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NOTE

This contribution is part of a larger dialogue of three articles and one responding piece that form the current issue of *JOLCEL*. The other contributions are "Avatars of Latin Schooling. Recycling Memories of Latin Classes in Western Poetry: Five Paradigmatic Cases" by Anders Cullhed (pp. 17-33) and "The Morosophistic Discourse of Ancient Prose Fiction" by Erik Gunderson (pp. 56-80). The response piece is "Letters, Poems, and Prose Fictions in Cosmopolitan Latinity" by Roland Greene (pp. 82-86).

Competition, Narrative and Literary *Copia* in the Works of Boncompagno da Signa and Guido Faba

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ABSTRACT

This study argues for the importance of competitive discourse in placing the study of the *ars dictaminis* within the cosmopolitan tradition of humanistic Latin literature in the Middle Ages, particularly as it is expressed in the writing of Boncompagno da Signa and Guido Faba at Bologna in the first decades of the thirteenth century. Examining cultural links and similarities to the competitive literary culture of twelfth century humanism in France and northern Europe (especially the Goliardic poets), it also compares the function and relative prestige of *ars dictaminis* to other studies at Bologna, especially canon law. This comparison focuses in particular on the respective ways each discipline employs narrative fictions, and this comparison establishes the humanistic literary character of the cultivation of *ars dictaminis*. Ronald Witt has argued that the textual culture of Bologna in Boncompagno's day is dominated by a practical legal orientation, but this study would qualify that claim by exploring the literary copiousness of Boncompagno's writing and the literary character of several of his works, including the *Rota Veneris*; it likewise links this literary performance to a pattern of competitive discourse that elevates *ars dictaminis* above other disciplines, Bologna above other *studia*, and Boncompagno above other masters. The study then turns to the work of Guido Faba, especially the *Summa dictaminis* and *Dictamina rhetorica* to explore how Guido deepens and broadens Boncompagno's competitive discourse, especially through the epistolary narrative sequences of the *Dictamina rhetorica*.

A Heroic Age of Technical Writing in Medieval Bologna

The rising status of *ars dictaminis* and those who taught it in early-thirteenth-century Bologna transformed it from a technical practice—the art of writing formal letters—to a prestigious form of expertise linked to the development of humanistic literary culture in Western Europe. The earliest known textual codification of *ars dictaminis* comes from the monastic school at Monte Cassino in the later eleventh century, but as with other fields of technical lore in our own day, codification trails behind practice.¹ Formulas of salutation and arrangement were already being formulated and elaborated in the chanceries of Pope and Emperor.² The teaching and learning of the *ars dictaminis* spread to schools at Pavia and Bologna, Orleans and Tours, and southern German monastic and cathedral schools as Bamberg, Speyer, Tegernsee, and Regensburg.³ In the twelfth century, letter writing continued to flourish among elite clerics in ecclesiastical and lay administration; with this skill in demand, the schools of Orleans and Bologna in particular became centers for the study of *ars dictaminis*.

Some historians of *ars dictaminis* have associated Orleans and Bologna with two distinct styles. The Orleans style was more florid and literary, the *stilus supremus*, the Bolognese more spare and utilitarian, the *stilus humilis*.⁴ According to Ronald Witt, the difference stemmed from the ascendancy of the liberal arts for their own sake in the ‘book culture’ of twelfth-century France as opposed to the ‘documentary culture’ of Northern Italy where the most prestigious and highly pursued studies were the practical arts—legal, dictaminal, and notarial.⁵ The distinction fell away in the first decades of the thirteenth century, a process paradoxically fought, sustained, and represented by the celebrated career of Boncompagno da Signa, a *dictator* who wrote prologues to seemingly practical school texts that were brash, self-assertive, and rivalrous. He towers over the Bolognese *ars dictaminis* of the first two decades of the thirteenth century as Guido Faba would tower over the third and fourth.⁶

These two men stood at the apex of a school whose aggressive competition contributed to the humanistic literary culture of Western Europe through their Italian successors. Boncompagno and Guido’s handbooks feature self-aggrandizing prologues referencing various feuds with rivals, asserting their own supremacy in their art, but also demonstrating their mastery through a verbal copiousness that included constructing fictions through the sequence of model letters. Model letter collections were an important part of the teaching

¹ A technical writer for an Internet Service Provider has informed me that startup firms typically hire a technical writer to collect and organize their ‘lore’ only when the company is passing beyond the control of its founders, who have no need to have the startup’s technical systems and peculiarities explained to them.

² Les Perelman, “The Medieval Art of Letter Writing: Rhetoric as Institutional Expression,” in *Textual Dynamics of the Professions: Historical and Contemporary Studies of Writing in Professional Communities*, ed. Charles Bazerman and James G. Paradis (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 100–102.

³ William D. Patt, “The Early *Ars Dictaminis* as Response to a Changing Society,” *Viator* 9 (1978): 135–55.

⁴ Ronald Witt, “Medieval ‘Ars Dictaminis’ and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (1982): 13.

⁵ Witt tells this story in great breadth in parts three and four of Ronald G. Witt, *The Two Latin Cultures and the Foundation of Renaissance Humanism in Medieval Italy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 229–350. Witt is careful to use the terms *Francia* and the *Regnum (Italiae)* to avoid confusion of these cultural-geographical regions with their successor states.

⁶ Florian Hartmann identifies how the *dictatores* linked their skill to the honor and prominence of their profession, of individuals and families in their cities, and of their respective communes as a whole. Florian Hartmann, “Il valore sociale Dell’*Ars Dictaminis* e Il *Self-Fashioning* dei dettatori dommunali,” in *Medieval Letters: Between Fiction and Document*, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 105–18.

and learning of *ars dictaminis*—by the second half of the twelfth century collections of model letters (real, fictional, and all the space in between) were circulating independently of the theoretical introductions and schemata of the *ars dictandi*. In Guido especially, these fictions transcend their utilitarian purpose to suggest a lifeworld in a manner that oscillates among satirical, novelistic, and legalistic modes of representation.

Latin Authority and Competitive Self-Display in the Twelfth Century

A number of scholars, including Robert L. Benson, Ronald Witt, and Enrico Artifoni have identified in the Bolognese grammar *studia* surrounding the *ars dictaminis* the origins of literary and civic humanism in Italy.⁷ I suggest that the ethos of Boncompagno and Guido, if they look forward to the monumental self-aggrandizement of Dante and Petrarch, also belong to the playful competition of twelfth-century Latin literature, such as the Goliardic verses of Hugh Primas, the Archpoet, and Walter of Châtillon, all of whom imagine themselves in competition with envious rivals. Walter of Châtillon's sixth lyric, a *stanza cum auctoritate*, satirizes the pretensions of the intelligentsia at many places: "superbia sequitur doctores, inflati scientia respuunt minores."⁸ Walter's strategy of self-justification is common to the agonistic intellectual life of clerics in the twelfth-century; he declares himself one hated by "Pharisees" for refusing to conceal their crimes, with echoes of Abelard's own tales of persecution by enemies.⁹ The Bolognese *dictatores* share this self-portrayal as surrounded by envious rivals and mercenary epigones; the notable difference is that Boncompagno and Guido represent themselves as triumphing over their rivals.

Giving themselves the laurel for their unrivalled supremacy in their textual and professional universe, these Bolognese *dictatores*, Boncompagno first and foremost, establish their educational community as a prototypical humanistic coterie. His work, although ostensibly devoted to practical textual arts, has unmistakably literary qualities that are an instrumental part of his self-promotion.¹⁰ The links between rhetoric and literary practice in the Middle Ages have been explored in depth.¹¹ Yet one aspect of their competitive

⁷ See n. 3–4. See also e.g. Enrico Artifoni, "Retorica e organizzazione del linguaggio politico nel Duecento italiano," in *Le forme della propaganda politica nel Due e nel Trecento. Relazioni tenute al convegno internazionale di Trieste (2-5 marzo 1993)* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994), 157–182; Enrico Artifoni, "Boncompagno da Signa, i maestri di retorica e le città comunali nella prima metà del Duecento," in *Il pensiero e l'opera di Boncompagno da Signa: atti del primo Convegno nazionale: Signa, 23-24 febbraio 2001*, ed. Massimo Baldini (Siena: Tipogr. Grevigiana, 2002), 23–36; Robert L. Benson, "Protohumanism and Narrative Technique in Early Thirteenth-Century Italian *Ars Dictaminis*," in *Boccaccio: Secoli Di Vita. Atti Del Congresso Internazionale Boccaccio 1975, Università Di California, Los Angeles, 17-19 Ottobre 1975*, ed. Marga Cottino-Jones and Edward F. Tuttle (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 31–50.

⁸ "In addition, pride accompanies the learned, who, puffed up in their knowledge, despise their lessers." Robert Levine, *Satirical Poems of Walter of Chatillon*, <http://people.bu.edu/bob1/walt821.htm>, 2018, accessed online: 2018-04-02; for the edition of the original text, see Walter of Châtillon, *Moralisch-satirische Gedichte Walters von Chatillon: aus deutschen, englischen, französischen und italienischen Handschriften*, ed. Karl Strecker (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1929).

⁹ Walter of Châtillon, *Moralisch-satirische Gedichte*, 11.69.

¹⁰ A similar point is made by Elisabetta Baroli, "Da Maestro Guido a Guido Faba: autobiografismo e lettera d'amore tra la seconda e la terza generazione di dettatori," in *Medieval Letters. Between Fiction and Document*, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 121.

¹¹ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963); the many publications of Rita Copeland (most notably Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995); the work of Martin Camargo focuses in particular on the history of *ars dictaminis* and its literary ramifications. See for example Martin Camargo, *Essays on Medieval Rhetoric* (Farnham: Routledge Taylor

self-display not yet systematically explored is their ‘fabulation’—the invention of stories—for use in the model letters that made up part of the *artes dictandi* like Guido’s *Summa dictaminis* or standalone collections like his *Dictamina rhetorica*, which the final part of this essay will treat. That model letter collections ever went farther than Guido Faba or contributed to the development of the medieval genre of the story collection cannot be established, but there is a direct genealogy of masters and students linking Boncompagno, Guido, Filippo Ceffi, and Boccaccio, and I believe that in its copiousness and naturalism, the *Dictamina rhetorica* anticipates and parallels later medieval story collections. Thus, secular literature of the later Middle Ages remains imbued with the competitive character of the dictaminal school, which has roots in school culture of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, be it that of the schools of the secular clergy in the North or the private schools of law and *dictamen* in Northern Italy.¹²

Twelfth-century schools enjoyed a flourishing in the production of texts collecting short narratives for didactic and utilitarian purpose, such as the *exempla* of preacher’s handbooks or legal textbook, but even such stories were capable of an aesthetic surplus. By aesthetic surplus, I mean that a selection of letter-writing handbooks and model letter collections exceeded their expressed utilitarian purpose to become objects of artistic contemplation and enjoyment in their own right. This happened with other kinds of school texts—the literary and self-consciously aesthetic character of some school texts is obvious, as in the poetic displays of Matthew of Vendome’s and Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s poetry handbooks, or in the artful stories of Peter Alfonso’s *Disciplina clericalis*. These can be seen as literature insofar as they are both *dulce et utilis*; Gratian’s *Decretum*, on the other hand, a textbook of canon law the second part of which was a compilation of 36 *causae* or cases, might be viewed as a more purely functional collection of narratives. These brief stories served as legal dilemmas for law students to practice arguing about, but like dictaminal letter collections strive for a comprehensive representation of society (according to the priorities of canonists, judges, and lawyers).

The variety and copiousness of such narrative collections is impressive, and one main goal of both institutional and literary authority in the Middle Ages was certainly to impress. The entire point of chancery styles from the *Variae* of Cassiodorus to the development of high medieval curial epistolography was to impress. Authority works by impressing—inviting admiration and allegiance—rather than coercion, and that purpose was served by the elevated and elaborate syntax and the sonority of the *cursus*—these were the textual counterparts to the elaborateness and ornamentation of imperial and papal dress and ceremony.¹³ Authority, then, is both literary and institutional. Both of these aspects of authority are enacted in writing, and both kinds of authority were combined in the work of the *dictatores* of the early thirteenth century who taught the techniques of textualizing authority through their instruction and wrote books for those who use those techniques as secretaries, chancellors, and notaries. Moreover, Boncompagno da Signa, Guido Faba, Bene of Florence, and others invoke their institutional authority as university masters in combination with the authoritative display of rhetorical skill.

& Francis Group, 2012).

¹² See also, for example, Monika C. Otter, “Sex, Magic and Performance in Anselm of Besate’s Rhetorimachia,” in *Performance in Medieval Culture*, ed. Almut Suerbaum and Manuele Gragnolati (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

¹³ It was Horace who first applied *purpureus* to written style. He meant it disparagingly, but it speaks to a longstanding associate of puffed-up language with authority. Quintus Horatius Flaccus, *Horace on Poetry: The ‘Ars Poetica’*, ed. C.O. Brink (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 14–21.

It has been commonplace for literary historians to dismiss the products of the *ars dictaminis* as distinctly unliterary. Auerbach posed a contrast between the literary language in the vernacular, continually re-invigorated by contact with common language, and the desiccated 'chancellery dialect' with its rhetorical mannerisms and artificial formulism; he identifies the latter in a tradition that runs from the *Variae* of Cassiodorus to the *artes dictandi* of fourteenth century.¹⁴ At the same time, observing a "new flowering in the *ars dictaminis*" of the Italian chancelleries in the thirteenth century, Auerbach found that

its methods—rhythmical movement of clauses, rhymed prose, sound patterns and figures of speech, unusual vocabulary, complex and pompous sentence structure—stem from the ancient tradition, but now they are used more freely, richly, organically.¹⁵

Auerbach identifies the origin of this development with the class of 'urban patricians' and with the large number of educated laymen in cities such as Bologna, Florence, Arezzo, and Siena, in distinction from the literary culture of the 'courtly clerics' and 'feudal aristocracy' in Northern Europe.¹⁶ This may seem to parallel Witt's distinction between 'book culture' and 'document culture,' but it also implies a commonality insofar as the elite laity of Italian communes are also striving and competitive, and those Northern clerics imagine their participation in the life of the Church explicitly along the lines of the patrician Cicero's participation in the life of his republic.¹⁷

If Auerbach and Witt do not thematize transalpine cultural exchange in their studies, they point to it, particularly the mutual influence of Orleans and Bologna (and the set of aesthetic values attached to those locales) with respect to the *ars dictaminis*. Italian scholars studied in France, and eminent northern scholars taught in Bologna; Geoffrey of Vinsauf was himself teaching *dictamen* privately in Bologna in the 1180s, and the Anglo-Norman clerical poet Walter of Châtillon's poem addressed to the students of Bologna demonstrates the reciprocity and exchange across the Alps.¹⁸ As indicated just above, the highly literate clerics who cultivated the *ars dictaminis* through the long twelfth century deliberately emulated the urban patricians of the late Roman republic and early empire, reproducing their modes and the specific medium—letters—of enacting and advertising affiliation and association.¹⁹ The clerical administrators in Northern European courts shared an elite subculture self-consciously distinct from the culture of the lay nobility and monks alike, but their culture had much in common with the literate elites of lay Italian city-dwellers. Their burgeoning civic culture called for an education that would both ornament the participant in public life with eloquence and prepare him for the "practical and worldly" work of civic administration.²⁰ Such men generated the demand that brought the center of the study of *dictamen* from

¹⁴ Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language & Its Public in Late Latin Antiquity and in the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Bollingen Foundation, 1965), 259.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 273.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 272-73.

¹⁷ See n. 4; on twelfth-century clerical Ciceronianism, see for example Cary J. Nederman, "Friendship in Public Life during the Twelfth Century: Theory and Practice in the Writings of John of Salisbury," *Viator* 38, no. 2 (2007): 385-97.

¹⁸ Witt catalogues the intensifying exchange of students and masters between *Francia* and the *regnum italiae* as the twelfth century progressed; celebrated intellectuals of the 'twelfth-century Renaissance' who studied or taught at Bologna included Alberic of Rennes, Walter of Châtillon, Stephen of Tournai, Peter of Blois, Gervase of Tillbury, and Geoffrey of Vinsauf among others. Witt, *Two Latin Cultures*, 384-85.

¹⁹ See n. 17.

²⁰ Auerbach, *Literary Language*, 273.

Orleans to Bologna at the end of the twelfth century and made eminent men of Bologna's masters.

Boncompagno da Signa and *copia verborum*

Boncompagno da Signa was not the first of the Bolognese *dictatores*, but he represents a new departure in the way that he celebrates his own genius and authority. Born in 1170 in the village of Signa outside Florence, educated in grammar, rhetoric, and law at Florence and then Bologna, he joined the faculty at Bologna around 1190 as its first doctor of the *ars dictaminis*.²¹ Boncompagno brought a literary copiousness to practical handbooks for utilitarian texts: not just letters, but wills, statutes, and arbitrations. In this way, he extended the authority of the *dictator* beyond a functionary producing practical documents. The developing professional identity of the *dictator* made the work of composition no longer something a cleric happened to perform when worldly affairs drew him from prayer and contemplation, nor the mechanical reproduction of the notary, but a source of professional distinction, with a recognizable style combining notarial precision with the allusive grandeur of humanistic rhetoric. Ronald Witt coined the term *stilus medius* to describe this style.²²

Boncompagno's *Boncompagnus* or *Rhetorica antiqua* criticizes overly ornate and quotation-heavy prose letters.²³ His targets are *grammantes*—grammarians influenced by the new grammatical studies from France and their rising popularity. Witt's compendious argument is aligned around the argument that Boncompagno is sincerely committed to a thorough difference in method and orientation in rhetorical practice.²⁴ The fact that his term for his enemies resembles *garamantes*—the term by which John of Salisbury attacks his rivals as intellectual pretenders in the *Metalogicon*—suggests that Boncompagno's rejection of northern influence and practice is more of a rhetorical posture—we might even say a 'branding' choice—than an important practical difference. Given Boncompagno's often florid and exuberant style, his championing of Bolognese schools and the legal-civic orientation of its culture and of his own supremacy within that culture, another possibility is that his rejection of an authoritative proverb as a necessary element for the letter's *exordium* serves as a symbolic distinction around which to orient a partisanship that is more civic and institutional than practical or intellectual. Bolognese scholarship stands before transalpine scholarship as Boncompagno stands before his peers and rivals at Bologna. Competition is both individual and collective. His parodic letter written under the pseudonym Robert of France is a mockery of the *stilus supremus* of Orleans, but also a demonstration that its "pretentious vocabulary and convoluted syntax" were well within his powers.²⁵ Bene of Florence, Boncompagno's rival *dictator* at Bologna, embraced the French learning and stipulated the inclusion of *auctoritates* in the *exordium* of letters, which further suggests that Boncompagno's self-identification with a local style was a competitive move to present himself as the champion of a particularly Bolognese style. Witt summarizes a polemical thread that connects a number of Boncompagno's treatises:

²¹ Josef Purkart, "Boncompagno of Signa and The Rhetoric of Love," in *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric*, ed. James Murphy (Berkeley, 1978), 320.

²² Witt, *Two Latin Cultures*, 417; Brundage identifies a similar development of professional identity among canonists in the same period. James A. Brundage, *The Medieval Origins of the Legal Profession: Canonists, Civilians, and Courts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

²³ Witt, *Two Latin Cultures*, 386-87.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 388-93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 391-92.

The error of the aggressive grammarians lay in their efforts to treat *ars dictaminis* as if it were the product of the grammarian's study, not of the communal secretary's busy office. The rhetorician or orator used language in a contextualized atmosphere, unlike the grammarian.²⁶

This implies that the *dictator* is no mere mechanical functionary—*ars dictaminis* is rhetoric or oratory, a liberal rather than practical art.

For whatever reason—out of an intellectual commitment to the 'documentary culture' over the 'book culture' that Ronald Witt's grand thesis proposes, or simply as a matter of personal ambition and competition among rival *dictatores* and masters at Bologna—there is a consistent apologetic attached to these performances, an argument for the indispensability of textual mastery to the formation of virtuous individuals and just, orderly societies. Boncompagno's formulation of the *dictator*'s status can be shocking in its audacity, not just in the literary fantasia of his *Rota Veneris*, a guidebook for writing love letters, but even in seemingly utilitarian texts, but the *Rota Veneris* merits examination as an example of Boncompagno's *copia verborum* and his ability to fashion sequences of letters into narratives.²⁷ In one section early in the text rubricated "The Commendation of Women," Boncompagno takes the variety of possible alternatives, the textual menu of *artes dictandi* (epitomized in the flowcharts of Thomas of Capua's *Summa dictaminis*) and links them into one copious utterance:

Cum inter gloriosos puellarum choros vos nudiustertius corporeis oculis inspexi, apprehendit quidam amoris igniculus precordialia mea et repente me fecit esse alterum. Nec sum id quod fueram nec potero de cetero esse. Nec mirum, quia michi et universis procul dubio videbatur, quod inter omnes refulgebatis tanquam stella matutina, que in presagium diei auroram polliceri videtur. Et dum subtiliter inspicerem, quanta vos gloria natura dotaverat, in amiratione deficiebat spiritus meus. Capilli siquidem vestri quasi aurum contortum iuxta coloratissimas aures mirifice dependebant. Frons erat excelsa et supercilia sicut duo cardines gemmati, oculi velut stelle clarissime refulgebant, quorum splendore membra quolibet radiabant. Nares directe, labra crossula et rubencia cum dentibus eburneis comparebant, collum rotundum et gula candidissima se directe inspiciendo geminabant pulcritudinem, quam nunquam credo potuisse in Helena intendi. Pectus quasi paradisi ortulus corpori supereminebat, in quo erant duo poma velud fasciculi rosarum, a quibus odor suavissimus resultabat. Humeri tamquam aure a capitella residebant, in quibus brachia sicut rami cedri erant naturaliter inserta. Manus longe, digiti exiles, nodi coequales et ungule sicut cristallum resplendentes totius stature augmentabant decorem.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 397.

²⁷ Paolo Garbini has explored Boncompagno's narrative powers and literary sensibilities in the *Rota Veneris* as well as his *De malo senectute* and connected these in passing with the narrative sequences in the *Boncompagnus*. Paolo Garbini, "Il pubblico della Rota Veneris di Boncompagno di Signa," in *Medieval Letters: Between Fiction and Document*, ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 201–13.

²⁸ "And I while I intently examined how much glory Nature had bestowed upon you, my spirit, in enrapturement, was overwhelmed. For the strands of your hair flowed down like braided gold over your most delicately reddened ears; your forehead was noble, and your eyebrows like gem-encrusted hinges; like two stars, your eyes were shining forth most brightly, and through their splendor all parts of your body were lent radiant light. Your straight nostrils, your sensuous and ruby lips vied with your ivory teeth; your smooth neck and whitest throat doubled, for the beholder, a beauty which, I think, could never have been intended more for Helena. Your bosom rose above your body like a garden of paradise, in which lay two apples like bundles of roses, from which wafted the sweetest perfume. Your shoulders rested like sockets of gold, into

This passage is offered to the service of the lover who would write a letter to his beloved, a formulary of compliments featuring a verbal abundance which can be chiseled down by the text's ostensible user; at the same time, it also demonstrates its author's mastery of the full range of possible expressions, and his invention in combining them. The same combination of invention and exhaustiveness can be seen in the whole of this work, which features love letters for a number of situations ranging from conventional courtly love to abandoned wives to young women forced against their will into convents. In both individual letters and in the range of letter types copiousness is manifested in the making of lists.

Boncompagno's *Rhetorica antiqua sive Boncompagnus* is a more practical work, and seems to have been better known; it survives in eighteen manuscripts and an incunabulum.²⁹ More than just knowledge of verbal formulas, Boncompagno advertises dictaminal mastery as a mastery of social situations—conflictual and cooperative—that take place across a broad range of elite institutions, and promotes a particular posture within that cluster of institutions for the *dictator*: a scholar, but not a humble retreating servant. In the *Boncompagnus*, we can find continual self-assertion and self-promotion that gives the *dictator* an authority and social status that spans various domains.³⁰ The *Boncompagnus* divides its model letters into different spheres of society: the school; the Roman church; the Pontifical curia; letters to and from emperors, kings and queens; bishops, their subordinates, and church business; noblemen, citizens, and the people. The typical fashion in a dictaminal treatise was to sort the model letters from highest rank to lowest, first clergy and then laity: pope to parish priest, and then emperor to commoner. The audacity here is in Boncompagno's placing letters among schoolmen, masters and students, and speaking to the values and goals of the school, at the beginning of the work, implying social priority through textual priority.

The prologue of the *Boncompagnus* is organized as a dialogue between the book and its author, adopting a prosopopoetic envoy based on Ovid's *Tristia*. In this fanciful conversation between the book and its author, Boncompagno claims that he was popular with students, but envious colleagues falsely accused him of fraud in order to drive him from Bologna at the height of his career.³¹ After a period (1204-15) serving at the court of Wolfger of Erla, Patriarch of Aquileia, Boncompagno returned to Bologna and wrote the *Boncompagnus* in a spirit of triumphal return epitomized by crowning this very book, the *Boncompagnus*, with laurel: "Demum, ad conferendum perpetuum robor institutioni iam facte, super caput tuum laureatam pono coronam."³² This crowning of his book is, of course, a metonymical self-crowning, as Boncompagno declares himself and his work supreme among his colleagues, but the organization of this text also puts the letters of rhetoric masters ahead of those of

which your arms, like boughs of cedar, were fitted naturally. Your long hands, your slender fingers, your well-shaped knuckles, and your nails, resplendent as crystal, enhanced the seemliness of your whole figure." Boncompagno da Signa, *Rota Veneris*, ed. Paolo Garbini (Salerno: Minima, 1996), 40; for the translation, see Boncompagno da Signa, *Rota Veneris. A Facsimile Reproduction of the Strassburg Incunabulum*, trans. Josef Purkart (Delmar: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1975), 77.

²⁹ Boncompagno da Signa, *Rota Veneris*, 77.

³⁰ As Elisabetta Bartoli puts it, the self-representations of thirteenth-century *dicatores* like Boncompagno and Guido Faba intensify the political and controversial nature of their works as a means of self-promotion, and their autobiographism is a "literary elaboration" linked to their magisterial role. See Baroli, "Da Maestro Guido a Guido Faba," 121-125.

³¹ See Purkart's introduction to Boncompagno da Signa, *Rota Veneris*, 14.

³² "At last, in order to confer perpetual validity to the institution already made, I place a laurel crown over your head," see Steven M. Wight, *Medieval Diplomatic and the 'Ars Dictandi'*, <http://www.scrineum.it/scrineum/wight/index.htm>, 3.18, accessed Online: 2018-04-02; at this time, I have not yet been able to consult the edition of Boncompagno da Signa, *Testi riguardanti la vita degli studenti a Bologna nel sec. XIII: dal Boncompagnus, lib. I*, ed. Virgilio Pini (Bologna: s.n., 1968).

popes and emperors, an act that is no mere anticipation of humanism.

We see this self-assertiveness in other texts by Boncompagno. He selects model letters that articulate the wills of the greatest personages in Latin Europe, and which may explore local and wider controversies. The *Mirra*, named for the aromatic resin gifted to Christ at birth, and used to anoint the bodies of the dead, is a formulary for preambles to wills written "in the office of the orator and not the jurist," a distinction that belies the thesis that Boncompagno's orientation is driven purely by the practical demands of his students.³³ For such oratorical preambles, he offers specific models, the first for the will of a dying emperor:

Quanto nos celestis pater mirarum temporali dignitate ac rerum affluentis fecit inter mortales copiosius habundare, tanto propensius extremum diem piis operibus et iustis actionibus preuenire debemus, ne dies Domini peccatis nostris exigentibus tanquam fur ueniens nobis testandi auferat potestatem.³⁴

This is in keeping with the orthodox discourse of the Middle Ages calling on those at the top to set an example of piety and service. Boncompagno's model imperial will, however, introduces specific material that belong to a will's body and not to its preamble:

Constituimus ergo nostrum commissarium archiepiscopum Maguntinum, qui de camera nostra .X. milia marchas purissimi argenti recipiat et ex illis monasterium in aliqua silua sub congregatione Claraualensium construere non postponat. Si uero in ualescentibus egritudinum procellis debitum exsoluerimus humanitatis, duo milia libras auri uiduis, pauperibus, orphanis, hospitalariis, templariis, infectis aliisque necessitatem patientibus procurent taliter inperituri, ut si qua macula de terrenis contagiis nobis inhesit, per elemosinarum largitiones et orationes pauperum diluantur.³⁵

This might refer to the 1197 death of Emperor Henry VI—the *Mirra* was composed in 1203; the Deeds of Innocent III suggest some controversy over who was appointed the executor to the imperial will.³⁶ This assertion of authority is more than rhetorical—it offers a generic model fleshed out with specific interventions, and the tension between the generic and the specific gives the work a character that exceeds the strictly utilitarian nature that characterizes most such formularies. It makes moral arguments about the content and not just the form of wills: if such deference to the spiritual authority of the church and attentiveness to individual and collective need within Christendom is to be found in the world's ultimate temporal

³³ "In hoc autem libro proposui non iurisperiti, sed oratoris officium exercere [...]," Wight, *Medieval Diplomatic, Mirra*, 1.3; a recent critical edition of the *Mirra* may be found in Boncompagno da Signa, *Breviloquium, Mirra*, ed. Elena Bonomo and Luca Core, *Subsidia mediaevalia patavina* 12 (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2013).

³⁴ "However much the celestial Father makes us abound among all mortals in the temporal dignity of marvels and in affluence of possessions, we should in like amount specially prepare for the last day with pious works and just actions, lest the day of the Lord, coming like a thief for the weighing of our sins, might take away from us the power to make a testament." Wight, *Medieval Diplomatic, Mirra*, 7.1.

³⁵ "Thus we constitute as our testamentary executor the archbishop of Mainz, who shall receive from our treasury 10,000 marks of pure silver, from which sum he shall not postpone to construct a monastery in a wooded area under the congregation of Clairvaux. If indeed, buffeted by waves of sickness, we shall have paid our debt of humanity, let 2000 pounds of gold be bestowed upon widows, paupers, orphans, Hospitallers, Templars, lepers and to others suffering need, so that if any stains of earthly contagion adheres to us, they shall be washed away through gifts of alms and the prayers of paupers," see *ibid.*, *Mirra*, 7.2.

³⁶ James M. Powell, *The Deeds of Pope Innocent III* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 35.

authority, *a fortiori* it should be found in all disposed to leave a will. This sets the tone for the preambles to follow, wills written to suit less unique circumstances: prosperity, sea travel, pilgrimage, war, youth, age, old age, and extreme old age. In the section on wills composed on behalf of the very ill, Boncompagno argues that their preambles should be brief, since

Pro infirmantibus non est exordiis utendum, quia repugnarent manifeste ueritati, cum infirmantes raro uel numquam exordiis utantur, sed cum gemitu et dolore coguntur sua negotia propalare. Ita nec tu, qui pro eo loqueris, debes uerborum longitudine uti, sed condere propere testamentum et narrare, que ab eo proponuntur sub competenti breuitate.³⁷

If mortal sickness is signified by verbal paucity, we may then consider verbal copiousness as the manifestation of health, power, abundance, and authority; as *dictator*, Boncompagno demonstrates this.

Boncompagno da Signa wrote many texts besides the *Mirra* to provide prescriptive theory and illustrative samples for various kinds of documentary instruments. The *Boncompagnus* lists the works for which he takes credit; the first two of these are *artes dictandi* in the traditional mode, offering instruction and models for epistolary rhetoric. He also applied dictaminal principles—composition “in the office of the orator and not the notary”—to the formation of wills (as in the *Mirra*), statutes (the *Cedrus*), ascriptions of privilege (*Oliva*), and other documents associated with the *ars notariae* or the study of law. This makes sense in the context of Bologna; texts were the information technology of the high middle ages, Bologna the Silicon Valley, and *dictatores* and notaries the programmers and system administrators, elaborating the formats codified in the previous century and extending them to new contexts and purposes in a culture that celebrated egotism as much as ingenuity. The competitive egotism is plain to see in the prologue to the *Cedrus*:

Propter geminam uictoriam quam Palma et Oliua mihi de inuidis prebuerunt, exalti sunt libri mei sicut cedrus Libani et quasi plantacio rose in Iericho. Vnde librum presentum Cedrum appello, quoniam hoc est dignus nomine nuncupari. Vel Cedrus dici merito potest per quandam similitudinem effectus. In hoc siquidem libro de statutis generalibus et laudamentis tractatur, quorum auctores uidentur ubique terrarum exaltari ut cedrus, cum inter alios componendi generalia statuta et pronuntiandi laudamenta recipiant potestatem.³⁸

The author compares his works to a triumph over enemies, associating his textual production with a victory that in a sense sets up the author by analogy to a statesman, and from this rhetorical position of authority writes a formulary for the writing of general statutes. It also speaks to the competitive culture of Bolognese masters—Boncompagno asserts his superiority within this community, a community whose primacy he argues for in

³⁷ “Preambles should not be used for <the testaments of> sick persons, because it would be manifestly repugnant to the truth, since sick persons rarely or never use preambles, but are forced to carry out their business with groans and pain. Thus you who would speak for a sick person should not employ lengthiness of words, but should construct a testament quickly and narrate those things which are proposed by him under appropriate brevity.” Wight, *Medieval Diplomatic*, *Mirra*, 23.1.

³⁸ “On account of the double victory which the *Palma* and the *Oliva* afforded me over enemies, my books are exalted like the cedar of Lebanon, like the propagation of a rose in Jericho. Whence I call this present book the *Cedrus*, since it is worthy to be called by this name. Or, it can be deservedly called *Cedrus* through a certain similarity of effect, inasmuch as general statutes and *laudamenta* are treated in this book, whose authors in all lands seem to be exalted like the cedar, since among others, they have received the power of composing general statutes and of pronouncing *laudamenta*,” see *ibid.*, *Cedrus*, 1.1-2.

the *Boncompagnus*. Again, there is an association of lists, verbal mastery, textual prowess, with plenitude, authority, and power. It is the *dictator* or a *notary* who gives actual verbal form to the statute. Boncompagno urges those who write statutes to add preambles even though it is not customary:

Post istam autem inuocationem non consueuerunt illi, qui statuta dictant, uti aliquo exordio, aut quia exordiri nesciunt aut quia prolixitatem cupiunt euitare. Sed magis est credendum, hoc ex ignorantia prouenire.³⁹

Boncompagno offers his instructions and profession as the antidote to this ignorance. The *Cedrus* features several model statutes, which offer long and specific accounts of contemporary situations.⁴⁰ This text also provides elaborate formulas for the composition of *laudamenta*, or binding arbitrations.⁴¹ The notary might compose the judgment in the first person or record it in the third, so there is a certain ambiguity between the function of the *dictator* who composes and the notary who records. But both enact an educated mastery over authoritative textual discourses including the particular copiousness of legal discourse (to which we refer in modern times with the expression 'fine print'); legal discourse seeks to saturate the full range of meaning to avoid ambiguity, as evidenced in the common practice of legal doublets, seen here in the *Cedrus*: *dico et pronuncio nomine laudamenti firmiter obseruandi*.⁴² This doubling redundancy—"I say and pronounce" is called a 'legal doublet'—have and hold, aid and abet, all and sundry—and in itself signifies the authority of the law. Boncompagno uses this doublet not in a model or formula, but to pronounce his own mastery over the forms of the *laudamenta* with the force of legal ceremony.

These collections of model documents reveal a performative self that coordinates their variations and that displays a unifying sensibility about both rhetorical and social values. However, the paramount social value expressed is the supremacy of the rhetorical master. In the prologue of the *Boncompagnus*, where the author puts the laurel on his book, he also compares his instruction to the life-giving abundance of water:

Certum est et rei effectus ostendit, quod dividi potes in mille particulas et ultra, quarum quolibet humore doctrine aridum cor irrigat et intellectus germen producit tanquam rivulus a flumine derivatus. Aquam tuam igitur divide in plateis et noli curare, quid invidi referant, qui propter aliorum felicitates igne inextinguibili aduruntur, videntes quod lucem de fumo produxi et ambulantis per errorum semitas rectitudinis itinera demonstravi nec ob aliud aliquorum errores perlegi, nisi ut per contraria viderem clarius veritatem.⁴³

Here, the *copia verborum* of the dictaminal master is identified with the truth, freedom from

³⁹ "[...] those who compose statutes are not accustomed to use any preamble, either because they do not know how to compose preambles, or because they desire to avoid prolixity. But it is more likely that this comes about from ignorance," see *ibid.*, *Cedrus*, 6.3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *Cedrus*, 6.17-19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, *Cedrus*, 10.4-5.

⁴² *Ibid.*, *Cedrus*, 10.3.

⁴³ "It is certain and shows the effect of the matter, that you can be divided into a thousand particles and more, each of which may irrigate the arid heart with the liquid of doctrine and bring forth a sprout of meaning like a stream derived from a river. Therefore divide your water in the streets, and do not care what the envious may say, who burn with inextinguishable fire on account of others' happiness, seeing that from smoke I have brought forth light and have demonstrated paths of rectitude for those wandering in trails of errors, nor for anything else have I surveyed the errors of others but to see the truth more clearly by way of contrast," see *ibid.*, *Boncompagnus*, 3.21-22. See n. 26.

error, and the ‘liquid of instruction’ irrigating the arid heart, imagery suggesting both natural fertility and life-giving baptismal water.

Guido Faba and the Heroic *Dictator*

This kind of bravado is not singular to Boncompagno; he is merely the outstanding instance of the wider culture of competition and self-assertion that prevailed at the University of Bologna in the opening decades of the thirteenth century. Guido Faba, one of Boncompagno’s most renowned students, frames his vocation in almost messianic terms in the preface to the *Rota Nova* of 1225.⁴⁴ He claims that “celestial mercy” wished to elevate Bologna in the profession of Rhetoric (speaking, perhaps, to the rivalry among cities and *studia*) and so it has become “matrem in terris et magistram, a qua sicut a capite vel a fonte singuli viventes lumen accipiunt et doctrinam.”⁴⁵ This echoes but outdoes the exalted civilizing mission that Cicero ascribes to rhetoric in *De inventione* 1.1, one of the most widely read and used rhetoric handbooks of the age. Guido goes on:

Gaudeas siquidem, Bononia, vere felix preminium et formosa facta, excelsa meritis et virtute, et tecum cives omnes laudes resonent ad superna, quia ex te natus est homo ille, qui veterum ignorantiam et confusionem modernam clarificet suis epistolis atque mundet.⁴⁶

With this *captatio benevolentiae*—medieval arts handbooks are given to practice what they preach—Guido appeals to the civic pride of Bologna and places its intellectual culture—its *studia*, at the center of its civic self-regard. The intellectual culture of the University of Bologna developed around the study of canon law, and Guido indicates that he spent time studying law and then the notarial arts before returning to the study and teaching of rhetoric.⁴⁷

[...] curam capelle sancti Michaelis suscepit, in qua feliciter ad sacerdotalis ordinis officium est promotus, et rehedicans ecclesiam ipsam cum domibus ruinosis post vicinorum multas persecutiones et scandala, que substituit patienter, quorum partem clerici fovebant civitatis latenter, novum templum fabricari fecit archangelo Michaeli, cuius preceptionibus et mandatis ystoriam hanc descripsit [...]⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Excerpted and translated in “Preface to the *Rota Nova*” in Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300 -1475* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 699–705; the Latin text can be found in Ernst H. Kantorowicz, “An ‘Autobiography’ of Guido Faba,” *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 1, no. 2 (1943): 253–80.

⁴⁵ Kantorowicz, “Autobiography,” 278; “[...] mother and mistress of the sciences on earth, from which, as from a summit or fountainhead, every single living being receives light and instruction,” Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 702.

⁴⁶ Kantorowicz, “Autobiography,” 278. “Therefore Bologna, happy and beautiful creation beyond measure, lofty in your merit and virtue, may you indeed rejoice, and with you may all your citizens sing praises to the heavens, because from you was born this man, who dispels the ignorance of the ancients and modern confusion, and cleanses both with his letters,” see Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 703.

⁴⁷ Kantorowicz, “Autobiography,” 268.

⁴⁸ “[He] took on the care of the Chapel of Saint Michael, where he was happily promoted to sacerdotal office. There he renovated the church itself along with the crumbling houses, and having borne with patience the many persecutions and scandals of the neighbors whose faction the clerics of the city covertly supported, he had a new temple constructed in honor of the Archangel Michael by whose precepts and rules he has written this account,” see Kantorowicz, “Autobiography,” 268; translation by Copeland and Sluiter, *Medieval Grammar*, 705.

Ernst Kantorowicz suggests he was not literally a priest; the "sacerdotal office" refers to the Bolognese practice of appointing masters to specific chapels—the chapel of St. Michael was where grammar and rhetoric was taught. Again, we see Guido's heroic identity as *dictator*, his singular excellence, thrown into relief by the existence of "persecutions and scandals of the neighbors whose faction the clerics of the city covertly supported." Like Boncompagno, Guido's status as the target of envy, conspiracy, and enmity serves to underscore and enhance his status. This, perhaps, is a perennial feature of emulous communities—the boasting and insults common to Occitan troubadours, hip-hop MCs, and the Goliardic versifiers of the twelfth century.

Guido's boasting also resembles the goliards through a kind of parodic discourse that appropriates sacred language bordering on, if not indulging in, outright blasphemy.⁴⁹ At the beginning of his *Summa dictaminis*, Guido Fabia paraphrases the epistle of Peter, and compares his lessons on proper letter writing to a revelation of sacred mysteries:

Iam omnia sint aperta: ecce novella surrexit gratia,⁵⁰ abicite procul vetustatis errores, ut viri doctissimi solliciti precauentes ne ignorantie vel cecitatis fermento massa vestre prudentie corrumpatur. Advenite nunc omnes ad viridarium magistri Guidonis, qui dona sophie cupitis invenire, ubi dulces avium cantus resonant et suaviter murmurant a fontibus rivuli descendentes [...]⁵¹

Again we see the generativity of the rhetorical master expressed in images of fertility, nature, abundance, and flowing fountains.

Kantorowicz also discerns a 'semi-farcical' effect to Guido's prologues, a rhetorical burlesque mismatching style and content. The effect of this mismatch is to draw attention to the prose style of authority as technique and performance; the manifestation of sacredness and majesty when a *dictator* writes on behalf of pope and emperor is not the necessary effect of their office but of his learning and skill. At the same time, there is something self-deprecating about this burlesque insofar as it reduces pomp to play. This curious combination of self-deprecation and self-promotion also recalls the goliardic ethos; isolating style in this way puts the power of style itself into relief, and asserts the professional identity of the stylistic master. This is evident, for instance in the Archpoet of Cologne's "Aestuans intrinsecus," where the poet shifts from confessing his sybaritic tendencies to advertising his skill in what appears like a pitch for a secretarial position.⁵² This kind of play illustrates the power and importance of a certain kind of work; it promotes its maker as master of the profession and promotes the profession itself. This is one of the essential features of competition—competition entails, and even generates

⁴⁹ On the drinker's masses and nonsense saint's lives of twelfth-century school culture, see Martha Bayless, *Parody in the Middle Ages. The Latin Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996).

⁵⁰ The phrase *novella rex* is found in a gradual in the Christmas liturgy, underscoring the incarnational discourse of Guido's self-presentation here.

⁵¹ "Let everything be now revealed—behold, a new favor has arisen, cast off far away the errors of old age, that the most learned men anxiously taking care that the bulk of your prudence be not corrupted by the ferment of ignorance or blindness. Come now all to the orchard of Master Guido, you who long for the gifts of wisdom, where the sweet songs of birds resound and the streams gently whisper as they flow from fountains [...]" Latin text from Guido Fabia, *Guidonis Fabie summa dictaminis*, ed. Augusto Gaudenzi (Romagnoli - dall'Acqua, 1890), translation is my own.

⁵² "Vide, si complaceat tibi me tenere; / in scribendis litteris certus sum valere, / et si forsan accidat opus imminere, / vices in dictamine potero supplere." Archipoeta and Hugo Primas, *Hugh Primas and the Archpoet*, trans. Fleur Adcock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), in my own translation: "Look, if you should like to hire me, / I am sure to succeed in writing letters, / And if maybe it happens that there's work that needs doing, / I will be able in turn to help out with the letter writing," see.

community through agreement, implicit or explicit, over its methods and stakes. The glory of a champion is also the glory of the game.

Copious Narrative in Guido Faba's *Dictamina rhetorica*

The *Rota Veneris* of Boncompagno da Signa and the *Dictamina rhetorica* of Guido Faba are two collections featuring the arrangement of model letters into narrative sequences. It is possible that the designing of vivid or humorous narratives in model letters stood as an arena of professional competition in this time and place. The *Dictamina rhetorica* is Guido Faba's most widely attested work.⁵³ This collection's announced ambition is to demonstrate letters for a full range of possible occasions and demands—"quasi oraculo super omni materia suavitatis odorem exhibent litteratis."⁵⁴

The organization of this collection is unconventional, proceeding not by rank, but by the social proximity of sender and recipient—the normal ordering is high to low, ecclesiastical to lay.⁵⁵ Thus, the *Dictamina rhetorica* begins with correspondence between immediate family members, then between cousins, then neighbors. Then come letters between scholars, then prelates, and then nobles, and as the work's focus passes through these orders its addressees move upward in clerical and lay rank. The topical focus of the *Dictamina rhetorica* thus moves for the most part from topics of greater to those of lesser relevance for students and masters at Bologna. This organizational scheme is in keeping with the way Guido Faba centers the study of rhetoric in the university, the university in the city, and the city itself in the cosmos.

If the *studia* are at the center of Guido's world, they are also at the center of Guido's representation of his work in the *Dictamina rhetorica*. The very first of the *Dictamina rhetorica*'s letters is of a kind familiar to medievalists since Haskins: a student requests money from his parents, explaining that necessities have consumed his money quicker than he had reckoned because of food being more expensive in Bologna.⁵⁶ The parents respond graciously, expressing their pride in his studies, their confidence in his diligence, and their wish that he should conclude his studies successfully while dwelling among his comrades honorably.⁵⁷ The third letter is again from the student's parents; they now declare their anguish and heartache upon hearing that their son is neglecting his studies to keep the company of prostitutes in brothels "day and night."⁵⁸ "Reverte igitur ad studium fili," they write, "reverte festinanter si nostram subventionem et gratiam unquam habere desideras vel expectas," and their subsequent language expresses in ever-amplifying terms their grief and shame.⁵⁹ In response, their self-described *devotissimus filius* expresses his shock and sadness that his parents could have believed the lies of his enemies. He insists that he has been living honorably, persevering in his studies, earning a good name in Bologna, and that his career and usefulness will put his detractors to shame.⁶⁰

⁵³ Guido Faba, "Guidonis Fabe Dictamina rhetorica," ed. Augusto Gaudenzi, *Il Propugnatore* 5, no. 25–26 and 28–29 (1892): Gaudenzi dates this treatise to around 1228–1229, but Gaudenzi's work is in need of revision.

⁵⁴ "[...] like a heavenly oracle, to offer the learned the smell of sweetness on every subject matter," see *ibid.*, preface.

⁵⁵ Giles Constable, "The Structure of Medieval Society According to the Dictatores of the Twelfth Century," in *Law Church and Society. Essays in Honor of Stephan Kuttner*, ed. Kenneth Pennington and Robert Somerville (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977),

⁵⁶ Faba, "Dictamina rhetorica," I.1; Charles Homer Haskins, "The Life of Medieval Students as Illustrated by Their Letters," *The American Historical Review* 3, no. 0 (1898).

⁵⁷ Faba, "Dictamina rhetorica," II.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, III.

⁵⁹ "Return to your studies quickly, son, if you ever wish or hope to have our support and good will," see *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, IV.

This narrative suggests the possibility that the agonistic culture of the *studia*'s masters is paralleled or emulated by the students. It is also possible that Guido is projecting his own experience onto students, or even parodying it. The story of this student is specific and concrete, but at the same time, skeletal. We have no frame or narratorial perspective to ascertain whether the student is telling his parents the truth. The reader is not asked to support or oppose the justice of the student's claim. The form of the model letter creates a shifting 'I' and 'you' that generate alternate possibilities. The student's debauchery or defamation are both plausible, and this uncertainty perhaps invited an appreciative smile from the Bolognese students and masters who were the collection's first audience. Despite the potential interest of the narrative in its own right, its purpose is to provide a framework to demonstrate and model Guido's rhetorical prowess.

The exchange has a satirical flavor, and follows one tendency in medieval satire, following its Roman original, to deal in types more than identifiable persons, so the model letter as a genre lends itself to satiric use. If these are intended as models, then the student's situation can be taken as typical or unsurprising, which contributes to the world-building quality of the collection's epistolary narratives, the potential for a sequence of exchanged letters to evoke an enduring fictional world. This becomes clear a few letters later in the *Dictamina rhetorica* because, after presenting some other situations, it returns to a student having trouble with money and family. We want to read this as the same student; the succession of letters offer a sequence that, like the panels of a comic, invite the reader to connect them through an act of cognitive closure. Letter XXII has the rubric "De scholare ad consanguineum ut intercedat pro subventionem apud patrem."⁶¹ This kinsman reports his failure to soften the *duritia* of the father's heart, and instead passes along and reiterates the condemnation of his parents for falling in with bad company and neglecting his studies.⁶² The young scholar then begs a *propinquus*, a neighbor, to intercede!⁶³ There is a certain domestic comedy to this repetition; the *propinquus* reports that the father is immovable because of the *serpentina lingua* of the young scholar's many detractors.⁶⁴ These two letters connect to the opening sequence of letters, implying the young scholar's periodic calling on an ever-widening network of family, friends, and acquaintances.

According to Constable, the organization of the *ars dictaminis*'s examples typically models the social hierarchy; in this case it gives an index not of hierarchy but of social distance.⁶⁵ It also, perhaps, does the work of resocializing the student into the priorities and affiliations of the university—not asking him to renounce family connections but to mobilize them to enable study. At letter LXI, the story takes a turn that links the student narrative to the wider institutional issues and experience reflected in Guido's own account of his studies in his 'autobiography.'⁶⁶ The student writes to his uncle asking for help in transferring his area of study from the liberal arts to law.⁶⁷ The uncle responds that he does not believe his nephew has spent enough time studying liberal arts and commands him to spend another year on this 'foundation of knowledge.'⁶⁸ If the work aims to teach epistolary rhetoric, it also has a

⁶¹ "From a scholar to a kinsman that he should intercede with his father for financial assistance," see *ibid.*, XXII.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XXIII.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, XXIV.

⁶⁵ See n. 55. The difference between social hierarchy and social proximity is discussed in Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1959), 259.

⁶⁶ Faba, "Dictamina rhetorica," LXII, see n. 47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, LXI.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, LXII.

more embracing meta-rhetoric persuading the reader of the collection about the value of its subject. Thus, as the work of an interested party, it models what Guido might have seen as appropriate priorities and views not just for students but also for those patronizing their studies. The last student letter in the collection features another repetition; the student asks a friend to intercede with his uncle to restore his financial help.⁶⁹ The friend responds with his regrets: “Nam quicquid tibi dedit se asserit amisisse, quoniam non in studio sed in postribulo, non in litteris sed potius in tabernis, dicitur quod omnia consumisti”—recalling directly the opening letters and bringing the narrative full circle.⁷⁰

Given Guido’s abortive legal career and what was no doubt the pervasive hegemony of legal study at Bologna, there should be little surprise that a liberal arts master should be called to advocate his discipline over law. For the same reason it should come as no surprise that there is a resemblance between the elaboration of *causae* (cases) among the canonists and the elaboration of cases for letters treated by the *dictatores*. Both trade in hypothetical situations often too far-fetched, elaborate, or specific to be understood as describing commonplace events. The two genres of hypothetical narrative, however, ask a different kind of work from their readers. The *causae* of the *Decretum* ask for judgment and analysis, not identification or impersonation. When presenting the case of a woman abandoned by her husband, the *causa* asks the reader to adjudicate principles of right and responsibility. If these legal *causae* are elaborate and highly specified, this is not to increase their verisimilitude or narrative power, but to achieve greater precision about the problem or set of problems that they pose to the canonist in order to finally work out a clear solution and to articulate the enduring principles on which the solution is based. In other words, the *causae* are ‘philosophers’ tales,’ thought experiments.⁷¹

The fictions of these Bolognese *artes dictandi* work differently; they do not ask for adjudication but participation and even role-playing. The events of these fictions that call them into being as narrative are always summoned through a petitioning voice; the reader of the handbook is implicitly charged by virtue of the book’s stated function with voicing that petition. Responding to this charge might demonstrate rhetorical virtuosity, but the fiction is open and undetermined in a way that a canonist’s *causa* cannot be. The *causa* is narrated in the third person in a way that tells the reader everything they need to know to carry out their legal reasoning. The narratives embedded in the *ars dictandi*’s model letters ask to be read as actual letters from one person to another, so that their generality reads like a deliberate concealment of specifics, but they hint obliquely at a lived experience and in a way that evokes a persistent fictional world. This evocation takes place whether the events described are unusual or predictable. This incompleteness is a necessary part of a fictional world, according to Thomas Pavel. We do not, for example, know the names of Sherlock Holmes’s grandparents, but are led to assume they exist.

In Pavel’s description, when events that belong to our world become fictions, they undergo what he calls ‘conventional framing,’ a reduction of detail to familiar types that can be easily contemplated and understood.⁷² I suggest that this hermeneutic can be reversed. The reader can begin with the conventional circumstances that pattern the letters of the *Dictamina rhetorica* and collections like it—the pairing of two social identities which

⁶⁹ Faba, “*Dictamina rhetorica*,” LXIII.

⁷⁰ “For [the uncle] asserts that whatever he has given you you lost, since it is said that you have spent everything not in study but in the bawdy house, not in letters but rather in taverns,” *ibid.*, LXIV.

⁷¹ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 30.

⁷² Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1986), 86.

provide circumstances for an exchange of letters—and imbue those letters with an increasing level of detail to the extent that they become less and less conventional and more and more the narration of unique and unrepeatable narrative events. Boncompagno's book of instruction on how to write love letters, the *Rota Veneris*, gives the circumstances and dispositions of the exemplary lovers to achieve the high degree of specificity found in romance or novella. In this way, the writer of fictional letter collections is the generative inventor described by Boncompagno in the *Rhetorica novissima*, the Genius-like figure who figures forth the range of possible letters as something like the building of a world through 'fabulation'.

Recurring characters like the scrounging student are just one part of a broader social representation that emerges from the small narratives of the *Dictamina rhetorica*. One sequence has two cousins (*consobrini*) discussing a threat to their inheritance from an uncle with no legitimate children. This exchange of letters includes warnings about threats from specific enemies.⁷³ Another short sequence represents the blustering threats of two counts against each other, arranging a place and time for combat.⁷⁴ If the *Dictamina rhetorica* was used in the way it offers itself to use, the early thirteenth century was a world in which a count who wished to threaten a neighboring magnate with military force put an educated secretary to the task of consulting a formulary like Guido's to find a suitable Latin threat or fashion an appropriate variation. But we, like (I think) the Bolognese students for whom it was written, encounter the *Dictamina rhetorica* as a sequence of letters, responses, and dialogues, enlarged and intertwined with stories of murder, conspiracy, war, unplanned pregnancies, blood feuds, and other parts of the social reality of thirteenth-century Europe with a vividness that demonstrates Guido's ability not just at finding appropriate and grand rhetoric for all these occasions, but at making fictions populated by indigent students, nobles, bankers, merchants, tailors, judges, wives, sisters, and so forth.

Conclusion: Competing Textualities and Humanistic Authorship in European Literature

Ronald G. Witt writes about Northern Italy at this time as a place where two different Latin cultures, a 'book culture' and a 'documentary culture,' are crashing against each other.⁷⁵ In these works by Boncompagno da Signa and Guido Faba, men educated at the intersection of these two cultures and responding to their creative demands, we see their creative ferment generated by the friction between those two worlds, and this creativity anticipates the capacious frame stories of Boccaccio and Chaucer. This narrative richness is a surprising feature of the *ars dictandi*, an innovation of the early thirteenth century, and perhaps an effect of the uneasy overlap of these two textual cultures. Boncompagno da Signa and Guido Faba stand at the beginning of a tradition that will flow in a thousand rivulets into the humanistic literary culture of the fourteenth century. Petrarch and Boccaccio studied law and the notary arts and were thus immersed in the culture of profuse textuality of which Boncompagno is a foundational figure. Further research, I suggest, will continue to demonstrate that Boncompagno and his immediate progeny are a direct link in literary history between the goliardic braggadocio of the literary culture of twelfth-century secular clerics and the self-assertion of later humanistic literary culture.

⁷³ Faba, "Dictamina rhetorica," XVIII-XXI.

⁷⁴ Ibid., XXXVI-XXXVII.

⁷⁵ See n. 4

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