

USING CULTURE:
GIOVANNI RUCELLAI'S KNOWLEDGE-CONSTRUCTING
PRACTICE IN THE MS *ZIBALDONE QUARESIMALE*¹

Gábor Mihály Tóth

Even though commonplace books are one of the most important sources for insight into the world view of everyday actors in Early Modern history, they present a serious methodological challenge to historians. In terms of the modern notion of authorship, commonplace books are not regarded as original compilations. The owners who diligently collected and copied texts written by others can hardly be considered the authors of their commonplace books. Therefore, today these documents are seen merely as mini-libraries which express the individual taste and preferences of their owners. However, notebooks like the Florentine merchant's, Giovanni Rucellai's *Zibaldone Quaresimale* (Archivio Rucellai, Florence) functioned as “cultural maps,” which involved a strategic use of texts and not spontaneous copying activity.² Rucellai used the key texts of his culture to transmit a representation of his family, himself, and the world around him to his sons. He often reworked and reshaped the inserted texts according to his own predefined program. This is not a passive but an active reproduction of texts, which attempts to create a system of meaning in its own right. By analyzing Rucellai's knowledge-constructing practice in two different sections of the codex, I shall argue here that using the methodology of approaching the commonplace book as a compilation where one consciously uses his culture will be most advantageous for the historian interested in everyday actors.

Giovanni Rucellai (1403–1481), descendant of one of the most important Florentine merchant families, became well-known due to his building program, which resulted in important Florentine buildings such as the Rucellai Palace and the facade of the Santa Maria Novella.³ Rucellai is also known thanks to the

¹ I use the following abbreviations. AR: Archivio Rucellai, Florence; Bodl: Bodleian Library, Oxford; BNCF: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Florence; Laur.: Biblioteca Medicea-Laurenziana, Florence; Trivulziana: Biblioteca Trivulziana, Milan.

² This article is based in part on my DPhil research at the University of Oxford, Balliol College, and on my MA thesis, “Information and Instruction in Fifteenth-Century Florence, Giovanni Rucellai and his *Zibaldone Quaresimale*,” (Central European University, 2009).

³ Studies on Rucellai's biography and his building program were published in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone 2*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (London: The Warburg Institute, 1981).

manuscript *Zibaldone Quaresimale*, which he began to compile in 1457 with the explicit intention of instructing his sons. The manuscript is an enormous cultural mosaic which consists of Classical, medieval, and Renaissance texts. A wide range of genres such as chronicles, compilations of wisdom literature, and devotional texts appear on the pages of the manuscript. The *Zibaldone* was created under the influence of two, typically late medieval, Florentine traditions. On the one hand, Rucellai's compilation is a *zibaldone*, a commonplace book or notebook in English. *Zibaldoni* are manuscripts "written in cursive and containing an astonishing variety of poetic and prose texts...which were juxtaposed apparently without any specific criteria."⁴ On the other hand, the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* has several features in common with the Florentine family records' book (*libro di famiglia* or *ricordanze*) tradition, although not a chronological structure.⁵

Previous scholarship did not regard Rucellai's *Zibaldone* as an original work. In 1960, a selective edition of the codex was issued by the Warburg Institute.⁶ According to Alessandro Perosa, the editor, the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* reflects Rucellai's personality through his selection of texts, his questions, and the way he reacted to the cultural and political situation of his time.⁷ This suggests that Rucellai's intellectual contribution to the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* consists of collecting and selecting texts. Fulvio Pezzarosa saw the *Zibaldone* as an enormous "stock of memory."⁸ Since the edition of the Warburg Institute, the *Zibaldone* has become one of the most quoted sources from the social world of the Florentine Renaissance. However, it is still an open question as to how this intriguing compilation expresses Giovanni Rucellai's individual thinking and his world view. What is his relationship with the intellectual world of the codex?

⁴ Armando Petrucci, "Reading and Writing in *Volgare* in Medieval Italy," in *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 181. For further meanings of *zibaldone* see Alessandro Perosa, "Lo Zibaldone di Giovanni Rucellai," in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone 2*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (London: The Warburg Institute, 1981), 103–104.

⁵ A *libro di famiglia* is a manuscript that kept both the economic and civic matters of a merchant family in chronological order, see Angelo Cicchetti and Raul Mordenti, "La scrittura di libri di famiglia," in *Letteratura italiana III, Le forme del testo II: La prosa*, ed. Alberto Asor Rosa (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1984), 1117–1158.

⁶ Giovanni Rucellai, "Il Zibaldone Quaresimale," in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone 1*, ed. Alessandro Perosa (London: The Warburg Institute, 1960).

⁷ *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, 105.

⁸ Fulvio Pezzarosa, "La memorialistica fiorentina tra Medioevo e Rinascimento," *Lettere italiane* 31 (1979): 113.

The Program behind the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*

Commonplace books are generally described as disordered and heterogeneous textual collections. At first glance, the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*, which Rucellai himself calls “a salad of various ingredients,”⁹ also gives this impression. However, both documentary evidence and Rucellai’s editorial praxis suggest that there was a predefined program which structured the apparently disordered content of the codex.

In his introduction on the first folio of the codex, Rucellai envisages the goal of his compilation: “I started this book to give information and instructions to my sons, Bernardo and Pandolfo, that can be useful for them.”¹⁰ Rucellai’s purpose of education makes the heterogeneous content of the manuscript an organic whole. The keyword of Rucellai’s program is utility. This assures the reader that the texts were not assembled spontaneously, without any criteria of selection; indeed, they each have a function. Usually *zibaldoni* lack any introduction or indication why the texts in the manuscript were put together. Generally they do not have an initial page which would mark the beginning of a planned enterprise. Simone di Muronovo, a fifteenth-century citizen of Verona, for instance, begins his *zibaldone* (Trivulziana MS 963) *in medias res* by recording poems and making drawings on the first page of the manuscript.¹¹ Rucellai’s intention to instruct his heirs, the introduction placed at the beginning of the codex, relate the *Zibaldone* to the tradition of *ricordi*.¹² The authors of these documents also outlined an educational program at the beginning of their writings.

The idea of a program can be seen not only in the introduction of the codex, but in other editorial decisions, which are meant to structure and connect the pieces of Rucellai’s cultural mosaic. As contrasted to traditional *zibaldoni*, the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* is divided into chapters, the titles of which appear in the contemporary table of contents. Similarly to Rucellai, Richard Hill, an early sixteenth-century English grocer, provided his notebook (MS 354, Balliol College

⁹ “Una insalata di più erbe,” Rucellai, “Il Zibaldone Quaresimale,” 1.

¹⁰ “Il quale (Zibaldone Quaresimale) o principiato per dare notitia et amaestramento a Pandolfo et a Bernardo miei figliuoli di più chose, ch’io credo abbia essere loro utile,” Ibidem.

¹¹ The Trivulziana MS 963 is a heterogeneous collection of vernacular texts and an extract from a *libro di famiglia*, written in a *mercantesca* hand.

¹² Usually, the works of the *mercanti-scrittori* such as Bonaccorso Pitti or Giovanni Morelli are called *ricordi*. Unlike *ricordanze*, they do not contain economic, but rather historical and autobiographical accounts. See Christian Bec, *Les Marchands Ecrivains* (Paris: Mouton, 1967), 49–53.

Library, Oxford) with a table of contents. The function of the table of contents is clear; it helps the reader to browse the content. This suggests that both Hill and Rucellai not only assembled texts, but also prepared a compilation for future use. Moreover, in the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* introductory notes by Rucellai himself precede several chapters, expressing either his personal opinion or a general presentation of the chapter's topic. Some of these introductory notes also reflect a conscious arrangement. For example, at the beginning of his family records Rucellai states: "First I think I give you information about the descent of our Rucellai family and about other things belonging to the honor of the family which are worth recording."¹³ In contrast, in Bodl. MS Add. A. 12, another, anonymous fifteenth-century *zibaldone*, the different texts, like Petrarch's *Trionfi*, recipes, and a discussion of education attributed to Quintilian, follow each other without being related. This manuscript contains one man's reading experience. Returning to Rucellai, even though the table of contents, introductory notes, and division into sections all indicate Rucellai's enthusiasm for editing the *Zibaldone*, this seems to have decreased with the passing of time. While the oldest parts of the codex, the so-called *Zibaldone Vetus*, which was probably finished by the early 1460s,¹⁴ contain numerous interventions by Rucellai, the later sections contain fewer and fewer. This does not undermine the fact, however, that Rucellai continued to select consciously the material that his scribes inserted into the *Zibaldone*.

Furthermore, another noticeable feature distinguishes Rucellai's work from other *zibaldoni*. While the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* was written by professional scribes, other *zibaldoni* are usually written by the owners themselves in *mercantesca* script.¹⁵ At the same time, several marginal notes in Rucellai's hand appear in the manuscript,¹⁶ which can be identified based on autograph letters.¹⁷ These notes revise and update the content of the codex, which indicates that Rucellai actively participated in compiling the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. On the one hand, the reason

¹³ AR, MS *Zibaldone Quaresimale*, 1^r. I consulted a microfilm copy in the Florentine State Archive and in the Warburg Institute, London.

¹⁴ Perosa called the sections written by scribes A and B *vetus*, which range from the first folio to f. 84. The f. 3, f. 61, f. 71, ff. 49^r–50^v are not part of the *vetus* as they were left blank by scribes A and B. Alessandro Perosa, "Prefazione," in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone 1*, XII–XIII.

¹⁵ Armando Petrucci, "Reading and Writing in *l'olgare* in Medieval Italy," 199.

¹⁶ For instance, AR, MS *Zibaldone Quaresimale*, 4^r, 6^r, 61^r.

¹⁷ See, for example, Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Carte Strozziene, III. 120. 310^r. William Kent gives a general overview of all the existing letters of Rucellai in F. W. Kent, "The Letters Genuine and Spurious of Giovanni Rucellai," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 342.

for commissioning professional scribes may have been the gradual diffusion of a new manuscript model developed by Poggio Bracciolini, Niccolò Niccoli, and others, which resulted in the appearance of the humanistic cursive in the less luxurious manuscripts by the second half of the Quattrocento.¹⁸ Rucellai's first scribe, for example, used a humanistic cursive. On the other hand, the humanistic cursive of professional scribes may have given cultural and social prestige to a manuscript book. *Zibaldoni*, unlike *ricordanze*, were meant for wider circulation among relatives and friends;¹⁹ consequently, these manuscript books written by professional scribes might have contributed to the social prestige of their owners. This also implies that Rucellai had to collect texts and prepare an exemplar that his scribes used later, since usually patrons had to provide their scribe with the parchment or paper and the exemplar.²⁰

Documentary evidence suggests that Rucellai had another notebook in which he might have prepared the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. Containing autographs of Rucellai's son, Bernardo, the early sixteenth-century manuscript BNCF MS Magl. XXV. 636 probably comes from the circle of the Rucellai family. The section from 36^r to 55^v of this codex has been thought to be a sixteenth-century copy of the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*.²¹ The title of this section, however, which states that it was copied from a *zibaldone* written by Giovanni Rucellai,²² raises some doubts. First, Rucellai was the owner and not the scribe of the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. Second, the scribe forgot the adjective *quaresimale*, which had an important role in fifteenth-century administrative culture. Adjectives added to traditional names such as *libro* and *zibaldone* served as unique identifiers meant to distinguish similar types of manuscripts in the archives of merchants.²³ Unfortunately, Rucellai did not give any explanation why he named the manuscript *zibaldone quaresimale* in his introduction on the first folio.²⁴ In fact, the content of the manuscript has no apparent connection with Lent. According to Giuseppe Marcotti, a nineteenth-

¹⁸ Albinia de la Mare, "New Research on Humanistic Scribes in Florence," in *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento, 1440–1525: un primo censimento*, ed. Anna Maria Garzelli (Florence: Giunta regionale toscana, 1985), 444.

¹⁹ Lisa Kaborycha, "Copying Culture: Fifteenth-century Florentines and their *Zibaldoni*?" (Ph.D. diss. University of California Berkeley, 2006), 88–91.

²⁰ Albinia de la Mare, "New Research on Humanistic Scribes in Florence," 417–420.

²¹ Perosa, "Prefazione," XI. See also the unpublished inventory of the Fondo Magliabechiano.

²² "Nota di piu cose trassi di uno zibaldone scripto da Giovanni di Pagolo Rucellai," BNCF MS Magl. XXV. 636, 35^v.

²³ Cicchetti and Mordenti, "La scrittura di libri di famiglia," 1119.

²⁴ "Il quale libro si chiama Zibaldone quaresimale," "Il Zibaldone Quaresimale," 1.

century historian, the adjective *quaresimale* refers to Rucellai's intention to educate his sons, that is to say, just as Lent, also the *Zibaldone* is dedicated to contemplation and study.²⁵ Lent is forty days of spiritual preparation for Easter, as an analogy, the adjective *quaresimale* may also signal Rucellai's intention to prepare his sons for their future life.

Moreover, the BNCF MS Magl. XXV. 636 contains a textual variant that could not have been copied from the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. From 42^r to 46^r it contains a chronicle which can be found in two versions in the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. From 60a^r to 61b^r, the first scribe recounted the history of Florence from 1400 to 1423. Later, the second scribe, from 71a^r to 78b^v, rewrote the same chronicle in a different orthographic pattern and continued the narration until 1457. The BNCF MS Magl. XXV. 636 also contains the chronicle from 1400 to 1457, but in the orthographic pattern of the first scribe, who, however, ended the narration with the events of 1423. Consequently, the BNCF MS Magl. XXV. 636 could have been copied from another notebook of Rucellai²⁶ which might have served as an early draft for the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*.

All this implies that well before the compilation of the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* Rucellai had been collecting sayings and texts in a now-lost notebook that his scribes later used. Like Boccaccio's *zibaldoni*,²⁷ this lost notebook might have served as a laboratory for further works. However, unlike Boccaccio, Rucellai did not prepare the usual literary product, but another *zibaldone*. That is to say, the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* is not the result of extemporaneous collecting and copying but a conscious production.

Using and Manipulating Textual Fragments

Perhaps the most valuable parts of the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* are those which depict the Florentine social world.²⁸ However, as Perosa pointed out in his edition, Rucellai's descriptions consist of borrowings from different medieval

²⁵ Giuseppe Marcotti, *Un mercante fiorentino e la sua famiglia nel secolo XV* (Florence: Nozze Nardi-Arnaldi, 1881), 28.

²⁶ Unless part of the chronicle written by the first scribe has been lost. However, Perosa, who examined the original manuscript, did not indicate any possible loss from the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*.

²⁷ Laur. MS Plut. XXIX. 8, Laur. MS Plut. 33, BNCF MS BR 50. Michelangelo Picone, "La Comedia Lidie dallo Zibaldone al Decameron," in *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio, Memoria, scrittura, riscrittura*, ed. Michelangelo Picone and Claude Cazalé Bérard (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 1998), 402.

²⁸ Rucellai, "Il Zibaldone Quaresimale," 2–13.

and humanist works. This leads back to the question of this article: How does a compilation of this kind express Rucellai's own point of view? Moreover, how did Rucellai's contemporaries and readers see this "plagiarism"?

In fact, Rucellai not only copied his borrowings word by word but he also rewrote them. His account of the Florentine social world contains passages from the late thirteenth-century florilegium, *Fiore di virtù*, and from the pseudo-version of Leon Battista Alberti's *I libri della famiglia*, known as *Del Governo della famiglia*.²⁹ The sentences of these works were used as constituents of a new narrative. Unlike the case of traditional commonplace books, the extracted passages do not just follow each other; they are logically related and thus make up a coherent narrative. To understand Rucellai's method of rewriting I compared the extracts from *Del Governo* in the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* with the BNCf MS Pal. 789, which contains the entire version of the *Del Governo*. Rucellai mixed passages from different parts of the *Del Governo* to create his own version. Furthermore, he also changed the syntactic structure of the inserted passages; sometimes he changed the subject or added new adverbs and adjectives. An essential component of his rewriting was omission. Sometimes he excluded important arguments of the *Del Governo*. And finally, among the passages from *Del Governo*, one can find quotations derived from the *Fiore di virtù*. His way of rewriting, thus, consists of the following aspects: omission, the insertion of new elements, changing the order, changing the syntactic structure of the original sentences, compressing the original content, and associating passages from different works. These modifications suggest intentional rewriting. Rucellai's version is unique and cannot be found in any existing copies of the *Del Governo*.³⁰ It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Rucellai carried out this rewriting himself.

Using sayings, proverbs, and passages authored by others as constituents of texts has a long tradition going back to antiquity. Aristotle, in the *Topics*, defined *topoi*, that is to say commonplaces, as speeches-within-speeches which are arguments that can be used to build or amplify texts.³¹ These general arguments, expressing

²⁹ Alberti's masterpiece was forgotten for centuries, instead, a rewritten and simplified version of the third book of the *I libri della famiglia* circulated among Florentines, which was attributed to Rucellai's maternal uncle, Agnolo Pandolfini. First published as *Trattato del governo della famiglia di Agnolo Pandolfini colla vita del medesimo scritta da Vespasiano Bisticci* (Florence: Tartini, 1734). See also Judith Ravenscroft, "The Third Book of Alberti's Della Famiglia and its Two *Rifacimenti*," *Italian Studies* 29 (1974): 44–50.

³⁰ See the manuscripts of *Del Governo* in Lucia Bertolini, ed., *Leon Battista Alberti. Censimento dei manoscritti* (Firenze: Polistampa, 2004).

³¹ Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1974), 3.

universally applicable ideas, were essential elements of rhetoric and dialectics. In his *De Inventione* Cicero describes *topoi*, in Latin *loci communes*, as an indispensable component of court speeches and instruments of persuasion.³² Quintilian in the *Institutio oratoria* defines *loci communes* as “weapons which we should always have stored in our armory ready for immediate use as occasion may demand.”³³ During the Middle Ages they were essential elements of letters, poems, sermons, and biographies. Besides, they also functioned as mnemonic devices. As Joan Marie Lechner says “these places or topical headings were referred to as cell and receptacles in which memorable sentences were hidden, and in which excerpts taken from reading were noted down for future use.”³⁴

Borrowing ready-made arguments or passages authored by others was also widely practiced by the humanists. For instance, borrowed passages from Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* appear in humanist books like Piccolomini's *De liberorum educatione* or in the *Vita Civile* by Matteo Palmieri.³⁵ Italian humanists were the first to reflect critically on the acceptable use of others' passages. Petrarch warned his contemporaries that the writer should not only collect sayings of the ancients but also transform them according to his own purposes. In a letter to Boccaccio he compared the good writer to bees who not only collect flowers, but also use them to make something more precious: “We should write in the same way as bees makes honey, not preserving flowers, but turning them into honeycombs, so that out of many and varied resources a single product should emerge, and that one both different and better.”³⁶

A few decades later another Italian humanist, Gasparino Barzizza (1360–1430) dedicated an entire treatise, *De imitatione*, to the different, acceptable and non-acceptable, uses of others' passages.³⁷ In Barzizza's work the use of others' passages is a means of imitation, however, similarly to Petrarch, Barzizza did not

³² *De inventione*, II. XV. 50. See also II. XXVI.

³³ *Arma sunt haec (loci communes) quodammodo praeparanda semper, ut iis, cum res poscet, utare*, Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, II. I. 12.

³⁴ Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces*, 70.

³⁵ Francis Henry Colson, “Introduction,” in Quintilian, *Institutionis Oratoriae* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1924), LXV–LXIX.

³⁶ *Ut scribamus scilicet sicut apes mellificant non servatis floribus sed in favos versis, ut ex multis et variis unum fiat, idque aliud et melius*. Francesco Petrarch, *Familiarum rerum libri*, XXIII. 19, in Francesco Petrarca, *Prose*, ed. G. Martellotti et al (Milan: Ricciardi, 1955), 1018–1020, quoted by Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 51.

³⁷ Barzizza's *De Imitatione* was published as the appendix of G. W. Pigman, “Barzizza's Treatise on Imitation,” *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 44 (1982), 349–351.

accept a word-by-word borrowing. Following Seneca, Barzizza emphasized that those who use others' passages must change the sentences and the words so that they do not seem to be borrowings.³⁸ Collecting sayings and using them was also an essential element of education in the fifteenth century. Students in the Latin grammar schools were often asked to extract sayings from Latin works and use them to compose new texts.³⁹ In short, starting from antiquity, the use of other authors' passages as ready-made arguments, rhetorical embellishment or a means of education and imitation was widely accepted and practiced. It is impossible to know whether Rucellai was aware of the cultural background of commonplaces. One thing is certain, however: once a quotation was transformed and inserted into a new context, it was considered the compiler's own.

At the same time, the notion of commonplaces was changing in the Early Modern period. Their original rhetorical context was extended to constructing scientific knowledge. While in Antiquity and the Middle Ages commonplaces served as rhetorical devices, in the Early Modern period they also meant concrete facts and data that scientists and philosophers recorded in their notebooks for further use.⁴⁰ For example, Guarino da Verona advised Leonello d'Este to assemble sayings and record them in his notebook for further use.⁴¹

Similarly, Rucellai might have created thematic lists of sayings in his lost *zibaldone*, then, by reworking them, he used these modified sayings as building blocks for compiling the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. In other words, the history of some textual fragments in the manuscript has two different aspects. First, an original author, like Seneca or Alberti, wrote them as part of an organic work. Second, Rucellai extracted, rewrote and inserted them into the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. In terms of our modern notion of authorship, which focuses on creating new artifacts, the second aspect cannot be interpreted as a creative activity in its own right. In contrast, as noted above, Rucellai's contemporaries regarded the modification and use of others' sayings as an acceptable activity which is part of authorship. Rucellai also regarded himself as the author of the *Zibaldone Quaresimale*. The last entry of the table of contents is by his hand, in which he

³⁸ *Dicit Seneca ad Lucilium quod imitatio non debet esse echo, id est: quando volumus imitari, non debemus accipere recte litteram sicut stat in illo libro in quo volumus imitari, sed debemus mutare verba et sententias ita quod non videantur esse illa eadem quae sunt in ipso libro.* Ibidem, 349–350.

³⁹ Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 323–324.

⁴⁰ Ann Blair, "Humanist Methods in Natural Philosophy: The Commonplace Book," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 53 (1992): 541–551.

⁴¹ Remigio Sabbadini, ed., *Epistolario di Guarino Veronese II* (Venice: A spese della Società, 1916), 270.

titles the last section of the manuscript “Memory of the reasons and motives why Giovanni di Pagolo Rucellai, *author* of this book must thank God.”⁴² Moreover, he gave the impression that he was the author of the rewritten texts himself. He often addressed his sons by their names; as the “you” refers to the sons, the “I” necessarily refers to Rucellai himself. Consequently, for the contemporary reader, he was the author.

In fact, Rucellai might have had in mind a notion of authorship in terms of which the intellectual contribution of author lies not in creating new artifacts, but in using, manipulating, and more importantly, in the words of Marshall Sahlins, putting textual fragments into the compiler’s own disposition. This last feature guarantees that even though the texts were not written but only used and modified by Rucellai, they express, indeed, his own ideas. I call this authorship “indirect authorship,” since the texts also express Rucellai’s ideas in an indirect way, that is to say, through how he modified and used them. This is a strategic use of culture, through which the texts of high culture become a means of communication expressing the intention, ideas, and experiences of an everyday actor. Beside Rucellai’s *Zibaldone*, another rare example presenting this strategic use of culture is the late fourteenth-century French advice book known as *Le Menagier de Paris*, the unknown author of which also often rewrote his borrowings to create an image of himself.⁴³ The French sociologist Michael de Certeau notes that culture has two sides. One side is a publicly available system of meaning. The other side is a hidden consumption through which the everyday actors use and manipulate this system of meaning according to their goals, desires or intentions.⁴⁴ Generally, this hidden consumption remains invisible to posterity. Creative practices such as Rucellai’s rewriting reflect this important field of human culture.

Dialogues between the *auctores*

The *Zibaldone* not only consists of rewritten texts. Rucellai also inserted longer extracts from various works without modifying them or giving the impression of being the author. Some parts of the codex resemble the form of traditional commonplace books where quotations from different authors, separated

⁴² “Righordo delle ragioni e chagioni per le quali Giovanni di Pagholo Rucellai, auctore di questo libro debbe ringraziare Idio,” Rucellai, “Il Zibaldone Quaresimale,” XXI.

⁴³ Georgine E. Bereton and Janet M. Ferrier, “Introduction,” in *Le Menagier de Paris*, ed. Georgine E. Bereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), XXXVII. I am most grateful to Marianne Sághy for calling my attention to this book.

⁴⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984), 12.

by empty space, follow each other. Again, in terms of the modern notion of authorship, these quotations do not reflect Rucellai's original ideas. Moreover, by also recording their authors, Rucellai does not even try to present himself as the author. For reflecting on this problem, I will examine one of Rucellai's accounts on *Fortuna* and *virtù*.

The opposition of *Fortuna* to *virtù* was undoubtedly one of the most important issues of intellectual life in the Italian Renaissance. From Petrarch to Castiglione, almost all thinkers reflected on the question of whether a virtuous man can overcome the power of Fortune. Rucellai inserted several texts which seek to answer this question. Here I will examine one of these texts, which seems to be related to traditional medieval rather than humanistic culture.

From 16b^r to 20a^v the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* contains a section called “Della Fortuna” in the table of contents of the codex. Preceding this section is an introduction in which Rucellai presents the topic and informs the reader that he will enumerate various opinions of different authors about Fortune.⁴⁵ The first sub-section attempts to answer the question of what are Fortune and accident.⁴⁶ The passage from the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle reveals that the notion of accident is only a product of human imagination which cannot find the cause of an event and therefore calls it an accident.⁴⁷ Rucellai quotes another passage from Boethius which also stresses that the notion of accident is merely the product of the human brain.⁴⁸ The conclusion of the first sub-section is that Fortune refers to a causality which is hidden from the eyes of people.

However, the main question is whether man can comprehend this hidden causality. The answer to the second sub-section is a definite “no,” man is not able to understand the invisible causality of the world. Rucellai inserted some passages from Canto VII of the *Inferno*, in which Dante describes Fortune as a celestial intelligence who represents the will of God on Earth, therefore, her intention is necessary for men who will never be able to understand the cause of events in the world.⁴⁹ In contrast, the final sub-section is a chapter of hope which proves that prudence, virtue, and good government can resist the power of Fortune. Rucellai starts with a long quotation from the thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century physician and poet, Francesco degli Stabili, also known as Cecco d'Ascoli,

⁴⁵ Rucellai, “Il Zibaldone Quaresimale,” 103.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 104.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁹ Dante Alighieri, *Divina Commedia*, ed. Natalino Sapegno (Milan: Ricciardi, 1957), 87–88.

who was burned as a heretic in 1327. The passage from the second chapter of the first book of his famous *Acerba etiam* discusses the ideas of Canto VII of the *Commedia*.⁵⁰ In contrast to Dante, Cecco speaks about a deistic God, who, after creating the world, left the creatures to themselves, thus, they can choose their own fates.⁵¹

In addition to various *auctores*, one also hears Rucellai's personal opinion in the introduction preceding the section about Fortune which claims that good government, wisdom, and prudence can keep the capricious events under control.⁵² Hearing Rucellai's voice is a significant novelty in a fifteenth-century Italian commonplace book culture, since *zibaldoni* generally lack the individual voice.⁵³ In fact, Rucellai is not only the narrator who simply introduces the topic, but also an autonomous point of reference among the *auctores*. Throughout the Middle Ages, the individual's position in respect to the *auctores* was, like Rucellai's, subordinate.⁵⁴ However, as Laurel Amtower, a historian of reading culture, has pointed out that, "by the Late Middle Ages the individual has both the ability and the duty to engage texts analytically and to question or doubt those opinions that may turn out to be dangerous or false."⁵⁵ Rucellai does not question the opinions of the *auctores*, but by juxtaposing them against each other he offers his sons various interpretative positions, including his own. Thus, the sayings of the *auctores* represent sets of perspective points, they are subjects of a sophisticated discursive game. It is worth comparing Rucellai's account of Fortune with another collection of sayings. The fifteenth-century, probably Florentine, BNCF MS Magl. XXI. 90 contains a short account on friendship.⁵⁶ Here, the sayings of the *auctores* are assembled under a common topic; they are part of a thematic list. In contrast, Rucellai creates a dialogue between the *auctores* by juxtaposing their ideas.

In fact, the intellectual world of the entire *Zibaldone* can be seen as a dialogue in which texts of a culture interact with each other. This is completely controlled by Rucellai, who thus used texts not only to transmit a representation of himself

⁵⁰ Francesco Stabili, *L'Acerba*, ed. Achille Crespi (Ascoli Piceno: Casa editrice di Giuseppe Cesari, 1927), 171–189.

⁵¹ "Non fa necessità ciaschun movendo, ma ben dispone creatura humana per qualità, qual l'anima, seguendo l'albitrio, abandona e fassi vile," Rucellai, "Il Zibaldone Quaresimale," 107.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 103.

⁵³ Kaborycha, "Copying Culture," 21.

⁵⁴ Alastair Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), 10–11.

⁵⁵ Laurel Amtower, *Engaging Words: The Culture of Reading in the Later Middle Ages* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 2.

⁵⁶ BNCF MS Magl. XXI. 90, 202^r–203^v.

and the contemporary social world but also to provide his sons with different perspectives on philosophical, ethical, and other questions. Nevertheless, sometimes these perspectives, like Dante's and Cecco's different views on human fate, are incompatible. Aby Warburg, characterizing Giovanni Rucellai's and Francesco Sassetti's world views, spoke about an equilibrium between medieval faith in God and Renaissance self-confidence.⁵⁷ In fact, a close reading of the *Zibaldone Quaresimale* suggests a man who is rather balancing on a tightrope. While in his account of *Fortuna*, echoing Cecco's ideas, Rucellai claims that his faith lies in the power of human action, which determines the course of the world, in another part of the codex he says that his business successes are thanks to God and not to his own efforts.⁵⁸ At the same time, some other parts of the codex suggest that faith and God were also subject to doubt and hesitation.⁵⁹ A world view is not a coherent whole of ideas, but a set of dilemmas and possibilities originating in the interaction of dissonant theories and ideas. Commonplace books like Rucellai's *Zibaldone* reflect these intrinsic contradictions of an individual's thought and culture.

Conclusions

How do works of high and popular culture express the ideas and world view of everyday actors of history? One can hardly answer this question, therefore, it must be reformulated. How did everyday actors of history use, manipulate or adapt the texts of their culture? Commonplace books are a typical field of these operations. Thus, the methodological challenge that I outlined at the beginning of this paper opens the way to understanding how different works of a culture express not only the general context of a society, but also particular individual situations. As the analysis of Rucellai's knowledge-constructing practice reveals, the world views of the compilers of commonplace books emerged not only from their selections and preferences, but also from the way they used, manipulated, and contrasted texts, which thus became a means of communication, expressing the ideas and dilemmas of everyday actors of history.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Aby Warburg, "Le ultime volontà di Francesco Sassetti," in Aby Warburg, *Opere I*, ed. Maurizio Ghelardi (Turin: N. Aragno, 2004), 461.

⁵⁸ Rucellai, "Il Zibaldone Quaresimale," 117–118.

⁵⁹ "Disse uno savio d'anima che quando l'uomo sentisse alchuna cosa che desse dubitazione alla fede Che si vuole inprigionare lontelletto ovvero chiudere gli orecchi della mente." AR, MS Zibaldone Quaresimale, 80b^r.

⁶⁰ I am most thankful to Nicholas Davidson and Jerry Schriver who read and commented an early draft of this paper.