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THE POETICS OF 'GENTILEZZA' IN THE 'FIORE' AND THE EMERGENCE OF DANTE'S POLITICAL VISION BEFORE THE EXILE

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This essay investigates the political and literary culture of late Duecento Florence as well as the entangled rather than mutually exclusive nature of Dante's pre- and post-exile political and literary visions. I read Dante's political vision against the *Fiore*, a Tuscan form of the medieval French epic *Roman de la Rose* that appeared in Italy before 1290. Pervasive in Dante's politics, poetics, and the cultural milieux in which the *Fiore* appeared are the rejection of French/Provençal cultural dominance, Franco-Angevin political influence in Italy, and mendicants as morally bankrupt threats to civil society. In turn, this essay argues that the *Fiore* and Dante's participation in the literary culture that produced it were the consequence of the geopolitical landscape of the late Duecento, which paved the way for his exile and subsequent rancor that pervaded his later works.

Keywords: Dante Alighieri, *Il Fiore*, *Roman de la Rose*, Angevins, anticlericalism

Introduction

Finding himself on the wrong side of the political machinations of early Trecento Florence, Dante was, as is well known, exiled alongside other prominent White Guelfs in 1302. While his later work—e.g., *Commedia*, *De Monarchia,* and his epistles—generally dealt more directly with politics and his vision of exile, we should not lose sight of the political imagination that he was developing in the years prior to, not just after, 1302.[1] In this regard, while his earlier

[1] Works suggesting that the exile is the definitive event in his political thought include Franco Ferrucci, "Plenilunio sulla selva: il *Convivio*, le petrose, la *Commedia,*" *Dante Studies* 119 (2001): 67-102; Joan M. Ferrante, *The Political Vision of the Divine Comedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); Barbara Seward, "Dante's Mystic Rose," *Studies in Philology* 52, no. 4 (October 1955): 515-23. Concerning the development of Dante's political thought, see Charles T. Davis, "Dante's Vision of History," *Dante Studies* 93 (1975): 143-60; Robert M. Durling, "The Audience(s) of the *De vulgari eloquentia* and the petrose," *Dante Studies* 110 (1992): 25-35;

works are generally not overt political theory, they do present, often in inchoate forms, many of the same themes that would appear in his later works.

This paper interrogates the pre-exile political culture in which Dante operated to show that Dante's early poetic vision was, like in his later works, deeply entangled with rather than mutually exclusive from his politics. Central to this was Dante's understanding of moral virtue as the key to true nobility, what he would call *gentilezza*. Dante's definition of *gentilezza* would evolve over time, especially after his exile. In later works such as *Convivio* (especially Book 4) and *De Monarchia,* he would come to define *gentilezza* as grounded in virtue and love of Christ. And this definition was in development before the exile. In this essay, I argue that his early definition of *gentilezza* hinged on nobility of character and Christian virtue, as it did later, as well as selfless civic engagement and the defense of Florence against moral turpitude. Dante's definitions of *gentilezza* grounded in Christian love, civic virtue, and reason that we see him developing before 1302 are, then, the early literary articulation of the political vision Dante was beginning to formulate, and that would come to fuller form in works such as *Convivio, De Monarchia,* and the *Commedia*.

For Dante and his cultural milieu, this burgeoning sense of religiously and civically charged *gentilezza* occurred on two distinct but interdependent levels: first was the burgeoning rejection of French/Provençal cultural dominance in Italy, which figures like Dante saw as a threat to true *gentilezza* because of the emphasis on nobility of blood and sexual conquest devoid of Christian love in courtly literature; ancillary to this is Dante's rejection of Franco-Angevin political influences in Italy, which were a destabilizing factor in Florentine and broader Italian politics. Second, he condemned the clergy, especially mendicants, as a morally bankrupt, politically corrosive force in fragile Italian city-states. Such beliefs in these latent threats were formed early on in Dante's life, and they appear throughout his early works such as *Vita Nuova*, even if they were couched in the poetics of often erotic love typical of the *dolce stil novo*.[2]

Stefano Rizzo, "Il *De vulgari eloquentia* e l'unità del pensiero linguistico di Dante," *Dante Studies* 87 (1969): 69-88.

[2] In Joseph Luzzi, "Literary History and Individuality in the *De vulgari eloquentia*," *Dante Studies* 116 (1998): 169-70, we see the origins of Dante's understanding of the larger historical, epistemological, and theological dimensions of poetry. This will subsequently impact Dante's view of poetry as having an important moral and political role. Also, the early self-realization prevalent in *Vita Nuova* suggests that Dante's realization of himself as philosopher poet pre-dates the exile.

This essay reads Dante's political vision against the *Fiore*, a 232-sonnet manipulation of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* from the original French into the Tuscan *volgare*. While there is still much debate surrounding Dante and the paternity of the *Fiore,*[3] I find John Took's recent interlinear reading of the *Fiore* against the *Commedia* as "very definitely knocking on the door of canonicity" to be quite convincing.[4] Moreover, the appearance of the *Fiore* in Tuscany at the very moment when a young Dante was beginning to cut his political and literary teeth points to a larger milieu in which Dante was operating and that influenced his literary corpus.[5] First, the *Fiore* appeared by the mid 1290s, making it contemporary to *Vita Nuova*, which Dante worked on until its final form in 1295. Second, it stresses similar themes present in *Vita Nuova* about the *cor gentile* and authorial self-realization.[6] Third, it is an act of *volgarizzamento*, that is to say it employs the *volgare* to make a clear political and literary statement through the act of translation.[7] Fourth and most importantly, the *Fiore*, like Dante's other poems at this point in his life, is a love poem containing some of the trappings of the *dolce stil novo*.

In turn, by examining the political strife of Florence as well as Angevin incursions into Italy in the decades preceding Dante's exile as the context in which works like *Vita Nuova* and the *Fiore* were produced, I argue that Dante began to develop his political thought as early as the 1280s. Surely, his political disenfranchisement enabled him to make a complete turn toward the poetic

[3] Any analysis of the *Fiore* as Dante's work comes with certain risks, as authorship of the *Fiore* is anything but agreed upon. One of the earliest works to attribute it to Dante is Gianfranco Contini, *Un'idea di Dante: saggi danteschi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1976). Others have weighed in: there are many (Casciani, Davie, Kleinhenz, Mazzotta) who believe that the *Fiore* is indeed attributable to Dante; others are less than willing to make such a concession. Jay Ruud explains that "I have chosen to adopt the more conservative position that regards such an attribution as uncertain," Ruud, *Critical Companion to Dante: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work* (New York: Facts on File, 2008), 440-41. Decidedly against attribution is Pasquale Stoppelli, *Dante e la paternità del Fiore* (Rome: Salerno, 2011). See also Lino Pertile, "Works," in *Dante in Context,* eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Lino Pertile (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 479.

[4] John Took, *Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 141.

[5] Angelo Mazzocco, *Linguistic Theories in Dante and the Humanists: Studies of Language and Intellectual History in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 1993).

[6] Luzzi, "Literary History and Individuality," 161–88.

[7] John M. Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 102. Cf. *Convivio* 1.13.4.

maturity seen in the *Commedia*. However, works such as the *Fiore* and Dante's participation in the literary culture that produced it were as much the consequence of the political strife of the late Duecento as was Dante's exile and subsequent rancor that pervades his later works.

In reading Dante's later works against the *Fiore,* we should move beyond reading the *Fiore* strictly as a poem about the amorous pursuit of the flower, but rather on three levels. First, we should place the *Fiore* into the political context of the late Duecento. Second, the evaluation of the *Fiore* against its French predecessor provides a potential glimpse into Dante's perception of French and Provençal literary traditions as well as Franco-Angevin political influences, which would come into fuller form in the *Commedia*. Thirdly, in examining the monologue of Falsembiante in the *Fiore*, in itself and against *Inf.* 27, we see Dante's concern with the nobility of character and the condemnation of deceitful clerics as a direct threat to civil society before his exile.

Florence, Angevin Hegemony, and Dante's Political Vision before the Exile

Much of the analysis of Dante's political vision hinges on his 1302 exile and its impact on his poetics. Dante's *Commedia* is an articulation of his view of himself as capable of enlightening us with larger truths through poetry.[8] And in *Conv.* 4, he carves out that authority for himself.[9] This is the post-exile Dante, a polemicist who uses his sharp tongue as a vehicle for condemning the moral corruption of his day.[10]

That said, by suggesting that Dante's poetics only became political after his disenfranchisement, we run the risk of overemphasizing the exile as what pushed him toward recognizing the political, and decidedly civic, value of poetry. We don't see it, like Dante, as a product of the larger political tumult of the day that shaped his poetics. In fact, his exile was so formative to later developments because politics remained central to his sense of himself prior to 1302. We should not treat the exile as the beginning point of Dante's poetics as a vehicle for political critique. Rather, we

[8] Ferrante, *Political Vision*, 43.

[9] *Convivio* 4.6.18-19. "Congiungasi la filosofica autoritade con la imperiale, a bene e perfettamente reggere. Oh miseri che al presente reggete! E oh miserissimi che retti siete! ché nulla filosofica autoritade si congiunge con li vostri reggimenti né per proprio studio né per consiglio."

[10] Albert R. Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 130-36, 157-68.

should consider more fully the geopolitical landscape of Dante's world from his birth to his exile.

In particular, Dante came of age in the wake of the French pope Urban IV's decision to encourage Charles I of Anjou, the brother of the French King Louis IX, to seize Naples, which he did in 1266, the year after Dante's birth; in subsequent years, Charles disenfranchised local nobles in favor of French, Provençal, and Italian Guelf allies, had himself elected Senator of Rome, and repeatedly intervened in the Guelf-Ghibelline rivalries of central and northern Italy, such as setting himself up as *podestà* or imperial vicar over several cities.[11] Dante's roles in Florentine civic affairs—such as his 1300 priorate; support for the exclusion of magnates from power in Florence, which came to fruition with the *Ordinances of Justice* of 1295; and his participation in the Battle of Campaldino (1289), which was partly instigated by the frequent Guelf use of the battle standard of Charles II of Anjou, King of Naples—would have provided him with insights into these geopolitical challenges that Florence faced. And, of course, it was Charles of Valois, the Count of Anjou and relation of the Angevin king of Naples, who invaded Tuscany in 1302 at Boniface VIII's behest to oust the papacy-defying White Guelfs, Dante included. In short, one of the often-overlooked causes of the destabilization of Italy prior to Dante's exile was the role of the Capetian dynasty—including the Angevins, Valois, and French kings—and its papal and Guelf allies.

Unpacking the impact of French-Angevin-papal-Guelf political designs compels us to rethink how Dante used poetry as a political vehicle before, not just after, the exile.[12] Likewise, Dante's increased geopolitical awareness of the threats that Franco-Angevin intervention and papal intrigues posed to Florentine society occurred alongside his and his peers' preoccupation with the definition of true nobility as grounded in Christian virtue, the gentility of the heart, and civic virtue. And it is in this context that *Vita*

[11] Charles D. Stanton, *Roger of Lauria (c.1250-1305): "Admiral of Admirals"* (Woodbridge, UK; Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 2019), 12-13, 68-69; Hiroshi Takayama, "Law and Monarchy in the South," in *Italy in the Central Middle Ages: 1000-1300*, Short Oxford History of Italy, ed. David Abulafia (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 76-78; David Abulafia, "Southern Italy and the Florentine Economy, 1265-1370," *The Economic History Review* 34, no. 3 (1981): 377–88." Likewise, Charles was named *podestà* of Prato and Pistoia in 1267, cities very close to Florence. Cf. David S. H Abulafia, *The Western Mediterranean Kingdoms, 1200-1500: The Struggle for Dominion* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2014), 60.

[12] John M. Najemy, "Dante and Florence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 236.

Nuova reached its final form (1295), and the *Fiore* was in circulation. Dante's application of his philosophical understanding of true gentility to an actual political setting is an entanglement of his poetic/philosophical and political personae. Dante matured both politically and poetically in a late Duecento Florence that was politically unstable and deeply divided because of factors such as Guelf-Ghibelline rivalries, papal-Angevin attempts to influence Italian politics, as well as internal conflicts between the *popolo* and the magnates.

Thus, the seeds of the philosophical and political underpinnings of his later works were planted as early as the 1280s. While post-1302 events mattered, the exile should always be viewed as a product of the culture that produced works like *Vita Nuova*, the *Fiore*, and the politically charged poetry of Dante and his contemporaries. When we read the *Fiore* in this context, the *Fiore* is in concert with the larger debates in which Dante participated, and lines up closely with his own definition of *gentilezza* at this stage in his poetic career. It is politically charged and reflects Dante's larger concerns with Franco-Angevin designs for hegemony in Italy, papal complicity, clerical opportunism, and the perceived erosion of civil society. What becomes apparent is that Dante's political concerns and his view of *gentilezza* that are present in *Convivio*, *De vulgari eloquentia*, *De Monarchia,* and the *Commedia* are beginning to take form in works like the *Fiore*.

Le Roman de la Rose *and Critiques of Franco-Angevin Influences in the* Fiore

The Old French (*langue l'oil*) epic poem *Le Roman de la Rose* is arguably the most pronounced demonstration of the cultural predominance of French vernacular literature in late Duecento Italy.[13] Its authors, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, wrote their portions roughly forty-five years apart. The first part of the work (c. 1230) is more in line with chivalric courtly love literature, as it explores the lover's unrequited sexual quest for the rose. The second, much longer part of the poem, completed probably around 1275 but certainly by 1280, is a far more philosophical examination of love. Once completed, it circulated beyond France into Italy, where it was widely read. Shortly thereafter, a Tuscan hand produced two works that are *volgare* renderings of the *Roman*, which

[13] Antonio Montefusco "A Politico-Communal Reading of the *Rose*," in *The "Roman de La Rose" and Thirteenth-Century Thought*, eds. Jonathan Morton and Marco Nievergelt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 151.

we now call the *Detto d'Amore* and the *Fiore*, the latter of which is the focus of my analysis.[14]

The *Fiore* is much more faithful to the Tuscan stilnovistic poetry of Dante's literary circle.[15] Moreover, the *Fiore* follows the narrative of Jean de Meun's portion of the *Roman,* but does so by excising roughly 22,000 lines from the original.[16] Not only does this position the *Fiore* as an original work that more closely follows Tuscan poetry, it is also important to note the politics of re-branding Jean de Meun's portion of the *Roman* in a stilnovistic style. Many Gallicanisms remain in the *Fiore*. However, we should see this as a reflection of the influence that the French-Provençal, Sicilian, and Bolognese literary traditions played in Dante's early development. The *Fiore,* as well as the *Detto*, as Antonio Montefusco suggests, might be "a mélange in which an abnormal number of Gallicisms have been grafted into the Tuscan mother-tongue with an intent that is both parodistic and ultimately also 'literary.'"[17] If true, then the Gallicanisms as are much satirical as they are aesthetic choices that speak to Dante's appreciation for literary tradition. Thus, his use of the Tuscan *volgare,* application of the sonnet form over the epic, and deletion of large swaths of Jean de Meun's portion are all evidence that Dante strategically aimed to divorce the *Fiore* from its French ancestor and place it into a specifically Tuscan context while retaining Gallicanisms for effect. Moreover, Jean de Meun was among the advocates for Charles of Anjou's invasion of Italy, which "had a profound influence both on Florence's political order as well as on its cultural life, contributing to the hegemonic rise of French culture among the new Guelph political and intellectual class."[18] In turn, the *Fiore* is not simply a response to French courtly literature, but is a critique of the pro-Angevin de Meun and

[14] While there are some distinctions between the *Detto d'Amore* and the *Fiore*, Antonio Montefusco convincingly argues that "there are some elements suggesting that the same author is involved" because "The *Detto* and the *Fiore*, therefore, represent an 'interlocked' interpretation of the *Rose*." See Montefusco, "*Roman de la Rose,*" in *The Oxford Handbook of Dante*, eds. Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca E. Southerden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 130-31. While Pasquale Stoppelli sees this as part of the argument against Dante's paternity of both the *Detto d'Amore* and the *Fiore,* even Stoppelli must admit that Dante cannot ever truly be excluded as a potential author without definitive proof.

[15] Pasquale Stoppelli, *Dante e la paternità del 'Fiore'* (Rome: Salerno, 2011), 99; Montefusco, "*Roman de la Rose,*" 132.

[16] *Ibid.*, 131.

[17] *Ibid.*, 130.

[18] *Ibid.*, 133.

others, such as Dante's mentor Brunetto Latini, whom I discuss in the next section.

Most believe the *Fiore* was completed by the mid 1290s right as Dante was completing *Vita Nuova*, navigating the political turmoil in Florence, engaging in important debates about civic participation that culminated in the passage of the *Ordinances of Justice,* and grappling with the larger impact of the ongoing war for Sicily between the Angevins and Aragonese that was the direct result of Angevin intervention in Italy at the papacy's behest. Montefusco has recently argued that the *Detto* and *Fiore* were "a way of seeking to bring about the impossible equilibrium between the courtly tradition and the rhetoric-based didacticism that would end up strongly mitigating the 'social' unevenness of Jean's discourse."[19] But I think it is also worth considering that increased political concerns among those who would become White Guelfs regarding the Angevins, other Guelfs, and the papacy compelled Dante to poetically critique Franco-Angevin cultural and political influences in Florence as well as define a civically-charged *gentilezza*. Moreover, given Dante's later anti-Capetian barbs in the *Commedia*, we should see the *Fiore* as a part of his rejection of Franco-Angevin interference in Florentine politics. The *Fiore* thus should be understood as a part of the same cultural milieu in which Dante and his contemporaries deliberated over the political future of Florence in the face of the Angevin attempts to maintain power in Southern Italy, regain Sicily after the Aragonese takeover, and further its influence within northern and central Italian city-states. This also overlapped with Dante's and others' efforts to articulate more cogent definitions of *gentilezza* grounded in Christian love, civic virtue, and reason in works that are the *Fiore*'s contemporaries, such as *Vita Nuova*.[20]

In this regard, the *Fiore* hints on several occasions at disdain for a Franco-Angevin cultural and military presence in Italy. In *Fiore* 21, the story's protagonist Amante is pursuing the *Fiore*'s eponymous flower. In his attempts to kiss it while completely unarmed, "'l mar s'andò turbando / Per Mala-Boc[c]a, quel ladro normando, / Che se n'avide e svegliò Gelosia / E Castità, che ciascuna dormia. / Per ch'i' fu' del giardin rimesso in bando" (*Fiore* 21.4-

[19] *Ibid.*, 134.

[20] In particular, there is an element of moving toward a "newer and better life" in *Vita Nuova* that is designed to push the reader away from erotic love toward an ontological security grounded in Christian virtue. Brenda Wirkus, "Vestiges and Communities: Franciscan Traces in Dante's *New Life,"* in *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. Santa Casciani (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 307-43. Cf. Took, *Dante*, 136-7.

8). In the *Roman*, Male bouche, Bad Mouth, is from Normandy as well, but there is no mention of him as a thief (*ladro*). In fact, the treatment of Male bouche in the *Roman* is entirely neutral: "At that moment, Bad Mouth / began to accuse me / and declared that he put up his eye / that, between me and Fair Welcome, / there had been a questionable trade."[21] This reflects not so much Dante's view of Normans per se, I think, but rather the reality that the Capetian kings had seized Normandy, along with Ponthieu and Gascony, within the past century: Normandy was seized in 1204, and Philip IV seized Ponthieu and Gascony from England in 1295, just as the *Fiore* was produced. And we know this weighed on Dante after the exile: in *Purgatorio*, he has Huge Capet, the founder of the Capetian line, lambaste his descendants, arguing that from the inheritance of Provence, "Lì cominciò con forza e con menzogna / la sua rapina; e poscia, per ammenda, / Pontì e Normandia prese e Guascogna" (*Purgatorio* 20.64-66). Dante uses *menzogna* to explain how Normandy was seized. Such a notion of French deception appears in *Fiore* 19, when Mala-Bocca "trouv'ogne menzogna," since "qu' c[h]'ogne mal sampogna."[22] Dante's labeling of Mala-Bocca as a Norman thief who employs *ogne menzogna* to reach his ends reflects, then, Capetian knavery as a tool of political conquest. In this sense, a metonym for French military rapacity in late Duecento Italy, "quel ladro normando," destabilized the sea and prevented Amante from finding true *gentilezza*, much as how, Dante believed, a Franco-Angevin military presence destabilized Florence and much of Italy.

This occurs again in Sonnet 22. Castità explains to Gelosia that "Donde vo' siete la miglior guardiana / Ch'i' 'n esto mondo potes[s]e trovare. / Gran luogo avete in Lombardia e 'n Toscana" (*Fiore*, 22.9-11).[23] This geographic reference does not appear in the *Roman*. Gelosia's military prowess and the presence of the other barons aimed to defend the flower from Amante hint at the military threats to Florentine and Northern Italian civic liberty. In *Fiore* 15,

[21] *Roman*; 3519-3523. "Male bouche de lors en ça / A encuser m'encommença / Et dist qu'il i metroit son oeil, / Qu'entre moi et bel acueil / Avoit mauvais acointement." My translation. For a longer exposition on Male bouche and his role in preventing Amant from reaching the Rose, see *Roman*, 3459-3526.

[22] *Fiore* 19.12-14. The passage in full reads: "Ed un villan che trouv'ogne menzogna / La guarda, il qual fu nato i•Normandia. / Mal-Boc[c]a, qu' c[h]'ogne mal sampogna."

[23] There are several geographic references in the *Fiore* that do not necessarily appear in the *Roman*, some, such as the one I have cited, are easily interpreted. Casciani and Kleinhenz explain that some of these geographic references are perhaps impossible to identify.

for example, Pietà and Sincerità convince Lo Schifo, who calls them "molto nobili parliere" (*Fiore* 15.5) to permit an unarmed Amante to enter the garden so long as he does not touch the flower. Rhetoric was a central element of political life in the communes of Lombardy and Tuscany. On one hand, rhetoric, civic virtue, and the absence of arms allow Amante to kiss the flower; on the other hand, Gelosia and others, above all Mala-Bocca, armed themselves to expel Amante, a metaphorical attack on *gentilezza* and the deliberative peaceful governing style of communes like Florence.[24] And given that the largest political threat for Dante was Capetian rapacity, we see Dante underscore the threats the French crown and Angevins posed to Florentine independence via the "Norman thief" and his fellow barons, who attack pure reason.

Let us take sonnets 21 and 22 as a pair and sonnet 23 as a continuation, where Gelosia acknowledges her abilities to guard the flower. This is an open critique of both French literary influences in Italy and the Capetians, both of which prevented Italians from achieving political independence and pursuing *gentilezza*.[25] As Jean de Meun represented both via his section of the *Roman* and support for Charles of Anjou, the recalibration of this story toward the condemnation of a Norman thief who relied on Gelosia and *menzogne* reflects Dante's attempt to distance himself from his predecessor.

Such assaults on Mala-Bocca occur elsewhere, such as the claim in *Fiore* 30 that "al cui 'ntenza / Ferriera a dir mal d'ogni criatura" (*Fiore* 30.13-14), and, in *Fiore* 48, when Amante expressed his wish that Mala-Bocca were in Normandy, "Nel su' paese ove fu strangolato, Ché sì gli pia[c]que dir ribalderia!" (*Fiore* 48.12-13). In *Fiore* 33, then, the seas grew unsettled "Per lo vento a Provenza che ventava" (*Fiore* 33.2) which compounded the rough seas initially caused by Mala-Bocca. In turn, as the wind "Che dal buon porto mi facé' alu[n]giare" (*Fiore* 33.8), Amante found himself beached in unsafe territory: "La terra mi parea molto salvaggia" (*Fiore* 33.11). Dante's descriptor *Salvaggia* renders this land as unfriendly as the wood (*selva selvaggia*) in which Dante the pilgrim awakens in *Inf.* 1.[26] And just as the threat in the *Fiore* is a pilfering knight presumably in the employ of the Capetians since

[24] Montefusco, "A Politico-Communal Reading of the *Rose*," 158.

[25] On erotic love and its ultimate moral failure in courtly love poetry, see Cristina Noacco, "Le mal d'amour au moyen âge: souffrance, mort et salut du poète," *Pallas* 88 (2012): 147–67.

[26] In particular, see *Inferno* 1.4-6. "Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura / esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte / che nel pensier rinova la paura!"

1204, in *Inferno* Dante was confronted by the she-wolf often thought to represent the Capetian dynasty, which included the Angevin and Valois cadet branches that sought their fortunes in Italy.[27] Given Dante's view of French interventions in Italy and the *Fiore's* claim that the initial cause of the tempestuous sea was Mala-Bocca's decision to awaken Gelosia and Castità (*Fiore* 21.4-8), the Provençal wind intimates the invasion of Charles of Anjou, who was Count of Provence. His invasion destabilized Italy and compelled Dante to call for a renewed pursuit of *gentilezza* that stood apart from Franco-Angevin influence and papal-Guelf intrigues. In this regard, Dante saw political treachery and the abandonment of moral righteousness as factors in Charles's success, just as they stood in the way of *gentilezza* in the *Fiore*, and later in the *Commedia*. For example, he placed Buoso of Dovara, ruler of Cremona, among the traitors to one's homeland or party for accepting a bribe to let Charles invade (*Inf.* 32);[28] and he claimed that "fu bugiardo / ciascun Pugliese" (*Inferno* 28.16-17) at Ceperano, where Charles entered the *Regno*, as many Pugliese nobles refused to resist his advance. That such Italian treachery could lead to a French advance is confirmed in *Fiore* 49, as Amico, "che non fu di Puglia" (*Fiore* 49.3), consoled Amante and agreed to help him pursue the flower. Casciani and Kleinhenz argue that this reference to Puglia points to the treachery of Pugliese barons who shifted their allegiance to Charles during the Battle of Benevento in 1266.[29] In short, Amante turned to one who was not Pugliese, believing he could trust him. In turn, Dante's belief that Italian abandonment of reason and *gentilezza*—as seen here in the cases of Buoso of Dovara and Pugliese barons—as a catalyst for the Capetian dynasty's push to dominate the Italian peninsula appears in both the *Fiore* and *Commedia*.

As John Took suggests, "the *Fiore* may be regarded as a premise both for the *Vita Nuova*, with its radical redefinition of love as a new affective and cognitive experience, and for the more distant *Inferno*, with its more complex analysis of spiritual confusion."[30] The allegorical techniques, moral vision, and political consciousness of its author are essential parts of unpacking the *Fiore* on its own terms and how such elements would later develop in the *Commedia*. It underscores that Dante's political vision, especially

[27] *Inferno* 1.49-59.

[28] *Inferno* 32.115-118. "El piange qui l'argento de' Franceschi: / 'Io vidi,' potrai dir, 'quel da Duera / là dove i peccatori stanno freschi.'"

[29] *Fiore* 49.3n2.

[30] John Took, "Towards an Interpretation of the *Fiore*," *Speculum* 54, no. 3 (July 1979): 526-27.

his view of Franco-Angevin interventions in Italy, was well under development in the pre-exile period. The *Fiore* points to Dante's moral, philosophical, and political vision that aims to push against French-Provençal literary influences in the name of a new Florentine poetic vision as well as against the Capetians' role in perpetuating the Guelf-Ghibelline and White-Black rivalries in Florence. The *Fiore* was the product of the creative vision of a poet who employed the sonnet form and the Tuscan *volgare* as a literary vehicle for not only separating Italian culture from the French courtly tradition, but also lambasting Italians' abandonment of *gentilezza* because of the Angevin invasion.

Moreover, the deletion of large swaths of Jean de Meun's section partly for his support of Charles of Anjou points to, as Kevin Brownlee suggests, "a newly emergent Italian claim to literary and linguistic primacy and authority that, paradoxically, must be based on a French vernacular model that is both evoked and denied."[31] Dante's goal, then, is to separate the *Fiore* from its French origins and influence, and recast it as a critique of the forces responsible for attacks on *gentilezza*, namely the Angevins, duplicitous Italians, and the church.

To great poetic effect with Falsembiante, the *Fiore* underscores how lustful, lying clerics work to push society away from his pursuit of *gentilezza* and toward an erotic end.[32] Falsembiante is the cleric in poetic cahoots with foreign influences, much as the papacy and its mendicants worked to further the geopolitical aims of the Angevins and the Capetian royal dynasty. Falsembiante thus typifies a late Duecento and later clearly Dantean rejection not only of courtly literature, but also Franco-Angevin political intrigue and their church allies.

Deception, Lust, and the Abandonment of the Cor Gentile

The character in the *Fiore* that represents the corruption of the church that, through wealth and fake earthly titles, seeks to dislodge *gentilezza* through fraudulent self-fashioning is the shape-shifting mendicant Falsembiante. The problem of false-seeming in the pursuit of vice is an important step toward unpacking *gentilezza* as

[31] Kevin Brownlee, "Jason's Voyage and the Poetics of Rewriting. The *Fiore* and the *Roman de la Rose*," in *The Fiore in Context: Dante, France, Tuscany*, eds. Zygmunt G. Baranski and Patrick Boyde (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 179-80.

[32] Timothy L. Stinson, "Illumination and Interpretation: The Depiction and Reception of Faus Semblant in 'Roman de La Rose' Manuscripts," *Speculum* 87, no. 2 (April 2012): 469–98.

central to seeing Dante use the *Fiore* to critique both Franco-Provençal cultural influences as well as the Angevin-Papal political alliance that pursued hegemonic control over the *Regno* and the northern and central Italian communes. Fictive nobility, clerical fraudulence, and the *menzogne* of Mala-Bocca are precisely what the *dolce stil novo* and the *Ordinances of Justice* aimed to eradicate. Part and parcel of that base culture was lust, such as how, after Amante was prevented from conquering the flower by the French militarism of Mala-Bocca and the other barons, he entrusts himself to Falsembiante, who uses deception to convince Amante to abandon reason, which only results in the sexual violation of the flower. Falsembiante, along with Dio d'Amor, plays the lead in assisting Amante in his quest after the barons representing French militarism—above all Gelosia and Mala-Bocca—deny his pursuit.[33] Thus, Falsembiante comes to represent the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of the clergy who allied with the French and Angevins, resulting in the abandonment of *gentilezza.*

When we last left Amante, he was denied the flower by the Provençal wind and the Norman thief, which, as we saw, represented French and Angevin attempts to unsettle the political landscape of Italy. In turn, Amante calls upon Ragione, who suggests that through Christ alone he can achieve true love.[34] However, Amante feels that Ragione's advice is "Fuor di tu' nome troppo l'otre misura" (*Fiore* 38.10). Ragione tries to explain that there is no love without reason.[35] Amante, however, ignores this advice and calls upon Amico, as we saw, to assist in his quest. Amico explains that to reach the flower, Amante must be humble and obedient when approaching Mala-Bocca, and "faccia di te come di su' fante" (*Fiore* 50.6).

Amico next suggests that Amante flatter La Vecchia and Gelosia with money and riches to free Bellacoglienza, the guardian of the flower. If, of course, Amante does not have money, Amico suggests that Amante should "far gran pro[m]essa" (*Fiore* 53.1) and swear by God and all the saints "Che ciascuna farai gran baronessa" (*Fiore* 53.4). As seen in the previous section, Amico is presented as trustworthy since he is not from Puglia. However, his deception here suggests that, like so many of Dante's contemporaries, Amico is an opportunist who believes that allying with the French and promising them lands and titles is the only way to achieve one's ends. Thus, we see the deceitful creation of a fictive nobility in the

[33] *Fiore* 78-79.
[34] *Fiore* 37-39.
[35] *Fiore* 41-45.

name of God indicative of Italians' opportunistic designs to side with foreigners. Amante's friend, then, is no friend at all, but a duplicitous traitor urging him to contribute to ongoing civil strife, turmoil, and moral decay that is coupled with the papal-Angevin intrigues that aimed to destabilize communes across central Italy. Rather than laying bare the characteristics of *gentilezza*, Amico encourages the abandonment of reason in favor of moral bankruptcy and deception to underscore the corruption and false nobility that typify a malevolent, vicious society.

In *Fiore* 80, Falsembiante offers his assistance to Amante: his companion, Costretta-Astinenza, explains that Falsembiante "sé governa co' sembianti / Che gli 'nsegnò sua madre Ipocresia. / I' porto il manto di papalardia / Per più tosto venir a tempo a' guanti" (*Fiore* 80.5-8). Being nurtured by hypocrisy captures the essence of Falsembiante, for "La ciera nostra par molto pietosa, / Ma nonn-è-mal nes[s]un che non pensiamo, / Ben paià-noi gente relegïosa" (*Fiore* 80.12-14). In the following sonnet, Falsembiante assures Amante that he has only the best of intentions: "Ch'altro c[h]'a lealtà ma' non pens'io" (*Fiore* 81.8). But, as explained in *Fiore* 80, Falsembiante serves only his mother, Ipocresia.

We then reach the monologue of Falsembiante, which encapsulates how lust, vainglory, and deceit are corruptors of *gentilezza*, just as were the Angevins and French culture more generally in Sonnets 21-23. In Sonnet 88, Falsembiante explains that he has chosen to don a Dominican habit because "dentro a' chiostri fug[g]o in salvitate, / Ché quivi poss'io dar le gran ghignate / E tuttor santo tenuto saròe" (*Fiore* 88.11-12). In essence, Falsembiante claims, "Chi tal rob'àe, non teme mai vergogna" (*Fiore*, 88.14). He then depicts the mendicant life as perfect for hypocrites, as they preach poverty while indulging in the fineries of the wealthy. Falsembiante does admit that true virtue prospers in the humblest of hearts; though, if he were to be around them, "i' sì mi 'nfignerei" (*Fiore* 91.11).

By abandoning reason, Amante gives himself over to Falsembiante's deceitful ways. And when Amante is ultimately unsuccessful in his quest for the flower via the means laid out by Falsembiante, the *Fiore* illuminates that the abandonment of reason's safe harbor, which Amante first failed to reach due to the intervention of Mala-Bocca, necessarily results in the impossibility of attaining true love. Amante's eroticizing of the flower, a product of his abandonment of Ragione that led him to linking himself to a deceptive friar who aimed to work with rather than against evil

barons, resulted in the destruction of the object of desire: he deflowered (*sfogliare*) the flower.

Falsembiante's ability to convince Amante to violate the flower, which ultimately leads to Amante's demise, has larger implications for those coming of age in the late Duecento, like Dante. The verb *sfogliare* possesses the double meaning of deflowering sexually but also of translation, in the sense of remaking a folium.[36] Casciani and Kleinhenz suggest that, in using *sfogliare* as a double entendre, "the author evokes the metaphors, symbols and erotic subject matter of the courtly tradition, as portrayed in the *Romance of the Rose*, but he also rewrites the poem using his own strategies and a new poetic style and vernacular."[37] By deflowering a poem that constellates around a deflowering, the author of the *Fiore* is divorcing himself and his literary culture from the courtly tradition by lexicographically critiquing its preoccupation with erotic love. But I believe we can also read this as Dante's criticism of Amante's abandonment of reason, which points to the actions of many of Dante's contemporaries: by linking himself to a corrupt, opportunistic cleric rather than reason, Amante deflowers not just the flower and the pursuit of *gentilezza*, but Italy itself.

This issue of deception and lustful pursuits is mirrored in Dante's linkage between erotic literature devoid of redemptive love and Franco-Angevin political designs in his post-exile works, above all the *Commedia*, a reminder that his disillusion with the papacy and its transalpine allies transcended the exile. In particular, Dante's presentation of the lustful and the troubadours points to his larger view of French cultural and political influence in Italy as well as Italians' abandonment of *gentilezza*. For example, when recounting her affair with her brother-in-law Paolo Malatesta, Francesca da Rimini tells Dante that "la prima radice / del nostro amor" (*Inferno* 5.124-5) was that "Noi leggiavamo un giorno per diletto / di Lancialotto come amor lo strinse" (*Inferno* 5.126-7). The eroticism of courtly literature led its readers to a perilous, adulterous end akin to that of Amante's demise stemming from deflowering the flower.[38]

Likewise, pointing to a linkage between Angevin political hegemony in Italy, Franco-Provençal literary influence, and

[36] Santa Casciani and Christopher Kleinhenz, "Introduction," in *The Fiore and the Detto d'Amore*, by Dante, eds. and trans. Casciani and Kleinhenz (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2000), 16.

[37] Ibid., 17-18.

[38] John Freccero, *In Dante's Wake: Reading from Medieval to Modern in the Augustinian Tradition* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016), 19-49.

mendicants as lustful deceivers is Dante's presentation of Brunetto Latini in *Inf.* 15 as a sodomite. First, as Alison Cornish argued, Latini committed "linguistic adultery" because he wrote his *Livres dou Tresor* in *langue d'oil*.[39] However, not only does this not require us to desexualize Latini's sin, but it also allows us to connect unfettered lust to the abandonment of *gentilezza* in the wake of the Angevin invasion. As mentioned earlier, Latini was an ardent supporter of the Angevins and, along with Jean de Meun, was in the retinue of the future pope Martin IV, who was made a cardinal by Urban IV and encouraged Charles of Anjou to invade Italy.[40] And Latini wrote his *Tresor* while in exile in France after his failed efforts to overthrow Ghibelline power in Florence. Latini discusses at length the political circumstances surrounding Dante's exile, and wishes that Dante find the "glorïoso porto" (*Inferno* 15.56) he pursued, language similar to the "buon porto" (*Fiore* 33.8) that Amante himself failed to reach due to Mala-Bocca. Given how the failure to reach *gentilezza* in the *Fiore* was due to Amante's erotic pursuit of the flower egged on by corrupt barons and clerics, we can see Latini as unrepentant both because of his personal life and his French leanings; that he wished Dante would eventually reach the harbor Amante failed to find, then, suggests that Dante uses Latini to underscore that Latini's sins—both his sodomy and his pro-French politics—prevented him from reaching *gentilezza*. Thus, given the eroticization of the pursuit of the flower in the *Fiore*, which is linked to the threat of the deprivation of Italy that the Angevins and their church allies posed, sexual deviance and Latini's pro-French leanings are not contradictory. In fact, Dante's presentation of him as a sodomite operates in tandem with his politics and parallels his attempt to distance himself from his predecessor, Jean de Meun, who was also in favor of Charles of Anjou's invasion and knew Latini personally. Latini, in addition to his purported sexual deviance, thus failed to defend Florentine political independence from Angevin encroachment and the literary language that represented it.[41]

Second, Dante's Latini explains that many among his number were clerics (*Inferno* 15.106-8). By linking Latini's literary adultery, political intrigues that led to his exile, and support of the

[39] Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 126-28.

[40] Montefusco, "*Roman de la Rose,*" 133.

[41] Glenn A. Steinberg doubts this, which should be noted. Steinberg, "Dante's Bookishness: Moral Judgment, Female Readers, and a 'Rerealization' of Brunetto Latini," *Modern Philology* 112, no. 1 (2014): 44. Contrast this with Steven Stowell, "Visualizing the Sodomites in Dante's *Commedia*," *Dante Studies* 126 (2008): 143–74.

Angevin-papal alliance while in France to clerics guilty of an adultery of the cloth because of their deceitful ways and sexual proclivities, Dante brings us back where we started: The Angevins, their Italian supporters, and clerics were Falsembiantes who threatened Italian independence through deception, fraud, and licentiousness. This is in contrast to Dante's treatment of the troubadours he encounters in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*; that said, the politics remains consistent. In *Purg.* 26, Dante encounters the twelfth-century troubadour Arnaut Daniel among the lustful.[42] While his place in *Purgatorio* indicates that he is not damned for his sins, it is most likely that Dante placed him among the lustful because of his loyalty to erotic over divine love.[43] Unlike Latini, who died unrepentant and admits that he died too soon to assist Dante in his poetic pursuits (*Inferno* 15.58-60), Arnaut Daniel could admit his former folly, not just in his own lustful ways but also as a troubadour who warbled erotic pursuits.[44] Also in *Purgatorio* is Sordello, the Mantuan troubadour who initially supported Charles of Anjou. Yet, it was his ultimate rejection of hypocrisy and his resistance to political intrigue that saved him for Dante. While he dabbled in erotic Occitan song, he, like Daniel, reformed himself and aimed to embrace the reason that Dante too pursued. More important, Sordello is the catalyst for Dante's long invective in *Purg.* 6 against Florence and Italy and is the main interlocutor for Dante's discussion of several thirteenth-century rulers, including Charles I and II of Anjou, in *Purg.* 7. While Dante praises Charles I for his virtues (*Purgatorio* 7.114), he slams Charles II as far inferior to his father; likewise, in *Purg.* 20 Dante has Hugh Capet include Charles I among his descendants who despoil Italy and bring vice and shame to his dynasty.[45] Third, there is Folquet de Marseilh, the lone troubadour in

[42] Maurice Bowra, "Dante and Arnaut Daniel," *Speculum* 27, no. 4 (October 1952): 459–74; Nathaniel B. Smith, "Arnaut Daniel in the *Purgatorio*: Dante's Ambivalence toward Provençal." *Dante Studies* 98 (1980): 99–109.

[43] William E. Burgwinkle, "Troubadours," in T*he Oxford Handbook of Dante*, eds. Manuele Gragnolati, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca E. Southerden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 146. Cf. Burgwinkle, "Modern Lovers: Evanescence and the Act in Dante, Arnaut and Sordello," in *Desire in Dante and the Middle Ages*, eds. Manuele Gragnolati, Tristan Kay, Elena Lombardi, and Francesca E. Southerden (London: Legenda, 2012), 14–28.

[44] *Purgatorio* 26.140-147. "Tan m'abellis vostre cortes deman, / qu'ieu no me puesc ni voill a vos cobrire. / Ieu sui Arnaut, que plor e vau cantan; / consiros vei la passada folor, / e vei jausen lo joi qu'esper, denan. / Ara vos prec, per aquella valor / que vos guida al som de l'escalina, / sovenha vos a temps de ma dolor." Also in *Purg.* 26 is Guido Guinizzelli, accused of homosexuality but who repented before death. See *Purgatorio* 26.74-93.

[45] *Purgatorio* 20.40-123.

Paradiso, whom Dante places there because he gave up love poetry to become a Cistercian and later Bishop of Toulouse.

Burgwinkle has recently argued that "Dante may have foreseen in the fates of these poets his own exile and wandering and, in essence, become his own creation, his own vision of the sad and spiteful poet, cleverer than the rest, condemned to performing for unappreciative audiences of wealth, power, and little else."[46] But as we have seen, Dante's linkage of political and clerical corruption to sexual deviance in the *Fiore* suggests that Dante presented these troubadours' rejection of erotic literature devoid of Christian love as indicative of their move toward a *gentilezza* that would also have included the Frenchmen that Dante would have abhorred. This is something that Latini, as opposed to those in *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* failed to do; and, in the case of Sordello, he used their literary talents to condemn those responsible for his exile, the roots of which can be found in allegorical form in the *Fiore* in the personages of Mala-Bocca, Amico, and Falsembiante. In short, whereas Dante's contemporaries in *Inferno* are condemned for their refusal to abandon eroticism, the troubadours themselves turned to moral lives that would allow them to eventually reach a *gentilezza* grounded in Christian virtue.

When read against the *Commedia*'s condemnation of erotic love without a redemptive turn as well as Franco-Angevin-Papal-Guelf intrigues, the *Fiore*'s Falsembiante is more than an allegorical mendicant helping Amante in his sexual conquests. Rather, he becomes an inverse rendering of the purity of heart, the *cor gentile*, which is for Dante the only way to pursue the *gentilezza* that can save Florence. Such a sentiment was present in the work of Dante's predecessors, such as Guittone d'Arezzo, who also saw the pursuit of a virtuous civic consciousness as an important element of the true *cor gentile*. Guittone's poetic impact on Dante is well known, as were his Guelf political leanings, long before Dante was exiled.[47] But the difference here is that by the time Dante wrote the *Fiore* much of the Guelf party had linked itself to the Angevins and Boniface, and the White-Black division in Florence had become a grave

[46] Burgwinkle, "Troubadours,"148.

[47] Teodolinda Barolini, "Dante and the Lyric Past," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 18-19; Roberto Antonelli, "Le letture fiorentine: le letterature volgari," in *Dante fra il settecentocinquantenario della nascita (2015) e il settecentenario della morte (2021)*. Vol. 1, eds. Enrico Malato and Andrea Mazzucchi (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2016), 255-72; Anthony Nussmeier, "Dante, Guinizzelli, Guittone, and the Politics of Literary Debate," *Textual Cultures* 7, no. 2 (2012): 43–72. In contrast, see Robert Hollander, "Dante and Cino Da Pistoia," *Dante Studies* 110 (1992): 201–31.

threat to Florentine political liberty, to Dante's position in Florence, and to *gentilezza* itself.

Thus, Dante felt that *gentilezza*—the love of Christ discussed by Ragione in the *Fiore* that the mendicant Falsembiante convinced Amante to reject—was under attack by false nobles, the Angevins and their Italian supporters, and corrupt clerics long before 1302. Dante and his political and literary milieux were thus furthering themselves from the French courtly tradition, hereditary nobility, a corrupt clergy, and an Italian licentiousness that linked itself to the Angevin-papal alliance that increasingly sought to destabilize the political landscape of central Italy. As the final section of this essay elucidates, there is also a direct critique on the abandonment of *gentilezza* by the church, the true facilitator of the corruption of Italian society because of its covetousness and stirring of political intrigues.

Falsembiante in Inferno: Guido da Montefeltro and the Mendicant Abandonment of Gentilezza

In both the *Fiore* and *Inferno*, mendicants, purportedly the most humble and incorruptible clerics, function metonymically for church corruption and duplicity. This is particularly important because mendicants operated in both the *Fiore* and *Inferno* as mendacious advisors who served a corrupt church and encouraged the abandonment of *gentilezza*. Dante remained angered by the papacy's support of Franco-Angevin political intervention, so long as it benefitted them. Boniface, of course, willingly opposed the French King Philip IV when expedient. Likewise, if the *Fiore* serves metaphorically, as I've argued thus far, for Dante's disillusion with the Angevins, then the mendicant Falsembiante parallels closely Guido da Montefeltro in *Inf.* 27, who advised Boniface VIII. In short, both Falsembiante and Guido da Montefeltro capture well how false-seeming mendicants provide cover for the clergy who feign humble servitude but in fact strive to support Franco-Papal political hegemony through deceit.

Beginning with *Fiore* 100-101, Falsembiante explains how he easily changes from one station in life to another and maintains his position in society through countless disguises of hypocrisy and deceit, as Falsembiante claims to do everything falsely (*fintamente*). He then explains that even Proteus, the great shapeshifter of ancient Greece, would be fooled by his trickery.[48] The idea of a protean mendicant also pervades Dante's encounter with Guido da

[48] *Fiore* 100.1-4.

Montefeltro in *Inf.* 27, whose deceitful advice for Boniface VIII placed him amongst the fraudulent councilors. Dante not only condemns Boniface's decision to absolve Guido for his sin of giving deceitful advice that led to the razing of the Colonna stronghold of Palestrina in 1298, a first step toward the eventual papal abandonment of Rome for Avignon in 1305.[49] He also reviles those who use the friar's habit for such ends.[50] And it is in Guido's description of himself in *Inf.* 27 where we see the deceit:

> Io fui uom d'arme, e poi fui cordigliero,
> credendomi, sì cinto, fare ammenda;
> e certo il creder mio venìa intero,
> se non fosse il gran prete, a cui mal prenda!,
> che mi rimise ne le prime colpe;
> e come e *quare*, voglio che m'intenda. (*Inferno* 27.67-72)

Guido's ability to switch between soldier and friar and back again demonstrates the protean nature of the duplicitous friar. Guido is Falsembiante incarnate, a real-life dissimulating mendicant who serves his mother hypocrisy, personified as Boniface, the head of the mother church.[51] Guido is constantly shifting and thus is always unlike himself. And, just as Falsembiante claims a fictive loyalty in *Fiore* 80, Guido claims to be the pope's man, but his denunciation of Boniface for his own hypocritical sins is an act of betrayal.

The parallels between Guido and Falsembiante continue. The linguistic similarities between Guido's and Falsembiante's self-representations underscore how Dante and his contemporaries excoriated mendicants who used the cloth to hide their true nature and their political intrigues. In the tercet immediately following the above-cited passage, Guido explains: "Mentre ch'io forma fui d'ossa e di polpe / che la madre mi diè, l'opere mie / non furon leonine, ma di volpe" (*Inferno* 27.73-75). *Fiore* 101 has similar

[49] It is worth noting that, despite his support of Charles of Valois's attack on Florence, Boniface was a steadfast opponent of the French king, Philip the Fair. In 1303, after Boniface's excommunication of Philip, Philip ordered Boniface arrested and to stand trial in France. Complicit in this attempt to arrest Boniface was Sciarra Colonna. Shortly thereafter, Boniface died. After the short reign of Benedict IX, the Frenchman Clement V relocated to Avignon, which Dante strongly condemned, along with the general increase in the papacy's temporal authority. See Chapter 1, "The Eagle's Flight," in Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested: An Intellectual History from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 25-49.

[50] Giuseppe Mazzotta, "Dante's Franciscanism,' in *Dante and the Franciscans*, ed. Santa Casciani (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 174.

[51] *Ibid.*, 181.

descriptions for Falsembiante: "Molto mi piaccion gente regolate, / Ché co·llor cuopr'i' meglio il mi' volpag[g]io" (*Fiore* 101.7-8).

This description of Falsembiante's foxlike nature is surrounded by parallels we see later in Dante's description of Guido in *Inf.* 27. If we read Sonnet 101, we see that Falsembiante prefers to be amongst the religious, as it is conducive to his ever-shifting hypocrisy and deceit:

> "I' sì so ben per cuor ogne linguag[g]io;
> Le vite d'esto mondo i' ò provate:
> Ch'un'or divento prete, un'altra frate,
> Or prinze, or cavaliere, or fante, or pag[g]io,
>
> Secondo ched i' veg[g]io mi' vantag[g]io;
> Un'altr'or son prelato, un'altra abate;
> Molto mi piaccion gente regolate,
> Ché co·llor cuopr'i' meglio il mi' volpag[g]io.
>
> Ancor mi fo romito e pellegrino,
> Cherico e avocato e g[i]ustiziere
> E monaco e calonaco e bighino;
>
> E castellan mi fo e forestiere,
> E giovane alcun'ora e vec[c]hio chino:
> A brieve mott'i' son d'ogni mestiere." (*Fiore*, 101.1-14)

This sonnet alludes to the perils of self-fashioning in the pursuit of deception and betrayal, an important social and moral critique of the church in the late Duecento. That Falsembiante can so easily switch from priest to prince to friar to abbot suggests a breakdown of barriers between the spiritual and the temporal, a critique that Dante would take up in both *Par.* 6 and *De Monarchia*, as Unn Falkeid has recently shown.[52] Falsembiante's ability to hide among friars because of his fox-line nature (*volpaggio*) likewise parallels Beatrice's discussion of useless philosophizing among deceitful preachers in *Par.* 29.[53] Falsembiante's desire to associate with clerics in order to hide his deceit is then the same invective laid against Guido.

[52] Falkeid, *The Avignon Papacy Contested*, 25-49.

[53] *Paradiso* 29.94-6. "Per apparer ciascun s'ingegna e face / sue invenzioni; e quelle son trascorse / da' predicanti e 'l Vangelio si tace." Beatrice continues that preachers spread fables and lies, leaving the flock ignorant, with great risk to their souls (*Paradiso* 29.103-109): "Non ha Fiorenza tanti Lapi e Bindi / quante sì fatte favole per anno / in pergamo si gridan quinci e quindi: / sì che le pecorelle, che non sanno, / tornan del pasco pasciute di vento, / e non le scusa non veder lo danno."

Such linguistically similar condemnations of the church capture how, for many within Florentine literary circles, the institutions designed to serve as society's moral compass in times of political crisis in fact undercut true *gentilezza*: rather than using Guidos and Falsembiantes to justify their politicking that destabilized places like Florence, Dante would suggest, the church should restore itself as the handmaiden of the true source of the *cor gentile*, the love of Christ. Likewise, Capetian political intervention—and papal support for it so long as it remained expedient—led to corruption, destabilization, and the abuse of clerical office for personal and financial gain.

Thus, we see Dante in the *Fiore* establishing himself as a moral and political authority. Barbara Seward argues that since politics "was of major importance to him, it is not surprising to find the entire Comedy suffused with his political opinions and the rose of heaven [in the *Commedia*] tinged with his political theory."[54] Likewise, Albert Ascoli suggests Dante was aiming to show this as early as *Vita Nuova*, as he came to see himself as the heir to Vergil, the greatest of the Roman poets.[55] Ascoli argues that, "slowly, almost imperceptibly, then, Dante has first moved Italian from the humble status of a language spoken even by women and children… to a universal, impersonal vehicle of the authoritative (poetry of rectitude), to an ideal language and an exalted poetic genre with which he is personally equated."[56] That he would use a deceitful mendicant as the mouthpiece for an anti-clerical invective in *Inferno*, just as had occurred in the *Fiore* with Falsembiante, cannot be a coincidence. Guido and Falsembiante are one in the same: liars and cheats who use deception to destroy what is good. Dante's manipulation of the *Fiore* while he was writing *Vita Nuova* and the use of similar language and characterizations in both the *Fiore* and *Commedia* suggest that the monologue of Falsembiante points to a pre-exile Dante beginning to articulate a poetics of love and nobility that become central to his critiques of a corrupt and politicized church in works such as the *Commedia* and *De Monarchia.*

The ultimate good, of course, is love grounded in pure reason. Thus, the "flower" of the *Fiore* is suffused with these same views of politics and the moral turpitude that colored his world both before and after the exile. In both the *Fiore* and the

[54] Seward, "Dante's Mystic Rose," 519.

[55] Albert R. Ascoli, "From *Auctor* to Author: Dante before the *Commedia*," in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 47-50.

[56] *Ibid.*, 60.

Commedia, the pilgrim reaches the flower. Eventually, Dante's *cor gentile* allows him to know a love that he could not articulate: "A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa; / ma già volgeva il mio disio e 'l velle, / sì come rota ch'igualmente è mossa, / l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle" (*Paradiso* 33.142-145).[57] But in the *Fiore*, as Dante was still trying to sort out his notion of *gentilezza* in the politically fraught environment of pre-exile Florence, Amante abandoned reason and entrusted himself to corrupt barons and the deceptive friar Falsembiante; in turn, all he did was deflower the flower, rendering it but an impure fragment of his erotic quest.[58] Had Amante listened to the reason that allowed Dante the pilgrim to reach his mystic rose and embrace it in its purest form, so pure that Dante felt unable to describe it in worldly terms, Amante would have been able to embrace the flower. More tellingly, Amante believes that he has succeeded in his pursuit despite the deflowering. Amante's ignorance, spurred on by clerical deceit, is his downfall. He will never know the truest, highest form of love—of *gentilezza*—as he has abandoned reason in exchange for the hypocrisy, deceit, and eroticism planted in him by corrupt barons and that a corrupt mendicant cultivated.

We return, then, to Falsembiante. After extolling his deceits, hypocrisy, lies—his *volpaggio*—he is still the greatest deceiver of them all. Despite openly admitting he is only loyal to hypocrisy, Falsembiante's lord Dio d'Amor asks if trusting him is folly. His response typifies the inversion of *gentilezza* that would eventually lead to Dante's exile at Boniface's behest: "Per Dio merzé, messer, non vi dottate, / Chéd i' vi do la fé, tal com'i' porto, / Ched i' vi terrò pura lealtate" (*Fiore* 127.9-11). Falsembiante had abandoned God long ago; his only lord was Ipocresia. For Dante and his contemporaries, Falsembiante captures the essence of real-life corrupt mendicants like Guido da Montefeltro. Rather than wed himself to God and ground himself in reason and virtue, Falsembiante/Guido embraces the corruption, discord, and hypocrisy that colored Dante's world. In this sense, when read against *Inf.* 27, the *Fiore* underscores the political strife of Dante's lifetime as well as the role dishonest mendicants played in perpetuating corruption and facilitating the political intrigues, foreign influences, and papal meddling that plagued Dante's Florence.

[57] Cf. Lino Pertile, "Does the *stilnovo* go to heaven," in *Dante for the New Millennium*, eds. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), 104-114.

[58] *Fiore* 230.9. "Sì ch'io allora il fior tutto sfogl[i]ai."

Dante's exile should be viewed in the same vein. Rather than the catalyst for Dante's invective against his contemporaries, the exile should be seen as the product of the instability of Italian city-states due in part to a politicized church and foreign influences such as the kings of France and the Angevins. As the *Fiore* was manipulated in the pre-exile cultural milieu that produced *Vita Nuova* and the *Ordinances of Justice*, it elucidates that Dante's political mind was developing and working toward its ultimate maturity. And even if Dante did not manipulate the *Fiore*, which some argue, its thematic and linguistic similarities to both *Vita Nuova* and the *Commedia* point to a shared vision of a politicized and corrupt church that was present long before Dante and others were cast out of Florence.

The exile is obviously important; Falsembiante becomes Guido da Montefeltro because of Dante's turn to political vitriol after the exile. But Falsembiante only becomes Guido because such a poetic blueprint existed long before the exile. In this sense, I agree with Mark Davie that "it seems reasonable to conclude that when Dante cites the *Fiore*, he is citing himself."[59] And if we are eventually proven wrong on attribution, the *Fiore* and the *Commedia* are at the very least the products of two like-minded individuals who believed that a corrupt church festooned with foxlike friars who collaborated with destabilizing forces like the Angevins and Valois was no small obstacle to true *gentilezza*. If the same fear of clerical false-seeming and hypocritical self-fashioning is present in both the *Fiore* and the *Commedia*, the political and religious climate of the late Duecento suddenly becomes deeply formative for Dante's poetics for the remainder of his exilic life.

Conclusion

In post-exile works, Dante privileges literary history as a mode for exploring his individual poetic voice in relation to the historical role of the poet. When writing *De vulgari eloquentia* and the *Commedia*, Dante came to view himself as the defender of Italian verse and thus of Italian cultural identity. Dante saw the *volgare* as a vehicle for social and political critique as well as a unifying force for the communication of a set of ideals. Moreover, there is a clear trajectory in *De vulgari eloquentia* from transalpine literary traditions such as *langue d'oil* and *langue d'oc*, to the Sicilian School,

[59] Mark I. Davie, "The *Fiore* Revisited in the *Inferno*," in *The Fiore in Context: Dante, France, Tuscany*, eds. Zygmunt G. Barański and Patrick Boyde (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 325.

to the Bolognese, to Dante.[60] I have suggested throughout, however, that Dante's formation in this regard began far earlier than *De vulgari eloquentia* and even before the exile. Dante's views of courtly literature, Franco-Angevin political interference, a corrupt papacy, and dishonest mendicants as threats to Florentine civic harmony predate 1302, as I have argued. His views here are also confirmed in that, aside from the threat of the Angevins, he saw the Capetian dynasty as the greatest threat to Italian freedom, the real *lupa* of *Inferno* 1.49-59. Later, in works such as *Convivio* (especially Book 4) and *De Monarchia*, Dante defines *gentilezza* as grounded in virtue and love of Christ. He then calls for a new emperor, one who would rid Italy of the French, the Angevins, and the corrupt papacy, one who would reform society and bring a new sense of nobility to the heirs of Rome. While Dante might have viewed Henry VII as this heir, it is also possible that Dante never had a particular individual in mind. Rather, this figure may have been eschatological or had not yet materialized. He was an idealized Christian heir of pagan Rome, come to instill virtue in society and lead it toward the ultimate form of nobility: loving union with Christ.[61]

We see all this developing in the *Fiore*. The manipulation of the *Roman de la Rose* into the *Fiore* points to poetic attempts to liberate Italy from French/Provencal cultural hegemony and Capetian/Angevin political influence, to condemn the corruption in the church, and to vilify the avaricious pride of Dante's contemporaries, which are all themes that have been highlighted in his post-exile works. One cannot deny the influence in Dante's Italy of courtly literature and Angevin designs for hegemony as well as a corrupt church and the general moral decay that preoccupied Dante's mind. Moreover, his involvement in the creation of the Florentine ruling class as articulated in the *Ordinances of Justice* informed his definition of *gentilezza* grounded not in landed power and military might, but in Christian virtue and civic engagement. The self-fashioning and deception for personal gain that we see in the *Fiore* were all formative elements in developing Dante's definition of *gentilezza* that pervaded later works. In circulation before the exile—amid French/Provençal cultural and literary dominance and political strife in Florence under the shadow of Angevin-Papal intrigues—the *Fiore* thus captures the essence of the political culture of Dante's Florence that informed the definition of *gentilezza* that pervaded his thought both before and after the exile.

[60] Joseph Luzzi, "Literary History and Individuality," 161-188.
[61] Davis, "Dante's Vision of History," 143-160. Also, see *Convivio* 4.6.20.