esp. the second part, 'Lire les inscriptions médiévales: Définition du public épigraphique.'

56 The phrase in the plural, *Memento Domine famulorum tuorum*, is from the prayer for the dead in the canon of the mass; Favreau, *Épigraphie médiévale*, 240.

57 'MEME[N]- / TO D(OMI)NE / FAMU- / LO TUO / SARULO / SACER[DOTE]' (at St Nicholas); 'MEME[N]TO D(OMI)N[E] / FAMULI TUI / SARULI SA- / CERDOT[IS]' (at St Margaret). For these rock-cut churches see Cosimo Damiano Fonseca, *Civiltà rupestre in Terra Jonica* (Milan and Rome: Bestetti, 1970), 172–203.

58 Literacy was never a clerical monopoly in Byzantium as it was in the West. See Robert Browning, 'Further Reflections on Literacy in Byzantium,' *TO EΛΛΗΝΙΚΟΝ: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis, Jr.*, ed. John S. Langdon et al. (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1993), 1:68–84.

59 André Jacob, 'Inscriptions byzantines datées de la province de Lecce (Carpignano, Cavallino, San Cesario),' *Rendiconti: Atti della Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. 8, 37 (1982): 41–61 at 51; André Jacob, 'Un nouvel amen isopséphique en Terre d'Otrante (Nociglia, Chapelle de la Madonna dell'Itrì),' *Rivista di studi bizantini e neoellenici* 26 (1989): 187–95.

60 See, e.g., Véronique Plesch, 'Memory on the Wall: Graffiti on Religious Wall Paintings,' *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32 (2002): 167–97; and Cécile Treffort, 'Inscrire son nom dans l'espace liturgique à l'époque romane,' *Les Cahiers de Saint-Michel-de-Cuxa* 34 (2003): 147–60. There are no preserved graffiti from the medieval Salento that feature a female name.

61 See, however, the work of epigraphist and palaeographer Armando Petrucci, including *La scrittura: Ideologia e rappresentazione* (Turin: Einaudi, 1986), translated by Linda Lappin as *Public Lettering: Script, Power, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); and that of art historian Stefano Riccioni, including most recently *Il mosaico absidale di S. Clemente a Roma: Exemplum della chiesa riformata* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 2006), and 'Épiconographie de l'art roman en France et en Italie (Bourgogne/Latium): L'art médiéval en tant que discours visuel et la naissance d'un nouveau langage,' *Bulletin du Centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* 12 (2008), available online at http://cem.revues.org/index7132.html.

62 See now Debiais, *Messages de pierre*.

5 The Textualization of Early Italian *Cantari*

New approaches to the study of medieval texts promoted by Armando Petrucci and others have taught us to ask questions and gather information not only from what the texts say but also from their physical appearance, in pursuit of what William Robins, in his introductory chapter to this volume, calls a 'semiotics of textual culture materialistically and historically inflected.' My study here follows those by such scholars as Furio Brugnolo, H. Wayne Storey, and Peter Weinmann, who have demonstrated that the very material layout of poetic texts offers preliminary indications about what genre a medieval reader could expect to encounter.[1] This paper investigates the physical layout of the first occurrences of the early Italian *cantari*, the genre which later gave rise to the famed Italian Renaissance epic poems such as *Orlando furioso* and *Gerusalemme liberata*. The origins of the genre are inextricably linked to the origins of its verse-form, the *ottava rima*. It is hoped that the following investigation into the visible distribution of the text of *cantari* on the manuscript page may shed some light on these questions about origins which have so far eluded satisfactory answers.

Today scholars agree that the verse-form of *ottava rima* appeared during the course of the fourteenth century and that *cantari* are a product of the late part of that century, abandoning the opinion held by earlier scholars that *cantari* were already popular in Italy at the end of the thirteenth century. However, a debate remains concerning the origins of the *ottava rima*: whether it was invented by Boccaccio for his *Filostrato* and *Teseida* (much as the *terzina* verse-form was invented by Dante) or whether Boccaccio adopted the metre of an already existing genre. At the end of a clear exposé of the various contributions to the debates, Aldo Menichetti, one of the most respected experts in problems of Italian metrics, concluded that 'the debate about the origins of *ottava*

rima remains more open than ever.'[2] I shall not attempt to solve the problem of whether or not we can speak of 'the *cantare* before Boccaccio,' but I will refer to a few elements which could help shift the focus of the discussion. The theses of Roncaglia, Gorni, and Balduino on the origins of *ottava rima* are well known to specialists and I shall not repeat them here; different as they are, they all have in common the notion that the eight-line stanza of *ottava rima* (the *ottava*) must have originally been a kind of stanza for a *canzone* (or for a religious *lauda*, according to Balduino), thus linking the *ottava* to a genre of lyric poetry and thereby stressing a direct association between *ottava rima* and singing.[3]

What I have always found perplexing about these theories is that *ottava rima* has always been used, from its very inception and throughout its history, primarily as a narrative structure and not as a lyric one. The use of *ottava rima* in genres other than narrative poetry on legendary subjects has been very rare. In the fourteenth century it was used in a few works whose historical subject matter might have been rendered otherwise in the verse-form known as the *serventese*: the *Profezia* by the friar Stoppa de' Bostichi (1347), the *Cantare della Guerra degli Otto Santi* (after 1378), and the *Lamento* on the death of Bernabò Visconti (1385). It was also used in some *laude* of Bianco da Siena, who entered the order of Gesuati in 1367 and whose works date to the second half of the fourteenth century.[4] Later it was also common in religious drama.[5] As opposed to the abundance of love poetry in *sonetti* and *canzoni*, I do not know of any love poetry in *ottave* from the fourteenth century. The *strambotti* and *rispetti* of the fifteenth century that reproduce the structure of the *ottava* and may be labelled as love poetry are to be considered as derived from and not as antecedents to the epic poems in *ottave*.[6]

Examples of lyric structures used for narrative purposes are, again, quite rare. One may recall the sonnets of *Il Fiore* (the Italian re-elaboration of *Roman de la Rose*) and Antonio Pucci's *canzone* 'Un cavalier di Roma una fiata';[7] but by this stage both the *sonetto* and the *canzone* had been severed from the sphere of performance for a long time and were considered the metres of primarily written, not oral, genres.

Although *ottava rima* is usually considered the metre of the *cantare* genre, one must not forget that a good number of early poems in *ottava rima* do not share the 'oral-performative' characteristics that we associate with the *cantari* (and that are implied in the derivation of the noun *cantare* from the verb *cantare*, to sing). A good example is the way several early poems were divided not according to the needs of performance but according to other criteria. In fact, the earliest known poem in *ottava rima*, Boccaccio's *Filostrato* (ca. 1335), is divided into 'parts' of very

irregular length, varying from the eight stanzas of the ninth part to the 167 stanzas of the fourth part.[8] The first and last stanzas of each 'part' have more characteristics of classical prologues and epilogues than of the orality typical of the *cantare* genre. Furthermore, within each 'part' the flow of *ottave* is often interrupted by rubrics announcing the content to follow, as if they were the titles of chapters in a prose romance. Similar titles are also found in the subsequent work in *ottava rima* by Boccaccio, the *Teseida*, which is subdivided this time according to classical models, into 'books.'[9] The length is again considerably varied, from the sixty-one octaves of Book Six to the 138 of Book One. Boccaccio's works, and especially the *Teseida*, enjoyed lasting fame and significantly contributed to the success of this new narrative metre. Another very early poem in *ottave* is the *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* by Domenico Scolari, which bears the date 1355.[10] Like the *Teseida*, the poem by Scolari is divided into four books and further subdivided into parts introduced by rubrics.[11] After the middle of the century, we find the Sienese religious poems composed by Saint Catherine's followers: Niccolò di Mino Cicerchia narrated *La passione* in an uninterrupted flow of 282 stanzas (1364); Neri Pagliaresi divided his story of *Giosafà* (after 1371) into fourteen *partes* just as Boccaccio had divided his *Filostrato* into 'parts'; and fra' Felice Tancredi da Massa wrote *La fanciullezza di Gesù* (between 1380 and 1385) in 448 stanzas with no subdivisions whatsoever.[12] Even the earliest known example of a *cantare*, *Fiorio and Biancifiore* (transcribed between 1343 and 1349), is not a typical one as far as major textual divisions are concerned – as we shall see below. One must wait for the *cantare* of *Bel Gherardino* (transcribed ca. 1373) before we find the canonical form of the *cantare* subdivided into two cantos with typical opening and closing *ottave*. Antonio Pucci's *cantari* are also assignable to this stretch of decades, as the author was active between the 1330s and his death in 1388, but the precise dates of his poems are unknown.

Let us consider how these early poems are physically written down on the manuscript pages. Of Boccaccio's *Teseida* we are fortunate enough to have an autograph manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Acquisti e Doni 325), in all likelihood transcribed between 1340 and 1350. In this manuscript the text is written in one column aligned to the left of the page, with one verse of poetry per line. The division into stanzas is marked by a capital letter appearing further to the left of the column; however, there is no line of blank space between the *ottave* (see figure 5.1). It is not surprising to find such an orderly layout of Boccaccio's work on a page. We know that Boccaccio was fascinated by books, literature, and writing. We also know that he
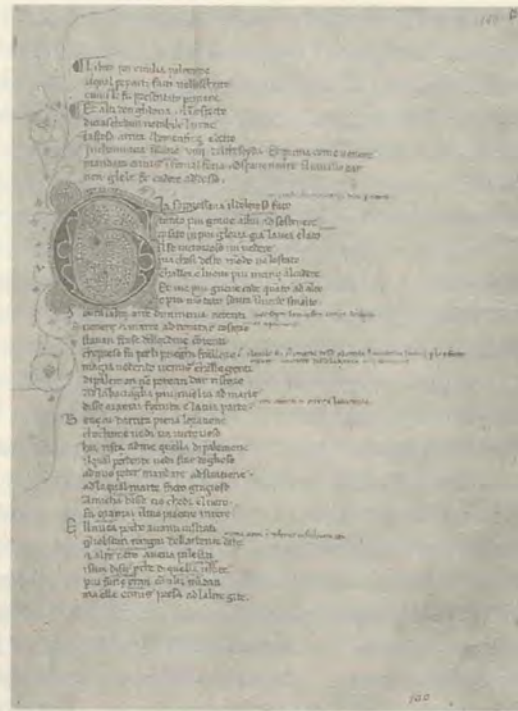
Figure 5.1
Layout of *ottave* at the beginning of Book Nine of the *Teseida* in Boccaccio's autograph manuscript (ca. 1340–50). Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Lauren-ziana, Acquisti e Doni 325, fol. 100r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

mastered more than one style of handwriting and that he was meticu-lous when it came to the physical presentation of his works. Whether or not he invented the metre of *ottava rima*, it is certain that in the layout of this poem Boccaccio imitated prestigious models of a narrative nature.[13]

In fact, a similar layout is found in manuscripts of classical poems such as Statius's *Thebaid* and Virgil's *Aeneid*, as well as in manuscripts of Dante's *Commedia* (of which we also have a copy transcribed by Boccaccio). Of course, Latin epic poems have no stanzaic division. If accompanied by *glossae*, Latin epics were normally transcribed in one column on the left hand side of the page, one verse per line, usually with the beginning of each verse emphasized by a larger letter. French narrative poems, whether Carolingian epic or Arthurian romance, and including Franco-Italian poems, were also transcribed in this way, one

verse per line, with initial capital letters, but with no space at the beginning of each *lassa* (see figure 5.2). Dante's *Commedia*, on the other hand, was usually transcribed, even in its earliest manuscripts, by emphasizing the beginning of each three-line stanza, or *terzina*, by means of a larger letter shifted to the left of the column (see figure 5.3).[14] This seems to be the closest model to the layout of the *ottava* and this is exactly how Boccaccio transcribed his epic poems, which were not destined to be sung in public squares but read to a circle of aristocratic ladies and cultivated readers.

In my opinion, the layout of Boccaccio's autograph *Teseida* emphasizes that the *ottava* was primarily conceived of as a narrative device, a metre appropriate to a continuous, albeit rhythmic, flow of discourse. With the column aligned in the centre of the page, this layout became standard for presenting poems in *ottava rima*. It is used, for example, for the *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, II.II.30, fols 7r–94r) and the *Cantare di Pirramo e Tisbe* (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. VII, 1066, fols 37v–43v) (see figures 5.4 and 5.5). Even a manuscript as late as the Ginori Venturi Lisci codex from the latter half of the fifteenth century, now Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Acquisti e Doni 759, preserves this traditional layout.

At this point I would like to invoke Petrucci's classification of medieval manuscripts. Apart from the classical Latin texts which were entrusted to so-called *libri da banco* (bench-books, which are large, heavy books written by professional copyists and to be consulted usually at a bench or lectern), the manuscripts that carry vernacular works belong to two basic categories: (1) the *libro cortese* (court-book), which was of relatively small dimensions, usually made of parchment, written in a gothic book-script (*gotica libraria*) by professional copyists, sometimes illustrated, and presumably destined to be read aloud to a small circle of people; and (2) the *libro-registro* (register-book), which was influenced by legal and administrative documents such as registers and accounting books, made of paper rather than parchment, and written in cursive script: register-books tended to contain texts of a disparate nature and to be of relatively untidy appearance. As Petrucci explains, during the fourteenth century, the *libro-registro* gave rise to two further variations: (1) the *libro-registro di lusso* (de luxe register-book), which was sometimes in parchment and illuminated, but always written in a cursive script (*minuscola cancelleresca*); and (2) the *libro zibaldone* (notebook), which was of small to medium dimensions, made of paper, undecorated, and written more and more frequently in the cursive merchant script (*lettera*
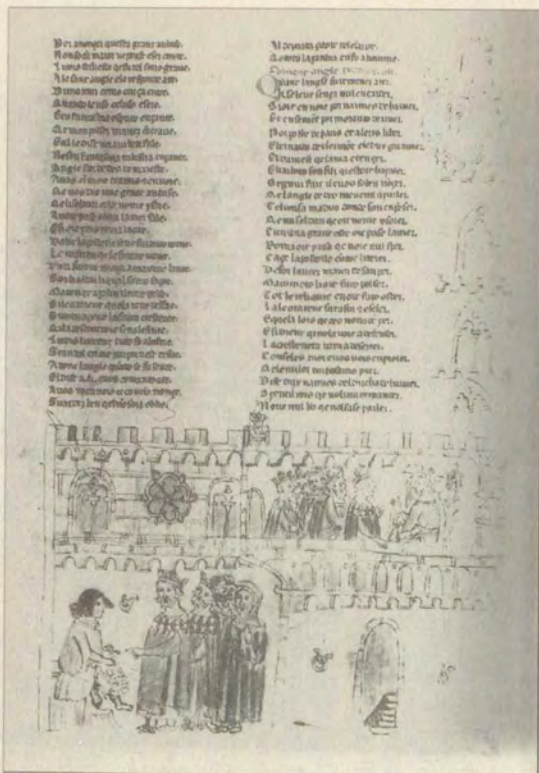
Figure 5.2
Layout of *lassas* in the Franco-Italian *Geste Francor* (fourteenth cent.). Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Franc. XIII (256), fol. 109r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.
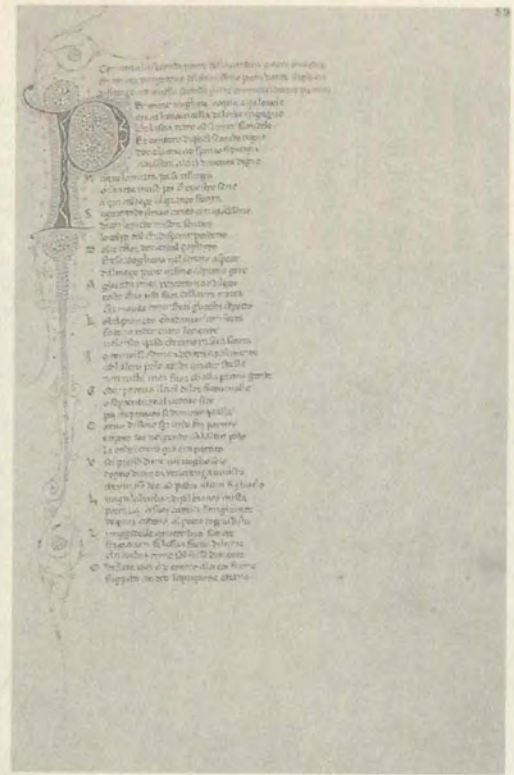

Figure 5.3
Layout of *terzine* in Dante's *Commedia* as transcribed by Boccaccio (ca 1370). Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Ricc. 1035, fol. 7r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.
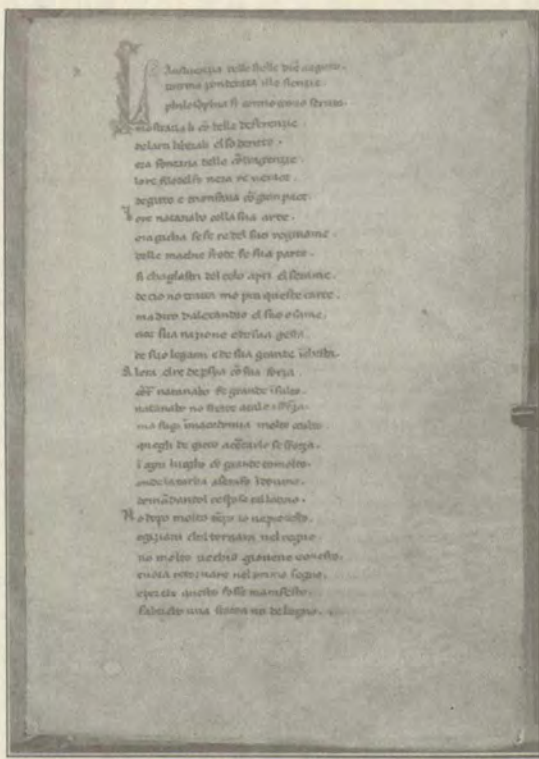

Figure 5.4
Layout of *ottave* in Domenico Scolari's *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* (1355). Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, II.II.30, fol. 8r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.
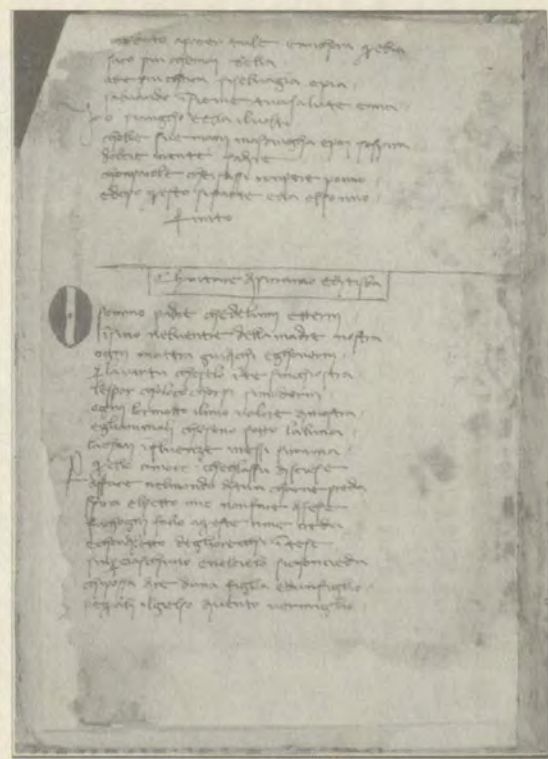

Figure 5.5
Layout of *ottave* in the *Cantare di Piramo e Tisbe* (end of the fourteenth cent.). Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. VII, 1066, fol. 40v. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

mercantesca).[15] Most of the manuscripts I have mentioned above fall into the category that Petrucci calls the *libro cortese*.

Between 1343 and 1349 *Fiorio e Biancifiore* appears. *Fiorio e Biancifiore* is the earliest documented popular poem in *ottava rima* (i.e., it is the earliest *cantare*) and it enjoyed lasting popularity, being handed down in approximately ten manuscripts, each preserving its own version of the work. The earliest transcription is in a manuscript that in Petrucci's terms is a *libro zibaldone* (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. VIII, 1416), the appearance and composition of which clearly reveal that it was destined for private use. It was probably assembled after the texts were transcribed, as the first and last pages are written in a different hand. The dimensions are approximately 22 cm by 15 cm. The contents are varied, the only reason for their compilation being that someone considered each item individually worthy of preservation. The story of Fiorio and Biancifiore is found between an incomplete notice on the twelve signs of the zodiac and a rule for calculating the accumulation of capital and interest on one side, and some tables for abacus and monetary calculations on the other; the codex also includes the vernacular translation of a treatise in prose by Martino Dumense on the four cardinal virtues (*Liber Senache pisolapus romanus*), a fragment of the *Gradi di S. Girolamo*, several short narratives, as well as sayings of philosophers, all in prose, and finally, both before and after the story of *Fiorio e Biancifiore*, notes on debts and credits.[16] The *cantare* starts on the recto of fol. 31, the loss of the preceding leaf having unfortunately deprived us of the beginning of the story. The title of the work can however be inferred by the *explicit* on the recto of fol. 47 which reads 'Finito è i·libro fiori e biancifiore / amen amen amen' (The book of Fiorio and Biancifiore is finished. Amen, amen, amen). The date 1343 appears on the recto of fol. 25.

This *cantare* is transcribed one verse per line, with a larger letter at the beginning of each verse, similar to the layout of the narrative works we have just considered, which have one column to the left of the page, one verse per line, and emphasis on the initial letter of each verse (see figure 5.6). In *Fiorio e Biancifiore* there is no sign to distinguish one stanza from another, which is not surprising given the nature of the manuscript, though in fact there may have been other reasons. Since *Fiorio e Biancifiore* is considered the first example of the *cantare* genre, it may be worth signalling a few more details. The poem is not subdivided into cantos but consists of one long narrative stretch of nearly 140 stanzas (too many to be sung in one session or even in two). The text is not designated as a *cantare* by the copyist but as a book (*libro*): 'Finito è i·libro
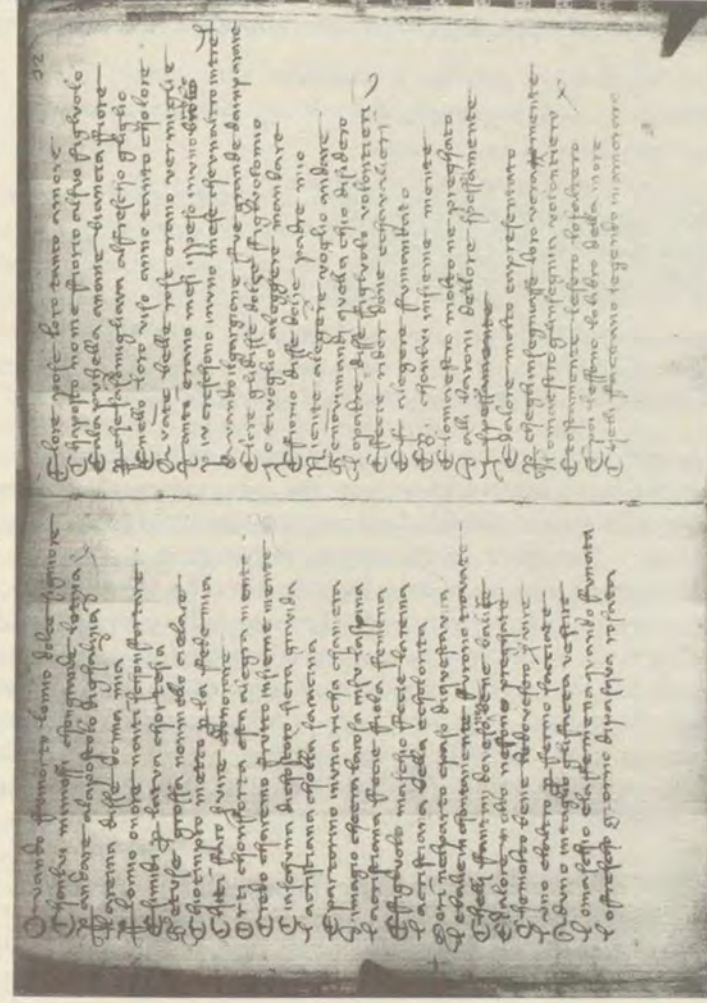

Figure 5.6
Layout of the *Cantare di Fiorio e Biancifiore* (ca 1345), with capital letters beginning every verse and no break between *ottave*. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. VIII, 1416, fols 31v–2r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

Fiori e Biancifiore' (The book of Florio and Biancifiore is finished).[17]
Unfortunately, the first stanzas of the *cantare*, where many character-
istics of orality are usually concentrated, are lost. However, they can be
approximated thanks to the testimony of other transcriptions. In the
manuscript Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnham
1473, for example, the opening (which here appears as a six-line *sestina*)
reads:

> [O] buona gente, vi voglio pregare
> Che ol mio detto sia bene ascoltato,
> Di quello che io vi vo<glio> dire e contare
> E questo intenda ogni omo inamorato,
> Sì come nacque Fiorio e Biancifiore,
> Insieme<mente> s'allevor<o> con grande amore.

> O good people, I pray you that you listen attentively to my words for
> what I intend to say and tell; let every person in love hear how Fiorio
> and Biancifiore were born; together they grew with great love.

In other words, although *cantari* usually devote the first stanza to an
invocation to God or saints and relegate the announcement of the topic
to the second or even to the third stanza, this does not seem to be the
case in *Fiorio e Biancifiore*. Furthermore, although it is common for
medieval verses in manuscript to be hypermetrical on account of words
that are written in their entirety even if meant to be pronounced in a
truncated form (for example, where *amore* is written for *amor*, *baroni* for
baron, *grande* for *gran*, *quello* for *quel*, etc.) some of the lines in *Fiorio e
Biancifiore* in Magl. VIII, 1416 have very peculiar ways of generating a
wrong measure in excess of the eleven syllables proper to the hendeca-
syllabic line. Some examples (with the number of syllables given in
brackets) follow:[18]

E poi diceva: 'Misera tapina,	[11]
Venduta sono alli malvagi cani	[11]
Che mi meneranno ïnella stranitade,	[12]
E già mai non tornerò nelle dolce contrade.'	[14]

And then she said: 'Alas, I, miserable wretch, am sold [as a slave] to the
evil dogs who will take me into their foreign lands; I shall never come
back to my lovely country.' (74.5–8)

O signor mio, come faremo noi di Fiorio?	[13]
Ché, s'elli ispia novelle, voi bene sapete ...	[13]

O my lord, what shall we do with Florio? You well know that if he
learns the news ... (78.2–3)

E di sopra la torre ha uno giardino	[11]
Ed in quello giardino sì hae una fontana bella	[15]
E di sopra da la fontana sì ha uno albore [fino].	[16]

And at the top of the tower there is a garden, and in the garden there is
a beautiful fountain, and above the fountain there is a handsome tree.
(103.1–3)

To my ear, these extra-long lines sound as if the copyist was not com-
pletely appreciative of the verse structure and worked as if he was
copying a text in prose.[19] In fact, they reveal the slow movement typical
of narration in prose, which reinforces the notion that the eight-line
stanza was perceived at this stage first and foremost as a narrative
structure.

The *cantari* transcribed in Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di
Firenze, Magl. VIII, 1272 show a very different picture.[20] This manuscript
may also be classified as a *libro zibaldone*. It consists of ninety-eight folios
in paper, measuring 30 cm by 23 cm, and is written in cursive script. It
contains the *Cantare del Bel Gherardino* and the *Cantari di Tristano*, but
also the *Storia d'Apollonio di Tiro* in prose, the *Ordine della vita cristiana* by
Simone da Cascia, the *Passione di santo Istagio*, a fragment from Dante's
Paradiso, poetry by Sacchetti and others, a geographical description of
Europe, and rhetorical precepts. These texts are interspersed with letters,
accounts, notes, and fragments of other *cantari*, as if someone were
trying to fill in the blanks, or needed space for miscellaneous records.
The writing is in two columns, and the *cantari* are consistently tran-
scribed without any attention to the division into verse, as if they were
in prose. However, the beginning of each stanza is clearly signalled by
a larger initial letter at the beginning of the line (see figure 5.7). The same
layout is also used in another manuscript, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale
Centrale di Firenze II.IV.163, which preserves the first twenty-eight
stanzas of *Bel Gherardino*. This manuscript is another *libro registro*,
originally a collection of legal formulas, as the title on the first page
suggests: 'Formule di saramenti di vari savi' (formulas for oaths
gathered from various learned men), presumably a repertoire of useful
formulas for a notary.

Such a method of transcribing *cantare* texts is not the result of the
inattention that often characterizes manuscripts compiled for private
use. It is the normal format used to transcribe lyric texts such as *canzoni*,

and originally it was the main format used to transcribe texts to be sung. We find it, for example, in thirteenth-century manuscripts that preserve troubadour Provençal lyrics, which were commonly considered musical texts. In this kind of layout the essential element is the division into stanzas; within each stanza the words are perceived as a continuum and the lines are written without divisions, although the end of the verse is usually signalled by some kind of mark, such as a period, a colon, or one or two oblique bars (see figure 5.8).

The same layout continued to be used for Italian 'lyric' poems even long after these genres had been severed from music and the poems were perceived essentially as literary texts. The information we can gather from this layout for *ottave* is therefore somewhat ambiguous: it may suggest that these poems in *ottava rima* were perceived by the scribes as lyric poems, such as *canzoni* and *sonetti*. More likely this layout suggests that those who transcribed *Bel Gherardino* and the *Cantari di Tristano* perceived the texts as inseparable from their musical performance: the narrative poems had become *cantari*. One may recall that at the end of the third day of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio refers to the story 'about Sir Guglielmo and the Lady of Vergiù' *sung* by Dioneo and Fiammetta (these figures are the subjects of a well-known *cantare*),[21] and that in Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*, the widow reads with gusto 'the *Song* [*canzone*] of the Riddle and that of Florio and Biancifiore.'[22] We might infer from this that the term *canzone* could be attributed to a narrative text in *ottava rima*. In the layout of *Bel Gherardino* we therefore seem to have further testimony to the practice of singing narrative stories in *ottava rima*.

What we have seen so far are texts of *cantari* that were transcribed in two very different styles: one that links *cantari* to narrative texts in verse, the other that links *cantare* to the performative style of lyric *canzoni*. To complicate the issue further, in the midst of a Florentine chronicle commonly known as the *Diario di anonimo* (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. xxv, 19, written in *minuscola cancelleresca*) the writer abruptly inserted a poem relating events that took place in 1375–6 during the War of the Eight Saints between Florence and the pope. One editor of this text, Armando Balduino, has entitled it the *Cantare della Guerra degli Otto Santi*.[23] Here the stanzas are written across the full page, the beginning of each stanza is emphasized by a larger initial letter shifted toward the left, but the verses are written two per line, separated by a sort of parenthesis mark (see figure 5.9). This is the only example known to me of such a layout for a poem in *ottave*. It is extremely interesting that this layout distances itself from both the
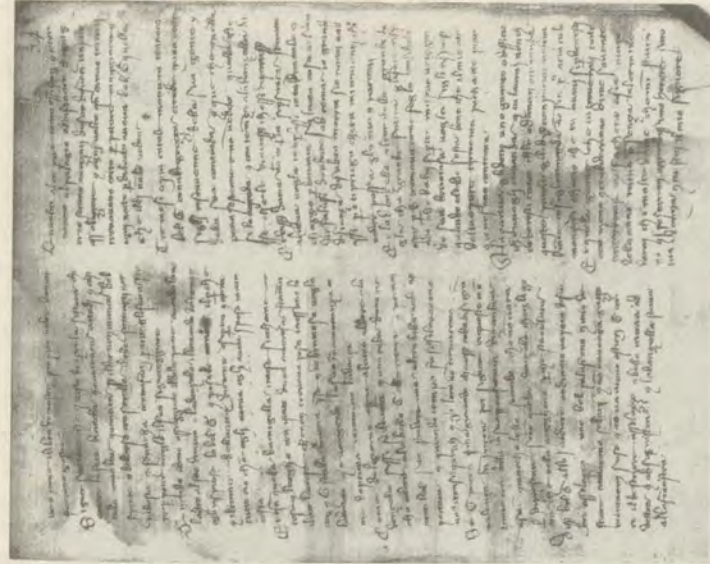

Figure 5.8
Layout of stanzas for songs of Peire Vidal in a *chansonnier* of troubadour lyrics (mid thirteenth cent.). Modena, Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, α.R.4.4, fol. 22v. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

Figure 5.7
Layout of the *Cantare del Bel Gherardino* (ca 1373), in register format, with each *ottava* written in the manner of prose. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. VIII, 1272, fol. 34r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.
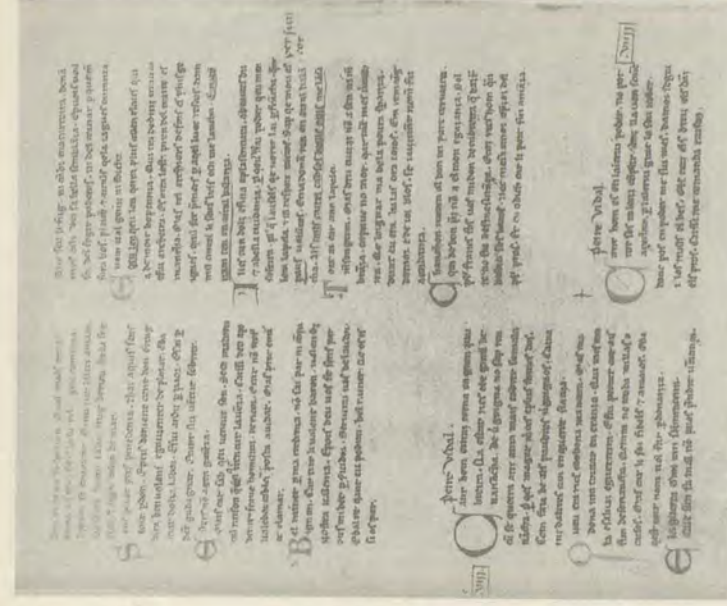
perception of the *ottava* as a primarily narrative device linked to reading and the perception of it as a *stanza di canzone* linked to a musical performance. Rather, such an arrangement emphasizes the binary rhythm of the couplets (rhyming ab ab ab cc), suggesting that the *ottava* was at this point perceived as a poetic structure fit for written literary poetry as if it were a sonnet or an Italian textual – not musical – *stanza di canzone*. This is confirmed by a comparison with the layout of Petrarchan sonnets and *canzoni*, where the *stanzas* are normally laid out in two-verse lines (see figure 5.10). Such a layout is also reminiscent of a common format for yet another metrical structure of interest in the study of the origins of the *ottava*, that of the *serventese*. Thus around 1380 the Tuscan *ottava* had reached full recognition as an autonomous poetic structure, paving the way for the single-stanza *strambotti* and *rispetti* of the fifteenth century.

Before attempting to reach any conclusions I would like to mention an issue that has not often been raised, that of the various degrees of 'singability' of texts delivered orally. We might agree that the *cantari* we read in these manuscripts were destined to be delivered orally, sung in public. However, might there have been a difference between the melodies used to narrate a story and the melodies used for troubadour songs? This question admits of no solution (given the lack of sound recordings from the Middle Ages). However, it is reasonable to assume that such a difference existed and that the distinction would have been very clear to a medieval listener. This seems especially likely in light of sacred texts: doesn't Gregorian chant distinguish between syllabic, neumatic, and melismatic styles according to the different texts to which the *cantus* is to be applied?[24]

Now, it may be possible to draw some conclusions from this evidence concerning the layout of the *ottava rima* in its earliest occurrences. The written representations of early *cantari* are too limited to allow us to reach any definite conclusions; nevertheless, I offer a tentative hypothesis. The early *cantare Fiorio e Biancifiore* is characterized by a specifically narrative mode; this narrative aspect adds to my perplexity regarding hypotheses that the eight-line stanza of *ottava rima* was derived from lyric poetry. From the very beginning, the metre of *ottava rima* was perceived by both Boccaccio and the anonymous copyist of *Fiorio e Biancifiore* as a narrative metre, and as such it was received by Domenico Scolari and by the Sienese authors of religious narrative poems. This implies that, if we want to investigate the origins of *ottava rima*, we should perhaps concentrate on narrative antecedents rather than on lyric ones. In this context, we should perhaps pay more attention to narrative
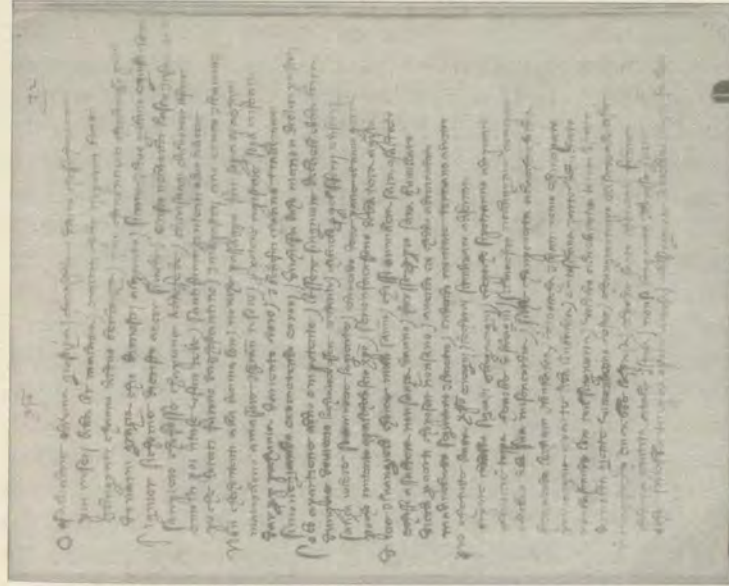

Figure 5.10
Layout of a *canzone* by Petrarch (fourteenth cent.), with pairs of verses written across the page. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo XLI.17, fol. 49r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

Figure 5.9
Layout of the *Cantare della Guerra degli Otto Santi* (after 1378), with pairs of verses written across the page. Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. xxv, 19, fol. 72r. Reproduced with permission of the Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali.

metres such as those used in *serventesi*, following De Robertis who already in 1980 underlined the similarities between the *serventese* and the *cantare*.[25] A variant form of *serventese* seems to have developed into the extremely popular six-line narrative stanza, the *sestina narrativa* (in the terminology of Raffaele Spongano, the *serventese ritornellato*). Although the *sestina* appears more often with the rhyme pattern aaaabb, the rhyme pattern ababcc also existed and is documented, for example, in a historical *contrasto* by Gidino di Sommacampagna dated 1384.[26]An interesting eight-line rhyme scheme is found in the *Atrovare del vivo e del morto*, whose octaves consist of couplets of hendecasyllables with the rhyme pattern aabbccdd.[27] Rhymed couplets of eight- and nine-syllable lines (*otto-novenari*) were common in early narrative poetry (one example is in *Detto del gatto lupesco*) and represented the Italian version of the primary narrative metre of the French courtly poems. It is precisely these poems that offer the legendary subject matter for most of the early *cantari* (beginning with *Fiorio e Biancifiore*).

Thirty or forty years after Boccaccio's narrative works, the singing of poems in *ottava rima* had become common practice. The stories were commonly divided into at least two cantos. The signs of oral delivery in the text, especially at the beginning of a canto, became prominent; the rhythm also became much smoother and more euphonious, as one notices when comparing the rhythm of the verses in, for example, *Bel Gherardino* with those of earlier poems in *ottave*. It is not by chance that *Bel Gherardino* is transcribed as if it were a *canzone*. It is worth noting however that, with the exception of *Fiorio e Biancifiore*, the stories sung in public squares seem to have nothing to do with the early written experiments of the genre: neither the *Filostrato* nor the *Teseida* nor the *Istoria di Alessandro Magno* appear to have ever been sung as *cantari*. It seems legitimate to identify two traditions, a written one that includes Boccaccio's poems, the *Istoria di Alessandro Magno*, and the *poemetti religiosi*, and an oral one, or rather a body of poems that entered the repertoire of jongleurs and were entrusted to writing only in order to be sung, beginning with *Fiorio e Biancifiore* and including Pucci's *cantari*.

The fact that it is possible to identify two traditions that run parallel, without any evidence of one having been derived from the other, justifies a philological argument for a preexisting structure that incorporated elements of both traditions: that of being written for narrative purposes, and that of being composed for oral delivery. The *libro* of *Fiorio e Biancifiore* (which I believe to be an antecedent to and not a derivative of Boccaccio's *Filocolo*) seems to respond to both criteria. By virtue of the fact that it appears to be a translation (and also a rewriting) of a much older French poem, this very first *cantare* seems to presuppose

a written text rather than an oral tradition. It is not inconceivable that Boccaccio received the suggestion of the new metre from a manuscript containing something similar to the story of *Fiorio e Biancifiore* (and possibly from a manuscript with that very poem: the story obviously impressed him so much that he reworked it in his prose novel the *Filocolo*).

Nevertheless, *Fiorio e Biancifiore* was part of a jongleur repertoire: it was composed in order to be recited, narrated, or sung. In the second half of the fourteenth century the practice of singing narrative poems of French descent and legendary subject matter became more common in peninsular Italy and the old jongleur made room for the new figure of the *canterino*. This explains the term *canzone* used by Boccaccio for works that may have been *cantari*, and it certainly influenced the way in which copyists transmitted the *Bel Gherardino*. The literariness of the prestigious Boccaccian poems, on the other hand, as well as the way in which the narrative poems were sung (which must have been different from that of lyric songs) facilitated the reception of the *ottava* as a poetic structure similar to other canonical forms of literary poetry. This explains the adoption of the metre not only by authors like Pucci but also, later on, by poets as refined as Poliziano.

The *cantare* genre thus appears, from its very inception, to have been characterized by a mixing of oral and written traditions, an enigmatic and intriguing quality of so much medieval literature.

NOTES

1 Excellent studies on the *mise-en-page* of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* have been provided by Furio Brugnolo, 'Libro d'autore e forma-canzoniere: Implicazioni grafico-visive nell'originale dei *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*,' and H. Wayne Storey, 'All'interno della poetica grafico-visiva di Petrarca,' both in *'Rerum vulgarium fragmenta'*: *Codice Vat. Lat. 3195*: *Commentario all'edizione in fac-simile*, ed. Gino Belloni, Furio Brugnolo, H. Wayne Storey, and Stefano Zamponi (Padua: Antenore, 2003), 105–29 and 131–71. For the *mise-en-page* of other lyrical texts, see also Geneviève Hasenohr, 'Le rythme et la versification,' and 'Les recueils lyriques,' in *Mise en page et mise en texte du livre manuscrit*, ed. Henri-Jean Martin et Jean Vezin (Paris: Editions du Cercle de la librairie – Promodis, 1990), 235–8 and 329–33; Peter Weinmann, *Sonett-Idealität und Sonett-Realität: Neue Aspekte der Gliederung des Sonetts von seinen Anfängen bis Petrarca* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1989); and the bibliography by Barbara Frank, *Layout-Entwicklung mittelalterlicher Handschriften*, available online at http://www.barbara-job.de/biblio/tex_bib.htm#medien.

2 'Il dibattito intorno alle origini dell'*ottava rima* è più che mai aperto'; Aldo Menichetti, 'Problemi della metrica,' in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa, vol. 3, *Le forme del testo*, tom. 1, *Teoria e poesia* (Turin: Einaudi, 1984), 349–90 at 390 (translation mine). For a brief overview of the *cantare* genre, see Eugenio Ragni, 'Cantare,' in *Dizionario critico della letteratura italiana*, ed. Vittore Branca (Turin: UTET, 1986), 1:480–8.

3 See Aurelio Roncaglia, 'Per la storia dell'*ottava rima*,' *Cultura neolatina* 25 (1965): 5–14; Michelangelo Picone, 'Boccaccio e la codificazione dell'ottava,' in *Boccaccio: Secoli di vita: Atti del Congresso internazionale Boccaccio 1975, University of California, Los Angeles, 17–19 ottobre 1975*, ed. Marga Cottino-Jones and Edward F. Tuttle (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 53–65; Guglielmo Gorni, 'Un'ipotesi sull'origine dell'ottava rima,' *Metrica* 1 (1978): 79–94; and Armando Balduino, '*Pater semper incertus*: Ancora sulle origini dell'ottava rima,' in *Boccaccio, Petrarca e altri poeti del Trecento* (Florence: Olschki, 1984), 93–140. According to Raffaele Spongano the *ottava* 'si sviluppò ... dallo schema fondamentale dell'antica poesia destinata alla danza: AAAB'; *Nozioni ed esempi di metrica italiana*, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Patron, 1974), 51.

4 See Domenico De Robertis, 'Nascita, tradizione e venture del cantare in ottava rima,' in *I Cantari: Struttura e tradizione*, ed. Michelangelo Picone and Maria Bendinelli Predelli (Florence: Olschki, 1984), 9–24, esp. 15 n. 24. The fact that religious poems in *ottave* were composed by Sienese authors may explain the use of the *ottava* in the *laude* by Bianco da Siena.

5 See for example the *sacre rappresentazioni* edited in Vincenzo De Bartholomaeis, *Il teatro abruzzese del Medio Evo* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1924; facsimile repr. Bologna: Forni, 1979).

6 Antonio Maria Cirese, 'Note per una nuova indagine sugli strambotti delle origini romanze, della società quattro-cinquecentesca e della tradizione orale moderna,' *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 144 (1967): 1–54, 491–566. An interesting example of a ballad with the same rhyme pattern as the *ottava* can be found in *Par les bons Gedeons*, written in French by Filippottò da Caserta, which because it exalts the antipope Clement VII is dated after 1378; see Antonio Cappelli, ed., *Ballate rispetti d'amore e poesie varie* (Modena: Cappelli, 1866), 23.

7 For the latter, see Anna Bettarini Bruni, 'Intorno ai cantari di Antonio Pucci,' in *I Cantari: Struttura e tradizione*, ed. Picone and Bendinelli Predelli, 143–60.

8 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, ed. Vittore Branca, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Vittore Branca, vol. 2 (Milan: Mondadori, 1994), 1–228.

9 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida delle nozze di Emilia*, ed. Alberto Limentani, in Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Branca, 2:229–664.

10 In the poem's final stanza the author purports to have drawn his subject from a work in Latin prose: 'ch'era per prosa e in gramatica prima.' I have read the poem in the unpublished thesis of Emanuela Bariani, 'Domenico Scolari, *Istoria di Re Alessandro* (edizione critica),' directed by Armando Balduino (Tesi di Laurea, Università degli studi di Padova, 1980–1).

11 In Boccaccio's *Teseida*, each canto is preceded by an introductory sonnet. The *Istoria di Re Alessandro* is preceded by a rhymed summary of the whole poem, divided into 176 *quartine*; the metre probably represents an Italian version of the French *couplet d'octosyllabes*, being rhymed couplets of *otto-novenari*.

12 See *Poemetti religiosi senesi del Trecento*, ed. Giorgio Varanini (Bari: Laterza, 1965). *La fanciullezza di Gesù* was left unfinished due to the death of the writer. Another poem by Niccolò di Mino Cicerchia, *La risurrezione*, of uncertain date, is divided into two cantos.

13 It is interesting to note that this layout is found in the semi-autograph manuscript of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano latino 3195), where it is exclusively reserved for the *canzoni* in *sestine*. The layout is a significant and intentional innovation by Petrarch according to Furio Brugnolo, 'Libro d'autore e forma-canzoniere,' 119–21.

14 These observations converge with those of Brugnolo, who states: 'l'incolonnamento è normale, anzi pressoché esclusivo e insomma obbligatorio, fin dalle origini, per i componimenti non-lirici ... essendo assai più agevole impaginare e incolonnare testi in versi caratterizzati da una rigida e costante isometria – epica, narrativa, didattica, eccetera – che non testi, come quelli appartenenti alla lirica d'arte'; Brugnolo, 'Libro d'autore e forma-canzoniere,' 116.

15 See Armando Petrucci, 'Il libro manoscritto,' *Letteratura italiana*, vol. 2, *Produzione e consumo*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: Einaudi, 1983), 499–524.

16 See description in Domenico De Robertis, 'Cantari antichi,' *Studi di filologia italiana* 28 (1970): 67–175, at 71–2.

17 *Il cantare di Fiorio e Biancifiore*, ed. Domenico De Robertis, in 'Cantari antichi,' 78–109, at 109. Citations to the poem as found in Magl. VIII, 1416 are given by stanza and verse, following this edition.

18 Other examples include: 'E disse: "Perché sète voi qui venuti? [12] / Hacci qui veruna cosa che vi piaccia?"' [12] (68.5–6); 'Alora disse Fiorio: "Ed io vi voglio andare"' [13] (89.1); 'Sì portarai teco, e nonn-avere

dotanza' [13] (90.6); 'Sì disse: "Donna, ista colla buona ventura"' [13] (94.6).

19 See also: 'Ora vi va', figliuolo, e fa' lo suo comando [13] / Ched ello ti manda molto salutando' [12] (19.7–8); Giuliano Tanturli (in seminar) has stated that he has not encountered verses that are hypermetrical on account of the euphonic 'd' (as here with 'ched').

20 De Robertis, 'Cantari antichi,' 72–4, describes Magl. VIII, 1272, noting that the verses are transcribed 'a mo' di prosa' (72).

21 'Dioneo e la Fiammetta cominciarono a cantare di messer Guglielmo e della Dama del Vergiù.' Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, vol. 4 of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittorre Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1976), 340 (3. Conclusione); *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: Norton, 1982), 240–1.

22 'Legge la *canzone* dello indovinello e quella di Florio e di Biancifiore e simili cose assai.' Giovanni Boccaccio, *Corbaccio*, ed. Giorgio Padoan, in Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Branca, vol. 5.2.499 (§ 316); *The Corbaccio*, trans. Anthony K. Cassell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 60 (emphasis mine).

23 *Cantari del Trecento*, ed. Armando Balduino (Milan: Marzorati, 1970), 239–51, 318–23. Recently Anna Bettarini Bruni has proposed recognizing Antonio Pucci as the author of the *cantare*; see 'L'impegno civile di Antonio Pucci versificatore dei Vangeli,' in *Firenze alla vigilia del Rinascimento: Antonio Pucci e i suoi contemporanei*, ed. Maria Bendinelli Predelli (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2006), 33–63.

24 As Timothy McGee puts it, '*Recitare* simply separates the type of singing that employs a relatively small vocal range and simple style from the more elaborate types of song. Such a distinction has always been employed in opera, for example, where the elaborate melodies are known as arias and the simple, chantlike, melodies are called recitativi.' Timothy J. McGee, 'Dinner Music for the Florentine Signoria, 1350–1450,' *Speculum* 74 (1999), 95–114 at 96 n. 7.

25 De Robertis, 'Nascita, tradizione e venture.'

26 See Gidino da Sommacampagna, *Trattato e arte deli rithimi volgari: Riproduzione fotografica del Cod. CCCCXLIV della Biblioteca Capitolare di Verona*, ed. Gian Paolo Caprettini (Vago di Lavagna: La Grafica, 1993); and *Trattato dei ritmi volgari*, ed. Giovan Battista Carlo Giuliari (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1870). The *contrasto* is partially reproduced in Spongano, *Nozioni ed esempi*, 289–90. The sestina with rhyme pattern aaaabb is also found, for example, in the *Cantare del Corpo di Cristo*, edited by De Robertis, 'Cantari antichi,' 139–42.

27 Edited by De Robertis, 'Cantari antichi,' 143–75.

PART THREE
Administrative Textual Cultures