo, e a gran onore condotti in sulla piazza di S. Cristofano, appena chiuso il Consiglio, nel quale fu fatta ed accolta l’offerta. (Cited in D’Ancona, “Cecco” 170)¹⁷

The loan was accepted and used to provide the salaries of the 800 German soldiers; the Republic of Siena pawned important assets, such as castles, to honor its debt to the Salimbeni family (Bandi 70-71). This shows that the Salimbeni family played a key role in the government, indicating its political importance within the *comune* and its open support of the Ghibelline cause. However, this Ghibelline support was later the cause of controversy between the Salimbeni and the government, because after the Battle of Colle (1269) Siena was ruled by a Guelph oligarchy comprised of wealthy merchants who excluded many noble families—such as the Salimbeni—from office (Martini 97-98). The murder of the merchant Baroccino, son of a Siennese governor, committed in 1262 by Salimbenuccio Salimbeni, further shows the tensions that existed between the Salimbeni, the merchant class, and government officials.¹⁸ Overall, both the Angiolieri and

¹⁷ The chronicler Niccolò di Ventura (c.1373-1464) wrote a century after this event; see Porri’s *Miscellanea storica senese* xix-xx; Nannetti 16.

¹⁸ As Davidsohn notes, a civil war occurred in Siena between nobles, merchants, and popolani: “nel novembre si arrivò all’aperto scoppio della guerra civile” (II.1 745). In 1262, the son of Salimbene Salimbeni was involved in a fight with prominent members of the Siennese government and responsible for the murder of one of the sons of the priors of Siena. This incident led to his imprisonment, “perpetuo banno,” and execution by decapitation; the palace and castles of the Salimbeni were all destroyed (Pazzaglini 175; see also Davidsohn II.1 745-47). As Martini shows, tensions grew between the Salimbeni family and the merchant class, causing an uprising against the Salimbeni because they and other noble families were involved in the murder: “Salimbenuccio Salimbeni [fu] aiutato, pare, da familiari e da alcuni

Salimbeni families were powerful and had political and economic influence in the life of their *comune*. As we shall see, both experienced conflicts with the government, especially after 1287 when the *Governo dei Nove* was established.

Cecco's family background shows that the poet was the product of a diverse socio-political environment which ultimately challenges any definitive conclusion regarding his political affiliation. If we consider the established Guelph legacy of the Angiolieri and the documented Ghibelline association of the Salimbeni, it is likely that Cecco did not side with one specific political group. Such a possibility is confirmed by data from historical records, which demonstrate his involvement with the Guelph party and his political activism in the city of Siena but also his voluntary withdrawal from such responsibility. As previously noted, in 1281 Cecco was active against the Ghibellines at the castle of Turri in Maremma, but he soon fled the battlefield without permission and was thus fined twice (D'Ancona, "Cecco" 253 n 28). He later participated with his father in the battle of Arezzo (1288) and on this occasion was compensated for his military service. Some critics suggest that he was present at the battle of Campaldino (1289) where he could have met Dante (Massera, "la patria" 447). We should then be cautious when approaching evidence pertaining to his involvement in the Guelph government during these years because he probably did not willingly participate in these wars. His contribution could be more properly evaluated as an obligation imposed upon him by governors. Furthermore, these governors were not socially heterogeneous comprising only members from the merchant class who were rivals of both the Angiolieri and the

dei Tolomei, Rinaldini e Malavolta: il popolo allora, guidato da Provenzano Salvani, si sollevò ed assaltò il palazzo Salimbeni. I membri della famiglia furono arrestati" (81).

Salimbeni families. A well-defined social group representing a single political party ruled Siena and officially excluded members of Cecco's social class. By virtue of his ancestry he belonged to the Sienese aristocracy and one other piece of evidence confirms that he followed the standard lifestyle of the nobleman because he had a maidservant: "Nucia fancela di Ceco domini Angiulieri" (Massera "La patria" 448 n 1). In addition, he had correspondence and friendly relations with various poets associated with the nobility, such as Meo dei Tolomei (who belonged to the *casato* that by tradition was the rival of the Salimbeni and lived in the palace across from Cecco's house), Cecco Fortarrighi, and Dante Alighieri (Alfie, *Comedy* 145-63).¹⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio in his *Decameron* presents Cecco as a handsome and respectable nobleman: "bello e costumato uomo era" (IX, 4).

However, there is evidence that unexpectedly documents his involvement and interaction with members of the low and middle classes as well (i.e., guildsmen from artisan classes) such as barbers, cobblers, and *ligattieri* or cloth dealers (Massera "La patria" 446 n 3). D'Ancona and Massera have extracted from existing documents that Cecco was often fined for various disreputable offenses and involved in such illegal acts as curfew violation, assault and battery, and befriending the notorious "gran bevitore e giocatore e ladro" Cecco dei Fortarrigo Piccolomini, who murdered Balduccio Ugolini in 1293 (Massera *I sonetti di Cecco* 141).²⁰ The association between Cecco and low- and

¹⁹ As Todaro and Marti established with their studies on Cecco, twenty poems previously attributed to Cecco were instead written by Meo dei Tolomei. For biographical information on Meo and his relation to Cecco, see Marti, *Cultura e stile* 59-82.

²⁰ The sentence against Cecco dei Fortarrighi, as Massera notes, was most likely revoked because in 1297 he resided in Siena without any problems (*I sonetti di Cecco* 141). Angiulieri wrote a sonnet to Cecco dei

middle-class workers is also documented by various occurrences. Two are particularly notable and pertain to fines that the government imposed on Cecco in 1282 and 1291 because “fu trovato a girare di notte dopo il terzo tocco della campana comunale” (Massèra, “La patria” 446). Massera notes that in 1291 the fine against Cecco was paid on his behalf “da un Ugazzo barbiere e da un Puccio ligrittieri” (“La patria” 446).²¹ During the weeks or months following the denunciation and payment of this fine, Cecco was involved with the cobbler Biccio di Ranuccio in injuring Dino di Bernardino da Montelucò (Massèra “La patria” 447). As Massèra first noted, while Biccio was charged and fined for battery, Cecco was not charged for this incident (447).²² All these episodes demonstrate that although Cecco was a member of the aristocracy, he interacted closely with individuals belonging to different social backgrounds.

One of the most complex issues of Cecco’s biography is his alleged banishment from Siena. The issue has divided critics because no archival evidence has ever been found to support that the poet actually was banished from Siena. The only evidence we currently possess comes from the poet himself who mentions it in some of his poems, and

Fortarrighi in what might “have comprised part of a *tenzone* between the two Ceccos, now lost” (Alfie *Comedy* 139). This shows that a poetical relationship existed between the two. See also Boccaccio *Decameron* IX.4, D’Ancona “Cecco” 175-184; Massèra *Sonetti burleschi* 330-331; and Lanza *Cecco Angiolieri* lviii.

²¹ The term “lighrittieri” refers to cloth dealer: “Lighrittieri, come rigattiere, ma non nel significato di venditore della roba usata, sì bene di venditore di panni e robe nuove” (Lusini 166).

²² Massèra hypothesizes that Cecco managed to be discharged by the judge and was therefore not charged (“La patria” 447). A close scrutiny of this event could reveal that this was neither an isolated incident in the life of the poet nor an example of Cecco’s degenerate behavior; it could rather be approached as an episode motivated by a political agenda because Dino di Bernardino was a nobleman while Biccio was affiliated with low-class workers. The fact that Cecco was not charged by the judge shows that he could have been involved as a mediator during the dispute and thus he could have had political ties with both the individuals involved in the case.

from the indirect sources of annotations written in a manuscript, in the margin of Cecco's poems. According to this evidence, Cecco was apparently banned twice, and he almost certainly took refuge in Rome at least once. In one of his sonnets, "Dante Alighier, s'i' so bon begolaro," Cecco writes: "s'eo so fatto romano, e tu lombardo" (8) [If I have become Roman, you (have become) Lombard] (Lanza 219). This sonnet dates from 1303-04 when Dante was in exile in Verona (Lanza lviii) or Milan (Nannetti 166). The annotations of Cecco's pseudo-descendant Celso Cittadini, written in 1597 in the margin of the manuscript Siena H X 47 alongside the sonnet, also confirm this possibility: "perché Cecco andò a Roma a stare in casa del Cardinale Riccardo Petroni sanese" [Because Cecco went to Rome to stay at the house of the Sienese Cardinal Riccardo Petroni] (Massera *I sonetti di Cecco* 179).²³ Vitale and Marti, referring to the word "rimbandito" in Cecco's sonnet "Se Die m'aiuti, a le sante guagnele," plausibly argue that Cecco specifically uses this term to refer to a politically motivated exile, but no

²³ Massera was the first scholar to transcribe in full the annotation by Celso Cittadini (Massera *I sonetti di Cecco* 179-180) in the margin of "Dante Alighier, s' i' so bon begolaro" from Siena H X 47 (Alfie "Cast Out" 115). The annotation also cites Boccaccio's fourth *novella* of the ninth day (Massera *I sonetti di Cecco* 179). Massera notes the discrepancy between what Cittadini writes about Boccaccio's *novella* and the content of the actual *novella*, thus calling into question the historical reliability of Cittadini's annotation, and also creating an intricate dilemma between reality and fiction: "ora, leggendo la novella del Boccaccio troveremo che la mèta di Cecco era tutt'altro che Roma, e che il cardinale a cui egli voleva andare non era a fatto il Petroni" (Massera *I sonetti di Cecco* 178-80). Nannucci notes that instead it is Massera who misreads Boccaccio, who does not name the cardinal and clearly writes that Cecco went to Rome (166). Furthermore, Nannucci shows that in "Io averò quell'ora un sol di bene" and "Io potrei così disamorare", Cecco makes clear reference to Rome, suggesting that the two poems could have been written when the poet was exiled from Siena (166-68). As Alfie notes, Cittadini's annotation "constitutes a precious biographical datum about the life of the poet" ("Cast Out" 115). Alfie recently provided a full diplomatic transcription of the annotation but he transcribed "Con(te)" instead of Cardinal ("Cast Out" 115). Pope Boniface VIII appointed Riccardo Petroni cardinal in 1298 (Massera, *I sonetti di Cecco* 178). Close scrutiny of the manuscript would clarify this ambiguity. Massera believes that a distinction should be drawn between Cecco's exile and this residence in Rome; the critic thinks that this episode had no political implication, since there is no explicit indication that Cecco went to Rome due to a banishment (Massera *Sonetti burleschi* 330).

available documentation supports this claim conclusively (Marti *Poeti* 114, Vitale 263-64).²⁴ Because the only available data on Cecco's banishment are not historical but literary, the issue of whether or not the poet was in fact exiled can always be open to question unless we find more definitive proof either in the *Libro della Biccherna*, the *Libro delle condanne*, *Liber clavium*, or any other Sieneese records or judicial papers from archives. However, because Cecco mentions in his poems other items that are supported by historical evidence, such as when he identifies his father as a *Frate Gaudente*, the term "rimbandito" [banished] likely refers also to a factual event politically and historically based.²⁵

The last available evidence pertaining to Cecco's life is his will. The *Libro di preste del comune* records that on February 25, 1313, Cecco's five children renounced their modest inheritance. Based on Celso Cittadini's note on this document to the effect that Cecco frequented the notorious "brigata spendereccia" or spendthrift brigade, D'Ancona assumed that Cecco had squandered his family's estate, leaving his children with a

²⁴ D'Ancona and Massèra exclude the possibility that Cecco was politically active, and thus suppose that family and social disputes caused his banishment from Siena (D'Ancona "Cecco Angiolieri" 176, Massèra "La patria" 451). Antonio Lanza, agreeing with both scholars, states that Cecco was exiled from Siena for reasons related to his battery charges and other unknown criminal acts (lviii).

²⁵ The term that Cecco uses is the vernacular version of the Latin legal term "rebannimentum" which refers to the lifting of the ban against Sieneese citizens who were condemned and banned from the city for committing crimes. The term might imply a public crime politically based, but not necessarily since it might relate to a crime committed during a private dispute. As Pazzaglini notes "town statutes did not make a clear distinction between bans for crimes and bans for damage to property" (73n). According to the offense perpetrated against the *comune*, the banished was able to petition his return by paying a fee: "full payment in cash of a pecuniary ban and the five *soldi* fee charged by the Biccherna to cover the administrative cost of the *rebannimentum* or the lifting of the ban was usually necessary before the name of the condemnation of the *bannitus* could be cancelled in the *liber clavium*" (Pazzaglini 73); for a comprehensive discussion of the *rebannimentum*, see Pazzaglini 72-98.

posthumous fine to pay (D’Ancona “Cecco” 258).²⁶ With only a few exceptions, critics have employed D’Ancona’s statement based on Cittadini’s gloss, treating it as an historical datum.²⁷ However, while evidence documents the existence of a posthumous fine, the assumption that Cecco squandered his property is not confirmed by any documents, and is thus unfounded. Furthermore, the sixteenth-century Sienese scholar Cittadini, who was not a contemporary of Cecco, often provided unreliable evidence about Cecco in order to prove his blood relation to the Sienese poet. As Massèra notes, nearly all of Cittadini’s evidence is “in gran parte errato e quasi sempre inattendibile” (“La patria 450 n 2). The only evidence we possess is a record that shows that Cecco sold his vineyard in 1302, almost certainly after his father’s death (Massèra “La patria” 447), which suggests that the poet was experiencing financial difficulties. This possibility is confirmed by the events pertaining to Cecco’s children after their father’s death. During the hearing in February 1313, Messer Andrea de’ Rossi da Pistoia, the Major of Siena, opposed Cecco’s children’s disavowal because legally the Sienese Statute obliged the sons to pay any debts their father owed to the *comune*: “Andreas de Rubeis . . . dixit et consuluit quod, in quantum dicte propositae sunt contra Statutorum senensium, quod de ipsos nichil fiat” [Andrea de Rossi. . . said and deliberated that, because the petitions

²⁶ D’Ancona provides a partial transcription of Cittadini’s gloss while Massèra transcribes it in full. Cittadini wrote that Cecco’s children “rinuntiarono all’heredità paterna, per haver Cecco loro padre. . . spregato tutto il suo, essendo stato un di que’ della ricca costuma, come dice un comentatore di Dante” (Massèra, “La patria” 449 n 2).

²⁷ Lanza recently employed Cittadini’s gloss as evidence and depicts the poet as an “allegro scialacquatore coi suoi compagni di brigata” (xlvi) and concludes that Cecco frequented “la ‘brigata spendereccia’ senese” (lviii). See also Orwen 22. Massèra was the first critic to call Cittadini’s evidence into question; see “La patria” 449 n 2. Vitale also discounts the evidence: “la cosa non è accertabile” (II 263). See also Alfie, *Comedy and Culture* 8.

were against the Sienese Statutes, nothing should be done about them] (translation mine) (Massèra “La patria” 452).²⁸ As Bowsky notes, in 1314 Cecco’s older sons Deo, Angioliero, and Meo presented a petition and were successful in resisting “the bargello’s efforts to make them pay monies owed [to] the commune” (*A Medieval* 268-69). However in 1315, Cecco’s sons were eventually taxed “due fiorini e mezzo,” so the *Governo dei Nove* somehow partially prevailed (Massera, “La patria” 449). The events pertaining to Cecco’s death confirm the tension that existed between the poet, the Angiolieri family, and the government. They also show that the *Governo dei Nove* did not desist from imposing economic sanctions upon the poet and his family despite their petitions and financial difficulties.

Overall, although some episodes from Cecco’s life paint a rather negative picture of the poet in respect to his civic persona, others emphasize his activism and values as well as the complexity of his role within Sienese society. Cecco was not a rogue, a scamp, a criminal, or even a *poète maudit* as many early critics speculated.²⁹ On the contrary, he was actively involved in the political life of Siena, often took a polemical stance against

²⁸ See Sienese Statutes Dist. I.361 “Che li filliuoli sieno costretti di pagare el datio per la libra fatta dal padre” (Elsheikh I.281) and Dist. II.160 “Del modo di rifiutare la Heredità” (Elsheikh, I.509). The *comune* of Siena implemented special measures in order to discourage citizens from repudiating their inheritances to avoid paying debts. This is evident from the mandatory procedure that made the disavowal official and was meant to expose the act directly to the community. In order to officially repudiate an inheritance, the male heirs were obliged to be present with the town crier when he declared publicly their disavowal for three consecutive days; the presence of female heirs was not mandatory (Elsheikh 160). The fact that female heirs were not obliged to be present, explains why the signatures of Cecco’s daughters do not appear in the documents pertaining to this case. This shows that Cecco’s daughter, Tessa Angiolieri, was not necessarily “emancipata” as Massèra and subsequent critics have concluded (“La patria” 448, Lanza lviii).

²⁹ See for example Papini, who called him “un mezzo delinquente” (cited in Figurelli 11); Momigliano calls him “un empio, uno dei più empî poeti italiani (“L’anima e l’arte” 3); and Figurelli a bizarre “poeta maledetto” (49);

the government and, although a nobleman, interacted with individuals from diverse sociopolitical backgrounds. As Alfie notes, he must also have been an influential and respected poet because other aspiring poets, such as the poet Simone, consulted him for poetic advice and “numerous subsequent authors [took] . . . direct inspiration from him” (*Comedy* 163). Such authors lived in the fourteenth century (e. g., Folgore da San Gimignano, Pietro dei Faintinelli, and Nicolò de Rossi) and during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Burchiello and Francesco Berni respectively) (Alfie, *Comedy* 146-47). Furthermore, an eighteenth-century source documents that Cecco was influential not only for poets but also for future popes: “Girolamo Gigli, nel suo ormai raro, ma pur sempre pregevole ‘Diario,’ dice che Enea Silvio Piccolomini (Pio II) trasse qualche ammaestramento dagli antichi poeti della sua città, e tra questi nomina anche l’Angiolieri” (Nannetti 159-60). Although this 1723 source is written four hundred years after the poet’s death, it could be supported by other documents, especially if we consider that Enea Piccolomini (1405-1464), before he became Pope, wrote *Euryalus et Lucretia* and numerous comic and erotic poems.³⁰ These examples show that Cecco was highly influential within his own Sienese environment and beyond. By further examining the relations between the historical Cecco and the Guelph government, we will be able to better interpret his invective poetry and assess its political and ethical value.

³⁰ Some of these poems might echo Cecco’s poetry; see Terzori’s *Enea Silvio Piccolomini: Uomo di lettere e mediatore di culture*. The fact that Cecco was a close friend of Cecco Fortarrighi (who belonged to the same Piccolomini family of Pope Pio II) could explain how the future pope was exposed to Cecco’s poetry.

Cecco's Banishment from Siena, and the Governo dei Nove

It is puzzling that modern critics overlook some of the available information regarding the political situation in Siena during Cecco's time. To my knowledge, no in-depth study of the political situation of Cecco's city during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has ever accompanied any recent critical study on Cecco.³¹ Modern scholars tend to disregard the substantial historical events concerning Siena during the time these poems were presumably composed. Raffaella Castagnola barely acknowledges the possibility that some sonnets can offer modern readers "tasselli di vita quotidiana, spia di concezioni ideali o politiche, denuncia di certi malcostumi o di reali difficoltà personali" (*Cecco Angiolieri* 10). By doing so, she shows a general skepticism that historical context may actually illuminate the poems to any useful degree. In a recent essay, Fabian Alfie links the theme of political banishment to a goliardic motif, or a performance of a poetic persona. Although he acknowledges that Cecco's sonnet "Se Die m'aiuti, a le sante guagnele" exemplifies "the personal impact of exile," (123) he does not investigate ways in which political sonnets about exile could also be a concrete response by the poet to specific political tensions during his own time ("Cast Out" 114, 117, 123). Overall, recent critics have acknowledged only vaguely the connection between the poet's exile and his corpus. If we examine legal and political documents in late thirteenth-century Siena,

³¹ In "Cecco Angiolieri, Scamp and Poet of Medieval Siena" (1967), Paul Angiolillo provides a very general historical background of Siena during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (156-158). Gifford Orwen in the section "Siena and Angiolieri" in *Cecco Angiolieri: A Study* (1979) is the only recent scholar, to my knowledge, who sketches the political background of Siena during Cecco's time (21-28).

further explanations for Cecco's banishments could be found that enable a new interpretation of his sonnets through a political lens.

The existing evidence suggests that Cecco, though militarily active, did not have a role of political leadership in his own *comune*. During 1287-1355, the oligarchic *Governo dei Nove* ruled Siena. The regime of the Nine or the *Buon governo* (as Ambrogio Lorenzetti illustrates it in the famous fresco) is, after the Venetian oligarchy, one of the most stable and long-lived oligarchies among all the Italian republics (Bowsky "The *Buon Governo*" 368). It was comprised of middle-class merchants and bankers who excluded nobles, judges, notaries, physicians, and knights from political power.³² This is evident from the Siena Statute of 1287 that stated that the Nine "are and must be of the merchants and of the number of the merchants of the city of Siena or indeed (*vel*) of the middle people" (Bowsky "The *Buon Governo*" 370). Since 1277, when the oligarchy of the merchants began to gain authority, the exclusion was evidently stated by a provision passed by the General Council that "non sit aliquis de casatis" [there shall not be anyone from the *casati*; cited by Martini 98, translation mine]. In order to clarify who was excluded from holding office at the communal magistracy, the government then released an official list of sixteen Siennese *casati* [noble houses] with Cecco's *casato* listed as the "Salimbeni," from his mother's side of the family (Martini 98). In a later vernacular version of the Siennese Statute in 1309-10, the government reaffirmed the exclusive supremacy of the merchants over the nobility since the high magistracy had to be

³² See Martini 98-99 and Bowsky "The *Buon Governo*" 370. The political exclusion of the nobles started from 1271, and more overtly in 1277, when the General Council of Siena passed a law appointing thirty-six men to the magistracy comprised only of merchants and Guelph party members (Bowsky "The *Buon Governo*" 370; Martini 98).

“de’mercanti de la città di Siena o vero de la meza gente” [of the merchants or of the middling sort of people; Norman 224-235].³³

This political exclusion was not unequivocal, since business contracts show that economic collaboration still existed between the governors and some nobles in Siena during these years (Bowsky, “The *Buon Governo*” 379). Such collaboration, however, pertains to loans in the settings of weddings and business ventures, and could be understood as merely financial interactions between two parties. The Sieneese nobility did not have formal political power in Siena, and their relationship with the *Buon governo* was based mainly on mutual economic interest (Waley 94). In addition, Sieneese representatives of the executive power opposed, and made it illegal for Sieneese citizens from the low and middle class to be members of any guilds.³⁴ As a result, neither nobles nor guildsmen in Siena had the opportunity to be part of the government, so that a select social group of wealthy merchants and bankers exclusively made all the political decisions. This might explain why during this period, Cecco and his once-prominent father (who were associated with the nobility and the papacy) were sidelined from any position of authority in Siena.³⁵

The Angiolieri and Salimbeni families most likely had political enemies, especially if we consider that the Nine Governors infamously imposed many taxes and fees upon

³³ Diana Norman cites Daniel Waley’s *Siena and the Sieneese in the Thirteenth Century*, 48; the English translation is hers. See also Martini 98-99 and Bowsky “The *Buon Governo*” 370.

³⁴ See Bowsky, *A Medieval* 207-10.

³⁵ The partnership between the Angiolieri family and the papacy is evident from the armorial bearings of the Angiolieri that depict three mitres. The *mitra* was the liturgical hat wore by the pope; see the cover of Stanghellini’s *Cecco Angiolieri* which bears the “stemma di casa Angiolieri” (4).

noble Sienese citizens to cover the cost of war (Bowsky, *A Medieval* 268-69). The *Libro della Biccherna* documents several fines and taxes paid both by Cecco and his father from 1282 to 1296, including a fine against Cecco's father in 1296 because he failed to appear when he was called upon "in exercitu de Castillione" [at the army of Castiglione; translation mine].³⁶ The fine against Cecco's father and his absence from military duty is somewhat surprising, especially if we consider that he was an important knight who stood behind Cecco in 1288 in the battle of Arezzo. He was also a Prior of Siena and a prominent figure in the *comune* from 1257 to 1275. However, if we consider that this incident echoes Cecco's desertion from battle in 1281, perhaps Cecco's father could have deliberately refused to take part in the battle to show his dissent against the Nine. Such a possibility is supported by historical evidence.

By 1296, Cecco's father was not officially involved in the government because in 1280 he became a *Frate Gaudente* together with his wife, Cecco's mother, who became *militissa* (D'Ancona "Cecco" 170). Documents show that the Government of Siena was initially permissive toward the lay order of the *Frati Gaudenti*, and permitted them, for a short period, to abandon any political and military commitment in Siena, allowing them even exemption from government taxes (D. Federici 1.141-45). However, in 1279 and 1280 tensions arose between the government and the friars because they requested to be freed from military duty and be exempted "quando la città facesse esercito o cavalcate" [when the city organized the militia or cavalcades] (D'Ancona "Cecco" 173). As D'Ancona documents from the *Libro della Biccherna*, prominent politicians, such as

³⁶ Massèra, "La patria" 445-46; Vitale 262.

Francesco d'Accorso and Dino di Mugello, passed judgment against Cecco's father and the *frati gaudenti*, and in 1285 the Nine appointed seventy-five men who "stiedero un giorno e mezzo a picconare le case dei Gaudenti" [worked for a day and an half to pickaxe the houses of the Gaudenti] (D'Ancona "Cecco" 173). As William Bowsky notes, tensions between the *Gaudenti* and the *Governo dei Nove* persisted from the end of the thirteenth to the beginning of the fourteenth centuries:

The Sienese commune fought a running battle with the Jovial Friars and denied them any exemptions from civic obligations. A rubric of the Constitution of 1309-10 commanded the Podestà to bring the problem of the Gaudenti before the City Council for its deliberation every January. But the numerous regulations enacted by the council testify to the difficulty of the problem as well as to the government's steadfast determination to eliminate it. (*Finance* 81-2)

This evidence shows that Cecco's father, prominent during the 1260s and 1270s, when he joined the military and religious order of the *Gaudenti* became almost a rebel and deserter in Siena, as his son had been on several occasions, and probably had political enemies placed high up in the hierarchy of the *Governo dei Nove*. If we link these facts to the historical Cecco, we can clarify why the poet so often and so explicitly evokes his exile and displays a belligerent stance in many of his well-known sonnets. Cecco's confrontational attitude, displayed in poems like "S'i fosse foco, ardere' il mondo," can be approached not simply as a display of a stylistic subversion, but as reflecting the poet's beliefs. As we have seen from the previous chapter, Rustico's invectives are framed within their own environment and become vehicles of his personal philosophy; likewise, Cecco's most aggressive vituperative poems could be approached as expressions of a specifically political stance toward the Sienese government. I shall focus

on the available documents about the biography of Cecco to examine how they can deepen our understanding of Cecco's exile, to assess whether it indeed had a personal impact on the poet and why he employed and invoked it so tenaciously in his invectives.

Like Messer Angioliero, Cecco collided with the government. Secret informers used to report to authorities those suspected of breaking the law, and almost certainly Cecco's political enemies, while remaining anonymous, reported him in 1282 and 1291 for violating the curfew (Bowsky *A Medieval* 119). These events can shed light on the relationship between Cecco and the Sienese government and on Cecco's poetic practice of invective. As Massèra first noted, the record book labeled "83" of the *Libro della Biccherna* documents that on July 1282 Cecco "fu trovato a girare di notte dopo il terzo tocco della campana comunale" ("La patria" 446). At a first glance, Cecco's transgression might simply show how Sienese citizens were subject "to a strict curfew" because "only such authorized persons as night guards, visiting physicians, and garbage collectors could appear on the streets at night without special permit. Others found outside their houses after the sound of the 'Third Bell' had rung two hours after sunset were subject to a fine of 20s" (Bowsky, *A Medieval* 119). However, evidence from record book 83 suggests that the reason why Cecco was found on the streets at that time is perhaps related to his poetic practice. As Massèra noted, Cecco's sanction is listed alongside other fines, all for the same amount of 20 *soldi*, and all for the same curfew violations committed by jesters and storytellers:

curioso notare a proposito di questo registro 83, che esso ci ha conservato la notizia di altre multe, tutte di 20 soldi e tutte per la medesima cagione delle passeggiate notturne, inflitte a cantastorie e a giullari: a un Casella. . . ad un Simonetto, ad un Canero. ("La patria" 446 n 3)

Massèra's evidence strongly suggests that Cecco could have been involved as a *giullare* in the performance of poetry alongside other prominent poets such as the cited Casella, who as suggested by early critics was almost certainly "Scarsella da Firenze, anch'esso girovago cantore che musicò le rime di Dante e gli imparadisò l'animo all'entrare nel Purgatorio (D'Ancona "Cecco" 183).³⁷ This evidence might also explain how Cecco could have been introduced to Dante through Casella, later immortalized in *Purgatorio* II. 76-117. Indeed, the Sieneese Statute implemented numerous sanctions against "giollari" or jesters and anyone who was directly associated with them; a good number of these laws fined them the exact amount of 20 *soldi*.³⁸ The possibility that Cecco was fined for his jester practice seems more plausible than the more speculative supposition provided recently by critics such as Antonio Lanza, who concluded that all of Cecco's curfew violations were based on the poet's desire to meet his beloved Becchina: "magari avrà cercato di raggiungere Becchina a dar retta al son. XXXIII; e la cosa si ripete nel 1291" (xlii). Lanza's conclusion is based on sheer speculation because it is extrapolated solely from fictional rather than factual documentation.

The fact that Cecco could have been a *giullare* does not necessarily mean that he was a breakneck rogue, an irresponsible young hedonist involved in orgies, as D'Ancona and many early critics have concluded: "avido di piaceri e sempre scarso a danari, sordo agli ammonimenti e alla voce del dovere" and "immerso nel vino e nella crapula, fra

³⁷ See also Massèra, "La patria" 446 n 3. The fact that the *giullare* Casella, friend of Dante, is found only in Sieneese archives, such as other entries of *the Libro della Biccherna*, confirms that Cecco almost certainly knew and interacted with him during his youth and that record book 83 refers to him explicitly; see D'Ancona, *Rassegna bibliografica* 86.

³⁸ See for example Dist. V 187, 191, 193 (Elsheikh 329, 331-32).

amici di ventura e compagni d'orgie" ("Cecco" 183-84). On the contrary, as a *giullare*, Cecco could have been politically active in voicing his viewpoint toward the *Governo dei Nove* and thus could have played a similar role as his compatriot Ruggieri Apugliese, a "giullare professionista" active in Siena in the 1260s (Contini, *Poeti* I 884). As Gabriella Piccinni has recently showed (2003), Ruggieri was a prominent intellectual in early thirteenth-century Siena; he was a militant poet, a notary, a *doctor legum* or university professor, author of political satirical poems, and overall "un personaggio che mette in scena il conflitto politico e ideale che divide la città e nel quale è stato coinvolto" (77-78). Like Cecco, Ruggieri was also involved in *tenzoni* or poetic exchanges with prominent individuals, such as the political leader Provenzano Salvani and an unidentified bishop (Piccinni 63- 67). In addition, Ruggieri was almost certainly banished from Siena for political reasons pertaining to a charge of heresy and slander against clergy members performed through invective poetry: "la vera colpa di cui è imputato Ruggieri, (è) quella di diffamazione" (Piccinni 77). As Piccinni illustrates, Ruggieri provides a chronicle of his trial in his *sermone* when he cites in the poem the main accusation waged against him by the Sienese clergy, i.e. the charge of singing invective poetry (Piccinni 77):

Non è questi [quel] Rug[g]ieri
 K' io audii e vidi l'altrieri
 Kantare inansi kavalieri
 di noi kome semo crudeli e ferì. (77-78) (Contini, *Poeti* I 906)

[Is this not that Ruggieri / whom I heard and saw not long ago / singing
 before the knights/ about us saying how cruel and fierce we are ?
 (translation mine)]

Ruggieri's evidence confirms that the profession of the *giullare* played a significant political role in the *comune* as well as being perceived as a threat to Sieneese officials high up in the government and clergy (Piccinni 85; Davidsohn II.1 739). Even though Ruggieri was not Cecco's contemporary, his example illustrates that being a *giullare* in thirteenth-century Siena was a practice associated with influential intellectuals who had significant ties with prominent political leaders. Like Ruggieri, Cecco was actively involved as an intellectual in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Siena, exchanging and performing political poetry and possibly causing similar controversies. Cecco's jester practice could be approached as evidence that he continued Ruggieri's legacy, and for this controversial practice he could have been banished from Siena.

If we closely inspect other documents pertaining to Cecco's fine, we can confirm the association between the poet and the practice of publicly performing invective poetry. The *libro delle condanne* records that Cecco was fined 25 *soldi* in 1291 for the same curfew violation (Massera "La patria" 446). As the document shows, the Sieneese poet did not pay the fine, because it was instead paid "per lui da un Ugazzo barbiere e da un Puccio ligrittieri, amici, forse, di taverna e di giuoco" ("La patria" 446). The fact that a barber and a cloth dealer covered Cecco's expenses suggests that they were somehow related to the incident surrounding the fine, and possibly felt somehow obligated to pay the fee on Cecco's behalf. It is unlikely that in 1291 Cecco, no more than thirty years old and a wealthy member of the nobility, was unable to pay the fee and would have needed a loan from Ugazzo and Puccio. I would guess that on this occasion Cecco was likely compensated for a service he provided to his benefactors and such a service was almost

certainly related to this incident. This possibility is confirmed by the fact that the fine was for 25 rather than 20 *soldi*. It is very possible that Cecco was fined not simply for breaking the curfew, because such a transgression would have been fined 20 *soldi*; instead, he could have been fined in conjunction with the violation of performing invective poetry in a public setting. The *Governo dei Nove* imposed the exact sanction of 25 *soldi* of *denari* to whoever sang or recited vituperative sonnets against Siennese citizens.³⁹ This law was first promulgated in c.1300-1302 (in the Siennese Latin Statute) and subsequently in 1309-1310 (in the vernacular version of the Siennese statute) (Mecacci 109-110)⁴⁰:

Et se alcuno farà o vero componarà alcuna canzone, sonetto o vero dittato ad ingiuria o vero vitoperio d'alcuno cittadino di Siena o vero contumelia sia punito et condannato al Comune di Siena in C libr. di den. Et se alcuno cantarà alcuna canzone, sonetto o vero dittato ad ingiuria o vero vitopero o vero contumelia d'alcuno sia punito et condannato al Comune di Siena in XXV libr. di den. (Mecacci 141)⁴¹

[And if anyone will create or else compose any song, sonnet, or letter to insult, offend, or vilify any citizen of Siena he shall be punished and fined by the Comune of Siena 100 pounds of den(ari). And if anyone will sing

³⁹ The term “soldi” or “libre” specified the amount of “denari”; see for example the law, among the many, in Dist. V 191 “De’ giollari” [on jesters] that fines innkeepers who lodged jesters “XX soldi di denari” [20 *soldi* of *denari*] (Elsheich 331)

⁴⁰ The law against authors and performers of invective poetry is first documented in early fourteenth century Siena. In the Siennese statute of 1262 no such law is on record. In the thirteenth century, Siennese statutes sanctioned citizens who made vituperative offenses in relation to oral insults or *ingiurie* rather than poetry; see Lodovico Zdekauer’s *Il costituito del Comune di Siena dell’anno 1262* Dist. 1.430, Dist. 2.149. Insults in writing were also punished, but the 1262 statute does not contain references to poetry: “if a resident of Siena, or outsider places or causes to be placed, or throws . . . any writing containing something dishonorable or insulting – let him be punished to the sum of 100 l.” (Waley 66).

⁴¹ Enzo Meccacci published both Latin and vernacular versions (140-41). The roman numerals “C” (in line 3) and “XXV” (in line 6) refer to 100 and 25 respectively, i.e., the amount of den(ari) to pay for whoever broke this law. The term “libr.” after the numbers refers to the weight of the money, i.e., libbre (pounds) or *lire* since coins were weighted on a scale as well as counted, to avoid counterfeit; see Barni 828; Bowsky, *The Finance* 70-71.

any canzone, sonnet, or letter to offend or vilify or insult anyone, he shall be punished and fined by the *Comune* of Siena 25 pounds of den(ari).]
(My translation)

Both writing and performing vituperative sonnets was punishable in fourteenth-century Siena. The fact that the law was included in the Statute also suggests that such invectives circulated and were commonly produced against real individuals, since the Nine legally regulated and wanted to limit invective writing by punishing whoever authored and promulgated it.⁴²

Because Cecco was fined 25 soldi, he most likely performed rather than authored invective poetry against a factual individual or group. Although we do not possess enough evidence to identify against whom the Sienese poet recited his—or someone else's—sonnet, the record mentions that in 1291 he was linked to Ugazzo the *barbiere* [barber] and Puccio the *ligrittiere* [cloth dealer], two members of the artisan class. Such a relationship might also be approached as a political alliance. Both trades of *barbieri* and *ligrittieri* were affiliated with organized guilds. If we consider that Sienese guildsmen, like noblemen, were excluded from the government, the connection between Cecco, Ugazzo, and Puccio could gain a political connotation. Besides being barred from any position of political power, guildsmen experienced significant conflicts with the *Governo dei Nove* (Bowsky, *A Medieval* 207-10). As Bowsky notes, the government outlawed

⁴² By mentioning the practice of singing sonnets, this law suggests that in the Late Middle Ages, poetry—and more specifically vernacular sonnets—was also performed in the streets. Franco Sacchetti in his *Trecentonovelle* documents such practice in the novellas 114 and 115 when both a blacksmith and an ass driver sing passages of Dante's *Comedy* (Ahern 214). Singers are fined only 25 denari in opposition to composers, who are fined 100. This separation emphasizes that a clear distinction existed between an author and a performer of invective poetry, thus further supporting how such compositions circulated on both written and oral levels within Siena, reaching a wide audience.

important guilds in 1287 and forbade them “to have a rector or guild. Such a prohibition was applied to the millers thirteen years later. In 1297 a similar attack was made upon the powerful and dangerous butchers” (209). Cecco’s partnership with guild members could be interpreted as an alliance between members of two different social groups united by a common political agenda. Such an agenda could have included acts of a subversive nature against the Nine, ranging from condemnation through poetry to acts of sedition such as conspiracy against governmental officials. As we shall see, the last possibility is confirmed by documents which show that members of the nobility (and possibly Cecco’s relatives from the Salimbene family) organized public protests and plotted against the *Governo dei Nove*.

If we consider this scenario, Cecco’s expulsion from Siena emerges within a clear political setting. Historical records also support this likelihood. Cecco’s banishment from Siena must have occurred between the years 1292-1302 because in 1302, Cecco was in Siena where he sold his vineyard, almost certainly after his father’s death.⁴³ He also retreated or was possibly banished from Siena a second time between 1303 and 1312, because to my knowledge no document mentions him either paying any administrative taxes or being in the city during the period 1303-1312 (Massèra *Sonetti burleschi* 331). The precise reason why the poet was banished cannot be established conclusively. However, further evidence confirms that during these years Siennese nobles like Cecco often conspired against each other and the government. If we examine these tensions and

⁴³ Massèra *Sonetti burleschi* 330, D’Ancona “Cecco Angioleri” 191, 258. Lanza believes that Cecco’s father died shortly after 1296 because critics have not found any documents after he was fined by the comune for not attending the army in Castiglione in 1296 (lvii).

link them to the political and social role played by Cecco during his final years, we should be able to clarify the important question of his exile.

At the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth centuries, political tensions were building between the governors and the Siennese nobility. In 1310, these tensions reached their apex when the government intervened on two decisive occasions against prominent noble families. The commentator Agnolo di Tura recorded these episodes in his fourteenth-century chronicle. The first occurrence involves a dispute and conspiracy between the Salimbeni and Tolomei families who, because they were jealous of each other, secretly conspired to banish one another from Siena. The government reacted firmly:

E' Tolomei presero gelosia de' Salinbeni, e' Salinbeni di loro, sichè ciascuna de le parti ararono gente segretamente per cacciare l'uno l'altro da Siena. E' signori Nove che governavano Siena s'avidero, e ordinaro per guardia de la città; a di 26 di magio fèro compagnie per le contrada de la città e vicariati per lo contado e capitani de le masse, che tutti fossero a guardia del buono stato de la città. (Agnolo di Tura 307)

[And the Tolomei family became jealous of the Salimbeni, and the Salimbeni family the Tolomei, so that both families secretly gathered people in order to banish the other from Siena. And the Nine Lords, who governed Siena, became aware of it, and ordered (the citizens) to keep guard over the city; on May 26 they placed the (militia) groups and commanders throughout the districts and vicariates of the city and the countryside surrounding, so that everybody watched over the good state of the city.] (Translation mine)⁴⁴

Great hostility often separated influential noble families as they plotted against one another and tried to use their power to perpetrate the expulsion of enemies from Siena.

⁴⁴ As Martini notes, the term “compagnie” refers to an armed corps “corpo di pubblica sicurezza” (120) [armed group of public safety] that comprised about 400 paid men commanded by a captain and a *gonfaloniere*.

However, if we consider that the Nine had the exclusive authority to officially expel individuals from the *comune*, both the Salimbeni and Tolomei families played a role that was not authorized by the government. Consequently, they committed an act of rebellion against the existing political hierarchy in fourteenth-century Siena.⁴⁵ The prompt reaction of the government also shows the apprehension that existed between the government and the aristocracy, which reached its apex in another episode.

Both the Salimbeni and the Tolomei, alongside many noble families, set aside their personal hatred for each other and made common cause in order to plot against the Nine. The conspiracy involved prominent Sienese families who worked against the government and other less influential noble families:

E i grandi di Siena avevano fatte molte consortarie insieme, molte famigl[i]e in una, per carta, per tenere più segregate l'altre. E' signori e regimento di Siena, veduto i modi de' sopradetti nobili, providero che perdessero ogni uffitio e beneficio de la città e del contado e anco providero che alcuna persona tenesse parte ghibellina non potesse accettare nè esercitare alcuno uffitio di comune; e poi e' signori dèro e' gonfaloni a dì 3 di giugno per le contrade e compagnie di Siena. (Agnolo di Tura 307)

[And the eminent (nobles) of Siena had formed many partnerships together, many families into one, by [formal] contract, in order to keep the other (families) more divided. And the Lords and the army of Siena, having observed the ways of the above-mentioned nobles, arranged it so that (the nobles) ceased to have any office or benefice within the city and outside; and they also settled it so that no person who was of the Ghibelline party could either accept nor wield any office in the *comune*; and then, on June 3, the Lords supplied the districts of Siena with Gonfalonieri and (armed) groups]. (Translation mine)

⁴⁵ As Bowsky notes, the nobles were involved in other orders of the city, such as the "Consuls of the Mercanzia, the Provveditori of the Biccherna, and the Consuls of the Knights" (*A Medieval* 78, Agnolo di Tura 307 n 1). However, the nobles in all three consuls could be perceived as serving the government because their role was limited. They did not act autonomously but under the strict surveillance of the Nine who also were in charge of appointing the nobles (*A Medieval* 78).

As Martini notes, this could have been one of the most critical moments of the Oligarchic Regime of the Nine because the nobles formed a menacing, organized coalition through official written agreements, “per carta,” and set aside their longstanding internal disagreements to fight a common enemy (121). The government’s immediate action against this threat shows how closely such uprisings were guarded, since possible escalations of events like these could have seriously undermined the political authority of the Nine. The fact that the Governors took measures to emphasize the exclusion of nobles and Ghibellines from office shows the potential connection between Sieneese nobles and the Ghibelline party (Bowsky *A Medieval* 171). The Salimbeni family had a deep-seated history of Ghibellinism in Siena. Cecco’s mother, in particular, played a crucial role during the battle of Montaperti that constituted one of the most important Ghibelline triumphs against Tuscan Guelphs in 1260.

These political tensions also spiked due to the arrival of Emperor Henry VII in Italy during these years, and conflicts escalated between Sieneese nobles (who sympathized with the king, who gave them munificent gifts) and the regime of the Nine (Muratori *Cronaca senese* 90-2). The Nine, like the neighboring *comune* of Florence, were organizing a military defense and counterattack against Henry’s army and were highly suspicious of Sieneese noble families (Muratori *Cronaca senese* 90-2).⁴⁶ Sieneese Ghibellines, Sieneese nobles, as well as many guildsmen were most likely hoping for a political change of course in Siena (Martini 121). As Florentine documents show, Rustico

⁴⁶ Bowsky *A Medieval Italian Commune* 71; Martini 121-22; Davidsohn 4, 204 and 514-16. The 1309-10 Sieneese Statute also records a law against anyone who possessed property that once belonged to Ghibelline exiles; see Dist. I 510 (Elsheich 357).

Filippi's sons were banished during these years. Cecco's banishment may also date from this time, but no evidence is available to confirm such speculation.

The political and historical context outlined thus far significantly enhances our understanding of the ethical content of Cecco's invectives, especially if we consider the sonnets that evoke his exile and his political stance against the regime of the Nine. The Nine had many enemies, including noblemen, guildsmen, and even jesters. Cecco lived in Siena during a time of great political and social tension and was actively involved with a heterogeneous group of citizens. He also interacted with other Siennese poets, and thus his poetical production should be framed within this political environment. The various fines that were imposed upon him likely played a significant role in his banishment, especially if we consider that the citizens who were not able to pay sanctions in due course were liable for imprisonment or banishment (Waley 69). Furthermore, the evidence provided shows that these fines were not imposed for simple transgressions. Instead, the fines pertaining to his curfew violations illustrate that Cecco expressed his political values through his poetry and earned both recognition and condemnation from his contemporaries. Because he indeed expressed criticism in his poetry, he can very well be approached as a political poet who rose against prominent officials and military leaders. He thus had influential enemies on account of whom he suffered a long exile from Siena because he openly expressed his critical ideas and beliefs against them in comic poetry. This Cecco is quite different from the one established in modern criticism. The prospect of a Cecco-poet-dissident shows him in the same light as other Siennese poets such as Ruggieri Apugliese, and his illustrious Florentine peer and friend Dante Alighieri.

Early critics generally depicted Cecco as a rebel but failed to frame his unruliness within a specific historical matrix. As Alfie has recently argued, early critics such as D'Ancona inaccurately asserted that Cecco wrote his poetry as a diversion since "the inn was the locale for which all his sonnets had been written," and that "the poet composes his works to be sung in the taverns, and his fellow drinkers are responsible for the preservation of his poetry" (*Comedy* 4). Contrary to D'Ancona, Alfie views Cecco as a "masterful writer" who participated in literary circles and wrote for a limited and cultured audience (*Comedy* 17). As we shall see, Alfie's reassessment of the poetic persona of Cecco has merit and should be aligned with the critical rehabilitation initiated by critics, such as Natalino Sapegno, in the early twentieth century. However, modern critics generally disregard the connection between historical events and the historical Cecco, and do not entertain the possibility that Cecco could have been involved in *giullare* practice like his compatriot Ruggieri Apugliese. In doing so, they ignore important evidence that could contribute greatly to the understanding of Cecco's sonnets. The following section will illustrate how the shift between early critics and modern scholars has rehabilitated Cecco the poet, rejecting an exaggeratedly biographical reading of his poems, but in doing so has also gradually disregarded the continuity between Cecco the poet and Cecco the Sienese citizen. As a result, Cecco the man has vanished from most of the recent criticism and is invoked solely to highlight what can be called a split personality case between a loosely evil Cecco-the-man, and an established superior author Cecco-the-poet.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ A negative depiction of Cecco the man, which overshadows Cecco the poet, is recently evident in Lanza

Cecco's Works and Critical Reception

Since the discovery of Cecco by Alessandro D'Ancona with his pioneering study "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo decimoterzo" (1874), anthologists of medieval Italian poetry have disagreed about which sonnets were actually written by Cecco. Massèra attributed to Cecco a total of 150 sonnets in his *Sonetti burleschi e realistici dei primi due secoli* (331; Lanza lxii). Subsequently, studies by Adele Todaro (1934), Domenico Guerri (1934), Mario Marti (1950), and Antonio Lanza (1990) have reduced the number of poems securely attributed to the poet to 111.⁴⁸

One of the perennial debates concerning Cecco's poetry has been how to distinguish fact from fiction in his poetry. D'Ancona's study first outlined relevant historical and biographical elements of Cecco's life that were closely connected to the critical interpretation of his poetry: "la forma sua propria di poetare, strettamente connessa colle sue vicende, si allontana infatti, e di gran lunga, dal modo più o meno comune ai suoi confratelli nell'arte" (166). D'Ancona emphasizes the close harmony

xlii. In his 1912 edition, D'Ancona added a note to answer back to Pirandello, who accused him of supporting and accepting Cecco's evil side. In doing so, D'Ancona first sketched the "split personality" of Cecco because he praised Cecco the poet to the detriment of Cecco the man. This approach is very similar to Lanza's and generally established in modern criticism: "non ho mai difeso nè dissimulato i difetti e vizi dell'uomo, e che ho deplorato e condannato tutto quello che c'era in lui d'istinto e di azioni malvagie; ho soltanto lodato una forma poetica, del tutto personale, molto singolare per sè stessa e pei tempi a cui appartiene" (D'Ancona "Cecco" 264n).

⁴⁸ See Lanza lxxii-xxiii. Several codices preserve Cecco's corpus; the three main ones are Chigiano L.VIII.305, Escorialense e.III.23, and Barberino Latino 2953. In a recent study, Menotti Stanghellini in *La grande rapina ai danni di Cecco Angiolieri, bisessuale, il nemico di Dante* (2007) attributes a total of 234 sonnets to Cecco because he thinks that the Siennese poet authored the 61 sonnets originally attributed to an anonymous "amico di Dante," and another anonymous group of 53 sonnets contained in the Ms. Vat. 3793. However, Stanghellini does not provide philological, paleographical, or historical documentation to support his attributions (64-75). Stanghellini's previous study, *Cecco Angiolieri*, published in 2003, approaches the question of Cecco's attribution more critically (11-18). Though it reaches interesting conclusions, this book too is not very convincing due to its lack of documentation.

between Cecco's life and his poetry, as well as his originality. By praising his originality, D'Ancona depicts Cecco's poetry as a unique expression quite apart from his own time and fellow poets. As a consequence, D'Ancona's interpretation paints a picture of a rebellious, penniless, and degenerate poet who gambles and writes poetry celebrating this transgressive way of life. D'Ancona ultimately highlights the connection between the poet's personal feelings (which reflect his sufferings and misfortunes) and his creativity (distinguished by humor):

Poesia dei sensi, eccitati da gagliarda foga d'immaginazione, ma insieme ritratto di dolori, di miserie, di bisogni reali e stringenti, esagerati e coloriti da un acre umore sarcastico, è veramente questo *Canzoniere* di Cecco.
(248)

Overall, D'Ancona approached Cecco's corpus as a reflection of the poet's emotions and personal tribulations, and also tried to connect his critical interpretation to the biographical and historical data he reconstructed. By drawing such a close connection between Cecco's life and his poetry, D'Ancona created a freestanding and convincing interpretation that appealed to his contemporaries. He also drew attention to the question of laughter and humor, as evident in the title of his study, "Cecco Angiolieri da Siena, poeta umorista del secolo decimoterzo." A number of studies immediately followed D'Ancona's pioneering work which at times reflected an excessively autobiographical interpretation of Cecco's works, claiming for them a nearly transparent expression of the poet's life. Overall, however, they contributed a dynamic discussion about the role of humor and laughter in the poet's works.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See Momigliano's "L'anima e l'arte di Cecco Angiolieri" (1906); Pirandello's "Un preteso poeta umorista del secolo XIII" (1906); Nannetti's "Comicità, malinconia e umorismo di Cecco Angiolieri"

As a reaction to the overtly autobiographical reading of post-Risorgimento scholars, the next generation of critics, including Natalino Sapegno and Mario Marti, elaborated a more formalistic approach that focused on the specific rhetorical and stylistic aspects of Cecco's poetry, minimizing the individual and personal contribution of the poet.⁵⁰ As noted earlier, Marti's *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (1953) represents the apex of this new approach. Marti states clearly how Cecco's comic and invective poetry should be interpreted through this viewpoint:

L'importanza (...) di Cecco sta soprattutto nell'aver donato ad una nascente letteratura i toni giocosi, adattando al lessico, alla sintassi, allo stile della nuova lingua letteraria la preparazione che a loro deriva appunto dalla cultura dalla tradizione dalla scuola. (40)

For Marti, a critical interpretation of Cecco should not rest on the poet's life, environment or psychological tribulations, but rather on language and style. As both Contini and Raimondi comment, Marti's *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi* offered an interpretation of Cecco's poetry within the wider context of the European comic tradition linked with movements such as Latin Goliardic poetry and the rhetorical tradition of the "artes dictandi" (Contini, *Poeti* II 369; Raimondi 105-106).

(1929); Asinelli's *Il riso di Cecco Angiolieri e l'amore, l'odio e il dolore nel canzoniere di Cecco Angiolieri* (1932); and Previtera's *La poesia giocosa e l'umorismo* (1939).

⁵⁰ See Sapegno's "La lingua e l'arte di Cecco Angiolieri" (1929) and Marti's *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi del tempo di Dante* (1953).

As recent critics such as Petrocchi, Giunta, and Alfie note, Marti's influential study caused a correction of course away from the biographical reading initiated by D'Ancona; however, it also launched an excessively formalistic approach.⁵¹ Salvatore Battaglia eloquently attacks Marti's formalism, questioning his departure from earlier romantic critics, and goes so far as to say that Marti's approach is harmful:

E da una prima interpretazione di tipo romantico, che tentava di identificare la poesia con la vita e riconosceva in Cecco un'esperienza di poeta disperato e maledetto, si è passati a considerare le sua espressione quasi come un'esercitazione letteraria e un gioco puramente verbale. E così è avvenuto che uno dei poeti più originali e ribelli d'ogni tempo è stato recentemente ridotto a una valutazione "retorica" e "tematica," come rimatore che si sia applicato ad adeguare il suo dire alle "Artes dictandi" e rifare con claudesca disionvoltura i vecchi motivi della goliardia medievale. (Battaglia 121-22, cited in Peirone 93)

Battaglia does not supplement his passionate and eloquent criticism of Marti's reading with any new corrective proposals. Other critics, such as Petrocchi and Giunta, share—though more moderately—Battaglia's criticism and offer valuable insights for dealing with the relationship between Cecco's life and his poetry. They suggest crafting an approach between the two extremes of autobiographism and formalism (Giunta *Versi* 320).

These recent studies show that although Cecco's poetry contains evident references to biographical data, we are still far from understanding concretely how these data relate either to a single sonnet or to his whole corpus. When considering the relation between Cecco's life and his invectives in light of D'Ancona's and Marti's interpretations, we should try to mediate between the two approaches, and if possible, formulate a "terza

⁵¹ See Petrocchi 577, Giunta's *Versi* 320, and Alfie's "Cast Out" 113 and *Comedy* 119.

via.” This approach should include the influences of Cecco’s life on his poetry, as well as his stylistic and linguistic individuality, as both dimensions contribute to our appreciation of the fictional and historical value of his corpus. In addition, modern scholars influenced by critics such as Marti have neglected Cecco’s humor, which was discussed vibrantly by post-Risorgimento scholars. As Alfie accurately notes, “scholars no longer ask if Angiolieri, Rustico di Filippo (...) and others intended to provoke laughter in medieval readers, but rather, analyze them according to medieval aesthetics” (Alfie *Comedy* 118). To my knowledge, no modern scholar has provided an in-depth study of the role of laughter and humor in Cecco’s work as it functions within the poet’s original cultural and social environment.⁵²

Another crucial issue pertaining to Cecco criticism involves the relationship between his poetry and the contemporary *stilnovo* genre, revealing Cecco’s association with other poets such as Dante. The *stilnovo* is often classified as “lirica d’arte” and described as “aulica” for its refined style and dignified tone (Marti *Cultura* 1). Most scholars, following Sapegno (1934) and Marti (1953), favor a formalistic approach to Cecco’s comic corpus which emphasizes his poetry as the antithesis of the *stilnovo*

⁵² Although Alfie notes that modern critics tend to avoid the question of Cecco’s humor, he also seems to suggest that the question of humor is old-fashioned and praises Marti for having set it aside: “Mario Marti in his *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi*, ended the controversy about whether Cecco was a humorist or not by successfully changing the terms of the debate” (*Comedy and Culture* 118). In my view Marti did not end the debate on humor, but rather diverted it into a question of style. One recent work that examines Cecco’s humor is Tracy Barrett’s “Cecco Angiolieri: A Medieval Italian Humorist” (1991). Barrett offers a lengthy discussion on how past scholarship has approached the question of humor in Cecco’s corpus and takes a clear stand against a biographical interpretation. However, Barrett does not examine how Cecco’s humor affects his original readers, since she examines thematic and stylistic models as delineated by Marti: “My conclusion is that while it is irrelevant and ultimately unknowable how the historical Cecco Angiolieri really felt about these matters, the artist Cecco is consciously using humor and several of its tools, most notably satire, as a deliberately chosen literary device particularly adapted to his style and themes” (349).

(Orvieto 87). This critical trend became more prominent after Sapegno's influential study on Cecco Angiolieri which, as Contini noted, launched subsequent studies on Cecco and Italian comic medieval poetry in general:⁵³

Per collocare giustamente l'Angiolieri nel quadro della storia letteraria contemporanea a lui, bisognerà considerarlo non (...) quasi un umile e secondario proselite della scuola poetica dello stilnovo, bensì come il rappresentante più notevole della reazione a quelle correnti di poesia astratta ed intellettuale. ("La lingua e l'arte di Cecco" 304)

Sapegno opposes the interpretation of scholars such as D'Ancona who portrayed Cecco as a solitary rogue; Sapegno claims instead that Cecco was an important voice during the fourteenth century. Though Sapegno understandably seeks to provide an approach that would value Cecco's poetry alongside the more fashionable *stilnovo*, he promotes what could be perceived as a rigid dichotomy between two models of poetic expression. In this dichotomy, Cecco's poetry is portrayed as reliant upon the *stilnovo*, which is also presented negatively as abstract and cerebral. By implication Cecco's poetry is by contrast concrete and intuitive.

Giunta recently debated the validity of Sapegno's critical approach, which he calls the "interpretazione metaletteraria," as it applies to Cecco (*Versi* 267). He applies valuable criticism to this interpretation, noting that both genres of poetry (the jocose or *comico-realistica* and the *stilnovo*) were not historically in opposition or in competition with one another, but rather coexisted (*Versi* 269). In addition, Giunta adds that we have no evidence of a direct controversy expressed by the poets between the two genres:

⁵³ See Contini *Poeti del Duecento* II 368-69. Recently Giunta has underlined how Contini first acknowledged and subsequently questioned this formalist critical approach in various occasions (*Versi* 326-38).

Dei molti testi delle origini che si possono fare entrare nella famiglia dei contre-textes burleschi, nessuno include prese di posizione esplicite contro l'altro versante della poesia contemporanea, la lirica d'amore propriamente detta: si potrà dunque parlare per ora di modi differenti di interpretare la poesia e l'amore, non di conflitti dichiarati tra questi diversi modi. (*Versi* 272)

Giunta supplies numerous examples that all show no indication that Cecco's or any other comic texts function in opposition to the *stilnovo*. He suggests that if a distinction should be drawn between the two genres, it is a difference of expression contingent upon the individual poets rather than generic internal disputes and competition between two poetic genres, one recognized, the other not. Overall, Giunta questions the "interpretazione metaletteraria" established by Marti's *Cultura e stile* (1953) and followed by the majority of modern critics who mainly focus on stylistic divergences between the style of Cecco's poetry and the *stilnovo* (*Versi* 278-293).⁵⁴

Following Giunta's study, Stefano Carrai and Giuseppe Marrani's collection of essays, *Cecco Angiolieri e la poesia satirica medievale* (2005), provides further discussion of hermeneutic models for Cecco's comic and invective poetry. Carrai shows that critics in Italy now seek to articulate a more comprehensive approach to Cecco's poetry, revising the conventional approach to his corpus as antithetical to the *stilnovo*:

Nei vari contributi si impone, difatti, in primo luogo la questione di una valutazione e interpretazione del rapporto con la corrispettiva poesia di genere aulico. Interrogandosi su questo punto, parecchi studiosi si pronunciano qui a favore di una autonomia del testo satirico, in stretta relazione con la poesia cortese sì, ma paritata: non di secondo grado, insomma, nè da intendere come semplice parodia. (233)

⁵⁴ Having introduced several examples, Giunta cites Marti's *Cultura e stile* (1953) and concludes: "lo stile di Cecco è diverso dallo stile di Dante e Cavalcanti. Ma ciò deve significare che lo stile di Cecco irride, capovolge, fa la parodia dello stile di Dante e Cavalcante? Gli esempi già discussi dovrebbero essere sufficienti a dimostrare che questa implicazione non è affatto necessaria" (*Versi* 287-88).

In these recent studies, Cecco's poetry containing vituperative attacks is now considered more as a phenomenon in harmony with other coexisting lyrical expressions in Northern Italy. Scholars now examine and question whether Cecco's texts, and other so-called jocose poems, are mere expressions of parody or competitive forces against the *stilnovo*. A critical revision could reopen Cecco's poetry as an independent poetic expression approached through the poet's own distinctive voice.

Though these scholars contribute welcome insights on the need for a new approach, they tend to overemphasize the stylistic continuity within various texts and literary traditions:

il sostrato goliardico, individuato nella poesia di Cecco da Marti e da Suitner, resta uno dei nodi fondamentali da scogliere e un campo di ricerca di fonti e di modelli, irrinunciabile quanto fertile; [. . .] che gli atti di questo convegno possano contribuire ad aprire una nuova stagione di studi in cui si ponga, appunto, in posizione centrale la ricerca delle radici latine medievali della prima poesia comica di area romanza. (Carrai 234)

By drawing special attention to the link between literary models and comic texts, current scholarship has tended to set aside the relationships between the physical author of the texts, his historical context, and his original readers. As Carrai argues, the main results of *Cecco Angiolieri e la poesia satirica medievale* pertain to the texts *per se* in their "inquadramento stilistico" alongside their "geografia e storia letteraria" (234). In other words, the current crop of studies discusses specific questions pertaining to the texts (i.e., their origins, circulation, content and style) by using a method that considers only the fictional texts as proof for critical interpretation. As a result, they neglect to consult nonfictional evidence such as legal or legislative documents, or biographical or codicological evidence from manuscripts, and decline to undertake an informed

reconstruction of the history, law, and custom of the urban centers in which these texts emerged. By placing Cecco's texts within a stylistic and geographical frame, present scholarship not only shows the existing gap between literary criticism and other disciplines such as history and social sciences, but also overlooks evidence that would enhance the comprehension of these poems. A solid historical and political frame would underline the continuity between the rhetorical and the ethical aspects of Cecco's invectives, and of comic poetry in general as well. If we locate invectives within a specific historical context, we can expose a dynamic network of poetic correspondence that offers a basic understanding of municipal, social, and ethical issues.

In addition, the current critical revision initiated by Giunta, Carrai, and Marrani has not yet provided a new course that does not follow the already well-worn path of formalism first delineated by Sapegno (1929) and secured by Marti (1953). This is evident when Giunta himself acknowledges ironically in his conclusion his own lack of conclusion, best expressed in a shortage of solutions or *modus operandi* in approaching Cecco's corpus:

Ho discusso, dunque, e quasi sempre ho respinto, le interpretazioni in chiave parodica di vari sonetti di Cecco Angiolieri e di altri duecentisti. In cambio, non ho indicato protocolli alternativi (...) Ma proprio la loro flessibilità può significare aderenza ad un oggetto (il corpus di testi che definiamo *comico-realistici*) che, essendo tutt'altro che monolitico, non tollera interpretazioni totalizzanti. ("Espressionismo medievale?" 297)

Giunta justifies the absence of new hermeneutic models for approaching Cecco's and other comic texts in his interpretation by holding responsible the rich variety of the corpus of the *comico-realistici* (because it resists monolithic interpretations). By doing so, Giunta underlines the complexity of Cecco's corpus, showing a desire to find

alternative readings and urging modern scholars to explore new ways of understanding Cecco's invectives. Whether or not this third path will be found, we have some crucial questions to keep in mind when considering a new approach to Cecco's invectives. The relation between his life and poetry, the relative autonomy of his corpus, and ultimately the ethical value of his corpus as it interacts with humor and blame, should all be components of this new approach.

Overall, most critics highlight the invective quality of Cecco's lyrics and the vituperative personal attacks against his father and mistress (or wife) Becchina.⁵⁵ I know of no recent study that has offered an in-depth analysis of the historical and political references in Cecco's vituperative poetry. Indeed, Lanza emphasizes the complete absence of an ethical or political dimension in any of Cecco's lyrics:

La vena di Cecco non è certamente etica (...) Colpisce, a questo proposito, la totale assenza nel suo corpus poetico dell'elemento politico. (li).

Such an assertion is, as we shall see, an overstatement that limits a comprehensive reading of Cecco's corpus. The fact that the elements of ethics and politics in Cecco's poetry have not been thoroughly studied is no proof that his whole corpus is devoid of ethical or political implication. On the contrary, some sonnets do contain clear if subtle references to wartime and sociopolitical tensions, suggesting that they probably had an ethical message for the original readers. The sonnet "S'i fosse foco, ardere' il mondo," though not traditionally considered an invective, aggressively attacks different individuals and groups, such as Cecco's compatriots and his own parents, as well as impersonating and indirectly criticizing the pope and the emperor. Its aggressive verbal

⁵⁵ Cian *Satira* 140-41; Marti *Poeti* 116; Castagnola *Cecco Angiolieri* 9; Alfie *Comedy* 128-129.

language seems to perform hyperbolic deeds which, if approached as examples of negative behaviors, do contain an ethical message. Few critics have approached “Quando Ner Picciolin tornó di Franza,” “Lassar vo’lo trovare di Becchina,” and “Dante Alighier, Cecco, tu’ serv’e amico” as invectives or *tenzoni*, since they attack specific individuals in a well-defined social environment (Castagnola *Cecco Angiolieri* 9; Giunta *Versi* 273-78). Other poems such as “Se Die m’aiuti, a le sante guagnele,” “Questo ti manda a dir Cecco, Simone,” and “Dante Alighier, s’i’ so’ buon begolaro” make a specific reference to Cecco’s exile from Siena, and thus might contain an oblique political message. The sonnets “Chi vòl vantaggio aver a l’altre genti,” and “Figliuol di Dio, quanto ben avre’ avuto,” clearly mention the battles of Montaperti (1260) and Colle (1269). In a sequence of close readings, I will examine “S’i fosse foco, ardere’ il mondo,” “Se Die m’aiuti, a le sante guagnele,” and “Lassar vo’ lo trovare de Becchina,” emphasizing their references to specific political tensions in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Siena. In doing so, I seek to explore how the vituperative attacks contained in these sonnets, by ridiculing and condemning Cecco’s own contemporaries, interact with their own specific historical frame and contribute to an ethics of invective.

“S’i fosse foco, ardere’il mondo”

Within the substantial corpus of sonnets attributed to Cecco, “S’i fosse foco” is by far the most renowned and widely anthologized. Cecco is commonly associated with the tradition of the *comico-realistici*, and is highly regarded as a stylistic innovator of the themes of comic parody and subversion discussed above (Alfie, *Comedy* 192). Although “S’i fosse foco” has not often been approached as an invective, its rhetorical constructions and violent verbal aggression make it one. The consistent sequence of the hypothetical “si” clauses suggests that the sonnet, in creating an imaginary setting, addresses a real addressee who is faced with Cecco’s verbal insults, attacks and ridicule in a concrete environment. A notable feature of invective writing is perceptible in the destructive and fierce language that mounts an attack first against the whole world (1-4) and then against individuals and groups within Europe (5-8). As the sonnet progresses, the attack focuses on more specific individuals, such as the poet’s father and mother, suggesting a shift from Europe to the poet’s native city of Siena where his parents reside (9-11). The sequence of the targets echoes the traditional form of invective in its hierarchical structure (from attacks of *res externa*, to *corpus*, and *anima*), moving the attack from a global to a confined scope, from the universal macrocosm to the civic microcosm.

Alongside the verbal assault, humor and ridicule also emerge in the sonnet’s hyperbolic content. The verbal violence of Cecco’s poem sardonically attacks his target reader through a sequence of threatening nouns and verbs which describe the whole

world burned by fire, buffeted by wind, drowned by water and finally hurled into the abyss:

S'i' fosse foco, ardere' il mondo;
 S'i' fosse vento, lo tempestarei;
 S'i' fosse acqua, i' l'annegherei;
 S'i' fosse Dio, mandereil en profondo; (1-4)

[If I were fire, I would burn the world; / If I were wind, I would buffet it; /
 If I were water, I would drown it; / If I were God, I would hurl it into the
 depths;]⁵⁶

The sequence of reproaches then becomes more personalized to all Christians⁵⁷:

s'i' fosse papa, serei allor giocondo,
 ché tutti 'cristiani embrigarei;
 s'i' fosse 'mperator, sa' che farei?
 a tutti mozzarei lo capo a tondo. (5-8)

[If I were Pope, I would then be joyful, / because I would molest all the
 Christians; / if I were emperor, you know what I would do? / I would chop
 off everybody's head at once.]

Cecco's attack then proceeds from mankind to his own parents:

S'i' fosse morte, andarei da mio padre;
 s'i' fosse vita, fuggirei da lui:
 similmente faria da mi' madre. (9-11)

[If I were Death, I would visit my father; / if I were Life, I would flee from
 him: / I would do the same with my mother.]

⁵⁶ All of Cecco Angiolieri's sonnets are from Antonio Lanza's *Le rime* (1990), and translations of Cecco's sonnets are mine.

⁵⁷ The term "cristiani," in medieval as in modern Italian, often denotes just "people" (as opposed to beasts) (*Dec.* IV.5 for example). With this term, Cecco could also refer to medieval Europeans all assumed to be under the rule of the pope and emperor. The term then could be translated as "Christians" or, from Cecco's point of view, even as "mankind."

Having attacked his own parents, both located in Siena, the poet then concludes the series of attacks perhaps toward his fellow townspeople of Siena, in particular old and ugly women and the men who would be stuck with them:

S'i' fosse Cecco com'i' sono e fui,
torrei le donne giovani e leggiadre:
le vecchie e laide lasserei altrui. (12-14)

[If I were Cecco as I am and have been, / I would snatch the young and slender women: / and leave the old and ugly ones to others.]

As Mario Marti emphasizes in his *Cultura e stile nei poeti giocosi* (1953), critics of the post-Risorgimento, endorsing a reading of Cecco's poetry as autobiographical, emphasized the writer's psychological discontent and dissent against his own time (119-29). The tendency of more recent critics, such as Marti and Quaglio, and more recently Castagnola and Orvieto, has been to focus primarily on the stylistic elements and impersonal intertextual dimension of Cecco's poetry, emphasizing his rhetorical subversion and parody of other poetic styles.⁵⁸ As Claudio Giunta has recently emphasized, however, these formalistic readings have positioned Cecco's comic sonnets as either stylistic exercises of subversion and reversal, or literary expressions of mere fictional parody of the 'higher' poetic form of the *Stilnovo* and courtly poetry, and have imposed this particular model of interpretation not only on Cecco but upon the majority of medieval comic poets (*Versi* 268-272). In addition, this influential interpretative model, while it has contributed significantly to highlighting the seriousness of Cecco's engagement with a literary tradition, neglects any potential seriousness of content. It thus

⁵⁸ Marti "Discussioni, conferme" 176-77; Quaglio 28; Castagnola *Cecco Angiolieri* 17-23; Orvieto 95-97.

fails to notice the ethical stance that Cecco articulated in his poetry, a stance that opens up the possibility of dialogue with interlocutors within a shared political matrix.

The poem's rhetorical structure suggests this interaction between authors and readers from the sonnet's very opening to its close. In the first quatrain, the hypothetical "Si" clauses that open each line not only suggest the possibility of destruction, but also create an invitation to the reader to envision a scenario different from his or her everyday life. Cecco introduces a make-believe setting through a series of attacks of apocalyptic proportion against the whole world. The devastations presented, in the series of conditional verbs "arderei" (1), "tempestarei" (2), "annegherei" (3), and "manderei" (4), are all hypothetical. However, the dual aspects of the violence depicted and of the imaginary identities elicited by the "si" interweave, presenting to the reader memorable images that are fictional but also concretely provocative and aggressively polemical.

The condemnatory and more quotidian quality of the invective emerges sharply in the second quatrain. Readers are confronted with destructive acts of aggression and execution evoked by the verbs "embrigarei" (6) and "mozzarei lo capo" (8). The effect of violence is present not only in the content, but also phonetically in the repetition of "r" sounds, as in *embrigarei*, and "z" sounds, as in *mozzarei*. If we read the poem aloud, the verbs create an effect of dissonance within the metrical equilibrium of the sonnet that even a modern ear can recognize. The violent verbal surface outlined here, though it seems predominant, is not the only aim of the invective; the hypothetical frame of the "si" and the comic standpoint of the attack are just as important. By impersonating the pope and the emperor, the poetic "I" directs a comic verbal aggression against these same

agents because it makes them perform hideous deeds with no particular motive, and thus turns them into ridiculous objects of the invective as well. If we compare the two scenarios of the cosmic apocalyptic attack (the world burned, buffeted, and drowned) with the more down-to-earth assaults of the second (the molestation and decapitation of “cristiani”) the latter seems placed in a less fantastic and more verisimilar –though still hyperbolic—setting.

As Menotti Stanghellini has noted, the verb *embrigare* could refer to the specific action of excommunication performed by the pope, while the decapitation threatened by the emperor describes his most common and simple means of execution (*Cecco* 110-11). Even if Stanghellini’s suggestion is sheer speculation, unsupported by philological data, it is in agreement with other scholars. Gianfranco Contini interprets the same verb *embrigare* in a similar way when it appears twice in *Proverbia quae dicuntur super natura feminarum*.⁵⁹ Through this scenario of quasi-normality, the damnation and decapitation of all “cristiani,” endorsed respectively by the hypothetical Cecco-pope and Cecco-emperor, could reflect the poet’s own political environment. Like Rustico’s “A voi che ve ne andaste,” Cecco’s sonnet seems both to criticize the institutions of papacy and empire generally, and perhaps more specifically also to ridicule the excessive ferocity of the popes and monarchs who were active when Cecco wrote the sonnet (c.1294-1312). The terms “papa” and “mperator” could both represent the abstract concept of the spiritual and temporal powers, and almost certainly refer to Cecco’s contemporaries Pope

⁵⁹ To explain the meaning of the term “embrigare,” Contini uses synonyms such as “to hamper,” “to compromise,” or “to defame” (“s’impacciano, si invischiano,” Contini *Poeti* I.535).

Boniface VIII (1294-1303) or Clement V (1305-1314) and the French monarch Philip the Fair (1285-1314) or the Emperor Henry VII (c.1275-1313).

Boniface and King Philip struggled against one another, but they also experienced serious domestic tensions within their own city walls due to local criticism of their cruel schemes. The influential Colonna family was inimical to the pontiff because “his pursuit of territorial aggrandizement, necessarily at the expense of even grander families, inevitably aroused their hostility” (Watt 159). In 1297, “the Colonna communicated their accusation against Boniface” while “papal legates throughout Italy were preaching a crusade against them” (Watt 159-60). Beside the Colonna family’s opposition, the *comuni* of northern and central Italy and wealthy members of the French nobility also resisted Pope Boniface. In 1297, the government of Siena openly revealed its support for the powerful Colonna by providing support to them through both military and financial aid in Rome during the war between the Colonna family and the pope.⁶⁰ King Philip the Fair encountered a similar unpopularity, with a record characterized by numerous executions, as in the war in Flanders (1290-1305), and later unpopular persecutions and exterminations, such as the well-known suppression of the Knights Templar in 1307 (Burman 259).⁶¹ In this moment of division and crisis, Cecco’s representation of the aggressive pope (whose supremacy is represented by the authority to excommunicate) and the rash emperor (whose power is expressed by whirls of the sword) could evoke a

⁶⁰ Waley 124; Bowsky *A Medieval* 90-1.

⁶¹ See Jonathan Riley-Smith’s recent study *Templars and Hospitallers as Professed Religious in the Holy Land* (2009); Malcom Barber’s *The Trial of the Templars* (1978).

more complex, pointed, and immediately relevant historical scenario characterized by a criticism recognizable to and “enjoyed” by his medieval reader or listener.

The last two stanzas of the sonnet create a further bridge between the author and the medieval audience, which seems invited to connect more directly with reality. The setting of the hypothetical death of Cecco’s father and mother in the previous tercet is almost certainly the city of Siena. If we consider the consistent shift of the sonnet from a universal to a more local dimension, the last three lines could further confine the setting of the invective to the open Sienese square where the image of pretty and ugly women is presented:

S’i’ fosse Cecco com’i’ sono e fui,
torrei le donne giovani e leggiadre:
le vecchie e laide lasserei altrui. (12-14)

[If I were Cecco as I am and have been, / I would snatch the young and slender women: / and leave the old and ugly ones to others]

These lines feature not only a visible downshift from the cosmic scope and murderous rage of the early lines to a more local and mischievous transgressiveness, but also a “reaching out” toward a more tangible audience, a “reaching out” which gains its momentum with this last tercet, in which the poet proposes a final ironic hypothesis. In it he seems to more directly criticize and ridicule his own compatriots, projecting a specific criticism against them. This criticism is expressed with the coexistence of the contrasting concepts of the poet’s separation from his compatriots and his potential arrival in the city. Cecco suggests his estrangement from Siena though his imminent violent arrival, and thus might suggest a potential condemnation of his own compatriots responsible for his

present situation of exile when the poem was possibly written. Cecco implies this by impersonating himself, as he devolves into claiming that “if he were Cecco, as he indeed is and has been” (“S’i’ fosse Cecco com’i’ sono e fui” 12), he would engage in an act of aggression, taking (“torrei,” 13) pretty and shapely women by force.

However, the value of this last scenario (introduced once again by the hypothetical “si”) is ambiguous. If we posit that the poetic “I” coincides with the poet himself, how is it possible that the rhetorical structure of this last tercet is still a hypothesis? “*If I were who I am*”: Is it possible to hypothesize about a factual reality? If the final lines indeed represent the poetic persona of the author, how does the “hypothesis” relate to the previous attacks, and how does it connect with Cecco’s own compatriots? If we consider all these questions within the setting of blame and humor, the paradox is only superficial. The series of hypotheses from the previous stanzas persuasively creates the effect that the last “si” is another hypothesis as well. Its ambiguous rhetorical structure, however, makes these last three lines a direct warning to the reader rather than a mere premise, since the “if” more logically serves the rhetorical function of an emphatic taunt: i.e., “Since I am who I am.” If we recall the context of Cecco’s banishment, then through a mocking construction he seems to communicate to the medieval audience the following provocation: “If I were who I really am and was (and I am who I say I am), I am coming back to Siena and I will seize all the pretty women, leaving you all with only the old and ugly ones.” This last statement seems suspended within a hidden question posed to the reader: “What would you do about it?” If we interpret these last lines as a warning against a specific target—that is, the author’s

compatriots responsible for his banishment—the criticism would connect, as it has consistently been connected throughout the sonnet, with humor, eliciting laughter in readers faced with the author’s last provocative but also derisive attack.

The sonnet’s association with exile is also confirmed with its probable reference to the legal expression of the “*Interdictio aquae et ignis*” [Interdict of water and fire] which was pronounced by the high magistracy “when the accused left the community before the condemnatory sentence was passed and went into voluntary exile” (A. Berger 507); such a practice is widely documented in late medieval Siena (Pazzaglini 16). As Peter Pazzaglini notes, the interdiction was based on the tradition of Roman law which

tolerated the voluntary exile of the accused to escape a criminal trial or a certain sentence of death. Closely following the exile, an administrative decree, the *interdictio aquae et ignis*, banished the fugitive, deprived him of citizenship and property, and permitted him to be killed by anyone who met him within the territory from which he had been expelled. (16)

By specifically evoking fire and water at the opening of the sonnet, Cecco utilizes the same legal language to sarcastically show how the death threats launched by the government against him can be equally ricocheted back to Siena.⁶² Furthermore, by using hyperbolic language and depicting stirring scenarios through an irreverent humor, Cecco suggests that the sonnet acts more as a teasing and a dissent against the interdiction rather than a subversive threat launched against the government. Cecco uses poetry and humor

⁶² As Gordon Kelly notes, “The full formula seems to have been *tecti et aquae et ignis interdictio* . . . although ‘shelter’ is generally omitted in the sources . . . fire and water were the symbolic material needs for life. . . and modern scholars generally view the interdiction as removing these symbolic needs from the outcast. . . . Another interpretation attaches a religious meaning to the interdiction of fire and water. Since fire and water symbolize purity, their use was denied the exile lest he defile them for the rest of the community” (26).

as a vehicle for his criticism, and proposes to his target readers a specific ethical stance on exile, war, and violence.

Overall, “S’i fossi foco” offers readers an ethical statement against conflicts and abuses grounded in a well-defined historical matrix. Beyond offering readers his own personal drama of exile, Cecco portrays political discords current in the early fourteenth century. In doing so, he personalizes the historical controversies of his time through poetry so that the representation of abuses contained in the sonnet becomes a source of criticism illustrating the damaging consequences of war and political conflict. “S’i’ fosse foco” is overall a polemical attack on the inconsistent motivations behind conflicts; it derisively enacts such discords, representing them in a clear and violent way, perhaps to warn readers of the potential damage of malevolent acts in a wider political context. This seems evident in the careful construction of the imagery arranged from the first quatrain to the final tercet, a construction which corresponds to prescribed ethical models, as we shall see.

In Cicero’s *De amicitia*, a source well known to medieval readers, friendship and harmony are associated with “fire and water” (VI.21).⁶³ Moreover, Cicero paraphrases Empedocles and his principle that strife disperses the four elements (earth, air, fire and water) while friendship unifies them (VII. 24). The necromantic treatise *Libro Di Geomanzia*, from the Florentine MS Magliabechiano XX.60 dated c.1279, documents astrological practices devoted to the understanding of the present and future condition of

⁶³ Robert Black notes, “in the fourteenth century, Cicero’s moral treatises and Virgil’s poetry became the most popular prose and verse classics in the Italian curriculum” (*Education and Society* 49). Cecco almost certainly knew Cicero’s treatise and explicitly evoked it in “S’i fossi foco” by using the imagery of fire and water.

individuals in the world (Bertelli 6-10, 17). One specific passage mentions the symbol of war and conflict, i.e., the planet Mars (Bertelli 29). The destructive nature of Mars is presented both as a menace and as a demon that possesses human beings. The passage appears strikingly similar to “S’i fosse foco” as it presents a sequence of excesses that match the sequence presented by Cecco:

Nel v cielo abita Mars, la sua natura (è) mala (e) d’è di fuoco (e) nera (e) rossa (e) masculine (e) serviziale del Sole (e) la sua potenza è contro ai Saracini [...] il su’ metallo est il ferro [...] Mars fa l’uomo piccolo (e) la faccia (e) la fronte stretta (e) parlante, allegro donatore (e) guastatore (e) tosto s’adira (e) tosto ritorna, [...] disideroso di femine [...] seminatore di discordia. (Bertelli 29)

[In the fifth heaven resides Mars. It is of evil nature, made of fire, red, black and masculine, and it is in the service of the Sun and its power goes against the Saracens; [...] its metal is iron [the sword]. [...] Mars makes men small with narrow faces and foreheads.⁶⁴ Mars is loquacious, a cheerful giver and wastrel, pugnacious, quick to anger, and quick to calm down, [...] lustful for women [...] sower of conflicts.] (Translation mine)

This extract represents discord through a sequence that neatly parallels Cecco’s poem: Mars is first introduced as fire, then as the symbols of the emperor (in the image of the sun associated with gold and the emperor) and the pope (in the description of the opponent of the Saracens), and at the end in terms of lust for women. Both *De amicitia* and the *Libro di Geomanzia* direct readers toward the understanding of friendship and universal harmony within a concrete environment. With “S’i fosse foco,” Cecco elaborates in a similar way hyperbolic representations of conflicts to stir readers’ response toward friendship and peace, which are the ethical models opposite to discord and war.

⁶⁴ This feature perhaps refers to limited intelligence.

Far from being an example of a generic literary practice, or a mischievous whirl, or a sketchy reflection of the poet's anger and verbal aggressiveness, "S'i fosse foco" addresses serious issues from the perspective of a poet engaged with the tensions of his own time. Both the elements of threat and the comic exaggerations contained in "S'i fosse foco" can be read as carefully constructed to stimulate the audience's active response. That active response ultimately interacts with the author's stance on important, challenging questions regarding political abuses perpetrated by specific individuals (such as the pope and the emperor), his own compatriots and family members, and others ranging from the lower to the higher ranks of the communal government.

"Se Die m'aiuti, a le sante guagnele"

Unlike "S'i fosse foco," the sonnet "Se Die m'aiuti, a le sante guagnele," makes explicit references to Cecco's banishment from Siena and its negative outcomes from the poet's perspective. It differs from "S'i fosse foco" in being more personalized and explicitly restricted to the poetic experience of exile. Like "S'i fosse foco," however, it is set within a consistent series of hypothetical "si" clauses that frames the entire poem, creating a make-believe scenario of violent and polemical attack. The poetic "I" pilots the descriptions of the sonnet as the main narrator and implicitly blames unknown individuals responsible for his present condition as an outcast.

Se Die m'aiuti, a le sante guagnele,
 s'i' veggio 'l dì sia 'n Siena ribandito,
 se dato mi fosse 'entro l'occhio col dito,
 a soffrire mi parrà latt'e mèle. 4

E parrò un colombo senza fèle,
 tanto starò di bon core gecchito:
 però ch'i' abbo tanto mal patito,
 che pietà n'avrebb'ogni crudele. 8

E tutto questo mal mi parrebb'oro,
 sed i' avesse pur tanta speranza,
 quant'han color che stanno 'n Purgatoro. 11

Ma elli è tanta la mie sciaguranza,
 ch'ivi farabb'a quell'otta dimoro,
 che babb'ed i' saremo in accordanza. 14

[So help me God, by the holy gospels, / If I ever see the day when I am
 summoned back to Siena, / even if I get a finger in the eye/ that pain
 would seem like milk and honey. / And I will seem like a dove without
 bile, / so well disposed will I be, / so that every cruel enemy I have/
 because I have suffered so much / would have pity on me. /And all this
 pain I am enduring would seem to me like gold, / if I only had as much
 hope left as the souls in Purgatory. / However, my bad luck is so great/
 that I would return to live there again at the moment / when my father and
 I will be in agreement.]

According to Alfie, the sonnet presents two distinct parts, breaking between the
 quatrains, which describe more general hypotheses, and the tercets that focus on the
 present condition of the poet (*Comedy* 171). However, in my view the fracture of the
 sonnet seems to occur with line 12, at the word “ma” [but], where the shift from the past
 to the present tense occurs. In the first quatrain, Cecco envisions his return to Siena,
 describing how joyful his homecoming would be for him even if someone were to poke
 him in the eye (3-4), because the mere fact of returning to his beloved Siena would make
 his pain feel as sweet as milk and honey (Alfie *Comedy* 170; Lanza 66). The second

quatrain continues the hypothetical description of Cecco's return to Siena by comparing the speaker to a peaceful dove devoid of ill-intentioned rage toward his compatriots and in particular his cruel enemies who, after seeing his long suffering, would have mercy on him (5-8). In the first tercet, the poet imagines that if he were as hopeful as the souls in Purgatory who await mercy, his present negative condition of exile would seem like gold (9-11).

But in the last tercet the poet changes his tone, adding a more tragicomic flavor to his personal drama and unmasking the falsity of his initial hope with the factual reality of his current exile (12-14). Cecco introduces the preposition "ma" [but], strongly diverging from the first stanzas of the sonnet that are based on a series of mere hypotheses. This is also confirmed grammatically since the closing tercet features no "si" clauses, thus reinforcing the pragmatism of his present condition of exile as introduced with the crude curse of the opening "a le sante guagnele" (1). In this final tercet, Cecco confirms the attack on his enemies by reinforcing the fact that they are determined not to recall him to Siena. He does this by hypothesizing an impossible condition: that his enemies would summon him back only when he and his father will be at peace with each other, or in other words, never (11-14).

The predicament of Cecco's exile, as Alfie subtly notes, might also recall a condition described in the biblical tradition (Alfie "Cast Out" 115-16; Castagnola *Cecco Angiolieri* 136). The entire sonnet borrows biblical and spiritual language in its references to Siena as the Promised Land of milk and honey (4) from Ex. 8: 8; the poet-dove as the symbol of peace (5) from Gen. 8:11; the condition of exile as Purgatory (11);

and the directive “Honor your father” (14) from Ex. 20:12 (Alfie “Cast Out” 115-16).⁶⁵ Cecco thus “sets up two structural parallels in the poem: between exile and hell, and between Siena and an unattainable paradise” (“Cast Out” 116). Alfie elaborates on these parallels, claiming that Cecco’s loss of hope puts him in a position of eternal damnation (“Cast Out” 116). He concludes, “the poet writes an internally consistent sonnet in which exile is depicted as a sinful hell on earth and the banished individual is a sinner deserving of such a punishment” (“Cast Out” 117). Alfie overall argues that Cecco in “Se Die m’ aiuti” elaborates a representation of a comic persona which, though it coincides with the author, does not accurately represent him, in order to state that if banishment is like hell, the banished is a sinner doomed to eternal damnation (“Cast Out” 116). Cecco’s “poetic acumen” serves to produce a highly elaborated “literary construct carefully crafted for artistic objectives” (“Cast Out” 116-17).

Although Alfie proposes a logical interpretation of Cecco’s sonnet, his conclusions are somehow unsatisfactory. Though the Siena/Paradise parallel seems very persuasive, the hell/exile parallel is not. The representation of exile is indeed negative, but this does not necessarily mean that the banished individual is completely condemned or damned to hell. Cecco’s representation of exile does not seem to coincide with hell because the poet’s present exile is not permanent damnation, but rather somewhere

⁶⁵ Alfie also mentions Christ’s admonition from Matthew 5:29, “if your right eye causes you sin, gouge it out and throw it away” in reference to “dato mi fosse’entro l’occhio col dito” (1), (Alfie “Cast Out” 115). This seems somehow contrived as in the Gospel passage the sinner’s eye is gouged out by the sinner himself, not by someone else. It could more naturally refer to the saying “dare del dito nell’occhio a qualcuno” that refers to the act of committing a general offense against someone (Marti *Poeti* 150, Massèra *I sonetti di Cecco* 111). It could have historical and political implications in reference to the practice employed in the Italian *comuni* of publicly humiliating exiles after they expressed the desire to return to their hometown (Waley 64-72). Cecco could hyperbolically refer to his own desperate desire to return to Siena and his willingness to endure any humiliation.

between hell and paradise, if not specifically in Purgatory. Cecco suggests this possibility to his readers with the consistent use of the hypothetical “si” that implies that his exile places him at the door of hell but not quite within it, since although he has lost his hope for the present, he might regain it in the future, depending on his fate. His hope, in other words, depends not entirely on himself but on the clemency of Siena’s governors (“ogni crudele,” v.8) who have the power to free him from banishment. The poet therefore does not necessarily suggest that he is damned or that he is “a sinner deserving of such a punishment” (“Cast Out” 117). His hopeless condition of exile could instead imply a condition of irresolution and despair rather than an admission of guilt. Cecco, though he does not invoke Dante overtly, describes his present condition of exile similarly to Dante the pilgrim before the gates of hell where he encounters the famous inscription, perhaps warning his readers: “Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch’intrate” [Abandon all hope ye who enter in] (*Inf.* III, 9).

The consistent construction of the “si” clauses within an imaginary narrative has led critics like Alfie to question whether we should read this sonnet autobiographically at all. In *Comedy and Culture*, Alfie discusses whether we should interpret this sonnet as a genuine self-representation of the poet or instead as a fictional representation or performance of a literary topos (74). Alfie explores autobiographical approaches to literary texts, which thematize how to assess whether or not a text is autobiographical. He examines the studies of Leo Spitzer, Philippe Lejeune, and Peter Dronke that examine the tension between the author and his poetic representation in his own texts. Spitzer argues that “the poetic I should be read as distinct but not entirely unconnected to the empirical

author” (cited in Alfie, *Comedy and Culture* 172). Lejeune elaborates the genre of autobiography as writing that exposes the identity between author, narrator, and protagonist (Alfie *Comedy* 172). Finally, Dronke explores the concept of poetic persona or comic mask in the medieval poet that is paradoxically not divorced from the author yet does not offer reliable facts about him (*Comedy* 174): “Cecco creates his own sophisticated comic mask and comic world” (Dronke 161).

Using these critics, Alfie acknowledges the presence of an historical Cecco alongside a fictional Cecco in “Se Die m’ aiuti.” He then suggests a reasonable solution to the enigma of the author’s position in the text by saying that “the answer probably lies in the middle ground between the assertion that ‘Se Die m’ aiuti, a le sante guagnele’ is autobiographical and the claim that it is purely fictive” (*Comedy* 172). This seems a fair compromise, but Alfie then questions the representation of Cecco himself in the poem and concludes that perhaps Cecco deliberately presents himself negatively, distorting reality and creating an unreliable narrative voice to echo a well-known topos in comic medieval literature (*Comedy* 173). Alfie goes so far as to say that “Se Die m’ aiuti” is a paradoxical self-directed invective that Cecco wrote, in his own name, in order to depict a negative representation of himself:

There exists at least one constant to this portayal in that he almost always depicts himself in a negative way. No matter which situation develops, no matter how circumstances unfold, no matter what the subject-matter treated, the self-portrait inevitably presents Angiolieri in the worst possible manner. (*Comedy* 174)

The hypothesis that a poet, mistreated by his enemies and in a state of despair, creates a fictional text to serve artistic objectives alone elides the potential ethical and political

implications in the poem, and above all fails to consider that the sonnet could have been written to convey a message to Cecco's contemporaries and to condemn not the poetic representation of the exile-poet but rather *the condition of exile*. Although the sonnet deploys comic and hyperbolic language, this does not mean that its comic style and literary construction are Cecco's main objectives in the poem. On the contrary, the generalized rhetorical and formalistic literary tradition could be the vehicle of Cecco's poetic expression, not his main objective in writing poetry.

Overall, although Alfie invokes an intermediary position for interpreting Cecco's sonnet, suggesting a middle ground between autobiography and fiction, he nevertheless advances the interpretation (already posed by critics such as Marti) that Cecco and the *comico-realistici* produce a type of poetry that is detached from the present sociopolitical reality of the poets, since their poetic representations in the poem are consciously constructed as negative, elusive, and unreliable (*Comedy* 174). Alfie places the fictional Cecco over the historical poet Cecco, and this interpretation overshadows and de-historicizes any specific political facts and potential ethical propositions the sonnet might have offered to its original readers.⁶⁶ Though Alfie is careful not to deny completely the influence of real life and the factual reference to exile in Cecco's sonnet, in focusing on Cecco's language and style he nevertheless brackets the historical and political references in the poems. In my opinion, however, these allusions were most likely inserted in the

⁶⁶ Alfie seems to question but also to sympathize with the view of critics like Marti who emphasize that poets like Cecco never write honestly about themselves (Alfie, *Comedy* 170). Even though Alfie advances the convincing claim that comic-realistic poets hardly write transparently about themselves, he does not explore the other possibility that their writings could be genuine expressions of the poets' lives and historical events.

poem to verbally attack specific external targets, thus suggesting a pertinent ethical reading of this sonnet in its original historical context.

Unlike “S’i fosse foco,” where we could interpret the first part of the sonnet as a sequence of negative actions that Cecco himself personifies to stir an ethical response, “Se Die m’ aiuti” features Cecco’s personal drama, which is both the premise of his personal attack against undisclosed political enemies and a fictional representation of the general suffering of a poet exiled from his city. Although the sonnet does not identify a specific target, the historical tensions between the Nine, Cecco’s father, and Cecco himself could be the starting-point for more in-depth historical research, supported by a close examination of all the archival documents from the *comune* of Siena pertaining to the poet and his exile.⁶⁷ As is evident in other sonnets (such as verse 8 of “Questo ti manda a dir Cecco, Simone” and verses 10-14 of “Dapo ’t’è n’grado, Becchina, ch’i’ muoia”), Cecco clearly mentions his exile and is more specific than in the sonnet “Se Die m’ aiuti,” providing the names (or nicknames) of his political enemies who caused his forced removal from his native land. By doing so, he highlights what he perceives as their cruelty in both causing his exile and perpetuating it, preventing him from returning to Siena. If we read “Se Die m’ aiuti” from this perspective, Cecco seems to craft a serious

⁶⁷ If we consider the years during which this sonnet could have been written, there is a strong possibility that at the moment of its composition and circulation the author was banished from Siena, since the relationship between the governors of the Nine and prominent Siennese nobles was experiencing a crescendo of political tension (Waley 122-23). The clear reference to Cecco’s residence in Rome and Dante’s in Lombardy, from the sonnet “Dante Alighier, s’i’ so’ buon begolaro” sent to Dante, could date Cecco’s banishment from c.1303-04 to 1312 (Lanza, lviii). “Se die m’ aiuti” could refer to Cecco’s compatriots and, more specifically, to those belonging to the oligarchic regime of the Nine. Cecco’s banishment could be extended from 1303 to 1312, because in 1312 all exiles returned to Siena, summoned by the Governors of the Nine (Muratori *Cronaca senese di anonimo* 92). Cecco may never have returned to Siena (as Dante never returned to Florence), since in February 1313 the *libro di preste del comune* (1315) documents his death as though it had already occurred (Massera, “La patria” 451-52).

ethical message that pertains to exile and war both from the single perspective of the poet, and also from the wider perspective of the condition of human estrangement from a world divided by offense (3), war and cruelty (8), despair (9-11), and social and economic disparity and injustice (12-13).

Cecco is not, however, trying simply to portray his personal case as a poet in exile and to teach a generic ethical lesson to his readers, because he employs a comic tone for his implicit criticism. A reading of this sonnet that valorizes only the moralistic aspect over the comic one would be too reductive. The presence of humor is evident from the opening of the sonnet: “a le sante guagnele” is a phrase taken from current Sieneese vernacular and functions to emphasize Cecco’s accursed condition of exile. It also immediately defines Cecco both geographically and linguistically as a native of Siena. This is evident from the poem “Pelle chiabelle di Dio, no ci avrai” which features a series of dialogues between individuals who speak various Tuscan vernaculars (Lanza 275-76). In that poem, the expression “A le guagnele” (12) is used comically to directly identify the Sieneese persona. “A le guagnele” (12), recurrent in medieval Sieneese vernacular, echoes other colloquial expressions used by Cecco’s contemporaries to emphasize anger or distress, such as “Dimme, per Deo” (12) [Tell me, by God] in “Cecco, se Deo t’allegre” which the poet Simone (perhaps Cecco’s son, or Simone dei Tolomei) sends to Cecco while the latter is in exile from Siena. Furthermore, the same expression is used in the Sieneese Statute of 1309-10 as the official oath pronounced publicly by the Nine before taking office: “a le sante Dio guagnele” (Dist. VI 4). In the context of Cecco’s sonnet, the expression “a le sante guagnele,” placed immediately after “Se Die m’aiuti,”

suggests a switch from the hypothetical “si” to a hyperbolic request directly petitioned to God or to the gospels. This theatrical switch from the open hypothesis to an unofficial oath evokes a comic effect because it trivializes the official vow lowering it from a public frame to a personal request (“Se Die m’aiuti,” 1).

The second quatrain offers a strong ethical model of behavior in the imagery of the poet-dove that contrasts sharply with the destructive force of “S’i fosse foco.” Such representation casts both derision and condemnation upon his political enemies:

E parrò un colombo senza fèle,
 tanto starò di bon core gecchito:
 però ch’i’ abbo tanto mal patito,
 che pietà n’avrebb’ogni crudele. 8

Massèra first discovered that this quatrain could contain a reference to Bono Giamboni’s *volgarizzamento* of Latini’s *Tesoro*: “Colombi sono uccelli di molte maniere e di molti colori, che usano intorno agli uomini, e non àno niente di fiele, ciò è il veleno che àno gli altri animali appiccato al fegato” [doves are birds of various kinds and of many colors, which frequent humans, and have no bile, that is, the venom that other animals have attached to their livers; cited in Massèra *I Sonetti burleschi* 111-12]. Giamboni describes doves as animals that have no bitterness and thus are not prompt to anger and discord (Vitale 398). Most critics, while acknowledging the allusion, overlook the biblical association in which Christ encourages His disciples to be as simple as doves (Mt. 10: 16), and have not highlighted how the dove in this quatrain invokes peace, meekness, and a Christian model of ethical behavior.⁶⁸ In addition, no critic has mentioned the connection between this poem and the Siense legal system. According to the Siense

⁶⁸ Marti *Poeti* 150, Lanza 66, Castagnola *Cecco Angiolieri* 136, Alfie “Cast Out” 116.

Statute, doves were protected and no Sieneese citizens were allowed to harm them: “Che non si pillion li colombi” (Dist. V.85) [No one must take doves] (translation mine). If anyone captured, sold, or killed a dove, the government imposed heavy fines. By depicting himself as a protected symbol of peace, Cecco strategically speaks to both his fellow citizens and legislators who enforced such a law and presents himself as a victim rather than as an aggressor. Furthermore, by employing the image of the dove, the poet implies a subtle moral lesson to his political enemies who are blamed as cruel (8).

Overall, Cecco takes an approach toward discord and war that is strikingly different from “S’i fosse foco,” because he frames a direct and powerful message of non-violence that, combined with humor, further emphasizes the ethical seriousness of his poetic intention in the face of political banishment and abuse.

“Se Die m’aiuti” does offer violent and hyperbolic imagery, but it suggests that the target of attack is both blamed and ridiculed. These images are respectively the eye poked (3) in reference to general offense and the humiliation of exiles (Marti *Poeti* 50); the poet-dove who stands before his cruel enemies bringing peace (8); the hope of the poet to return to Siena which, like the hope of the souls in Purgatory, is as precious as gold (9-11); and finally, the tensions between father and son (12-13).

This last allusion, recurrent in Cecco’s sonnets, could refer to specific cultural and religious beliefs prominent in Siena during the poet’s life, and more specifically to Sieneese mysticism. As Alfie shrewdly notes, Cecco employs poetic metaphors of poverty, divulging an anti-paternal stance by disavowing his father in order to communicate “an anti-Franciscan attitude” (*Comedy* 106). Cecco criticizes the fact that

by turning away from contemporary costumes, Francis and his followers located themselves outside the normal hierarchies of communal life, and thereby decried both the rising economic status of the bourgeoisie and the powerful, corrupted institutions of the age. (*Comedy* 99)

The Franciscan order advocated a renunciation of every worldly attachment, urging Sienese citizens to abandon their fathers, following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi and also of the Gospel of Matthew (*Comedy* 129, Matthew 10:34-39). Although such cultural and religious principles were rooted in Sienese culture, preachers also notably endorsed the opposite practice of parents abandoning their children. Giovanni Colombini, for example, took a particular position “toward family—in Colombini’s words, ‘to despise your own relatives’” (Cohn *Death and Property* 77). Cohn provides the eloquent example of Saint Agnes of Montepulciano who “after nine years abandoned her children to join the Franciscan tertiaries in Cortona and expressed no emotions when told that her son had drowned himself in a well at Arezzo” (Cohn *Death and Property* 77). Cecco’s father, who belonged to the order of the *Frati Gaudenti*, also followed this practice as modeled by other such well-known mystics as “Giovanni Colombini, Francis of Siena, and Gioacchino of Siena (1258-1306)” who were all merchants (Cohn *Death and Property* 76). As former merchants, these mystics once belonged to the wealthy social group who governed Siena. After they were beatified, the Nove utilized the saints’ influence and their social upbringing in order to establish the governmental cultural and moral ideology. As Bowsky shows,

the commune officially sanctioned and sponsored annual celebrations in honor of indigenous religious personalities, and the *Nine* and other public officials were granted the necessary statutory permission to attend those festivities as official representatives of the government. (*A Medieval* 263)

This bond between Sieneſe mysticism and government

helped instill among members of those families who sat in the important councils of the commune a stronger sense of duty, of Christian charity toward citizens for whom they labored, and of civic patriotism and attachment. (Bowsky *A Medieval* 264)

The ideals of poverty and separation between family members were promoted by Sieneſe mysticism and further propagated through sumptuous official ceremonies financed by the government. This ideological system was solid and successful, especially if we consider that “the period of the Nine was marked by increasing laicization and increasing state intervention into formerly ecclesiastical preserves” (Bowsky *A Medieval* 273).

If we consider the poet’s exile as he depicts it in “Se Die m’aiuti,” by providing the sarcastic motif of the separation between himself and his father, Cecco seems to employ such hyperbole to impersonate, and indirectly ridicule, the uncharitable attitude of parents who abandon their children—as Sieneſe mysticism promoted. Furthermore, such imagery could also be understood as a controversial statement of the cruelty of the *Nove* (who as fathers have abandoned their exile children). In other words Cecco, in his position of exile, launches a double attack against advocates of the moral and political ideology upon which Siena was currently founded. By doing so, Cecco challenges them to consider whether charity, mercy, and unity had been truly applied to his personal case, and thus stirs his target audience to critically question such an ideology as it applies to all Sieneſe citizens, both exiled and living in late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Siena. By presenting an array of hyperbolic imagery both entertaining and poignant, the closing tercet effectively discloses both specific and general ethical implications

pertaining to existing social, economic, cultural, and political power structures or injustices in early fourteenth-century Siena.

With the sonnet “Se Die m’aiuti,” Cecco elaborates both a personal and a more general criticism against the cruelty of his enemies. His more general criticism is perceptible in the image of the dove that posits a well-known symbolic model of civic harmony and justice. This model was promoted in the idea of the common good pursued by the Sieneese civic code contained in the *Statuto* (and later illustrated in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s famous fresco (Rutigliano 20-25). As Antonio Rutigliano notes, cruelty is the first accusation listed in the allegorical depiction of the *malgoverno* in Ambrogio Lorenzetti’s fresco: “the allegory of tyranny (a horned demon with boar’s tusks) [is] surrounded by vices: *Crudelitas*, *Proditio*, *Fraus*, *Furor*, *Divisio* and *Guerra*” (24). Cruelty, as opposed to clemency, was portrayed in the Sieneese *Statuto* as the primary cause of bad rule and thus as the main antimodel (alongside betrayal, deception, anger, dissension, and war) that the government had to avoid in order to achieve the peace and stability of the *comune* (Rutigliano 24-25). Cecco, by choosing to specifically tax his enemy with cruelty (8), directs his condemnation sarcastically against the rulers of Siena who—in opposition to the expected ethical model of the *buon governo*—are depicted as tyrants, suggesting to readers a visual representation of the poet-dove in contrast to the horned demon with boar’s tusks in Lorenzetti’s representation of the pitiless *malgoverno*.

“Lassar vo’ lo trovare di Becchina”

In “Lassar vo’ lo trovare di Becchina,” Cecco’s individual strategy of both blaming and ridiculing a specific target is more overt than in the two previous poems. This sonnet, which dates after 1289 and before 1301, has been called a caricature of (Massèra *I sonetti di Cecco* 166) or a vituperative attack against (Giunta *Versi* 274) a military leader identified only by his rank as “Mariscalco” (2).⁶⁹ The unnamed *Mariscalco* [marshal] was probably known both to Cecco and to the addressee, in this case the illustrious Dante Alighieri. Claudio Giunta illustrates that although this sonnet has been labeled as a *corrispondenza per le rime* [a poetic exchange or a *tenzone*] and linked with the other two sonnets Cecco sent to Dante, its structure shows that it does not anticipate an answer from the addressee (*Versi* 274). On the contrary, the addressee, clearly identified in the second line of the *salutatio* as “Dante Alighieri” (2), is rather the spectator, the witness, or even the accomplice of the invective. As the narrative of the poem suggests (9-14), Cecco would have never sent the invective directly to the marshal, who almost certainly never read it (Giunta, *Versi* 277).

Giunta persuasively demonstrates that “Lassar vo’ lo trovare” follows the expected scheme of the indirect *vituperium*, which is similar to examples in other sonnets

⁶⁹ The sonnet has been dated after 1289, the year of the battle of Campaldino. Most scholars believe that Cecco wrote the sonnet no later than 1301 because the last tercet suggests that he sent it to Dante who was probably still residing in Florence at that time (Contini, *Poeti del Duecento* II 383; Alfie *Comedy and Culture* 151). Marti narrows the possible date of composition to the years between 1289 and 1294 because it refers to Dante’s *Vita Nova* and a particular sonnet Dante composed in c.1294 (*Sulla Genesi* 8; Alfie *Comedy and Culture* 151). A few scholars, such as Del Lungo, extend the probable date of composition to 1305 because they identify the *Marescalco* with Diego de la Rat who resided in Florence in 1305 (Castagnola “Becchina, Dante e il marescalco” 55-56).

written by Guido Cavalcanti and Rustico Filippi (*Versi* 274). These sonnets are directly addressed to named individuals to whom the author presents a comic spectacle involving a third individual, unnamed or identified only by a nickname, who is ridiculed and reprehended. Dante, as the chosen addressee, was almost certainly not expected to answer this sonnet, but rather to share the criticism against the marshal contained in it, to enjoy the invective as a “partner in crime,” and thus implicitly to side with the Sieneese poet (Giunta *Versi* 274). This entails a political complicity alongside a poetic one, since the sonnet takes a particularly negative and polemical position against King Charles of Anjou’s representative, and implicitly perhaps against the king himself. With a series of colorful antitheses, Cecco discloses the discrepancy between the marshal’s external appearance and inner essence, and in general derides him for lacking personal worth, strength, and masculinity.

Lassar vo' lo trovare de Becchina, Dante Alighieri, e dir del Mariscalco: ch'e' par fiorin d'or, ed è de recalco; par zucar caffettin, ed è salina;	4
par pan di grano, ed è di saggina; par una torre, ed è un vil balco; ed è un nibbio, e par un girfalco; e pare un gallo, ed è una gallina.	8
Sonetto mio, vätene a Fiorenza: dove vedrai le donne e le donzelle: di' che 'l su' fatto è solo di parvenza.	11
Ed eo per me ne conterò novelle al bon re Carlo conte di Provenza, e per sto mo' gli fregiarò la pelle.	14

[I want to stop writing poetry about Becchina, / Dante Alighieri, and talk about the Marshal: / for he seems a golden coin, but is made of brass; / seems refined sugar, but is coarse salt; / seems bread of grain, but is of sorghum; / seems a tower, but he is a base scaffold; / he is a kite, and seems a royal falcon;/ and seems a rooster, but is a hen. / Oh sonnet of mine, go to Florence: / where you will see women and young girls: / tell them that his substance is only appearance. / And as far as I am concerned I will talk about him / to good King Charles Count of Provence, / and in this way I will decorate the Marshall's skin.]

In the first two quatrains, Cecco accuses the *Mariscalco* of a number of specific faults. In the initial quatrain, the marshal is revealed first as counterfeit (3) because he is made of forged gold (“recalco,” 3), instead of real gold, and then as base (4) because he is not made of refined material but rather is as crude and coarse as salt (Vitale 419). Cecco goes on to charge the marshal of being worthless (5) like bread made of sorghum (“saggina,” 5), a secondary grain which peasants and the poor used to eat in contrast to the wheat bread used in urban communities; it was also often used to feed swine and to make brooms (Montanari 124-25, 132). This allusion is confirmed by several municipal documents that disdainfully describe *saggina*, often called *melica*, as suitable for “porcis et rusticis” [hogs and peasants] (Ambrosoli 20).

As Alfie notes, in this first part of the sonnet Cecco positions this series of antitheses to discredit the marshal, “insinuating an ignoble birth and implying that a man of his station has no place being in a position of authority” (*Comedy* 153). Such attacks on the marshal’s birth and upbringing could be approached in two ways. From a rhetorical perspective, these accusations clearly follow the expected prototype of invective writing that initially arranges the attack against the “external circumstances” of the target, such as birth and upbringing, and then proceeds to attack his physical

appearance and character as illustrated in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (Rutherford 5).

Second, from a political standpoint, Cecco not only asserts the position that only the aristocracy should lead while lower social classes must serve, as Alfie correctly but too generically concludes, but also reveals a more specific sociopolitical orientation, in light of the specific historical background between 1289 and 1301, during which the poem was most likely written (*Comedy* 153).

As I mentioned, Cecco and Dante probably shared a similar sociopolitical position with respect to the marshal. Both Tuscan poets, besides being part of the nobility, experienced in the late thirteenth century what historian John Najemy defines as a period of class awareness, “class conflicts” and “class antagonisms” between the *magnati* (the noble landed aristocracy) and *popolani* (prosperous non-noble urban citizens) (*A History* 2, 39).⁷⁰ In Siena, this conflict developed into the long-lasting oligarchy of the Nine who were comprised of middle-class bankers and wealthy *popolani*. They excluded all

⁷⁰ In *A History of Florence*, Najemy proposes to reconsider the dominant historical approach of assessing the social and political life of Tuscan *comuni* during the late Middle Ages. Currently, contemporary historians approach Florentine political, social, and constitutional developments from 1280 to 1400. Most modern historians deny the existence of “any and all class conflicts, a view that reduces Florentine politics to mere quarrels within the upper class” (39). Najemy illustrates that “Florence history was replete with conflicts, both within the elite class. . . and other classes: the ‘popolo’ that created the guild republic and challenged the elite to justify its power within a normative framework of law and political ethics; and the artisan and laboring classes” (*A History* 2). Najemy reconstructs the metacritical review of medieval Florence’s history and shows how the present direction of historians follows a specific dynamic from Gaetano Salvemini’s study (1899) to Nicola Ottokar (1926) and Nicolai Rubinstein (1966). In 1926, Nicola Ottokar “criticized the class-conflict explanation . . . advanced by Gaetano Salvemini in 1899” (*A History* 39). In his influential study, *Magnati e popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295*, Salvemini “had seen ‘magnates’ and ‘popolani’ as distinct classes with divergent economic interests” and in constant conflict with one another (*A History* 39). Ottokar argued on the contrary that “the magnates were not a class and that their economic activities and interests were in many cases identical to those of leading ‘popolani,’ thus their conflict was minimal” (*A History* 39). As Robert Black also notes, Ottokar’s interpretation minimized class conflicts and became “the orthodox approach, not only among Italian medievalists but also in Anglophone historiography. Here the crucial figure was Nicolai Rubinstein, who became Ottokar’s pupil and assistant in the 1930s. Rubinstein remained a devoted admirer of Ottokar throughout his long life (1911-2002). [...] (His studies) followed Ottokar in suggesting the limitations of a class-based interpretation of Florentine history” (“Review”).

magnati from the government, although select members of the *magnati* held economic ties with the *popolani* (Bowsky *A Medieval* 293-310).⁷¹ In Florence, the tensions and divisions between these two groups were more obvious than they were in Siena. Such separation is evident if we consider the overthrow of 1293 in which the *popolani*, led by Giano del Bella, prevailed over the *magnati* and promulgated the Ordinances of Justice excluding all *magnati* from holding governmental positions on the grounds that they did not belong to any guild (Salvemini 168-169; Cohn *Popular Protest* 43). At the end of the thirteenth century, as Cohn notes, local *popolani* expelled noble families not only from Florence and Siena but also from other northern Italian cities such as Viterbo, Bologna, and Venice (47-55). This suggests that class conflicts were on the rise in northern Italy during this time, and I would argue that Cecco evokes them in his invectives. If we consider the sonnet from this perspective, we heighten our understanding of its political value expressed in the criticism of these tensions and of the marshal who claims to be part of the nobility but instead, from Cecco's view, is associated with the lower class. Within this political and social context, Cecco depicts him as a deceptive man who acts against the interest of the same noble families (such Cecco's and Dante's) with whom he claims to have ties.⁷² Through poetry, Cecco directs a personal attack against the

⁷¹ As Najemy notes, William Bowsky's influential study of Siena's history tends to alleviate the existing conflicts in Siena against the Siennese regime, neglecting to highlight internal political revolts that occurred against the Nine. Najemy notes Bowsky's oversight in mentioning only *one* revolt. Bowsky approaches this uprising, which occurred in Siena in 1318, as the only serious rebellion before the final overthrow of the regime in 1355 ("Review of *A Medieval Italian Commune*" 1031; Bowsky *A Medieval* 131). In doing so, Bowsky negates the existence of any class-consciousness, thus reducing existing tensions in Siena to mere family quarrels and rivalries (Bowsky *A Medieval* 310).

⁷² In the same context, but from the opposite perspective, we could read Dino Compagni's sonnet, very similar to Cecco's. Compagni, a *popolano*, wrote "Se mia laude," a polemical sonnet addressed to the nobleman Guido Cavalcanti. "Se mia laude," as Najemy notes, reprehends Cavalcanti for his arrogance and

ambiguous character of the marshal while using class-based political discourse and finally claiming that the marshal is neither *popolano* nor noble. The young Dante likely shared this sardonic attack as he directly experienced the political conflicts between the *popolani* and the nobility in Florence during the period before his exile.⁷³

The second quatrain reinforces the vituperative and sneering attack on the Marshal, adding accusations of weakness (6), submissiveness (7) and cowardice (8) that could be understood as claims of both military and sexual deviancy and incompetence.⁷⁴ As Castagnola and Alfie note, the marshal is ridiculed for his unsuccessful sexual performance, as described in the symbolic depiction of the more horizontal scaffold instead of the erect (and more masculine) tower, which is then reinforced with two avian images: that of prey (the *nibbio*) instead of predator (the *girfalco*, 7) and finally a hen instead of a cock (8). These metaphors thus imply not only passivity and weakness but more specifically practices of sodomy.⁷⁵

In his close reading of “Lassar vo’ lo trovare,” Alfie notes broad but relevant historical aspects of sodomy which clarify Cecco’s last verbal assault, a sarcastic offer to

“simultaneously wants Cavalcanti and his class to give up their pretensions to ‘nobility,’ their factions, and clients, and embrace instead the social values of merchants and guildsmen” (*A History of Florence* 30-31).

⁷³ In the next chapter, I will examine these conflicts and Dante’s political stance toward both the *popolani* and the nobility.

⁷⁴ Vitale 418-19; Castagnola “Becchina” 56-57; Alfie *Comedy* 153.

⁷⁵ Castagnola “Becchina” 57; Alfie *Comedy* 154. Paul Labroid notes that during the Middle Ages, falcons and kites were perceived very differently: falcons were mainly employed for hunting, and their cost was great in comparison to the *nibbio*, which was mainly used for recreational purposes or to train falcons. The cost of kites was modest in comparison to that of falcons (197-201). Kites were often pitted in losing battles against falcons in order to allow the falcons to practice their hunting skills. If we consider this, the relation between the antithetical prey (the *nibbio*) and predator (the *girfalco*) becomes more evident.

“fregiar” (14) the skin of the military leader. Alfie mentions that Cecco could have chosen specifically the expression “‘fregiar la pelle’ (14) as a direct reference to sodomy because such practice, if made known, was punishable by law in thirteenth-century Florence with the burning at the stake” (*Comedy* 154).⁷⁶ However, according to the Sieneese statute, burning was not the punishment for younger sodomites. As Dean Trevor notes, “the under-forties, and younger passives, were to be whipped through the city to the sounds of trumpets” (141-42). The term “fregiar” could be intended as the act of slashing someone’s skin with a whip. The expression could be a sarcastic mockery parallel to the practice of military recognition (*fregiar medaglia*), especially since the punishment was paired with the action of playing the trumpet.⁷⁷ Overall, the expression could re-instate the vitriolic condemnation of the marshal’s vanity and moral flaws within the specific Sieneese legal and social belief system.

Although Alfie acknowledges the importance of including such historical context to better understand the poem, he declines to explore further historical data that pertain to the marshal, because he believes we do not possess enough information to identify him conclusively (*Comedy* 154). I will argue that we do have more than enough information

⁷⁶ Problematically, Alfie translates the verb “fregiar” as “fry,” assuming that the sentence means, “frying the Marshal’s skin” (154). The verb “fregiar” means to instead adorn, decorate and embellish someone (Dante *Inf.* VIII 47, *Purg.* I 38, Cotterill 93). As attested from *Il libro della cucina del sec. XIV*, “friggere” was instead the verb used to express frying and not “fregiar” (Zambrini 5). The Sieneese Statute written in vernacular during 1309-10 also uses the term “forego” and “fregiar” as respectively ornament and to decorate in reference to the practice in use by Sieneese women to decorate their dresses (*Dist.* V 342).

⁷⁷ J. F. Verbruggen notes that throughout the Middle Ages trumpets were employed in the battlefield because they “sounded the calls ‘to arms’ and ‘take arms’ before the battle” and during a retreat to recollect the scattered troops during the battle (84-85). In the context of the invective, Cecco could sardonically imply that he is willing to whip the marshal’s skin throughout the streets of Siena when in an imaginary scenario the trumpets would unveil his practice of sodomy to everyone.

to speculate about the identity of the marshal in question, especially if we consider the fact that two military officers endowed with the title of marshal resided in Florence in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. By attempting to use some of the available data to identify the marshal, we will be better able to understand, if only provisionally, the political implications of “Lassar vo’ lo trovare.”

The great majority of critics agree that the sonnet was sent to Dante, as obvious by the *salutatio* at the second line.⁷⁸ Rather than debate who the recipient is, critics have focused on the identity of the marshal and the possible dates of composition and circulation of the sonnet. The marshal has been associated with three possible officials: the commander Diego de la Rat (or di Larhat) who arrived in Florence in 1305 when Dante was in exile (Del Lungo *Da Bonifazio VIII* 414; Boccaccio *Decameron* VI 3); Marshal Amerigo di Narbona (or Aymeric de Narbonne) who was in Florence when Dante also lived there, after the battle of Campaldino in c.1289-1294 (Massera *I sonetti di Cecco* 167); and finally the commander Berto Frescobaldi, who was apparently a supporter of King Charles and who resided in Florence from the late thirteenth century to the first years of the fourteenth (Castagnola “Becchina, Dante e il Marescalco” 63-67).

The majority of critics, such as Marti, Contini, and Lanza, agree with Massera’s identification of the marshal with Amerigo di Narbona, who fought in King Charles’ army during the battle of Campaldino and, according to the chronicle Dino Compagni, was renowned for his physical appeal, not for his military effectiveness:

⁷⁸ The exceptions are Michele Barbi (20) and Adele Todaro (70-72). They both propose that Cecco sent the sonnet “non a Dante, bensì alle donne di Firenze” (Todaro 71).

Il re Carlo di Sicilia (...) lasciò loro m. Amerigo di Nerbona, suo barone e gentile uomo, giovane e bellissimo del corpo, ma non molto sperto in fatti d'arme, ma rimase con lui uno antico cavaliere suo balio, e molti altri cavalieri atti e esperti a guerra, con gran soldo e provisione. (I.7)⁷⁹

[King Charles of Sicily (...) left them (the Guelphs) one of his barons and noblemen, M. Amerigo of Narbonne, who was young and very handsome, but inexperienced in the deeds of arms. His tutor (William of Durfort), however, an aged knight, remained with him, besides many other knights tried and expert in war, who had high pay and ample provision. Trans. Benecke and Howell 17].

Compagni's comment about the discrepancy between Amerigo's appeal and his military expertise is one of the most convincing pieces of evidence that the marshal in question could have been Amerigo. Moreover, I believe that the narrative of the poem and its estimated time of composition (1289-1301) disqualify Diego de la Rat and Berto Frescobaldi as candidates for the marshal in the poem.

Diego de la Rat, known as King Robert's Marshal, was a Catalan officer who arrived in Florence in 1305 after Dante was exiled. In *Decameron* VI.3, Boccaccio immortalizes Diego as a successful womanizer, which contradicts the poem's derision of its target's impotence and possible sodomy (Castagnola "Becchina, Dante e il Marescalco" 57). Moreover, Diego de la Rat was the Marshal of Robert Duke of Calabria (later King of Naples in 1309), and Cecco's sonnet clearly states that the marshal he ridiculed was King Charles' (l.13). Last but not least, the date of composition of this sonnet, if we accept the identification with Diego de la Rat, would be in 1305 after Dante's exile. Such a possibility would be problematic because in the first tercet of the sonnet Cecco explicitly writes that the poem addressed to Dante was meant to reach him

⁷⁹ See also Marti *Poeti* 227; Contini *Poeti* II 383; and Lanza 214-215.

directly in Florence: “sonetto mio, vātene a Fiorenza” (9) [Oh sonnet of mine, go to Florence]. In 1305, Dante, as long established, was not in Florence but most likely in Padua.⁸⁰ A close scrutiny of prescribed models for epistolary writing also confirms the possibility that the sonnet could not have been written in 1305. A sonnet written and sent to a recipient identified its addressee first in the opening *salutatio* and then in the final *congedo*, which confirmed and restated to whom the sonnet was addressed and where it was intended to go.⁸¹ This last clarification dates the sonnet before Dante’s exile and thus before Diego de la Rat’s arrival in Florence in 1305.

Castagnola’s recent identification (1994) of the marshal with Berto Frescobaldi is also unconvincing, because no documents show any evidence that he was either a *Mariscalco* or a commander in King Charles’ service. Berto Frescobaldi was a knight and a military captain in Florence, and no documentation is available to convincingly conclude that he was even a supporter or an official affiliated with King Charles II of Provence (Castagnola “Becchina, Dante e il Marescalco” 66-67). The title of *marescalco*, as Del Lungo notes, “era titolo di dignità militare” (Compagni 118n) which, though it was not clearly defined, implied the honor of being the commander-in-chief of the cavalry in the battlefield. The thirteenth-century chronicler Ranieri Sardo documented the title of *marescalco* in his *Cronaca pisana*, suggesting that it was not used to designate simply a captain, as Castagnola implies, but was rather an honorary title bestowed by a high-ranking figure such as the king:

⁸⁰ See Petrocchi’s *Vita di Dante* (97-98) and Mazzotta’s “Life of Dante” (8).

⁸¹ Lanza 214; Giunta *Versi* 98-102.

Curradino si partì di Pisa e andoe a Poggibonisi e a Siena (. . .) e sconfisse al Ponte alle Valli messere Amerigo di Nerbona e lo mariscalco dello re Carlo con molti. (89)

[Conradin left Pisa and went to Poggibonisi and Siena (...) and defeated at Ponte Valle Messer Amerigo di Nerbona and King Charles' marshal along with many others]. (Translation mine)

This passage refers to an event prior to the battle of Tagliacozzo in 1268 and shows that the term “mariscalco” is associated with the king, “mariscalco dello re.” It also demonstrates how important the title was, and distinct from the role of a simple captain. The passage also mentions that Amerigo di Narbona was somehow involved in the battle, although at the time he was very young and on his first tour of duty. Amerigo was fighting alongside William of Durfort, the former marshal of King Charles I. As Compagni clearly suggests, after succeeding his father King Charles I, King Charles II almost certainly appointed Marshal Amerigo—and not Berto Frescobaldi—removing from office the veteran William of Durfort (I.7). King Charles II's decision to appoint Amerigo in place of William seems not to have been a popular choice from Cecco's point of view (and likely Dante's as well).

Historical evidence and close examination of Cecco's invective support more convincingly the identification of the marshal with the French Amerigo di Narbona. Four arguments in particular favor this identification. First, during the time Dante was in Florence, Amerigo di Narbona was the only prominent Marshal who resided there; more specifically, Amerigo stayed in Florence from 1289 to probably 1291. In 1289, he stayed in Florence before the battle of Campaldino from May 13 to June 2, 1289 (Sanesi “Review of Massèra” 31; Villani VII.131). After the battle of Campaldino and the

military campaign against Arezzo he was back in Florence in July 24, 1289 where the Florentines greeted him joyfully and triumphantly (Villani VII.132). Second, a close examination of the sonnet confirms that it could not have been written when Dante was in exile but rather when he was living in Florence. The verse “dove vedrai le donne e le donzelle” (10), in the *congedo* of Cecco’s sonnet, notably refers to Dante’s canzone “Li occhi dolenti” from his *Vita Nuova*, written in c.1293-1295 before Dante’s exile (Castagnola “Becchina” 57). This reference shows that Cecco was most likely engaged in a discussion with Dante’s sonnet during the time it circulated as a single poem or as already included in the *Vita Nuova* (Giunta *Versi* 276). “Lassar vo’ lo trovar” could have been written alongside or even before the sonnet “Dante Alighieri, Cecco, tu’ serv’e amico,” thus reinforcing a more precise chronological collocation of the sonnet during the time Dante was completing *Vita Nuova* (Lanza 217). Third, Cecco’s sonnet stresses that the marshal is not what he appears to be; Cecco launches accusations against him that could be intended not only as a general criticism of his personal worth, but also, more specifically, of his military value. If we read the first two quatrains in this way, they appear to criticize his political and military leadership skills as merely cosmetic. A close scrutiny of the role of Amerigo di Narbona in the battle of Campaldino and subsequent battles against Arezzo strongly supports this claim. Ireneo Sanesi and Castagnola claim that Amerigo played a prominent role in Campaldino and therefore propose that the accusations of inexperience and failure in the poem must refer to some other *mariscalco*.⁸² However, if we examine evidence from archives pertaining to the war in

⁸² Sanesi “Review of Massera” 30-31; Castagnola “Becchina” 56.

Campaldino, Cecco's invective assumes a more pointed historical relevance with respect to the individuals and events between 1289 and 1291.

Amerigo, appointed commander in chief by King Charles II of Anjou, was supposed to have a central role on the front line, but during the battle of Campaldino (and subsequent battles in Tuscany) he did not show himself to be a capable and successful leader; indeed, he was often negligent and ineffective. As noted by modern historian Herbert Oerter, as well as historians contemporary to Dante and Cecco, Amerigo was "a youngster, untrained in combat, but was a favorite of Charles II of Anjou who detached one of his own veterans, Guillaume Bernard de Durfort, . . . to act as 'advisor'" (Oerter 432).⁸³ Young Amerigo di Narbona, as Compagni emphasized, did not have enough experience and his command "depended heavily on Guillaume de Durfort, his 'advisor'" (Compagni I.7; Oerter 450). Villani as well, though he praises him as a "grande gentiluomo e prode e savio in guerra", mentions how King Charles II made him a knight ("fece cavaliere Amerigo di Nerbona") in order for him to be accepted as "capitano di guerra" in Florence (VII.130). This evidence shows how Amerigo became knight and captain at the same time, a few days before Campaldino only through the king's benevolence, and without rising through the ranks, because he was a baron and not a tested warrior.

A review of the events of the battle of Campaldino (June 11, 1289) helps to demonstrate that the charge Cecco laid against the marshal can best understood be as an

⁸³ See also Compagni I. and Villani VII.130. Unlike Compagni, Villani praises Amerigo but he agrees that he was inexperienced at the time of the battle since he documents the fact that he was made knight just a few days before Campaldino.

attack on Amerigo di Narbona. During the battle of Campaldino, Florentine forces had an advantage over the Aretines due to the large numbers of their reserve army (Oerter 445). Three deployments were present on the battlefield. The Florentine Guelph militia led by Amerigo di Narbona fought alongside the army reserve of Pistoia and Lucca, guided by the Florentine Corso Donati. Finally, opposed to Amerigo's militia and reserve, there were the Ghibelline troops from Arezzo guided by Count Guido Novello (Villani VII.130).⁸⁴ The reserve army led by Corso Donati had the role of defending the main army commanded by Amerigo di Narbona; it was therefore held in reserve under the direct command of the marshal and his advisor, in all circumstances (Oerter 446). Any act of disobedience would have been punished by beheading (Villani VII.131). Herbert Oerter, who has scrupulously reconstructed the battle in "Campaldino, 1289" notes that Amerigo's mentor, Guillaume de Durfort, was one of the main authorities who could have been empowered "to commit the reserve [guided by Corso Donati] for the Florentines" but he died on the field "at the moment when the reserve was most needed," when the Florentine army was in serious difficulty and could perhaps have lost the war against Arezzo (Oerter 450). As the commander-in-chief, Amerigo should have ordered the reserve army to intervene in the field to aid his troops, but he did not give that order. Fortunately Corso Donati, though he was not the Marshal, nevertheless broke ranks and commanded his troops to fight:

Unable to contain himself further he stood in his stirrups and shouted at his troops: 'If we lose this fight I want to die with the men of my own city; if we win, whoever wants my head can come to Pistoia and try the case

⁸⁴ As Oerter states, "the Florentine army consisted of allies from Lucca, Pistoia, Bologna and the Romagna, Siena, Orvieto, and Volterra" (433; Villani VII.131; Compagni I).

there!' With these words Donati turned, spurred his horse and dashed down the slope to the action. The hot-blooded Pistoiesi gave their own war whoops and spurred after him. The impact of two hundred mounted knights on the flank of the now-tiring Ghibellines was all that was needed to complete the action in favor of the Florentines. In a few moments it was over. (Oerter 448; Villani VII.131)

Donati's intervention in the battle was decisive and resulted in a victory for his city, but the citizens of Florence were not aware of his pivotal contribution; instead, they celebrated Amerigo di Narbona as the hero. As Villani documented, Amerigo enjoyed a moment of "deserved" triumph as Florence welcomed him with great honor (VII.132). Dante's compatriots did not scrutinize the battle and the marshal's merit because they were exalted by the victory, which constituted one of the most significant comebacks Florence enjoyed after the Battle of Montaperti (Davidsohn, II.2 467). Florentines organized massive feasts and the excitement was so great that the name "Amerigo" became the mark of success. Dante was 24 years old at the time and was present among the troops on horseback (Davidsohn II.2 458).⁸⁵ Most likely Cecco Angiolieri was there as well, though no document attests conclusively to his participation in Campaldino, although he undoubtedly fought in 1288 at the battle of Siena against Arezzo. Both poets, therefore, were familiar with and may have witnessed directly the fighting style and ineptitude of Amerigo di Narbona.

In light of this evidence, Compagni's remark that the Marshal was "young and very handsome, but inexperienced in deeds of arms" (Benecke 17) is neither an

⁸⁵ In the *Divine Comedy*, through Forese, Dante mentions Corso Donati in negative terms. He blames him for the discords existing in Florence and depicts his future brutal death, which occurred in 1308, similar to what the poet probably saw on June 11, 1289 (*Purg.* XXIV 82-87). Dante describes the battle of Campaldino in *Purg.* V through Buonconte da Montefeltro (*Purg.* V 85-129).

innocuous remark, as Sanesi argues (“Review of Massera” 30), nor a “giudizio riduttivo,” as Castagnola labels it (“Becchina, Dante e il marescalco” 56). Compagni specifically puts an emphasis on the two contrasting terms “inexperienced” [non sperto] and “experienced” [esperti]: “Amerigo...*non molto sperto* in fatti d’arme, ma rimase con lui uno antico cavaliere suo balio, e molti altri cavalieri atti e *esperti* a guerra” (I.7). By doing so, he emphasizes the discrepancy between the marshal’s military incompetence and the prowess of other veterans. Compagni’s remark thus constitutes a sarcastic note made by a chronicler who “sat on the government of the Priors for the period 15 April to 14 June 1289” and “saw and took part in many of the incidents described,” providing a “high degree of reliability on those portions of his testimony” (Oerter 441).⁸⁶

Guittone d’Arezzo’s Letter XII sent to Amerigo in c. 1289-1291 both confirms and strengthens Compagni’s negative judgement. No compliments on the marshal’s military value ever appear in the letter, which offers instead an evident admonishment about his lack of decorum. At the close of the letter, Guittone discloses that the marshal is prone to lust and that this causes him to neglect higher responsibilities. Guittone thus warns Amerigo that he should avoid moral dissipation, following a wiser path. This final passage echoes Cecco’s poem because Guittone draws a clear distinction between how Amerigo wishes to appear and what he truly is:

⁸⁶ This might also explain the omission of sarcastic remarks about Marshal Amerigo from Villani’s *Chronicle*. Villani neither met nor had any direct involvement in the events of Campaldino because he was a generation younger than Compagni. Bianca Ceva also discredits Villani’s praise: “Amerigo di Narbona . . . la cui perizia guerresca non era per nulla eccezionale, nonostante il troppo favorevole giudizio del Villani, nella battaglia di Campaldino condusse le milizie guelfe” (51).

Ahi, che miracolo magno e che doglioso
 de femina veder sia suggiugato
 barone forte e onrato!
 E non dica già alcuno: "Io non son tale,"
 Seguendo amor carnale,
 Chè servo è lei, quant'el vol sia forzoso.
 E voi, mercè, geloso
 siate de voi com' omo razionale. (137)

[Alas! What a great and painful wonder it is / to see subjugated by a woman/ such a strong and honored Baron! / And let no one say: "I am not like that," while he follows carnal lust, / because he is servant to her, although he wants to be strong. / So you, please, be careful / of yourself as a wise man (is) (translation mine)].

As Claude Margueron notes, Guittone's warning explicitly refers to "una certa sregolatezza nei costumi di Amerigo a Firenze, riprovata dal rigorista Guittone" (139n). Through this letter that almost certainly was sent from Arezzo, Guittone provides further evidence of Amerigo's notoriety in Florence and throughout Tuscany.

After Campaldino, the Marshal Amerigo was involved in further battles against Arezzo and Pisa, but all were failures due to his inexperience. Davidsohn underlines the marshal's lack of military skills, expressing a harshly negative assessment of his military failures following Campaldino:

Aimeric di Narbona rimase alcuni anni capo dei cavalieri assoldati guelfi e lo incontreremo ancora nelle lotte armate contro Arezzo e contro Pisa, ma altri allori non ornarono la sua fronte e probabilmente egli dovette le sue ore di gloria piuttosto a quel suo "bailli" (...) che al proprio valore. (Davidsohn II.2 469)

The sepulcher built after Campaldino to commemorate Guillaume de Durfort further confirms this possibility, since no war memorial was ever built in Florence in honor of Amerigo di Narbona.⁸⁷

Though the young Amerigo was deemed charming and appealing, his lack of military success might have been the reason that his initial favorable reputation waned. Castagnola notes that Marshal Amerigo, despite a surge in popularity in Florence after his return from Campaldino in 1289, suffered a significant decrease of reputation as evident in two documents from *Le Consulte della repubblica fiorentina*. First, in October 1291, the legislative body of Florence explicitly requested to replace Amerigo with a new Italian captain, as opposed to a French one: “Capitaneus non sit ultramontanus, francigena vel provincialis, sed italianus” [a captain who shall not be transalpine, French or provincial, but Italian] (Cited in Castagnola “Becchina, Dante e il Marescalco” 56). A month later the council officially directed Amerigo di Narbona to pay an enormous debt that he owed to the *Comune* of Florence (“Becchina, Dante e il Marescalco” 56; Gherardi *Le Consulte* 70-71). Additional documents from *Le consulte* confirm Amerigo’s difficulties in Florence after Campaldino. In September 1291, the mayor of Florence protested against him for having wrongly imprisoned someone: “Item constitutus fuit syndicus ad requirendum et protestandum d. Amalrico pro quodam captivo” (Gherardi *Consulte* 99) [Also it was deliberated that the mayor appeal for and protest (against) Lord

⁸⁷ See Davidsohn II.2 464 and Del Lungo *Dante ne’ tempi di Dante* 144. The memorial includes a marble statue of Guillame de Durfort with a sword and the emblem of a lily in his armor that represents the *comune* of Florence. As Davidsohn notes, this statue is the oldest surviving example of commemorative sculpture made in Florence (II.2 464).

Amerigo for someone (he) imprisoned] (translation mine).⁸⁸ One document shows that in March 1290-91, he was not compensated by various *comuni* outside Florence: “d. Amalrici notificatum est et protestatum est coram Potestate, Capitaneo e Prioribus civitatis Florentie, de solutione sibi non facta per aliqua Comunia Societatis” [Lord Amerigo informed and complained to the Podestà, the Captain, and the priors of the commune of Florence about recompense for him that was not made by some members of the (Guelph) league; Gherardi *Consulte* 117]. In 1292, Cecco’s city of Siena owed Amerigo and his soldiers a large sum of money that was probably never paid (Gherardi *Consulte* 289).⁸⁹ This evidence shows that Florentines did not value Amerigo’s stay in their city, due perhaps to his military failures. He gradually became a burden upon both the *comune* of Florence and the Guelph League, which comprised cities such as Siena.

Besides the three reasons provided thus far, a fourth could be added to corroborate that Amerigo was probably the *mariscalco* Cecco referred to in “Lassar vo’ lo trovare.” Cecco mentions in the last tercet that he wants to make known to King Charles II the incompetence and ineffectiveness of the Marshal, and suggests that the poet will somehow encounter the monarch in his native Siena.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Gherardi comments on this entry by saying: “Sindaco a fargli una protesta ‘pro quodam captivo’” (733).

⁸⁹ Gherardi mentions that there was a “debito del comune di Siena con Firenze per conto dei suoi stipendi” (Consulte II 733); see also Bowsky, *The Finance of the Commune of Siena* 42-3n.

⁹⁰ Del Lungo and D’Ancona suggest that the king in question could have been King Charles I; see Del Lungo, *Da Bonifazio VIII* 415-16n; D’Ancona “Cecco Angiolieri” 186. However, this possibility is unlikely because King Charles I died in 1285, before Campaldino and before the time the sonnet was likely written; see Jean Dunbabin’s *Charles I of Anjou: Power, Kingship and State-Making in Thirteenth-Century Europe*. Del Lungo’s speculation that Cecco refers to King Charles I as already dead and thus crafts an “evocazione di un morto” (Da Bonifazio 415 n 3) is also unlikely. It seems evident that Cecco’s sarcastic threat against the Marshal relates to King Charles II because the poet implies that the king was coming to Siena at the time (lines 12-14). Massèra, alongside Marti and Vitale, believes that Cecco

Ed eo per me ne conterò novelle
 al bon re Carlo conte di Provenza,
 e per sto mo' gli fregiarò la pelle. (12-14)

Cecco's concluding threat against the marshal is supported by historical fact, since King Charles II arrived in Siena in 1294 and met with all the Siennese nobles (Muratori *Cronaca senese* 78). This is the only time that I can discover that King Charles II visited Siena and personally encountered the Siennese nobility before he died in 1309. Taken together, this evidence strongly supports the hypothesis that the marshal in question is indeed the young and inexperienced Amerigo di Narbona. In addition, the term "bon," as Lanza notes, could be ironic, especially if we consider Dante's opinion of the Angevin monarch as often expressed in his *Comedy*.⁹¹ In this case the criticism and ridicule of the Marshal could also extend to his monarch, reinforcing the political weight of Cecco's invective.

explicitly invokes Charles II, who was crowned king in May 1289 (Massèra *Sonetti burleschi* 168; Marti *Poeti* 228, Vitale 419); see also Castagnola's "Becchina, Dante e il marescalco" (57).

⁹¹ Lanza 216; *Purg* VII 127; and *Par.* VI 106, XIX 127, and XX 63. Massèra interprets the reference to King Charles II as a "scherzevole minaccia" (*I sonetti di Cecco* 168 n 12).

Conclusion

“Lassar vo’lo trovare di Becchina,” like the other sonnets examined here, contains subtle yet evident vituperative attacks against unnamed but well-known individuals. The original reader, aware of political turmoil and events, could easily have identified the unnamed targets. Cecco crafts each invective using carefully constructed elements of vituperation, including the condemnation of his targets’ qualities. By focusing on internal faults such as cruelty or cowardice, and denouncing specific behaviors such as aggression, injustice, or incompetence, he confronts the reader with a serious ethical message. Prominent members of medieval Sieneese society, individual kings and popes, and well-known military leaders and politicians were Cecco’s targets. Although Cecco does not explicitly name his targets, he nevertheless confronts them on all levels. It is plausible that he avoids mentioning their names and only hints at specific individuals and groups in order to avoid further penalties. As previously noted, the Nine governors fined poets who wrote vituperative sonnets that insulted and ridiculed explicit individuals, and thus they might have punished Cecco for his poems.

Whether or not “S’i fosse foco,” “Se Die m’aiuti,” and “Lassar vo’ lo trovare,” are meant to be invective might be open to debate, but it is undeniable that they do indeed contain vituperative attack. If we read them as invective, as I strongly suggest we should, we can conclude that Cecco enriches the genre of invective with his own innovative style. By not including a clear *salutatio* at the beginning of all his invectives Cecco follows a more descriptive, rather than prescriptive, practice of invective writing. Cecco’s poems

do feature a *narratio* and a *conclusio* as expected by invective writing. The close of his poems is particularly remarkable because it is sharper than Rustico's and is combined with a *congedo* or leave. As Christopher Kleinhenz first noted, the Sienese poet supplies

one striking new feature to the sonnet, and this is his use of the second tercet as a *congedo*. . . The *congedo*, as found in the *canzone* or *ballata*, stands as a separate 'mini-strophe,' here it is an integral part of the composition. (*The Early Italian Sonnet* 176-77)

According to Kleinhenz, Cecco was the first poet to include a *congedo* in the sonnet, thus employing a typical element usually found in the *canzone*. Indeed, the three close readings show how Cecco sends each sonnet to his readers who are thus circumscribed within a precise geographical area either in Siena (i.e., "S'i fosse foco" and "Se Die m'aiuti") or Florence (i.e., "Lassar vo' lo trovare"). By doing so, Cecco crafts an identifiable style in order to divulge his distinctive political message to readers. His invectives become a vehicle for dialogue and ethical discourse and function differently from Rustico's invective. The Florentine poet addresses his target readers offering a diachronic development of historical events in association with the fixed standpoint of Florence and pertaining to conflicts such as the battle of Montaperti, Benevento, or Colle. In a different way, Cecco often projects his mockery and criticism synchronically, offering to his readers the variable standpoint of the poet's own personal situation that is not fixed, like Rustico, in a specific geographical location. In doing so, the poetic I evokes polemical attitudes about exile and internal conflicts within Siena or sometimes even beyond his hometown (e.g., "S'i fosse foco").

Cecco's emphasis on his personal point of view is confirmed stylistically by his use of the poetic "I." As Alfie and Barrett have recently noted, the use of the first person "dominates Angiolieri's poetic production: in ninety-one sonnets, he uses a first-person singular pronoun" (Alfie, *Comedy and Culture* 168; Barrett 101-02). In contrast, "Rustico's jocosely sonnets consistently focus on others, never on himself" (Levin, *Rustico* 26). As Levin eloquently concludes, "unlike Cecco Angiolieri and many others, however, Rustico never caricatures himself" (Rustico 88). This clear distinction between the two poets is evident in the sonnets examined in this and in the previous chapter. Rustico's sonnet "A voi, messer Iacopo" is centered upon a named individual and even if the author is included in the narrative of the poem, he is expressed not in the first but rather in the third person: "Rustico s'acomanda" (2). Cecco's sonnets are mainly centered instead upon the poet's personal problems, and even if they initially address unnamed individuals (e.g., "S'i fosse foco" and "Lassar vo 'lo trovare") at the close of the sonnet, they promptly focus on the poetic "I".⁹² Such a divergence in style between the two poets is also reflected in their humor.

Like Rustico, Cecco employs a complex sarcastic humor expressed through multiple dimensions that include sexual allusions (e.g. "Lassar vo' lo trovare"), but also hyperbolic violent imageries (e.g. "S'i fosse foco"), and subtle biblical and legal references (e.g. "Se Die m'aiuti"). Cecco's multiple allusions evoke Rustico's multifaceted humor and can also be approached through a political, ethical, and historical perspective. Unlike Rustico, Cecco does not favor portraits of individuals in order to

⁹² See for example "S'i fosse Cecco, come sono e fui," (12) and "Ed eo per me ne conterò novelle" (12) respectively at the last tercet of "S'i fosse foco" and "Lassar vo 'lo trovare."

ridicule or denounce their shortcomings. As Levin notes, “Cecco’s humor develops more from the description of a personal situation than from objective caricature” (Levin, *Rustico* 100). By placing the author as the subject of the narrative, Cecco, more overtly than Rustico, stages for his readers his personal drama of exile, exaggerating its implications through hypothetical scenarios that evoke a real-life scenario. He thus blends the seriousness of his banishment with humor and derision in order to denounce the wrongdoings of prominent political authorities.⁹³

Cecco achieves this purpose by using various figures of speech, such as hyperbole, adynaton or hypothetical impossibility, and antithesis. The use of antithesis is evident especially in “Lassar vo’ lo trovare” where the marshal is ridiculed through the combination of contraries such as zuccar /salina (4) [sugar/salt] or gallo/ gallina (8) [rooster / hen]. If we inspect the tradition of the so-called *comico-realisti* or jocose poets, such as Rustico, Folgore da San Gimignano, and Pietro de’ Faitinelli, we do not find a similar extensive use of antithesis. We could then conclude that by using a wide variety of antitheses in various sonnets, Cecco contributes to invective and comic poetry with his own original style.

However, a closer scrutiny of the thirteenth-century Sienese literary background shows that the use of antithesis in vernacular Italian poetry is not Cecco’s original contribution. Instead, the tradition of antithesis within Italian verse could be ascribed to the Sienese *giullare* Ruggieri Apugliesi (c.1200-1270-80) and more specifically to his

⁹³ For a more in-depth comparison of Rustico and Cecco’s poetry, see Alfie, *Comedy* 120-26; Marrani “La poesia comica fra ‘200 e ‘300” (101-110).

renowned *canzone de oppositis* [song of the opposites] or “Umile sono e orgoglioso.”⁹⁴ In this *canzone*, Ruggieri exposes his internal contradictions and paradoxes within the Sienese economic and social environment and creates an hyperbolic representation of the poetic-I through a generous list of antitheses:

Umile sono ed orgoglioso,
 prode e vile e corag[g]ioso,
 franco e sicuro e pauroso
 e sono folle e sag[g]io . . . (1-4) (Contini, Poeti 885)

I am humble and proud,
 Valorous and cowardly and brave,
 frank and confident and fearful
 and I am mad and wise . . . (translation mine)

Ruggieri’s *canzone* is likely the most direct precursor of Cecco’s “Lassar vo ‘ lo trovare” where Cecco depicts the marshal with strikingly similar antitheses. Ruggieri’s *canzone* is also reminiscent of other invectives such as “S’i fosse foco,” because the poetic “I” performs hyperbolic and paradoxical actions reflecting on the possibility of being exposed to both good and evil: “tosto aviene a l’omo bene e male” (80) [suddenly good and evil come upon men]. Like Cecco’s, Ruggieri’s poetic repertoire is versatile and includes political *tenzoni* and *sirventes* which evoke the troubador tradition (Piccinni 56). If we link Cecco’s invective tradition to Ruggieri Apugliese, we can frame his poetry within the geographical and social environment of Siena. This exposes Cecco’s poetry not merely as an expression of a generalized comic style, but rather as a more local, autonomous, and distinct poetic expression.

⁹⁴ Ruggieri Apugliese has suffered critical neglect in recent criticism. The dates I provide in parenthesis refer to Gabriella Piccinni’s study; she is the only modern critic who ever discussed Ruggieri’s biography, sketching his likely date of birth and death (60-61, 81).

Such a possibility is confirmed if we juxtapose Ruggieri's poetry with other contemporary poets who were active outside the Sienese borders in the early thirteenth century. Although Ruggieri's *canzone* is inspired by the Provençal tradition of Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (i.e., "Savis e fols, humilis et orgoillos"), critics had difficulties placing him within a specific literary tradition (Contini, *Poeti I* 885n). As Contini notes, Ruggieri's vast poetic repertoire "ha sempre ascendenze provenzali, (ma) non s'inquadra nei moduli curiali fossilizzati dai Siciliani, mentre la tecnica . . . svela natura 'giullaresca' (*Poeti I*.884). I believe that this intricacy should be approached not as a problem but rather as evidence for the existence of a unique type of local Sienese poetry that coexisted alongside the so called *Scuola siciliana* and the Florentine poetic tradition examined in the previous chapter. Like Rustico's poetry, Cecco's poetry could also be approached within his own original environment and thus placed in juxtaposition with other Sienese poets. As documents show, Cecco interacted with Meo dei Tolomei and a Sienese poet named Simone. It is very likely that he also corresponded, or at least had some poetic relations, with other fellow Sienese poets who were active during the late thirteenth century such as Niccola Muscia, Iacomo dei Tolomei, and Bindo Bonichi.⁹⁵ All of these poets were Cecco's peers and must have been influenced by Ruggieri Apugliese who, along with Pietro Giuliani, Tebaldo, and Guidotto da Bologna, were teaching the arts of

⁹⁵ For Niccola Muscia and Iacomo dei Tolomei, see Marti *Poeti Giocosi* 253-96. For Meo dei Tolomei see Marti *Poeti* 253-88. For Bindo Bonichi see Sanesi "Bindo Bonichi da Siena e le sue rime" (1891). Antonio Lanza briefly discusses Bonichi in relation to Cecco (l). See also Bowsky *A Medieval* 270-71, 281-83.

the trivium (i.e., grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic) in early thirteenth-century Siena (Black *Education and Society* 67-68).⁹⁶

Despite such documents, modern scholars have not examined the existing poetic relations among various contemporaneous Sienese poets. On the contrary, recent critics have insisted on juxtaposing Cecco's poetry with the Latin goliardic tradition and the Provençal lyrics as first delineated by Marti's influential study *Cultura e stile* (Carrai 235). Cecco's poetry continues to be approached mainly on a stylistic level, and this is evident in the way it is anthologized with other comic texts of the so-called comic-realistic or jocose lyric. As a result, modern anthologies often position Cecco's comic sonnets in juxtaposition with other comic authors who are not Sienese but who follow similar stylistic principles as delineated by Marti's and Vitale's influential anthologies. By doing so, they fail to consider the possibility that Cecco's poems could be associated with other poets who share mutual cultural, political and geographical elements. As a result, Cecco and his distinct Sienese belief system fades away as it is blended with other poets native to different *comuni* such as Florence, Arezzo, San Gimignano, and Lucca, who do not all correspond with Cecco or follow Cecco's ideological and cultural belief system. The current approach to Cecco's poetry diminishes his localized Sienese components that emerge from the social and political elements of his poetry. The possibility that Cecco's poetry could be approached in continuity with other Sienese texts is confirmed by codicological evidence.

⁹⁶ Ruggieri Apugliese was a peer of Brunetto Latini. Even though many studies have been devoted to the relation between Brunetto and Dante, no study, to my knowledge, has ever speculated on this relation and the possibility that Ruggieri could have been the master of Cecco.

As Anna Bruni has recently shown in her study “Cecco Angiolieri, la lirica comica e la nozione di scuola.” (2005), the Vat. 3793 confirms that medieval scribes circumscribed a Siense poetic tradition by placing contiguously the *canzoni* of three Siense authors such as “Messer Folchachieri, Bartolomeo Mocati e Cacc[i]a di Siena” in conjunction with “la voce del maestro di tutte le arti, Ruggieri Apugliese” (77). Further evidence from il MS. Chig. L.VIII.305 supports the thesis of a continuity between Cecco and other Siense poets, since the manuscript assembles anonymously “le rime di Cecco a quelle di Meo e di Muscia, distinte poi grazie alla testimonianza di altri codici” (Bruni 79n). This evidence shows that the original scribes of Vat. 3793 and Chig. L.VIII.305 followed clear geographical and cultural parameters in the ordering of the manuscript, and considered the three Siense poets as an indistinct single geopolitical block. It thus suggests that medieval scribes did not assemble the poems following a mere stylistic agenda. As noted in the previous chapter, personal ideology and political beliefs most likely played a significant role in shaping medieval manuscripts. In addition, direct evidence shows that Meo dei Tolomei and Cecco used the same opening line for their respective sonnets “I’ son si magro che quasi traluco” suggesting that a mutual poetic collaboration existed between the two poets (Bruni 96).⁹⁷ Despite such codicological evidence, Bruni reaches the surprising conclusion that no definite evidence exists to support that there ever was a relation among Cecco and his Siense contemporary poets; therefore she emphasizes the “mancanza di incontri veri” because “manca quindi tra i poeti siensi più prossimi una relazione. . . dei tre Cecco, Meo, Muscia nessuno era

⁹⁷ Such a close poetic collaboration between the two Siense poets has always confused critics, who have never been able to conclude whether Cecco influenced Meo or Meo influenced Cecco.

abbastanza allegro per fare brigata” (98). Her negative conclusion is solely based on a stylistic intertextual analysis among various sonnets by Florentine and Sieneſe authors. Though Bruni provides valid manuſcript evidence, ſuch evidence is never employed to elucidate if a continuity has ever exiſted among Cecco and other Sieneſe poets.

In my opinion, Cecco muſt be placed within his own Sieneſe environment and juxtapoſed with poets ſuch as Ruggieri Apuglieſi and Bindo Bonichi (1260-1338). Both Ruggieri and Bonichi were actively involved in the ſocial and political life of Siena. While Ruggieri embodies the well-defined political and professional practice of the jester, Bindo Bonichi was the poet of the regime of the Nine. As Bowsky has noted, Bindo “was a member of the ruling oligarchy. He ſerved on the Nine at leaſt twice (in 1309 and 1318), was at leaſt three times a conſul of the merchant guild” (*A Medieval* 281). As a member of the *Governo dei Nove*, Bindo’s poetry often ſides with the ideology of Sieneſe upper middle claſſ as he launches acrid invectives againſt clergy members (“Le chieſe ſon poder de’ maggiorenti”), the *Gaudenti* (“Benchè gli cavalier giurano a’ frieri”), and nobleſmen (“Tra gli uomin grandi, che ſon di caſato”).⁹⁸ Although Bindo often writes moral and didactic poetry, like Cecco he alſo engages in comic and ſatirical ſonnets. Only Lanza has noted that critics have neglected to draw any connections between the two poets: “I rapporti tra Cecco e Bindo, che vivevano nella ſteſſa città ed erano coetanei, non ſono ſtati ſottolineati dagli ſtudioſi. . . eppure. . . eſſi ſono ben più fitti di quanto generalmente non ſi creda” (1). As Lanza ſuggeſts, more ſtudies are needed to juxtapoſe Cecco’s poetry with other influential Sieneſe poets.

⁹⁸ See Bowsky *A Medieval* (280-83); Pietro Bilancioni’s edition of Bindo Bonichi (187, 168).

In the previous chapter, we saw that Rustico's ideology is framed within his own Florentine environment. Similarly, Cecco's poetic voice represents a well-defined ideology at work. In order to gain a richer understanding of the Sienese poet and his ideology, we must frame him and his poetry within his original Sienese microcosm. By doing so we gain a more complex and comprehensive overview of invective as a practice and a distinct geopolitical phenomenon. Both Siena and Florence represented separate political and poetical realities. Florence and Siena, though they both became Guelph *comuni* after the battle of Colle (1269), developed two parallel political and social approaches to controversies during wartime. Each of these approaches, if studied independently, appears coherently set within the particular needs of each social and political environment. While Florence was administered by nobles and guild members belonging to the *arti*, Siena had an oligarchic regime comprised of merchants, bankers and traders who had an antagonistic relationship with guild members and nobles. Nobles from Florence had a different political agenda from the one pursued by nobles from Siena. The ethical and political models of both *comuni* were also distinctive from one another: Siena was centered upon peace, stability and mercy (Bowsky *A Medieval Commune* 314); Florence focused in its *statuto* upon mutual collaboration and activism (Mazzoni 354-58). It seems therefore that different urban ideologies contributed to Rustico and Cecco's invectives and that their poetry is original in its structure, themes, and contents. These historical and political nuances help us to see more clearly the ethical value of certain attacks contained in these invectives, and to accurately frame each Tuscan poet within his own distinct *comune*.

Overall, Cecco's sonnets refer to his exile in terms both critical and entertaining. The evidence provided in this chapter suggests that Cecco's factual exile played a significant role in his poems and constitutes the main source of its fictional representation. Even though we do not possess conclusive documents about Cecco's exile, this lack of evidence should not keep us from reading these poems through a biographical and political lens. In my opinion, it is counterproductive to downplay the historical and political context of these three sonnets because it reduces the ethical weight of invective and comic writing to a mere fictional construction built on a general literary topoi. The poet's own voice should be heard because it bears witness to his personal life and the historical events around him. The presence of the historical author within these sonnets must be revalorized. The presence of the author in the text cannot be reduced to a mere expression of personal pain and discontent or to a cursory figure centered on a generalized rhetorical and formalistic literary tradition. The bitter blame that characterizes the verbal aggression of Cecco's invective poetry interacts with a concrete medieval audience through humorous allusions and hyperbole. Historical events and interpersonal relations should not be sidelined, because they are the matrix from which these invectives emerged and articulated a dialogue with their original readers. In conclusion, Cecco's contribution to invective lies not only in style, but also in the content of his lively and innovative sonnets as they relate to his Sienese environment. By locating Cecco's poetry in juxtaposition with his own original local environment and fellow poets, we will be able to approach his invectives not merely in continuity with an abstract

jocose and goliardic tradition, but rather as both satirical and political poetry that was practiced in thirteenth-century Siena by influential Siennese citizens.

In the last chapter, I shall approach Dante's most prominent invectives from his *Commedia*. Like Rustico and Cecco, Dante expresses his individual stance toward specific battles and political figures. He also uses humor alongside his criticism expressing his polemical attitude toward specific popes, emperors, and political leaders from northern Italian cities. However, unlike Rustico and Cecco, Dante's political scope is larger because he neither privileges a single *comune* (as Rustico does), nor focuses solely upon the poet's own persona (as Cecco does). Instead, Dante projects his criticism and ridicule on a global scale which often assumes the proportion of a whole nation or peninsula (i.e., Italy in *Purg.* 6), and includes a generalized social category (i.e., the clergy in *Inf.* 19) as well as the high institutions of papacy and empire (i.e., in *Par.* 27). To attain this wide aim, Dante does not resort to the compact and direct medium of the sonnet. He rather elaborates the poetic medium of the *canto* which, even if longer than the sonnet, metrically evokes it, being organized in *terzine* hendecasyllables. He also elaborates hybrid vernacular language which incorporates different Italian vernaculars to maximize the effects of denunciation upon his readers, inviting into the discussion citizens from different Italian *comuni*. Through these experimentations, Dante's invective poetry develops as a testimonial of the individual poet who projects his ridicule and blame toward a wide audience confronted with an unwavering, almost biblical anger alongside a subtly irreverent humor. Crafted as public trials, the invectives of the *Commedia* are in continuity with the classic rhetorical

tradition of Cicero and Quintillian as well as political writings authored during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. As we shall see, Dante employs both the theoretical and practical aspects of invective writing in order to activate a call for readers to be responsible and responsive in the face of conflict, hostility, and opportunism.

CHAPTER V

“*CLOACA/ DEL SANGUE E DELLA PUZZA* ”: HUMOR, POLITICS, AND
RELIGION IN DANTE’S INVECTIVES

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I provided a general overview of invective in Tuscany and examined selected invective poems by Rustico Filippi and Cecco Angiolieri within their respective urban and sociopolitical environments. In the present chapter, I shall focus on selected passages from Dante’s *Commedia*. Unlike Rustico and Cecco, Dante launches verbal attacks on practices, offenses, and decisions grounded in events that occurred over the entire Italian peninsula. He directs his invectives not merely toward single individuals, parties, or groups, but to entire political institutions and their leaders (i.e., the empire and the emperor, the papacy and the pope). The complexity and wide scope of the *Commedia* should not be used to diminish other models of invective. Rustico’s and Cecco’s invectives are framed within the microcosm of their own *comune* and in their own way are as complex as Dante’s, as they provide their fellow citizens with valuable ethical models rooted in a well-defined local environment and belief system. Consequently, we should assess the distinctiveness of their poetry both in continuity and in juxtaposition with Dante’s. This chapter will further corroborate my claim that invective was a widespread phenomenon in high and late medieval Italy and reached a broad variety of addressees, demonstrating a high degree of resourcefulness.

Furthermore, by applying my approach to Dante's masterwork I will be able to explore the coexistence of blame and humor within the invective genre and show how the *Sommo Poeta* uses the tension of curses and laughter to divulge his ethical message to readers. Like the invective poems examined in chapters III and IV, in the *Commedia* invective could be still perceived as comic poetry while containing a serious ethical charge. Scholars have not been able to balance or harmonize humor and ethics in invective, and this is evident in the irony that Cecco and Rustico have been called comic poets but denied any real ethical goals, while Dante is acknowledged to have very serious ethical freight but denied any actual comic charge.

I shall first examine Dante's political ideology and vision. If we approach Dante's political background in relation to his affiliation with Guelph and Ghibelline ideologies, as well as with various social groups (i.e., the *popolani* and *magnati*), we will be able to better understand the poet's evident condemnation of crucial contemporary events. Dante launches his invectives within a clear and specific sociopolitical frame that must be understood in order to grasp the complexity of Dante's masterwork as well as other relevant works such as the *Convivio*, the *Monarchia*, and his political epistles. I believe that such a frame must be examined starting from the years before his exile. Even though Dante's political stance on the events that took place in Florence and Italy emerges more evidently in the works written after his exile, it can also be understood by examining evidence from the period before his banishment. I shall first briefly examine the available information from historical records which shed light on Dante's political affiliation during the time before his exile, when he still resided in Florence. Like Cecco, Dante

lived during a period of great political turmoil and tension. Between 1265 and 1300 the government in Florence experienced numerous changes because of social and political struggles between individuals siding with various parties (such as the Guelph government that succeeded the Ghibelline regime in 1266) and groups belonging to various social classes (such as the *popolani* and the high and low nobility). These competing social groups took turns in experimenting with different regimes while overturning each other through new systems of government, such as the priorate of the guilds in 1283, the regime of the Ordinance of Justice in 1293, the Guelph oligarchical regime of the nobility during the last decade of the thirteenth century, and finally the Black Guelph hegemony of Florentine *magnati* from the early fourteenth century (Najemy “Dante and Florence” 243-47). Dante was thus exposed to a very dynamic political situation which almost certainly shaped his complex yet comprehensive political views. However, before his exile Dante was not merely passively absorbing the shock of all these political changes; he was also experimenting with various political ideals and models as he took an active part in Florentine politics.

After sketching Dante’s political ideology and vision, I will examine his humor. The presence of humor in Dante’s *Commedia* has been largely neglected by modern critics, especially after the monumental (but unfairly forgotten) attempt by Enrico Sannia to lay out the satirical and humorous elements of the *Comedia* in his two-volume work *Il Comico, l’umorismo e la satira nella ‘Divina Commedia* (1909). Not all scholars have viewed the topic of humor as unorthodox and incompatible with the *Commedia*; a few

studies have been devoted to the topic of humor and laughter in Dante.¹ These studies have the merit of providing lively and accessible interpretations of specific passages of the *Commedia*, but they have simplified the question of Dante and humor by simply praising isolated occurrences of humor in Dante. In other words, they just list humorous passages from the *Commedia* and do not adequately clarify the role that humor plays in the *Commedia*. I will elaborate an approach to the question of humor in the *Commedia* by mediating between the two extremes of dismissal and enthusiasm to show that Dante employs derision alongside an aggressive blame to achieve a *captatio benevolentiae* with his readers according to the rhetorical tradition of invective writing. The term *captatio benevolentiae* refers to the goal of the orator in classical rhetoric as illustrated in *Ad Herennium*, which literally means “capturing goodwill,” i.e., making the audience benevolently disposed and persuaded by the speech (I.iv 7-9). Dante explicitly mentions the *captatio benevolentiae*, referring specifically to *Ad Herennium*—known as *Rhetorica Secunda* or *Rhetorica Nova*—when he introduces his *Commedia* to Cangrande della Scala in his Letter XIII:

Ad bene exordium tria requiruntur, ut dicit Tullius in Nova Rethorica, scilicet ut benevolum et attentum et docilem reddat aliquis auditorem; et hoc maxime in admirabili genere cause, ut ipsemet Tullius dicit.

[To make a good exordium three things are requisite, as Tully says in his *New Rhetoric*; that the hearer, namely, should be rendered favorably disposed, attentive, and willing to learn; and this is especially needful in

¹ See Lonsdale Ragg’s “Wit and Humor in Dante” (1913), Dorothy L. Sayers’ “The Comedy of the Comedy” from *Introductory Papers on Dante* (1949), and Glauco Cambon’s “The Purgatorial Smile: A Footnote on Dante’s Humor” (1980).

the case of a subject which is out of the common, as Tully himself remarks.]²

Here Dante clarifies that he composed the *Commedia* according to the principles of classical rhetoric, aiming to encourage a favorable disposition in target readers.

Furthermore, if we read the passage after the one cited by Dante, we see that the author of *Ad Herennium* explicitly mentions laughter and humor as important tools to achieve the aforesaid *captatio benevolentiae* (I.vi.10). It is thus very likely that Dante was aware of the importance of humor and laughter in *captatio benevolentiae* and Cicero's explicit emphasis on the importance of using humor in speech was implicitly accepted and evoked with the choice of the title *Commedia* for his masterwork. However, Dante does not employ humor solely to follow a conceptual rhetorical tradition; as we have seen with previous authors, Dante contributes his own model of invective and uses humor according to his own poetic and human sensibility. Having delineated how Dante uses both blame and humor, I will show how these two elements coexist and are framed within a dialogue between author and readers through a series of close readings of selected passages from all three *cantiche* of the *Commedia*.

² The text of the original letter is edited by Ermenegildo Pistelli. The English translation is by Paget Toynbee. Both Latin and English translations are available in *The Princeton Dante Project*, <<http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/index.htm>> (accessed March 15, 2010). All subsequent citations of Dante's Letter XIII are from *The Princeton Dante Project*. I will not address here the controversial issue of the authenticity of the Letter XIII which has been hotly debated by many critics in many studies. I accept Dante's authorship of the letter in light of Luca Azzetta's evidence, which, in my opinion, strongly establishes Dante as the author. As Hollander has recently noted (2008), Luca Azzetta's recent discovery has established that Dante is almost certainly the author of the letter: "In two groundbreaking articles, Luca Azzetta has discovered and presented evidence that makes a strong case . . . that the *Epistole to Cangrande* is nearly certainly authentic. . . See Azzetta, "Le chiose alla *Commedia* di Andrea Lancia, l'*Epistola a Cangrande* e altre questioni dantesche," *L'Alighieri* 21 (2003): 5-76." Hollander's article "Dante's Quarrel with His Own *Convivio* (Again)" has been published electronically in the *Electronic Bulletin of the Dante Society of America*; see <<http://www.princeton.edu/~dante/ebdsa/hollander032308.html>> (accessed March 15, 2010)

Inferno XIX, *Purgatorio* VI, and *Paradiso* XXVII contain Dante's most violent and blunt invectives against specific wrongdoings perpetrated by the citizens of Florence and Italy, and by specific popes and emperors (Nicholas III, Boniface VIII, and Albert I of Austria). I will focus on two main aspects of these invectives: first, the aggressive verbal surface and overt rhetorical strategies that are expressed in the specific words chosen to mock and criticize the explicit moral faults of individuals; and second, the relation of these expressions of anger and condemnation to their ethical effect upon readers in creating a call to responsibility in the form of a corrective laughter in response to reigning moral, political, and cultural tensions. This laughter embodies the basis of the ethics of invective conceived as a call to responsibility. I shall consider the rhetorical and ethical dimensions of the invective first separately and then together.

I will then propose a reading of Dante's invective that reconciles its aggressive verbal surface with its interior poetic expression of an ethics characterized by an encounter with the other, as articulated by Emmanuel Levinas. I will show how the encounter with the other stirs a dialogue between Dante and his readers, confronted with the author's political vision and called upon to react actively and concretely. Thus, Dante does not merely denounce a wrongdoing or elicit laughter for its own sake; he goes beyond reprehension and amusement by engaging his readers and offering them possible responses in the face of a wrongdoing.

Dante's Political Ideology and Vision

As numerous studies on the subject show, the question of politics is crucial in order to understand Dante and his masterwork.³ From the beginning of the *Commedia*, and specifically in Ciaccio's denunciation of the political abuses of Florentines in *Inferno* VI, to the very end (*Paradiso* XXVII and XXIX), Dante invokes the political plight of Florence and Italy.⁴ However, as scholars have stressed, we should be careful not to overemphasize the question of politics because we might risk seeing "elements in the *Commedia* in purely political terms, whereas they may, in fact, have wider implications" (Herzman 309).⁵ I do not seek to reduce the *Commedia* to its political aspects; instead, I seek to show that to reach the most comprehensive reading of the political invectives contained in the *Commedia*, we must address Dante's personal political stance on

³ See Francesco Ercole's *Il pensiero politico di Dante* (1927); Charles Davis' *Dante and the Idea of Rome* (1957); Piergiorgio Ricci's "Dante e l'impero di Roma" (1965); Francesco Mazzoni's "Teoresi e prassi in Dante politico" (1966); Aldo Vallone's "Il pensiero politico di Dante dinnanzi ad A. Trionfi e a G. Vernani da Rimini" (1971); Joan Ferrante's *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (1984); Donna Mancusi-Ungaro's *Dante and the Empire* (1987); John Scott's *Dante Political Purgatory* (1996); Lino Pertile's "Dante Looks Forward and Back: Political Allegory in the Epistles" (1997), and Christian Moevs' "The Metaphysical Basis of Dante's Politics" (2003).

⁴ Perhaps the *Paradiso*, above all the other canticles, presents strong references to the political life in Italy from the perspective of political prominent leaders such as Justinian (cantos V-VI), Charles Martel (Canto VIII), and Cacciaguida (cantos XV-XVII).

⁵ In reviews of Ferrante's *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy*, both Steven Botterill and Ronald Herzman criticize Ferrante's focus on the political aspects of the *Commedia*. However, Ferrante has already emphasized the complexity and multifacetedness of Dante's work and the fact that her study consciously focuses only on a specific aspect: "The purpose of this study is to analyze the political concepts expressed in the *Comedy* in relation to contemporary history and theory, and to define the political message(s) of the poem. This is offered as one perspective on an unusually complex and multifaceted work. It is not meant to deny the importance of other aspects. . . but rather to emphasize one that was far more important to Dante than it has been to many modern critics" (4). These criticisms seem somehow unwarranted as Joan Ferrante has made clear that she wanted to emphasize the political aspect without negating other perspectives; as she makes clear, the political aspect of the *Commedia* is very important, but we should always be aware of "other aspects—religious, aesthetic, philosophical, cultural, (and) allegorical" (4).

important events. In the previous chapters, I have shown that the invective poet's ideology must be considered alongside his poetry, because art and ideology constituted an indissoluble unit in high and late medieval Italian authors. Authors communicated directly with their target audience through poetry, and they meant to sway, or at least affect, their listeners' opinion on controversial events. Each poet was deeply rooted within the same cultural belief system as his readers. Likewise, if we examine Dante's personal political creed, we will be able to better understand its practical application to his invectives which are a reflection of crucial events from his life, such as his exile from Florence and his condemnation of the wrongdoings of political and religious leaders. Dante takes a clear stand against such wrongdoings, communicating to readers his own criticism and proposing possible solutions.

To examine Dante's political ideology and his judgment on particular events that contain both political and historical implications, I will briefly examine Dante's political affiliation during the years before his exile as documented in the historical record.⁶ As Najemy has cautioned, critics often employ Dante's exile in order to justify his harsh denunciation against Florence and his contemporaries, but the period before his exile (1302) should also be examined as a moment "equally important to grasp the influence on Dante of the traditions of political and historical thought that emerged in Florence during the course of the thirteenth century" ("Dante and Florence" 236). As Giorgio Petrocchi

⁶ Dante was exiled from Florence in 1302 for political reasons, and we possess evidence for his banishment in the *Libro del Chiodo* (see Ricciardelli's *Il Libro del Chiodo* 305). His banishment was also reiterated in 1311 and 1315 as evident from *Il Libro del Chiodo*, the *Archivio Diplomatico* of Florence, and the *Statuto del Capitano*; Isidoro Del Lungo published all these documents for the first time in his *Dell'esilio di Dante* (see especially 73-149). Dante's name appears in these documents three times (99, 138, and 149).

has shown, before entering politics Dante met and cultivated friendly relationships with two prominent political leaders: the Pistoiese judge and *Capitano del popolo* (chief military official) of Florence, Aldobrando Mezzabati (c.1291-92), and King Charles Martel of Anjou, son of King Charles II of Naples (c.1294).⁷ Dante exchanged poems with them, and most likely he also exchanged political ideas pertaining to the resolution of various tensions in Florence after Campaldino (Mazzotta “Life of Dante” 7). During the years immediately after the Battle of Campaldino against Arezzo (1289) Florentines experienced both devastating wars and a yearning for peace and stability. Giuseppe Mazzotta eloquently illustrates the contradictions of these years:

The decade was marked by a number of contradictory signs for the future of Florence. In the aftermath of the battle of Campaldino there were many hopeful, scandalously utopian attempts to establish a bipartisan government, such as an alliance of Guelfs and Ghibellines to secure peaceful conditions in the city. (“Life of Dante” 7)

While waging several wars against Pisa (c.1290-92), Florentines attempted to ease factional strife through several bipartisan governments (Davidsohn II.2, 502—528). The fiasco of these attempts and the increasing taxation of Florentine citizens were most likely among the main reasons that caused the promulgation of the Ordinance of Justice in 1293, an extraordinary series of new laws implemented without any act of violence (Davidsohn II.2, 537). Through the Ordinance of Justice, Florentines agreed to enact a new statutory reform which significantly changed the previous system, which had favored aristocratic families. The new government was based on twelve major guilds supervised by the *Podestà*, the Priors of the Guilds, and the *Savi* or wise men (Najemy

⁷ See Petrocchi “Biografia” 16-17; see also Fabrizio Beggiato 1937.

“Dante and Florence” 246). The Ordinances favored the *popolani* and significantly limited the political role played by the noble families or *magnati* by introducing “harsh penalties . . . for crimes of violence against non-magnates” (Najemy “Dante and Florence” 246). This historic political overturn brought a moment of stability in Florence, and was successfully orchestrated by the charismatic leader Giano della Bella.

Unfortunately, in March 1295 the government of Giano and the *popolani* collapsed when the Florentine elite families effectively fueled an uprising, causing the exile of Giano (Najemy *A History* 89). 1295 is thus a crucial year in Florence because it coincides with the eruption of new internal tensions within the city, causing the return to power of noble families but also a rupture within the Guelph party which gradually began to separate into the Black and White factions. As Mazzotta illustrates, the nomination of Pope Boniface VIII and the fall of Giano and the *Secondo Popolo* in 1295 almost certainly affected Dante, who decided to pursue a political career in that same year by enrolling “in the guild of the *Medici e speziali* (Physician and Apothecaries)” (Mazzotta “Alighieri” 18):

There were, however, other events which signaled ominous and disastrous consequences. Chief among them was the inauguration of Boniface VIII’s theocratic papacy (1294) in the aftermath of the collapse of Celestine V’s ideals of evangelical pauperism. The new papal policy presaged difficult times for Florence’s hegemonic claims, since the theocratic scheme entailed nothing less than the submission of the whole of Tuscany to papal control. This factor alone possibly constitutes the background against which Dante’s further political involvement is to be seen. In this same year (1295) he enrolled in a guild, and on several occasions opposed Boniface’s exactions on Florence. Dante’s political career reached its acme in 1300. (“Life of Dante” 7-8)

The historical events summarized here help us to better understand the specific events which constitute the grounds of Dante's political invectives. Dante lived during two notable periods of political tension which have implications both social (i.e., the Florentine *popolani* and the *magnati*) and religious (i.e., the pressure that Pope Boniface VIII exerted upon the Florentines). The historical record provides evidence that would allow us to understand clearly Dante's position during these events because the *Archivio Diplomatico* in Florence records how he voted on various propositions at the city council. I shall use this evidence to show his position on important questions pertaining to sociopolitical and religious tensions during the years he entered into politics and gradually became a prominent figure in early fourteenth-century Florence.

Stephen Bemrose concisely introduces the poet's entrance into politics when he states: "Dante's first official position in the Florentine government, as a member of the Special Council of the *Capitano del Popolo*, lasted from November 1, 1295 to 30 April 1296" (42).⁸ In this office, Dante gained gradual recognition, as is evident from his title of *Savio* [wise man] in the record of the *Consiglio di Capitadini* on December 14, 1295, when the poet spoke on the issue of choosing the future priors. During his subsequent appointment as councilor in the *Consiglio dei Cento*, on June 5, 1296, Dante took part in the discussion of two important proposals involving legal actions aimed at avoiding tensions between *magnati* and *popolani* (Petrocchi "Biografia" 19). The first bill prohibited the admittance into Florence of recent Pistoiese exiles, while the second "sought to confer full power on the priors and the *Gonfaloniere di Giustizia* . . . to

⁸ See also Petrocchi "Biografia" 18-19.

proceed against anyone assaulting, or even insulting, members of the *popolano* class who were holders of public office” (Bemrose 42). On this occasion Dante spoke in favor of the two proposals, thus playing an important role in their approval (Petrocchi “Biografia” 19). The registry of the *Consiglio dei Cento* records that on December 28, 1301, Dante spoke in the council and stated his support for the safeguarding of the *Ordinamenti di Giustizia* and the *popolani*: “Dante. . . si pronuncia favorevolmente alla conservazione degli Ordinamenti di Giustizia e in genere del governo popolare” (Petrocchi “Biografia” 28). These two facts reveal an allegiance to the *popolani* and a readiness to limit the power, and abuse thereof, of the *magnati*.

Additional evidence further confirms that Dante supported the Florentine *popolani* and their political agenda, and suggests that he was affiliated with neither the White nor the Black Guelph factions. At the beginning of the 1300s the internal tensions between the *magnati* and the *popolani* reached their apex with the banishment of the *magnate* Corso Donati. Due to the numerous successful proposals to reduce the authority of the *magnati*, the internal split within the elite Guelph party became official in 1297 when the formal division between the pro-*magnati* faction (led by Corso Donati) and the pro-*popolani* faction (led by Vieri de’ Cerchi) exposed respectively the two parties of the Black and the White Guelphs (Petrocchi, “Biografia” 19). As Bemrose succinctly summarizes:

The Donati/Blacks were the more staunchly Guelph in the traditional sense, that is, they supported the papacy and the House of Anjou. The Cerchi/Whites were what might be called ‘moderate’ Guelphs, and sought to promote policies independent of those of the papacy and not subservient to the interests of the Anjou. (45)

Such a division has significant implications for Dante and his political ideology, especially if we approach critically the poet's stance toward both factions.

As Najemy has subtly noted, "it is usually claimed that Dante belonged to the party or faction of the Whites, but he was more closely tied with them in the first few years after his exile than he had been in the period of his political participation" ("Dante and Florence" 237). Najemy's observation is accurate if we examine the years 1300-1301, when Dante was appointed first ambassador to San Gimignano and then one of the six priors of Florence. During these years, Dante was involved as a mediator in the bitter clash between the two factions which reached its apex with Corso Donati's banishment and death sentence in 1300. Dante was almost certainly not involved in Donati's sentence, which occurred before he was appointed prior (Petrocchi, "Biografia" 24). In addition, when Dante was elected prior in 1301, he displayed a bipartisan stance by deciding in agreement with the other priors to "banish a number of *grandi*, both Black and White" (Bemrose 49).⁹ Dante's decision was likely very controversial at the time, because the fourteenth-century historian Leonardo Bruni (1370-1444) documented that Dante wrote a letter to justify the decision after he was bitterly criticized by prominent members of the Whites:

Questo diede gravezze assai a Dante, e contutto ch'esso si scusi come uomo senza parte, niente di manco fu riputato pendesse in parte Bianca. . .
(102)

⁹ The fact that Dante's close friend, Guido Cavalcanti, was among the White Guelph exiles further supports the claim that Dante did not act out of his self-interest or in favor of the White Guelphs.

[This brought much blame upon Dante, and though he stands on his defense and declares himself to be above party, he was nonetheless reputed to lean to the White faction.]¹⁰ (Wicksteed 125)

As this evidence shows, Dante defended his position and attempted to present himself as “uomo senza parte,” thus distancing himself from the White Guelph faction. This distancing is also confirmed by the fact that after Dante fulfilled his appointment in the priorate, the newly elected priors made the biased decision to revoke the banishment of the Whites while upholding that of the Blacks. This notorious decision overturned Dante’s diplomacy and further confirms the disagreement between the more impartial Dante and the White Guelph successors (Petrocchi, *Vita di Dante* 82). In the aforementioned letter, Dante takes another clear stand against the decision of the newly elected priors stating that “esso era fuori dell’ufficio del priorato. E che a lui non si debba imputare” (Bruni 102) [He was no longer in office as prior, and should not be held responsible] (Wicksteed 125). Even though Dante sympathized with the *popolani*, he did not necessarily favor the White Guelphs, nor was he unequivocally against the Black Guelphs; instead, he took a stand against the instability and tensions of the time by fighting the abuses of the *magnati* rather than siding with any specific party. Before his exile, he was more likely a bipartisan poet who had contacts with prominent politicians and effectively voiced his opinions regardless of party preferences.

The sociopolitical events outlined thus far intermingle with the ecclesiastical and religious affairs which involved Boniface VIII. Pope Boniface played an active role in

¹⁰ Bruni paraphrased the letter in his “Vita di Dante.” Even though the letter is now sadly untraceable, critics believe that it was genuine (Petrocchi “Biografia”). The citation of Bruni is from Angelo Solerti’s edition (1904); the English translation is by Philip Henry Wicksteed.

Florentine politics despite the fact that he did not hold a public office in the *comune*. Beside protecting Corso Donati and supporting the hegemonic plans of the Black Guelphs, Boniface was also involved in many scandals and gave open support to Noffo di Aquintavalle, Simone di Gerardo, and Cambio da Sesto. These three Florentines were charged with conspiracy against the government of Florence and eventually condemned to a heavy fine and the cutting out of their tongues (Petrocchi “Biografia” 24-26). As Petrocchi shows, Dante and the other priors executed the sentence immediately after their inauguration in the priorate. This sentence most likely played a significant role in Dante’s and other priors’ excommunication launched by the papal mediator Matteo d’Acquasparta two months after the sentence (“Biografia” 26).¹¹ The events of June 1301 further confirmed Dante’s opposition to Pope Boniface’s intervention in Florentine politics. On June 19, 1301, Dante took an active role in the Council of the *Cento*. First, he was the only one to oppose a proposal of military aid for the pope during the Council of the Captain (Petrocchi, “Biografia” 27-28). During a subsequent meeting on the same day, Dante was most likely summoned to defend his position. As documents show, Dante restated his opposition to Boniface VIII in a closing address while another speaker communicated to the council an opposing view. Judging from the outcome of the meeting, Dante did not prevail over the other speaker; his proposal was supported by 32

¹¹ Other incidents that occurred after this sentence (i.e., the military attack—which fortunately did not occur—organized by Matteo d’Acquasparta of Lucca against Florence, and above all the assassination attempt against the papal mediator perpetrated by a *popolano*) constituted the main reason why the papal *paciario* or mediator launched the excommunication against the governors; see Petrocchi, “Biografia” 26.

votes while his opponent received 49 votes.¹² Despite Dante's defeat, his speech must have played a crucial role in influencing many voters because even though his opposition to Boniface VIII was not supported by all of the electorate, it gained significant support in the Council. Furthermore, after his second speech the poet was no longer alone in opposing the pope. As Bemrose notes, "the day's proceedings show that the Whites were by no means unanimous in their policy towards him [Boniface]. The majority favored caution; Dante was an outspoken member of a defiant, even intransigent minority" (52).

Dante's fierce clash with Boniface VIII found its final confirmation when the pope spoke directly to him and other Florentine officials during a diplomatic mission in Rome on the behalf of the Florentine government.¹³ As Mazzotta explains, "The Florentines dispatched three emissaries to Rome to persuade the pope to keep the French from entering Tuscany" ("Alighieri" 19). During the embassy, the pope probably alluded explicitly to Dante's hostility toward the papacy when he declared to the Florentine ambassadors:

Perchè siete voi così ostinati? Umiliatevi a me: e io vi dico in verità, che io non ho altra intenzione che di vostra pace. Tornate indietro due di voi; e abiano la mia benedizione, se procurano che sia ubidita la mia volontà.
(Compagni *Cronica* II.4)

[Wherefore are ye thus obstinate? Humble yourself before me. And I declare to you in truth, that I have no other intention but to promote your peace. Let two of you go back, and let them have my blessing if they can cause my will to be obeyed.] (Trans. Beneke and Ferrers 82-83)

¹² See Petrocchi: "Dante conferma la sua netta opposizione ma prevale con 49 voti positivi e 32 contrari il parere favorevole di un altro oratore" ("Biografia" 28).

¹³ Dante's contemporary and chronicler Dino Compagni records Boniface's words in his *Cronica*. To my knowledge no scholars have questioned the validity of Compagni's evidence.

Even though no official documents survive about this diplomatic mission, Dante's contemporary and chronicler Dino Compagni narrates the event in his *Cronica* and identifies the two ambassadors who were sent back to Florence by the pope (i.e., Maso Minbetti and Corazza da Signa), also naming Dante (*Cronica* II.11, II. 25). According to this evidence, scholars have concluded that this diplomatic mission almost certainly involved three ambassadors who represented Florence, and also that Dante was the one who stayed behind in Rome with Pope Boniface.¹⁴ According to Petrocchi, Dante remained in Rome because he was "troppo influente perchè Bonifacio potesse correre il rischio di rimandarlo a Firenze" ("Biografia"29). The fact that Dante was not chosen to return to Florence might not have been arbitrary. If we consider that the *Sommo Poeta* was not easily enclosed within a particular party and took an openly intransigent position against the pope, Dante could have been considered a threat whom the pope wanted to keep under his direct supervision.

Furthermore, as Bemrose notes, Dante could have been kept in Rome because "Boniface thought it wiser to keep him away from Florence until his pro-Black schemes had been put into action" (59). Indeed, while the poet stayed in the papal court, King Charles of Valois entered Florence with his army alongside the Black Guelphs, who in a *coup d'état* took control of the government, banning all Whites and destroying their houses (Petrocchi "Biografia" 29-30). Dante "was sentenced first to exile on January 27,

¹⁴ Compagni also mentions a group of ambassadors from Bologna; see Bemrose 59. The Florentine ambassadors could have been three or even more. Like the majority of critics, Petrocchi speculates that the ambassadors from Florence were three, though he acknowledges that the number could have been higher: "Il Compagni ci dice il nome degli ambasciatori (o di tre di essi se la missione diplomatica fu più numerosa)" ("Biografia" 29).

1302, and later, on March 10, 1302, to death should he ever return to his native city” (Mazzotta “Alighieri” 19).

Overall, the political ideology of the Florentine poet was complex and did not lean entirely toward the White Guelphs during the period before his exile. On the contrary, Dante took an unpopular position among both White and Black Guelphs. Furthermore, his frequent support of the *popolani* must be considered, especially in connection to the important role of the popular movement that initiated the constitutional reform of the *Ordinamenti di Giustizia* in 1293. The *Sommo Poeta* owed his political career to the *popolani* who “created the conditions for the participation in communal politics of large numbers of men like Dante: citizens who took their turn in office but who were not outspoken leaders of the various factions of the political class” (Najemy, “Dante and Florence” 237).¹⁵ However, as Najemy has shown, after his exile Dante took a more critical position toward the *popolani* and their political philosophy (Najemy, “Dante and Florence” 252-53).

If we examine the years immediately following his exile, it is evident that Dante created an alliance with both White Guelphs and Ghibellines and changed his initial position of “uomo senza parte” or man without party (Petrocchi “Biografia” 31-32). During the years between 1302 and 1304, he was involved in both diplomatic attempts and wars against the Blacks until he “broke away from compatriots whom he would call the *compagnia malvagia e scempia* (“wicked, dimwitted company,” *Par.* 17.62) to

¹⁵ The *popolani* were also responsible for Brunetto Latini’s political career during the government of the *Primo Popolo*, i.e., 1250-1260.

become a party unto himself” (Mazzotta “Alighieri” 19).¹⁶ Throughout these difficult years, he still played important political roles as an ambassador and diplomat (Peters 80). After these events, the poet fervently endorsed Emperor Henry VII between 1310-13, as evident from his political treatise *Monarchia* and letters V, VI, and VII, written during this period.¹⁷ During the last years of his life, Dante’s political position could be characterized as very versatile. He opposed the pope’s plan of a theocratic hegemony over Tuscany, Italy, and Europe, and promoted the ideal of an honest and modest pope. He also endorsed the coexistence and interdependence between papacy and empire, seeking a model of a worthy emperor.

Dante thus experienced a complex and dynamic political process; from being initially involved in the Florentine government, after his exile he conspired with White Guelph and Ghibelline exiles, and finally he detached himself from all his Florentine political allies, yearning for an equilibrium between a universal empire and a spiritual papacy. The poet actively participated in various conflicts, acting as a moderator but also taking controversial positions and expressing a decisive stance against specific abuses. After considering the long itinerary of events that took place both before and after his exile, we cannot simply label Dante as a White Guelph or a closet Ghibelline.¹⁸ I believe

¹⁶ The English translation of the passage from the *Paradiso* is Mazzotta’s. However, the term “scempia” does not correspond to “dimwitted;” see Hollander who translates the term “scempia” with “witless.”

¹⁷ Even though critics do not agree on the time of the composition of *Monarchia*, it is unanimously accepted that it was at least drafted when the Emperor Henry VII came to Italy in 1308-1313 (Cassell 3).

¹⁸ Dante’s affiliation with either the Guelphs or the Ghibellines is not currently a principal object of debate of modern scholars. Even though some discussion on the subject still takes place, scholars do not explore questions such as “Was Dante unequivocally Guelph, or was he a Ghibelline sympathizer?” However, intellectuals from the *Risorgimento* and post-Unification era had a heated debate on whether Dante was a Guelph or a Ghibelline. The nineteenth-century poet Ugo Foscolo initiated the debate by labeling Dante as

that this open-ended conclusion should also be applied to the poet's political invectives.

In this way, we will be better equipped to place the author's personal ideology (as delineated in his biography) in continuity with his fictional works.¹⁹

The biographical data and specific people and events examined thus far should be brought to bear on Dante's political invectives. By evoking factual people and events that

a Ghibelline Italian nationalist. Foscolo coined the influential expression, in his *Sepolcri* (1804), "ghibellin fuggiasco" (59)[fugitive Ghibelline]. This political assessment of Dante as a Ghibelline was later established in Foscolo's essay "Discorso sul testo della *Commedia* di Dante" (1825), which influenced a generation of scholars such as Giuseppe Mazzini and Gabriele Rossetti. While teaching in London, Mazzini was involved in the project of completing Foscolo's critical edition of the *Commedia*, and his assessment of Dante's political ideology agrees with Foscolo's. See W. P. Friederich, "Dante Through the Centuries": "Foscolo...during the last eleven years of his life (published) two articles in the *Edinburgh Review* in behalf of Dante. . . and beginning a four-volume edition of the *Divina Commedia* which, after his death in 1827, was finished by his fellow exile Mazzini" (52). Rossetti developed the imaginative idea that Dante was a sectarian Mason who secretly conspired against the pope and the whole of Christianity; see Rossetti's *Sullo spirito antipapale che produsse la Riforma, e sulla segreta influenza ch'esercitò nella letteratura d'Europa* (1832) especially 117-118. Rossetti believed that Dante created a secret jargon to communicate with sectarian antipapal groups. However, by the end of the nineteenth century scholars started to question whether Dante was undeniably a Ghibelline and proposed that he could have been a Guelph as well; see Pier Vincenzo Pasquini's "Se Dante fosse Guelfo o Ghibellino" in *La principale allegoria della Divina comedia: secondo la ragione poetica e secondo i canoni posti da Dante* (1875) 12-14. Pasquini wisely concludes that Dante's Ghibellinism was not a question of party but likely of conviction and could also be associated with his Catholic faith because the Ghibelline ideology was not in conflict with Christianity (14). Other subsequent critics, such as G. A. Scartazzini in 1890—even though he rejected Rossetti's speculation that Dante opposed the papacy—he proposed that Dante changed allegiance from Guelph to Ghibelline (254-258). Finally in 1900, Isidoro del Lungo reconciles both possibilities that Dante could have been both a Guelph and a Ghibelline during different times of his life (*Il priorato* 13). By the mid-twentieth century critics started to question Dante's alleged Ghibellinism and nationalism as posited by post-Risorgimento scholars. Scholars such as Michele Maccarrone, Bruno Nardi, and Gustavo Vinay more carefully examined evidence from the historical records pertaining to Dante, focusing on his historical environment and contemporary political writings; see Pier Giorgio Ricci's comment "noi dobbiamo essere particolarmente grati a coloro che, come Michele Maccarrone, Bruno Nardi, Gustavo Vinay, tanto hanno faticato per inquadrare la monarchia entro la pubblicistica del tempo" ("Dante e l'impero di Roma" 137-38). Their studies were further substantiated by modern critics who emphasized the realistic and activist value of Dante's political agenda. See Pier Giorgio Ricci, Aldo Vallone, and Francesco Mazzoni's studies.

¹⁹ Based on recent studies it seems that scholars tend to conclude that Dante was neither Guelph or Ghibelline; see Christian Moevs "The Metaphysical Basis of Dante's Politics" (2003): "Though he appears to be both a Ghibelline and a reactionary, Dante is neither" (239). However, modern Dante scholars do not usually offer evidence from Dante's biography alongside their conclusions because they mainly refer either to his fictional writings (such as the *Commedia* and *Convivio*) or—though more seldom—his non-fictional writings, such as his epistles and the political treatise *Monarchia*.

affected his life, Dante divulges to his target audience both his criticism of his political environment and his proposed political vision. That political vision is crucial when approaching his invectives because the elements of ethics and politics were strictly connected. Such a connection played a key role in the make-up of Florentine citizens during Dante's generation, and teachers not only taught it but also expected their students to put it into practice.²⁰ Dante and his contemporaries often treat the theme of politics in their writings, showing that they conceive politics, like philosophy, as a science that is practiced for the enrichment of all; thus politics “non ad speculationem per prius, sed ad operationem ordinatur” (Dante, *Monarchia* 1.II) [is not organized with regard to speculation, but rather with regard to action] (Cassell 112).

Dante's emphasis on the practicality of political writing suggests that when he refers to political issues through poetry, he envisions an active role for readers who are called upon not only to read and understand the poetic message, but also to take a radical position in the face of a wrongdoing by becoming judges. Dante expresses this idea beautifully in a passage from the *Monarchia* where he instructs readers on how to approach and interpret general circumstances in the contest of the principle of free will:

²⁰ The connection between ethics and politics and its practical application is inspired by Aristotle's teaching. Brunetto Latini is the teacher mainly responsible for introducing it to Florentine students through his *Tesoretto* and *Livres dou Tresor*, which follow the process of learning from ethics to politics; see also his “Ethica.” Dante almost certainly knew and read these texts. Holloway believes that Dante transcribed the Tuscan vernacular translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* authored by Brunetto and contained in Florentine archives (*Twice-Told* 429). On the evidence of Brunetto Latini urging his students to practice his teaching see Villani's citation on Brunetto teaching “secondo la politica” ; see also Najemy, “Brunetto Latini's ‘Politica.’”

Et ideo dico quod iudicium medium est apprehensionis et appetitus: nam primo res apprehenditur, deinde apprehensa bona vel mala iudicatur, et ultimo iudicans prosequitur sive fugit. (1.XII)²¹

[And, therefore, I say that judgment lies amid apprehension and appetite: for, first, a thing is apprehended, then, once apprehended, it is judged good or bad, and, lastly, the person judging either sees it or avoids it.] (Cassell 122)

In this passage, Dante provides the example of an individual faced with a general circumstance. While facing it, he gradually learns to assess it by employing a careful decision-making process which he regulates between judgment and desire. Once the event is assessed ethically, it is either accepted or rejected. Dante's simple and sharp logic offers no middle ground between acceptance and avoidance, implying that when facing a general "res" or fact, we should first properly understand and judge it and finally unequivocally embrace or avoid it. In other words we, as readers, should understand the implications of a certain behavior presented to us through the narrative, and if we recognize its wickedness we must avoid it, thus taking immediate action and not lingering between the two extremes of excessive speculation and desire.

In *Inf. V*, Dante reiterates the swiftness of the first stage of "apprehensionis" through Francesca who expresses it clearly when speaking to the pilgrim: "Amor, ch'al cor gentil ratto s'apprende" (100) ["Love, quick to kindle in the gentle heart," Hollander].²² Francesca is also presented as a reader, but Dante clarifies her motivation,

²¹ For the text of the *Monarchia*, I use Federico Sanguineti's edition (1985). The English translation is Cassell's.

²² Federico Sanguineti notes the link between *Monarchia* 1.XII and *Inf. V* in his edition of the *Monarchia*, see 153 n xii.1

i.e., sheer pleasure: “Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto” (127) [“One day, to pass the time in pleasure, we read,” Hollander]. She thus becomes a countermodel for the active role of readers as articulated in *Monarchia* because she does not allow herself to exercise her free will but subjects herself to sheer desire.²³ By not employing full judgment, Francesca allows herself to be led by personal appetite and consequently commits adultery with Paolo. Dante clearly articulates the negative implication of impulsiveness and disengagement in the act of reading, and he introduces all the sinners of Francesca’s circle in a similar way as disconnected from reality, i.e., “i peccator carnali, che la ragion sommettono al talento” (38-39 [the carnal sinners. . . they who make reason subject to desire, Hollander]).

Like Francesca, readers are free to choose and free to act; however, every action should be understood not as an instinctive response, but as one that should be grounded within the full potential of readers’ judgment. In other words, Dante envisions the model reader of his invective as someone who could be inspired by the provocation of the text, but would nevertheless go beyond a simple impressionistic reading and take a judicious action following his or her own judgment in light of the wrongdoing condemned. We shall see now how Dante stimulates readers to take a position in the face of a specific wrongdoing by employing his own personal political ideology that reaches readers through his poignant criticism and humor.

²³ Francesca reads “Lancelot” (128) but she does not exercise her free will because initially she does not even judge the text, accepting it only on a literary level. She then blames the text and its author instead of herself (137).

Humor and Derision in the *Commedia*

The invective quality of the *Commedia* has been acknowledged from the very first readers and scholars of Dante—who have used verbs such as “riprendere” [to reprehend], “condemnare” [to condemn], and “mordere” [to bite] in order to describe the design behind the work—to our present day.²⁴ Franco Suitner states that Dante’s contemporaries most likely appreciated the *Commedia* as “una immensa opera infamante” (202).²⁵ As one would expect, the elements of reprehension emerge vibrantly in the *Inferno*, wherein Dante the pilgrim casts his attacks against the sinners who are depicted in their harsh punishments within the pitch darkness of the “cieco mondo” (blind world, *Inf.* IV.13) and against his own contemporaries (as for example in *Inf.* XIX). However, fierce criticism also arises in many cantos of the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*, where the environment is less dark and the punishments less hyperbolic than in the *Inferno*. Although critics have emphasized that the last two canticles of the *Commedia* represent a shift from the ruthless

²⁴ See Iacopo Alighieri’s Chiose all’ “Inferno” (c. 1324) which, explaining the intention behind the *Commedia*, uses the term “satire”: “satira, sotto il quale si tratta in modo di *reprehensione*, sì come Orazio” (86, emphasis added); Guido da Pisa’s *Expositione et Glose super Comediam Dantis* (c.1327-43): “Tertius finis est ut vitam pessimam malorum hominum, et maxime prelatorum et principum, exemplariter *condemnet*, bonorum autem et virtuosorum, per exempla que point, multipliciter commendaret” (4, emphasis added); Pietro Alighieri’s *Comentum super poema Comedie Dantis* (c. 1337-1364), 83. Benvenuto da Imola approaches the *Commedia* as a work whose author literarily seeks to “mordere viciosos” or bite the depraved; see *Comentum super Dantis Aldigherij Comoediam* (17). Boccaccio also uses the same term employed by Benvenuto in his *Trattatello* stating that the *Commedia* seeks to “mordere e premiare . . . la vita degli uomini” [bite and reward. . . the lives of men] (cited by Suitner 19). For a comprehensive overview of numerous scholars who assess Dante’s *Comedy* as a satire see Cian, *La Satira* 165-67. More recently, John Scott highlights the aggressive stance and invectives launched by Dante in *Inferno* and *Paradiso* (*Understanding Dante* 194-203, 210-11).

²⁵ Suitner reaches this conclusion inspired by Gherardo Ortalli’s *La pittura infamante nei secoli XIII-XVI*; see Suitner 202 and Ortalli 8. Mario Marti in a review of Suitner criticized this conclusion as “forse un po’ esagerato” (“Variazioni” 583).

and aggressive language and themes of the *Inferno* to a more lofty level, we can still find numerous invectives throughout *Purgatorio* and even in the high peak of heaven, launched by Saint Peter himself (Par. XXVII) and Beatrice (Par. XXIX and XXX).²⁶

Even though scholars in general have acknowledged the slanderous component of Dante's masterwork, only a few modern critics have connected it to humor and derision. Perhaps one of the most eloquent advocates of the coexistence of blame and humor in Dante is Alessandro Manzoni, who as an aspiring poet addressed Dante in a powerful verse: "Tu dell'ira maestro e del sorriso / Divo Alighier, le fosti" (cited in Sannia viii). The lack of systematic scholarship on the relationship between blame and humor in Dante studies might suggest that there is no apparent connection between these two elements in Dante's political invectives. However, as we have seen, the coupling of humor and mockery had been traditionally associated with the genre of invective since classical antiquity. By not confronting the issue of humor in Dante's invectives, we overlook an element that has been traditionally regarded as an essential, integral part of vituperative speech, and erroneously claim that Dante's *Commedia* is a work completely separated from the classical tradition of invective writing. Such a claim is not only imprudent and unfounded, but indeed inaccurate. As I will show, the invectives of the *Commedia* emerge from the rhetorical tradition of Cicero and Quintilian, and humor constitutes a fundamental element of the *Commedia*.

²⁶ See for example Hollander's comment of the *Paradiso* introduced as "dramatically different" from both the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*: "The language and style of this part of the poem are, in many respects, dramatically different from those to which the reader has become accustomed in the previous *cantiche*" (viii). Hollander also singles out both the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* from the *Inferno*: "*Purgatorio* is the more 'churchly' of the last two *cantiche*, while *Paradiso* is the more 'scholastic'" (xxiv).

As Phillip Harding has noted, the early comic theater influenced “Greek rhetoric in style, vocabulary, technique and theme” (196). Comic theater was gradually adapted to invective from Greek to Roman oratory, where the tradition of vituperation began to be influenced by comic poetry and evolved from an initial “serious expression of hostility” to a sophisticated mix of censure and mordant wit (Harding 201). The influential rhetorical manuals of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian illustrate the structure and theme of vituperative speech and establish a solid connection between blame and humor, confirming that ridicule was the basic component of invective. Recalling the strong connection between humor and derision in the invective tradition, we are in a position to evaluate if humor is indeed present in Dante’s *Commedia*.

As I noted in Chapter II, invective was taught in schools, where its theory was practiced through oral performance and the writing of letters and poetry. Dante was most likely introduced to the tradition of invective writing in his studies in Florence and Bologna where he learned to appreciate and imitate Roman authors such as Sallust, Cicero, Ovid, Martial, Juvenal, and above all Horace; the practice of *imitatio* was indeed crucial in the school curriculum of the *trivium*. Horace, among all Roman authors, was regarded as a satirist for his “Ars poetica” and Dante describes him as such in *Inferno* IV, 89 (Reynolds 129-31). Suzanne Reynolds emphasizes that Dante’s contemporaries conceived satire as “poems which blame (*reprehendere*) in order to correct” (129-30) and notes that the term *satire* consistently appears in the manuscripts of Horace to illustrate satirical style (132). Despite this evidence, modern scholars still resist linking Dante’s *Comedy* to Roman satire. Even Reynolds, after providing such evidence, is not convinced

that Dante evoked Horace because he was linked to the tradition of satire: “Clearly, there is more to ‘Orazio satiro’ than a reminder that Horace wrote satire” (137). Even if “there is more to ‘Orazio satiro’” this does not mean that we should dismiss that facts that Horace was perceived as a satirical writer and that Dante clearly evokes Horace to link him to that tradition. In my opinion, if we detach Dante from the classical satirical tradition in order to claim that he was more original than his contemporaries—as Barański and Reynolds propose—we impose a different understanding of the term ‘satirico,’ and dramatically detach Dante from his own original intellectual environment.²⁷ Overall, during Dante’s time, invective writing was mainly associated with either satire or comic poetry as an expression of the art of blaming individuals or groups for wrongdoing.²⁸ Dante’s contemporaries often privileged the use of the Latin terms *satira* or *satirico* over the Greek terms *comicus* or *comica*. However, they were almost certainly aware of the etymological and conceptual differences between the two terms and consistently distinguished the Greek term “commedia” from the Latin term “satira.”²⁹ Dante perhaps consciously named his masterwork *Comedia* to pay homage to

²⁷ See Barański’s dogmatic statement that Dante was not linked to the satiric tradition: “Dante is openly subverting Horace’s instruction” (“Dante and *Comedy*” 70) or his hyperbolic conclusion: “the Roman comedians were understandably marginal; Dante’s main interlocutors, given his ambitions, could only have been God and Virgil” (“Dante and *Comedy*” 91).

²⁸ The term *satira* or “satire” was widely used by Roman authors such as Cicero who replaced the Greek term “comedy”—originally used by Aristotle—with terms such as *facetiae*, *urbanitas* or *satira*, referring to an original Roman-made genre. Quintilian is perhaps the first to draw a clear distinction between the two in his *Institutio Oratoria* where he is proud to claim that ancient Romans invented and cultivated satire which can be regarded as a genuine Roman invention: “*Satura quidem tota nostra est*” (10.1. 93) [satire at least/if nothing else is all ours, cited in Freudenburg 2]; see Freudenburg’s *The Cambridge Companion to Roman Satire* (2005).

²⁹ See for example the fourteenth-century commentaries of Iacopo della Lana and Benvenuto da Imola: Jacopo della Lana 7; Benvenuto da Imola 18-19.

the Aristotelian Greek tradition, as well as connecting it to the satirical Latin tradition of ancient Roman authors. This is evident in Dante's Letter XIII, where he explains his title "Commedia" by juxtaposing the Greek term "Comedia" to the Latin satirical tradition of Horace (XIII. 9-10).

If we examine many early commentators on the *Commedia*, we see that they follow the tradition of invective writing I have outlined as they assess Dante's masterwork. It is remarkable that in their respective commentaries Iacopo Alighieri, Guido da Pisa, Pietro Alighieri, and Benvenuto da Imola not only acknowledge the value of reprehension in Dante's work but also consistently use the term "satira" in association with the Roman poet Horace.³⁰ As Suitner eloquently notes, Dante's contemporaries frame the *Comedy* within the satirical tradition: "il compito che Dante si assegnava secondo gli interpreti del suo tempo viene pienamente ad identificarsi con quello del poeta della tradizione satirica: castigare e censurare i malvagi, premiare e lodare i buoni" (19). In addition to the connection between blame and satire, the art of invective was also connected to pleasure and entertainment. Pietro Alighieri, the poet's son, was perhaps the

³⁰ See also Dante's friend Giovanni del Virgilio, who addressed Dante as "censor;" see Cian, *La satira* 165. As John Scott notes, recent scholars tend to interpret the meaning of the title "Commedia" as a mere expression of style, following the statement of Benvenuto da Imola: "most scholars have followed the fourteenth-century commentator Benvenuto da Imola in his statement 'I say that the author decided to call his book Comedy because of its lowly vernacular style'" (*Understanding Dante* 171). Benvenuto da Imola explained that the title "Comoedia" expresses a "stylus poeticus" (Benvenuto da Imola 18) or poetic style which is "infimo et vulgari" [base and vulgar] (18-19). Agamben explains that modern critics privilege Benvenuto da Imola's stylistic approach after the influential study of Erich Auerbach (2-3). Auerbach singled out Benvenuto da Imola's *Comentum* from the other early commentaries of the *Commedia*; see his *Mimesis*, especially 135 and 163n. However, Benvenuto da Imola emphasizes satire as well, even if he places it alongside tragedy and comedy; see Scott *Understanding Dante* 171-72. By limiting the interpretation of the title "Comedia" to a stylistic category, we risk missing the connection of the title to the tradition of satire, and thus miss the scope and wider implications of Dante's title.

first to highlight how Dante aimed to both advise readers (by reproaching a target) and delight them; he does this clearly by quoting Horace's *Ars poetica*:

Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando
pariterque monendo; nam prodesse volunt aut delectare poete. (83)

[He scores on all points who combines the useful with the pleasant, / by simultaneously delighting and advising the reader; so that poets intend to either admonish or delight (readers).] (Translation mine)

Pietro Alighieri provides clear evidence that his father's masterwork aimed to both instruct and delight its addressees. This evaluation is confirmed by the repetition of terms such as "dulci," "delectando," and "delectare," which Horace employs to explain the aim of the exemplary poet. The historian Villani also blends the element of delight with the act of censoring and attacking a target: "ben si diletto [Dante] in quella *Commedia* di garrire e sciamare a guisa di poeta" (cited in Cian, *La Satira* 165) [Dante well enjoyed in that *Comedy* to chatter and exclaim like a poet]. Villani uses emphatic expressions pairing the colorful verb "garrire" [to chirp or chatter], usually employed to describe the twittering of birds, with "sciamare" [to exclaim], thus conveying in the phrase both elements of humor and reproach.³¹ Although this connection between vituperation and entertainment might seem odd for a modern reader, it is a conventional association not only in Roman satire but also in the practice of invective. Lindsay Watson illustrates that invective in Roman times sought to entertain and give pleasure to readers: "the primary object of invective was to persuade the audience that one's accusation were true. . . . At the

³¹ "Garrire" is usually employed in relation to the sounds birds make in spring; see Petrarch sonnet XLII: "E garrir Progne, e piangere Filomena (3)." See also Bonghi, "Archaismi del Due e Trecento" http://www.classicitaliani.it/glossari/glossario_medioevo_02.htm (accessed January 30, 2010): "garrire: stridere." See also Jacopo della Lana's Commentary (c.1324-28): "*Satira* è uno stile da trattare di repressione e quasi *garrire*, siccome Orazio" (7, emphasis added).

same time, invective aimed to give pleasure to listeners” (762). Even if Dante does not directly state that his *Commedia* sought to elicit laughter in readers, he might have implicitly incorporated humor, pleasure, and laughter to achieve the purpose of the work—as stated in Letter XIII—to “removere viventes in hac vita de statu miserie et perducere ad statum felicitates” (15) [to remove those living in this life from a state of misery, and to bring them to a state of happiness].³² The question of its humor should always be considered especially in light of the relationship between pleasure, happiness, laughter, and invective as illustrated in classical rhetoric and—as I previously noted—acknowledged by Dante himself in Letter XIII with the reference to *Ad Herennium*. By examining the role played by humor in the *Commedia* we would be better equipped to appreciate the ethical value of Dante’s political invectives. The possibility of such a connection is confirmed by a number of studies that offer readers valid tools to appreciate the vituperative attacks of the *Commedia* within the frame of mockery and satire. I shall briefly outline the available studies on the subject of humor and derision in Dante’s *Commedia* to show how some critics have ventured to examine this topic and reached valuable conclusions. Sadly, modern scholars have either overlooked or vehemently opposed the connections between satire, humor, and the *Commedia*.

³² See the connection between laughter and satire that Cian emphasizes in his *Satira*: “Arturo Graf ebbe a distinguere tre specie di riso, il riso burlesco e parodico, forma inferiore, dotata di scarsa consapevolezza; il riso comico, in cui questa è maggiore, ed il riso satirico, dove si trova il massimo di consapevolezza” (4). According to Graf, the laughter evoked by satire is of a superior kind because it is characterized by a higher level of consciousness. In our case, this consciousness refers to the wrongdoings criticized and censored by Dante in his invectives.

In 1854, Francesco de Sanctis was perhaps the first critic to draw attention to the laughter and humor in Dante's *Comedy*.³³ He focused particularly on the *Inferno*, highlighting the comic quality of the *Malebolge* or the eighth circle of Hell, which he described as a staged comedy: "la forma estetica di questo mondo è la commedia, rappresentazione de' difetti e de' vizi" (*Storia della letteratura* 202). Besides focusing on the comic quality of the *Inferno*, De Sanctis also examined irony, ridicule, sarcasm, and laughter (*Lezioni* 172-208). He repeatedly suggested that Dante consciously employs elements of the comic in the *Malebolge*, where he blends humor and solemnity to elicit a "riso amaro" or bitter laughter in readers (*Nuovi saggi critici* 40).³⁴ According to De Sanctis, Dante uses these comic elements to create a crude type of comedy for the purpose of showing to readers a tragicomic representation of punishment which is ultimately devoid of a genuinely refined laughter. Even though De Sanctis' pioneering studies offer the first indication that readers could approach Dante's *Commedia* through a lens of ridicule and laughter, his conclusions are somehow unexpected. De Sanctis convincingly proposes that comic elements play an important role in the *Inferno*, yet he discards the idea that the elements of humor and laughter could engage readers. He reaches this conclusion by negatively assessing humor and laughter as unrefined and unethical, thus unworthy of Dante and his readers. This is evident when De Sanctis

³³ See his *Lezioni sulla Divina Commedia* 172-208.

³⁴ See also *Storia della letteratura* 207. De Sanctis often offers the thesis that both comic and serious elements coexist in specific episodes of the *Malebolge*. He declares that the element of laughter blends with aggression. However, he does not believe that laughter is an element that can stand on its own and often contradicts himself. For example, after proposing that Dante's verse elicit a "riso amaro," he writes that "I suoi versi più comici non fanno ridere" (*Storia della letteratura* 207). In other words, Dante's lower hell contains only the element of the comic but not of laughter. At times, it is not clear whether De Sanctis examines the laughter in the author or the laughter in the readers of the *Commedia*.

acknowledges that some passages would elicit laughter in readers, but he warns the readers that such laughter is not appropriate and would not have been tolerated by Dante: “Quando leggiamo in Dante alcuna cosa ridicola non ci avventuriamo a ridere, perchè ci par di vedere l’autore con quella sua faccia severa che ci sgridi di questa debolezza. Noi abbiamo riso. . . ma guai se Dante fosse presente!” (*Lezioni* 188). Overall, De Sanctis concluded that while the *comico* plays an important role, humor and laughter are not only absent but also unsuitable for Dante’s masterwork. This radical view seems to contradict De Sanctis’ own terminology—and particularly terms such as “*commedia*,” “*comico*,” and “*riso amaro*”—which suggests a closer connection to laughter and humor in target readers of the *Commedia*. Furthermore, De Sanctis does not explore in detail these terms, which readers could approach as interconnected within a solid satirical or comic medieval tradition. Overall, De Sanctis’ study is original but it remains incomplete, especially if we consider that it is mainly based upon his personal evaluation of selected passages and does not frame Dante’s comic elements within a comprehensive historical frame. As we shall see, this dismissal of laughter and humor in Dante’s *Commedia* persists in numerous modern critics who tend to take a similarly hostile position toward the topic of humor and laughter, while accepting elements of the comic in strictly abstract terms.

Luigi Pirandello in his reading of *Inf. XXI* expresses his strong disagreement with De Sanctis in evaluating the comic in the *Commedia*. Pirandello retorts that Dante is not trying to be comical at all, since it is not conceivable that the *Malebolge* would elicit any laughter in readers, as it displays atrocious punishments (“*La commedia*” 348-49). Instead, he proposes that Dante elicits disgust and repulsion but never laughter: “non è

mai comica l'intenzione del poeta; e perciò non fa ridere. . . ci sarà disgusto, nausea” (“La commedia” 349). Further, Pirandello concludes by stressing that it would be more appropriate to use the term “sarcasmo” instead of “riso”:

non c'è affatto la compartecipazione di Dante alla commedia, che va considerata in relazione col poeta che solo non ne ride nè può riderne; e non rideremo più neanche noi, perchè avremo inteso che qui c'è un sarcasmo, il sarcasmo che non è mai commedia. (“La commedia” 361)

Pirandello's argument is based on the view that Dante's personal tragedy of exile constitutes the core of the *Commedia* and dominates any supposedly amusing elements that emerge from the text, so that both the comic and laughter are absolutely absent in the *Inferno*. While Pirandello proposes a valuable argument to contrast the terminology used by De Sanctis, his argument does not propose a new approach to humor and laughter; indeed, by defending the seriousness of the intention behind the *Commedia*, Pirandello chiefly reiterates De Sanctis. In addition, the Sicilian scholar reaches a dogmatic conclusion by denying a priori that laughter plays any role in the *Commedia*.

Furthermore, even though Pirandello often uses the term “invettiva,” he does not frame it within the medieval theoretical understanding of invective writing. Pirandello's observation seems to contradict De Sanctis', but in reality both scholars dismiss humor as nonexistent, and refer to laughter solely in relation to their own contemporary aesthetic categories. In other words, they both assume in essence that the standard for what is laughable is the same for medieval and modern readers.

Pirandello's direct attack on De Sanctis suggests a modern perception that privileging the comic and laughter constitutes an unorthodox reading of Dante's masterpiece. It also shows that the question of humor in Dante's invective is complex,

and requires that we address it without unconsciously relying on our modern aesthetic categories but rather upon factual historical evidence regarding medieval aesthetic categories. This conclusion is also confirmed by a similar polemic between Enrico Sannia and Ernesto Giacomo Parodi.

In 1909, Enrico Sannia published his two-volume work *Il comico, l'umorismo e la satira nella Divina Commedia*, the most comprehensive study on the controversial topic of the comic, satire, and humor in the *Commedia*. It is curious that Francesco d'Ovidio, De Sanctis' student, convinced his pupil and relative Sannia to embark on the theme "il comico nella *Divina Commedia*" after being initially inspired by De Sanctis himself in 1870 but ultimately unwilling to undertake it (*Il comico* xi-xiv). There is continuity between De Sanctis' original study on the comic in Dante and Sannia's pioneering work. However, Sannia's study differs greatly from De Sanctis' because he frames the elements of the comic and the satirical more systematically, applying them throughout the entire *Commedia*. Sannia opposes the view that laughter and humor are absent in Dante and seeks to introduce a new satirical Dante who, according to Sannia, would stun and surprise readers (58).

Sannia's 700-page study offers a fresh approach to all the episodes and characters in the *Commedia*, and no scholar to my knowledge has matched its results. Even though the work undeniably breaks new ground, however, it is limited by its own scope because the main thesis of the work is to demonstrate that wit, satire and humor play an important role in the *Commedia*. However, once Sannia proves that these elements do indeed exist in the *Commedia*, he does not explain what role they play in the poem, so he advances a

slightly circular argument.³⁵ In other words, even though Sannia methodically examines the “comico,” “l’umorismo,” and “la satira” canto by canto, once these elements are detected, he does not elaborate further or interpret their purpose. Sannia offers a comprehensive list of examples where Dante uses humor, but he does not elucidate why humor exists in the *Commedia* and how it functions in relation to Dante’s readers. Even though Sannia’s innovative perspective refreshes Dante, it still significantly under-examines the poem as a whole and provides no answers to illuminate the tension Dante employs between blame and humor. While Sannia’s groundbreaking work sought to unearth the elements of the comic, humor and satire in the *Commedia*, it does not solidly place them within a historical or theoretical frame. Ironically, these elements, which are at the foundation of Sannia’s study, do not serve any particular purpose besides to celebrate the aesthetic and poetic achievement of the *Commedia*. This is confirmed by Sannia’s concluding statement that the comic is irrelevant because it is an end in itself, and its value does not lie in wider intentions: “la comicità è fine a sè stessa” (II 648).³⁶

Despite these shortcomings, Sannia provides readers with a boldly ambitious and unfairly forgotten work. Sannia’s *Il comico* reopened the discussion initiated by De Sanctis about the theme of the comic, and stresses the satirical and amusing qualities of the *Commedia* that, to my knowledge, no modern scholars have ventured to examine in such depth. Even though Sannia’s work is indeed revolutionary, it surprisingly caused

³⁵ Unfortunately Sannia does not develop his appealing conclusive statement that “Dante. . . seppe passare ad inventare . . . le forme più perfette ed evolute dell’umorismo moderno” (II, 693).

³⁶ Sannia also proposes that the comic sometimes functions in opposition to morality: “Talvolta, la comicità è in contrasto con qualche motivo più alto, morale o religioso” (II 648)

little reaction among critics. The only exceptions are Ernesto Parodi's caustic review and Lonsdale Ragg's article "Wit and Humor in Dante," which are worth examining because they represent two hermeneutic models to the question of humor in Dante. I shall approach first Parodi's review, which expresses a strongly negative reaction to Sannia's work, and then Ragg's article, which instead assesses it quite positively and attempts to follow its example. Parodi and Ragg embody two distinct ways of approaching Dante's humor that could be articulated through two distinctive views—or legacies—on this topic: one inflexibly antagonistic and the other more sympathetic.

Parodi's review is from the opening uncompromisingly harsh and extremely polemical against both the author and the object of his study: "Questi due volumi. . . saranno . . . da me giudicati con qualche severità" (161).³⁷ Parodi explains the reason for this hostility by declaring that the work itself aims to achieve what is inherently impossible:

penso che nel suo complesso [l'opera] non sia ben riuscita, e non raggiunga, perchè non è possibile raggiungerlo, il suo scopo di additare nella *Divina Commedia* una larga vena di comicità e copiosi motivi comici non mai prima scoperti. (161)

According to Parodi, Sannia's work fails to achieve its promise to bring to light the comic elements of the *Commedia* because no such elements in fact exist in Dante's work. In other words, Parodi believes that humor is excluded a priori from the *Commedia*, and thus Sannia's project is unsuccessful from its premise. One would think that after this initial dismissal, which expresses such a negative and categorical evaluation, Parodi

³⁷ Parodi published his review in 1909, the same year Sannia published his work *Il comico, l'umorismo e la satira nella Divina Commedia*.

would not even have confronted the issues posed by Sannia and would have concluded his review. However, in this unusually long review, which is a stunning 54 pages, Parodi approaches Sannia's arguments very carefully and frequently attacks him on a personal level, suggesting that Sannia's study indeed deeply provoked and affected Parodi: "sono parole che, a me turbano il godimento della poesia" (165). This is confirmed by Parodi's frequent use of sarcasm to undermine Sannia's project, and descriptions of his conclusions as groundless because of the author's own elation, hallucinations, arrogance, naivety, and inexperience (162-65). Such a strong reaction against what Parodi believes is "un argomento così pericoloso e così vasto" (168) suggests that the topic of humor and satire in Dante is indeed controversial, and such unorthodoxy is what motivates Parodi's hyperbolic disapproval. This is confirmed by the fact that alongside his sharp criticism, Parodi vigorously defends his own viewpoint by articulating the "correct" way to approach Dante's *Commedia*. According to Parodi, Dante never aimed to elicit laughter in readers and any attempt to claim that he did, distorts Dante's original intentions (165); thus Dante projected to readers "non la comicità, ma la tragicità dell'episodio" (166) and Sannia's error seems to Parodi have diminished the greatness of the *Commedia* (162).

Even if Parodi, by accepting the insulting and brutal tone of many passages in the *Commedia*, acknowledges the invective quality of Dante, he concludes that it is unthinkable that humor could coexist with vituperation: "Dante qui è brutale, è insultante, è implacabile, è tutto quel che si vuole, tutto tranne che piccolo e comico" (165). By resisting to confront or even acknowledge the elements of humor and laughter in Dante's invectives, Parodi fails to provide a viable alternative to Sannia's thesis. Furthermore, he

does not explore the possibility that the lighter component of laughter could indeed coexist with insult and blame. As we shall see, the blend of criticism and mockery strengthens, rather than threatens, the serious intention in Dante's *Comedy* because it heightens the impact that Dante envisioned for his readers.

Parodi's review and Pirandello's study show how scholars tend to resist the hypothesis of humor and laughter in Dante because they consider it a real threat to the greatness of Dante and the seriousness of his intentions. More recent scholars have not stepped up to critically discuss the themes of laughter, humor and satire either historically or sociologically, or to evaluate their relevance to Dante's political invective poetry. Examples of this are visible in numerous specialized studies such as Alfredo Schiaffini's "Lo stile comico e la 'Commedia'" (1953), Henry Kelly's *Tragedy and Comedy from Dante to Pseudo-Dante* (1989), Zygmunt Barański's *Libri poetarum in quattuor species dividuntur: Essays on Dante and "Genre"* (1995), and Giorgio Agamben's "Comedia" (1996). These studies approach comedy and the comic in Dante's masterwork by merely employing either stylistic categories (Schiaffini, Kelly, and Barański) or eschatological or abstract concepts (Agamben), thus avoiding confronting the relations between laughter, satire and Dante's *Commedia*. Even though Barański devotes a broad and in-depth study to the theme of the comic in Dante, he reaches surprisingly dogmatic conclusions when he denies any link between Dante and Roman satire, which he calls "Roman comedy": "the *Commedia*'s seeming lack of interest both in the 'comic' tradition and in Roman comedy is so perplexing" and "Dante showed up the inadequacies of Roman comedy" ("Dante and Comedy" 63, 91). By denying the connection between Dante and Roman

comedy, Barański overlooks the invective tradition, so prominent in Tuscany, which is described in Cicero and Horace and also goes back to the invective tradition of the Etruscan *fescennini versus*.³⁸ Agamben's study, though greatly indebted to the concept of the comic mask (*persona*) from classical theatrical performance, ignores the presence of laughter, satire, and humor. Even though he proposes an innovative approach to the concept of comedy, Agamben approaches it on strictly eschatological terms.³⁹ More recently Barański's essay "Scatology and Obscenity in Dante" (2003) goes so far as to deny that Dante ever wanted to elicit laughter in readers: "it is extremely unlikely that *risus* (laughter) was something that Dante wanted to provoke" ("Scatology" 260). Here Barański makes a short but eloquent allusion to laughter and comic poetry in reference to *Inferno* XVIII and evokes Pirandello's negative assessment of the comic by providing yet another cavalierly negative position on laughter in Dante's *Commedia*. Overall, following Parodi, the majority of scholars stress their distance from a critical discussion of laughter and humor by ignoring or dismissing it.

This first group of studies takes a negative approach to humor and laughter in Dante's *Comedy*; I shall now survey the more favorable view, which acknowledges their importance and connection with the *Sommo Poeta*. In my opinion, although this second group is valuable and original for approaching humor, satire, and laughter in Dante's *Comedy*, they do not establish a convincing reading, because they resemble Sannia's pioneering but ineffective work. Lonsdale Ragg is perhaps the first scholar who continues

³⁸ See Chapter I for more details on the relation between the *fescennini* and Roman invective.

³⁹ See also Massimo Cacciari, who like Agamben, in a brief gloss accepts an eschatological approach to Dante's *Comedy* which he applies also to laughter: "Dante, che ha l'orecchio solo per la dimensione escatologica del riso. . . non vede, non può vedere il giullare" (667).

Sannia's privileging of the amusing and satirical elements in Dante's *Comedy*. Unlike Parodi, Ragg's article "Wit and Humor in Dante" (1913) acknowledges the originality and importance of Sannia's work:

Professor Sannia's work on the humorous element in the *Divine Comedy* marks in some respect an epoch in the study of Dante. . . his pioneer movement is certainly far from futile. We believe that he has largely proved his point, and given us, in consequence, a living Dante, in place of the traditional wooden effigy. (27)

Ragg believes that Sannia has contributed greatly to revitalizing the modern image of Dante by linking him to humor and satire, and avoiding the typical error of linking Dante only to a more lofty and serious tradition. Ragg's project to expose humorous passages in Dante is equally original because it expands on other works such as *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia*. However, Ragg's study is limited to providing a list of evidence to prove merely "that Dante. . . was not devoid of that sense of humor whereby man is able to wring matter for cheerfulness and mirth out of the most unlikely material" (46). In other words, Ragg examines and interprets various passages through a humorous lens to illustrate "the funny side" of Dante, and thus his resourcefulness and brilliance. This approach limits the scope of humor and laughter in Dante, reducing their role to a mere aesthetic tool to promote the author and thus overlooks any ethical or practical purpose in the *Commedia*'s humor.

Ragg's study could be seen as the precursor of Dorothy L. Sayers' "The Comedy of the *Comedy*" (1949), Allan Gilbert's "Comedy" (1963), and Barbara Reynolds' "From

Humor to Invective” (2006).⁴⁰ Like Sannia and Ragg, these critics seek to propose a more accessible Dante and thus to appeal to those amateur readers intimidated by an excessively academic reading. By doing so, however, they avoid the more intellectual and grave themes within the *Commedia* to open new ways to appreciate other, more appealing aspects of the poem. From this perspective their projects are indeed valuable introductory studies of the *Comedy*, because they question the conventional view that Dante’s masterwork is humorless. However, if read carefully, they do not seem to explore in depth the role that humor plays in Dante’s *Comedy*; instead they provide a sketchy list of examples where Dante elicits laughter in readers. Their Dante becomes a sort of stand-up comic who causes hilarity either for an abstract moral purpose, or to provoke hyperbolic reactions, or most likely for no particular reason at all.⁴¹ It is perhaps for this reason that recent scholars have assessed these works—but not the topic of humor—as unconvincing.⁴²

⁴⁰ Dorothy Sayers’ study was first published in 1949 and then included in her book *Introductory Papers on Dante* (1954); see 151-178. Gilbert’s “Comedy” is Chapter Three of his book *Dante and His Comedy*; see 61-108. Reynolds’ is Chapter 32 of *Dante: The Poet, the Political Thinker, the Man* (2006); see 258-64.

⁴¹ I have summarized Sayers’, Gilbert’s, and Sannia’s conclusions; see Sayers 174; Gilbert 107.

⁴² See for example Thomas Bergin, who eloquently summarizes Sayers’s essay on Dante and humor from her *Introductory Papers on Dante* and states that the work is interesting but not convincing: “In the ‘Comedy of the *Comedy*’ Miss Sayers develops the picture of her Dante – ‘dear, funny Dante’ - with the affectionate and possessive tenderness of a maiden aunt describing a favorite nephew. She follows him closely on his journey, seeing in all the hesitations, misunderstandings, misplaced questionings of the traveler Dante evidence of a whimsical, self-deprecating author capable of making fun of himself in the style of an Oxford don on vacation. This essay is meant as a corrective to the conventional notion of Dante as grim and humorless. Useful it is, too, but I am afraid not entirely convincing” (321).

Furthermore Charles T. Davis makes a powerful remark that, even if directed only to Gilbert's *Dante and His Comedy*, applies to all the studies mentioned thus far about humor and Dante. Davis notes that Gilbert defines his method as "an experiment" which follows the "principle of minimum interpretation" ("Review" 128). He mentions previous works on the subject of humor and laughter in Dante, such as those of Sannia and Sayers ("Review" 129). While praising the spontaneity of Gilbert's work, Davis describes his controversial anti-academic approach as commendable for its freshness and originality but devoid of any solid connection to other significant issues such as allegory or Dante's historical background ("Review" 129-30). According to Davis, by refusing to engage in a scholarly debate on the topic of humor and laughter in Dante's *Comedy*, Gilbert indeed succeeds in supplying an extravagant and controversial reading, but his book is "essentially iconoclastic" ("Review" 129). Davis' term "iconoclastic" describes Gilbert's tendency to oppose the settled conviction that Dante's *Comedy* is humorless, but it also illustrates perfectly how his work is detached from any academic and scholarly tradition. This negative conclusion also applies to Sayers, Reynolds, and even Sannia, all of whom attempt to create an original reading but neglect to anchor their studies in a solid critical tradition, and thus do not take an intellectual position on the subject of humor and laughter in Dante. By distancing themselves from the scholarly debate, these scholars ultimately undermine the credibility of the very subject they are treating, because it appears by implication unworthy of serious academic consideration. This is also confirmed by the fact that virtually all these studies, with a few exceptions, do not take the issue of humor and laughter seriously on an historical level, but rather undertake close

readings that do not link Dante to any specific historical, satirical, or cultural tradition.⁴³

This becomes more problematic if we consider that these studies (except Sannia's) are not autonomous but are included as excursions, a sort of afterthought, within much larger introductory books on Dante's *Comedy*.⁴⁴

Having outlined the two main branches of studies on the topic of humor and laughter in the *Commedia*, we can summarize the conclusions of both the negative and positive approaches. The main argument against the element of humor in the *Commedia* is that the intention of the work is serious, and that to approach Dante's masterwork as humorous would undermine its seriousness. While I believe that the *Commedia* has indeed powerfully serious intentions behind its master design, I do not believe that if we accepted the humorous elements in the *Commedia* we would destabilize these intentions. On the contrary, by acknowledging the interrelation between blame and humor, we strengthen the work's seriousness of intention. Humor is not the purpose of the work, but the means to appreciate the seriousness of the satirical object of reprehension. On the other hand, the main argument in favor of humor in the *Commedia* is that Dante uses it

⁴³ This reservation is articulated by Davis in his review of Gilbert's *Dante and His Comedy* 130. Vittorio Cian is perhaps the only exception as he devotes an entire chapter on the subject of "La satira nella *Divina Commedia*" (1923), providing a valuable historical frame. After Sannia, Cian's study is perhaps the most comprehensive study on the topic of satire and Dante's *Comedy*. Cian's study is Chapter 2 of his book *La satira*; see 148-191. Unlike Ragg's, Cian's research is independent from Sannia's, being the product of a research initiated from earlier studies; see Cian's "Una satira dantesca prima di Dante" (1900). However, Cian only briefly mentions the comic, ironic, burlesque, and sarcastic elements of the *Commedia* and unfortunately does not provide in-depth analysis of such rich topics (*La satira* 182-84).

⁴⁴ All the works cited are indeed included in volumes and cannot be conceived as independent studies on the subject. More recent studies on the topic of humor are: Glauco Cambon's "The Purgatorial Smile: A Footnote on Dante's Humor" (1980); C. J. Ryan's "Inferno XXI: Virgil and Dante: A Study in Contrasts" (1982); Nino Borsellino's "Un nuovo Ludo" in *La tradizione del comico: letteratura e teatro da Dante a Belli* (1989) 25-31. Cambon's study partly echoes Leo Spitzer's article "The Farcical Elements in *Inferno*, Cantos XXI-XXIII" (1944). More recently, Ronald Martinez in Robert Durling's translation *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno*, Vol. 1 (1996) briefly glosses the topic of humor in the *Inferno* (181; 329; 331; 361; 506; 510; 567; 656).

abundantly along laughter and satire, demonstrating that these are important components of the poem. While these studies provide valuable insights and offer readers a new way of approaching the humor in Dante, they undermine any possibility of approaching the topic of humor and laughter in Dante on academic terms because they disregard the historical and cultural tradition of laughter in Dante's masterpiece. In addition, while these studies are successful in highlighting the presence of humor in Dante's work, they do not propose or elaborate further on these findings, and simply supply a comprehensive list of examples to prove that Dante's work does indeed contain humor.

Overall, when dealing with humor and laughter in Dante's *Comedy*, we should try to mediate carefully between these two conflicting approaches. We should not feel threatened by the fact that this topic is still unorthodox and has been either overlooked or vehemently opposed by critics; at the same time we should not feel obliged to simply defend or pay tribute to the topic of humor in Dante's *Comedy*. Thus, we should find a balance between the excesses of the severely dismissive approach (as evident in Pirandello, Parodi and Barański) and of the intuitive and enthusiastic approach (as evident in Sanna, Sayers, and Gilbert). In other words, we should focus on both the tradition of invective writing, from which the element of humor and laughter emerge, while at the same time appreciating the originality in Dante's invectives. We should keep in mind Regina Psaki's warning:

An inescapable dilemma in Dante studies can be phrased as follows: If we argue for a radical originality in some aspect of Dante's thought, we risk being thought ahistorical and aberrant in our conclusions; if we try to show that every element in our understanding of his achievement has its roots in an earlier tradition. . . we risk reducing his work to a collage or mosaic of predigested cultural commonplace. (550)

Psaki's remark cautions us to avoid excesses, but also warns us to be aware of the difficulties inherent in new or unorthodox hermeneutical approaches. We can find that necessary balance by stressing the practical value of Dante's *Commedia* as expressed in its ethical charge. I shall show that Dante does indeed use humor, and not only must its existence be acknowledged in the poem, but also its function, which is to elicit laughter and derision in readers in the service of a specific purpose. Dante's goal is thus not simply a few laughs; rather, humor serves the specific purpose of activating his readers to respond. Dante then follows through with a proposal of feasible solutions in the face of the wrongdoings he has condemned.

Through close readings of selected invectives from the *Commedia*, I shall explore how humor and derision coexist with verbal aggression. Through these close readings, I will approach the theme of humor going beyond the list-and-praise method and avoiding the simplistic thesis that "Dante is funny." That approach, as I have argued, may be productive to make Dante approachable to a lay reader, but it tends to undermine the general framework of the *Commedia*. By overstressing humor we might distort or simplify the serious intention of the work and its author. I shall temper my approach to humor and derision by stressing Dante's project. By deploying derision and aggression, Dante urges readers to oppose and take a step forward in the face of a wrongdoing, eliciting both opposition and action. He thus proposes possible solutions to problems rooted in the political and religious tensions of his time and urges readers to act and be responsible. Dante clearly articulates this aim by using derision and indignation, as exemplified in a powerful passage from his treatise *Monarchia*:

Propter quod derisive, non sine dolore quodam, cum illo clamare possum pro populo glorioso, pro Cesare, qui pro Principe celi clamabat: "Quare fremuerunt gentes, et populi meditati sunt inania? Astiterunt reges terre, et principes convenerunt in unum, adversus Dominum et adversus Christum eius". Verum quia naturalis amor diuturnam esse derisionem non patitur, sed, ut sol estivus qui disiectis nebulis matutinis oriens luculenter irradiat, derisione omissa, lucem correctionis effundere mavult, ad dirumpendum vincula ignorantie regum atque principum talium, ad ostendendum genus humanum liberum a iugo ipsorum, cum Propheta sanctissimo me me subsequenter hortabor subsequencia subassumens: "Dirumpamus" videlicet "vincula eorum, et proiciamus a nobis iugum ipsorum". Hec equidem duo fient sufficienter, si secundam partem presentis propositi prosecutus fuero, et instantis questionis veritatem ostendero. (II.1)

[As a result, with some derision and not without a certain grief, I can take up for that glorious people and for Cæsar, the cry of him who cried out for the Prince of Heaven: "Why have the Gentiles raged, and the people devised vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes met together, against the Lord, and against his Christ." But since natural love cannot suffer derision to last for long, for—like the summer sun, which, upon rising, scatters the morning clouds and shines out radiantly—it dismisses scorn and prefers to put forth the light of correction; to break the chain of ignorance of such kings and princes and to show forth human kind free of their yoke, I shall cheer myself along with the most Holy Prophet whom I imitate in repeating the following words, to wit: "Let us break their bonds asunder: and let us cast away their yoke from us." These two things, anyway, will be fulfilled when I have completed the second part of my present plan and when I have shown the truth of the question at hand.] (Cassell 128-29)

This passage clearly states Dante's ethical charge behind his invectives which are characterized by both ridiculing and blaming a target. Dante's use of blame and humor is explicitly exposed through the term "derisio" or derision which blends with indignation and grief ("dolore"). Furthermore, Dante makes explicit reference here to the satirical and prophetic traditions. The satirical tradition is present in the overt statement which exposes the ethics of correcting wrongdoing: "lucem correctionis effundere" or "to put forth the light of correction." As previously noted, such terminology refers to the satiric tradition

or “satira” as Dante—and his early commentators—conceived it. The prophetic tradition also constitutes a crucial element in Dante’s invective which refers to prophets such as Isaiah and other biblical sources such as, Ps. 2:3 and Acts 4:26-27. Dante uses hyperbolic language (such as “clamare” and “clamabat” or “to cry out”) as well as poetic metaphor (such as the beautiful imagery of the summer sun) to finally convey both the derision and assertiveness of the invective, which consciously employs mockery for a limited time: (“derisionem non patitur”). Ridicule and indignation are thus required to deliver the poet’s message, but they do not constitute the purpose of the attack—only the means to achieve it. Finally, Dante expresses to readers possible solutions to the sociopolitical problems of his time and stirs readers’ responsibility, guiding them away from ignorance (i.e., “ad dirumpendum vincula ignorantie”) and offering them freedom.

As we have seen in the *Monarchia*, Dante clarifies in the *Commedia* that derision coexists with reprehension. This coexistence emerges from the traditions of satire and prophecy which are at the foundation of Dante’s invectives. Dante’s *Commedia* features invectives renowned for their bitterness and contentiousness, with *Inferno* XIX, *Purgatorio* VI and *Paradiso* XXVII prominent among them. I shall examine the poet’s hyperbolic use of allusions and specific expressions chosen to criticize the faults (such as fraud, irresponsibility, abuse of power and opportunism) of political and religious leaders (such as Nicholas III, Boniface VIII, Albert I of Austria) in reference to the cities of Florence, Rome, as well as unnamed northern *comuni*. I mean to probe the tension between blame and humor, and the ethical significance of that tension, in order to

determine the role played by concepts such as responsibility, ridicule and laughter in connection to selected invectives from Dante's *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.

***Inferno* XIX**

Inferno XIX is the only canto of the *Commedia* that begins so abruptly with an apostrophe or *salutatio* explicitly launched against an individual target. This suggests that the entire canto could also be conceived as an invective.⁴⁵ As noted by Mark Musa, “the words certainly are those of Dante the poet” (256):⁴⁶

O Simon mago, o miseri seguaci
che le cose di Dio, che di bontate
deon essere spose, e voi rapaci 3

per oro e per argento avolterate,
or convien che per voi suoni la tromba,
però che ne la terza bolgia state. 6

[O Simon Magus! O wretches of his band,
greedy for gold and silver,
who prostitute the things of God

that should be brides of goodness!

⁴⁵ Other cantos from the *Commedia* start with apostrophe, but toward an abstract target; see *Inf.* XXVI which starts with an apostrophe but the target is not identified as an individual but instead as a city: “Godi, Fiorenza” (1); see also *Par.* XI addressed to mankind: “O insensate cura de’ mortali” 1; and *Par.* XVI, 1 addressed to the sins of pride. In other instances, a *salutatio* is present but to address either God or the Virgin Mary, and as such it functions as a prayer and not as an invective (see *Purg.* XI: “O Padre nostro, che ne’ cieli stai” , 1 and *Par.* XXXIII, 1). Dante also employed a *salutatio* to specifically address the readers; see *Purg.* XVII: “Ricordati, lettore” 1; *Par.* II: “O voi che siete in piccoletta barca,” 1, and *Par.* XIII, 1. Finally, other cantos start with a vocative *salutatio* within the narration of the canto and directed toward the Pilgrim or other fictional characters within the diegesis of the canto rather than being launched against a named target of a verbal attack; see *Purg.* XXXI, 1 and *Par.* XXIV, 1.

⁴⁶ See also Francesco D’Ovidio and his in-depth distinction between Dante the pilgrim and the Dante the poet throughout this canto (347-48).

Now must the trumpet sound for you,
because your place is there in that third ditch.]⁴⁷ (Hollander 1-6)

Dante immediately introduces the target of attack as expected in invective writing (i.e., Simon Mago and his followers). Scholars have unanimously recognized the term “Simon Mago” as a Biblical reference to Acts 8:9-24, which introduces Simon as a “sorcerer of Samaria who was converted by the preaching of Philip the evangelist. . . (and) attempted to buy the power of conferring the Holy Ghost” for which “he was severely rebuked by the apostle Peter for thinking that the gift of God might be purchased with money” (Singleton, 329).⁴⁸ However, Dante does not address only Simon Mago but also his “seguaci” [band] who are linked to him by the sin of simony. The term “simony” is particularly grave if we consider the way Dante defines it by the lines “che le cose di Dio . . . per oro e per argento avolterate” (2-4). With this passage Dante specifically denounces the practice of betraying Christ’s trust and most likely evokes the Gospel of Matthew when Christ instructs his disciples on how to fulfill their evangelic mission: “Get you no gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses” (10:9). As Matthew suggests, the apostle must not accept neither gold nor silver because they do not own the “le cose di Dio” (2) or “spiritual goods and offices” (Singleton 329), which as the phrasing suggests, belong instead to God. Thus, Dante addresses the followers of Simon Mago who are the false apostles. Furthermore, as Italo Borzi notes, these followers share with Simon Mago the sin of adultery, “il tradimento del vincolo sacro che rende le ‘cose di Dio’ ‘spose’

⁴⁷ All citations from Dante’s *Commedia* are taken from Giorgio Petrocchi’s edition, *La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata*. For the English translation I alternate between Robert Hollander and Charles Singleton. Hollander’s translation is available online at the Princeton Dante Project <http://etcweb.princeton.edu/dante/pdp/> (accessed June 1, 2010).

⁴⁸ Singleton’s *The Divine Comedy: Inferno 2: Commentary*.

della bontà, in un perenne matrimonio che evoca l'unione indissolubile di Gesù con la Chiesa, la mistica sposa dei salmi, custode delle 'cose di Dio' (7). Borzi's suggestion is confirmed by the biting term "avolterate" (4) [adulterate], which is opposed to the term "spose" (3) or brides and which refers to the act of degrading the loyal bond of marriage between Christ and the Church by replacing it with an act of adultery.

Scholars have recognized the exceptionality of this canto in comparison with the others, and emphasized its aggressiveness. Umberto Bosco emphasizes the novelty of the canto and its harshness (277), while Kenelm Foster eloquently describes its opening as "an act of war" (47).⁴⁹ However, only a few scholars have suggested that this stern invective could also contain elements of humor, irony, and sarcasm. The sarcastic tone is evident from the expressions Dante employs in the second *terzina*. Francesco D'Ovidio and Mark Musa note that the phrase "or conven che per voi suoni la tromba" (5) is a witty remark appropriate for a jester ("un uscita un po' giullaresca," D'Ovidio 348) which demonstrates a "peculiarly Dantesque sarcasm" (Musa 256). The sarcasm of the verse is confirmed by fourteenth-century commentators who suggested that the trumpet could be intended as Dante's poetic voice which resounds to denounce the wrongdoings of Simon Mago and his followers.⁵⁰ Dante's sarcasm functions similarly to a jester's

⁴⁹ See Bosco: "La tecnica narrativa di questo canto è diversa da quella dei canti che abbiamo sin qui letti. . . questo canto comincia *ex abrupto* con una specie di protasi in forma di apostrofe ai peccatori stessi, dei quali si definisce severamente la colpa" (277). Bosco's citation is from *La Divina Commedia: Inferno* edited by Umberto Bosco and Giovanni Reggio.

⁵⁰ See Iacopo della Lana's explanation "dice tromba al parlare poetico" and Benvenuto da Imola's expression "vox poetica."

performance: Dante announces his poetic denunciation to readers, blasting it at the opening of the canto as if he were in a public square.

This expression contains strong sarcastic undertones especially visible in use of the verb “convien,” which expresses Dante’s imminent reproach of the sin of simony, in connection with the mocking act of “sonare la tromba.” D’Ovidio emphasizes that the trumpet in question almost certainly does not echo a tragic or epic sound destined to be heard by everyone, because it likely functions as a declamation of a town crier (349).⁵¹ Dante’s poetic voice is specifically directed toward his targets (i.e., “per voi”), and it could be conceived as a tune that ironically “conviene per voi” [literally, is suitable for you]. In other words, Dante designs this tune of mockery especially for them. The expression “sonar la tromba” could then be associated with the custom practiced by the “banditori comunali che gridavano per le piazze le condanne e i nomi dei condannati” (D’Ovidio 349). As evident from both Sienese and Florentine statutes, blowing the trumpet was an established practice connected to wrongdoing; the community expected the town crier to blow the trumpet before the public reading of a sentence and also during the implementation of various sentences.⁵² If we consider this nuance, we might be able to frame the expression within its historical matrix and thus regain the original sarcastic and humorous undertone alongside the strong mockery of this opening invective. Overall, through this abrupt beginning, Dante most likely aims to elicit a sarcastic laughter in

⁵¹ The reference to a trumpet can also be a precursor to the more explicitly comic expression in *Inf.* XXI “ed elli avea del cul fatto trombetta (139)” [and he had made a trumpet of his asshole] (Hollander).

⁵² See Frank D’Accone’s *The Civic Muse: Music and Musicians in Siena during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* 417.

readers who are exposed to the scandalous wrongdoings of the *Simoniaci* sardonically declaimed by the prophet-poet and town-crier Dante.

This final witty and sarcastic verse can also be connected to the prophetic tradition; scholars have also linked the expression to “the sounding of the angel’s trumpet on the Day of Judgment” (Singleton 330). However, even though Dante’s opening invective evokes a prophetic and apocalyptic attitude, it seems projected not so much toward the future but rather toward the immediate present, and thus more directly involves the target readers. This is confirmed by the fact that all the verbs employed in this first two tercets are all in the present tense: “deon” (3), “avolterate”(4), and “convien” (5). Even though Dante invokes Simon Mago—a remote figure from the Biblical tradition—he projects his attack in relation to current events and toward the wrongdoing of his contemporaries. The clerics attacked in the invective are still alive in the narration, but possibly Dante regards them and their legacy as still “in progress” and thus as concrete individuals who are still a potential threat to his contemporaries during the time the poet completed and circulated this invective (Singleton 329). If we consider both the theoretical and the practical values of the invective, we can approach its imaginative elements not merely as fiction but also as serving the purpose of both persuading and cautioning readers about factual wrongdoings. This possibility is confirmed by the early commentator Francesco da Buti who in his *Commento* (1385-95) emphasizes Dante’s change of registers between the initial exclamation at the opening of the canto, the introduction of fictional episodes, and the invective at the conclusion of the canto: “l’autore nostro incomincia lo suo canto da una esclamazione. . . l’autore nostro

finge. . . l'autore nostro pone una bella invettiva. . . una lezione" (495, 500, 503) [our author begins his canto with a shout. . . our author imagines. . . our author puts forward a beautiful invective. . . a lesson] (translation mine). As Francesco da Buti illustrates, the canto can be divided into various sequences: the initial *exclamatio* is interrupted by a fictional episode and then resumed by the final "invettiva-lezione." This remark suggests that Dante's contemporaries did not conceive the invective strictly as fiction but rather as a "lezione" [lesson] which Dante addressed to his contemporaries (perhaps both fellow poets and general readers) (Francesco da Buti 503).

In order to pertinently place the comic episode that follows the opening invective, we must consider the satirical tradition of the *Commedia*. Having concluded his initial tirade, Dante the poet places Dante the pilgrim in a rather comical scene; the pilgrim is unaware of the identity of the sinners and their sin, and he will progressively learn about both (D'Ovidio 347-48). This awareness only partially coincides with that of the readers, who have already received a generic introduction to the sin of simony in the opening lines of the canto. When readers approach the narration for the first time, they learn significant details of both the sins and the sinners of the *bolgia* through a series of clues that Dante gradually presents.

Dante specifically chooses to introduce the sinner through "uno sviluppo tutto teatrale" (Borzi 12) that unveils the punishment of the sinners of simony: they are all plunged head down into the "pietra livida"(14) or purple rock inside round "fori" (14) or holes up to their calves while a flame burns both soles from toes to heel (25-30) causing the "giunte" (26) [knee-joints] of their legs to "guizzar" (26) [writhe] strongly. When the

reader discovers that the sinners punished are mainly clerics, the *contrapasso* of the circle becomes both a bitter and amusing parody. As Foster notes, the violence of the imagery is fastened to humor and sarcasm; this is evident if we examine how Dante depicts the popes trapped in a

topsy-turvy situation, both physically and morally “upside down”. . .the papacy was founded on Peter the Rock, and here the popes are planted head down in “*pietra livida*,” livid stone, symbols of contradiction of the sacred order they abused. (54)

Foster emphasizes the paradoxical position of the sinner popes who are trapped in a moral and physical inversion and become a living caricature of their own betrayal of Christ.

As Borzi notes, Dante uses a language characterized by a “*pittresco e violento realismo*” (13) when he colorfully discloses to readers the pathetic Pope Nicholas III who frenetically wriggles his soles in the air while they are burned by stunning red flames:

“Chi è colui, maestro, che si cruccia
guizzando più che li altri suoi consorti,”
diss’io, “e cui più roggia fiamma succia?” (31-33)

[‘Who is that, master, who in his torment
wiggles more than any of his fellows
and is licked by redder flames?’]

Dante uses both harsh rhymes and a low and comic lexicon, with terms such as “*cruccia*” (31) and “*succia*” (33), to convey his message of ridicule and reprehension against his target. Such a description bluntly destabilizes the solemnity of the sinner and thus already discredits him a priori because he appears immediately ridiculous and reprehensible before the readers even encounter him. The ensuing dialogue between Dante and Pope

Nicholas III should be approached within this satirical and comic frame where Dante derisively depicts the sinner as a frantic and absurd caricature.⁵³

The initial invective is thus interrupted by the dialogue between the pilgrim and Pope Nicholas III. The episode is immediately comic when the pope's identity is disclosed through a series of humorous puns:

Mi disse: "Dunque che a me richedi?"

Se di saper ch'i' sia ti cal cotanto,
che tu abbi però la ripa corsa,
sappi ch'i' fui vestito del gran manto;

e veramente fui figliuol de l'orsa,
cupido sì per avanzar li orsatti,
che sù l'avere e qui me misi in borsa. (66-72)

['What is it then you want from me?

If you are so keen to learn my name
that you descended from the bank for it,
know that I was cloaked in the great mantle.

'But in truth I was a son of the she-bear
and so avid was I to advance my cubs
I filled my purse as now I fill this hole.']

The sinner immediately presents himself arrogantly by posing a question to Dante the pilgrim and introducing himself as an important man—despite the fact that he is ridiculously placed upside down—when he conceitedly exposes the pilgrim's interest in learning his name (66-68). Even though he speaks "con voce di pianto" (65) [with a plaintive voice], Dante's early commentators emphasize that his sorrow is probably caused not by his condition as a sinner but by the previous episode when he wrongly

⁵³ See also the comic moment when Pope Nicholas III confuses Dante for Pope Boniface VIII (52-63).

believed that Dante was Pope Boniface VIII; he is now distressed by the realization of his error (Francesco da Buti 501; *L'ottimo commento* 349).⁵⁴ He declares himself to be a pope (69) belonging to the Orsini family “figliuol de l'orsa” [son of the she-bear], as evident from the official term “de filiis Ursae” used to identify family members of the Orsini family (Bosco 286n). However, Pope Nicholas uses the adverb “veramente” (70) to stress that he was truly a son of the she-bear in both name and deed. As Dante's contemporary and scholar (perhaps Andrea Lancia) wrote in the *Ottimo Comento* (c.1330-40) and Bosco recently recaps, according to medieval bestiaries the she-bear is an avid and greedy animal that cares solely for its progeny (Bosco 286n; *L'Ottimo commento* 350).

Bosco's observation is also confirmed by the following verse when the pope makes his self-deprecating pun, declaring that he was concerned solely to promote his little bears [“orsatti,” 71]. The next remark also reinforces the humorous language that the pope uses to describe his own sin to the pilgrim. Having used the two similar terms of self-mockery “orsa” and “orsatti,” the pope then further intensifies his self-irony by using the term “borsa” to convey the double meaning of his purse and the hole he is now in, because “as he ‘pocketed’ wealth in life, he has ‘pocketed’ himself in Hell” (Musa 263). More specifically, the noun “borsa” functions as the figure of speech of zeugma that highlights the pope's greed. The zeugma suggests that the pope's hunger for money is consistent also in hell where his desire to fill his purse on earth has led him to fill hell's “purse” with himself. He has thus paradoxically become money, empursed in hell. If we

⁵⁴ See *Inf.* XIX, 52-63.

also consider the term “cupido” (71) [desirous]—usually associated with erotic love—and the reference to “misi in borsa” (72), the verse can connote a sexual undertone. Dante portrays Nicholas as a depraved because his desire for money is entirely sensual and for this reason his punishment could perhaps suggest a representation of a grotesque coitus as he is now plunged inward inside his object of desire and reward (i.e., “borsa”). If we consider these nuances, we can better understand the ethical value of parody and humor contained in this verse within the frame of denunciation.

Even though scholars generally interpret these verses as harsh, tragic or dramatic, and humanize the pope, I believe that the episode should be understood in the opposite way. Momigliano, Bosco, and Musa, for example, interpret these words as the tragic and bitter expression of a defeated sinner who dramatically expresses his human emotion.⁵⁵ However, very little humanity is present in this sinner who appears more as an unrepentant beastly bear and as a ridiculous half-man (the bottom half, at that) than a bitter and sorrowful man. Furthermore, the late pope’s self-mocking lines, which are consistently rehearsed throughout the *terzine* with puns and allusive words, could be approached as examples of his malicious humor and intrinsic absurdity rather than an example of his allegedly tragic self-awareness as a sinner. This is evident if we link the character of the Pope to the comic exchange that occurred before this dialogue, when Nicolas III mistakenly takes that Dante the pilgrim for Pope Boniface VIII (52-63). This episode discredits any solemnity in the character of the pope as it depicts him as a

⁵⁵ See Bosco “con amarezza e dolore il dannato ironizza sul proprio nome (orsa/orsatti) e sul tragico contrapasso della *borse* dei denari e della buca in cui è conficcato” (286n). Bosco also mentions and agrees with Momigliano’s reading which proposes that the pope is “prima schernito, poi dolente, poi confesso e profetico” (286n); see also Musa: “This pun dramatically signifies Nicholas’s contrapasso” (263).

confused mole-like creature jammed upside down into a crack, unable to recognize anyone and in constant anticipation of the arrival of Boniface VIII.⁵⁶ Overall, both the representation of the sinner and his words were meant to elicit in readers a type of laughter at the expense of Pope Nicholas III who ridicules himself throughout the *terzina* (70-72), displaying his bottomless wickedness and irreverence.

This comic moment, which displays the abomination of simony and the shameless and arrogant self-irony of Pope Nicholas III, almost certainly constitutes the cardinal motive for the revival (in the pilgrim's voice) of the initial invective (in the poet's voice). Dante the pilgrim resumes the invective at the end of this canto by confronting not only Pope Nicholas III, but also all sinners of simony. The pilgrim's invective is indeed "the longest denunciation of the corrupt clergy" in the *Comedy* (Durling and Martinez I, 301n):

Io non so s'i' mi fui qui troppo folle,
 ch'i' pur rispuosi lui a questo metro:
 "Deh, or mi di: quanto tesoro volle

Nostro Signore in prima da san Pietro
 ch'ei ponesse le chiavi in sua balia?
 Certo non chiese se non 'Viemmi retro.'

Né Pier né li altri tolsero a Matia
 oro od argento, quando fu sortito
 al loco che perdé l'anima ria.

Però ti sta, ché tu se' ben punito;
 e guarda ben la mal tolta moneta
 ch'esser ti fece contra Carlo ardito.

E se non fosse ch'ancor lo mi vieta

⁵⁶ Pope Nicholas III is depicted as a comic character in opposition to the grave and solemn Ghibelline leader Farinata degli Uberti from *Inf.* X, who is presented standing proudly in the opposite position.

la reverenza de le somme chiavi
che tu tenesti ne la vita lieta,

io userei parole ancor più gravi;
ché la vostra avarizia il mondo attrista,
calcando i buoni e sollevando i pravi.

Di voi pastor s'accorse il Vangelista,
quando colei che siede sopra l'acque
puttaneggiar coi regi a lui fu vista;

quella che con le sette teste nacque,
e da le diece corna ebbe argomento,
fin che virtute al suo marito piacque.

Fatto v'avete dio d'oro e d'argento;
e che altro è da voi a l'idolatre,
se non ch'elli uno, e voi ne orate cento?

Ahi, Costantin, di quanto mal fu matre,
non la tua conversion, ma quella dote
che da te prese il primo ricco patre!" (88-117)

[I do not know if then I was too bold
when I answered him in just this strain:
'Please tell me, how much treasure

'did our Lord insist on from Saint Peter
before He gave the keys into his keeping?
Surely He asked no more than "Follow me,"

'nor did Peter, or the others, take gold or silver
from Matthias when he was picked by lot
to fill the place lost by the guilty soul.

'Stay there then, for you are justly punished,
guarding well those gains, ill-gotten,
that made you boldly take your stand against King Charles.

'And were it not that I am still restrained
by the reverence I owe the keys supreme,
which once you held in the happy life above,
'I would resort to even harsher words

because your avarice afflicts the world,
trampling down the good and raising up the wicked.

'Shepherds like you the Evangelist had in mind
when he saw the one that sits upon the waters
committing fornication with the kings,

'she that was born with seven heads
and from ten horns derived her strength
so long as virtue pleased her bridegroom.

'You have wrought yourselves a god of gold and silver.
How then do you differ from those who worship idols
except they worship one and you a hundred?

'Ah, Constantine, to what evil you gave birth,
not by your conversion, but by the dowry
that the first rich Father had from you!']

This invective powerfully reprises the opening of the canto and similarly regulates the tension between blame and humor. This is evident by the repetition of identical terms—such as “oro od argento” (95) which parallels “per oro e per argento” (4)—and the use of related verbs—such as the eloquent “puttaneggiar” (108) which, while more devastating, yet corresponds to “avolterate” (4) as well as to “simoneggiando” (74). As Musa notes, the opening of the invective begins with a question which is modeled after the speech of Pope Nicholas III: Dante’s “opening is a sarcastic one, with the contemptuous ‘deh’ and the imperative ‘or mi di’ used to parody Nicholas’s opening, ‘Dunque, che a me richiedi’ (65)” (264). The invective is indeed a direct response to Nicholas characterized by the equal arrogance and sarcasm as originally displayed by the pope. This is evident by the use of the singular pronouns “ti fece” (97), “ti sta” (99), “tu tenesti” (102). However, from verse 104 Dante radically changes target, introducing the plural adjective “vostra” (104), and thus explicitly shifting from the singular “tu” to the plural “voi pastor” (106)

and “Fatto v'avete” (112) [You have wrought]. The term “pastori” [shepherds] is used here not simply as a metonymy (meaning shepherds of the Church, i.e., popes) but rather with strong irony to discredit expressively to his readers the aforementioned Pope Nicholas III, but also Boniface VIII, Clement V, and almost certainly—although only hinted in verse 87—Dante’s contemporary Pope John XXII, who followed the legacy of Clement V by remaining in Avignon and reinforcing the tie between the papacy and French kings (i.e., “Puttanegiar coi regi” 108). Dante likely opposed the pope’s plan to increase the Church’s resources in France rather than in Rome as he staunchly opposed his predecessors.⁵⁷ Dante most likely confronts in particular Pope Clement V and John XXII by the shocking and hyperbolic *terzina*:

Di voi pastor s'accorse il Vangelista,
quando colei che siede sopra l'acque
puttanegiar coi regi a lui fu vista; (106-108)

[Shepherds like you the Evangelist had in mind
when he saw the one that sits upon the waters
committing fornication with the kings;]

Scholars such as Singleton have noted that the term “puttanegiar coi regi” (108) refers to the prophetic tradition of Apoc. 17.1-3, 5 (342-343). Even though scholars were quick to discern the biblical connection, few have emphasized the strong irony and the shocking controversy surrounding this passage which is perceptible in Dante’s early

⁵⁷ As we shall see, Dante implicitly refers to Pope John XXII (in office from 1316 to 1334) and his bull *Si fratrum* of 1316-1317 in *Par.* 27 (Cassell 3).

commentators.⁵⁸ Sannia is perhaps the only one who eloquently highlights Dante's refined irony:

Al Vangelista era apparsa in visione una grande meretrice che
puttaneggiava coi re della terra. Simboleggiava, al creder di tutti, la Roma
pagana. Ma D(ante) è d'altra opinione. "Sapete chi è la meretrice?—è la
chiesa romana quale l'avete ridotta voi, voi papi!" Di qui l'aria di scoperta
trionfante che è nel primo verso, ove tutta l'enfasi s'appunta nel pronome.
(I, 179)

Sannia suggests that irony and humor constitute an important element in Dante's *Inf.* XIX and proposes that Dante conveys both a prophetic and personal interpretation of current events that he vividly presents to his target readers as the climax of his invective. Overall, by using numerous examples of sarcasm and irony, Dante consistently blends humor and denunciation throughout the canto, suggesting that his most aggressive verses could be interpreted not only as simply a violent expression of aggression and vituperation, but also as examples of "ironia sopraffina" (Sannia 179).⁵⁹

How did Dante expect his readers to react to this invective? This question might seem inapposite to many scholars who do not link laughter and humor to invective writing; as I noted, Barański straightforwardly declares that laughter should not even be conceived as a reader response in connection to Dante's *Comedy* ("Scatology" 260).

⁵⁸ See for example Iacopo Alighieri, who personally takes a position in favor of the verse by stating that the meaning of the expression "puttaneggiar co'regi" refers "apertamente per colpa d'i moderni pastori *nel suo vero* si vede" (165, emphasis added); also Guido da Pisa, who is usually very objective, here takes a similar position as Iacopo's expressing his personal views on clerics while glossing Dante's verse: "non dicit de Ecclesia, quia Ecclesia semper est bona, sed de pastoribus que aliquando mali sunt vel esse possunt" (365) [He is not talking about the Church, because the Church is always good, instead he is talking about the priests who sometimes are evil or can be evil] (translation mine).

⁵⁹ Another example of Dante's hyperbolic use of irony, sarcasm, and humor is in the verse "calcando i buoni e sollevando i pravi" (105) [trampling down the good and raising up the wicked] which ironically is the exact opposite of what is expected from the Church (Francesco da Buti 506).

However, as I noted in Chapter One, invective poetry seeks to elicit two types of laughter based on abuse. The first is a good-natured laughter which, through a benevolent ridicule, conciliates the audience and creates a relaxed environment, thus revealing “the cultured and kindly nature of the speaker” (Grant 75). This type of laughter defuses excessive hostility against the speaker because it aims to convince the target audience that the speaker has good and harmless intentions even if he uses mordant wit. The second type, which has been described as “tinged with anger,” is the ill-natured laughter that provokes the audience’s hatred by “maliciously denigrating the target of attack” (Grant 75). By projecting ridicule toward a specific target, both the speaker and his audience share a mutual bitterness against a particular wrongdoing, calibrating it through laughter. Hate and anger trigger the ill-natured laughter.⁶⁰ The parallel good- and ill-natured laughter works within the ethical value of invective poetry to both amuse and teach readers. Readers experience both laughter and indignation, thus finding amusement in the condemnation while becoming aware of a specific abuse. This complex reaction excites not only their personal enjoyment but, most importantly, their sense of responsibility. Invective poetry employs laughter as an instrument for entertaining readers and keeping them attentive, but also for condemning wrongdoings, thus blunting excessive aggression by eliciting a benevolent *and* a malevolent derision. The close of this canto hints indeed at the very explicit reaction in readers of these two types of laughter, and can offer an answer to my question.

⁶⁰ My Chapter I provides more detail on these two types of laughter.

After Dante delivers his invective against Pope Nicholas III and his followers, readers are confronted with two distinct reactions: first the angry response of the pope who “forte spingava con ambo le piote” (120) [kicked out hard with both his feet], and second the benevolent response of Virgil. The former clearly illustrates the comical disempowerment of the target of the invective whose wrongdoings Dante has explicitly unveiled for the readers who now can see both the disgrace and ludicrousness of Nicholas Orsini. Virgil’s opposite reaction could be approached instead as the model of the reader’s response to the invective as Dante visualized it in the following passage:

I' credo ben ch'al mio duca piacesse,
con sì contenta labbia sempre attese
lo suon de le parole vere espresse.

Però con ambo le braccia mi prese;
e poi che tutto su mi s'ebbe al petto,
rimontò per la via onde discese. (121-26)

[Truly I believe this pleased my leader,
he listened with a look of such contentment
to the sound of the truthful words I spoke.

Therefore, he caught me in his arms
and, when he had me all upon his breast
remounted by the path he had descended.]

Dante describes Virgil’s reaction with the graphic expression “contenta labia” (122), literally cheerful look or mouth, as early Dante commentators confirm.⁶¹ This expression clearly refers to Virgil’s positive reception of the pilgrim’s tirade, but it could also connect with the expected reaction of laughter. The term “contenta” alone refers to

⁶¹ See Guido da Pisa: “est ydioma Tuscorum et tantum valet quantum ‘apparentia faciei.’ Unde quando gratiosam faciem alicuius hominis volumus commendare dicimus: ‘Questi à una bella labia’ (370) [it is a Tuscan expression and it is equivalent to ‘the appearance of the face.’ When we want to praise someone’s attractive face we say: ‘he has a beautiful *labia*’]; see also Bosco, “viso, volto” (290).

pleasure and satisfaction, but linked to “labia” it almost certainly describes the act of smiling or laughter. This interpretation is also confirmed by Dante’s early commentators who consistently use the expression “ridente” [laughing] to describe the two terms. This strongly suggests that a connection existed between the expression “contenta labia” and laughter, and thus that Virgil was described as laughing.⁶² The fact that Dante does not mention Virgil’s teeth—and thus emphasizes only his “labia”—could mean that the *duca*’s reaction is a moderate laughter, which according to medieval standards was the most acceptable and appropriate type of laughter.⁶³

In the first *terzina* (121-23), Virgil displays a mixture of the two types of good-natured laughter (*risus*) and ill-natured laughter (*derisio*). His smile or laughter can be understood as an expression of approval for the pilgrim who uses his rhetorical ability to confront and reprehend the sin of simony, serving as a “cultivated” and “caring” “maestro” to his readers by advising and entertaining them.⁶⁴ This is confirmed by the subsequent warm embrace Virgil spontaneously offers the pilgrim with both open arms (“con ambo le braccia” 124) in approbation. Virgil’s reaction of laughter can also be understood as an ill-natured laughter stirred by Dante’s mordant derision expressed in ironic, hyperbolic and sarcastic language. Ill-natured laughter is a response to those

⁶² Iacopo della Lana explains the term with the expression “vista ridente” (335) [laughing appearance] and Francesco da Buti similarly employs the phrase “con labbie ridenti” (510) [with laughing mouth or lips].

⁶³ See for example the *Regula Sancti Benedicti* that prescribes a moderate type of laughter (4.52-54). St. Bernard of Clairvaux in his *Sermo XCIII* urges Christians to avoid laughing excessively and reprehends those who when laughing show their teeth, a type of laughter called “risus cum cachinnis” (cited in Moretti 39).

⁶⁴ The terms “cultivated” and “caring” refer to the terminology Grant uses to describe the good-natured laughter in invective (75). Francesco Buti suggests that Dante acts as a “maestro” through the *lezione* of his invective (503).

insults that are crafted to fittingly denigrate and unmask the wrongdoing of the sinners in the canto.

Virgil's twofold laughter emerges from the blend of aggression and humor that rises from both his approval of Dante and his disapproval of the sin of simony. However, we should not see Virgil's reaction as laughter for its own sake, but as the necessary and temporary reaction Dante envisions for the readers when facing a wrongdoing (Dante, *Monarchia* I.1).⁶⁵ With this explicit reaction, Virgil embodies what Umberto Eco defines as the "Lettore Modello" or model reader, defined as the target reader that the author has projected as a prototype for his work: "Io chiamo Lettore Modello—un lettore-tipo che il testo non solo prevede come collaboratore, ma anche cerca di creare" (*Sei passeggiate* 11).⁶⁶ Eco explains this concept by providing the illuminating parallel of the director of a comic movie who anticipates a specific target audience that would laugh while watching the movie even though the comic episodes in the movie do not directly involve them (*Sei passeggiate* 10-11). Eco's analogy of the director of the comic film particularly suits the close of *Inf.* XIX because Dante chooses to depict the ideal "Lettore Modello" through Virgil's positive reaction, and thus provides modern readers with a precious clue on what could have been his desired response and his precise objective in writing this particular invective.

⁶⁵ See also Virgil's similar positive reaction in *Inf.* 8, 44-45.

⁶⁶ See also Eco's *Lector in Fabula* (1979).

Overall, the comic, burlesque, humorous, and satirical elements within this canto are crucial components of Dante's political invective. Modern scholars, with only a few exceptions, have not seriously considered the importance of these elements, instead regarding *Inf. XIX* as a supremely serious and stern canto. But Kenelm Foster expressively articulates the comic and satirical flavor of the entire canto: "What most obviously distinguishes our present canto is the comic element, the way religious polemic is translated here into mockery and burlesque" (50). Foster subtly emphasizes that the element of the comic, expressed through caricature and derision, is prominent in the canto. He also states that Dante employs the comic in order to represent the religious controversy of simony. While I agree with Foster's observation, I would argue that the comic does not solely serve the artistic purpose of merely "translating" or converting the polemic into something amusing and ridiculous for mere spectacular reasons; Dante's invectives are indeed a spectacular and shocking experience for readers, but beyond the ridicule and aggression, he seeks to provoke readers to take action and thus not to remain mere passive observers. The reaction of laughter serves the purpose of placing bluntly in front of readers the concrete threat of a wrongdoing, thus calling on readers to be aware and responsible. As we shall see, like *Inf. XIX*, *Purg. VI* also contains a powerful invective launched directly by Dante the poet, in which the elements of humor and ridicule blend with the aggressive satirical message of reprehension.⁶⁷ The following is unquestionably one of the most famous invectives in Dante's *Commedia*.

⁶⁷ See Giovanni Reggio who subtly notes "Dante non più personaggio, ma poeta nell'atto dello scrivere, prorompe in una fiera apostrofe all'Italia" (104). This note is from *La Divina Commedia: Purgatorio* (1978).

Purgatorio VI

As Silvio Pasquazi notes, the memorable invective at the end of *Purg.* VI has not been a favorite of modern scholars; Benedetto Croce and Attilio Momigliano respectively for example labeled it as verbose and lacking any poetic value (187). This 75-line invective, the longest of the *Commedia*, is set in the *Antepurgatorio* where the souls of the negligent, who died a violent death and neglected their religious responsibility, await entry into Purgatory proper. The invective begins after the momentous encounter between the poets Sordello and Virgil; realizing that both are from Mantua, “l’un l’altro abbracciava” (75) [they embraced each other]. Though the invective is generally considered just what Dante called it, a “*digression*” (128), it is significant for its powerful use of verbal aggression. It divides into four parts according to the object of its apostrophes and thus of its attacks: Italy (76-90), the papacy (91-96), the Emperor Albert I of Austria (97-126), and finally the city of Florence (127-151). Furthermore, Dante targets even God: “O sommo Giove” (118-126)—though expressing some hesitations in doing so (“Se licito m’è,” 118 [And if it is lawful, Hollander]).

This invective displays a wide variety of rhetorical strategies, including irony, metaphor, onomatopoeia, anaphora, and hyperbole. Its rhymes resemble speech, deploying less melodic effects and more emphasis on sounds and “rime aspre e chioce” (*Inf* XXXII, 1) [verses harsh . . . and rasping, Hollander] already audible in the opening lines:

Ahi serva Italia, di dolore ostello,
 nave senza nocchiere in gran tempesta,
 non donna di province, ma bordello! (76-78)

[Ah, servile Italy, hostel of grief,
 ship without pilot in great tempest,
 no mistress of provinces, but brothel! (Singleton 59)]⁶⁸

The coarse bitterness of “nocchiere” and “bordello” is present not only at the acoustic level, in the arrangements of guttural consonants and vowels, but also in the content. Italy is compared to a slave who collects grief and sorrow as it acts like a boat without a pilot during the storm, flinging about without direction like a disoriented prostitute lurching from one whorehouse to another. This aggressive language is almost certainly inspired by the biblical (Lam. 1.1) and medieval judicial traditions (Justinian’s *Corpus iuris civilis*),⁶⁹ but this famous *terzina* also echoes the thirteenth-century political and religious poetry of Jacopone da Todi and Guittone D’Arezzo. Teodolinda Barolini first suggested that Guittone d’Arezzo’s canzone “Magni baroni certo e regi quasi”—for its lexicon (i.e., “donna de la provincia. . . ancella”) and content—was a direct source for Dante’s invective (*Dante’s Poets* 179-82).⁷⁰ However, she overlooks Jacopone da Todi’s *Lauda* XXXIII “Amore contraffatto” which, more strikingly than Guittone, constitutes the direct inspiration for this *terzina* and, thus is a crucial reference for *Purg.* VI (Suitner,

⁶⁸ I use Singleton’s translation here because its lexicon is most faithful to the original Italian.

⁶⁹ See Singleton’s “Canto VI” from *The Divine Comedy: Purgatorio* (127).

⁷⁰ Barolini convincingly argues that the political content of Guittone’s canzone plays an important role not only in *Purg.* VI, but also in *Purg.* VII. She also provides valuable insight in interpreting lines 83-4 “e l’un l’altro si rode” which might refer to Guittone’s reference to Ugolino who later will have a prominent role in *Inf.* XXXII-XXXIII (*Dante’s Poets* 182-83).

La poesia 100).⁷¹ Both Jacopone and Guittone are important precursors of Dante's invective in *Purg.* VI and should be approached within the same invective tradition.

However, Dante is not simply duplicating biblical, legal, and poetic sources throughout the canto to impress readers or echo well-known stylistic traditions. On the contrary, I argue that Dante rearranges, revives, and personalizes them, adding his own sensibility and humor in order to convey a message both poetic and ideological. This is evident in the use of terms that are not present in the abovementioned sources because they are Dante's own creation. The word "bordello," which closes the *terzina*, is a powerful, even savage word which suggests that Dante carefully selected this etymon placing it at the end of the verse in order to elicit a particular response. I believe that it is not a mere expression of discontent, anger, or derision because most likely readers enjoyed a moment of actual ill-natured laughter when they encountered the word "bordello." My hypothesis might sound inapposite or even presumptuous, as we do not have the evidence to document medieval readers' response, yet it is a possibility we must consider in trying to understand both the ethical value of invective as the art of blame, and the ethics of the laughable in readers' responses to invective.

⁷¹ No scholar seems to have pursued Suitner's discovery and suggestions in *Purg.* VI.; see Suitner *La poesia satirica* 100. Jacopone da Todi's "Amore contraffatto" contains a verse that is identical to Dante's and thus cannot be conceived as a mere coincidence: "nave senza nocclero rompe en tempestanza" [a ship without a pilot breaks in a storm (translation mine)]. However, Suitner does not develop his claim which can also be expanded to Jacopone's subsequent *Lauda* XXXIV. As Franca Brambilla Ageno eloquently notes, both *laudas* XXXIII and XXXIV launch a polemic against "quegli eretici che asserivano di aver raggiunto mediante l'amore la perfetta unione con Dio, e quindi la perfetta libertà, in quanto Dio stesso avrebbe agito in loro e a Dio si sarebbe potuto riportare ogni loro atto. Cfr. XXXIV" (117n). Jacopone da Todi's political vision and staunch opposition to Pope Boniface VIII must have carried significant weight for Dante in *Purg.* VI on both a theoretical and ideological level, comparable to Guittone's and Sordello's political poems.

As V.A. Kolve notes on the medieval practice of the Corpus Christi, “laughter was respectable in the Middle Ages partly because it could teach” (129). Numerous medieval references echoed the Aristotelian definition of the human being as “the only animal that laughs” (Aristotle *Basic Works* 84). Medieval authors such as Martianus Capella, Boethius, Isidore of Seville, Alcuin, and St. Thomas Aquinas all assert that “laughter was well known as the property of human race” (Adolf 252) and “the distinctive feature of man” (Le Goff 430). Elsewhere in his writing, Dante recognizes the importance of laughter, such as in *Vita nuova* (XXV, 2) and *De vulgari eloquentia* (II, 1).

A careful reading shows that in *Purg.* VI Dante presents a complex understanding of laughter, articulated in the tension between good-natured and ill-natured laughter. The ill-natured laughter perhaps present in the readers’ response to the invective differs from the benevolent smile which Virgil attributes to Beatrice in the first half of the canto, before the invective. Virgil mentions her smile to encourage the pilgrim and to remind him that she is waiting for him at the peak of a mountain smiling and happy, “tu la vedrai di sopra, in su la vetta/ di questo monte, ridere e felice” (47-48) [You shall see her above, upon the summit / of this mountain, smiling and in bliss]. By contrast, the laughter that is presumably a response of readers of invective is a laughter tinged with anger.

Neither type of laughter, however, is an end in itself. Beatrice’s benevolent laughter represents her joyful response to the vision of heaven and the eternal glory of God that awaits the pilgrim. As a corollary of the art of blame, ill-natured laughter comes at the expense of others and has the ethical function of blaming the sinful, a role well-documented in medieval school manuals such as Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars*

Versificatoria (c. 1175), Averroes's Middle Commentaries, Herman the German's translation of Averroes' commentary (c.1256), and William of Moerbeke's translation of Aristotle's *Poetics* (c. 1278). In the prologue of his *Ars Versificatoria*, Matthew declares the worth of his treatise as a work "for the advancement of learning, for the increase of knowledge, (...) and food for detraction" (25). The first part of the work indeed provides a hearty "food" for poetic invective, but places detraction in juxtaposition with laughter. Matthew acknowledges that laughter is a response to poetic attacks, but warns detractors against a type of "loud laughter" that "is barren and fruitless"; he assures these detractors that if they pursue it, a sure punishment by arrow and pestilence awaits them (26). Medieval authors of verse who consulted this and similar sources found guidance to compose invective poetry that would elicit laughter in readers. However, Matthew emphasizes that authors should avoid seeking to generate an ill-natured laughter for its own sake, because that is never an appropriate goal. Dante not only represents these rhetorical guidelines but puts them into practice within the reality of his time. His invective could be related to the function of corrective comedy, a representation of evil actions in order to reprehend vice and encourage its avoidance. The invective launched at the end of the canto is thus grounded in a moral matrix where the harsh, violent attacks serve as both the rhetorical means (persuading an audience to condemn specific wrongdoings), and also the practical end (eliciting in readers the dual response of disdain and ill-natured laughter toward these faults).

The choice of specific terms with comic resonance supports this claim. The term “bordello,” as Singleton’s commentary highlights, literally denotes a house of prostitution but also seems from the context to allude to a state of confusion (as it still does in modern Italian). This twofold allusion is all at the expense of the targets of the invective, which are not the medieval political and religious institutions of empire and papacy per se, but rather the specific wrongdoings committed by historical individuals who lead astray the ideal institutions of papacy and empire as Dante conceived them. These individuals include the Emperor Albert I of Austria (“Alberto tedesco” 97), current members of the clergy (“gente che dovresti esser devota,” 91), and Dante’s own contemporary citizens of Italy, in particular of Rome and Florence. All are reproached for their dishonesty, cowardice, and irresponsibility, and blamed for the current “bordello.”

The emperor becomes a ridiculous representation of evil for his failure to fulfill his role of designated guide. The citizens of several Italian cities such as Rome and Florence fight—literally gnaw—one another even within their very city walls: “l’un l’altro si rode” (83). The final lines of the invective again exemplify this coexistence of verbal violence and the ethical function of calling readers to be responsible agents, *even while* eliciting an ill-natured laughter. Having introduced Italy as a prostitute, Dante presents Florence as a delirious woman:

vedrai te somigliante a quella inferma
che non può trovar posa in su le piume
ma con dar volta suo dolore scherma. (149-151)

[You will see yourself like the sick woman
who cannot find repose upon the down,
but with her tossing seeks to ease her pain.] (Singleton 65)

This delirious woman is trapped in a incongruous predicament: she is “inferma,” sick both in the literal sense of being incapable of moving and in a more figurative sense of not being able to get out of bed, yet she must continuously “dar volta,” toss and turn on the bed, paradoxically pretending not to be static.

This bizarre suffering puts her in restless motion and makes her a tragicomic character. She turns from one side to the other, like a broken spinning top. Her motion becomes part of an absurd, playful, and repetitive ritual that evokes the movement of a dice in a game and therefore could be linked to the opening of the canto where Dante introduces the “gioco de la zara” (1). In the particular setting of the bed, a sexual allusion also emerges. Dante denounces Florence as unsettled and fickle because of its erratic management of politics that continuously alters laws, coinage, offices, social practices, and party members [“legge, moneta, officio e costume (...) e rinovate membre!” 146-7]. By choosing the specific setting of the bed, Dante suggests that Florence’s perverse and obstinate motion has a sexual implication parallel to the more explicit one of Italy as “donna di bordello” (78). Florence too acts like a prostitute as she swings (perhaps both in a literal sense with her sickness and a figurative sexual sense) to exploit economic profits exclusively for her own gain. This possible allusion could have elicited an ill-natured laughter in Dante’s target readers, especially if we consider its connection with the proverb “Firenze non si muove, se tutta non si duole” (Villani 451) (“Florence does not act unless she hurts all over,” my translation).⁷² This proverb, according to Dante’s contemporary Giovanni Villani, was popular in Florence during Dante’s time (Mattalia

⁷² My English translation does not fully capture the humor of the proverb which lies in the phonetic play between the assonance of the two verbs “muove” and “duole.”

151). If the canto's final line refers to the proverb it would reinforce the humorous dimension of these last lines, which further emphasize the opportunism of Florence, represented as a comic persona who constantly puts off resolving immediate crisis, is motivated solely by self-interest, and takes late action when the crisis has already reached catastrophic proportions.

As we have seen in the *Inferno*, Dante heightens his blend of blame and humor in *Purgatorio* by crafting a complex yet straightforward invective. By doing so, he not only reprehends serious wrongdoings but also unveils their ridiculousness and admonishes his readers. He thus goes beyond simple reprehension and simple derision because he proposes guidelines on the appropriate way to approach the problems and tensions raised by the wrongdoing. This is evident in the fact that the invective is introduced at the end of the canto after the momentous embrace between Virgil and Sordello. This embrace—which echoes the similar embrace at the end of *Inf. XIX*—is what triggers Dante the pilgrim to launch his invective, and it should not be conceived as an episode invented simply to charm readers. On the contrary, Dante emphasizes the embrace between the two fellow *mantovani* who recognize their commonality, which is not based on common interest but rather on the ideal of common good which empowers citizens who share the same civic identity. As clearly stated in *Par. VIII*, during the dialogue between the pilgrim and King Charles Martel, being a citizen does not simply imply holding a citizenship but rather being politically, socially, and humanly present within a community in solidarity:

Ond' elli ancora: "Or di: sarebbe il peggio
 per l'omo in terra, se non fosse cive?"
 "Sì," rispuos' io; "e qui ragion non cheggio." (115-117)

[And he continued: 'Now tell me, would it be worse
 for man on earth if he were not a social being?'
 'Yes,' I agreed, 'and here I ask no proof.'](Hollander)

This passage evokes the importance of being a “cive” and discloses what is at the foundation of the embrace of Sordello and Virgil as well as of Dante’s political ideology. During the years before his exile, Dante put into practice the creed of “uomo senza parte” by implementing laws at the City Council for the benefit of the entire Florentine community, not privileging a specific political party (Bruni 102). As both a political figure and a poet, through his *Commedia* Dante now speaks to his contemporaries throughout Italy, although focusing on Rome and Florence. By providing readers with provocative material, he stirs their sense of responsibility, showing them two opposing realities: first a model of friendship and the behavior expected of citizens living in harmony with one another (idealized in the embrace of Sordello and Virgil); and then the reality of disarray, discord, and opportunism (launched by the invective). Here Dante does not directly address readers, but he gives them clues to guide them. This is evident if we consider how Dante consistently pairs his reprehensions with terms that suggest what actions should be taken in order to resolve the disorder he denounces. For example, in verse 91 (“Ahi gente che dovresti esser devota”) he both reprehends and instructs readers, indicating principles and possible solutions to solve concrete problems: the clerics attacked should indeed be what they are not, i.e., “devoti” or loyal to God, and avoid treachery and opportunism. Another example is evident in the line “O Alberto tedesco

ch'abbandoni" (97), where the political ruler is reproved and repeatedly summoned to be present in order to avoid the "abbandono" (97) and its consequences of confusion and war: "Vieni" 106, 109, 112, 115 [come]. Since the *Commedia* is set during "Eastertide 1300" and differs from its actual time of composition (c. 1306-1321), this call for the emperor could also be approached not merely in relation to the fictional setting of the poem but also in respect to the factual time when the poem circulated (Scott, *Understanding Dante* 167-68). In fact, because Emperor Albert of Habsburg died in 1308, Dante is employing him as the negative example in contraposition to the ideal emperor who has not yet come to claim his place as *rex Romanorum* (Scott, *Dante's Political Purgatory* 103-06). These and many other examples are offered to readers who have confronted the invective on an emotional level by initially being simultaneously entertained and indignant at the wrongdoings denounced, and now are being called upon to take action.

Dante's political message stresses the essential roles of both empire and papacy for the attainment of justice, unity, and peace. Modern readers could approach these principles as idealistic, but nevertheless they constitute a concrete model which Dante expounds not only in the *Commedia* but also at greater length in *Monarchia* and his political epistles. The fact that Dante envisioned a universal and united political entity on earth—the empire—held by a secular leader who shares power with the pope, has led to criticism from some recent scholars.⁷³ In his essay "Dante Looks Forward and Back:

⁷³ Dante envisioned a universal empire on earth located in Rome and held by a Roman emperor in association with the spiritual power held by the pope. Dante understands both powers as autonomous entities and thus independent from one another. His political model is therefore not merely a duality but is

Political Allegory in the Epistles,” Lino Pertile disparagingly labels Dante’s political ideology as unrealistic and reactionary because he finds Dante’s political model “politically unworkable” and characterized by “immobility” and “social injustice” (15). Perhaps so. However, Pertile’s negative assessment is based on an understanding of medieval politics filtered through modern political ideals rather than Dante’s cultural and ideological belief system. This is evident from the recurrence throughout the essay of terms such as “democracy” and “empire.” Pertile uses these terms with a strong partiality, and deploys not only modern moral and political categories but also the lamentable cliché that labels the high Middle Ages as a reactionary age and the Renaissance as revolutionary:

Dante’s aim is to see the authority of Church and Empire reaffirmed so that Italy and the world can have peace again. A noble aim, no doubt. The trouble is that the order he has in mind. . . was one which the most advanced Italian cities and communities had been struggling to grow out of, and replace, over the previous 150-200 years. A very successful struggle, may I add, that made Italy the cradle of the European Renaissance. . . It must not be forgotten that, as Dante was urging Henry to attack Florence, and writing his masterpiece against the *gente nova*, the *gente nova* were not only accumulating possessions and opening banks, but also building churches and palazzi, and commissioning paintings and sculptures which the world still admires today . . . Dante’s concern is neither with social equality nor with democracy, and it would be anachronistic to expect otherwise. He is concerned with social stability. . . based on a pre-determined and universally accepted distribution of social roles allowing no room for individual aspirations. (14)

Pertile believes that artistic achievements are strictly connected to what he defines as political progress, which not surprisingly coincides with the capitalistic and democratic

threefold (*Mon. 1.X*), a triangle with God at the top and the pope and the emperor at the bottom. The pope does not have any jurisdiction over the emperor and vice versa; God holds the judicial power above both.

ideology “of the *gente nova*, the new moneyed classes” (Pertile 14).⁷⁴ For Pertile, Dante’s political view is so backward that it does not allow him to even conceive the achievement of modern democratic growth that becomes visible during the Renaissance. Overall, Pertile implies that the democratic model is more favorable than the one Dante provides because democracy promotes social equality, individual freedom, art, and success. Even though Pertile lucidly advances his interpretation and successfully avoids glamorizing Dante as an extreme or progressive political thinker, I suspect that he does not do justice to the complexity and practicality of Dante’s political model. As evident from numerous thirteenth- and fourteenth-century political manuals, medieval scholars employed the term “democracy” and were concerned about its application in society, but overall the democratic ideology was conceived not to promote any constituencies but—with very few exceptions—in a rather neutral way.⁷⁵ Thirteenth- and fourteenth-century political manuals listed democracy not as *the* political system but rather as *a* political model among the many that were practiced in Europe. Terms such as “democracy” and

⁷⁴ The idea that social democracy, freedom, and the republican ideology were mainly developed during the fourteenth century is itself highly questionable. See James Thompson’s essay “The Development of the Idea of Social Democracy and Social Justice in the Middle Ages” (1923) which persuasively explains that feudalism played an important role in the development of democratic ideology and individual freedom with the development of contractual law and the feudalistic theory of government. See also Robert Benson (1982) who provides concrete evidence that already by the twelfth century “the north Italian cities claimed and exercised full legislative and judicial autonomy” (206).

⁷⁵ While thirteenth- and fourteenth-century scholars and historians often expressed their views on specific political events or leaders, they rarely expressed their personal views on a model of government. There was no uniform agreement among them on the “perfect” form of government. This suggests that in the Middle Ages various forms of government were equally important and many manuals sought to explore the issue of government in a comparative way considering objectively all possible systems. A few exceptions are evident; see Brunetto Latini, who explicitly favors the republican system in his *Tesoretto*; other medieval scholars such as Thomas Aquinas and Tolomeo da Lucca preferred instead the monarchy (Cassell 297n). For a comprehensive overview of the various systems of government discussed by pre-humanist political thinkers and also for an overview of these political manuals see Skinner, especially 132-134.

“empire” were conceived in the late Middle Ages more flexibly than as modern scholars use them today.⁷⁶

Furthermore, the fact that Dante does not focus on social equality and democracy does not mean that he expresses antidemocratic views or opposes social equality. On the contrary, he takes a clear position in favor of empire because in his opinion it more directly benefits human liberties:

Genus humanum solum imperante Monarcha sui et non alterius gratia est: tunc enim solum polities diriguntur oblique - democratie scilicet, oligarchie atque tyrannides - que in servitutem cogunt genus humanum, ut patet discurrenti per omnes. (1.XII)

[Only under the rule of the monarch does humankind exist for itself and not for the sake of something else, for only then are perverted forms of political order—such as democracies, oligarchies, and tyrannies, which force mankind into slavery—rectified, as is clear to anyone who checks though them all.] (Cassell 122-23)

Here Dante plainly expresses his idea that the well-being of humanity can be attained through the political system of a universal empire which insures stability and freedom for all. The concept of universal empire must not be understood as an imposition of imperial power upon all other systems of government; on the contrary, Dante conceives the emperor as a force for preserving global unity. Other systems of government can peacefully exist as self-governing entities able to create their own laws: “Habent nanque nationes, regna et civitates intra se proprietates, quas legibus differentibus regulari oportet: est enim lex regula directiva vite” (*Monarchia* 1.XIV) [Nations, kingdoms, and

⁷⁶ See for example Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s influential and controversial book *Empire* (2000). They clearly use the noun “empire” and its derogatory adjective “imperialistic” as a priori negative term. For Dante, “empire” is related not to the hyperbolic idea of imperial domination but rather to *imperium*, [state] which meant a united system of centralized peace, as the Augustian imperial model described in the *Monarchia*.

cities have different characteristics one from the other, which must be governed by different laws, for the law is the rule guiding our lives, Cassell 125]. Legislative power is thus a prerogative not of the emperor but rather of each individual political entity.

William Archibald Dunning elucidates that Dante

does not intend, however, that the local authorities of earth shall all be obliterated by the one supreme government. The particular characteristics of different peoples must be regulated by different systems of law, while the monarch coordinates all the various communities to the ultimate end of peace. (232)⁷⁷

Dante implies that a variety of political systems ranging from oligarchy to republic and democracy would be active and in existence under the guide of the universal empire, according to each different geographical entity or size of population. It would not be entirely inaccurate to compare Dante's political model to current political and economic unions or organizations such as the European Union or the United Nations. The main difference between Dante's model and these would be that according to Dante the executive power would have been held directly by a single ruler instead of being represented by a council.⁷⁸ Dante's political model is thus far more flexible and complex than Pertile allows. It is also applicable and related to the political experimentalism of his age when various cities in northern Italy tested various forms of government. Overall,

⁷⁷ See also Cassell: "Notably, Dante does not specify what forms of government he would favor *under* the world monarchy in the various realms and provinces subordinate to it, although he does affirm regional differences" (297-98n).

⁷⁸ While Dante might support the concept of the modern European Union (although based on a municipal model), he would greatly dislike the fact that Brussels, instead of Rome, is its capital. Dante's ideas were not as Pertile suggested "irrelevant to actual historical circumstances" as we can find their applicability now as well as seven hundred years ago (12).

Dante does not promote immobility, nostalgia, and social injustice; on the contrary, he advocates stability, social unity, justice for the worthy, and political practicality.

Pertile's view of Dante's political vision has been recently criticized by Christian Moevs who opposed the idea that Dante was "a theocratic fundamentalist" or "a reactionary" ("The Metaphysical Basis" 215-17). Moevs argues instead that Dante's political vision is based on a metaphysical perception of reality rather than upon an ideology:

The *Comedy* is not born from ideology, which cannot produce poetry, only its counterfeit. Dante's political vision is obsessive and impracticable because it, too, is a work of art, an emblematic expression of a profound metaphysical-spiritual understanding of reality" ("Review" 971).

Even though Moevs advances valuable insights on the metaphysical aspect of Dante's political thought, he supports Pertile's claim that Dante's political model is impracticable, denying its applicability to real life, ideology, and politics. In other words, both Moevs and Pertile view Dante's vision of empire as a utopia detached from reality and as a mere expression of either shortsightedness (Pertile) or of excessive abstraction (Moevs). In my view, this assessment overlooks the basic concept that ideology and poetry actually constituted an integrated unity in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century poets, and that a medieval author shared a common ideology with readers and acted often as their spokesperson. The invectives of *Inf.* XIX and *Purg.* VI are thus not mere expressions of an inadequate or abstract political vision; rather they are an expression of a concrete reality. Pier Giorgio Ricci has most powerfully illustrated for modern readers the practical value of Dante's political ideals not as a utopian dream but rather as a

realtà effettuale, ancorata ad una tradizione storica più che millenaria radicata nel diritto pubblico, consacrata dalla chiesa; e che non di sogno si trattasse, ma di pienissima realtà, ben lo sapevano tutti coloro che paventavano l'impero nella pienezza del suo ufficio ed ogni sforzo impegnavano per negarne i diritti, per limitarne la potenza, per distruggerlo. ("Dante e l'impero di Roma" 144-45)

Ricci places Dante accurately in his contemporary context, emphasizing the author's ongoing dialogue and engagement with his contemporaries. Dante's engagement with his readers is evident not only in his political vision but also in his use of humor. Humor and politics are both grounded in the reality of the poet's social environment and refer to key events and individuals that have marked his era. Overall, the tension we have seen between good-natured and ill-natured laughter plays an important role in the encounter between Dante and his readers. In the *Paradiso* Dante carries this message and dialogue with his reader to its final stage by placing the pilgrim in the position of the reader. In *Par. XXVII* the pilgrim witnesses a devastating and irreverent invective from St. Peter and becomes the model reader that we have seen sketched at the end of *Inf. XIX* with the character of Virgil. As we shall see, Dante becomes engaged in a face-to-face encounter with the author of the invective who launches it from the loftiest heights of heaven.

Paradiso XXVII

Paradiso XXVII features another invective which while shorter than the previous ones is no milder. As in *Inf.* XIX and *Purg.* VI, Dante installs a tension between good-natured and ill-natured laughter. *Par.* XXVII presents a “contrappunto” characterized by two contrasting parts (Sansone 964). The first half of the canto is characterized by refined language and the lofty description of a celestial laughter, “un riso de l’universo” (4-5); the second part of the canto is crude and employs aggressive language to savagely condemn the papacy in an invective attributed to no less a figure than Saint Peter:

Quelli ch'usurpa in terra il luogo mio
 il luogo mio, il luogo mio che vaca
 ne la presenza del Figliuol di Dio,

fatt' ha del cimitero mio cloaca
 del sangue e de la puzza; onde 'l perverso
 che cadde di qua sù, là giu si placa. (22-27)

[He who on earth usurps my place,
 my place, my place, which
 in the sight of the Son of God is vacant,

has made of my burial-ground a sewer
 of blood and of stench, so that the Perverse One
 who fell from here above takes comfort there below.] (Singleton
 303)

Dante has Saint Peter employ vivid and violent expressions such as “usurpa,” “cloaca,” and “sangue e puzza,” expressions directed toward the modern papacy but most specifically to Pope Boniface VIII, accused of seizing the papal seat and office, and of endorsing a moral corruption and decadence fueled by his thirst for power and

vengeance. Almost all of Dante's early commentators remark that Saint Peter alludes exclusively to Pope Boniface by using the pronoun "quelli" (22).⁷⁹ Surprisingly, however, other commentators such as Jacopo della Lana and Francesco da Buti choose not to identify the specific pope attacked by Saint Peter, using general explanations such as "il sommo pastore" (Iacopo della Lana 3.406) or "lo papa" (Francesco da Buti 3. 743). Their discretion could be seen either as an expression of reluctance to name an individual pope or, most likely, as a suggestion that Dante perhaps might have deliberately chosen to be vague so that readers could decide who "quello" might be.

This last possibility seems evident if we compare this canto with the others analyzed thus far. In *Inf.* XIX Dante hints at the identity of Pope Nicholas by describing his papal garment, using the pun orsa-orsatti (*Inf.* XIX, 69–71), and naming "Bonifazio" (*Inf.* XIX, 53) as his successor in the hole, clearly identifying both popes and their sins of simony. In *Purg.* VI, Dante names specific political leaders such as the Emperor "Alberto tedesco" (97). Surprisingly, in the invective of *Par.* XXVII, Peter does not give any such pointed clue about who "quelli" might be. For this reason we must be circumspect in identifying "quelli," because the verse pointedly does not specify which pope is the target of Saint Peter's invective. I believe that, as Jacopo della Lana and Francesco Buti suggest, Saint Peter could have implied both Boniface VIII and perhaps other popes who shared the title of usurpers with him. These popes are most likely Boniface's notorious

⁷⁹ See Pietro Alighieri's *Comentum* (673). Benvenuto da Imola also mentions Boniface VIII: "His incipit Petrus suam invectivam, dicens: Quegli, scilicet, Bonifacius VIII" (5. 389). Andrea Lancia in his *Ottimo commento* is more explicit because he provides Boniface VIII's biographical information: "Qui dirizza san Piere la sua undignazione, sì come vicario di Dio, contra Bonifazio, nato d'Agnana, detto prima Benedetto, il quale per inganno, e per simonia fu eletto papa nel 1294, sì come è scritto nel capitolo XIX Inferni" (3.583).

successors Clement V and John XXII, who both took strong positions against subsequent emperors, claiming supreme political power over all secular leaders. They also crafted their own controversial bulls in striking continuity with Boniface VIII's notorious bull *Unam sanctam* (Cassell 18-22). As Cassell notes, Pope Clement V is not only responsible for moving the papal seat from Rome to Avignon but also (through his bull *Pastoralis cura*) for asserting the superiority of the papacy over the empire, claiming that ““vacante imperio papa est verus imperator” (when the empire is vacant, the pope is true emperor)” (Cassell 204n).⁸⁰ Furthermore, Pope John XXII “reasserted his own possession of imperial power almost as the first gesture of his papacy” by proclaiming the bull *Si fratrum*, which aggressively warned anyone who challenged the supreme authority of the pope: “Monitio quod vacante imperio nemo vicarii imperatoris nomen assumat” [A warning lest anyone dare to assume the title of imperial vicar when the empire is left vacant] (Cassell 204n, 198). A term that recurs consistently in these bulls is “vacante” [vacant], and Dante's term “vaca” (23) is almost certainly a direct allusion to these popes

⁸⁰ In *Par. XXX*, Beatrice launches an invective against both Clement V and Boniface VIII (*Par. XXX*, 142-48). As Hollander notes, these are Beatrice's last words in the poem; they express “rancor against the ecclesiastical enemies of the imperial ideas” and have “disturbed many, who find it entirely inappropriate as Beatrice's last utterance in a theologically determined poem” (759n). In my opinion these controversial words are in continuity with Saint Peter's invective, further confirming the importance of the satirical, prophetic, and invective traditions in the *Commedia*.

and their bulls.⁸¹ As Cassell explains, it would not have been the first time that Dante in his writings explicitly mocks a papal bull and employs its language in opposing it.⁸²

Overall Dante's Saint Peter almost certainly directs his anger at Pope Boniface VIII—Dante's most ardent opponent—but also at his legacy, by using crudely powerful and aggressive polemical language. The verbal aggression of Saint Peter's invective is emphasized by the harsh sounds and choice of words such as "cloaca" [sewer], immediately associated with "cimitero" [cemetery] (25). The invective, following the guiding principle of the art of blaming, directly ridicules the towering position of Pope Boniface VIII and his legacy by representing them as seated not on a papal throne above the sacred tomb of Saint Peter and the martyrs, but instead, comically, on a "cloaca" or latrine producing only excrement and blood. The last line emphasizes this derision with the elliptical claim "Onde 'l perverso / che cadde di qua sú, lá giù si placa" (26-7), [so that the Perverse One / who fell from here above takes comfort there below], suggesting in a comic and hyperbolic way that the pope, instead of executing God's will, is doing the devil's will. As evident from the *Ottimo commento*, the terms "cloaca" and "puzza" are both understood in the context of "fogna" or sewer, and more specifically describing putrid waste matter and above all feces (3.583). Jacopone da Todi in his violent *Lauda*

⁸¹ The connection between Dante and Clement V and John XXII has been recently noted by Hollander: "if Boniface had left the papacy 'vacant' because of his various shortcomings, both of his successors, one having moved the papacy to France and the other having kept it there, had left its true seat, in Rome, vacant" (669n). Hollander does not refer to the bulls of Pope Clement V and Pope John XXII.

⁸² As Cassell notes, Dante was directly involved in the contentions between Pope John XXII and Can Grande della Scala. He explicitly refers to Pope John XXII's *Si fratrum* by defying "the strictures of *Si fratrum* in the dedication of his *Epistola ad Canem Grandem*" . . . dating from the midst of the controversy, in its opening words: "To the magnificent and most victorious Lord, the lord Can grande della Scala, *Vicar-General of the most holy principality of Caesar*" (22).

XLVI “Co l’occhi c’ajo nel capo” suggests the same connection between “puzza” and excrement

O vita mia maledetta,
 mondana lussuriosa,
 vita de scrofa fetente,
 sozata en merda lotosa, (28-90)

[Oh my accursed
 worldly lustful life,
 life of a stinking sow,
 soiled in muddy shit]⁸³

Here Jacopone evokes repulsive images and associates the term *fetente* [stinking] with moral and corporeal corruption. This link between *cloaca* and *puzza* unquestionably evokes the repulsive nexus of sewer and feces, illustrating how the pope is deemed responsible for both the material and moral pollution which soils Saint Peter’s vacant seat in Rome.

This image of the pope who sits on the latrine carries not only theoretical or poetic meaning, but also historical and cultural significance. As illustrated in Martha Bayless’ forthcoming book *The Devil in the Latrine* and Alain Boureau’s *The Myth of Pope Joan*, the rite of the *sedes stercoraria*, or dung seat, was described as early as the twelfth century and lasted until the late sixteenth century. During the ritual of papal investiture, the newly elected Pope sat on a marble seat placed in the portico of the Basilica of St. John Lateran in front of all the congregation of cardinals (Boureau 23).

⁸³ The text of the lauda is from Ageno’s edition (180); the translation is mine. See also Suitner: “la puzza è associata alla morte, alla corruzione, alla corruzione suprema. Iacopone si compiace nell’indugiare a descrivere l’incredibile fetore che accompagna il disfarsi del corpo dell’uomo” (165). The theme of physical and moral corruption is best represented by Pope Innocent III’s powerful—and, by virtue of his low rhetorical register, also “comic”—work *De miseria humanae conditionis* or *De Contemptu Mundi* (c. 1196).

According to the ceremonial books the rite was purely symbolic; while seated the pope was not expected to release his own excrement. The twelfth-century witness Cencius Camerarius succinctly describes the practice:

On reaching the porch of the cathedral, the pope “ducitur a cardinalibus ad sedem lapideam, quae sedes dicitur Stercoraria” (is brought by the cardinals to the marble seat, called *Stercoraria*), where the *jactum pecuniae* (the scattering of the money) was observed. Then the pope entered the Basilica, where two porphyry thrones stood, one on each side of the Chapel of S. Silvestro. (qtd. in Bertelli 179)

After the pope-elect sat briefly upon the dung seat, the cardinals respectfully lifted him up from it. The act of lifting him from the *sedes stercoraria* represented the change from his status as pope-candidate to that of designated pope, as it was followed by the two gestures of standing up erect in front of the audience and the tossing of the coins, in which he “threw three fistfuls of coins to the crowd, saying, ‘gold and silver are not mine; what I have I give you’” (Stinger 54).⁸⁴ The symbolic association between money and feces was well established in the medieval imaginary, and the fact that the pope threw the coins to the crowd might have symbolized the act of defecation.⁸⁵ Taddeo di Bartolo depicts a devil shitting gold coins into an avaricious sinner’s mouth in his fresco of the Last Judgment (c.1396) in San Gimignano (fig. 2):

⁸⁴ As I noted from *Inf.* XIX the reference to gold and silver refers also to Matthew 10: 9.

⁸⁵ For additional information about the symbolism of feces with moral corruption and money, see Susan Signe Morrison’s *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer’s Fecopoetics*.

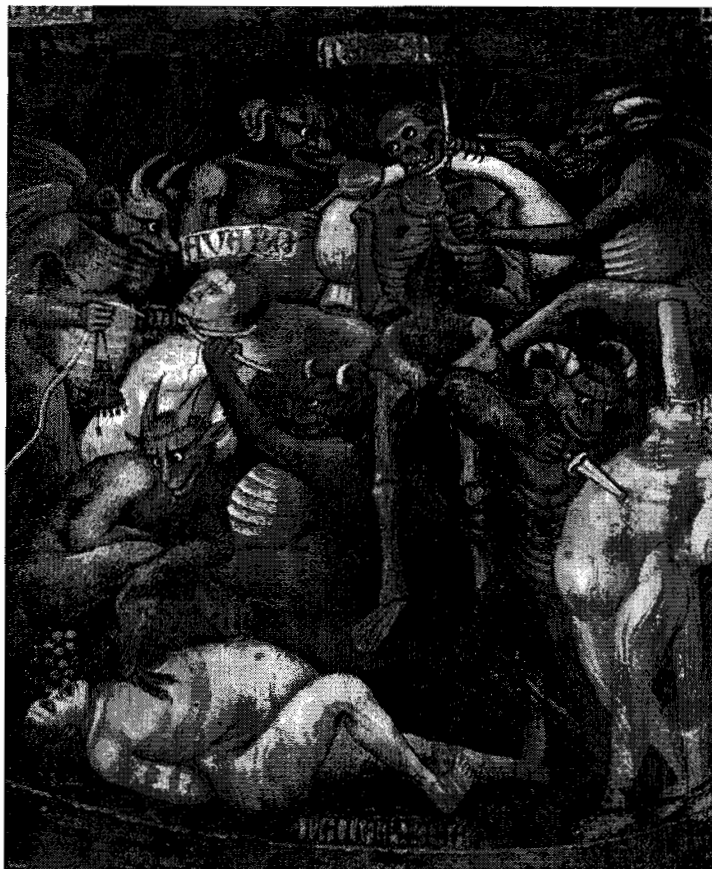


Fig. 2. Taddeo di Bartolo, *Inferno: Avarizia* (1396)

By first sitting on the *sedes stercoraria* and then lifting himself up and throwing coins the pope linked the act of tossing the coins with defecation, suggesting that he performed the ritual in a figurative sense to perform an act of humility in front of the crowd. The entire rite was thus intended to be metaphorical, and the pope's stay on the dung seat was supposed to be brief and wholly symbolic. Overall, the purpose of the ceremony was to emphasize the shift from the lowest state of humility (expressed in the act of symbolic defecation) to the high position of leader of the church (expressed in the act of standing up). The *sedes stercoraria* allegorically illustrated the biblical passage: "he lifts up a poor

man from the dust, and a pauper from dung, so that he may sit with princes and possess the throne of glory” (I Kings 2.8).

This ritual was observed in Rome during Dante’s time and continued until Pope Pius IV abolished it in 1560 (Bertelli 181). It is likely that Dante saw the *sedes stercoraria* in the Roman Lateran cathedral in 1301 while he was an ambassador in Rome and a guest of Boniface VIII or while he was visiting the city during the jubilee. It is also possible that Dante and his exiled contemporaries may have known the ritual of the *sedes stercoraria* from other direct witnesses. If so, the invective might not only have involved the actual practice of the time, but also elicited readers’ ill-natured laughter as well as their scorn against the shortcomings of Boniface VIII, Clement V, and John XXII.⁸⁶ Dante’s invective could propose a comic reversal of the rite, presenting the scatological image of the pope defecating as opposed to the eschatological image of the original rite. The image of the defecating pope in the invective carries the attack even further since it implies that, in a way that is grossly unfit for the papacy, the current pope has derailed the symbolism of the dung chair rite, literalizing its evocation of blood and excrement (the sad matrix of human corporeality, and allegorically the two products of social conflict and moral corruption respectively).

Saint Peter’s violent and comical invective provokes a strong reaction of both indignation and embarrassment throughout the sky (“in tutto ’l ciel,” 30) as well as in Beatrice (31-34), who becomes tinged by the reddish color which expands throughout

⁸⁶ The *sedes stercoraria* could have been moved from Rome to Avignon after Boniface VIII’s death and was most likely used for the papal investitures of Clement V and John XXII. The fact that it is possible to see a reproduction of the *sedes stercoraria* in the national museum in Paris further corroborates the likelihood that the rite was also observed in Avignon, thus suggesting that Dante employs it to ridicule also Clement V and John XXII (Boureau 50).

heaven. This response is described as only a brief interruption, because Saint Peter resumes his *vituperatio* for twenty-seven more lines (40-66). The second portion of his invective is remarkable because in the closing *terzina* Saint Peter places Dante in the position of the active recipient of the verbal attack. As Hollander notes, “these are the last words spoken by any character in the poem” (671):

e tu, figliuol, che per lo mortal pondo
 ancor giù tornerai, apri la bocca,
 e non asconder quel ch'io non ascondo. (64-66)

'And you, my son, who, for your mortal burden,
 must return below, make sure they hear this
 from your mouth, not hiding what I do not hide.' (Hollander 663)

Many scholars have interpreted these lines as the expression of the interaction between invective and prophecy and the poet's lofty mission (Singleton III, 433). Hollander describes this *terzina* as the momentous “investiture” of Dante as “God's prophet” (Hollander 672); Ascoli has recently described it simply as a “commission” (373). Cian also emphasizes the prophetic and the satiric role of Dante as a poet who receives an “investitura e quasi consacrazione celeste della sua alta missione di poeta satirico, interprete privilegiato e ministro della ‘vendetta,’ cioè della Giustizia divina” (Cian, *La satira* 164). The term “asconder” (660) indeed suggests a prophetic tone in this final “investiture” appositely endowed by Saint Peter upon Dante in order to reveal, in reference to the apocalyptic tradition of the Revelation, the hidden truth (Scott, *Understanding Dante* 302-03).

However, scholars have not linked this investiture to other agents besides Dante. Saint Peter does indeed address and empower the pilgrim, making him the poet; however, this investiture is significant because the invective is not only launched against a target, but also offered as a tool for the target audience. The pilgrim is not the speaker of the invective in this particular canto, but he could be conceived as the witness who becomes the symbolic carrier of the invective's ethical discourse. This is evident if we examine Dante not as an author but as a reader. Even though recent scholarship has focused on subjectivity, reevaluating the significance of the concept of authorship in Dante's *Commedia*, this approach will hardly apply to the passive role of the pilgrim who here also coincides with the poet.⁸⁷ In *Par.* XXVII, the role of Dante the author seems to vanish under the vehemence of Saint Peter's presence. I conceive the pilgrim here as an everyman model reader sent by Saint Peter into the world not as an independent poet or prophet but as a *reader*, who has received the ethical message of the invective and has the duty to pass the word on to other readers. The interpretation of the pilgrim as an everyman, specifically presented toward the end of the poem, would logically accord with the incipit of the *Commedia*, reprising the opening line where Dante uses the pronoun "nostra" and not "mia": "Nel mezzo del cammin di *nostra* vita" (*Inf.* I.1).⁸⁸

⁸⁷ See Ascoli's invaluable and comprehensive recent book *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (2008).

⁸⁸ I am not endorsing a reading of the whole *Commedia* conceiving both the pilgrim and the poet as a representation of a generic everyman. However, throughout the poem numerous passages invite readers to identify themselves with Dante and thus, at times, the *Commedia* could be conceived as a work written for a general readership. This idea is not very popular among *dantisti*; for example, Scott warns that modern readers must not interpret the *Commedia* as a poem written for 'everyman' (*Understanding Dante* 172-73). Scott believes that "the cliché that Dante wrote his encyclopedic poem for 'everyman' is in fact negated by his statement that the third, final section may be attempted only by those 'few who early on reached out with your necks for the bread of angels' . . . in other words, by those who have already studied and acquired

Saint Peter's investiture of Dante constitutes the final stage that should apply to Dante's readers as well, summoned to see these monstrous wrongdoings and to respond to them practically. This *terzina* also confirms that Dante's mission (and by implication the readers') is to denounce wrongdoings rather than the individuals who committed them. Saint Peter expresses this crucial point by employing the term "quel" (66) [that] and not "quelli" (22) [him]: "e non asconder *quel* ch'io non ascondo" [not hiding what I do not hide, Hollander 663]. In the invective of *Par.* XXVII, Dante attacks offenses rather than offenders. Dante's political invective should be approached not as an attack *ad personam* but rather *ad errorem*.⁸⁹ In other words, Dante directs his condemnation and mockery neither against the pope nor the institution of the papacy, and neither against the emperor nor the institution of the empire. Instead he specifically directs his attack against specific wrongdoings such as opportunism, corruption, or treachery committed by specific individuals and institutions.

In my opinion, this constitutes a great innovation in Dante with regard to classical invective. As Anthony Corbeill notes, during the late Roman Republic "*ad hominem* attacks characterize the bulk of political humor" (4). Anna Novokhatko states that in the classical tradition, invective aimed "to humiliate its object in public by any possible means" thus addressing "the object by name" (13). Dante's focus—and to a lesser degree

some knowledge of theology and heavenly or divine wisdom" (*Understanding Dante* 173). Even though the *Commedia* is a challenging experience that could be fully appreciated by consistent study, this does not mean, in my opinion, that a general readership should not be able to learn, understand, and appreciate its depth. Even if Scott believes that Dante wrote the *Commedia* for a "few chosen ones," he eloquently presents the *Commedia* as a work which empowers readers (*Understanding Dante* 336).

⁸⁹ The invective of *Par.* XXVII differs from *Inf.* XIX. Even though in his invectives Dante focuses on wrongdoings, in *Inf.* XIX he clearly launches his attack against offenders rather than offenses. This is evident from the opening of the canto: "O Simon mago, o miseri seguaci" (1).

Rustico's and Cecco's—seems to have been on the wrongdoing rather than on the individual. Within this context, we should also conceive the function of humor which elicits a type of laughter directed toward something rather than someone.⁹⁰ Despite this fundamental difference, both Roman and Dante's invectives use humor for practical reasons and constitute a binding unit within their own particular communities, societies, and cultural belief systems. Corbeill persuasively argues that this is the case for Roman invective:

The topics exploited in the political invective of this period participate in specific biases already present in Roman society. The persuasive power of humor lies not merely in the speaker's ability to relax and entertain the audience (*captatio benevolentiae*). Rather, within each instance of abuse reside values and preconceptions that are essential to the way a Roman of the late Republic defined himself in relation to his community.
(*Controlling* 5)

The connection illustrated by Corbeill between the author of an invective and his audience takes place within a specific community and toward a concrete target audience. Dante uses both blame and humor to move his readers and thus create a relationship with them. This relationship between author and readers should be conceived not so much as a general exchange of opinions or ridicule, but as a serious call centered upon the concept of dialogue and responsibility. Humor plays an essential role because the reaction of laughter invigorates readers who become engaged with Saint Peter's condemnation on an emotional level and understand the negative implications of a wrongdoing as it affects a

⁹⁰ In addition, classical invective aimed to convince rather than verify a truth (Novokhatko 14). On the contrary, Dante focuses on the veracity of his *Comedy* and its prophetic value; see Barolini's *Dante's Poets: Textuality and Truth in the "Comedy."* Even if less pointedly than Dante, Rustico and Cecco—with a few exceptions—often focus on specific wrongdoings as evident from their invectives where they allude to specific individuals emphasizing the wrongdoing of a group (i.e., the Guelphs and the Ghibellines or governors) rather than distinguishing a specific person.

whole community. By understanding Saint Peter's mockery through an ill-natured laughter, readers actively participate in Saint Peter's derision of the wrongdoing committed by past and present popes. This emotional participation and response by the readers of Dante's invective is evident by the description of the reaction of the fictional audience in *Par.* XXVII; Dante clarifies that the redness of shame and anger is not only expressed externally in the clouds (19-21), but also in the entirety of heaven (30), and it is visible in Beatrice's face (34). Derision, laughter, and indignation play a crucial role in Dante's invective, constituting a temporary but necessary stage prior to taking appropriate action against a wrongdoing (*Monarchia* II.1). This is evident if we consider again the end of *Par.* XXVII, where Dante the pilgrim becomes the model reader and is summoned directly by Saint Peter to act and expose the truth of the wrongdoings. He thus goes beyond simple condemnation and mockery; he interacts and directly confronts world realities by engaging in a face-to-face encounter with the other.

Conclusion

The dimensions I have highlighted here, of rhetorical verbal aggression, humor, and the effect of good- and ill-natured laughter elicited in readers, have been associated with the notion of invective as a means to activate readers' condemnation of the wrongdoing of different individuals and groups. I would argue that a complex ethics characterized not only Dante's but Italian medieval invective in general. The interrelation between authors and readers through this ethics is not inert or unilateral, but rather a dynamic expression of an encounter with the other. The philosopher Emmanuel Levinas provides a model to clarify such an encounter.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas expresses his philosophical project as an ethics of dialogue expressed through an encounter with the other that is characterized by a transcendental materialism. The encounter with the other is an act of transcendence in which the subject approaches the material presence of the other (as expressed in the concept of the face) and gains proximity to the other without negating or totalizing the singularity of the subject and of the object. The responsibility of the subject, who faces the other as an individual and human being, lies in not reducing the other to mere object, but in preserving instead his or her humanity. The importance of such responsibility is expressed by the concept of the subject and the other as ethically constituted when the "I" welcomes the Other with hospitality and goes beyond "mockery" or "derision" (Levinas, *Totality* 21-22). In the preface of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas employs powerful and

perhaps provocative expressions such as “being duped” (21), while framing the ethical value of his philosophy in the setting of war and violence:

Everyone will readily agree that it is the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality. Does not lucidity, the mind’s openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war? . . . War . . . renders morality derisory. (22)

In this passage Levinas suggests that in a state of war individuals are easily deceived because we cannot conceive morality as we conceive it in situation of peace. In wartime, morality becomes derisory because it ceases to function straightforwardly and lucidly thus becoming a mere instrument of individuals who manipulate it in order to deceive other individuals. Within this paradoxical frame, Levinas does not seem to value both humor and aggression but yet he acknowledges their existence and provocative force in a situation of conflict. Even though Levinas describes the process of encountering the other in situation of hospitality and peace, this opening passage evokes a connection between the violence of war and ridicule that could be helpful in understanding Dante and medieval invective poetry. Levinas proposes the connection between war and ridicule in order to enable a dynamic and genuine level of exchange between individuals; like Dante, he invites readers to go beyond a generic confrontation with a wrongdoing because he proposes an active ethical engagement with the other. In doing so, he perhaps implicitly questions Friedrich Nietzsche’s influential position, articulated in *Beyond Good and Evil*, that promotes a subject more independent from morality. Levinas, on the other hand, foregrounds the concept of ethics within interpersonal relations and mentions war as the setting of violence and mockery: “war is not only one of the ordeals—the greatest—of which morality lives; it renders morality derisory,” and adds “the moral consciousness

can sustain the mocking gaze of the political man only if the certitude of peace dominates the evidence of war” (*Totality* 21-22). What Levinas intends in these passages is linked to his philosophical project to reclaim morality in philosophy and in human relations, underlining the importance of being responsive toward the wrongdoings of other people and thus valuing a discovery of human relations rather than a more Nietzschean “discovery of the self.”

In this context, Levinas uses a terminology that consistently refers to mockery and again seems to imply that a connection indeed exists between being mocked (or duped) and being responsible as a reaction to the mockery and treachery of war. The link between mockery and war is suggested once again when, after having stressed the importance of ethics in human relations, Levinas adds:

Violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every possibility for action. (*Totality* 21)

Levinas perceives violence not simply as an act of destruction for its own sake, or as an act of an annihilation of an individual but as an imposition of a performance upon the other, a disruption of continuity and dialogue between individuals. The act of violence becomes a representation of an absurd mechanism that wreaks instability, disruption, and corruption. Violence is like a type of play that involves a suppression of creativity and continuity which, if fully actualized, would bring about paralysis or meaningless play. With his invectives Dante presents a similar notion of violence in his representations of the abuses perpetrated by the empire, the papacy, and fellow citizens. By ridiculing the

absurd mechanics of violence through hyperbolic allusions and comic expressions, he successfully highlights the dangers of specific wrongdoings and the need to take action. In Dante's invective, the emperor's irresponsibility, the clergy's dishonesty, the pope's corruption, and his compatriots' selfishness are all presented as ethical counter-models and primal causes of the present state of disorder and paralysis in Italy.

In this context, violence is not the subject of invective, since Dante's poetic attacks do not appear as merely destructive or as ends in themselves. The invectives operate instead as a constructive means to make a concrete audience aware of concrete violent deeds perpetrated in wartime, and he uses laughter as an opening-out toward an ethical position and action. The ill-natured laughter that occurs as a response to invective should not be understood as an act that objectifies the other, but rather a response generated in an audience called on to be responsible. What activates the act of responsibility is a type of laughter that projects both a response of non-violence toward the other and also a reaction of indignation against a specific wrongdoing. The laughter is then not directed against *someone* but rather against *something*. Dante identifies his attack against specific wrongdoings within the papacy and the empire, without specifically naming contemporary individuals but rather those who were already deceased when the *Commedia* circulated (i.e., Boniface VIII and Emperor Albert, both dead by the first decade of the fourteenth century). In doing so, Dante projects his invective implicitly toward the wrongdoings of present individuals such as Pope John XXII and his contemporaries. Thus Dante's invectives contain the double dimension of condemnation and derision. This dimension is the starting point to a call to action and

also the idea of continuity and communication among individuals (the I and the other), groups (family members or members of different political parties), and institutions (such as Empire and Papacy) during a specific moment in medieval history. Even though Levinas does not suggest that mockery and laughter can ever be employed to refute the mockery initially provoked by an act of violence, he proposes the concept of ethics as a commitment toward the other understood as the irreducibly and concretely human. Thus Levinas conceives human relations not as an abstract principle but rather as an act of responsibility. He conceives the encounter with the other as bliss, comedy, and love. The ethics of invective poetry in the Middle Ages suggests a similar concept of ethics characterized as a call toward the other which could be approached as an intrigue equally complex as Levinas' concept of "divine comedy." Dante, as I believe also Rustico and Cecco do, does not employ derision and mockery simply to ricochet them back to someone or to metaphorically evoke them crafting a sort of mimicry or ambivalence laid—even if problematically—always at the margin.⁹¹ On the contrary, Dante seeks to transcend laughter and mockery while employing them in a constructive way, thus making them enjoyable while stirring a serious reply and ethical engagement in readers.

⁹¹ Even though I am using the terms "mimicry" and "ambivalence" referring specifically to Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*, I am using the terms not as positively as he does because I believe that Bhabha tends to marginalize the issue of mockery by posing it at the margin as a subversive and performative discourse. However, Bhabha remarkably sets his discussion of mockery and mimicry within the fixity of the stereotype (66), thus evoking Levinas' concept of violence as fixity and repetition as evident in the opening of *Totality and Infinity* (21-22). I believe that medieval authors of invective might have the double intention to entertain and also to stir their audience both *laughing at* something and *laughing with* somebody. A good discussion of the difference between "laughing at" and "laughing with" is provided by Samuel Johnson; see Walter Jackson Bate 480-499, especially 491-93.

Once the audience recognizes the irresponsibility of the wrongdoings and enjoys its moment of ill-natured laughter, the call to be responsible represents the final stage of awareness between the reader and the author. This is the stage where, putting it again in Levinas' terms, the encounter with the other finally occurs. In this state, as Levinas describes it, "the gravity of ineluctable being freezes all laughter" (200). In *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas further describes the encounter with the other as being at "the brink of tears and laughter" (18), and more recently, in *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, as "the ethical intrigue," which he refers to as "the divine comedy without which" the word God "could not have arisen" (69). Explicitly referring to Dante, Levinas uses the term "divine comedy" in order to describe the encounter with the other as he conceives it as "a comedy taking place in the ambiguity between temple and theater; but wherein the laughter sticks in your throat at the approach of the neighbor, that is, of his face or his forsakenness" (70). As Levinas suggests, the initial stage of the encounter with the other occurs beyond mockery and laughter.

The face-to-face encounter between the audience and the author of invective is suitably described as a problematic moment, since the final recognition of a relationship between the negativity of real-life wrongdoings and the fictional dimension of the poem that has evoked sentiments of amusement ultimately creates responsibility. By recognizing and interacting with the verbal violence at the surface of the invective, the audience has been stimulated through an ill-natured laughter to transcend the rhetorical harshness of the style and content encountered and has appreciated a type of humor that not only has elicited laughter but also has represented the premise for a serious

confrontation. Now, this final confrontation with responsibility is ready to occur beyond laughter, and coincides with the ultimate call to action in the face of the other.

Overall, the invectives of Dante elicit a type of laughter that is the preliminary effect of an encounter with the poet's criticism and discontent. It is also the necessary stage crucial to provoke a critical confrontation with current political and cultural tensions. In this scenario, laughing at something does not denigrate or objectify the other, because it does not degenerate into laughing at someone. The tensions of blame and humor in the invective instead stir a call to responsibility that is the first step in a constructive ethics toward the other, the basis of understanding where faults and blame are positioned so that after "the laughter sticks in your throat" they can be seriously understood and constructively faced, in concert.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION. THE ETHICS OF INVECTIVE POETRY IN WARTIME :
AGGRESSION OR ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER?

The invectives by Rustico Filippi, Cecco Angiolieri, and Dante Alighieri that we have examined consistently balance their verbal aggression with humor. By doing so, they claim an ethical role for humor and laughter in creating dialogue within conflict. Far from a sheer rhetorical practice or a roguish whirl, each invective exemplifies the poet's engagement during his own troubled time. The scenario of wartime and the practice of blame and laughter situate invective poetry within a complex frame made up of the historical, social, political, and cultural background of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy. My research, which takes all these elements into consideration, proposes to a deeper role for the multiple dimensions of invectives as expressed by their authors and received by their original audiences.

I have proposed that this interrelation between authors and readers could be defined as an act of exchange and a dynamic expression of an "encounter with the other;" a term that refers to Emmanuel Levinas who describes ethics in terms of responsibility. Even though Levinas would not bestow an ethical value to mockery, humor, and laughter, I believe that the ethical function of medieval invective poems can be better understood if we keep in mind the strong ethical project behind the genre of *vituperatio* and this notion of calling upon the other. The fact that an author chooses to voice his discontent through

poetry, rather than through violence and destructive verbal aggression, and the fact that he employs humor—even if sardonic and caustically mordant—must be taken into account when reading invective poetry. Rustico, Cecco, and Dante articulate their call toward their own contemporaries in a creative and humorous way, suggesting that they conceive poetry as a practical means to achieve change and propose feasible solutions to problems within a civic setting. These problems concerned all thirteenth- and fourteenth-century community members of Florence and Siena, but also any citizens of Italy as exemplified by the important role that laughter plays in the invective and by the cultural understanding of laughter as the property of all human beings (Le Goff, “Laughter in the Middle Ages” 40). As modern readers we too are called upon by the author and we too are reminded of our own responsibilities as well as of our own limits. Through the ethos of civic responsibility the shortcomings of others become the responsibility of all citizens, when the faults of others are not used to weaken individuals or to celebrate ourselves, but rather to strengthen our critical thinking and a positive disposition toward life in general, thus becoming determined about the future and the possibility of achieving the common good for all.

Current interpretation of invective poetry focuses primarily on the playful side of these texts, examining them on a formal level and reducing them to stylistic exercises in inversion or reversal. By doing so, modern critics of comic medieval poetry do not provide a thorough discussion of the ethical weight of these texts in their twin dimension of blame and humor. The practice of invective writing in medieval Italy, as a result, has been examined neither within its historical background nor through the existing network of interpersonal, social, and political relations of the time.

My focus on political invective poetry anchors the poems in the geopolitical and historical context of each poet and his cultural environment, allowing for a critical assessment of the relationship between blame and humor in comic poetry. This approach allows a deeper comprehension of the dialogic and political value of medieval invective, and encourages a more thorough examination of the significance of invective poetry. Locating invectives within a specific historical context exposes a dynamic network of poetic correspondence that highlights significant ideas pertaining to municipal, political, and ethical issues. My method also proposes an alternative reading of these texts that contests the predominant depiction of comic literature as an intrinsically subversive and marginal form of recreation. Overall, the significance of my approach is both literary-historical (invectives in thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italy remain underexamined) and ethical (the deployment of blame and humor within an ethical discourse). Finally, my project resonates with many fields of Medieval Studies. My attempt to redress these particular historical imbalances in criticism has potential for illuminating how historical specificities and transhistorical continuities can be balanced in other areas of medieval cultural study.

Where does all this lead us? Medieval invective poetry is a genre that we should revive, as we should revive the numerous authors who are labeled as “*minori*” or sidelined within umbrella terms that become too often convenient labels (such as the term *giocosi* or *comico-realistici*) for describing not simply one but an entire group of poets. We should seriously rethink the way we read and write about these texts and authors. Thus, we need to improve and expand on biographical data for each single medieval author in order to use this information to interpret the texts, because we can add various

nuances in medieval invectives if we read them through a political and social lens. I hope to have refuted the misconception about the “impossibility” of reconstructing relevant historical data about the life of a poet. I believe that the current lack of historical data should not be used to regress to a reading devoid of an historical approach but rather fuel new research and stir new research methodologies. As a matter of fact, the internet gives us unprecedented access to arcane materials, and a new organizing project for archives and databases could revolutionize the way medieval literature and history can illuminate each other. A revolution will be much welcome, as I believe it will be very valuable to see these invective poems not so much as an act of gratuitous aggression but rather as the expression of a poet’s activism and ethical engagement.

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