


# Historicizing Italian Literature in the Early Sixteenth Century: Pietro Bembo's *Prose*<sup>1</sup>

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The *Prose di messer Pietro Bembo nelle quali si ragiona della volgar lingua*, first printed in Venice in 1525, has a pivotal role in the history of Italian Renaissance culture. The work, cast in dialogue form, provides — as is well known — an answer to the urgent issue of the lack of a common linguistic standard for the vernacular. Its three books take place during three days and report the conversations between Pietro's own brother Carlo Bembo, the Genoese courtier Federico Fregoso, the Florentine Giuliano de' Medici and the Ferrarese poet Enrico Strozzi. The dialogue, and its proposal of archaic Tuscan as the normative standard for the language question, was — as is also well known — rapidly accepted, and was to shape the history of Italian language and literature for centuries afterwards. Bembo's dialogue first reflects on the diversity of Italian vernaculars, their relationship with Latin and Provençal, and the preferred vernacular (book I), before expounding on rhetorical matters (book II) and the main points of grammar (book III). As well as establishing which models were to be followed while writing in the vernacular, it also codified a canon of authors which consisted mainly in the great Tuscan authors of the fourteenth century, above all Petrarch and Boccaccio.

This codification was based on a series of literary value judgements, ones underpinned by Bembo's own reconstruction of the history of the previous vernacular authors. The beginning of the second book of Pietro Bembo's *Prose* (II, 2) includes in fact a schematic history of vernacular literature, culminating in Petrarch's and Boccaccio's production. In its definitive form, this account mentions a handful of prose writers and thirty different vernacular poets: twenty-five coming before Dante and in part with him (but for five of these, says Bembo, there are no surviving poems), another three contemporary to Dante but (according to Bembo) surviving him, and finally Petrarch.<sup>2</sup> From these proportions alone, it is clear that Bembo's historical reconstruction privileges the earliest, pre-Dantean poetic tradition. And yet, in spite of this emphasis, according to Carlo Dionisotti, Bembo did not distinguish among the vernacular poets that came before Dante.<sup>3</sup> In his important study of the redactional history of the *Prose*,

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<sup>2</sup> Since none of the editorial interventions in the Marcolini (1538) and Torrentino (1549, posthumous) editions of the *Prose* seems to affect this passage (or the other passages of Bembo's dialogue on the vernacular that are of interest for this paper), its definitive form is already established by the *princeps* edition (Tacuino, 1525). On Bembo's last will for what concerns the *Prose*, see Fabio M. Bertolo, Marco Cursi, and Carlo Pulsoni, *Bembo ritrovato. Il postillato autografo delle "Prose"* (Rome: Viella, 2018).

<sup>3</sup> See Dionisotti's note to the passage (all translations are my own unless otherwise noted): "Come già nell'elenco del libro I, cap. X, il Bembo non fa qui differenze di generazioni e di scuole fino al Cavalcanti incluso. Numericamente, l'elenco rappresenta un buon passo avanti rispetto alle precedenti rassegne dell'antica poesia volgare, ma esso anche rivela una certa impazienza: il Bembo era troppo impegnato in una ricerca linguistica e metrica valida per l'età sua, per poter anche guardare al passato remoto con distacco e insieme puntiglio di storico. Così anche qui, dove la lezione del *De vulgari eloquentia* è pure evidente, di una lezione si tratta imperfettamente appresa. Le distinzioni che l'opera dantesca suggeriva sono trascurate senza apparente motivo. Solo il gruppo dei poeti bolognesi [...] risulta compatto nell'elenco. Sono invece mescolati i poeti siciliani e meridionali della prima

moreover, Mirko Tavosanis remarks that, in the passage from the first manuscript version to the *editio princeps*, this long list of poets is modified according to criteria that are not entirely transparent.<sup>4</sup> And yet, if in Bembo's eyes all the twenty-five poets preceding Dante were a completely undifferentiated group, in my view it remains unclear and problematic why he reworked their catalogue. On the subject of other revisions, and concerning Bembo's judgment on the Sicilians (I, 7: here reproduced at the end of the section "Redactional Stages Considered"), Tavosanis remarks that they seem to originate from the improved knowledge regarding this group of poets that Bembo had acquired thanks to the Vatican Latin 3214 manuscript. He argues that this modification runs in parallel with other small alterations that can be found in Bembo's autograph of the *Prose*.<sup>5</sup>

The aim of this study is to analyze all the revisions made by Bembo in relation to passages of the *Prose* where an historicizing perspective on the early poetic tradition can be found, and in so doing to test the hypothesis as to whether such revisions are related to changes of perspective, fostered by an enrichment of Bembo's historical knowledge thanks to the acquisition of new sources or further consideration of them. The ultimate purpose is to verify whether through these different redactional stages—carried out in two main phases over the period 1515–1525—we can identify an evolving outlook in Bembo's understanding of pre-Petrarchan authors. The article has five main sections, in which we explore: all the different redactional stages of the *Prose* and their dating; then, Bembo's sources and the chronology of their acquisition; the revisions occurring in the autograph manuscript; the revisions in the stage which lead to the 1525 print; and finally Bembo's historicizing perspective as it can be reconstructed in its evolving state by means of the analysis of the various passages and their revisions.

## Redactional Stages Considered

At the outset, it is useful to recall and clearly distinguish the different textual layers that we have at our disposal, especially since two of them are actually preserved in the same volume, the autograph manuscript Vatican Latin 3210 (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana). On its pages, Bembo has in fact copied a complete version of the *Prose*, one that he has then proceeded to revise. In the Vatican Latin 3210 manuscript, then, we have at least two different versions of

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scuola [...] con i poeti toscani [...] e fra questi anche non è fatta distinzione d'età né di scuola" (Pietro Bembo, *Prose e rime*, ed. Carlo Dionisotti [Turin: Unione tipografico-ed. torinese, 1978], 129n1; "As already in the list in Book I, ch. X, Bembo does not distinguish here generations and schools up to Cavalcanti. With respect to numbers, the list is a good step forward from previous reviews of vernacular poetry, but it is also indicative of some impatience. Bembo was too engaged in a linguistic and metrical research valid for his age to allow space to attend to the distant past with the detachment and meticulousness of an historian. Thus, even here, where the lesson of the *De vulgari eloquentia* is apparent, it is nevertheless imperfectly apprehended. The distinctions suggested by Dante's work are overlooked for no clear reason. Only the group of the Bolognese poets [...] forms an identifiable unit in the list. The Sicilian and Southern Italian poets of the first school are instead mixed [...] with the Tuscan poets [...] and also among these no distinctions are made according to school or period"). Similar remarks can be found also concerning other passages in the same edition and in Mario Pozzi, ed., *Trattatisti del Cinquecento* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1978), 112–113.

<sup>4</sup> Mirko Tavosanis, *La prima stesura delle "Prose della volgar lingua:" fonti e correzioni. Con edizione del testo* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2002), 111. The critical edition Pietro Bembo, "*Prose della volgar lingua:" l'editio princeps del 1525 riscontrata con l'autografo Vaticano latino 3210*, ed. Claudio Vela (Bologna: CLUEB, 2001), deals with the same material but is based on 1525 *editio princeps* placed in conjunction with the autograph manuscript. Bembo's digitized autograph manuscript can be seen in the Digital Vatican Library website: [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.3210](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3210).

<sup>5</sup> Tavosanis, *La prima stesura*, 110.

the dialogue: the text that has been copied in the first instance, and the same text after all the revisions were made. Before the 1525 print the *Prose* went through further revisions, probably carried out in another manuscript copy now lost, that was the base-text for the *editio princeps*. The text of that first printed edition therefore incorporates these further revisions and constitutes the third version of Bembo's dialogue, as well as the last relevant one in the framework of this article.

As for the dating of these different versions, while the print one can be traced with some degree of accuracy to the summer of 1525, assigning a precise date to the manuscript version and its revisions is not so straightforward. The first manuscript version, which we might call the "form A" ("stato A" for Tavoanis), must have been completed after January 1515, and maybe after 1516. At least some of the revisions have been added after Bembo received a manuscript (now Vatican Latin 3214) in November 1523, since in the relevant passages he quotes texts that he read in that manuscript. Tavoanis argues quite convincingly that at least some passages of the "form A" must have been written before 1517 and have been subsequently deleted or changed due to evolving historical circumstances.<sup>6</sup> But it is obviously difficult to put a precise date on revisions that could have taken place over a period spanning several years.

For greater clarity, this is how the above-mentioned passage about the Sicilians (I, 7) reads in the three different versions (the bold lettering indicates the variant readings at the end of the final two versions):

Tuttavolta de' Siciliani poco altro testimonio ci ha, che a noi rimasto sia, se none il grido; ché poeti antichi, che se ne sia la cagione, essi non possono gran fatto mostrarci. ("Form A")

Tuttavolta de' Siciliani poco altro testimonio ci ha, che a noi rimaso sia, se none il grido; ché poeti antichi, che che se ne sia la cagione, essi non possono gran fatto mostrarci, **se non sono cotali cose sciocche e di niun prezzo, che oggimai non si leggono per alcuno.** (Final autograph version, or "Form A" after the revisions)<sup>7</sup>

Tuttavolta de' Siciliani poco altro testimonio ci ha, che a noi rimaso sia, se none il grido; ché poeti antichi, che che se ne sia la cagione, essi non possono gran fatto mostrarci, se non sono cotali cose sciocche e di niun prezzo, **che oggimai poco si leggono.** (1525 *editio princeps*)

## Bembo's Manuscripts of Early Vernacular Poetry

Let us now discuss in more detail which sources Bembo had and when he obtained them.<sup>8</sup> We will move from the most indisputable sources and time frames to the ones that are most debatable and hence the most difficult to reconstruct with some degree of certainty.

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<sup>6</sup> Tavoanis, *La prima stesura*, 17–43.

<sup>7</sup> Actually Bembo originally wrote *nessun prezzo*, and the form *nessun* has been replaced by *niun* in a subsequent interlinear correction to this passage (which has been inserted in margins of Vatican Latin 3210), but it seems unnecessary to add a fourth layer to the analysis.

<sup>8</sup> On Bembo's library Massimo Danzi's work is especially important: *La biblioteca del cardinal Pietro Bembo* (Geneva: Droz, 2005). However, this text is primarily concerned with an inventory of Bembo's Rome library in his late years, where vernacular works are patently missing or underrepresented.

First of all, we still have the already mentioned manuscript that Bembo received in November 1523. Now known as Vatican Latin 3214, this manuscript containing the *Novellino* and an anthology of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century poems was copied for Bembo from a now lost manuscript, one probably dating from the fourteenth century. The copy was then sent to him by the Friulian humanist Giulio Camillo Delminio, whom Bembo thanks for his support in a letter dated 18 November 1523.<sup>9</sup> In this case, we can therefore ascertain with a high level of precision what Bembo could read and from which moment he had this source at his disposal.

We know that Bembo already had — and had used while writing his *Prose* — other sources, most notably a now untraceable poetic anthology of which we have a partial copy in the form of the so-called “Raccolta Bartoliniana” (Florence, Accademia della Crusca, 53). Between 1527 and 1533, the Florentine abbot Lorenzo Bartolini transcribed this manuscript of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century lyric poetry drawing from three main sources, one of them being Bembo’s text. Bartolini copied in fact several poems that had not been printed in the celebrated 1527 print edition, the *Sonetti e canzoni di diversi antichi autori toscani*, more commonly known as the *Giuntina delle rime*. He divided them into authorial sections, starting with a source text owned by Ludovico Beccadelli. He then proceeded to add at the end of each section the poems of the authors that he found in a second source, a manuscript owned by Giovanni Brevio. At the same time, Bartolini also registered with a different and darker ink (black, as opposed to brown) all the various readings that could be found in this new manuscript for the poems he had already copied, and indicated when he was switching from the first source to the second one. He proceeded to do the same with Bembo’s text, this time using red ink for the new variants. And finally, he also added the different readings that he could find penned into a copy of the 1527 *Sonetti e canzoni* that we also still have (Milan, Biblioteca Trivulziana, Triv. L. 1144), even though it is clear that he could not complete his collation. According to Michele Barbi, this was likely because he had to leave Padua before he could reproduce all the poems he wanted. Barbi also established that Bembo’s text was closely related to an extant fourteenth-century manuscript, the Chigi L.VIII.305 (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana), containing almost the same poems in an identical order, and, we should therefore understand Bembo’s manuscript as being a collateral manuscript of this Chigi codex.<sup>10</sup> We can summarize the situation for this manuscript source by noting the following. First, we have copies of some poems in Bartolini’s hand. Second, for other poems, we know that they were in Bembo’s text, but we only have Bartolini’s notes of collation; and we can hypothesize with a variable degree of certainty the presence of yet other poems. And finally, we can also assume that Bembo owned this manuscript before 1515 and probably already in 1511. This chronology is supported by a letter, dated 27 November 1511, that Bembo sent to his friend Giovan Battista Ramusio with the opening lines of all the poems by Guido Cavalcanti that he had in his possession. In this letter, Bembo asks his correspondent whether he had any others by the same poet. In another letter to the same friend dating from 4 February 1512 he writes of having several poems by Guido Guinizzelli and notes that these are ones that Ramusio did not own.<sup>11</sup> Since in the anthology partially copied by Bartolini there were several poems by

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<sup>9</sup> See letter 457 in Pietro Bembo, *Lettere*, ed. Ernesto Travi (Bologna: Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, 1987), 2:192–193. The digitized manuscript can be seen in the Digital Vatican Library website: [https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Vat.lat.3214](https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.3214).

<sup>10</sup> Michele Barbi, *Studi sul canzoniere di Dante, con nuove indagini sulle raccolte manoscritte e a stampa di antiche rime italiane: in servizio dell’edizione nazionale delle opere di Dante promossa dalla Società Dantesca Italiana* (Florence: G. C. Sansoni, 1915), 121–206.

<sup>11</sup> See letters 312 and 314 in Bembo, *Lettere*, 2:55–57.

both Guinizzelli and Cavalcanti, it is reasonable to assume that, in these two letters, Bembo was drawing upon and referring to this source, and hence that he already had it in his hands by 1511.

The hypothesis that, in writing the *Prose*, Bembo also exploited at least a third manuscript has been advanced by Tavosanis on the basis of an analysis of all passages taken from thirteenth-century poets quoted in the dialogue.<sup>12</sup> Tavosanis' hypothesis is that this manuscript was a copy of the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, the well-known anthology of earlier poetry commissioned around 1477 by Lorenzo de' Medici to be sent to Federico d'Aragona, the son of the king of Naples. In a recent article, I have expanded upon Tavosanis' argument by investigating whether Bembo knew the accompanying letter which opened the anthology, and have provided new supporting elements for this view.<sup>13</sup> Still other corroborating evidence can be found for Bembo's use of a copy based on the *Raccolta Aragonesa*.

The caption on top of folio 1r of the Chigi manuscript M.VII.142 (probably copied in the third decade of the sixteenth century) informs us that what follows in the book are several very old texts written by different authors and the volume is the property of Girolamo de' Rossi (1505-1565), apostolic protonotary (appointed 1517), and his friends. The manuscript is another partial copy of the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, from which it draws part of the anthological selection of poems and — most notably — the life of Dante written by Boccaccio.<sup>14</sup> This was the second text copied in the now lost codex sent to Federico d'Aragona, immediately after the prefatory letter signed by Lorenzo de' Medici (but in all likelihood written by Poliziano), which offers an important historicized catalogue of earlier vernacular poets. These elements bolster the hypothesis that Bembo knew the Aragonesa anthology and in particular its opening letter, because Girolamo de' Rossi had sufficiently close ties with Bembo for him to be considered one of his friends. This is made quite apparent by Bembo's letters to de' Rossi. Some of these letters discuss early vernacular texts, and other ones not directly addressed to de' Rossi refer to him. In one such letter, dating 21 April 1526, Bembo informs his correspondent of how Girolamo de' Rossi spent time with him quite often.<sup>15</sup> It seems plausible, then, that at least part of the texts preserved in the Chigi manuscript M.VII.142 could have been passed on to de' Rossi by his friend Bembo. Bembo was much older than de' Rossi. When they started corresponding, circa 1525, de' Rossi was around twenty years old, while Bembo was in his mid-fifties, and had better access to old vernacular texts. What is more, the above-mentioned manuscript copied by Bartolini was also a copy of the *Raccolta Aragonesa* owned by Giovanni Brevio, who was operating in the same environments as Bembo during the same period of time.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the quotations studied by Tavosanis, then, the availability of a copy of the *Aragonesa* helps to explain how Bembo could mention Guittone d'Arezzo among the poets whose poems he was able to read. He also quotes several times specific forms used by Guittone.

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<sup>12</sup> Tavosanis, *La prima stesura*, 85–97.

<sup>13</sup> Maria Clotilde Camboni, "Paradigms of Historical Development: The *Raccolta Aragonesa*, Landino, and Bembo's 'Prose,'" *MLN* 134, no. 1 (2019): 22–41.

<sup>14</sup> Barbi, *Studi sul canzoniere di Dante*, 247–259.

<sup>15</sup> See letter 670 in Bembo, *Lettere*, 2:353. Other letters where Bembo mentions de' Rossi are 548, 566, 638, 689, 716, 753, 765, 768, 769, 795 of the same edition. The letters addressed to him include: 540, 541, 599, 683, 699, 760, 762, 780, 783, 796, 814, 860.

<sup>16</sup> On Brevio, see Gennaro Ferrante, "Dante nelle postille inedite di Giovanni Brevio sul Petrarca aldino (1514) e sugli scritti di Trissino (1529). Studio e Edizione," *Rivista di studi danteschi* 12 (2012): 164–201; Trovò's introduction in Giovanni Brevio, *Le novelle di Giovanni Brevio*, ed. Sabrina Trovò (Padua: Il poligrafo, 2003), 15–41; Martin L. McLaughlin, "Un petrarchista legge la 'Commedia': il Dante postillato di Giovanni Brevio," in *La filologia in Italia nel Rinascimento*, eds. Carlo Caruso and Emilio Russo (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2018), 101–116. On Brevio's manuscript, see Barbi, *Studi sul canzoniere di Dante*, 172–181.

For such cases, it is notable that neither in Vatican Latin 3214 nor in any other of Bembo's manuscripts are there or were there poems attributed to Guittone. Thus, once more the most likely and economical hypothesis for his access to such poems is by means of the *Aragonese*.

Still other sources may well have been available to Bembo. For example, among poets contemporary or near contemporary to Dante, Bembo mentions the Florentine's own son Iacopo Alighieri, passing on him a rather harsh judgement. Once more, no poems attributed to Iacopo can be found in Vatican Latin 3214, the *Raccolta Aragonese*, or Bembo's manuscript. However, we can find a sonnet attributed to Iacopo present in Chig. M.VII.142.<sup>17</sup> Also no poems attributed to Guido delle Colonne are to be found in Bembo's three main sources, despite the fact that Bembo puts him in the group of poets whose works can still be read. And in the *Prose* Bembo quotes a passage by Brunetto Latini (III, 66), a few lines from a sonnet by Boccaccio (III, 65), and others from a sonnet attributed to Petrarch that is not in his *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (I, 10), because, Bembo says, he excluded it from his main work on grounds of its insufficient quality. Once more, it is noteworthy that none of these three texts was in the three main anthologies that we suppose Bembo to have used.

### The Revisions in Vatican Latin 3210

Let us now start from Bembo's revisions in his autograph manuscript, and more specifically from those in the long list of pre-Dantean poets whose poems could still be read in book II, 2. To avoid repetition and for greater clarity, I present the different orders of this list of poets in all three different versions of the text considered here. We will then discuss the changes that took place in the passage from manuscript to print. The new insertions and the authors whose position changes in each passage are highlighted in bold.

"Form A" (Vat. lat. 3210)	Vat. lat. 3210, revised	1525 <i>editio princeps</i>
Giacomo da Lentini	<b>Giacomo da Lentini</b>	
Pier delle Vigne	Pier delle Vigne	Pier delle Vigne
Bonagiunta da Lucca	Bonagiunta da Lucca	Bonagiunta da Lucca
Guittone d'Arezzo	Guittone d'Arezzo	Guittone d'Arezzo
Rinaldo d'Aquino	Rinaldo d'Aquino	Rinaldo d'Aquino
Lapo Gianni	Lapo Gianni	Lapo Gianni
Francesco Ismera	Francesco Ismera	Francesco Ismera
Forese Donati	Forese Donati	Forese Donati
<b>Guido Orlandi</b>		
Gianni Alfani	Gianni Alfani	Gianni Alfani

<sup>17</sup> Pozzi remarks that the presence of Iacopo Alighieri is rather bizarre and probably due to the mention by Boccaccio in his life of Dante (*Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, 113). Similar remarks already appear in Bembo, *Prose e rime*, with the additional elucidation that knowledge about Iacopo could not come from the Alighieri family tradition in Verona (130). Iacopo is also absent from the exegetical tradition of the *Commedia* until Landino, who mentions him but without qualifying him as a poet. However, Boccaccio's mention of Iacopo and the harsh judgment about his poetic abilities do not explain entirely Bembo's own stance, since both the reference and associated judgment also extend to his older brother Pietro. What is more, Bembo clearly states that poems by Iacopo were still available to be read. It is possible that he had in mind Iacopo's *Divisione*, which is transmitted by more than 150 manuscripts and is also one of the print paratexts in the 1477 Venetian print of the *Commedia* produced by Vindelino da Spira, with a caption explicitly attributing the text to "Iacobo figliuolo di Dante Allighieri di Firenze."

		<b>Brunetto Latini</b>
		<b>Giacomo da Lentini</b>
Mazzeo di Ricco da Messina	Mazzeo di Ricco da Messina	Mazzeo di Ricco da Messina
Guido delle Colonne	Guido delle Colonne	Guido delle Colonne
	<b>Re Enzo</b>	Re Enzo
	<b>Federico II</b>	Federico II
Onesto da Bologna	Onesto da Bologna	Onesto da Bologna
Semprebene da Bologna	Semprebene da Bologna	Semprebene da Bologna
Brunetto Latini	<b>Brunetto Latini</b>	
Guido Guinizzelli	Guido Guinizzelli	Guido Guinizzelli
Lupo degli Uberti	Lupo degli Uberti	Lupo degli Uberti
	<b>Guido Orlandi</b>	Guido Orlandi
Guido Cavalcanti	Guido Cavalcanti	Guido Cavalcanti

First of all, we should note that two new names are added in the margins, those of Federico II and his son Enzo, and this raises the broader issue of which poets enter into Bembo's list and which ones do not. In the sources available to Bembo, there were in fact poems attributed to several authors who are not mentioned in this catalogue, while those listed here at *Prose* II, 2 are mostly named elsewhere in Bembo's dialogue. The main exceptions are Rinaldo d'Aquino, Forese Donati, and Mazzeo di Ricco da Messina, and five further poets whose poems had been lost and whose names Bembo drew from Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, and Iacopo Alighieri.

What is especially interesting to note is that the only other mention of Enzo is in a revision as well, where Bembo inserts a passage from his canzone "S'eo trovasse pietanza" as an example (III, 4). This quotation is clearly taken from the newly acquired Vatican Latin 3214, since the same poem was probably present also in Bembo's anthology that was partially copied by Bartolini, although here it was attributed to Semprebene da Bologna, as it is in the collateral manuscript Chigi L.VIII.305. It is clear, then, that Enzo's name has been added in the historicizing frame presented in II, 2 for contextual reasons, in order to not leave out an author whose distinctive linguistic choices had been an example. In fact, no earlier poets named in other passages of the *Prose* are left out of this list—with one apparent exception that will be considered shortly.

As for Federico II, a passage from his "Poi ch'a voi piace, Amore" had already been quoted in the "form A" of the *Prose* (III, 68). Here, the most plausible explanation for the insertion of his name into the historical catalogue is that Bembo had simply forgotten to add it, and had realized this omission while carrying out the revisions related to Enzo. We should also consider that, in the Vatican Latin 3214, the caption attributing "Poi ch'a voi piace, Amore" to Federico II immediately follows Enzo's "S'eo trovasse pietanza." In this way, the manuscript source and its material form would have provided Bembo with an immediate reminder of his oversight. This is not, however, the only oversight on his part, as we will see. It seems plausible in fact that Bembo progressively perfected the historicizing perspective presented in the *Prose* not only because he was acquiring new knowledge, and this brought with it a greater attentiveness and interest in these matters. This point—supported by the manuscript evidence presented above—has not been sufficiently acknowledged in previous scholarship.

The other main change is the relocation of Guido Orlandi, who goes from his previous position before the Bolognese poets and a group of Sicilians to about ten places further ahead, in a position close to Guido Cavalcanti. This modification can also be explained by means of a

closer examination of Vatican Latin 3214. This manuscript in fact preserves three poetic exchanges between Cavalcanti and Orlandi, made up of seven correspondence sonnets in total, of which five were not present in Bembo's previous sources. Therefore, it seems plausible that Bembo decided to move the less well-known Guido nearer to the more celebrated one, because he realized that they were close in chronology. We might ask why he did not realize this chronological proximity earlier, considering that he already had in his available sources a poetic correspondence in sonnet form between Cavalcanti and Orlandi, as well as the sonnet, "Onde si move, e donde nasce Amore?" This sonnet, according to the captions in the manuscripts, was sent by Orlandi to Cavalcanti, and ostensibly brought about the composition of "Donna me prega."

The most plausible hypothesis here is that when Bembo first completed the first two books in April 1512, he was relying on far fewer sources, perhaps little more than the anthology later partially copied by Bartolini, and at this time too he was not as strongly concerned with historical matters.<sup>18</sup> This would be rather understandable, considering that an anthology of this kind gives almost no points of reference by which to establish a chronology. Still, other texts that we know Bembo had at his disposal offered some historicizing elements, such as the already mentioned Aragonese prefatory letter and Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*. However, the available evidence and earlier studies suggest that he probably acquired both of these sources later—again, we cannot provide a precise moment, but the earliest and most probable date for Bembo's knowledge of the *De vulgari eloquentia* is Trissino's first stay in Rome in 1514.<sup>19</sup>

The knowledge of these texts prompted Bembo to edit his dialogue, but he probably did not have time nor the interest for a thorough revision.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, some inaccuracies or misconceptions remain. One example is the position of Gianni Alfani, adjacent to that initially occupied by Guido Orlandi, and also introduced in Book III, 66 as a very early poet ("rimator molto antico"). This is even more remarkable considering that Bembo could read in the anthology lent to Bartolini "Guido, quel Gianni ch'a te fu l'altrieri," that is, Alfani's sonnet addressed to Cavalcanti, with an explicit caption spelling out the fact that that text had been sent to Cavalcanti. Unlike Orlandi's own placement, Alfani's position remains unchanged. Bembo did not go back to his first source, and it is also possible that he did not have the means to do so at all times. From a letter that his secretary Cola Bruno sent to Ramusio in April 1513, we know in fact that in that moment Bembo did not have with him in Rome most of his materials concerning vernacular poetry.<sup>21</sup> It is highly probable that for his work on the vernacular he had

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<sup>18</sup> We know from Bembo's letters that a redaction of the first two books was completed at the very beginning of April 1512 and, in that period, it was sent to his Venetian friends in order to be revised: see the above-mentioned letter 314 and especially the following 315 in Bembo, *Lettere*, 2:56–59.

<sup>19</sup> Carlo Pulsoni, "Il 'De Vulgari Eloquentia' tra Colocci e Bembo," in *Angelo Colocci e gli studi romanzi*, eds. Corrado Bologna and Marco Bernardi (Vatican City: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2008), 463. I hope to tackle the impact of encountering Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* and the Aragonese prefatory letter on Bembo's historical perspective in a monograph that I am currently writing.

<sup>20</sup> Tavosanis, in *La prima stesura*, remarks that Bembo did not even revise any of the passages that he had already quoted from his previous sources comparing their readings in the new ones (38). He also notes two mistakes in Bembo's quotations that result in incorrect metrical schemes (*ibid.*, 85, 92). For an inconsistency in III, 77 due to an insertion in the passage between manuscript and print, which remained in all successive editions, see Bembo, *Prose e rime*, 306. For others, see below.

<sup>21</sup> The letter, highlighted by Carlo Dionisotti, has been partially reproduced in Dante Alighieri, *Rime*, ed. Domenico De Robertis (Florence: Le Lettere, 2002), 2:211. See also Maria Clotilde Camboni, "Da molti desiderate. Le canzoni citate in 'Rerum vulgarium fragmenta' 70 a Venezia prima dell'Appendix aldina," *Carte romanze* 9, no. 1 (2021): 238–239.

taken notes from his sources and was mainly relying on those, not the original manuscripts.<sup>22</sup> There are other elements that point in this direction.<sup>23</sup>

Among the small alterations taking place in parallel with the first revision of the judgment concerning the Sicilians quoted by Tivosanis and being made in this same stage of the work, there is also the recasting of a passage in the first book (I, 17). This sequence will undergo further changes in the stage leading to the printed edition, but let us consider first those that take place in Bembo's autograph. Discussing how, in the most archaic period, the Florentine language was still coarse, Giuliano de' Medici's character lists a number of ancient vernacular poets whose poems were replete with rough expressions. In its first redaction in the "form A," the list is made up of the following names: Guido Guinizzelli, Guido Cavalcanti, Farinata degli Uberti. In a second moment, Guinizzelli is expunged and the following three names are inserted in the margins: Guittone, "il Notaio" (i.e., Giacomo da Lentini), and ser Brunetto (Latini). The latter's name is then crossed out.

Guinizzelli's name was probably removed because he was neither Tuscan nor Florentine. However, once again one wonders why he had been inserted in the first place. The erroneous view that Guinizzelli hailed from Florence can be found in several sources, but another and perhaps more likely possibility is that the geographical provenance of several authors, albeit spelled out in manuscripts' captions, had been omitted by Bembo in his working notes.<sup>24</sup> This would explain how another Bolognese author, Semprebene, is explicitly indicated as Tuscan in a passage of the third book. This particular passage discusses how some verbal forms probably coming from Sicily had not been accepted by Tuscan authors except the most ancient ones, such as Semprebene (III, 34). These forms are in fact used in "Como lo giorno quand'è dal maitino"

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<sup>22</sup> About the usage of compiling record or card-indexes, see Carlo Vecce, "Bembo e Poliziano," in *Agnolo Poliziano poeta scrittore filologo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi (Montepulciano, 3-6 novembre 1994)*, eds. Vincenzo Fera and Mario Martelli (Florence: Le Lettere, 1998), 484-485. Specifically about one such card-index by Bembo, Carlo Vecce, "Bembo e Cicerone," *Ciceroniana* 9 (1996): 147-59. About the marginalia that could be used to assemble them, with an edition of some by Bembo, see Elisa Curti, *Tra due secoli: per il tirocinio letterario di Pietro Bembo* (Bologna: Gedit, 2006), 17, 48-56, 219-261. More in general, on this way of working and reading the sources, with a special focus on Equicola (but references to Bembo and Castiglione as well), see Alessandra Villa, *Istruire e rappresentare Isabella d'Este: il Libro de natura de amore di Mario Equicola* (Pisa: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 2006), 58-62. The hypothesis that Machiavelli relied on materials of this kind while writing his *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, which could help explain several of the author's errors, is advanced by Mario Martelli, *Machiavelli e gli storici antichi: osservazioni su alcuni luoghi dei "Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio"* (Rome: Salerno, 1998), 114, 128, 140, 156, 159.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, in *Prose*, III, 51 Bembo says that among those using the form *redire* there was Cino in his *canzoni*. However, Cino uses this term in "Ciò ch'i' veggio di qua m'è mortal duolo," which is a sonnet. Something similar happens in III, 59, where Dino Frescobaldi is mentioned among the authors of *canzoni* where Sicilian rhyme is present: this only happens in Dino's "La foga di quell'arco, che s'aperse," which is again a sonnet. It must be remarked that several times Bembo uses *canzone* as a synonym for poem, most notably twice in II, 8, referring to the first sonnet of Petrarch's *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*. The fact of repeatedly using a generic term instead of a specific one seems to suggest that the information that Bembo was drawing on was partially lost or confused. This source-notes passage could also have played a role in Bembo's misattribution to Guinizzelli of a line from Cavalcanti's "Voi che per gli occhi mi passaste il core." It may be, for instance, that in Bembo's materials Guido's family name had been omitted or written in a truncated form. This Cavalcantian sonnet is not attributed to Guinizzelli anywhere else.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, Landino's 1481 *Comento* on Dante and a 1473 letter by Francesco Filelfo to Lorenzo de' Medici each misstate Guinizzelli's place of origin. See Cristoforo Landino, *Comento sopra la Comedia*, ed. Paolo Procaccioli, Edizione nazionale dei commenti danteschi, vol. 28 (Rome: Salerno, 2001), 3:1433; Francesco Filelfo, *Collected letters: Epistolarum Libri XLVIII*, ed. Jeroen de Keyser (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2015), 3:1560.

by Percivalle Doria, a *canzone* that in Chigi L.VIII.305 is attributed to Semprebene da Bologna. Thus, in all likelihood, this *canzone* was also included in Bembo's anthology that was collateral to this manuscript. We might imagine a language card prepared by Bembo where these forms were recorded with the name of the author and yet without geographical provenance. When afterwards Bembo wrote the relevant passage of his dialogue he did not remember that Semprebene was Bolognese. It may be that this kind of explanation accounts for the oversight; and since, as we have seen, his revisions were not meticulously accurate, this particular error remained in all printed editions of the *Prose*.<sup>25</sup> On the subject of Guinizzelli and Bembo's persisting inaccuracies, it is now interesting to consider another passage of the *Prose* that will remain unchanged as well. When in the first book Carlo Bembo asserts that Petrarch and Boccaccio did not have to use the same language as Dante and even less so the language of those who came before Dante, the two names mentioned are Guinizzelli and Farinata degli Uberti (I, 19). Here, Bembo is clearly recalling the authors named a few pages before by Giuliano as being rather linguistically unrefined. However, as we have seen, Guinizzelli had disappeared from the previous list, and his persistence in this passage is then at odds with the revisions made in I, 17. Even more incongruent are the mentions in both passages of Farinata, who seems to be the only vernacular author named in the dialogue and then not included in the historicizing catalogue of II, 2. We do not have a single line by Farinata degli Uberti. Dionisotti points out that this seems to be a misconception on Bembo's part, since he could read in his anthology, later copied by Bartolini, the sonnet, "Guido, quando dicesti pasturella," which was addressed to Cavalcanti by Lapo Farinata degli Uberti (who could be the son of Dante's Farinata degli Uberti).<sup>26</sup> To add to the already confusing situation, it seems that Bembo believed that Lapo Farinata degli Uberti, the author of "Guido, quando dicesti pasturella," was the same person as Lupo degli Uberti, to whom the same anthology attributed a sonnet and a ballad.<sup>27</sup> This explains the position of Lupo degli Uberti in the long list of pre-Dantean poets found in the second book, and adjoining Cavalcanti, especially since "Guido, quando dicesti pasturella" is a rather memorable sonnet. Therefore, the exception constituted by the two mentions of Farinata in I, 17 and I, 19 is probably only an apparent one.

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<sup>25</sup> Yet another possibility is that in Bembo's view Bolognese authors could be assimilated to Tuscan ones: he in fact also mentions Onesto da Bologna among the ancient Tuscan authors when exemplifying a particular usage in III, 38. He does not omit, moreover, the geographical provenance as in the case of Semprebene (the other Tuscan poets quoted as examples of this particular usage are Bonagiunta da Lucca and Cino da Pistoia). Onesto da Bologna and Guido Guinizzelli are also mentioned among Tuscan poets in the introductory *epistola* of the *Raccolta Aragonese*. This could also explain why, in the above-mentioned passage of I, 17, the Florentine Giuliano de' Medici, while answering Carlo Bembo's assertion that being a native Florentine speaker is not an advantage for writers, since they should focus on studying the most refined authors, used Guinizzelli as an example of earlier linguistic coarseness: yet as we have seen the Bolognese was soon removed from the number of authors named here. For the other "ancient Tuscan" mentioned along Semprebene in III, 34, see below; nor Dionisotti neither Pozzi in their notes offer any remark concerning these instances where Bembo labels as Tuscan those poets who in fact did not come from Tuscany.

<sup>26</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime*, 116n3; see also Pozzi, *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, 102.

<sup>27</sup> It is still unclear whether the three texts are the work of one or two different poets: see Linda Pagnotta, "Un altro amico di Dante. Per una rilettura delle rime di Lupo degli Uberti," in *Studi di filologia italiana offerti a d'Arco Silvio Avalle* (Milan: Ricciardi, 1996), 365.

## The Revisions in the 1525 Printed *Prose*

Let us now consider the changes found in the stage leading to the printing of the *Prose*, one of which concerns Brunetto Latini, whose position in the historicizing catalogue of II, 2 is modified so that it now comes after, rather than before, the group of Sicilians. This rearrangement results in a better regrouping of a few poets according to their geographical provenance from Bologna. The passages of the *Prose* concerning Brunetto witness multiple and complicated revisions,<sup>28</sup> but other changes are more interesting. Three in particular will be studied now: they are all in historicizing passages, all concern Giacomo da Lentini, and all take place in this passage between manuscript and print version.

In the previous section, we in fact saw how Giacomo da Lentini was inserted among the ancient Tuscan poets whose language was still unrefined, a group from which Guinizelli had been expunged (I, 17). In the 1525 *editio princeps* of the *Prose*, however, Giacomo da Lentini is not mentioned in that passage anymore. The final version of I, 17 names as examples of ancient Tuscan poets Guido Cavalcanti, Farinata degli Uberti, and Guittone. Giacomo da Lentini also disappears from a list of pre-Dantean poets who used loanwords from Occitan (I, 10). This in turn effaces a clear affiliation with this group of originally seven poets that is found in the prefatory *Epistola* of the *Raccolta Aragonesa*, since there are no previous sources in which they are associated.<sup>29</sup> And finally, as can be seen in the above paragraph, Giacomo da Lentini loses his primacy as the first poet of the historicizing catalogue (II, 2), and joins the Sicilian poets more than halfway through the list.

Bembo is, in other words, regrouping the Sicilian poets, as he had already grouped the Bolognese. However, for a modern reader a question arises: why are Rinaldo d'Aquino and Pier delle Vigne still among the Tuscans and quite high on the list? For Pier delle Vigne, the answer seems to be quite straightforward, namely, that Bembo thought that he was one of the earliest Tuscan poets. In the same passage of the third book where he discusses Sicilian verbal forms that had not been accepted by Tuscan authors, except the most ancient ones (III, 34), the second and last poet to be mentioned as one of the most ancient Tuscans, after Semprebene da Bologna, is Pier delle Vigne.

Apart from this glaring misconception, what is most interesting here is the fact that in the list of pre-Dantean poets of II, 2 there seems to be implied a chronology, or at the very least an order of some sort. Even though this is difficult to reconstruct, in Bembo's *Prose* there seems to be a gradation in the idea of vernacular antiquity, and this is present too in the pre-Dantean tradition. We have just seen that Pier delle Vigne is considered one of the earliest authors, and in fact he is at the beginning of the list. We have also seen how Gianni Alfani is considered very ancient, and he is in the first half of the historicizing catalogue. Then, in a passage of the first book concerning the different kinds of poetic lines, Bembo correctly points out that the earliest Tuscan poets used a wider variety of metres, while later authors used fewer ones (I, 9). What is more, a gradation between earlier and later authors can be found also in some passages of the third book (III 6, 9, 16, 50, 66). This is always a relative chronology, and usually Bembo's mentions of more ancient, very ancient, or the most ancient authors are quite ambiguous.<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup> Tavosanis, *La prima stesura*, 50–51.

<sup>29</sup> Camboni, "Paradigms of Historical Development," 33–35.

<sup>30</sup> See for instance; "i più antichi Toscani" (I 9, III 8, and elsewhere); "gli antichi" (II 11); "gli antichi uomini" (II 12); "ultimi poeti . . . primieri," "gli antichi Toscani," "i più antichi" (III 6); "più antichi" (III 9); "i meno antichi" (III 16); "da' suoi più antichi" (III 34); "da' più antichi" (III 50); "i molto antichi" (III 66).

fact that the last pre-Dantean poet in the historicizing catalogue of II, 2, Guido Cavalcanti, was one of the most recent ones, must have nonetheless been obvious to him. Cavalcanti was Dante's contemporary, as made abundantly clear from the sonnets that he addressed to Dante, sonnets that Bembo could read in his manuscripts, and also from *Inferno* X along with the available exegesis.<sup>31</sup> In bringing Guido Orlandi nearer to Cavalcanti, Bembo improved the chronological order of this part of his catalogue, which suggests that a chronology exists, albeit one that is at times blurry and in progress. In order to build this chronology, Bembo probably also relied on the above mentioned prefatory *Epistola* to the *Raccolta Aragonese*.

One can compare Bembo's historicizing catalogue with the following passage of that letter, while keeping in mind that it had previously stated that, "il primo adunque che dei nostri a ritrarre la vaga imagine del novello stile porse la mano, fu l'aretino Guittone" ("the first Tuscan author to outline the fair new style was Guittone d'Arezzo"):

Né si deve il lucchese Bonagiunta e il Notar da Lentino con silenzio trapassare: l'uno e l'altro grave e sentenzioso, ma in modo d'ogni fiore di leggiadria spogliati, che contenti dovrebbero restare se fra questa bella masnada di si onorati uomini li riceviamo. E costoro e Piero delle Vigne nella età di Guittone furono celebrati.

Nor can we forget to mention Bonagiunta da Lucca and the notary Jacopo da Lentini. They are both solemn and principled in their teaching, but so deprived of every bit of elegance that they should rejoice at being included in this group with such honoured men. And both they and Pier delle Vigne were celebrated at the time of Guittone.<sup>32</sup>

One cannot help noticing that these are the first four poets mentioned at the beginning of Bembo's schematic history of vernacular literature in all extant manuscript versions, and this only changed in the passage leading to the 1525 print.

### **Bembo's Chronological Perspective**

By way of conclusion, and before coming back to the reasoning behind the changes concerning Giacomo da Lentini, let us now examine the final form of the historicizing catalogue of poets at the beginning of the second book of Bembo's *Prose*. We have seen that the first positions are occupied by those poets classified as the most ancient in the *Aragonese Epistola*, originally four and then, after Giacomo da Lentini's relocation, three. In Bembo's final version, the fourth one is therefore Rinaldo d'Aquino. After seeing that in Bembo's opinion Pier delle Vigne was a Tuscan

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<sup>31</sup> The *Vita nova* was probably less relevant in this regard, considering that Guido is never explicitly named but only referred to as Dante's "primo amico"; his identity could nevertheless be easily inferred from the manuscripts' captions to Guido's sonnet answering the first of the *Vita nova*. Especially informative in this regard are the captions of the *Raccolta Aragonese*. Bembo however in all likelihood had at his disposal also a copy of the *Vita nova*: he quotes several poems from this text and also refers to Dante's terminology in its prosaic part (II 11).

<sup>32</sup> Giancarlo Breschi, "L'epistola dedicatoria della Raccolta Aragonese. Edizione critica," in "*Per beneficio e concordia di studio: studi danteschi offerti a Enrico Malato per i suoi ottant'anni*," ed. Andrea Mazzucchi (Cittadella [PD]: Bertinello artigrafiche, 2015), 219. This translation can be found in: Stefano Ugo Baldassarri and Arielle Saiber, *Images of Quattrocento Florence: Selected Writings in Literature, History, and Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 172, 173 (the last sentence of this translation is here rephrased).

poet, and considering that Bembo was apparently doing his best in order to regroup the poets according to their geographical provenance and possibly chronology, our most likely hypothesis here is that, in the perspective represented in the final form of the *Prose*, Rinaldo d'Aquino was a Tuscan poet as well, and a very early one. One wonders how Bembo might have arrived at this correct chronological assessment. Rinaldo d'Aquino's canzone "Per fino amore," which Bembo also had in his sources, is quoted twice in Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia*, but without any elements that might secure a dating. Rinaldo's placement seems therefore to be the result of an indirect reasoning on Bembo's part. In the previous section, we have seen how he had correctly reconstructed a major evolution in Italian medieval metrics, the progressive reduction in the variety of line measures employed, and in several of the poems attributed to Rinaldo d'Aquino that he could read in his sources there are lines different from hendecasyllable and *settenario*. The same kind of indirect process applies with Percivalle Doria's "Como lo giorno quand'è dal maitino," which, as we have seen in the section dedicated to the revisions in the autograph manuscript Vatican Latin 3210, Bembo read with an attribution to Semprebene, whom he believed to be, in III, 34, one of the most ancient Tuscan authors. The definitive position of Semprebene is in the second half of Bembo's list, but this is hardly one of the most remarkable oversights left in the *Prose*.

The fact that the list is opened by Tuscans followed by the earliest Sicilian poets, is coherent with Bembo's stated position in the first book (I, 7). In the ongoing discussion about the identities of the first vernacular authors, Bembo takes a stand when making the character of Federico Fregoso state that the Provençal poets were the first who wrote in the vernacular, and then the most ancient Tuscans imitated them. We have seen how Bembo had difficulties in distinguishing who was Sicilian and who was Tuscan, and probably even more in establishing a chronology. Bembo may well have been influenced here by a misinterpretation of a passage of Dante's *Vita nova*, one that seems to underpin the first historicizing passage that we encounter in the *Prose*, at the very beginning of the first book, in the opening statement addressed to the dedicatee Giulio de' Medici (I, 1). Bembo here says in fact that there had been writers in the vernacular for more than three hundred years—which is to say, for more than three centuries before the fictitious date of Bembo's writing and addressing himself to Giulio de' Medici, which spans from January 1515 to March 1516.<sup>33</sup>

Bembo's chronology in my opinion is clearly influenced by Dante's statement in *Vita nova* XXV, 4 [16, 4] that in searching out the Provençal and Italian vernacular tradition it was not possible to find poems written more than 150 years before.<sup>34</sup> Since Bembo was clearly able to date Dante's *Vita nova* to more than two centuries before the turn of the sixteenth century, and it is possible to infer from the above passage that Dante knew poems in the vernacular written more than one century earlier, Bembo came to the conclusion that the origins of vernacular

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<sup>33</sup> As is well known, Bembo fashioned a discussion between his brother Carlo Bembo, Federico Fregoso, Giuliano de' Medici, and Ercole Strozzi, which took place in his family house in Venice in December 1502 and was related to Pietro by his brother a few days later. At the same time, he pretended that he had written the dialogue and dedicated it to the then Cardinal Giulio de' Medici ten years before its print publication in 1525. The chronological reference point of this first historicizing passage is therefore the fictitious date of the dedication, not explicitly stated but spanning a period from January 1515 to March 1516, not 1502.

<sup>34</sup> We could also think of a mediation of the quite widespread *Vita di Dante* by Leonardo Bruni (116 manuscripts, according to Monica Berté et al., eds., *Opere di dubbia attribuzione e altri documenti danteschi. 4: Le Vite di Dante dal 14. al 16. secolo. Iconografia dantesca* [Rome: Salerno, 2017], 218), which explicitly quotes Dante and is clearly appropriating chapter XXV of the *Vita nova* (albeit without mentioning the work) in the passage stating that the origins of vernacular poetry took place around 150 years before him.

literature could be placed more than three centuries before 1515. However, Dante here is discussing the situation of two vernacular traditions — Provençal and Italian — without distinction and without signalling the belatedness of the Italian tradition with respect to the troubadours. We do have poems in Italian vernacular written more than three hundred years before the *Prose*, but since, unlike the Sicilians, they do not engender a tradition, the poets of Frederick II's court are rightly considered the first authors of Italian literature. Yet, with all the limitations of the few sources that he had at his disposal, Bembo could not realize this, and his judgment here is also affected by his placing the beginnings of vernacular literature in a remote past. Federico Fregoso explicitly says in the *Prose*, immediately before his judgement about the Sicilians in I, 7, that there was no knowledge of what was written before the age preceding Dante's own, and no more ancient memory of this had arrived to them.<sup>35</sup> As already remarked by Dionisotti and Pozzi, the fact that Bembo could only read Sicilian poems (or prose works attributed to Sicilian authors like Guido delle Colonne) in their Tuscanized versions, and was therefore convinced they had been written in Tuscan, was also probably a contributing factor.<sup>36</sup> Bembo's reading of *De vulgari eloquentia* I, xii confirmed this belief without arousing in him any suspicions about his hypothesis concerning the origins of vernacular literature. In fact, nowhere in this passage concerning the Sicilian vernacular does Dante state that the poets in the Sicilian court of Frederick II and his son Manfredi were the first Italian poets. Even if Bembo considered the dates of Frederick II's reign in order to date the Sicilian poets of his court (which appears rather unlikely, even more so in light of the fact that he actually refers to the court of the Neapolitan kings), the two ruled in a later age than the one he incorrectly inferred from the *Vita nova* for the origins of vernacular literature.

Bembo's chronology was in any case a loose one. He places Dino Frescobaldi among the poets that emerged with Dante and survived him, even though Frescobaldi died in 1316, five years before Dante. We have seen how in I, 17 he mentions Cavalcanti among the rather linguistically unrefined ancient vernacular poets preceding Dante, even though Cavalcanti was Dante's contemporary.<sup>37</sup> This particular oversight may well be a remnant of a previously held

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<sup>35</sup> “È il vero, che in quanto appartiene al tempo, sopra quel secolo, al quale successe quello di Dante, non si sa che si componesse, né a noi di questo fatto memoria più antica è passata” (“It is true that, concerning the chronology, before the age that was succeeded by that of Dante, it is not known what was being written, nor has more ancient memory of this come down to us”). See: Bembo, *Prose e rime*, 89. A different opinion may be found in Theodore J. Cachey, “Dante, Bembo e la scuola siciliana,” *Schede umanistiche* 13, no. 2 (1999): 107–115. According to Cachey, Bembo's judgment about the Sicilians in I, 7 could be the first move in a strategy aimed at rewriting the history of Italian literature and at finally removing the Sicilian school as the originators of its lyric tradition. Cachey also raises the hypothesis that Bembo's oversights in the list of authors at the beginning of the second book of the *Prose* (II, 2) might be intentional and part of a revisionist programme, as a preventative response to an imagined, future, and different historicizing perspective enabled by Dante's *De vulgari*. Cachey's well-documented work, however, does not take into account the whole array of passages in the *Prose* where historicizing perspectives or judgments can be detected, and especially all the revisions and different versions of these passages that have been the central focus of this essay. After consideration of the whole range of improving changes, and notwithstanding some remaining oversights and misconceptions, it seems more plausible to view Bembo as demonstrating a sincere lack of awareness rather than a feigned one.

<sup>36</sup> Bembo, *Prose e rime*, 88; Pozzi, *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, 71–72. I do not share however both Dionisotti's and Pozzi's view that in *Prose* I, 7 Bembo is making a distinction — inspired again by Dante's *De vulgari eloquentia* — between nominally Sicilian poems written in Tuscan and truly Sicilian and dialectal poems. The few poems of scarce value mentioned by him are clearly of the former sort.

<sup>37</sup> This is highlighted by Pozzi, *Trattatisti del Cinquecento*, 102; and Bembo, *Prose e rime*, 116.

perspective, like the parallel one concerning the view that Cino was apparently more ancient than Dante in I, 10, which is then contradicted by the correct view that he survived him in II, 2.<sup>38</sup>

One wonders now how Bembo finally become aware of the fact that Giacomo da Lentini was a Sicilian. Considering that he had lived two years in Sicily, the most likely possibility is that he reached this conclusion by further reflection on the matter. More than the occasional additional Sicilian texts that he could read in the Vatican Latin 3214, it is probably this realization that led him to change again his judgement about the Sicilians, the different versions of which have been reported in the second section. In the revision we move from the view that their poems are few, of scarce value, and read by nobody, to the judgment of their being read to a very limited extent.

It is clear that Bembo's perspective on the earlier Italian literary tradition was different from our own, and this essay has shown the challenges of attempting to reconstruct it. The same passages he relied on in order to build his historicizing perspective are today read with built-in interpretations and presumed chronologies. The present article has shown that such interpretations and chronologies are very difficult, if not impossible, to infer from the actual texts Bembo had at his disposal. Without these interpretations, settled datings, and an understanding of the poets' interrelationships, Bembo had to advance his own interpretations and reach his own conclusions. Through an analysis based above all on the reconstruction of available manuscripts of ancient vernacular poetry and his correspondence, we have shown that sometimes Bembo's interpretations are correct and coincide with modern ones, but that sometimes they are rather less so. The analysis of phases and of manuscripts available provided here has helped to reconstruct more accurately Bembo's state of knowledge of the "ancient" vernacular tradition and of his historicizing perspective. At the same time, this analysis has highlighted the fluidity of such knowledge and related perspectives, ones that evolved over time and were progressively improved as more sources became available and Bembo's interest in these matters increased. The gaps and limitations in the recovery and state of knowledge of this earlier literary tradition clearly had a crucial role in the process of constructing its history and its results, even in such an advanced vernacular connoisseur, and one so well equipped with texts and manuscripts as Bembo.

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<sup>38</sup> Camboni, "Paradigms of Historical Development," 33–36.