

READING THE *DECAMERON* FROM BOCCACCIO TO SALVIATI

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Daniel Thomas Tonozzi

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READING THE *DECAMERON* FROM BOCCACCIO TO SALVIATI

Daniel Thomas Tonozzi, Ph.D.

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My dissertation analyzes the assumptions and anxieties the *Decameron*, in complete and expurgated forms, reveals about the practice of reading, the category of reader, and the materiality of the text. I also consider stories from the *Decameron* as a dialogue among the narrators who discuss the responsibilities of readers and writers.

My introduction sets up how I engage existing concepts of hermeneutics, reader-response theory, and imitation.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the practice of reading in terms of humanist imitation. I privilege an appreciation and examination of method, highlighting two responsibilities that weigh on the *Decameron*'s readers: to recognize useful textual models and to execute those models in a way that balances their replication with innovation.

In Chapter 2, I consider the *Decameron*'s assumptions about how readers judge useful models and discern opportunities for pleasure. I propose a reader who simultaneously acts as an individual agent and a member of a larger community. I identify two divergent models for communal participation that are marked by gender.

In Chapter 3, I analyze the interventions of expurgators Vincenzo Borghini and Lionardo Salviati, illustrating how their editions manipulate the tensions inherent in any censored book between its status as literature and its mandate to represent and support a specific ideology. Salviati's successful expurgation owes

itself both to the way he justifies textual extractions in the terms of humanist discourse and to the way his edited pages serve as visual reminders of Church authority. Salviati's edition highlights the central role the materiality of the text plays in its interpretation and circulation.

In Chapter 4, I trace how certain narrators use their stories to create a dialogue about effective strategies for communication and interpretation. Their dialogue emphasizes the reader's responsibility to recognize the abundance of meaning available in a text and the writer's capacity to manage that abundance. This method teases out a tension in the *Decameron* between preservation and innovation in regards to hermeneutic ideals, a tension central to understanding the *Decameron's* enigmatic final tale and the *brigata's* return to Florence.

My conclusion sets up further discussions prompted by my work.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Daniel Tonozzi began his scholarly career in the second-floor classrooms of his mother and of Mrs. Kathy Martin at St. Bede Academy in Peru, Illinois. He moved on to study history, Italian literature, and music at the University of Notre Dame, where he also worked with Christian Dupont in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections of Hesburgh Library. Eager to explore the connections between his various interests and studies, Tonozzi came to Cornell University immediately following the completion of his undergraduate degree.

To my family:

My parents, my sisters, and my brother

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INTRODUCTION

While an undergraduate at the University of Notre Dame, I worked with Dr. Christian Dupont in the Hesburgh Library Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts. The thrill I found working with incunabula editions of Dante's *Divina commedia* and rummaging through collections of sixteenth-century papal correspondence prompted me to pursue graduate studies in Italian Literature. It comes as no surprise, then, that once at Cornell University, my dissertation project began with a visit to the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections of Kroch Library.

As part of a *Decameron* seminar, the class viewed antique and illustrated editions of Boccaccio's stories at the Kroch Library. One of the volumes on display was a 1582 expurgated version of the *Decameron* in which the censor, Lionardo Salviati, rendered the story of Alibech and Rustico (*Decameron* 3.10) utterly incomprehensible. Hardly more than two words succeeded each other before little asterisks interrupted them. Salviati's remarkable treatment of the *Decameron* prompted a seminar paper that also introduced me to the 1582 edition's Florentine predecessor, an expurgated *Decameron* completed in 1573 by a group of scholars known as *I Deputati*. Both Salviati and the *Deputati* replace the priests, monks, and nuns that misbehave in the original *Decameron* – breaking their vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience – with teachers, notaries, and widows. Making such changes, together with others, saved the *Decameron* from complete prohibition in era of the *Index of Prohibited Books*. An

analysis of these expurgated editions became the basis for Chapter Three of this dissertation.

As studying the expurgated *Decameron* became more central to my work, my family in Illinois, wondering how I was spending my days in Upstate New York, took an interest in Boccaccio's writings.

Acquainting himself with the text and a bit of its circulation history, my father became a bit concerned. After a reunion with a friend of his from law school, my father found out that several stories from the *Decameron* had appeared in *Playboy*. I was, at the time, unaware of this fact, which pleased my father, first of all because he had offered a new bit of information on my topic, and secondly, no doubt, because it meant that I was ignorant of the illustrations that *Playboy* used to accompany these tales.

I did not remain ignorant for long, however, because I soon found myself again in the Kroch Library reading room, this time requesting *Playboy's* first issues from the 1950s. Starting with its premiere in December of 1953, *Playboy* included a monthly column called "Ribald Classics" that featured "a new translation of one of the choicest stories from Boccaccio's bawdy classic."¹ In March of 1954, letters to the editor start to applaud the magazine for including these tales. One reader, apparently already familiar with Boccaccio's stories, congratulates *Playboy* for exercising discretion and choosing only the best parts of the long work: "Some of the *Decameron's* stories are boring, but the ones you choose are really laugh producing."² Another

¹ Giovanni Boccaccio, "A Humorous Tale of Adultery," trans. Norman Holland, *Playboy*, December 1953: 39-40.

² "Letter to the editor," *Playboy*, June 1954: 28.

reader notes that “tales from the *Decameron*...are much more interesting *alla Playboy*.”³ These readers appreciate the certain something that *Playboy* brings out in the stories.

I was quite surprised, however, to find that one of Boccaccio’s stories, Dioneo’s tale on Day Nine (9.10), is quite similar *alla Playboy* as it is *alla Salviati*. In the original story, Dioneo recounts the adventures of a travelling parish priest who, while claiming that he is turning his host’s wife into a mare, cuckolds the husband while the husband watches. *Salviati* secularizes the story, changing the priest’s name from “Donno Gianni” to “Compar Gianni,” making the priest just another Pugliese peasant. The October 1954 *Playboy* presents the story as the chronicle of “a penniless professor.”⁴ While the titles are different in the *Salviati* and *Playboy* versions, both tales differ from the original in the same way; they are secularized accounts of Dioneo’s story. The first, however, operates as a Vatican-approved literary exemplar circulating throughout sixteenth-century Europe, the latter as a pornographic fantasy squeezed between photos of Hugh Hefner’s current-favorite coeds.

Struck by this odd situation, I began to think about how such a paradox could be. The answers that I came to using available scholarship were helpful, but insufficient. It is certainly popular to think of the *Decameron* as well suited for *Playboy*, perhaps even to think of the one as a predecessor of the other, both being graphic portrayals of sexual fantasy, especially of male sexual fantasy. It is

³ “Letter to the editor,” *Playboy*, May 1954: 28.

⁴ Giovanni Boccaccio, “Ribald Classics,” trans. M.S. Miller, *Playboy*, January 1954: 20-21, here 20.

harder, however, to find scholars whose readings of the *Decameron* help us understand how and why the expurgated work attained the success it did as a work of censored literature.

The lack of response to my questions is indicative not only of a gap in Boccaccio scholarship but a problem with the study of hermeneutics more generally. As Terry Eagleton describes the problem, hermeneutics “cannot come to terms with the problem of ideology – with the fact that the unending ‘dialogue’ of human history is as often as not a monologue by the powerful to the powerless, or that if it is indeed a ‘dialogue’ then the partners – men and women, for example – hardly occupy equal positions. It refuses to recognize that discourse is always caught up with a power which may by no means be benign; and the discourse in which it most signally fails to recognize this fact is its own.”⁵ The study of hermeneutics has developed without making any accommodations for the possibility of interference with the text or intervention between it and the reader by a demanding third party – the Vatican’s Office of the Index, for example. My own study of humanist hermeneutics, then, recognizes the limits of the field in the traditional sense. At the same time, however, I find the term very useful and still applicable because of its insistence that all understanding is productive. I choose to employ the term in my dissertation because it demonstrates that I think of understanding and interpretation as a process. I add to its meaning an awareness that there are multiple players involved in this process.

⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 64.

That awareness is partly influenced by the work of Stanley Fish, whose contributions to reader-response theory, a branch of critical discourse that has emerged out of hermeneutics, expand our understanding of the process of interpretation beyond a framework that isolates the individual reader. Fish encourages us to speak of the reader's experience of meaning as conditioned by the influences and demands of larger ideological groups. He calls those larger groups "interpretive communities," a concept that recognizes the multiplicity of meanings offered by a text and simultaneously argues that forces apart from the text and its reader valorize and judge those offerings quite differently. He writes:

What I finally came to see was that the identification of what was real and normative occurred within interpretive communities and what was normative for the members of one community would be seen as strange (if it could be seen at all) by the members of another. In other words, there is no single way of reading that is correct or natural, only 'ways of reading' that are extensions of community perspectives.⁶

Fish's theory denies that any universal or absolute right way to read exists. He refutes the existence of a single and correct method for arriving at any single meaning intended by the text. At the same time, he recognizes that specific groups sanction certain sets of interpretive strategies and products. Fish's work has been invaluable while considering the relationships between sixteenth-century Inquisition officials, editors and expurgators who carry out the demands of those officials, printers and publishers who translate editorial techniques

⁶ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 16.

into material documents, and the readers who finally consume those printed materials.

While Fish is incredibly adept at arguing for the influence of a larger ideological group on the reader, he does not consider the reversal of that relationship – the individual reader’s influence on the larger community – with the same rigor. Fish presents interpretation as a reader’s expression of communal codes, but does not consider the possibility for readers to in turn expand and develop those codes – to evolve the community without abandoning it. I have thus found Thomas Greene’s commentary on the “humanist hermeneutic” to be an important balance to Fish’s ideas about the process of interpretation. Greene’s work insists that a reader enjoy a strong sense of selfhood in order to more fully appreciate a text. Choosing Petrarch as his model reader, Greene writes: “Petrarch read (and sub-read) the ancients with less risk, with fuller appreciation, and with sharper philological acuity than Malpaghini not only because he was a great poet but also because he was a great egoist.”⁷ The reader, according to Greene, operates within a framework of established tradition, within what Fish calls, as noted earlier, a “community of interpretation,” but also infuses the experience of reading with personal insight and caution. Greene notes that the adroit mind of the reader is “obsessed with its own movements and turnings but intermittently open nonetheless to other minds and worlds.”⁸ Self and community, innovation and

⁷ Thomas Greene, “Petrarch and the Humanist Hermeneutic,” in *Italian Literature, Roots and Branches*, ed. Giose Rimanelli and Kenneth John Atchity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 201-24, here 213. Here, Greene is referring to Giovanni Malpaghini, Petrarch’s student and copyist.

⁸ Greene, “Petrarch and the Humanist Hermeneutic,” 213.

tradition, text and reader are elements, according to Greene, that are both in opposition and yet, at the same time, intimately linked, sustaining each other through the experience of reading and the development of literary history.

I thus come to the *Decameron* with an understanding of the tensions that are central to the process of reading and the concept of reader. Reading involves personal discernment by readers who are shaped and formed by the larger communities in which they participate. This dissertation, then, is the presentation of my analysis of the assumptions and anxieties that the *Decameron*, in both its complete and expurgated forms, has about the inherent tensions that operate in the process of reading and the category of the reader. To organize my study, I divide my work into four chapters. Three of these chapters investigate the practice of reading, the category of reader, and the materiality of the text, respectively. The final chapter considers stories from the *Decameron* as a dialogue between the narrators who discuss the characteristics of responsible readers and writers.

The first chapter of my dissertation frames the practice of reading in terms of humanist imitation. Doing so shifts the discussion of reading the *Decameron* from a focus on message to an appreciation and examination of method. Specifically, I highlight two of the responsibilities that weigh on readers of the *Decameron*. The first is to recognize on their own the most useful and beneficial models that the text has to offer. The second is to execute those models in a way that balances their replication with innovation, to infuse novelty into repetition. I ground my arguments in an examination of the ways in

which the *Decameron* itself engages literary models, specifically the *Divina commedia*. Further, I choose and analyze a selection of stories that take imitation as their central theme. In these stories, the narrators portray the positive and negative repercussions of well and poorly executed imitation, emphasizing the import of keen discernment and innovative repetition.

In Chapter Two, I consider the assumptions the text makes about the ways in which its readers will judge those useful models and discern opportunities for pleasure. I identify a reader who simultaneously acts as an individual agent and a respectful member of a larger community. My chapter begins with an evaluation of the *Decameron's* proem, a portion of the text that depicts a reader who, though alone in her room, does not enjoy a room of her own. I then move on to analyze how the Author's own reliance on his network of friends connects to the ways in which the members of the brigata organize their own group during their time away from Florence. My work also identifies two divergent models for communal participation outlined on Day Two by its first two narrators, Neifile and Filostrato, and how these models influence the choice of monarchs and of story topics in the days to come. My work in this chapter challenges the trend to discuss the *Decameron's* function as an escape for its readers from their daily lives and its invitation to an interpretive space free from the limits of ideological allegiances. This chapter proposes a reader who, while unfettered by the text, remains cognizant of the influences of and obligations to the structures that govern daily life.

Chapter Three investigates the success of the expurgated *Decameron* as a work of censored literature. In this chapter, I utilize the 1573 *Edizione dei Deputati* and Lionardo Salviati's 1582 *rassetatura* of the *Decameron*, two Florentine expurgated editions of Boccaccio's hundred tales. Specifically, I offer close readings that illustrate how these editions manipulate the tensions inherent in any censored book between its status as literature and its mandate to represent and support a specific ideology. I suggest that Salviati's successful expurgation owes itself, first of all, to the clever way he justifies his textual extractions in the terms of humanist discourse. Specifically, he exploits the humanist desire to witness a text in the moment of its creation. Secondly, Salviati is able to preserve substantial portions of the *Decameron* by innovatively employing traditional page designs. He makes his edited pages a visual reminder of the authority that sanctioned the work, even if the stories themselves depict behaviors and ideas that are contrary to the Church's rules. This chapter exhibits the important role that the materiality of the text plays in its interpretation and circulation.

In my final chapter, I develop and expand Millicent Marcus's discussion of the *Decameron's* stance on the practice of reading.⁹ Marcus privileges the Griselda story and focuses on moments when the *Decameron* resists the influence of established reading strategies. I, however, analyze the ways that the *Decameron* stories operate as a dialogue between the narrators and investigate how this dialogue

⁹ See Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the Decameron* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1979), especially 93-109.

balances preservation and memory with denial and separation. The discussion I highlight begins on Day One when Pampinea describes the elements of effective communication; it continues with animated and diverse responses from Emilia and Dioneo on Days Six, Seven, and Ten. The responses from Emilia and Dioneo place special attention on the reader's responsibility to recognize the abundance of meaning available in a text and the writer's capacity to manage that abundance. This method teases out a tension in the *Decameron* between preservation and innovation in regards to hermeneutic ideals, a tension that plays an important role in our understanding of the *Decameron's* enigmatic final tale and the brigata's return to Florence.

In this dissertation, I consistently refer to the *Decameron's* reader as a woman. This practice began with the rather innocent justification that the Author dedicates his work to lovelorn ladies, and if he spoke of female readers, then so would I. The issue, however, is by no means so simple. First of all, Vittore Branca has shown that, historically, most manuscript copies of the *Decameron* were in the possession of male merchants.¹⁰ Second, scholars such as Joy Hambuechen Potter and Millicent Marcus find indications in the *Decameron's* frame and its stories that the Author's dedication to

¹⁰ Branca asserts that the *Decameron* first enjoys success in the "operoso e avventuroso ambiente finanziario dei fiorentini" [industrious and enterprising financial circle of the Florentines] (47). Following its initial Florentine success, Branca identifies a diffusion of the *Decameron* into Neapolitan merchant society. Examining correspondence between Florentine and Neapolitan merchants and political figures, Branca notes that "riusciamo a intravedere quella società fiorentino-napoletana mercantescopolitica in cui il *Decameron* aveva la maggiore fortuna e circolava rapidamente" [we are able to glimpse that Florentine-Neapolitan, merchant-political society in which the *Decameron* had the greatest success and circulated rapidly] (51). See Vittore Branca, "La prima diffusione del *Decameron*," *Studi di filologia italiana* 7 (1950): 29-143.

women is misleading. They argue that this dedication masks an intended male audience.¹¹ Having considered the issue for some time, I find it ultimately impossible to limit a discussion of the *Decameron's* reader in terms of male or female, even in a historical sense. First of all, Branca's research identifies who the owners of the *Decameron* were, but his work does not specifically determine who had access to those copies, so it is quite difficult to have an accurate estimate of early readership. Second, if we look forward to the end of the sixteenth century and use the censored editions of the *Decameron* as an example, we can determine that Salviati anticipated both male and female readers of the work, because the editor addresses marginal notes both to jealous husbands and to vain women.

Beyond this, the *Decameron* itself resists any attempt to determine the gender of an intended reader. In fact, it undermines its own categories of male and female in the same portion of the text that dedicates the work to lovesick women. In the proem, the Author claims that the dedication is more suited to women because these women suffer from their experience of love (Proem.9-11). While men can distract themselves from love's torments with any number of diversions (the text lists going for a walk, listening to and seeing many things, hawking, hunting, fishing, riding, gambling, and conducting

¹¹ Potter, for example, calls the dedication to the first part of the "double lie" that Boccaccio uses to open the *Decameron*. The second part is that he writes from his own experience of failed love. See Joy Hambuechen Potter, *Five Frames for the Decameron: Communication and Social Systems in the Cornice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 5. Marcus reads the *Decameron's* third story as a portrayal of an ideal reader who is secular, learned, and male. See Millicent Marcus, "Faith's Fiction: A Gloss on the Tale of Melchisedech (*Decameron* 1.3)," *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies* 2 (1978-79): 40-55.

business), women are bound to suffer in the closed confines of their chambers (Proem.12). Before he makes this distinction, however, the Author recounts his own experience of suffering from love. He suffered from an “altissimo e nobile amore” [exalted and noble love] and its harmful effects (Proem.3; 3).¹² It is only the “piacevoli ragionamenti” [pleasant conversations] and “laudevole consolazioni” [admirable consolation] of a friend in his times of need that saved him from death; he mentions no relief from any of the active remedies he lists as the prerogative of men (Proem.4; 4). The Author, then, is an anomaly to his own categories of male and female. The creation of the text is motivated by the experience of a man who suffers like a woman in love.

Just as the depiction of the writer defies a stable gender identification, so too, I assert, must our understanding of the reader. In her reading of *Decameron* 5.8, Filomena’s story about Nastagio degli Onesti and the daughter of Paolo Traversari, Diane Duyos Vacca describes a female and male mode of reading reading in terms of “text-dominant” and “reader-dominant.” She writes:

Reading can be text-dominant, a passive activity in which the reader submits to the authority of the text, allowing herself to be effaced by it. But reading can also be reader-dominant: it can engender the reader’s authority and mastery, for the text is nothing without the reader, and meaning is defined by the reader’s interpretation.¹³

¹² Citations of the *Decameron* are found in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, 2 vols. (Torino: Einaudi, 1992). Translations, unless otherwise mentioned, taken from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella (New York: Signet Books, 1982). All other translations are my own.

¹³ Diane Duyos Vacca, “Carnal Reading: On Interpretation, Violence and *Decameron* V.8,” in *Boccaccio and Feminist Criticism*, ed. Thomas C. Stillinger and F. Regina Psaki (Chapel Hill: Annali d’Italianistica, 2006), 169-88, here 170.

As will become evident in my dissertation, discussing reading in terms of humanist imitation adds another possibility for the text-reader relationship – that while both reader and text are active in the creation of meaning, neither party dominates the other. I thus question the necessity to consider each one in exclusive terms of male and female, as does Duyos Vacca. Instead, I propose that we consider the experience of reading the *Decameron* in terms of the bountiful text and the skilled reader working together. The necessity of choosing a gendered pronoun to refer to the reader, then, becomes a requirement of the English language rather than a demand of the text. I meet that requirement with feminine forms.

CHAPTER ONE

ANYTHING THE *DECAMERON* CAN DO...

In this chapter, I analyze the *Decameron's* representations of reading practices by framing my study in terms of imitation, a key concept in the study of humanism. I will first explain how imitation functions in a humanist context not only as a method of writing but also as a reading strategy. To contextualize the term, I offer my reading of a series of letters that Petrarch wrote to Boccaccio shortly after the dates traditionally assigned to the composition of the *Decameron*, and also letters that Petrarch wrote to Tommaso da Messina in either 1333 or 1350.¹⁴ Next, I analyze how the *Decameron* informs and engages the humanist understanding of imitation as a reading practice. I contend that the *Decameron* places the responsibility to recognize useful models on the reader and supports a method of interpretation rather than any specific message or meaning. My study spans multiple levels of the text. I begin with a discussion of how the *Decameron's* portrayal of a literate lovelorn audience in the Author's proem demonstrates the preparation required for implementing imitation. I then investigate key moments when the *Decameron* imitates Dante's *Divina commedia* and by doing so comments on the relationship between a text and its reader. Finally, I

¹⁴ The purpose of including these letters is not to claim that Petrarch imitates Boccaccio in them. Rather, my aim is to inform my audience of my understanding of the concept of imitation – a term whose meaning varies throughout literary history – and the way that I engage this concept in my own work.

move on to analyze stories of the *Decameron* that thematize imitation. These stories – 3.2, 3.4, 5.8, and 9.10 – depict various attempts at imitation and the ruin and success that result.¹⁵

Anything you can do...

In my study, I speak of imitation in a very specific sense. The concept of imitation that I engage reflects a definition of the practice established in a well known sequence of letters written between 1353 and 1360 in which Francesco Petrarca advises his epistolary pupil, Giovanni Boccaccio, on how to engage literary models. These letters adopt a paternal, pedagogical tone, in which Petrarch instructs the younger Boccaccio with the authority and arrogance of a man already well established in his career. This set of letters has come to be recognized as the codification of the humanist ideals of textual imitation; my analysis of them investigates the delicate balance between creation and duplication, the hallmark of humanist imitation, and the way this balance informs the practice of reading.

Petrarch consistently insists on a definite and yet complicated independence of the imitator from his model, championing a delicate tension between reproduction and innovation when discussing poetic imitation. Petrarch does not deny the value of a model or the usefulness of recognizing and engaging a literary past; he just insists on doing so with a personal and individual style. As Martin

¹⁵ The *Decameron* follows no discernable program to determine when or why imitation will be of concern or which of the narrators will be drawn to this topic. The selection of stories that illustrate the idea of imitation, then, can only be personal and serves to demonstrate how my ideas are at play in the text.

McLaughlin comments on this rather bi-polar attitude: “Even if he is following a model, Petrarch insists on preserving his autonomy.”¹⁶ According to Petrarch, the writer should strive for *similitudo* and not *identitas*, likening an imitator’s resemblance to his model to that of a son to his father.

As a staunch supporter of a writer’s autonomy, Petrarch emphatically condemns exact reproduction, making the avoidance of textual repetition one of his key concerns. When following a model, the mature writer must abandon the slavish imitation of his exemplar; otherwise, there is no possibility for poetic progression and literary advancement. Indeed, direct reproduction results not simply in stagnation, but in regression. In a letter to his younger counterpart written in 1360, the great poet describes in bestial terms the threat that strict replication poses to the imitator:

We must thus see to it that if there is something similar, there is also a great deal that is dissimilar, and that the similar be elusive and unable to be extricated except in silent meditation, for the resemblance is to be felt rather than expressed. Thus we may appropriate another’s ideas as well as his coloring but we must abstain from his actual words; for, with the former, resemblance remains hidden, and with the later it is glaring, the former creates poets, the second apes.¹⁷

¹⁶ Martin McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation in the Italian Renaissance: The Theory and Practice of Literary Imitation from Dante to Bembo* (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1995), 28.

¹⁷ “Sic et nobis providendum ut cum simile aliquid sit, multa sint dissimilia, et id ipsum simile lateat ne deprehendi possit nisi tacita mentis indagine, ut intelligi simile queat potiusquam dici. Utendum igitur ingenio alieno utendumque coloribus, abstinendum verbis; illa enim similitudo latet, hec eminent; illa poetas facit, hec simias.” *Familiares* XXIII.19.13; translation taken from Francesco Petrarca, *Letters on Familiar Matters: Rerum familiarum libri, XVII-XXIV*, trans. Aldo S. Bernardo (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 302.

Petrarch warns his correspondent against following his models too closely; he advocates imitation but not replication. Adherence to a model is a poetic requirement, but the exact repetition of that model is the non-human lot of the undeveloped primate, not the intellectual task of a poet.¹⁸ The great writer, according to Petrarch, must look both to the literary precedents and at the same time exploit his own creative capacities. Should he fail to transform his exemplar, this writer is not a poet. In fact, he is not even human.

The element of independence in terms of humanist writing has been carefully studied, especially by Thomas Greene who has famously emphasized the importance of novelty and individual creation in the reproduction of the model.¹⁹ Indeed, Petrarch's insistence that the writer actively infuse the model with personal innovation almost leaps off the page. Offering himself as an exemplar, Petrarch writes:

I am one who intends to follow our forebear's path but not always others' tracks; I am one who wishes upon occasion to make use of others' writings, not secretly but with their leave; I am one who delights in imitation and not in sameness, in a resemblance that is not servile, where the imitator's genius shines forth rather than his blindness or his ineptitude; I am one who much prefers not having a guide than being compelled to follow one slavishly.²⁰

¹⁸ "One of Petrarch's key concerns, then, in his theory of literary imitation is the avoidance of textual repetition and the search for the author's own words which will distinguish his work from the model." McLaughlin, *Literary Imitation*, 31.

¹⁹ See Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

²⁰ "Sum quem priorum semitam, sed non semper aliena vestigia sequi iuuet; sum qui aliorum scriptis non furtim sed precario uti velim in tempore, sed dum liceat, meis malim; sum quem similitudo delectet, non identitas, et similitudo ipsa quoque non nimia, in qua sequacis lux ingenii emineat, non cecitas non paupertas; sum qui satius rear duce caruisse quam cogi per omnia ducem sequi" (*Familiares* XXII.2.20; 214).

Writing is clearly a moment for difference from the past and an opportunity to express novelty. Writing, however, is only the second phase of the imitative process, since writing begins with reading. The construction of a new text begins by culling material from previous works.

My main concern is thus how independence, a central element of the writing process, operates as an element of the experience of the model itself. While writers must produce their own texts free from the constraints of their literary models, are they allowed a personal interpretation while reading the exemplar? Do the “ideas and coloring of another” to which Petrarch refers in the above-quoted passage operate in his writing as fixed points, or rather does he appropriate them as categories independently determined by the reader? In order to answer these questions, we must examine the passages in which Petrarch describes the encounter with his models, encounters that Petrarch consistently describes with animal metaphors.

Be the bee

Petrarch’s menagerie of metaphors helps us begin to refine our understanding of how reading initiates the process of creative imitation. The great humanist poet equates readers and writers not only to apes, but also to cows, bees, crows, and peacocks. Within this vast array of animal comparisons, apian metaphors are by far the most common in Petrarch’s letters on imitation. Notably, this metaphor is itself modeled on comments made by Seneca in his *Epistulae morales*. Seneca was under the impression that bees

harvested honey directly from flowers rather than producing the sweet syrup themselves. He thus creates an apian metaphor that is focused on collection. He writes:

We too should imitate the bees; we should separate whatever we have gathered from divers reading (for things held apart are better preserved), and then having carefully applied our intellect, we should mix those various sips into one taste.²¹

Petrarch, however, is more informed on the process of mellification, and so his bees emphasize transformation. He writes in one of his many apian passages: “Imitate the bees which through an astonishing process produce wax and honey from the flowers they leave behind.”²² G.W. Pigman insists that Petrarch’s bees only contrast to those of his Roman predecessor: “The apian metaphor is perhaps the most misleading topos [used by the two writers] because [they use it] to present two opposed conceptions of imitation: the poet as collector (or follower) and the poet as maker.”²³ It certainly is true that these two passages promote a different model for writing. Seneca likens his poet to an expert winemaker, blending different vintages into a delicious elixir, while Petrarch’s is more akin to an alchemist, transforming his raw materials into something new and precious.

What is missing from Pigman’s comments, however, is a consideration of the way these two models are similar. While the

²¹ Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 84.5-6, quoted in G.W. Pigman, “Versions of Imitation in the Renaissance,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 33.1 (1980): 1-32, here 12. Pigman goes on to analyze how Petrarch’s engagement of Seneca’s text demonstrates the humanist poet’s own theories of imitation.

²² “Cuius summa est: apes in inventionibus imitandas, que flores, non quales acceperunt, referunt, sed ceras ac mella mirifica quadam permixtione conficiunt” (*Familiares*, 1.8.2; 41).

²³ Pigman, “Versions of Imitation,” 4.

Roman and Arentine authors employ apian metaphors to create different models of writing, their metaphors share one striking feature in common, as indeed they must according to Petrarch's own views of imitation as a mixture of preservation and progress. Notice that the moment Seneca identifies for the application of intellect happens after the experience of reading. While active personal innovation is an element of writing, the judicious creation of a new text, reading is a process of gathering. Just as the bee pulls from each flower the one finished product that the blossom has to offer, so too does the reader witness, collect, and remember. The reader drinks in the great work of past masters, savoring the choice blends that each poet before him has crafted.

Petrarch makes a similar distinction when he employs the apian metaphor, thereby seeming also to delay the application of individual perspicacity. While transformation for Petrarch is an active task determined by personal style, reading operates as an almost instinctual recognition of raw materials whose status as a worthy and useful exemplar precedes the reader's encounter with and interpretation of them. This idea comes across most clearly when Petrarch directly equates readers with bees and texts with wildflowers. He writes:

Now in the meadows and through the countryside let us settle on the various flowers of many others. Let us examine the books of learned men and from them let us alight on their very rich and very sweet lessons as though

we were lighting upon the white lilies.²⁴

In this passage, the apian reader acts as a collector drawn to worthy exemplars like – what else? – bees to honey. Putting the reader in the position of a collector makes him a witness to “sententias florentissimas ac suavissimas,” which Bernardo calls the “very rich and very sweet lessons” that these texts have to offer but can also be “brilliant and beautiful” or “effective and attractive ideas and meanings.”

It is essential to note that the reader does not play a role in the creation of these ideas in Petrarch’s description. The reader remains a forager in Petrarch’s prolific employment of the apian metaphor, just as he had been in Seneca’s letter. This notion is even clearer in the original Latin than it is in Bernardo’s translation. Petrarch uses the verb “eligere” to describe the task of the reader who must “select, choose or pick out” what is most useful in the text.²⁵ While the imitator will ultimately have to convert the pollen he takes away from the flowers into the sweet sticky substance of a new poetic creation, he begins by culling the raw materials that lay in wait for him. His new work must base itself (“fundare”) on the petal-like pages of his literary precedents. The apian metaphor thus choreographs a would-be imitator’s entire experience of a text, dividing the process between the reader’s encounter with the model and the writer’s reproduction of it.

²⁴ “In pratis et per rura multorum floribus variis insidamus; perscrutemur doctorum hominum libros, ex quibus sententias florentissimas ac suavissimas eligentes, candida circum lilia fundamur”(Familiars 1.8.19; 45).

²⁵ The reader operates in a way akin to the “cognitive student” described by Paulo Freire in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The cognitive student is one who “strives for critical intervention” (62). See Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), esp. 52-67.

Making the monkey

We can now begin to see a tension between the two parts of Petrarch's imitative model. The father of humanism admonishes his pupil from becoming a slave of the exemplar, directly reproducing a model. The good poet must not write like an ape. Petrarch encourages his young pupil instead to forge ahead in each new creation and infuse his own texts with innovation and individual style. A poet's ink sits dried and fixed on the lily-white parchment, waiting in full bloom for the reader to thumb through and harvest the rich and sweet lessons (and beautiful and brilliant ideas) it has to offer. This tension, however, is not a direct contradiction. Petrarch does *not* champion an active writer and insist on an altogether passive reader. He advances a more subtle concept of gathering that demands a sophisticated reader and allows him the same independence when encountering the model that Petrarch grants the poet when reproducing it in writing.

The reader's freedom grounds itself in Petrarch's recognition of the multiplicity of meanings available in each poetic precedent. In a particularly emphatic statement on his encounters with textual models, Petrarch describes moving through a literary exemplar in terms of walking through the woods. He writes:

I do want a guide who leads me, not one who binds me, one who leaves me free use of my own sight, judgment, and freedom; I do not want him to forbid me to step where I wish, to go beyond him in some things, to attempt the

inaccessible, to follow a shorter, or, if I wish, an easier path, and to hasten or stop or even to part ways and to return.²⁶

By acknowledging the various paths through a text available to the reader, Petrarch makes a case for the importance of the reader's discernment. Petrarch concedes the existence of an authorial intent, the path forged by the guide, but at the same time recognizes his separation from it and the freedom that that division grants him as a reader. While each flower only offers one pollen to the bee who dips his dibber into its petals, each text offers a plethora of meaning to its audience, and the reader is obligated to follow only those which he chooses to follow. The reader has the delightful opportunity to sift through the various elements of a work and decide himself which are the most beautiful for him at the moment of textual encounter and what will be the most useful fuel for propelling his own subsequent textual creations.

In the end, then, Petrarch stays true to his word and infuses novelty and difference even when most closely resembling Seneca's apian metaphors. Petrarch's reader is no more a slave to a model than is the ideal writer he champions. The humanist reader's evaluation of the exemplar is by no means a foregone conclusion, but a product of the time and place and person who reads. Petrarchan readers must be ready to work their way through the vast forest of literary possibilities that each poetic precedent presents. They are given license to monkey around with every text they encounter and swing through the

²⁶ "Nolo ducem qui me vinciat sed precedat; sint cum duce oculi, sit iudicium, sit libertas; non prohibear ubi velim pedem ponere et preterire aliqua et inaccessa tentare; et brevior sive ita fert animus, planior callem sequi et proferre et subsistere et divertere liceat et reverti" (*Familiares*, XXII.2.21; 214).

multiplicity of meanings they find with the turn of each new leaf of the folio.

Boccaccio's literate ladies

Imitation is a guiding principle for the encounter between the *Decameron* proem's genteel lovelorn women and the hundred tales that are to follow.²⁷ Specifically, the proem highlights the reader's personal responsibility and investment in the reading process. Further, the proem depicts a text that functions not to endorse or teach a specific message but rather presents its reader with a multiplicity of meanings and possibilities of meaning and leaves it up to her to judge the best and most effective one for herself. In the proem, the Author promises that his stories give their readers the opportunity to find pleasure and useful counsel: "parimente diletto delle sollazzevoli cose in quelle mostrate e utile consiglio potranno pigliare, in quanto potranno cognoscere quello che sia da fuggire e che sia similmente da seguitare" [they [the readers] will be able to snatch away both delight and useful counsel from the amusing things demonstrated by them [the stories] in as much as they [the readers] will be able to recognize that which is to be avoided and similarly that which is to be followed" (Proem.14, my translation).²⁸ This description of how readers harvest the promised

²⁷ While Petrarch speaks to and about male readers and writers, the *Decameron* addresses a female audience. I will follow this personification of the audience when discussing Decameronian readers, employing feminine pronouns.

²⁸ Some critics have already helped deepen our appreciation for the complexity of the categories of "pleasure" and "useful" in the text. For the meaning of the word "*utile*," see Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), especially 69-109. For commentary on how these categories define "what to avoid and what to follow," see Kurt Flasch, *Poesia*

fruits of the text merits our attention, as it is the first and one of the most explicit descriptions of reading in the *Decameron*.

The proem states that as the lovesick lady works her way through Boccaccio's thick stack of vernacular prose, she will be able to "*pigliare*" [snatch away, my translation] pleasure and useful counsel from the *Decameron*. Currently available translations of the work agree that the task of the reader, or perhaps the opportunity available to her, is to "derive" pleasure and useful counsel from the *Decameron*. I do not find, however, that "derive" captures the meaning of a verb such as "*pigliare*." Indeed, these very same translators, when faced with the same verb during the fifth story of the eighth day, use livelier, almost violent, words to convey the active physicality of the original Italian.²⁹ In this later appearance, these men (as the *Decameron* has only been translated into English by men) focus on the violent urgency of the word and translate it as "caught hold," and "took a firm hold."³⁰ Others emphasize not only force but also speed, rendering the motion into one quick verb: "grabbed" or "grasps."³¹ Each of these choices

dopo la peste: Saggi su Boccaccio, trans. Rosa Taliani (Bari: Laterza, 1995), especially 17-40.

²⁹ The fifth story of the eighth day tells of how three young men pull down the breeches of a judge while he is sitting on the bench. The passage reads: "E mentre che il giudice stava ritto e loro più vicino per intendergli meglio, Matteuzzo, preso tempo, mise la mano per lo rotto dell'asse e *pigliò* il fondo delle brache del giudice e tirò giù forte" [And when the judge stood up and was starting to edge up closer to them in order to hear them better, Matteuzzo saw his chance, and sticking his hand through the broken plank, he *grabbed* the seat of the judge's breeches, and pulled down very hard, and the breeches were off in a flash] (8.5.14; 581, emphasis added).

³⁰ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Decameronweb, trans. J.M. Rigg (1903), August 6, 2009, <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/decameronNew/DecShowText>; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 3.

³¹ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Musa and Bondanella, 5; Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 5.

vibrantly portrays an urgent physicality, an active motion. These elements are missing from the translators' renderings of the same verb in the prologue, a place where, I assert, the same connotations are necessary

Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin is the one scholar whose work does not use the word "derive." He instead writes that the reader will "take comfort" and "gain useful counsel."³² This differing word choice, however, further supports my argument. "Taking comfort" is a docile action that connotes some of the most hopeful, reassuring, and peaceful passages of Christian scripture. "Gaining useful counsel" implies a reward received more than an achievement earned. The physical component to the word "*pigliare*" recalls the idea of reading as collection – that in the *Decameron*, pleasure and good advice will need to be actively collected by the reader as she plods through the stories, like a skillful poet collects literary inspiration, and a bee collects pollen.

The active reader will have to search for the *Decameron's* useful counsel on her own, and she will have to recognize it when she finds it. The text says that attentive ladies will pluck away the pleasure and good advice "in quanto potranno cognoscere quello che sia da fuggire e che sia similmente da seguitare." Three British versions of the work insist that this passage highlights the *Decameron's* pedagogical benefits. J. M. Rigg, in a 1903 work, insists that Boccaccio's readers will learn specific moral examples from the text. Indeed, he claims

³² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin (London: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 2004), 3.

that these women pick up the book so “that they may learn what to shun, and likewise what to pursue.”³³ G. H. McWilliam, in his 1972 translation, closely follows certain key elements of the Rigg version. He prescribes the *Decameron* as a necessary textbook for feminine development: “For they will learn to recognize what should be avoided and what should be pursued.”³⁴ The most recent English-language *Decameron* to appear on the market is Ó Cuilleanáin’s reworking of John Payne’s 1886 translation. In his work, Ó Cuilleanáin claims that reading the stories will coincide with “learning from the tales what actions should be avoided and what actions should be pursued.”³⁵ Each of these translators insists that the following pages will be instructive, actively teaching the readers who attentively follow the course of the *Decameron*’s tales.

In the original Italian, however, no such pedagogical promises are made. In fact, the text proposes a very different relationship with its reader. Translating the passage more carefully, Guido Waldman, in his work published in 1993, acknowledges that the ladies who read the *Decameron* will have to work, but his initial confidence in his audience assures that they will be up to the task. Waldman confidently states: “And the womenfolk to whom I have been alluding will be able, as they read them, to derive entertainment from the amusing events there described and, equally, helpful advice, for they will contrive to grasp what is to be avoided and what to pursue—none of

³³ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Rigg.

³⁴ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. McWilliam, 3.

³⁵ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Ó Cuilleanáin, 3.

which will take effect (so I believe) without raising their spirits.”³⁶

Waldman is sure of the *Decameron*'s readers and of their lettered capacities; though it will require some effort, they will be able to derive entertainment and advice.

Unlike Waldman, Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella depict a more tenuous relationship between text and reader. They write:

These stories will contain a number of different cases of love, both bitter and sweet, as well as other exciting adventures taken from modern and ancient times. And in reading them, the ladies just mentioned will, perhaps, derive from the delightful things that happen in these tales both pleasure and useful counsel, inasmuch as they will recognize what should be avoided and what should be sought after.³⁷

Here, the prologue states that the reader will get out of the *Decameron* just as much as she already knows, or, as Musa and Bondanella state “will derive...useful counsel inasmuch as they will recognize.” They further focus on the contingency of the relationship. All the verbs in this phrase in the original Italian are in the future tense, and so, inasmuch as they predict an upcoming experience, they must speak with a certain degree of doubt or uncertainty. Consistent with this, Musa and Bondanella say outright that “perhaps” such an edifying experience will take place. According to these translators, the capacity to recognize what is to be avoided and what is to be followed is a condition that precedes the ladies' encounter with the text.

This passage of the *Decameron* places the responsibility of interpretation on the reader. The reader must work for any kind of

³⁶ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Waldman, 5.

³⁷ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Musa and Bondanella, 5.

benefit. The stories will sit open like flower petals in bloom, displaying their contents, but making no effort themselves to reward the reader with any specific pleasure or advice. Indeed, at the end of the *Decameron*, the Author explicitly states that the text does not limit any options in the reader's quest for pleasure and useful counsel:

Chi vorrà da quelle [novelle] malvagio consiglio o malvagia operazion trarre, elle nol vieteranno ad alcuno, se forse in sé l'hanno, e torte e tirate fieno a averlo: e chi utilità e frutto ne vorrà, elle nol negheranno, né sarà mai che altro che utile e oneste sien dette o tenute, se a que' tempi o a quelle persone si leggeranno, per cui e pe' quali state sono raccontate. (Conclusione dell'Autore, 13-14)

Whoever wishes to derive evil counsel from them or use them for wicked ends will not be prohibited from doing so by the tales themselves if, by chance, they contain such things and are twisted and distorted in order to achieve this end, and whoever wishes to derive useful advice and profit from them will not be prevented from doing so, nor will these stories ever be described or regarded as anything but useful and proper if they are read at those times and to those people for whom they have been written. (804)

The stories offer a multiplicity of meanings, moralities, and advice. It is the reader who determines which elements of the text to actuate, to know which bits of the stories to collect in order mix the most pleasing and effective results. The *Decameron* will not put any new information forward to its reader; it does not promise instruction or resist manipulation. It poses a challenge: the reader will find delight and good counsel inasmuch as she will already be able to recognize on her own what to avoid and what to follow. Her judgment will not be determined by the *Decameron* itself, but rather will be conditioned by her own attitudes and knowledge at the time of the textual encounter.

The reader is on her own as she responds to each episode of the *Decameron*; she must be ready to apply rather than waiting to acquire knowledge and good judgment when she opens the *Decameron*. She must make use of her own faculties as she plods her way through the evil counsel as well as the useful advice the text contains. The *Decameron* invites its reader to walk down the right path, but will not show her the way – or confine her to it.

You who enter: Don't abandon anything. You'll need it here.

The lonely reader, unaccompanied as she weaves her way through the *Decameron*'s hundred tales, is a defining feature of the *Decameron*. It is also one that distinguishes it from its exalted predecessor, Dante's *Divina commedia*, in which the close relationship between the pilgrim and his guide serves as a model for the relationship between the reader and the text. The *Decameron* foregrounds this difference in a privileged place: the first tale.³⁸ The *Decameron*'s first novella features a wily personality named Ser

³⁸ For previous readings of the first novella of the first day, see Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957), 201; Giovanni Getto, *Vita di forme e forme di vita nel Decameron* (Turin: G.B. Petrini, 1958), esp. 38; Marga Cottino-Jones, *An Anatomy of Boccaccio's Style* (Naples: Editrice Cymba, 1968), esp. 23-51; Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar: Narrative Technique in the Decameron* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), esp. 19-62; Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in Boccaccio's Decameron*, (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1979), esp. 11-26; Joy Hambuchen Potter, *Five Frames For the Decameron: Communication and Social Systems in the Cornice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), esp. 38-40, 50-53, 60-62 and 104-11; Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin, *Religion and the Clergy in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984), esp. 148-76; Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), esp. 47-74; Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), esp. 21-52; Franco Fido, "The Tale of Ser Ciappelletto (1.1)," in *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 59-76.

Cepparello, whose entrance into the story highlights the reader's independence and at the same time connects the *Decameron* with its own literary heritage. Panfilo's adroit imitation of his Dantean model links the *Decameron* to its model just as closely as it seems to separate the two works.

Panfilo begins the first tale of the *Decameron* with a litany of real-life fourteenth-century political figures and moneylenders: Boniface VIII, Charles of Valois and thus, indirectly, Philip III of France, Musciatto Franzesi, and finally one Ser Cepparello da Prato. The narrator presents these men in descending order of international power, culminating in the central figure of the novella. Several scholars comment about the air of historical legitimacy that such an opening lends to Boccaccio's text. Robert Hollander, the great reader of Dante in the *Decameron*, reads this list of notables as a way to ground the novella historically to the event of Dante's exile and to date Boccaccio's writing as contemporary to the completion of the *Commedia*. He writes: "One might wish to consider the likely possibility that in Boccaccio's mind the narrated action that initiates the metamorphosis of Cepparello into a saint intersects historically with the very moment that began the terrible series of events leading to Dante's exile and, not coincidentally, to the completion of the *Commedia*."³⁹ I find a much more direct link between the two works here through a parody of Dante's work.

Panfilo's list of fourteenth-century notables is reminiscent of Virgil's description of his commissioning at the opening of Dante's

³⁹ Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante*, 28-29.

Divina commedia. In the *Commedia*, Virgil recounts a chain of command: the Blessed Mother calls to Lucy, who leaves her seat to carry a message to Beatrice, who is sitting with Rachel. Finally, Beatrice comes to Virgil.⁴⁰ Here, just as in the *Decameron*, we have a list of five people, beginning with an important figure of the Church, and progressing in descending order of power and piety. Notably, both lists have a reference to an uninvolved party who is parallel to one of the key figures. In the *Decameron*, it is the King of France; in the *Commedia*, it is Rachel. But here the similarities end. Panfilo lists five men, Dante five women. Panfilo's series stems from a dubious cleric known for corruption and intrigue, while Dante roots his in the pinnacle of human virtue. Panfilo, the uninvolved narrator, recounts the *Decameron's* line-up, while Virgil directly recalls his own role in the series. It is worth noting, however, that scholars have nominated both Panfilo and Virgil as figures of Reason in their prospective texts.⁴¹

This mix of reverent replication, exaggeration, and inversion of the Dantean model shows that Panfilo does not simply reference a literary predecessor; he parodies the famous text.⁴² The parody is in

⁴⁰ See *Inf.* 2.94-102.

⁴¹ See Victoria Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), 110.

⁴² Thomas Greene describes parody as an "engagement of a subtext in a dialectic of affectionate malice." See Greene, *The Light in Troy*, 46. Linda Hutcheon investigates parody's nuanced balance of intimacy and contrast between two texts: "Parody, then, in its ironic 'trans-contextualization' and inversion. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure of parody's irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual 'bouncing' between complicity and distance" (32). She later describes the phenomenon as a "combination of respectful homage and ironically thumbed nose" (33). See Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

full force at the conclusion of the series. There, we do not find a courteous Mantovan spirit. Rather, we encounter the somewhat historically inaccurate identification of a ruddy moneylender from Prato. While Beatrice trusts Virgil because he is known for his noble speech (*Inf.* 1.113), Musciatto calls on Cepparello because he is famous for his ruthless business deals and dishonest way with words. Indeed, Panfilo will later remark that Cepparello “era il piggioro uomo forse che mai nascesse” [was probably the worst man that ever lived] (1.1.15; 27). The scene drains the original model of all its spirituality. While Beatrice called upon Virgil to rescue a soul lost from the heavenly flock, Musciatto engages Cepparello to collect overdue bills from cantankerous Burgundians. So the comic effect is at its best when Cepparello is at his worst.

Boccaccio’s clever manipulation of the Dantean material engages the relationship between the text and the reader. In the *Commedia*, the pilgrim responds to the powerful lineup with enthusiastic obedience:

Tu m’hai con disiderio il cor disposto
 sì al venire con le parole tue,
 ch’i’ son tornando nel primo proposto.
 Or va, ch’un sol volere è ambedue:
 tu duca, tu signore e tu maestro

By your words you have made me so eager to come with you that I have returned to my first resolve. Now on, for a single will is in us both; you are my leader, you my master and my teacher.⁴³

⁴³ *Inf.*2.136-41. See Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, volume 1 of 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

As an effect of witnessing the chain of command that has brought Virgil to him, the pilgrim concedes all judgment of his own, trusting in his divinely appointed guide to lead him through the downward spiral of evil that awaits him. Dante hands himself over to his guide so completely that by the end of their journey together, the pilgrim will call his divinely appointed leader “Virgilio dolcissimo padre, / Virgilio a cui per mia salute die’mi” [Virgil my sweetest father; Virgil to whom I gave myself for my salvation].⁴⁴ These links spill out of the text as the pilgrim addresses the reader. Indeed, by the opening of the *Paradiso*, Dante will parallel the relationship between text and reader to that of his own with his guide. The reader follows the pilgrim like a little skiff following a large ship; he would remain forever lost if ever separated from his leader.⁴⁵ The strict course of the text requires of its reader the same trust and obedience that Dante offers to his guide and in return gives that reader a direct line to the heavens.

While Virgil welcomed Dante and his readers to their voyage through the afterlife, Ser Cepparello, perhaps the worst man who ever lived, awaits the *Decameron’s* reader. The effect of this parody is extraordinary. The *Decameron* acknowledges a distance between itself and its model and ultimately revels in the difference that this distance affords. At the same time, the text does not abandon or negate a strong connection to its parent text, but rather recognizes that its own

⁴⁴ *Purgatorio* 30.50-51. See Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, volume 3 of 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

⁴⁵ “O voi che siete in piccioletta barca, / desiderosi d’ascoltar, seguiti / dietro al mio legno che cantando varca...non vi mettete in pelago, ché forse, / perdendo me, rimarreste smarriti” (Dante, *Paradiso*, 2.1-6). See Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, volume 5 of 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

comic effect is dependent upon this strong connection. By making these complex and yet comical references to the *Commedia* and to the relationship it sets up with its reader, the *Decameron* reminds its own reader that she will discover no consistent voice that will unequivocally indicate the virtuous way to her. She is reminded that these pages contain a multiplicity of meanings and possibilities – not the singular moral purpose claimed by the *Commedia*. She will have to judge for herself – will have to actively discern according to parameters established for herself before she encounters the text – what advice will be best for her to collect and put into practice.

Taking the path already traveled

The practice of imitation is of special concern to the narrators of the *Decameron*, even Dioneo, who on the first day initially seems to be focused on innovation.⁴⁶ Dioneo introduces his own spin on imitation; he revels in the freedom that imitation allows its reader. In his story about a monk and an abbot, Dioneo is the *Decameron*'s first narrator to demonstrate how to twist and distort a text (in this case, the *Divina commedia*) and use it for wicked ends – or at least for the dubious suggestion of sexual indiscretion.

It would be easy to be distracted by the novelty of Dioneo's story and miss the ways in which this narrator engages established models. Dioneo tells the first novella of the *Decameron* that features a female

⁴⁶ For a good introduction to the tale of the monk and the abbot, see Ronald Martinez, "The Tale of the Monk and His Abbot," in *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); see also Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar*, 63-76.

character. Further, he is responsible for the first depiction of a sexual encounter in a book that is known for its ostentatious displays of lewd behavior. Following these clues, Guido Almansi encourages his reader to see this early story as a new starting point for the work by comparing the tale to other elements of the *Decameron*. He writes: “Coming on the heels of the tight logical architecture displayed by the first three *novelle*, the *fabel* of the Monk and the Abbot is connected to the preceding story only by an artificial and tenuous link. With this novella Boccaccio can be said to set in motion a new manner in his repertoire.”⁴⁷ At the climax of his analysis, Almansi strikes a liberating tone for the tale: “The fourth novella of the First Day would therefore seem to be linked by its thematic content to a certain medieval tradition of short story and yet to stand apart from any specific example of it. This entitles us to imagine that *Decameron*, I, 4 is an original invention by Boccaccio.”⁴⁸

Marilyn Migiel, dissatisfied with Almansi’s limited commentary, initiates a more in-depth comparison between Dioneo’s first story and its traditionally identified sources in the *Novellino* and the *fabliaux* tradition.⁴⁹ She specifically tracks the fortunes of the female character whom Dioneo presents as the unnamed daughter of a local worker. Doing so, Migiel identifies an alarming reduction in the role of this figure: “Refashioning these two subjects with a vengeance, Dioneo

⁴⁷ Almansi, *The Writer as Liar*, 64.

⁴⁸ Almansi, *The Writer as Liar*, 65.

⁴⁹ Both Branca and A.C. Lee mention two sources for what Branca calls “il tema centrale della novella” [the main action of the novella]. The first is *Novellino* 54; the second is “L’evesque qui beneï le con,” from the *fabliaux* tradition. See Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 83, note 1; A.C. Lee, *The Decameron: Its Sources and Analogues* (1909, New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1972), 14-17.

limits very significantly the roles given to the female characters, and he creates a male protagonist who, unlike his two priestly predecessors, is capable of carrying out every segment of his project independently.”⁵⁰ Migiel finds this representation to be central to the narrative strategies of the entire *Decameron*, as she puts it “a key element in what [she] would call ‘a discourse in the process of articulating itself.’”⁵¹ That discourse has disquieting repercussions for the relationship between the *Decameron* and its sources, between the young narrators, and between the text and its readers.⁵²

Migiel’s commentary insists on the importance of understanding who Dioneo’s unnamed female character is in terms of who she was in Dioneo’s models – a strategy that is particularly helpful in understanding this story and its relationship both to others within the *Decameron*, to its inherited literary tradition, and to the text’s relationship with its readers. Hence, I will also investigate how Dioneo engages those literary predecessors, and the effect his novella has on the imitative narrative communities formed within the *Decameron*. While this novella may function as a new beginning for the *Decameron*, there are definite links between it and Panfilo’s own first story. Specifically, Dioneo’s novella looks back on the *Commedia* and

⁵⁰ Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 35.

⁵¹ Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 34.

⁵² “In this novella where secrets are key to the development of the plot, only male secrets about sexual possession are granted any significance. The girl’s mysterious identity comes to be irrelevant in the competition between males to assert superior knowledge and sexual rights. In exchange for its pleasurable exploration of difference (high/low, serious/comic, heavy/light, truthful/hypocritical), the novella asks the reader to accept a voyeuristic interest in secrets about sex (secrets that, even though they involve woman, are ultimately men’s secrets) and to turn a blind eye to the secret of subjectivity (a secret that woman bears).” See Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 36.

introduces a new element in the *Decameron* – sexual activity – by imitating this established dantesque model.

Dioneo indicates the literary pedigree of his unnamed beauty at the very opening of his tale: “Fu in Lunigiana, paese non molto da questo lontano, un monistero già di santità e di monaci piú copioso che oggi non è, nel quale tra gli altri era un monaco giovane il vigore del quale n’è la freschezza né i digiuni né le vigilie potevano macerare” [In Lunigiana, a town not too far from here, there was a monastery (once more saintly and full of monks than it now is), in where there lived a young monk whose virility and youth could not be diminished by fasts or by vigils] (1.4.4; 46). Commenting on which monastery this might be, Branca notes that a monastery

di benedettini pulsanesi, certo assai noto al B., ricorre spontaneamente al pensiero. È il piccolo priorato di Santa Croce del Corvo, dipendente dall’Abbazia di San Michele degli Scalzi di Pisa: cioè il cenobio (fondato nel 1176 e abbandonato nel 1350-1360) presso cui sarebbe avvenuto il famoso incontro di Dante con Frate Ilaro, la cui lettera il B. trascrisse nel suo *Zibaldone* ora Laurenziano e riecheggiò nel *Trattatello*...

of devout Benedictines, certainly well known to Boccaccio, instantly jumps to mind. It is the little priory of Santa Croce del Corvo, dependent on the Abbey of St. Michael of the Barefoot in Pisa; that is to say the monastery (opened in 1176 and abandoned sometime between 1350 and 1360) near which Dante would have made his famous encounter with Brother Ilaro, whose letter Boccaccio transcribed in his *Notebook*, now the Laurenziano and echoed in the *Trattatello*.⁵³

The setting of the story, bringing Dante to mind, is telling what literary precedents the novella will engage. Dante’s *Commedia* remains a

⁵³ Branca, *Decameron*, 84, note 3, my translation.

model for Boccaccio as he writes. Indeed, Robert Hollander encourages us to recognize that the *Decameron* is “the Boccaccian text which is most pointedly filled with reminiscences of the *Commedia*,” as, “steeped in Dante, Boccaccio could not avoid sounding like him.”⁵⁴ Dioneo’s monk is in the place of the pilgrim, following the footsteps of a previous traveler.

Meandering through the same fields that Dante once trod, a monk happens upon the young lady when he should have been tucked away in his cell:

Il quale per ventura un giorno in sul mezzodì, quando gli altri monaci tutti dormivano, andandosi tutto solo da torno alla sua chiesa, la quale in luogo assai solitario era, gli venne veduta una giovinetta assai bella, forse figliuola d’alcuno de’ lavoratori della contrada, la quale andava per li campi certe erbe cogliendo: né prima veduta l’ebbe, che egli fieramente assalito fu dalla concupiscenza carnale. (1.4.5)

One day around noon while the other monks were sleeping, he happened to be taking a solitary walk around the church—which was somewhat isolated—when he spotted a very beautiful girl (perhaps the daughter of one of the local workers) who was going through the fields gathering various kinds of herbs. The moment he saw her, he was passionately attacked by carnal desire. (46)

This encounter imitates Dante’s encounter with Matelda in Canto XVIII of the *Purgatorio*, differing from its model while at the same time invoking the literary predecessor. At the opening of Canto XVIII, the pilgrim is wandering through a forest, the trees that surround the entrance to the Garden of Eden. Passing through the gently swaying branches bathed by a soft breeze, the pilgrim encounters a beautiful

⁵⁴ Hollander, *Boccaccio’s Dante*, 12 and 14.

young woman:

e là m'apparve, sì com' elli appare
subitamente cosa che disvia
per meraviglia tutto altro pensare,
una donna soletta che si gia
e cantando e scegliendo fior da fiore
on'era pinta tutta la sua via.

and there appeared to me there, as appears of a sudden a thing that for wonder drives away every other thought, a lady all alone, who went singing and culling flower from flower, with which all her path was painted).⁵⁵

The pilgrim, like the monk of the *Decameron*, unexpectedly stumbles upon a lone female collecting flora. Further, both the pilgrim and the monk, men whose vocations supposedly turn their thoughts away from carnal desire, immediately respond to the sight of the woman with sexual longing, indicated by his comparison to the lovers Hero and Leander. Dante expresses that desire in terms of classical models:

Tre passi ci faceva il fiume lontani;
ma Elesponto, là 've passò Serse,
ancora freno a tutti orgoli umani,
più odio da Leandro non sofferse
per mareggiare intra Sesto e Abido,
che quel da me perch' allor non s'aperse.

The river kept us three paces apart, but Hellespont where Xerxes passed it-ever a curb on all human pride-did not suffer more hatred from Leander for its swelling waters between Sestos and Abydos than that from me because it did not open then.⁵⁶

Notably, then, Boccaccio introduces physical desire into his

⁵⁵ *Purgatorio* 28.37-42.

⁵⁶ *Purgatorio* 28.70-74.

Decameron by invoking an episode in the *Commedia* that itself relies on past models to convey sexual lust.

But where Dante finds an affinity with his sources from the past, Boccaccio infuses difference. The pilgrim feels the same desire that Leander had at a small stream that Dante almost ridiculously equates with the great waters crossed by the Persian king. Singleton comments on the rivulet: “The stream is certainly not very wide, but Dante somehow knows that he must not attempt to cross it yet.”⁵⁷ I assert it is the pilgrim’s recall of his classical models that impedes any forward motion. The pilgrim remembers that Leander died in his attempt to cross the waters separating him from his beloved. He is conscious that Xerxes’ crossing into Greece, while admirable, resulted in his defeat. Keeping his models and his similarity to them in mind, the pilgrim realizes that crossing the waters while motivated by sexual desire can only lead to his destruction and defeat. Separated by water, the pilgrim is only able to ask Matelda to sing and speak, and her speech curbs the pilgrim’s desire and curtails the sexual encounter.

Dioneo, however, insists on a difference between his character and that of his Dantean predecessor. He manipulates his literary models, first of all, by manipulating physical space itself. Dioneo removes the stream, the barrier between the monk and the young woman; his young man has complete access to the woman. The monk is not slowed down by any softly sung psalm; rather, he seems to do

⁵⁷ Charles Singleton, *Purgatorio: Commentary*, volume 4 of 6 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 674.

all the talking himself: “entrò in parole e tanto andò d’una in altra, che egli si fu accordato con lei e seco nella sua cella ne la menò, che niuna persona se n’accorse” [He went up to her and began a conversation. One subject led to another, and finally, they came to an understanding; he took the girl to his cell without anyone’s noticing them] (1.4.6; 46). Musa and Bondanella are here perhaps a bit generous when they describe the encounter between the two lusty figures as “a conversation.” Migiel notices that the vocal role of the woman is incredibly decreased in this meeting: “Although presumably she speaks when she consents to accompany the monk back to his cell, her words are never reported in direct discourse; and once she is in the cell, she assumes a passive [and silent] role, listening if all is going well, or crying if it isn’t.”⁵⁸ The narrator thus eradicates the role of the female voice in the encounter. It is now all but absent from the tale, serving only to agree (assumedly) to a sexual encounter rather than impede it.

Dioneo’s imitation of his Dantean model emphasizes a focus on method over message. While the practice of imitation choreographs the reader’s encounter with a model, it does not determine the product of that encounter. Dioneo has used his famously moral model as a means for depicting an explosion of moral transgressions – illicit sexual behavior, broken vows, clerical hypocrisy. Just as Panfilo’s Dantean parody demonstrates that the reader will have to determine which passages of the text offer the most useful counsel, Dioneo’s

⁵⁸ Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 35.

treatment of the *Commedia* shows that it also remains for the reader to decide how to use and apply that advice.

Carefully, carefully or There's something rotten in the state of Lombardy

The narrators sustain their focus on and commitment to the importance of successful imitation as they pass from one storytelling setting to another, highlighting the fact that while the context of a story might change, the method for engaging it remains constant. A strong example of this constancy is Pampinea's story on the third day, a story that foregrounds the difference between imitation and reproduction. This tale sits in an interesting position in the *Decameron*, one that again is infused with novelty. It is the first tale told by a woman on this third day, under a command that the young narrators choose stories "di chi alcuna cosa molto da lui desiderata con industria acquistasse o la perduta ricoverasse" [about people who have attained something they desired through their ingenuity or who have recovered something they once lost] (3.Intro.1; 190). It is also the first tale told by a woman in the walled garden, the *brigata's* second storytelling setting, after the three-day hiatus imposed by Queen Neifile.⁵⁹ Along with these differences, Pampinea upholds a commitment to imitation with a tale of horse groom and his queen, a

⁵⁹ Jonathan Usher remarks that the garden setting is itself concerned with imitation. He writes that this walled garden "represents the strenuous, active pursuit of man-made imitations of natural order." See Jonathan Usher, "Frame and Novella Gardens in the *Decameron*," *Medium aevum* 58.2 (1989): 274-85, here 278.

story that thematizes imitation and warns against its misuse by highlighting the repercussions of reproduction.

As the second narrator on the third day, the prudent Pampinea regales the *brigata* with the adventures of a young horse groom who falls in love with Teudelinga, Queen of the Lombards. Resolving to die while trying to satisfy his desires, the horse groom hides himself in the hall outside the queen's bedroom and carefully watches the king's habits for entering the chamber. Mimicking these habits, the eager horse groom, after a hot bath to rid himself of the lingering stench of horse manure, is able to sneak his way into the queen's bed and enjoy all the sexual delights that his adulterous stratagem affords him. Later the same evening, however, after the horse groom has left Teudelinga's chambers, the king himself arrives to take his pleasure of the queen. The female monarch's prudent caution to the king not to over-exert himself in one night exposes her previous sexual encounter that evening. Agilulf is silent in his anger, much to the approval of his narrator, and goes through his castle until he finds the culprit, whom he marks by cutting the groom's hair just above his ear. Expecting to expose the lascivious servant the next morning, the king finds that his horse groom has instead cleverly cut all of his colleagues' hair, so as to make himself unidentifiable. Impressed by the horse groom's "alto senno" [good sense, judgement or wisdom], Agilulf lets the whole household hear an ambiguous reprimand and assures himself that such an event will never happen again during his reign.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ For an analysis of what "senno" might mean as a description of the stable hand, see Marilyn Migiel, "Can the Lower Classes Be Wise? For the Answer, See Your Translation of the *Decameron*."

Imitation is at the forefront in Pampinea's tale. Her opening line makes as much clear to her audience: "Agilulf re de' longobardi, sí come i suoi predecessori avevan fatto, in Pavia città di Lombardia fermò il solio del suo regno, avendo presa per moglie Teudelinga, rimasa vedova d' Auttari re stato similmente de' longobardi" [Agilulf, King of the Lombards, as his predecessors did, established the capital of his kingdom in Pavia, a Lombard city, having taken as his wife Teudelinga, the widow of Auttari, the former King of the Lombards] (3.2.4; 201). This king replicates the actions of his forebears, with great success and for the benefit of his subjects: "essendo alquanto per la virtù e per lo senno di questo re Agilulf le cose de' longobardi prospere e in quiete" [the affairs of Lombardy were prospering and there was peace because of the virtue and wisdom of King Agilulf] (3.2.5; 201). While this repetition is beneficial for the state, however, it impairs the position of the king.

The danger is that the king leaves himself open to being replaced just as easily as he replaced his precursor, and this is exactly what happens in the story. No sooner does Pampinea praise the king's virtue and wisdom than does she undermine his exceptionality. The sentence that Pampinea begins by paying tribute to the king, she concludes by introducing the cunning protagonist of her tale, an unnamed horse groom: "adivenne che un pallafreniere della detta reina, uomo quanto a nazione di vilissima condizione ma per altro da troppo più che da così vil mestiere, e della persona bello e grande così come il re fosse, senza misura della reina s'innamorò" [it happened that the Queen's groom, a man of the lowest birth but, in other

respects, far too talented for such a humble trade, as handsome and as tall as even the King himself was, fell madly in love with the Queen] (3.2.5; 201). This extraordinary manure-shoveler is too amazing a character for an occupation that keeps him smelling of horse dung. He is so remarkable, in fact, that he is comparable to the great king himself. It is this physical similarity that allows the horse groom to slip into the queen's bed unrecognized. While wisdom and virtue may sustain the king on his throne, they do not secure him exclusivity in the queen's bed. She has passed from king Auttari, to King Agilulf, to the horse groom; replication makes the king vulnerable to substitution.

The king is by no means the only party in this tale guilty of exact reproduction or the only one punished for it. The horse groom himself chooses to replicate the actions of the king, a decision that influences the groom's own exceptionality. The horse groom elaborates a plan for sneaking into the queen's bed: "né altro ingegno né via c'era se non trovar modo come egli in persona del re, il quale sapea che del continuo con lei non giacea, potesse a lei pervenire e nella sua camera entrare" [he knew that the only way to get to her, the only trick that might possibly work, was to impersonate the King, whom he knew did not lie with her every night, and in this way gain entrance to her bedroom] (3.2.12; 202). So the horse groom lies in wait, learns the sequence of the king's choreographed entrance into the queen's chamber, ultimately enjoys the rapturous delights of a very passionate physical liaison with Teudelinga, and then quietly escapes into the night. Vittore Branca explains the stable hand's stratagem: "egli in

persona del re' cioè scambiando la propria con la persona del re, fingendo di essere il re" ["in the person of the king" which is to say changing his own with the person of the king, feigning to be the king] (341; my own translation). While this plan enables the horse groom to slide into the queen's bedchamber, it also is the cause of his ruin in the story. The horse groom, like the king before him, eliminates any difference between himself and his model.

Although Day Three of the *Decameron* is to be a day describing the acquisition or reclamation of a desired object, Pampinea uses this tale of adultery to emphasize all that the horse groom loses when he decides to take the place of the king. First, we notice that he must sacrifice his capacity to speak in order to mimic the mighty monarch. Once he has approached the doorway of the queen's bedroom, Pampinea emphasizes the stable hand's reliance on silence. When met by the chambermaid, the groom proceeds wordlessly: "laonde egli, senza alcuna cosa dire, dentro alla corinta trapassato e posato il mantello, se n'entrò nel letto nel quale la reina dormiva" [then without speaking a word, the groom passed behind the bedcurtain, took off his cloak, and climbed into the bed where the queen was sleeping] (3.2.15-16; 203). The horse groom's next moves are similarly silent: "senza dire alcuna cosa o senza essere a lui detta piú volte carnalmente la reina cognobbe" [without uttering a word to her or her saying anything to him, he made the carnal acquaintance of the Queen several times] (3.2.16; 203). The horse groom must even manage a sleek escape without passing a word to the queen: "senza alcuna cosa dire, se n'andò e come piú tosto poté si tornò al letto suo" [without saying a

thing he went away. As quickly as he could, he returned to his own bed] (3.2.16; 203). Three times, then, within the space of a few lines, the narrator highlights the groom's imposed silence.

The horse groom's silent, anonymous entry into the queen's chamber is indicative of his greater loss of self. Marcus examines the effects of a character operating as a silent sexual figure in the *Decameron*. In her analysis of Alatiel, she argues:

Two things conspire to rob Alatiel of her humanity and reduce her to the level of mere ornament: first, her suitors do not know who she is, and second, they share no medium of communication with her. Without language, Alatiel's admirers can only respond to her in a physical way. She ceases to be a human being, as complicated and as multifaceted as themselves, and serves instead as a screen onto which their own sexual desires may be projected. Alatiel becomes the nameless and selfless partner of pornographic fantasy who makes no emotional demands on her mates and frees them of all moral responsibility for their desires.⁶¹

Pampinea imposes a similar loss of status on the horse groom. At the opening of the tale, when he is in the service of the king and in love with the queen, Pampinea refers to her protagonist by his profession: "pallafreniere" [horse groom] (3.2.5; 3.2.9, translation my own). His lack of moniker is especially striking in Pampinea's thorough line-up of names. King Agilulf reigns over the Lombards; even his wife, a role not typically singled out with individual identification in the *Decameron*, merits a named mention, Teudelinga. Pampinea also singles out the queen's first husband by name, Auttari. In Pampinea's trilogy of main characters, only the groom remains nameless.

⁶¹ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 41.

Once the horse groom has decided to act “in persona del re” [impersonate the king] (3.2.11; 202), however, and reproduces the role of the king, the horse groom abandons the little individuality he had. Pampinea refers to him only as “costui” [that guy] or “egli” [he].⁶² Indeed, by the end of the tale, after the protagonist has put on the king’s clothes and taken his place in the queen’s bed, Pampinea almost all but obliterates any individual mention of him. In the resolution of the story, he is only the man to whom the King refers to in his speech: “colui solo a cui toccava” [the man to whom [the King’s remarks] referred] (3.2.31; 206). The horse groom ultimately blends into the text, just as he blends into the crowd of the king’s servants after he cuts off their hair. Thus, the horse groom has not only sacrificed his voice for a night of pleasure with the queen, he has sacrificed his self. He never develops beyond an unnamed horse groom in the text and instead blurs into the larger group of household helpers.

The horse groom is an example of the dangers of failing to keep the balance between affinity and distance when engaging an established model. The groom failed to infuse independence and separation into his replication. Understanding the episode this way, we see that the groom’s irresponsible employment of his model as a warning. As a result of his reproduction rather than imitation of his model, he has regressed into the background – he loses his

⁶² Marilyn Migiel is the first to point out Pampinea’s insistence on referring to the stable hand with these pronouns. See Migiel, “Can the Lower Classes be Wise?”

specialness, his difference. Though he may not have become an ape, as Petrarch would have it, he slips back to his spot amidst the horses.

Fear and function: The case of Nastagio degli Onesti and the Traversari girl

The challenge of engaging a model persists through the pages of the *Decameron*. Filomena tells a story on Day Five, for example, in which one of the challenges that face her characters is the charge to engage and interpret established models. In this tale, she juxtaposes the responses of Nastagio degli Onesti, a prodigal young society man from Ravenna, and the unnamed daughter of Paolo Traversari. In this story, Nastagio moves beyond his initial reaction of fear to a ghastly scene of otherworldly carnage and finds a way to appropriate the spectacle to his advantage.⁶³ The woman he loves, however, remains trapped in fear by the close association she feels with the display. Her entrapment condemns her to abandon her own desires and to subject herself to the wishes and whims of others. This story also highlights

⁶³ For commentary on this story, see Susanne Wofford, "The Social Aesthetics of Rape: Closures Violence in Boccaccio and Botticelli" in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature In Honor of Thomas M. Greene*, ed. David Quint et al. (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 189-238. See also Diane Duyos Vacca, "Carnal Reading: On Interpretation, Violence and *Decameron* V.8," in *Boccaccio and Feminist Criticism*, ed. Thomas C. Stillinger and F. Regina Psaki (Chapel Hill: Annali d'Italianistica, 2006), 169-88. Vacca reads 5.8 as a moment "in which Boccaccio examines the acts of reading and interpretation" (169) and is particularly adept at associating 5.8 with a wide range of sources. In her essay, she limits the possible relationships between the reader and the text. She writes: "Reading can be text-dominant, a passive activity in which the reader submits to the authority of the text, allowing herself to be effaced by it. But reading can also be reader-dominant: it can engender the reader's authority and mastery, for the text is nothing without the reader, and meaning is defined by the reader's interpretation" (170). Discussing reading in terms of humanist imitation adds another possibility for the text-reader relationship – that neither text nor reader is "dominant." Instead, the bountiful text and the skilled reader work together.

the importance of distance and separation when confronting a model and shows the benefit of imitation while at the same time depicting the consequences of reproduction.

The eighth story of day five portrays a rich young man whose social standing and family lineage are insufficient to make him a suitable partner for the daughter of Paolo Traversari. This unnamed beauty slights Nastagio, despite the fact that he is very rich, continually pursuing impressive deeds in her honor, and squanders a good part of his inheritance trying to impress her.⁶⁴ Disheartened by the daughter of Paolo Traversari's lack of regard for him and counseled by his relatives who fear he will throw away all of his money trying to attract this girl's attention, Nastagio leaves the city and sets up a magnificent tent city for himself in the pine forest near Chiassi. There, while wandering through the woods, Nastagio witnesses the infernal punishment of a cruel woman and her ardent suitor. This suitor, who in life was a man from Ravenna named Guido degli Anastagi, explains to Nastagio that in life he lost all hope of ever finding return for his love of this young lady and killed himself because of her "fierezza and crudelta" [arrogance and cruelty] (5.8.21; 360). As a punishment for his suicide, he is condemned to hunt and chase his beloved in the afterlife, killing and gutting her each time he catches up to her. The girl, in turn, is damned to such torture for her cruelty and for the

⁶⁴ Filomena notes that after receiving inheritances from his father and his uncle, Nastagio "senza stima rimase ricchissimo" [left rich beyond all measure] (8.5.4, 358). The narrator describes the deeds he does to try and attract his ladylove as "grandissime, belle e laudevole" [magnificent, splendid, and praiseworthy] (5.8.6; 359).

delight she took in spurning his attention and affection for so long.⁶⁵ After Guido explains his plight and Guido informs Nastagio that the two will return to this spot for as long as the punishment endures, Nastagio decides to invite his family and friends, including the Traversari girl, to a banquet built around this brutal spectacle. Fearful that she would some day share the same fate as the condemned girl, Paolo Traversari's daughter changes her attitude towards Nastagio and makes herself available to him at the earliest opportunity. Nastagio, in the end, marries the Traversari girl, and Filomena reports that all of the women of Ravenna from then on become "troppo più arrendevoli a' piaceri degli uomini furono che prima state non erano" [a good deal more amenable to men's pleasure than they ever had been in the past] (5.8.44; 363).

The ways that both Nastagio and the Traversari girl respond to this gruesome exhibition express distinct criteria for the interpretation and engagement of an established model. Nastagio timidly observes as Guido points out the similarities between his own situation and that of Nastagio.⁶⁶ Hearing the knight's macabre story, Nastagio waits in

⁶⁵ "Né stette poi guari tempo che costei, la qual della mia morte fu lieta oltre misura, morì, e per lo peccato della sua crudeltà e della letizia avuta de' miei tormenti, non pentendosene, come colei che non credeva in ciò aver peccato ma meritato, similmente fu ed è dannata alle pene del Ninferno" [Nor was it long afterward that this woman, who rejoiced at my death beyond all measure, also died, and for this sin of her cruelty and for the delight she took in my sufferings, unrepentant as she was and convinced that she deserved to be rewarded rather than punished for them, she, too, was and continues to be condemned to the pains of Hell] (5.8.22; 361).

⁶⁶ "Il cavaliere allora disse: Nastagio, io fui d'una medesima terra teco, ed eri tu ancora piccol fanciullo quando io, il quale fui chiamato messer Guido degli Anastagi, era troppo più innamorato di costei che tu ora non se' di quella de' Traversari" [The knight then said: "Nastagio, I was from the same town as you, and you were still a small child when I, Messer Guido degli Anastagi, fell too passionately in love with this woman, far more so than you are with this Traversari girl of yours"] (5.8.21; 422).

horror to see the punishment acted out in front of him: “Nastagio, udendo queste parole, tutto timido divenuto e quasi non avendo pelo addosso che arricciato non fosse, tirandosi addietro e riguardando alla misera giovane, cominciò pauroso ad aspettare quello che facesse il cavaliere” [When Nastagio heard these words, he became quite frightened, and there was not a hair on his head which was not standing on end, and stepping back, he watched the wretched girl and waited in fear to see what the knight would do to her] (5.8.28; 423). Nastagio’s fear is so great that he responds physically to it; it makes his skin crawl. Waiting to see the woman’s body ripped open, his own body registers horror and fright.

At the same time that he feels drawn into the scene, however, Nastagio *draws back*, away from the episode, physically separating himself from the spectacle he witnesses. This separation is key to Nastagio’s understanding of and response to the horrible episode. After witnessing the horror, Nastagio’s fear mixes with pity. Then, both feelings give way to the young man’s ingenuity: “Il quale, avendo queste cose vedute, gran pezza stette tra pietoso e pauroso: e dopo alquanto gli venne nella mente questa cosa dovergli molto poter valere, poi che ogni venerdì avvenia” [After witnessing these events, Nastagio remained in that spot for a long while, caught up in his feelings of compassion and fear, but after a while it occurred to him that this spectacle, since it occurred every Friday, might well be useful to him] (5.8.32; 423). Nastagio ruminates for some time over his mixture of pity and fear – feeling *pietoso* and *pauroso* – and finally digests the spectacle into a plan that can work to his own advantage – a way to

exchange his pity and fear for something more useful.

In order to gain personal benefit from the knight's punishment and the woman's torture, Nastagio sets a stage for this painful show.⁶⁷ The people of Ravenna have a complicated response to the scene, one that highlights their methods of interpretation, and the passage is worth quoting at some length:

Il romore fu fatto grande e a' cani e al cavaliere, e molti per aiutare la giovane si fecero innanzi; il cavaliere, parlando loro come a Nastagio aveva parlato, non solamente gli fece indietro tirare ma tutti gli spaventò e riempì di meraviglia; e facendo quello che altra volta aveva fatto, quante donne v'aveva (ché ve ne aveva assai che parenti erano state e della dolente giovane e del cavaliere e che si ricordavano dell'amore e della morte di lui) tutte così miseramente piagnevano come se a se medesime quello avesser veduto fare. La qual cosa al suo termine fornita, e andata via la donna e 'l cavaliere, mise costoro che ciò veduto aveano in molti e varii ragionamenti. (5.8.38-40)

They began screaming loudly at the dogs and the knight, and many of them stepped forward to help the girl, but the knight, speaking to them just as he had spoken to Nastagio, not only forced them to draw back but filled them with terror and amazement; and after he had done to the girl what he had done the other time, all of the ladies present (many of whom were relatives either of the suffering girl or of the knight and who remembered his love affair and his death) began to weep piteously, as if what they had witnessed had actually been inflicted upon themselves. When the scene came to an end and the lady and the knight had vanished, they all began to discuss what they had observed, with many different interpretations. (424)

⁶⁷ This strategy challenges the dichotomy of "text dominant" and "reader dominant" relationships. In Nastagio's set-up, he does not dominate the scene. He cannot control the time or place that it appears; he must adjust to the schedule already determined by the punishment. His stage, also, is one that Guido and the unnamed woman pass through; they are not caged in on their arrival. Nastagio profits from the opportunity the episode affords him, but cannot control the scene itself.

The audience grows from Nastagio alone to a group of men and women from Ravenna. As the public expands, the number of responses to and interpretations of the scene also increases. Many of them (“molti”) rush forward to help the hounded woman, but not all the guests do. Furthermore, we cannot assume that all of the guests step backwards; it could be that Guido only forces the people that went forward to assist the girl to step back and away from the scene. These various physical reactions parallel different interpretive responses to the hellish scene. Filomena notes explicitly that the ensuing discussions involve “molti e varii ragionamenti.” While Musa and Bondanella translate this to mean “many different interpretations,” we can also think that these discussions involve “many and different *ways of thinking*.”⁶⁸ This passage depicts different methods of interpretation as well as describing the different reactions themselves.

Of those various methods, Filomena depicts only one of them in her tale – the empathy that the women of Ravenna feel – and thus only describes one product of the guests’ encounter with the horrific event –

⁶⁸ According to the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, “ragionamento” has a double meaning applicable at the time of Boccaccio’s writing: “Il ragionare; il processo per il quale si pensa e si discorre in forma logica e, in particolare, si muove da premesse per giungere una conclusione. – Anche: il risultato di tale procedimento; discorso o pensiero articolato logicamente, che ha un fondamento razionale; concatenazione di argomenti a dimostrazione di una tesi, argomentazione” [The reasoning; the process by which one thinks and discusses in logical form and, in particular, one moves from the premises to reach a conclusion. – Also, the result of this process; a discourse or thought logically articulated, that has a rational foundation; the connection of arguments and proof of a thesis, argumentation] (340, my translation). The *Grande dizionario* cites the documents of “Albertano giudice da Brescia (intorno al 1300)” [Albert, judge from Brescia (around 1300)] as evidence: “La ragione...è comprendimento del bene e fuggimento del male, e indi è detto ragionamento, cioè della ragione trovamento” [Reason...is the understanding of good and the escaping of evil and therefore it is called “reasoning,” which is to say finding with reason] (341, my translation). See Salvatore Battaglia, et al., *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (Turin: UTET, 1990).

the submission of Ravennese women to the advances of male suitors. While Nastagio was able to step back from the scene – literally and figuratively – certain women present at the banquet cannot. The relatives of the two condemned visions weep miserably, as if the knight was taking action against the living women themselves. What they see and what they feel are strongly linked; they cannot distance themselves from the scene. I assert that this inability to distinguish between the episode before them and their own lives acts as a detriment, particularly in the case of the Traversari girl. Filomena describes her response thusly:

Ma tra gli altri che piú di spavento ebbero, fu la crudel
giovane da Nastagio amata, la quale ogni cosa
distintamente veduta avea e udita e conosciuto che a sé piú
che a altra persona che vi fosse queste cose toccavano,
ricordandosi della crudeltà sempre da lei usata verso
Nastagio; per che già le pareva fuggire dinanzi da lui adirato
e avere i mastini a' fianchi. (5.8.40)

But among those who were the most terrified was the cruel girl Nastagio loved, for she had clearly seen and heard every detail and realized that these things concerned her far more than anyone else who was present, inasmuch as she recalled the cruelty she had always inflicted upon Nastagio; as a result, she already felt herself fleeing from his rage and the mastiffs lunging at her sides. (424)

The Traversari girl identifies so strongly with the dead maiden that she feels as if she is already chased by Nastagio and the dogs of the afterlife.

In her interpretation of the story, the Traversari girl is so caught up in her identification with the dead maiden that she cannot absorb the scene as a whole. In Guido's explanation, the two people are condemned because they are *both* at fault: Guido is guilty of suicide,

the maiden of cruelty and neglect. The Traversari girl, however, thinks only to the maiden's responsibility for the horror that is played out in the scene in pinewoods. Unable to distance herself from the scene, she ultimately assumes all responsibility for rectifying her own situation and saving herself from such horrible punishment.⁶⁹ I assert that, by trying to avoid an eternal punishment, the Traversari girl condemns herself to marriage with Nastagio.

Nastagio was able to step back from the scene, not only physically, but also as an interpreter. Nastagio gives himself space to evaluate the episode, and evaluation that accounts not only for his personal and immediate reaction to the scene but also a consideration of how he can put this episode into circulation for his own benefit. The Traversari daughter, however, only lets the episode absorb her. She is so terrified by the display that she gives in to Nastagio's advances, the same advances that were so anathema to her before: "E tanta fu la paura che di questo le nacque acciò che questo a lei non avvenisse" [So great was the terror aroused in the lady by this spectacle that in order to avoid a similar fate herself] (5.8.41; 424) the Traversari girl changes her hatred into love and makes herself completely available to Nastagio. While Nastagio's reaction to the scene brings him a method for achieving his desires, the Traversari girl's response dominates her and induces her to be dominated; she abandons her lofty airs and offers herself as Nastagio's lover. Finding

⁶⁹ Here, the setting underlines the Traversari's girl's error. Both Vacca ("Carnal Reading," 176) and Mazzotta (*The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron*, 7) point out the connections between the woods of 5.8 and the forest described in *Inferno* 13, the domain of the suicides.

his beloved completely conquered, Nastagio takes the girl as his wife, while all the other women of Ravenna replicate the Traversari girl's interpretive choices and become exceedingly available to their male suitors.

My analysis of this tale points out that not only do Nastagio and the Traversari girl arrive at different interpretations of the gruesome scene in the pine woods, those interpretations are the result of different methods of interpretation. Nastagio appreciates the import of the scene, acknowledges its connection to his own life, and at the same time recognizes the importance of distancing himself from this scene in order to gain any benefit from it.⁷⁰ The Traversari daughter, however, is so drawn into the scene that she takes on all responsibility for avoiding the same tragedy in her own life. She never moves beyond "*paura*" [fear]. By avoiding one punishment, she sentences herself to giving in to Nastagio – the one fate that she has so adamantly resisted through the rest of the story. It is her method of reading – her failure to establish difference and distance with the model before her – that determines her interpretation and her fate.

Teachers and students: Who's kidding who?

Quite surprisingly, while imitation and its execution are central concerns of the *Decameron*, the variant forms of the word itself –

⁷⁰ Granted, of course, Nastagio's benefit is not without complication nor do I view the episode without certain ethical qualms. The *Decameron*, however, challenges readers to sort through what is to follow and what is to avoid, and the example of Nastagio illustrates how we can identify successful reading strategies without valorizing the ends to which they are employed.

imitare, imitazione, imitatio – are conspicuously absent from the text.⁷¹ Instead, we find the *Decameron* using other language to describe the interaction between a model and its duplicator. On Day Three, Panfilo frames his story about a lecherous Franciscan and his gullible prey in terms of instruction. In this story, Dom Felice promises to teach Frate Puccio, a pious but naïve Tertiary, a secret shortcut on the road to heaven. Blindly following the instructions of his master, however, does not get Puccio to heaven any faster; instead, it has very earthly repercussions: it makes him a cuckold. While Puccio remains occupied with his fasting and prayers, Dom Felice finds his own path to paradise by cavorting with Puccio's young and beautiful wife. In this tale, Panfilo emphasizes the seminal role that recognition plays in the reading process, demonstrating that successful imitation begins with choosing the right model. Like the women of the *Decameron's* proem, Panfilo's characters are charged with the responsibility of identifying useful models.

As we noted earlier, the *Decameron's* reader is one who will be able to recognize what to follow and what to avoid. She is thus a woman of some ability and knowledge, up to the task of navigating the various paths before her and choosing the one that will be most beneficial for her. Poor Frate Puccio, however, is not at all up to the task. Though pious and rich, Frate Puccio is a dunce: “E per ciò che uomo idiota era e di grossa pasta, diceva suoi paternostri, andava alle prediche, stava alle messe, né mai falliva che alle laude che cantavano

⁷¹ See Alfredo Barbina and Umberto Bosco, *Concordanze del Decameron* (Florence: Giunta, 1969).

i secolari esso non fosse, e digiunava e disciplinavasi, e bucinavasi che egli era degli scopatori” [Since he was a rather thick-witted, simpleminded man, he always said his Our Fathers and went to Mass, attended sermons, and never failed to show up when lauds were being sung by laymen, and he fasted, and practiced other types of discipline. It was rumored that he was a member of the Flagellants] (3.4.5; 216). This description of Puccio is especially scathing not only because Panfilo calls the man outright a thickheaded idiot, but also because the narrator shows his protagonist to be void of personal discernment. Puccio lives a scripted and mechanical prayer life, expressing his piety by reciting paternosters. Further, his participation in organized religious activities is limited to his attendance – he goes to prayers, attends Mass, and is present at Lauds – but we have no indication of his activity in these services; he does not add anything to the occasion. This passage is an evaluation of Puccio’s lack of personal initiative; he is the picture of a man who has forsaken the important practice of critical examination. He relies on others to choose the right path and to show him the way to follow it. He is an inversion of a successful Decameronian reader: stupid, gullible, and void of personal discernment.

Panfilo exaggerates Frate Puccio’s lack of recognition skills in the scene of instruction and heightens the connection between Frate Puccio’s errors and the careful reading skills endorsed by the *Decameron*. Dom Felice proposes revealing his secret plan to Puccio: “Ma, per ciò che tu se' mio amico e haimi onorato molto, dove io credessi che tu a niuna persona del mondo l'appalesassi, e volessila

seguire, io la t'insegnerei" [But since you are my friend and have been very good to me, if I could believe that you would never reveal this method to anyone else and that you were willing to try it, I would reveal it to you] (3.4.13; 218). While Musa and Bondanella relay that Puccio must be "willing to try" Felice's plan, implying Puccio's disposition, the cleric actually asks if Puccio's "wants to follow it" (volessila seguire). Here, then, Panfilo's story connects back to the *Decameron's* description of its readers, who must recognize "quello che sia da fuggire e che sia similmente da seguitare" [that which is to be avoided and likewise that which is to be followed] (Proem.14, my translation). The proem uses the verb "seguitare" and Panfilo here employs "seguire." The similarity of these verbs links the two passages, but their difference prompts the reader to question whether Dom Felice is offering advice that Frate Puccio should follow.

Dom Felice exposes the absurdity of his own advice. He even admits that the program he is laying out for Puccio is ineffective – or at least no more so than standard Church rites of penance and absolution. Before Felice outlines the ritual, he acknowledges as much and even encourages Puccio to recognize its futility: "Ma intendi sanamente: io non dico, che dopo la penitenzia tu non sii peccatore come tu ti se" [But please understand: I am not saying that after doing the penance you will no longer be a sinner as you are now] (3.4.15; 218). Musa and Bondanella exorcise the word "sanamente" from Felice's entreaty, but Felice is really giving Puccio advice here that he

should understand “healthily,” which is to say for his own wellbeing.⁷² Felice divulges the fact that his plan will not turn Puccio from a sinner into a saint. Rather, the sinner will remain unchanged. Granted, Felice notes that Puccio’s sins committed thus far in his life will be forgiven, though this is to be expected as Felice’s plan includes a ritual Confession, the purpose of which is to absolve the sinner of wrongdoings previously committed. Also, Felice predicts that Puccio’s sins from here on out will be considered venial, a very safe prediction to make for Puccio, a man who spends all of his time at Mass and prayers with the Franciscan friars. Panfilo is thus amplifying Puccio’s credulity – the dimwitted Tertiary cannot recognize a trap even when his deceiver admits to deception!

The young and lovely Monna Isabetta, Puccio’s wife, however, is as keen and clever as Puccio is dull. The sly Monna Isabetta hears Felice’s plan and “intese troppo bene” [understood only too well] (3.4.22; 218).⁷³ What the husband cannot understand “sanamente,” the wife understands “troppo bene.” The repetition of the verb “intendere” [to understand] highlights the juxtaposition of the two characters. Isabetta’s deciphers Felice’s ulterior motive, and the two spend blissful nights frolicking in their own sexual paradise. While Puccio’s lack of sense leaves him open to deception, Isabetta’s sharp skills of perception land her an earthly and physical reward. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that superior rhetorical skills

⁷² G.H. McWilliam renders the phrase “But listen *carefully*” (259, emphasis added). Likewise, Guido Waldman writes “Now listen *carefully*” (192, emphasis added).

⁷³ McWilliam says that the lady “grasped the monk’s intentions *all too clearly*” (261, emphasis added). Waldman writes that she has “the *clearest indication* of what the friar had in mind” (193, emphasis added).

accompany Isabetta's expert reading abilities. When the house shakes because she and her lover lose all restraint in their acrobatic search for ethereal pleasure in the bedroom, Isabetta cleverly references her husband's own words and uses them as a defense and deception. Isabetta claims she is shaking because of extreme fasting, a fate predicted by her husband (3.4.27). The clever reader here becomes the effective speaker. She cannot only recognize a good opportunity, she can also appropriate the material set before her to her own advantage.

Mares, mystery, and mischief: Donno Gianni comes (to visit)

Dioneo also tells a story about a priest and a simple-minded husband on the *Decameron's* ninth day, moving the setting from San Bancrazio to Barletta, in Puglia. This story is also an important tale to consider in terms of the *Decameron's* central connection between reading and imitation. In Dioneo's story, Donno Gianni di Barolo, a combination parish priest and traveling salesman, requests silent obedience from his impoverished host Compar Pietro, who Dioneo describes as "anzi grosetto uom che no" [more or less a simpleton] (9.10.13; 700). Compar Pietro and his wife believe that Donno Gianni is going to teach Pietro how to change his wife into a mare. Compar Pietro, however, reacts vocally when he sees that Donno Gianni's "spell" is really sexual foreplay and intercourse. The priest claims that Compar Pietro's outburst has ruined the spell, and the man's wife chastises him heartily for his blunder.

Dioneo seems to focus his audience's attention on Compar Pietro and his – describing him, his work, his relationship to the priest – and his responsibility for spoiling the spell. The rubric of the tale endorses this focus, naming Pietro twice, Donno Gianni only once, and referring to Comar Gemmata only as “la moglie.”⁷⁴ It is, however, Pietro's young and beautiful wife who makes the decision to learn Donno Gianni's spell, and this decision illustrates the reader's responsibility to carefully choose which models are suitable for imitation.

Pietro's wife has a most unfortunate entrance into the *Decameron*. Her first appearance in the tale is buried deeply in the middle of a long description about Pietro and Donno Gianni's habits of hospitality:

Compar Pietro d'altra parte, essendo poverissimo e avendo una piccola casetta in Tresanti appena bastevole a lui e ad una sua giovane e bella moglie e all'asino suo, quante volte donno Gianni in Tresanti capitava tante sel menava a casa, e come poteva, in riconoscimento dell'onor che da lui in Barletta riceveva, l'onorava. (9.10.7)

Compare Pietro was a very poor man who owned a small house in Tresanti, barely large enough for him, his young and beautiful wife, and his donkey. But whenever Father Gianni happened to be in Tresanti, he always took him to his home and tried to entertain him as best he knew how in gratitude for the hospitality his friend had shown him in Barletta. (699)

Dioneo does not name the wife at her entrance. She is distinguished only by youth and beauty and is the last member of Compar Pietro's

⁷⁴ “Donno Gianni ad istanzia di compar Pietro fa lo 'ncantesimoper far diventar la moglie una cavalla; e quando viene ad appiccar la coda, compar Pietro dicendo che non vi voleva coda, guasta tutto lo 'ncantamento” [At Compare Pietro's request, Father Gianni casts a spell in order to turn his wife into a mare; but when it comes time to stick the tail on, Pietro, by saying that she doesn't want a tail, ruins the whole spell] (9.10.1; 689).

household that we meet – since the donkey is making its second appearance in the story here. Moreover, this presentation equates the wife with this beast of burden; they are introduced in parallel.

Comar Pietro has a house that is just large enough for him to keep his unnamed wife and his donkey there with him.

The wife's youth and beauty are of little service to her when she talks to Donno Gianni, and he responds to her in cryptic language that eventually makes the wife, originally equated with a donkey, beg to be turned into a mare. As a gesture of hospitality, Pietro's wife offers to sleep at the home of a neighbor, Zita Carapresa di Giudice Leo for the duration of Donno Gianni's visit (9.10.10). The priest replies:

Comar Gemmata, non ti tribolar di me, ché io sto bene, per
ciò che quando mi piace io fo questa mia cavalla diventare
una bella zitella e stommi con essa, e poi, quando voglio, la
fo diventar cavalla; e perciò non mi partirei da lei.
(9.10.11)

Comare Gemmata, don't bother about me, I'm fine. You
see, whenever I want to, I can change this mare of mine
into a beautiful young girl and lie with her. Then,
whenever I wish, I can turn her back into a mare. And so
I'd never want to be separated from her. (699)⁷⁵

This reply is both polite and puzzling at the same time. The priest refuses to impose on his hostess, but at the same time this ordained cleric admits to sexual deviance and expects it to reassure his addressee. She shouldn't put herself out, because the priest wants to be left alone to turn his mare into a sexual partner.

⁷⁵ Translators handle the phrase "stommi con essa" in various ways. G.H. McWilliam writes "turn in with her (728)." Waldman chooses "enjoy her company" (593). Considering Dioneo's propensity for depicting sexually active characters, including members of the clergy, I agree that the phrase has a sexual connotation.

This disturbing image that suggests sorcery or bestiality can also be read as a clever rhetorical trick on the part of Donno Gianni, one that is entirely lost on Comar Gemmata. Donno Gianni's speech is unique in the *Decameron*, as it is the only instance of the word "zitella." Musa and Bondandella are not incorrect in translating the word as "young girl," as Branca's notes to the *Decameron* explain the term to mean "ragazza, fanciulla" [girl, young girl].⁷⁶ This word's singularity is tempered, however, by a similarity it shares with the name of the neighbor woman in this story. Though Compar Pietro's wife waited halfway through the story to finally be addressed by name, Dioneo names the neighbor lady, who never participates directly in the story, immediately. He gives her a name that is also unique in the *Decameron*, Zita. Zita, used as a name here, is also a word that means "young girl." It is, in fact, used to mean "young girl" in Boccaccio's own *oeuvre*.⁷⁷ The similarity (in form and in meaning), the proximity, and the rarity of "zitella" and "Zita," together with the fact that Dioneo has already shown himself to be a narrator that equates women with barnyard animals, suggest that Donno Gianni is not speaking in literal terms in his speech. Saying that he switches his mare for "una bella zitella" may be the priest's way of admitting to a sexual affair with the neighbor woman Zita. Gianni may not want Pietro's wife disrupting

⁷⁶ See Branca, *Decameron*, 1102, note 6.

⁷⁷ The *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* cites Boccaccio's *Filocolo* as evidence that "zita" means "young girl." The passage discusses a woman's relationship to "libidine" [lust] in the various stages of her life and reads: "La zita che ciò si sia ancora non conosce, se non con imaginazione: però tiepidamente disia" [The young girl still does not know that there is this sort of thing, if not in her imagination, but tepidly she desires] (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, ed. Vittore Branca in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1967), 434).

the sleeping arrangements because he himself is looking forward to swapping his place in the hay next to his horse for one next to the Zitella that sleeps next door.

Gemmata, however, does not make this connection. She takes Gianni's furtive confession seriously and convinces her husband that they should ask Gianni to teach them the magic spell: "Compar Pietro, che era anzi grossetto uom che no, credette questo fatto e accordossi al consiglio e, come meglio seppe, cominciò a sollicitar donno Gianni che questa cosa gli dovesse insegnare" [Compare Pietro, who was more or less a simpleton, believed this story and took his wife's advice] (9.10.13; 597). Pietro, who is simple headed and dull, agrees with his wife's *consiglio* – advice, and the *Decameron's* promised product of reading for those who read carefully. But the *consiglio* the proem promises will only be useful when the readers can recognize what they should follow and what they should avoid. Here, these two unfortunate country sops mistake what to avoid for what to follow, even after Donno Gianni tries to discourage Compar Pietro: "donno Gianni s'ingegnò assai di trarre costui di questa sciocchezza" [Father Gianni tried his best to dissuade him from this foolishness] (9.10.13; 597). The words "trarre," which Musa and Bondanella translate as "dissuade," actually has a more physical connotation.⁷⁸ In order to help Compar Pietro see the silliness of his request, Donno Gianni tries

⁷⁸ McWilliam translates: "Father Gianni did all he could to talk him out of his folly" (728). Waldman renders it: "Donno Gianni did his best to deter him from this nonsense" (594). Citing sources as early as the thirteenth century, the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* defines "trarre" to mean: "Far muovere, tirare esercitando una trazione protratta, energica, e, anche, violenta" [to make move, to pull exerting a prolonged, energetic and even violent force] (my translation) (*Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* 191, volume 21).

to pull him away from it, to encourage critical distance. Donno Gianni, however, is unable to move Compar Pietro, so the friar goes ahead with a spell, turning Comar Gemmata into a sexual partner. In the end, Pietro seems to have a moment of awakening, even if a late one. He realizes he has been duped when he watches himself being cuckolded. In the end, he returns to his work and his donkey. Comar Gemmata, however, remains in the dark and chastises her husband for ruining the spell. She ends the tale “dolente e malinconosa” [sad and forlorn] (9.10.24; 701). Dioneo, apparently, not only equates women for animals, but also implies that you can’t teach an old donkey new tricks.

In this chapter, I have analyzed how imitation operates as a reading practice in the *Decameron*. The process of humanist imitation begins by carefully discerning useful and productive models and then executing them with a balance of replication and innovation. Framing my discussion in this way draws attention to the *Decameron*’s focus of method over meaning. It further colors the reader’s liberty with responsibility. While the text does not confine or determine the meaning a reader will find in the text or lesson she will take away from it, the work does caution its readers to examine carefully the possibilities before her. In the next chapter, I will demonstrate how the *Decameron*, while not imposing interpretive restrictions of its own on its readers, at the same time recognizes how the reader’s participation in a larger community does influence a reader’s experience of the text.

CHAPTER TWO

I, WE, AND THE *DECAMERON* MAKES THREE

In the previous chapter, I proposed that readers of the *Decameron* accept a large responsibility in the process of gaining pleasure and useful counsel from the text. Readers are responsible for the identification of useful models; the text requires readers to decide for themselves which passages will be the most beneficial to them. The *Decameron*, I have argued, invites its readers to make their judgments uninhibited by any moral restraint imposed by the text itself. This is not to say, however, that the *Decameron* envisions a reader who is entirely free of any restraint or influence at all. The *Decameron* depicts a reader who is simultaneously an isolated individual and a member of a larger community. Indeed, I detect a consistent tension between the personal and the communal in the *Decameron*. In this chapter, I will analyze the operation of that tension on multiple levels of the text – in the voice of the Author, amongst the members of the brigata, and in their stories. In order to do so, I will consider the *Decameron*'s proem as well as the moments when the narrators define for themselves both their concepts of self and of community as they set out on their own from Florence. Those moments occur on the *Decameron*'s first two days of storytelling (the Introduction and Conclusion to Day One, 2.1, 2.2.), two days which themselves form a distinct unit because they are followed by the brigata's first pause in storytelling. Specifically, stories 2.1 and 2.2 introduce two different models for communal participation and

organization; the narrators then organize themselves around these models as they act as monarchs who must organize their own community.

All by herself but not alone

Certain scholars have proposed that Boccaccio's work actively liberates its readers from the experiences and influences that might limit their access to whatever pleasure and counsel they might find the text offering them. Cormac Ò Cuilleannàin, for example, argues that the *Decameron's* frame lifts readers away from the everyday:

I suggest that the cumulative effect of the frame is to lure the reader into a free zone of imagination, between fantasy and reality, just as the writer is forced to cast off the inhibitions of everyday personality and judgment, in order to create. The frame-story alters the reader's consciousness by casting off the intolerable demands of everyday life and insulating him in an ideal paradise of order suspended between two bewildering confusions of social and moral anarchy.⁷⁹

In Ò Cuilleannàin's terms, reading the *Decameron* is a temporary escape from the demands of the everyday.⁸⁰ Suggesting that the reader leaves

⁷⁹ See Cormac Ò Cuilleannàin, *Religion and the Clergy in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1984), 61.

⁸⁰ Ò Cuilleannàin is not the only commentator to think of the *Decameron* as an escape. In his work, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages*, Glending Olson claims that the *Decameron* lures its readers away from their own world, just as the brigata abandons Florence and their dreary lives of dying relatives and sorrow. This behavior, he claims, is hedonistic and selfish but also therapeutic. See Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 164-204. Giuseppe Mazzotta also incorporates a discussion of the *Decameron* as escapist literature in his work, claiming that the text treats "literature as a middle ground between two absences, between utopia and social structures, as a provisional retreat from the city in an atemporal space." See Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 56. This trend seems stronger in English-language commentary but does have its adherents on the other side of the Atlantic as well. See Kurt Flasch, *Poesia dopo la pesta: Saggio su Boccaccio*, trans. Rosa Taliani (Bari: Laterza, 1995). Flasch

the “intolerable demands of everyday life” behind for the text’s “ideal paradise of order” recalls the loss of self that Roland Barthes identifies as a key component of reading, an activity described in terms of the pleasure of the text. Barthes writes: “what pleasure wants is the site of a loss, the seam, the cut, the deflation, the *dissolve* which seizes the subject in the midst of bliss.”⁸¹ Leaving all troubles and constraints behind, the reader gives in to the world of the text, a world cut off from the reader’s own everyday reality.

Timothy Kircher also finds liberation to be an important element of the *Decameron*, but the liberating effects of the text that Kircher identifies are both more specific and more lasting than the momentary suspension of quotidian trials and tribulations that Ò Cuilleanàin proposes. Kircher argues that Boccaccio’s work frees its readers from those persons and institutions who claim to act as the guardians and administrators of moral authority. Commenting on the proem, he writes: “we can perceive Boccaccio’s address to women in the *Decameron* as more than a literary convention or social critique; it can be part of an enterprise that questions the rational moral hierarchy advanced by his mendicant contemporaries.”⁸² Kircher sees the *Decameron* as a direct attack on what he calls “the ecclesiastical center

reads the *Decameron* as a more permanent, but still limited, means of escape specifically for women. He writes that the *Decameron* enacts “la liberazione delle donne dall’inferno di una vita asfittica e crea nuove possibilità di vita, anche se solo nell’immaginazione” [the liberation of women from the hell of a life without vitality and creates new possibilities in life, even if only in the imagination] (23, my translation).

⁸¹ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975), 7.

⁸² Timothy Kircher, *The Poet’s Wisdom: The Humanists, the Church, and the Formation of Philosophy in the Early Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 29.

of the *exemplum* tradition” and contends that in this campaign against the Church, the *Decameron* transfers the powers of understanding and moral judgment to a reader whom the text similarly convinces to shed ideological shackles. When confronted by the narrators’ explicitly stated moral lessons, “the reader is instantly challenged to assess their remarks, accept them or reject them, *without recourse to clerical authority*. A key support of medieval tradition, the theological and social status of the clergy, *has been knocked away*, and one is left to consider the worth of the tale *in one’s own terms: a liberating, anxious moment* [my emphasis].”⁸³ The *Decameron* deposes any previous religious authority to which the reader held allegiance and at the same time sacrifices itself to her ultimately independent experience of understanding. According to Kircher, who echoes here the Author’s prologue: “Personal experience is the touchstone in determining what has moral value or is worthless.”⁸⁴ While my reading has some similarities to the work of Kircher – we both, for example, identify a reader’s responsibility to judge moments of the text – we differ in that Kircher avers that a reader’s assessments of the *Decameron* are independent not only from textual influence, but from institutionalized moral and religious influence as well.

In two of her own works, Millicent Marcus asserts that the *Decameron*’s liberating effects are even broader than those that Kircher suggests. First, in her article, “Faith’s Fiction: A Gloss on the Tale of

⁸³ Timothy Kircher, “The Modality of Moral Communication in the *Decameron*’s First Day in Contrast to the Mirror of Exemplum,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54 (2001): 1035-1073, here 1038. Emphasis added. Reprinted in Kircher, *The Poet’s Wisdom*.

⁸⁴ Kircher, “The Morality of Moral Communication,” 1038; *The Poet’s Wisdom*, 33.

Melchisedech (*Decameron* 1.3),” Marcus suggests that the *Decameron* refuses the applicability of codified religious standards. She reads the *Decameron*’s third tale as a kind of new beginning for the work and writes that the “powerful, learned, and well-disposed readers who constitute Boccaccio’s ideal audience” emerge from “a tale which is strictly secular in its claims.”⁸⁵ In this story, according to Marcus, readers witness the portrayal of the clergy as “an extravagant portrait of vice” and are thus convinced that the clergy is impotent in the task of communicating the divine.⁸⁶

Marcus expands her argument in her book *An Allegory of Form*. Here, she asserts that reading the *Decameron* encourages its readers to shed not only their religious allegiances but also to free themselves from their connections to established ideological bonds in general. As such, Marcus claims that the hundred tales create a literary vacuum that unleashes its readers into the free realm of interpretive independence. She writes:

Prior to Boccaccio, prose narrative was used to exemplify external, fixed truths...[and] fictions were always pressed into the service of external dogma...but Boccaccio makes a

⁸⁵ Millicent Marcus, “Faith’s Fiction: A Gloss on the Tale of Melchisedech (*Decameron* 1.3)” *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies* 2 (1978-79): 40-55, here 49 and 43. Marilyn Migiel invokes Marcus’s reading in her own discussion of the relationship between *Decameron* 1.3 and 1.5. Migiel writes: “On the basis of Millicent Marcus’s assessment of the novella of Melchisedech and the sultan (1.3), we should probably grant primacy to Filomena. Declining to participate in the cosmic ambitions that Panfilo and Neifile had advanced in the first two stories of the *Decameron*, stories that showed readers of religious truths who were either deluded or willing to impose their interpretations on texts unlikely to support them, Filomena presents the ideal reader as a secular presence who is keenly aware of how meanings are generated. Her story reminds us that social reality is constructed by means of agreements – however provisional, however constrained – about narratives that we produce” (32). See Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

⁸⁶ Marcus, “Faith’s Fiction,” 52.

radical break from the exemplary tradition, freeing his stories from any absolute interpretive systems, and clearing a new, non-dogmatic fictional space.⁸⁷

Later in the work, she contends that, with the tale of Ser Cepparello, “Boccaccio seeks to free his work from any absolute interpretive systems, demanding that the stories be read and received on their own terms, without recourse to extranarrative ideologies.”⁸⁸ The text thus frees its readers from their own interpretive constraints as it liberates itself from the burdens of its literary predecessors.⁸⁹

Granted, I do agree with parts of these scholars’ arguments – particularly that the text does not endorse or enforce a specific moral code and lets its readers judge the text on their own terms. I am hesitant to concede, however, that the text actively resists or denies the ideological influences already at play for its readers. In fact, I see quite the opposite happening in the *Decameron*. The *Decameron* recognizes its readers are part of a larger community and realizes that the decisions and judgments they make will be informed by the structures and ideas of that community. Far from assuming or encouraging its readers to negate all social and moral norms when left their own devices, the text opens with an image of a readers who, while on their own, are aware of the fact that they are subject to the

⁸⁷ Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the Decameron* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1979), 12.

⁸⁸ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 21.

⁸⁹ The work of Kircher and Marcus, then, is reminiscent in this respect of the work of Aldo Scaglione, who has made some of the most extreme arguments for the moral revolution led by the *Decameron*. He writes: “the *Decameron* sounded like a battle cry against the Middle Ages...the *Decameron* is, indeed, a conscious revolt against prevailing standards.” See Aldo Scaglione, *Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), 68.

powerful structures that define their participation in a larger community.

In the opening prologue, the lovelorn woman's lonely isolation actually serves as a reminder of her obligations to familial authority. The Author explains that he dedicates these stories to women in love because they are "ristrette da' voleri, da' piaceri, da' comandamenti de' padri, delle madri, de' fratelli, e de' mariti, il piú del tempo nel piccolo circuito delle loro camere racchiuse dimorano e quasi oziose sedendosi" [restricted by the wishes, whims, and commands of fathers, mothers, brothers and husbands, they remain most of the time limited to the narrow confines of their bedrooms, where they sit in apparent idleness] (Proem.10; 4). Like prisoners in solitary confinement, these women are compelled to remain in their rooms by their more powerful guardians, and their isolation makes those that hold power over them all the more present. Locked away, these women still hide their desires "temendo e vergognando" [out of fear and shame] (Proem.9; 4). They are left on their own but are aware of their place within the greater power structures of their society and the allegiances that place entails.

Not coincidentally, the Author dedicates his work to these lone but alert women. They are the readers destined to judge the hundred stories, to discern their useful counsel and to recognize what pleasure they afford – and at the same time recognize what advice or pleasure the text makes available but that readers themselves must avoid. Their isolation does not negate the influence that their social allegiances hold over them. Instead, their isolation stands a challenge.

As they make their way through the text, afraid of their superiors and embarrassed by their desires (Proem.9), they will be guided by the skills of recognition and understanding that accommodate the authority that feels so present to them. They are women who know that the right path has already been determined for them. In the *Decameron*, she must keep to it on her own – or diverge at her own risk.

The author: There's no "I" in *Decameron*...or is there?

Like his imagined dedicatees, the Author thinks of himself both as a discreet individual and as a member of a larger community, one that he in fact relies heavily upon for sustenance and aid. This duality is evident from the opening lines of the text, when the Author both singles himself out and belies his participation in a larger group.⁹⁰

Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti: e come che a ciascuna persona stea bene, a coloro è massimamente richiesto li quali già hanno di conforto avuto mestiere e hannol trovato in alcuni; fra' quali, se alcuno mai n'ebbe bisogno o gli fu caro o già ne ricevette piacere, io sono uno di queglii. (Proem.1)

To have compassion for those who suffer is a human quality which everyone should possess, especially those who have required comfort themselves in the past and have

⁹⁰ For readings of the *Decameron*'s opening line, particularly the mention of the "umana cosa," its difference from divine things, and its Ovidian allusions, see Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar: Narrative Technique in the Decameron* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), 30-31; Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Robert Hollander, "The *Decameron* Proem," in *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 12-28; Victoria Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), 117-29; Joy Hambuechen Potter, *Five Frames for the Decameron: Communication and Social Systems in the Cornice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 70-73.

managed to find it in others. Now, if any man ever had need of compassion and appreciated it or derived comfort from it, I am that person. (3)

This passage highlights universality and singularity, particularly in the Author's identification of himself. The support of the community and the benefit of the individual take top billing in the *Decameron*: expression of the general human condition does *each person* ("ciascuna persona") good. Amongst those people is the Author himself – one among many. Musa and Bondanella, however, fail to capture the way the Author subtly encapsulates the tension between the person and the group in the original Italian. The Author, when he states "io sono uno di queglii" introduces himself as an individual. He includes the superfluous subject pronoun "io" before the singular verb "sono," itself followed by the singular masculine "uno." The Author fervently stresses his individuality, an insistence that Musa and Bondanella capture as they render the passage "I am that person" (3). This single picture of the solitary man, however, is not the full portrait of the artist. The structure of the sentence, "io sono uno di queglii," complicates the Author's identification of himself far more than Musa and Bondanella's translation indicates. More accurately, the statement reads: "I am one of those." Thus, the first mention the Author makes of himself is as a member of a larger group. He is one of many; he describes his individuality in terms of his connection and similarity to other people.

The *Decameron*, from its very opening, engages and sustains a literary tradition that credits social interaction with physical

salvation.⁹¹ The Author's description of his lovesickness credits the torment he suffers to the burden of his solitary situation. In fact, quite notably, the pain that he endures is not externally imposed (by a cruel or negligent lover or by the woman's refusal to return his affections), but rather is self-sourced, a product of his own person. It comes "certo non per la crudeltà della donna amata, ma per soverchio fuoco nella mente concetto da poco regolato appetito" [certainly not because of the cruelty of the lady I loved but rather because of the overwhelming passion kindled in my mind by my unrestrained desire] (Proem.3; 3). On his own, the Author lays prey to the continual anguish that his isolation breeds in his own mind. Any relief from this misery comes in the form of friendly commiseration with sympathetic comrades: "Nella qual noia tanto rifrigerio già mi porsero i piacevoli ragionamenti d'alcuno amico e le sue laudevole consolazioni, che io porto fermissima opinione per quelle essere avvenuto che io non sia morto" [In my suffering, the pleasant conversation and the admirable consolation of a friend on a number of occasions gave me much relief, and I am firmly convinced I should now be dead if it had not been for that] (Proem.4; 3-4). Here the *Decameron* credits social interaction with the power to heal. This physical benefit remains the focus of the

⁹¹ The *Decameron* is not the first text to credit social relationships with curative properties. Aristotle begins his discussion of friendship in Books Eight and Nine of the *Nicomachean Ethics* with the statement: "Friendship is very necessary for living." See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 115a5, 208. Cicero and Seneca also both heavily influenced the concept of beneficial relationships in the humanist period. For a general review of this topic, see George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). McClure examines the social dimension of curative friendships in the context of Coluccio Salutati's letters; he claims that their focus on the community "reflects the emergence of a prominent sensibility in medieval and Renaissance moral thought" (75).

Decameron's link between the singular and the general as the *Decameron* continues; it will be of particular import, for example, as we examine how the members of the brigata learn to balance their own autonomy with their participation in a larger coherent whole.

The speaker passes from a description of the life-sustaining powers of his friend's counsel and a celebration of physical salvation to a tribute of divine insistence on mortal finiteness. He continues: "Ma sí come a Colui piacque il quale, essendo Egli infinito, diede per legge incommutabile a tutte le cose mondane aver fine..." [But since he who is infinite had been pleased to decree by immutable law that all earthly things should come to an end...] (Proem 5; 4). While human encounters offer the advantage of survival, the divine appears in the *Decameron*'s proem as a guarantor of conclusion. The proem reinforces the termination of the love relationship with a solemn ending to the sentence: "dilettevole il sento esser rimaso" [there remains only a sense of delight] (Proem.3; 4). As Vittore Branca points out, the Author adds a particular flourish to the phrase here, adding a "chiusura del periodo solenne con un endecasillabo: il primo di quelle varie migliaia di versi che punteggiano sapientemente la prosa del *Decameron*" [an ending for the solemn passage using an hendecasyllable; the first of very many verses that wisely punctuate the prose of the *Decameron*].⁹² The appearance of the first hendecasyllable in the *Decameron* underscores the importance of the communal ideal both in and for the text. The use of a formal device of the hendecasyllable binds the *Decameron* to a textual past, to a

⁹² Volume 1, page 6, Note 6, my translation

literary community, and, of course, most specifically, to its great predecessor, the *Divina commedia*. Even in the face of the divine, then, the proem maintains its commitment to the beneficial earthly community; indeed, the *Decameron* uses its mention of Providence's proscriptive power to reinforce the importance of not only social but also textual affinity.

The Author of the *Decameron* maintains and elaborates this tension between the personal and the communal as he moves beyond his own romantic memoir. The Author advances from his experience of love to his memory of the plague's devastation. As the depiction of death and destruction that he paints becomes more and more fantastic, the Author becomes more and more dedicated to assuring his readers that he is speaking from personal experience:

“Maravigliosa cosa è a udire quello che io debbo dire: il che, se dagli occhi di molti e da' miei non fosse stato veduto, appena che io ardissero di crederlo, non che di scriverlo, quantunque da fede degna udito l'avessi” [What I am about to say is incredible to hear, and if I and others had not witnessed it with our own eyes, I should not dare believe it (let alone write about it), no matter how trustworthy a person I might have heard it from] (1.Intro.16; 8). While his experience of the plague is personal, it is not singular. His account is trustworthy because he did not witness this havoc on his own; he substantiates his claims noting that other eyes than his own witnessed the havoc of the plague along with him. The Author again recalls his own discreet membership in a larger community as he recaps his description of plague-ridden Florence: “dico che, stando in questi termini la nostra

città” (*I say that when our city was in this position*) (I.Intro.49; 15).

The Author’s reliability as a witness – as an authoritative “I” that speaks – is dependent on his participation in the greater community. He speaks both on his own and in communion with his fellow citizens.

Finishing his description of the ruin caused by the plague and having linked the position of the “I” that speaks with a larger community, the Author shifts gears and begins his depiction of the group of Florentine nobles who form the frame for the ensuing hundred tales. Notably, the Author admits that he is not telling a story that is entirely his own; he is reporting a chronicle that another person first related to him: “addivenne, sí come io poi da persona degna di fede sentii” [it happened (as I heard it later from another person worthy of trust)] (I.Intro.49; 15). The Author’s voice is thus not entirely his own; his “I” is not grounded only in himself, but rather it is the product of his encounters and interactions with others. He tells his readers what he himself has been told.

The girls and boys of the brigata

This trustworthy person tells the Author that a group of seven women – themselves already connected to each other by the bonds of family, neighborhood, and friendship – assembled together in the church of Santa Maria Novella in order to hear the divine offices. The Author introduces these Florentine women without differentiating among them, indeed refusing individual description. The text gives their personal qualities, appearances, and even ages collectively, denying each figure her own personality and appearance (1.Intro.49-

50). In the end, the text only distinguishes the women in order to make a comprehensive narrative possible: “È però, acciò che quello che ciascuna dicesse senza confusione si possa comprendere appresso, per nomi alle qualità di ciascuna convenienti o in tutto o in parte intendo nominarle” [But so that you may understand clearly what each of them had to say, I intend to give them names which are whether completely or in part appropriate to their personalities] (1.Intro.51; 15). Each woman is only important in so far as she participates within the narrative community of the *Decameron*. What follows then is a cryptic list of monikers that protect the women from criticism.⁹³

The *Decameron*'s ideal community, however, is not one that entirely denies any sense of individuality. Indeed, we must recognize a key element of the *Decameron*: difference and individuality balance the communal ideal. Similarity and affinity accompany distance and separation. One of the strongest markers of distinction within the *Decameron*'s narrative community is sexual difference.⁹⁴ This difference is immediately noticeable: the brigata's three young men have a collective entrance that is similar, though not identical, to that of the seven women (1.Intro.78-79). Their names are provided outright

⁹³ This has prompted an investigation into the perceived qualities of each female narrator and the relationship those qualities have with each name. See: Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, note 1, 31-32. For a more elaborate and thorough discussion, see Victoria Kirkham, “An Allegorically Tempered *Decameron*,” in *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction*, 131-171, especially 149-69. I would point out, however, that these claims are academic speculation rather than textual demarcation. As even Kirkham admits in her chapter's introduction, “Only Dioneo, Filostrato, and Pampinea possess distinctive ‘qualities,’ while the rest of the group are almost indistinguishably alike” (*The Sign of Reason*, 133).

⁹⁴ For a comprehensive investigation into the stakes of sexual difference within the *Decameron*, see Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*.

rather than coded; the men have a minimum age but not a maximum; they are connected to the women through amorous bonds as well as familial ones.

Sexual difference provides a framework for which the narrators to learn to balance individual personalities and the coherence and survival of the group as a whole. This focus becomes visible after the group's departure from this city. When the group arrives at their first country villa, Dioneo is the first to speak, letting the women know that he plans on having a good time, and he invites the others to sing, laugh, and generally amuse themselves as well:

Donne, il vostro senno, piú che il nostro avvedimento ci ha qui guidati; io non so quello che de' vostri pensieri voi v'intendete di fare: li miei lasciai io dentro dalla porta della città allora che io con voi poco fa me ne usci' fuori: e per ciò o voi a sollazzare e a ridere e a cantare con meco insieme vi disponete (tanto, dico, quanto alla vostra dignità s'appartiene), o voi mi licenziate che io per li miei pensier mi ritorni e steami nella città tribolata. (1.Intro.92-93)

Ladies, more than our preparations, it was your intelligence that guided us here. I do not know what you intend to do with your troubled thoughts, but I left mine inside the city walls when I passed through them in your company a little while ago; and so you must either make up your minds to enjoy yourselves and laugh and sing with me (as much, let me say, as your dignity permits), or you must give me leave to return to my worries to remain in our troubled city. (21)

Dioneo opens his statement by acknowledging his debt to the women – it is their wisdom that has led the genteel band of young people out of the miserable city. He separates the groups of men and women: “*vostro senno*,” the intelligence of the women, as opposed to “*nostro avvedimento*,” the preparations of the men, as Musa and Bondanella

translate. This “nostro” is the only time in his speech that Dioneo uses the first-person plural, and he does so in order to speak of his solidarity with the men. Dioneo shares in the shortcomings of the men’s “avvedimento” [sagacity (my translation)] that he compares to the women’s greater “senno” [judgment, wisdom (my translation)].

For the remainder of the speech, Dioneo avoids the inclusive first-person plural. When he speaks of the brigata as a whole, as a group composed of men and women, he uses the first-person singular and second-person plural forms, separating himself from the women and the various pleasures that they may pursue. Though he does speak of singing “con meco insieme” (together with me), he consistently maintains a division within his group of pleasure seekers – a “you and me” rather than “we.” Indeed, Dioneo is particularly emphatic about his separation from his audience, repeating almost compulsively the superfluous first-person subject pronoun “io” four times in his short speech. This separation is important because Dioneo attempts to profit from the sexual difference that he identifies and maintains. He moves to impose a personal agenda onto the women, addressing them with an ultimatum. He tells the women “o voi..vi disponete,” literally “either you...prepare yourselves” for pleasure and entertainment “o voi mi licenziate” [or you give me license] to dismiss himself from their company. Dioneo threatens the women that they had better do as he says, or he will leave. Issuing orders to the women is a move that has the potential to change the group’s dynamic from communal accord to obedience to a single male authority.

Pampinea diffuses Dioneo's burst of authority and, in response to his ultimatum, creates a communal structure that can accommodate individual agency but need not acquiesce to a specific individual. While she applauds Dioneo's endorsement of pleasure, she alters the way in which the various individuals may pursue that pleasure:

Ma per ciò che le cose che sono senza modo non possono lungamente durare, io, che cominciatrice fui de' ragionamenti da' quali questa così bella compagnia è stata fatta, pensando al continuar della nostra letizia, estimo che di necessità sia convenire esser tra noi alcuno principale, il quale noi e onoriamo e ubidiamo come maggiore, nel quale ogni pensiero stea di doverci a lietamente vivere disporre. (1.Intro.95)

But when things lack order they cannot long endure, and since it was I who began the discussions which brought this fine company together, and since I desire the continuation of our happiness, I think we should choose a leader from among us, whom we shall honor and obey as our superior and whose only thought shall be to keep us happily entertained. (21)

While Dioneo requests license, Pampinea encourages order and does so with brilliant rhetorical aplomb. First of all, she reasserts her role as a guide for the group: "io, che cominciatrice fui de' ragionamenti da' quali questa così bella compagnia è stata fatta" [I, who was the woman who began the discussions from which this fine company has been made] (my translation). By doing so, she reminds Dioneo that it was not simply collective female wisdom, but Pampinea's own adroit foresight that brought the happy travelers to their swank and secluded quarters. She thus changes the terms of Dioneo's imposed difference,

making it one not just between genders, but also between individuals who make up a larger group.

In Pampinea's speech, however, individuality only goes so far. Having made her point, she immediately abandons the "I" for the "we," slipping from one to the other with the same off-handed grace the Author used in his own opening speech, including herself and her interlocutors in a common group with a common purpose. She offers her own thoughts in the service of "la nostra letizia" [our happiness]. Rather than imposing commands onto her audience, then, Pampinea employs the subjunctive mood of the verb to put forward her suggestion: "estimo di necessità sia convenire tra noi alcuno principale" [I think it is necessary to elect from those among some leader] (my translation). While Dioneo tried to make himself an authority Pampinea does not bark orders; she makes beneficial observations as a member of the group.

Pampinea inverts Dioneo's model of authority. He earlier tried to impose his will from above, making the group a sign of his own personal agenda. Pampinea, however, suggests the creation of a leader who is a guardian of the group's well-being and reflection of its happiness. While Dioneo focused on dividing the group with his authority, Pampinea's move unites the members of the brigata: "Queste parole sommamente piacquero, e a una voce lei prima del primo giorno elessero" [These words greatly pleased everyone, and they unanimously elected Pampinea Queen for the first day] (1.Intro.97; 22). The men and women respond *in one voice*, acting together to express their desire and advance the enjoyment of the group as a

whole. Note, however, that Musa and Bondanella jump the gun a bit in their translation. Pampinea is elected “prima del primo giorno” which we might translate as the “first of the first day.” As leader of the brigata, she is more of a “first citizen” than she is a sitting queen.

One of Pampinea’s first moves as the elected leader is to define the boundaries of her community as she gives structure to the functioning household over which she now presides. While solidarity in decision-making was so important for Pampinea in her interactions with other members of the brigata, she demonstrates that such tact is not universally applicable. Calling the servants present, the register of Pampinea’s commands changes, as does her title. Elected by the brigata, she is a “first citizen;” now wearing the laurel crown and holding court in front of the servants, Pampinea has been “fatta reina” [made queen] (1.Intro.98, my translation). With the servants present, Queen Pampinea “comandò che ogn’uom tacesse” [commanded everyone to be silent] and with the floor open only to herself, she presses each domestic into her service, noting that Parmeno will be “mio siniscalco” [my steward] and telling Sirisco that “voglio che di noi sia spenditore” [I want him to be our purveyor] (my translations). Pampinea, who prevented Dioneo from imposing his authority within the group, now demonstrates how exercising personal will can be used for the betterment – rather than the subjugation – of the community. She impresses her power – legitimized by the members of the brigata – on those outside of the group of ten narrators, defining the supporting roles of the servants.

Of particular note is Pampinea's employ of what Branca identifies as the "royal we" in order to give her harshest command: "E ciascun generalmente, per quanto egli avrà cara la nostra grazia, vogliamo e comandiamo che si guardi, dove che egli vada, onde che egli torni, che che egli oda o vegga, niuna novella altra che lieta ci rechi di fuori" [And in general, we desire and command each of you, if you value our favor and good graces, to be sure – no matter where you go or come from, no matter what you hear or see – to bring us back nothing but good news] (1.Intro.101; 22).⁹⁵ While Pampinea had previously used the first-person plural to blend in with her Florentine contemporaries, she uses the form here, as Branca points out, to demonstrate and impose her authority, to separate herself from the servants, the servants from the brigata, and the brigata from outside world.

With her words, Pampinea delineates the boundaries of her community. She royally commands her servants, but never takes this tone with the members of the brigata. Rather than telling the other nine members of the brigata what she wants, she speaks only in terms of her disposition to follow the pleasure of the others. Indeed, throughout her entire reign, Pampinea never once uses an imperative verb form when addressing another member of the brigata. Note, for example, the striking way in which the Queen organizes the fundamental activity of storytelling, offering the pastime as a helpful proposition that establishes itself as the product of a communal

⁹⁵ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca (Volume 1, page 45, note 1). He calls the phrase "vogliamo e comandiamo" a "formula regale" [royal phrase] (my translation).

decision:

Ma se in questo il mio parer si seguisse, non giucando, nel quale l'animo dell'una delle parti convien che si turbi senza troppo piacere dell'altra o di chi sta a vedere, ma novellando (il che può porgere, dicendo uno, a tutta la compagnia che ascolta diletto) questa calda parte del giorno trapasseremo. (1.Intro.111-12)

But if you take my advice in this matter, I suggest we spend this hot part of the day not playing games...but rather telling stories...so, if what I say pleases you (and in this I am willing to follow your pleasure), then let us do it; if not, then let everyone do as he or she pleases until the hour of vespers. (24)

Here, Pampinea offers her guidance rather than imposing her authority. The central action of the *Decameron* itself – storytelling – appears in the text as a communal decision, a group effort that binds the individual narrators together in an expression of a common desire. “Piacere” and “diletto” in this structure are not personal pursuits, but rather are a mode of interacting with other people, an element of, rather than a goal for, the narrators.

All for one on Day One

As the first day progresses, a concerted effort to balance the personal and the communal continues to guide the brigata’s activity. This balance is especially clear in the way each narrator chooses his or her story on a day when the monarch had granted free reign to the choice of topics: “‘Adunque,’ disse la reina ‘se questo vi piace, per questa prima giornata voglio che libero sia a ciascuno di quella materia ragionare che più gli sarà a grado’” [“Then,” said the Queen, “if this is your wish, for this first day I wish for each of you to be free to

tell a story treating any subject which most pleases you”] (1.Intro.114; 24). Pampinea again emphasizes that what she wants is a reflection of what the community finds pleasing.

Panfilo begins the entire collection of one hundred stories with the introduction:

Convenevole cosa è, carissime donne, che ciascheduna cosa la quale l'uomo fa, dallo ammirabile e santo nome di Colui, il quale di tutte fu facitore, le dea principio. Per che, dovendo io al vostro novellare, sì come primo, dare cominciamento, intendo da una delle sue maravigliose cose incominciare... (1.1.2)

Dearest ladies, it is fitting that everything done by man should begin with the marvelous and holy name of Him who was the Creator of all things; therefore, since I am to be the first to begin our storytelling, I intend to start with one of His marvelous deeds. (23)

Panfilo identifies his opening tale as a response to a specific obligation and tradition, one that, as the initial narrator, it is his place to retain. Notably, that obligation is not to any member of the brigata, but rather to the “ammirabile e santo nome” [the marvelous and holy name] of the Creator. As a narrator, Panfilo is cognizant of the influence and the demands of a higher power. His choice of a tale, then, balances personal liberty and traditional obligation from the very outset of the *Decameron*'s storytelling.

After Panfilo has made this gesture, the remaining narrators on Day One negotiate their freedom as storytellers in relation to the other members of the brigata itself. It is especially striking to note that, on a day when each narrator has complete liberty to choose his or her own story topic, the group comes together rather cohesively of its own

accord. Each narrator begins his or her story by explicitly referencing the previous tale and grounding the subsequent one – the expression of what is most pleasing to the narrator – in its predecessor’s ideas, images, and characters. Neifile, who follows Panfilo, tells her audience that she plans to demonstrate the “medesima benignità” [same mercy] (1.2.3; 38) that Panfilo expounded in his story. Filomena then states her own tale came to mind after hearing Neifiele’s (1.3.3), and Dioneo grounds the suitability of his novella and his license to tell it by recalling stories 1.2 and 1.3 (1.4.3). After Dioneo’s story, Fiammetta, who is seated next to Dioneo, points out the fact that these first four narrators have linked their tales thematically: “mi piace noi essere entrati a dimostrare con le novelle quanta sia la forza delle belle e pronte risposte” [it pleases me that with our stories we have begun to show how powerful the force of witty and ready retorts may be] (1.5.90; 50) and she continues this theme herself. Following Fiammetta’s pronouncement of a thematic coherence amongst these tales, the five remaining sustain the topic of quick replies through the rest of the day. The narrators on Day One repeat the theme of, engage characters from, and make explicit references to preceding tales. They use the stories of their companions as a way to help them identify and express what is most pleasing to them.

Beyond this, after Fiammetta’s observation, four of the remaining five narrators on the second half of Day One link their stories not only thematically, but also closely associate the protagonists of their tales. Emilia speaks boldly about a “valente uomo” [worthy man] who responds to a greedy inquisitor “con un

motto non meno da ridere che da comendare” [by means of a remark no less amusing than commendable] (1.6.3; 52). Filostrato references Emilia’s “valente uomo” and greedy inquisitor as he introduces his story (1.7.4). Lairetta, in turn, opens by saying “la precedente novella” [the previous tale] induces her “voler dire” [to want to tell] about “un valente uomo di corte” [a worthy courtier]. Lairetta’s courtier marks the third appearance of a “valente uomo” in so many tales. The “valente uomo” then reappears in Queen Pampinea’s introduction to her tale and in the tale itself. Chastising women for their limited rhetorical skills, she accuses these same women of actively deluding themselves. Conversationally handicapped by their own shortcomings and thus precluded from participating in any meaningful conversation, they “fannosi a credere che da purità d’animo proceda il non saper tralle donne e co’ *valenti uomini* favellare e alla lor milensaggine hanno posto nome onestà” [make themselves believe that that they do not know how to converse with ladies and with *worthy gentlemen* because of a purity of soul, having given the name propriety to their stupidity] (1.10.6; my translation, emphasis mine). In Queen Pampinea’s story, her leading lady tells an older admirer that she appreciates his affection: “sí come di savio e *valente uomo* esser dee” [for it is from a wise and worthy man] (1.10.19; my translation, emphasis added). The narrators balance the freedom that they retain by connecting their stories with clever quips and worthy gentlemen.

One day at a time

Once the tales are completed and the First Day comes to a close, the brigata must decide whether to sustain and develop the narrative community they have established for themselves or whether they should abandon it and organize themselves differently for the next day. Pampinea makes it clear that Filomena, chosen to be the next queen, is perfectly free to alter or even do away with the communal structure that the first queen worked to create. According to Pampinea, the next monarch will have total autonomy in her rule: “reina nuova, la quale di quella che è a venire, secondo il suo giudicio, la sua vita e la nostra a onesto diletto disponga” [the new queen will decide, according to her own judgment, how she and we shall spend our time tomorrow in seemly pleasures] (1.Concl.2; 68). Musa and Bondanella translate the subjunctive “disponga” (disporre – to arrange, to set in order) as a future-tense verb: “will decide.” In Pampinea’s speech, however, the verb has a hortatory function. Thus, we might translate the passage as “may she set in order” or “let her organize her life and ours towards honest pleasure.” Pampinea’s transfer of power is an order to be ordered.

Licensed to guide the brigata according to her own judgment, Filomena does not use this autonomy to reject the precedent set by the previous monarch or to disrupt the narrative community formed during Pampinea’s reign. Indeed, Filomena uses her authority to sustain the structure of Day One and to refine and define the community she now guides. Filomena begins her rule by *confirming* all the orders that Pampinea had given – “primieramente gli ufici dati da

Pampinea riconfermò” [first of all she confirmed all the orders given by Pampinea] (1.Con.5; 68) – and then admits “non sono io per ciò disposta nella forma del nostro vivere dover solamente il mio giudizio seguire, ma col mio il vostro insieme” [I do not intend to follow merely my own personal judgment in organizing our life together here, but yours as well] (1.Con.6; 68). In fact, the one novelty that Filomena does add to the day’s organization – the restriction of stories to a single topic – is itself a reflection of the brigata’s inclination on Day One to focus their tales on a similar theme. As queen, Filomena does not exercise absolute authority. Rather, she makes room for the influence and participation of others in her reign

Filomena’s reign on the *Decameron*’s second day opens with an overt recollection of and connection to its first. The noble Florentine brigade enters into the garden together, but the text makes explicit that it is a community with internal differences: “tutte le donne e i tre giovani” [all the young ladies and the three young men] (2.Intro.2; 72). This group gathers to repeat the events of the previous day: “E sì come il trapassato giorno avean fatto, così fecero il presente” [And as they had done on the previous day, so they did on this one] (2.Intro.2; 72). Thus, the text immediately encourages us to think of the new day’s events and ideas in terms of those enacted and established on the work’s first day.

One of those ideas that the text recalls immediately is the balance of the self and the group. Exercising her duties and powers as Queen, Filomena turns to the young woman seated closest to her and “a Neifile comandò che alle future novelle con una desse principio”

[she ordered Neifile to begin the day's storytelling with one of her tales] (2.Intro.4; 72]. More literally, Filomena commands Neifile to "use a story to give beginning to future tales." The Queen does not request a story from Neifile in order to witness the appropriation of her personal property, as Musa and Bondanella call it "one of her tales." Rather, the Queen invokes the narrative network the narrators created the day before, building one story off of another; she asks Neifile to set into motion a similar unification.

Neifile's Republic

Neifile responds to the queen with cheerful obedience and opens the day's storytelling with an almost direct repetition of the queen's command ("acciò che io al comandamento della reina ubidisca e principio dea con una mia novella alla proposta," [in deference to the Queen's command and in order to begin the proposed theme of the day]) (2.1.2; 73), a move that foreshadows the ideas that will dominate Neifile's tale. Neifile valorizes obedience to communal structures in her story just as Filomena had in her decisions as a monarch. Neifile demonstrates the benefit and stability that these structures afford in her story about three traveling Florentines - Stecchi, Martellino, and Marchese - whose acting tour of the peninsula brings them to the town of Treviso. They arrive in the small Northern community just after the death of a local figure, the German Arrigo, who was reputed to be a good man in his life and a saint after his death. Wanting to see the body as it lies in state, Martellino and his companions decide to employ their talents of impersonation and enter the town's church in

the guise of an ailing cripple and his two charitable assistants.

The travelers' plans go awry, however, when a Florentine member of the crowd unwittingly outs Martellino and his charade, and a riot ensues that threatens Martellino's life. In an attempt to save their associate from the raging crowd in the church, Stecchi and Marchese falsely denounce Martellino to a local judge, who has Martellino hauled from the church and brought before the bench to answer the trumped-up charges. Finding their companion to be in an even worse predicament with the judge than he had been with the fanatic crowd, however, the two friends are finally able to save Martellino by explaining their predicament to a powerful local figure, himself a from a family of Florentine origins, who finds their predicament hilarious and erupts in a great fit of laughter. Rescuing Martellino from the corrupt judge and protecting the men from any more harm in the town, the governor gives each man a new set of clothes and guarantees them a safe return to their native Florence.

Neifile divides her tale into two separate spheres, the religious environment inside the church and the secular rule of the commune itself. Contrasting the events that take place against each backdrop helps us to understand how the surrounding community influences the ways in which its members interact with and interpret each other. First, as Neifile opens her tale with the scene within the church, she makes it clear to her audience that communal participation and interpretation are connected activities. The people of Treviso deem the Arrigo a holy man: "uomo di santissima vita e di buona era tenuto da tutti" [one who was reputed by everyone to be a most holy and good

man] (2.1.3; 73). Upon his death, then, Treviso's residents claim a local miracle, though Neifile is careful not to endorse the event herself. Instead, she lets her audience know that there was a miracle "secondo che i trivigiani affermavano" [the people of Treviso claimed] (2.1.4; 73). Neifile deftly manages this communal speculation and the locals' insistence on Arrigo's beatification without confirming or negating any of these claims. Indeed, she points out that the subsequent events of her story do not rely at all upon the confirmation of any of these claims to sainthood. At the church of Treviso, "o vero o non vero che si fosse" [whether this was true or not] (2.1.4; 73) is of little consequence.

So Neifile leaves her audience wondering: how does the Treviso religious community interpret the signs around them? The clever Martellino claims that the people of Treviso respond to appearances – to the way things seem by their outward form. The people inside the church gather themselves around an enshrined body that has the appearance of a saint – *guisa d'un corpo santo* [appearance of a saintly body] (2.1.5; 73) – and so Martellino and his friends decide to infiltrate the group by assuming the appearance of a sick man. Martellino proposes: "Io mi contraffarò a guisa d'uno attratto, e tu dall'un lato e Stecchi dall'altro, come se io per me andare non potessi, mi verrete sostenendo facendo sembianti di volermi là menare acciò che questo santo mi guarisca: egli non sarà alcuno che veggendoci non ci faccia luogo e lascici andare" [I will disguise myself as a cripple with you on one side of me and Stecchi on the other, and as if I couldn't walk on my own, the two of you will go along holding me up, pretending to take

me to be cured by this saint, and there won't be a soul who will not make room and let us pass when he sees us] (2.1.10; 72). Just as Arrigo appears "a guisa di un corpo santo," so does Martellino appear "a guisa d'uno attratto." The saintly and the sickly body both become visual, physical tools that can manipulate the crowd. The people's response to them is a foregone conclusion; their appropriation prompts from the audience a codified response. Within the church, the interpretation of appearance is conditioned and practiced; the process of decipherment is as superficial as the sign itself.

This tale exposes the stakes, indeed the dangers, of such superficial and conditioned responses. A fellow Florentine citizen in the tale holds Martellino responsible for his clever manipulation of appearance. When the unidentified Florentine observer first comes to realize that the miraculously cured cripple is none other than the famous impersonator, he exclaims: "Chi non avrebbe creduto, veggendol venire, che egli fosse stato attratto da dovero?" [Who would not have believed he was really crippled when they saw him come in that way?] (2.1.14; 75). When the nearby citizens question him about these remarks, he continues: "Egli è sempre stato diritto come qualunque è l'un di noi, ma sa meglio che altro uomo, come voi avete potuto vedere, far queste ciance di contraffarsi in qualunque forma vuole" [He has always stood as straight as any of us here, but as you have been able to observe, he is better than anyone at disguising himself in whatever manner he chooses] (2.1.16; 75). Neifile here demonstrates a separation between outward appearance – that Martellino is a cripple – and the truth it can hide or expose – that

Martellino is a contortionist. Notably, once the fickle crowd hears the Florentine's accusation, they instantly begin to riot: "Come costoro ebbero udito questo, non bisognò più avanti" [Once they heard this, there was no need to say more] (2.1.17; 75). Exposed to the untrustworthy relationship between form and content, the congregation of Treviso abandons language and reverts to the use of physical force.

Martellino's exposure is the first hint of the important link Neifile makes between truth and civic allegiance. In a church full of people, a fellow Florentine exposes Martellino's charade. The second part of the novella moves from the riotous church to the palace of the *podestà*. This new setting indicates a new, more reliable interpretive frame. While in the church, Arrigo is deemed a saint "o vero o non vero che si fosse" [whether this was true or not] (2.1.4; 73), in the courtroom it is of the utmost importance to determine the truth. The repetitions of the word "vero" [true, truth] in the courtroom scene focus the audience's attention on the gravity this category holds in these civic surroundings. Indeed, we find the judge directly enquiring as to what the truth is in regards to the barrage of false accusations that the people of Treviso bring against Martellino: "domandandolo il giudice se ciò fosse *vero* che coloro incontro a lui dicevano" [the judge asked him if what everyone accused him of was *true*] (2.1.25; 76, emphasis added). And Martellino, for his part, claims that he is ready to make the truth known: "Signor mio, io son presto a confessarvi il *vero*" [My lord, I am ready to confess the *truth* to you] (2.1.25; 77, emphasis added), and he is able to make this truth known with the aid

of the town's customs records. Here is Neifile's most striking claim, not only *must* one know the truth in the courtroom, one *can*: civic authority offers access to the truth through the texts and books of its order. Responding to his charges, Martellino implores the court:

E che io dica il *vero*, questa pruova ve ne posso far: che così non fossi io mai in questa terra entrato come io mai non ci fui se non da poco fa in qua! E come io giunsi, per mia disventura andai a veder questo corpo santo, dove io sono stato pettinato come voi potete vedere; e che questo che io dico sia *vero*, ve ne può far chiaro l'uficial del signore il quale sta alle presentagioni e il suo libro e ancora l'oste mio. (2.1.27-28)

And I can give you proof that I am telling the *truth*, for I have never set foot in these parts until a short time ago when I had the bad fortune of going to see the holy body, and there I was beaten up as you can well see for yourself; and that I am telling you the *truth* can be verified by the customs officer at the city's gates, by his checking his register book, and by asking my innkeeper as well. (77)

As the key to saving Martellino's life at the hands of the local executioner, these civil texts offer their own kind of salvation.

Neifile is confident in civic authority's ability to make the truth available to its citizens, but she also concedes the fact that truth's availability does not guarantee its recognition and enforcement. In order for truth to find its expression, it must be in the hands of those who are committed to making order and fact prevail. Unfortunately, Martellino finds himself under the jurisdiction of a local bureaucrat that Neifile describes as "un ruvido uomo" [a rough customer] (2.1.23; 76) who is motivated by personal prejudice rather than the professional obligation he holds to his public office: "il giudice niuna cosa in sua [i.e. Martellino's] scusa voleva udire; anzi, per avventura

avendo alcuno odio ne' fiorentini, del tutto era disposto a volerlo far impiccar per la gola" [the judge refused to hear anything said in his defense; on the contrary, as he happened to hold some sort of grudge against Florentines, he was fully determined to see Martellino hanged by the neck] (2.1.32-33; 78). But where Neifile sheds doubt, she also gives hope. No cantankerous judge from Treviso is the final word in an ideal civic order. In a blatant yet endearing scene of *campanilismo*, it is up to Sandro Agolanti, a member of a family with Florentine origins, to restore order and save Martellino's life. This man can guarantee access to a local authority that will listen to their story, administer justice according to his civic obligation rather than according to personal prejudice, and guarantee a rational interpretation of identifiable facts. Thus, in Neifile's final scene, the story finds resolution through the functioning of civic and social bonds: one citizen working in concert with another, utilizing rather than denying communal obligation, and using the self as a means of sustaining the community.

Chez Saint Julian

Neifile trusts civic authority and communal spirit to provide the salvation of her protagonist and the necessary framework for knowing and administering the truth. The next narrator, Filostrato, responds to the young girl's tale by complicating the framework for interpretation that she appropriates. While Neifile's story finds her travelers firmly lodged within the walls of Treviso, we find Filostrato's protagonist wandering through the open, wild, unknown, and even dangerous

spaces outside of the ordered civic authority of the Italian city-state:

Era adunque, al tempo del marchese Azzo da Ferrara, un mercatante chiamato Rinaldo d'Asti per sue bisogne venuto a Bologna; le quali avendo fornite e a casa tornandosi, avvenne che, uscito di Ferrara e cavalcando verso Verona, s'abbatté in alcuni li quali mercatanti parevano, e erano masnadieri e uomini di malvagia vita e condizione, con li quali ragionando incautamente s'accompagnò. (2.2.4)

During the reign of the Marquis Azzo da Ferrara, there was a merchant named Rinaldo d'Asti who had come to Bologna on business; he was on his way home after completing his business when on the road from Ferrara to Verona he happened to fall in with some men who looked like merchants but who were actually thieves of a disreputable sort with whom he incautiously conversed as they rode along. (79)

Before the narrator's first full stop, *Filostrato* has already listed four far-flung communities – Ferrara, Asti, Bologna and Verona – highlighting the traveler's itinerate lifestyle. *Filostrato* opening setting in the space outside of the communal order and civic authority that *Neifile* endorsed indicates an important difference between the two stories. While *Neifile* valorizes obedience (to civic authority, to the duties of office) in her tale, *Filostrato* promotes mastery and manipulation of past traditions as effective interpretive strategies.

Filostrato begins his tale by looking back to *Neifile*'s story and disqualifying the options for communal organization that she presented. Out on the road, Rinaldo is just as free from divine protection as he is from civic authority. *Filostrato* mocks both ideas in his robbery scene. First of all, the narrator identifies the site of Rinaldo's misfortune in terms of its proximity to the town: "di là dal Castel Guiglielmo" [on the road to Castel Guiglielmo] (2.2.13; 80). The

nearby city can offer no assistance to the traveler in the isolated and abandoned scene of the crime. Indeed, Filostrato inverts Neifile's appropriation of the city as the site of justice. In his tale, the city initially provides the refuge for the thieves; the walled fortress becomes a robber's den. Rinaldo instead finds himself in a wasteland, trolling through the desolate remains of a countryside ravished by war (2.2.15). Rinaldo rides through the countryside, one that Branca points out was known historically for its thick concentration of bandits and burglars (142, note 7), with no more protection than a cowardly servant and an ardent prayer to St. Julian. Filostrato flippantly turns this prayer of the faithful into a thief's scathing taunt. Riding away with their booty, the bandits goad their victim: "Va e sappi se il tuo san Giuliano questa notte ti darà buono albergo, ché il nostro il darà bene a noi" [Now go and see if your Saint Julian gives you as good a lodging tonight as our saint will provide for us] (2.1.13; 80). The robbers use celestial patronage as a way to mock the faithful Rinaldo and credit the sinful acquisition of their booty to St. Julian's holy intervention.

In Filostrato's tale, however, the profane inversion of sacred utterance not only describes Rinaldo's problem, but it also shapes his solution. The scene of Rinaldo's rescue by the hospitable widow has a decidedly human framework. Having her servant let Rinaldo in through a secret door so that he might profit from the available supper and lodge in the warmth of her home, the widow's response to the ailing Rinaldo recalls the *Decameron's* opening prologue in that both are characterized by a redemptive humanity. The widow's maid

praises her mistress's compassion: "La fante, di questa umanità avendo molto commendata la donna" [The maid commended her lady for her kindness] (2.2.26; 82). The widow expresses "umanità," the saving trait that the Author first acclaims in his opening, "Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti" (Proem.2). Rinaldo responds to this invitation with immediate thanksgiving to both God and Saint Julian.

This divine thanksgiving, however, is misplaced, as a comparison of this widow's generosity to that of the unnamed widow who hosts the Prophet Elijah shows.⁹⁶ The biblical widow grants Elijah's request for hospitality knowing full well that she does not have enough sustenance even for herself and for her son. She shares with the prophet despite her own personal loss. Note that Filostrato's widow, however, only offers hospitality out of her surplus: "qui è questa cena e non saria chi mangiarla, e da poterlo albergar ci è assai" [there's supper here without anyone to eat it, and there's plenty of room to put him up] (2.2.25; 82). Finding herself well supplied, indeed

⁹⁶ This story is found in 1 Kings 17:8-24 in the King James Bible and 3 Kings 17: 8-24 in the Douay-Rheims Bible. The Douay-Rheims version of the story reads: "Then the word of the Lord came to Elias, saying: Arise, and go to Sarephta of the Sidonians, and dwell there: for I have commanded a widow woman there to feed thee. He arose, and went to Sarephta. And when he was come to the gate of the city, he saw the widow woman gathering sticks, and he called her, and said to her: Give me a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. And when she was going to fetch it he called after her, saying: Bring me also, I beseech thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand. And she answered: As the Lord thy God liveth, I have no bread, but only a handful of meal in a pot, and a little oil in a cruse: behold I am gathering two sticks that I may go in and dress it, for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. And Elias said to her: Fear not, but go, and do as thou hast said: but first make for me of the same meal a little hearth cake, and bring it to me: and after make for thyself and thy son. For thus saith the Lord the God of Israel: The pot of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil be diminished, until the day wherein the Lord will give rain upon the face of the earth. She went and did according to the word of Elias: and he ate, and she, and her house: and from that day. The pot of meal wasted not, and the cruse of oil was not diminished, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke in the hand of Elias" (3 Kings 17: 8-16).

in surplus of rations and comfortable sleeping quarters, she can both take care of herself and offer her bounty to a fellow person. Her invitation, therefore, does not qualify as an expression of Christian charity; it involves no sacrifice. It is a very human action, not actuated by religious affiliation or prompted by divine command.

It is indeed a human focus that Filostrato sustains, in contrast to his sacred model, throughout the rest of the novella. In both the story of Elijah and that of Rinaldo, the action continues when a central figure in the story comes back to life. In the Biblical story, when the widow of Zarephath laments the death of her son, Elijah prays to God and revives the boy.⁹⁷ The story concludes as the widow of Zarephath claims this miracle as testimony to divine truth and of Elijah's authority to speak with and of it: "And the woman said to Elias: Now, by this I know that thou art a man of God, and the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true" (3 Kings 17:24). Like the ailing boy, Rinaldo returns to the mortal world. Enjoying the comforts of the warm bath, he feels as if he has come back from the dead: "da morte a vita gli

⁹⁷ "And it came to pass after this that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick, and the sickness was very grievous, so that there was no breath left in him. And she said to Elias: What have I to do with thee, thou man of God? art thou come to me that my iniquities should be remembered, and that thou shouldst kill my son? And Elias said to her: Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him into the upper chamber where he abode, and laid him upon his own bed. And he cried to the Lord, and said: O Lord my God, hast thou afflicted also the widow, with whom I am after a so maintained, so as to kill her son? And he stretched, and measured himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord, and said: O Lord my God, let the soul of this child, I beseech thee, return into his body. And the Lord heard the voice of Elias: and the soul of the child returned into him, and he revived. And Elias took the child, and brought him down from the upper chamber to the house below, and delivered him to his mother, and said to her: Behold thy son liveth. And the woman said to Elias: Now, by this I know that thou art a man of God, and the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true" (3 Kings 17: 17-24).

parve esser tornato” [he felt as if he had been completely returned from the dead to the living] (2.2.27; 82).

Filostrato’s portrayal of the resurrection scene, however, does not point outside of itself towards any divine power. In fact, Rinaldo’s rebirth casts the Biblical tale into a very human and physical context. In Filostrato’s tale, the widow claims to witness the rebirth of a loved one she has lost: her husband. Dressed in her husband’s clothes and seated in her home close to the fire, the widow tells Rinaldo that it appears as if her husband has come back to her (*Decameron* 2.2.37). This rebirth, rather than prompting divine praise, begins sexual seduction. Filostrato concludes his tale with the physical expression of human desire, the consummation of which is contrary to, rather than indicative of, divine law.

While Filostrato claims to be telling a tale of piety and saintly patronage, we come to understand that Rinaldo’s salvation is physical and worldly. At the end of the story, he regains his servant, his horse, and his merchandise (except for a pair of garters), and returns home. His story requires a human framework of understanding that sets itself up by engaging sacred scripture and by innovatively utilizing the concepts and depictions of hospitality available from previous narrators and literary works. The way in which Filostrato engages this Biblical episode offers a depiction of reading as such. He looks back at a literary example – one, indeed, that is weighted down with a traditional interpretation – and infuses it with human immediacy.

Translatio imperii

The opening two stories of Day Two, then, give the brigata two different models for participating in a community and using that participation as a way to determine meaning. Neifile endorses obedience in her portrayal of civic authority, communal obligation, and professional office; in her story, it is the individual's duty to maintain the community. Filostrato, on the other hand, suggests incorporation in the way he himself manipulates his biblical model; in Filostrato's terms, it is the individual's task to master and renovate the inherited traditions of the community. The way that Filostrato depicts communal participation attracts his fellow male narrators on Day Two, who both tell stories in which mastery and renovation of the past are key points.⁹⁸ It is Neifile's model of communal structures, however, that attracts the Queen, and thus we begin to see how these models

⁹⁸ After returning to her father's kingdom, Panfilo's main character Alatiel (2.7) must conform to a place in the community already determined for her: that of the virgin bride. In order to do so, she must overcome her own past in which, over the course of the last four years, she has shared a bed with no less than nine different men (2.7.7), a task that she quite successfully accomplishes with a speech dictated to her by the older gentleman Antigono. Reclaiming her virginity, Alatiel reenters the society from which she had been separated, and Panfilo finishes his story with the aphorism: "Bocca basciata non perde ventura, anzi rinnuova come fa la luna" [A mouth that is kissed loses no flavor, but, like the moon, is renewed] (2.7.122; 148).

Dioneo's leading lady also takes on her own past and changes her place in society by manipulating the meaning of being a wife. Sexually unsatisfied by her husband in Pisa, Bartolomea tells him that she prefers to remain in Monaco with her sexually superior pirate abductor. Bartolomea does this by imparting a physical and sexual component to the meaning of wife: "E dicovi cosí, che qui mi pare esser moglie di Paganino e a Pisa mi pareva esser vostra bagascia" [And let me tell you this, that here I feel like Paganino's wife, whereas in Pisa I felt like your whore] (2.10.38; 185). Bartolomea's constant sexual activity with the pirate makes her feel like his wife.

In her chapter "Boccaccio's Sexed Thought," Migiel argues that "the *Decameron* describes a world where the two sexes hold divergent views on sexuality, moral choice, language, and truth" (*A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 66). On Day Two, I would add, they also set up divergent views on communal participation.

influence the way that the members of the brigata behave as the monarchs of the remaining days of the *Decameron*.

At the end of Day Two, Filomena walks up to Neifile and, calling her “cara compagna” [dear companion] (2.Concl.2; 187), transfers the crown. The Queen’s name for Neifile implies Filomena’s appreciation for the model of communal interaction that Neifile gave the brigata at the start of the day. Neifile, as the brigata’s monarch, does indeed implement her tale’s social model. Her first words as queen demonstrate her deference for established custom: “non dilungandomi dalla maniera tenuta per quelle che davanti a me sono state, il cui reggimento voi ubidendo commendato avete, il parer mio in poche parole vi farò manifesto” [I shall not depart from the manner of those who have preceded me, whose rule you have commended by your obedience, and I shall make known to you in a few words my own proposal] (2.Concl.4; 187). Neifile identifies an element of consent in the brigata’s obedience and moves to maintain that consent in her own reign. She notes that the brigata will follow her plan only if they approve to do so: “se dal vostro consiglio sarà commendato” [if it meets with your approval] (2.Concl.4; 187). Once she explains her proposal – one that involves respecting the conventions of setting aside Friday and Saturday for religious meditation and personal hygiene as well as a change of storytelling location – the members of the brigata approve and submit to her plan: “Ciascuno commendò il parlare e il diviso della reina, e così statuiron che fosse” [Everyone commended the Queen’s speech and her proposal, and they decreed that it should be done] (2.Concl.10; 188). Neifile’s kingdom is the product of the willing

subjugation of its members to the beneficial structures and traditions of the community.

At the end of her own reign, Neifile passes the crown to Filostrato, who also behaves as a monarch according to the model he set up in his story on Day Two. While Neifile acted as a queen whose rule is grounded in the consent of the community, Filostrato predicates his reign on the conformity of the community to the monarch's will. Filostrato opens his reign by speaking about himself and his troubled relationship with love (3.Concl.5). He then declares that the entire brigata must conform their stories to his unhappy lot in life: "E per ciò non d'altra materia domane mi piace che si ragioni se non di quello che a' miei fatti è piú conforme, cioè di coloro li cui amori ebbero infelice fine" [And so it pleases me that the topic of our discussion for tomorrow should be one that conforms best to my state of affairs: that is, those whose loves come to an unhappy end] (3.Concl.6; 282). Filostrato does not make any of the concessions to the consent of the other members of the brigata that Neifile did. Under his reign, compliance is a requirement, not a choice. As monarch for the day, Filostrato does not adjust his person to the conventions of the group, but rather arrests those conventions and imposes a personal element on them, as he had with the biblical story. While this manipulation does not happen until the *Decameron's* fourth day, Filostrato already foreshadowed its expression on Day Two. As a monarch, Filostrato dominates the group rather than acting as its spokesman.

Filostrato ends his reign with the conviction that his heir will amend the bitterness caused by his own period as monarch. Turning to Fiammetta, he states: “Io pongo a te questa corona sí come a colei la quale meglio, dell'aspra giornata di oggi, che alcuna altra, con quella di domane queste nostre compagne racconsolar saprai” [I now bestow upon you this crown, for you better than anyone else will know how to console these companions of ours for the harsh storytelling of today with what you will order for tomorrow] (4.Concl.3; 363). Indeed, under the reign of Fiammetta, the bitterness of Day Four gives way to a day of stories about love affairs that end happily. Fiammetta’s rubric earns the communal accord that Filostrato’s lacked; her topic “a tutti piacque” [pleased everyone] (4.Concl.6; 363). This task is a pleasure for the group, rather than an imposition on them. This resolution between the experience of love and the structure of the community that Fiammetta encourages at the level of the brigata plays out in the narrators’ stories as well, most of which are characterized by a love affair that finds resolution with a society that originally acted as an impediment. David Wallace notes that “in most instances” on Day Five, the lovers are originally thwarted in their own communities and must venture to foreign territories, and that “these adventures to foreign lands...represent...a means through which they can negotiate a return to the homeland and be accepted as a permanent alliance, a new household within the established social structure.”⁹⁹ Fiammetta

⁹⁹ David Wallace, *Giovanni Boccaccio: Decameron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 61.

inverts Filostrato's rubric and thereby prompts her fellow narrators to depict an experience of love that society can accommodate.

As one might expect by now, female narrators, like Neifile, reign in a way that reflects and respects the traditions and benefit of the group. Elissa, for example, receives the crown from Fiammetta and repeats the actions of her predecessors: "sì come per adietro era stato fatto così fece ella" [Elissa did as those before her had done] (5.Concl.2; 441). She then proposes a topic that "fu commendato molto da tutti" [highly approved by everyone] (5.Concl.4; 441). This topic, in fact, is a repetition of Day One's focus on quick replies, a subject that Elissa notes the members of the brigata have already proven to be both "bella" [fine, pleasing] and "utile" [useful] to them (5.Concl.3; my translations).

Dioneo, however, looks back at the past only to use it as a means to impose his authority and personal will on the brigata. After Elissa crowns Dioneo king for Day Seven, he picks a topic that he claims is prompted by the servant Licisca's outburst at the beginning of Day Six: the tricks that wives play on their husbands (6.Concl.4-6; 479). Some of the women of the brigata protest to his choice, but Dioneo remains reticent, concluding his defense of his topic with the assertion of his authority: "Senza che voi mi fareste un bello onore, essendo io stato ubidente a tutti, e ora, avendomi vostro re fatto, mi voleste la legge porre in mano, e di quello non dire che io avessi imposto" [Not to mention the fact that you would be paying me a pretty compliment indeed if after I obeyed you all, you, now that you have made me your King, decide to take the law into your own hands by

refusing to speak on the topic I have imposed] (6.Concl.14; 481). He insists that, as King, it is his prerogative to pick the topic and the women's duty to comply to his choices.

Again, following Dioneo's reign, it is up to one of the female members of the brigata to transform a topic imposed on the brigata into something that more suitably reflects the desires and established patterns of the group. Laretta succeeds Dioneo with the opening claim that she does not want to lash back at her predecessor with a direct inversion of his topic, and so broadens the topic to tricks played by people more generally, men on men, men on women, and women on men. Emilia follows Laretta as Queen and says that her own choice to not limit the next day's topic is an expression of her concern for the wellbeing of the group. Such a freedom will be refreshing, and this renewal will be "non solamente...utile ma oportuno" [not only useful...but fitting] (8.Concl.5; 649). Emilia's command is a response to the influence of the past – her recognition that the members of the brigata need to be relieved because of the restrictions they have already obeyed – and simultaneously a consideration of the future. She has the future longevity of the group in mind: "e così avendo fatto, chi appresso di me nel reame verrà, sí come piú forti, con maggio sicurtà ne potrà nell'usate leggi restringere" [having done this, the person who succeeds me in this kingdom will find us more refreshed, and thus be able with greater confidence to restrict us to the customary rules] (8.Concl.6; 650). She makes an exception to the brigata's habits only so that their usual rules might have a chance to return stronger in the future.

Emilia places that future in the hands of Panfilo, the *Decameron's* last monarch. Panfilo is the first and only male monarch in the *Decameron* not to consider his authority as an opportunity to impose his personal will on the group and instead uses his reign as a way to benefit rather than dominate his storytelling subjects. Panfilo immediately recognizes the debt that he has to the other members of the brigata. Once Emilia passes the crown to his brow, Panfilo responds: “La vostra virtù e degli altri miei subditi farà sí, che io, come gli altri sono stati, sarò da lodare” [Your excellence and that of my other subjects will ensure that my reign will be as worthy of praise as the others before it have been] (9.Concl.3; 702). Panfilo is then the first King whose actions are described in terms of the other monarchs; he acts “secondo il costume de’ suoi predecessori” [following the custom of his predecessors (9.Concl.3; 702)]. He then proposes that the group tell stories about acts of generosity and magnificence, not because it reflects his own personal experience or desire, but rather because he claims that such stories will inspire praiseworthy behavior in their audience. Panfilo is thus an exceptional monarch, incorporating traits into his method of governance that the other two male narrators had resisted. He works for the benefit of the group rather than its domination. It is perhaps Panfilo’s communal focus that leads him, at the end of his day as monarch, to lead his subjects back to Florence, the community from which they collectively fled at the opening of the *Decameron*.

This analysis problematizes the sense of the personal in the readers' responsibility to judge and discern on their own as they read the *Decameron*. The *Decameron* engages a sense of the individual that defines self according to a relationship to a larger community. Individuals are aware of their connection to the group and use those connections as a way to interpret and engage the world around them. Some readers of the *Decameron* have fretted over the fact that this text does not specifically identify which communities should or should not have the strongest influences over those individuals, when one should respect tradition, or when convention should be manipulated and renewed. This anxiety came to a head in sixteenth-century Italy, the case of which I will examine in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

EDITORS AND EXPURGATORS: PRESERVING AND DESTROYING THE *DECAMERON* AFTER THE COUNCIL OF TRENT

The Author's Conclusion to the *Decameron* states: "Ciascuna cosa in se medesima è buona a alcuna cosa, e male adoperata può essere nociva di molte; e così dico delle mie novelle" [Everything is, in itself, good for some determined goal, but badly used it can cause a good deal of harm; and I can say the same of my stories] (Conclusion dell'autore/Author's Conclusion.13; 804). Though the Author had originally offered his *cento novelle* as a benign pastime for lovelorn ladies, he here recognizes the potential threat they pose to traditional moral standards. The Author continues: "Chi vorrà da quelle malvagio consiglio e malvagia operazion trarre, elle nol vieteranno a alcuno, se forse in sé l'hanno, e torte e tirate fieno a averlo" [Whoever wishes to derive evil counsel from them or use them for wicked ends will not be prohibited from doing so by the tales themselves if, by chance, they contain such things and are twisted and distorted in order to achieve this end] (Author's Conclusion.14; 804). Notably, the conclusion does not claim that the *Decameron* endorses evil counsel or champions the wicked ends that might be possible. In order to provide a recipe for sin, the words of the text must be, as Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella translate the passage, "twisted and distorted."

Nonetheless, the fact that these words can indeed be so twisted and distorted and that the tales offer no apparent resistance to such treatment proved to be the cause of some concern. Thus, while the text itself focuses on who *should* be reading the *Decameron*, constantly referring to a readership of lovelorn women hopelessly isolated and incessantly tortured by the burnings of their unfulfilled passions, subsequent vanguards of social customs and moral standards have instead constantly fretted over who *should not* be scouring the beautifully rich but potentially hazardous Boccaccian prose.

This preoccupation can be traced back to none other than the fourteenth-century author himself. In a letter of 1373 to Maghinardo Cavalcanti, Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) writes: “I cannot praise your having allowed the honorable ladies of your household to read my trifles, rather I beg you to give me your word you will not do so again.”¹⁰⁰ The stories, he claims, are unsuitable for impressionable female readers. The danger lies in “how many incitements to vice even for those of iron will” the work contains and in their propensity to allow “illicit burnings [to] slip in with silent step.”¹⁰¹ Later, San Bernardino da Siena (1380-1444) was to share the author’s fears over the effects of the text on impressionable minds. In a sermon delivered in Florence on February 20, 1425, he “advised students to avoid ‘dishonest books,’” among those the works of Boccaccio.¹⁰² San Bernardino sustained the preoccupations that Boccaccio expressed in

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 4.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 5.

¹⁰² Quoted in Paul F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 66.

his treatise on poetry, namely that “a neophyte whose faith is not yet confirmed might, if the rein slackened, deviate into slippery places.”¹⁰³

Still later, another fiery Renaissance tongue, the infamous Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498), found the hundred stories to be entirely unsuitable for any Christian audience, neophyte or no. In a quintessential display of flaming zeal, the preacher-come-civic-leader threw Boccaccio’s masterpiece of fiction to the flames during the “burning of vanities” in Florence in the Lenten seasons of 1497 and 1498, in an effort to save all virtuous Florentines from the sinful traps laid by the seemingly glamorous portrayals of sin found in the *Decameron*. In 1559, the dour Pope Paul IV (Gian Pietro Carafa, 1476-1559) institutionalized the fears of these various individuals. This ultra-conservative champion of the Inquisition created the first official *Index of Prohibited Books* and unconditionally blocked any subsequent publication and circulation of Boccaccio’s masterpiece by placing the work on his formidable list of titles.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio’s Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, trans. Charles S. Osgood (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merill Company, Inc., 1956), 124.

¹⁰⁴ Such treatment of a landmark piece of vernacular fiction is striking when compared to the Vatican’s involvement in textual affairs previous to the publication of the Index. Certainly the Church had always been concerned with and involved in the production and dissemination of texts within the borders of its spiritual and temporal realms, and popes as early as Gelasius I in 496 had issued decrees of recommended reading and discouraged certain titles. (“Index Librorum Prohibitorum,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2005, Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, 6 August 2009, <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9042271>).

The Church, however, had traditionally limited her focus to theological texts, concerning herself only with heretical works that directly threatened orthodox Catholic doctrine. Take, for example, the papal bull *Inter sollicitudines*, issued on May 3, 1515, during the reign of the Medici pope Leo X (Giovanni de’ Medici, 1475-1521). This document represents the first move by the institutional Church to organize any kind of centralized censorship and to involve the Church even at the stage of prepublication. The bull established the Master of the Sacred Palace, the pope’s personal theologian and later the Roman leader of the Inquisition, as the definitive voice on matters of textual censorship, charging him with the duty of

The 1559 *Index* is the first instance of the Church directly and officially concerning herself with vernacular fiction, thus marking the moment when heresy no longer stands as the only category for censorship. As Paul Grendler notes in his work *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press, 1540-1605* in reference to the *Index*:

[The 1559 *Index*] was the first to manifest the Puritanism characteristic of Counter Reformation censorship, with the result that it vastly enlarged prohibitions in the field of vernacular literature. Newly prohibited were a number of authors whose works were not heretical, but were judged to be anticlerical, immoral, lascivious, or obscene.¹⁰⁵

The Church no longer limited herself to using censorship to protect orthodox doctrine, but now extended her defenses to guard what the Vatican labeled as standard morality. With this move, no text, secular or sacred, vernacular or Latin, was safe from papal intervention or prohibition, including the *Decameron*.¹⁰⁶

Despite this flashy display of papal muscle, the *Index* was popularly criticized and condemned, most especially after the death of Paul IV and upon the election of the new, more moderate pope Pius IV

examining materials before they went to print, eliminating any material contrary to orthodox Catholic doctrine, and blocking, if necessary, a work's publication. Again, it is important to note that the Master of the Sacred Palace is at this point confined to eradicate heretical, not morally offensive, material.

¹⁰⁵ Grendler, *Roman Inquisition*, 116.

¹⁰⁶ In his work, however, Grendler tends to downplay the significance of this innovation, preferring instead to focus on the importance of the production of the document itself. He writes: "its greatest significance derived from the fact that it was the first *Index* to be promulgated unequivocally by the papacy in its capacity as spiritual leader of Catholic Christendom" (Grendler, 117). Thus, for this scholar, the *Index* stands as an expression of Vatican authority not present in previous pontificates. Grendler evaluates the reign of Clement VII as especially passive. He writes: "Even if Clement VII had not been struggling with such grave problems as the Habsburg-Valois wars and Henry's divorce case, he would not have been resolute enough to do anything as decisive as compiling an *Index*" (Grendler, 76). Hence, one sees the logic that dominates Grendler's writings: the *Index* is a product of papal authority, not a producer of it.

(Giovanni Angelo de' Medici, 1499-1565). Pius IV responded to this criticism by issuing a new version of the *Index* as a part of the new session of the Council of Trent that he reopened in 1562. The pope was deeply involved in the creation of the new *Index*, and some scholars claim that it was Pius himself who completed the work after the council had officially ended. The Tridentine *Index* appeared in 1564 and closely followed its predecessor in its treatment of vernacular literature, as can be seen in rules seven, eight, and nine of the ten *regulae* that itemize the categories subject to censorship.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, however, there is one striking difference. The new list of prohibited books conceded that the *Decameron*, despite its violation of all three of the previously quoted rules, could be produced and circulated after undergoing an official expurgation.

The First Try: The 1573 *Edizione dei Deputati*

Removing this textual cornerstone left a void in the literary world of the Cinquecento. As Peter Brown notes: “It was a fact (whatever our opinion on the culture of the time may be), that the *Decameron* was a text of such importance in sixteenth-century Italy as to make its disappearance from circulation nothing less than a

¹⁰⁷ “Of the ten *regulae* which itemize the categories subject to censorship, most, understandably, are concerned with fundamental religious issues raised by the specter of reformed theology, but rules seven, eight, and nine touch on matters with a direct bearing on literature. Rule seven forbids the publication of ‘obscene and lascivious’ books which threaten faith and morals. Rule eight states that books which are essentially sound, but which contain references to heresy, impiety, divination or superstition can be permitted after due expurgation. Rule nine condemns books which are about or contain various forms of divination or magic.” Jonathan Usher, “The Fortune of ‘Fortuna’ in Salviati’s ‘Rassetatura’ of the *Decameron*,” in *Renaissance and Other Stories: Essays Presented to Peter M. Brown*, ed. Eileen A. Millar (Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 1988): 210-22, here 213.

national disaster.”¹⁰⁸ The print history of the *Decameron* previous to this papal manhandling supports Brown’s assessment of the text’s importance. Major printing houses in Florence and Venice rode the wave of the *Decameron*’s popularity and churned out editions of the *Decameron* at a staggering rate. The first printed edition of the *Decameron* came from the house of Christofal Valdarfer in Venice in 1471, very shortly after printing arrived in Italy. Volumes from Mantova, Vicenza, and several other Venetian printers soon followed.

The apogee of the *Decameron*’s printed work came in the sixteenth century. In 1525, Pietro Bembo institutionalized the work’s ever-increasing importance when he canonized the *Decameron* as the model to follow for vernacular prose writing in his *Prose della volgar lingua*. Brian Richardson notes the effect that Bembo’s commentary had on the hundred tales’ print history: “Between 1501 and 1524 only six editions had been printed, one every four years on average, but about thirty followed in the period from 1527 to 1557, a rate of nearly one per year.”¹⁰⁹ Bembo’s endorsement guaranteed the *Decameron*’s place on the inventories of some of the largest printing houses in the world at that time, including the Giunta in Florence and Aldus Manutius and Gregorio dei Gregori in Venice.

¹⁰⁸ Peter M. Brown, “Aims and Methods of the Second «Rassetatura» of the *Decameron*,” *Studi secenteschi* 8 (1967): 3-41, here 20.

¹⁰⁹ Brian Richardson, “Editing the *Decameron* in the Sixteenth Century,” *Italian Studies* 15 (1990): 13-31, here 21. For an inventory of the principal sixteenth-century editions of the *Decameron* and their printers, see the appendix of this article, p. 31. Mirella Ferrari gives a similar catalogue. See Mirella Ferrari, “Dal Boccaccio illustrato al Boccaccio censurato,” in *Boccaccio in Europe: Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, December 1975* (Louvain: Presses Universitaires de Louvain, 1977), 111-34.

As the sixteenth-century progressed, these editions became more and more elaborate and academic. The title pages of each new printing of the *Decameron* demonstrate this evolution. In 1522, the firm of Aldus Manutius printed a *Decameron* with a relatively simple title page: “IL DECAMERONE DI M. GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO NOVAMENTE CORRETTO CON TRE NOVELLE AGGIUNTE” [The *Decameron* of Giovanni Boccaccio, Newly Corrected with Three Short Stories Added].¹¹⁰ Just four years later, Nicola da Sabbio, working in Venice, made it a point to highlight the attention his printing house paid to the production of a linguistically correct text: “IL DECAMERONE DI M. GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO NOVAMENTE STAMPATO ET CON SOMMA DILIGENTIA CORRETTO” [A New Printing of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* Edited With the Greatest Care].¹¹¹ The books printed in Venice by Gabriel Giolito da Ferrari, however, reign supreme over the souped-up editions of the *Decameron*. The title page of his 1542 edition reads:

IL DECAMERON DI MESSER GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO CON
 NUOVE È VARIE FIGURE NUOVAMENTE STAMPATO ET
 RICORRETTO PER MESSER ANTONIO BRUCIOLI CON LA
 DICHIARATIONE DI TUTTI I VOCABOLI DETTI PROVERBII
 FIGURE ET MODI DI DIRE INCOGNITI ET DIFFICILI CHE
 SONO IN ESSO LIBRO AMPILIATI IN GRAN NUMERO PER
 IL MEDESIMO CON NUOVA DICHIARATIONE DI PIU
 REGOLE DELA LINGUA TOSCANA NECESSARIE A
 SAPERE A CHI QUELLA VOI PARLAR O SCRIVERE.

A new printing of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* with many new illustrations and edited by Antonio Brucioli with the explanation of all the words and phrases and figures of speech in the book that are unknown or difficult. This list

¹¹⁰ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1522); my translation.

¹¹¹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Venice: Nicola da Sabbio, 1526); my translation.

is compiled and expanded by Brucioli with a new explanation of many rules of the Tuscan language whose mastery is necessary for anyone who wants to be able to speak and write in this language.¹¹²

Here, we see that the sale of the book depends on a legitimate editing job undertaken by a known scholar. Hence, printers began advertising the names of Niccolò Delfino, Antonio Brucioli, Girolamo Ruscelli, and Lodovico Dolce in large letters on the books' opening page. Beyond this, publishers began to sandwich the text of the *Decameron* between long extended commentaries that dealt exclusively with linguistic matters. Giolito's editions of the 1540's and 1550's are again exemplary, as they include long lists of Boccaccio's use of adjectives and concordance-like litanies of Boccaccio's most common noun and verb choices.¹¹³ These texts are clearly aimed at a market of learned philologists engaged in the peninsula-wide discussion of a codified, Tuscan, literary language - figures who approach the *Decameron* as a linguistically exemplary text.¹¹⁴

Blocking the *Decameron*'s circulation thus stymied what had become a vibrant book market expanding exponentially with the passing of each year. After the death of Paul IV, then, under pressure from various disgruntled sources - from scholars to book-dealers to political impresarios - Pope Pius IV granted the *Decameron* a

¹¹² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Venice: Gabriel Giolito de' Ferrari, 1542); my translation.

¹¹³ I have thus far found that Giolito produced a *Decameron* in each of the following years: 1542, 1546, 1548, 1550 (two editions), and 1552. This is by no means, however, a complete list, but rather an inventory of those I found in the collections of the British Library.

¹¹⁴ This academic format is the method of peddling the *Decameron* and not just a trend of large Venetian print houses. Take, for example, a small pocket edition from Brescia, whose title page makes the very grandiose claim "NUOVAMENTE STAMPATO ET CON DILIGENTIA CORRETTO." See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Brescia: Ludovico Britannico, 1536).

provisional publication pass in a revised version of the *Index* in 1564. This pass for the *Decameron* was an incredible opportunity both culturally and economically. In an attempt to reclaim both the text and the profits to be gained from its production for his Florentine duchy, Cosimo de' Medici (1519-1547) used his influence to secure the work for his own Florence. The result of this lobbying is the first censored edition of the *Decameron*, published in 1573 by the Florentine firm of Filippo Giunta. This volume is alternately referred to as the “*edizione dei Deputati*,” because its final form is the collaborative effort of a group of Florentine scholars (nominated by Cosimo himself) referred to as the Deputati, or the “*edizione Borghini*,” after Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580), the Benedictine monk who directed this band of academic brothers.¹¹⁵

The editorial strategy in this work operated on two levels. As Stefano Carrai, in his article “Il *Decameron* censurato: preliminari alla ‘rassetatura’ del 1573” describes one of them, the Deputati were to “ripristinare la purezza della prosa boccacciana, restaurandone la veste linguistica e spesso anche il senso, corrotto in più luoghi per l'intervento di correttori poco competenti e privi di scrupoli filologici” [restore the purity of Boccaccian prose, putting it back in its original linguistic robes and at times even giving it back its original meaning,

¹¹⁵ “The surviving correspondence concerning the preparation of the edition shows that Antonio Benivieni, Bastiano Antinori, Braccio Ricasoli, and Giovambattista Adriani were among those involved, [and] that [Piero] Vettori was consulted.” See Brian Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 164. Lesca gives a similar but not identical list of the members: Antonio Benivieni, Vincenzo Borghini, Agnolo Guicciardini, Bastiano Antinori, and Pietro Vettori; others participate, mostly friends of Borghini. See Giuseppe Lesca, “V. Borghini e il *Decameron*” in *Studi su Giovanni Boccaccio* (Castelfiorentino: Società storica della Valdelsa, 1913), 253.

corrupted in many places by the intervention of incompetent editors lacking philological scruples].¹¹⁶ Yet this edition was to be the first reprint of the *Decameron* not simply concerned with linguistic form. Rather, it was the alteration of the narrative content that was to be the editor's primary concern. Carrai points out that the Deputati "seguendo le istruzioni ricevute del cardinale Tommaso Manrique, Maestro del Sacro Palazzo, acconciarono il testo in modo che non incautasse la reputazione del clero e dei religiosi in genere" [adjusted the text in a way so as to not damage the reputation of the clergy and of religious people in general, according to the instructions sent to them by Cardinal Thomas Manrique, Master of the Sacred Palace].¹¹⁷ In other words, it was the elimination of all episodes of the *Decameron* in which the Church and her representatives are portrayed in compromising situations and positions that was the Deputati's main purpose.

These episodes were each explicitly identified by Fra Tommaso Manrique (d. 1575), a Spanish Dominican nominated to the post of Master of the Sacred Palace by Pius IV. This friar clearly outlined the interventions in the work required by an official censor in order to make the *Decameron* licit for a Catholic literary audience in the latter half of the sixteenth century. In a letter addressed to Filippo Giunta, the Florentine publisher of the first expurgated volume, and dated October 3, 1571, the friar writes that "per niun modo si parli in male o scandolo de' preti, frati, abati, abadesse, monaci, monache, piovani,

¹¹⁶ Stefano Carrai, "Il *Decameron* censurato: preliminari alla 'rassetatura' del 1573," *Rivista di letteratura italiana* 7 (1989): 225-47, here 225, my translation.

¹¹⁷ Carrai, "*Decamerone* censurato," 225.

proposti, vescovi o altre cose sacre” [in no way can one speak poorly or scandalously of priests, friars, abbots, abbesses, monks, nuns, parish priests, rectors, bishops or other holy things].¹¹⁸ This letter accompanied a copy of the 1527 Giunta edition of the *Decameron* in which the cleric crossed out in black ink those passages that had to be completely removed and colored over in red ink those passages that needed to be somehow altered in order to comply with the guidelines of the *Index*. The Deputati, however, were not as compliant as Manrique initially intended them to be. Instead, after two years of constant debate and correspondence, the final product was not necessarily a result of direct Vatican intervention but rather of Borghini’s thoughtful and, at times, even clever campaigns to preserve and protect as much of the original text as possible. Nonetheless, in August 1572, Manrique and the Florentine Inquisition issued their licenses for the expurgated *Decameron* to be printed.

While this ecclesiastical work of selective cut-and-paste does have its place in Italian literary history, it is most commonly brushed off as an unfortunate and inept literary endeavor. Raoul Mordenti defends the volume from a political and economic standpoint, noting that the work was an important piece of international propaganda for Cosimo de’ Medici, the first grand duke of Tuscany.¹¹⁹ Despite its

¹¹⁸ Giuseppe Chiecchi, *Dolcemente dissimulando: Cartelle laurenziane e Decameron censurato* (Padua: Antenore, 1992), 4.

¹¹⁹ Mordenti comments: “La straordinaria importanza dell’edizione dei Deputati è del tutto innegabile, ed anzi essa va ben al di là della censura.” This scholar’s article proposes that the volume “rappresenta per l’Italia e l’Europa il consolidarsi definitivo del nuovo stato granducale e della sua industria editoriale” [The extraordinary importance of the *edizione dei Deputati* is altogether undeniable, as it even had a positive effect beyond that of censorship...it represents for Italy and for Europe the definitive consolidation of the new Grand Ducal state and of its publishing industry].

worthwhile contribution to Cosimo's international image, however, the *edizione dei Deputati* did not enjoy immediate success, nor has it ever been highly regarded by scholars of censored literature. Peter M. Brown notes, "This 1573 correction left both the Inquisition and the Florentines profoundly dissatisfied."¹²⁰ Brown, in fact, claims that the Borghini version of the *Decameron* actually damaged the already tenuous position of the *Decameron* in the post-Tridentine literary world: "Shortly after the completion of the revision the Roman Curia produced a list of 157 'censure' against the *Decameron*, attacking not only its irreligiousness but its immorality."¹²¹ Thus, Boccaccio's collection of tales had, from a censor's standpoint, taken a step backwards on its path to resurrection.

Most specifically, the 1573 edition did not satisfy Fra Paolo Costabili, the new Master of the Sacred Palace, recently appointed by Pius V. Richardson writes: "The efforts of the Deputati were almost in vain. Manrique died in 1573, and his ecclesiastical colleagues found the censorship far too lenient for their tastes."¹²² Thus, although the Deputati had worked in constant agreement with the Vatican and with the Congregation of the Index, in June of 1573, the new Master of the Sacred Palace banned the sale of the edition in Bologna and other cities and forbade the Giunta to peddle the volume.

See Raul Mordenti, "Le due censure: La collazione dei testi del *Decameron* «rassetati» da Vincenzo Borghini e Lionardo Salviati," in *Le Pouvoir et la plume: Incitation, contrôle et repression dans l'Italie du XVI^e siècle* (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1982) 253-73, here 254, my translation.

¹²⁰ Peter M. Brown, *Lionardo Salviati: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 163.

¹²¹ Brown, *Lionardo Salviati*, 163.

¹²² Richardson, *Print Culture*, 165.

If at first you don't succeed: Salviati (and what the people are saying about him)

The next attempt to fill this literary lacuna came in 1580, when the Vatican authorized another expurgation attempt, this time entrusting the project to one Lionardo Salviati, a Florentine scholar in the service of Gregorio Buoncompagni, Duke of Sora.¹²³ Salviati received no specific imperatives like those sent to the *Deputati*. Instead, the Vatican, through the person of Francesco I de' Medici, entrusted Salviati, “con ampla et libera facultà di correggere et purgare

¹²³ The Duke was the illegitimate son of Gregory XIII (Ugo Buoncompagni, reigned 1572-1585). How exactly this permission came about has been a central issue of contemporary scholarship on the censored editions of the *Decameron*. This debate was begun by Peter M. Brown in 1957 in his article “I veri promotori della «rassettatura» del «Decameron» nel 1582.” In this article, Brown reviews a lineup of possible suspects, including: Francesco I de' Medici, Grand Duke of Tuscany; Gregorio Buoncompagni, Duke of Sora, the son of Pope Gregory XIII and the Roman patron of Salviati; assorted church officials and figures of the Inquisition; as well as Salviati himself. Brown examines the correspondence between these major figures to try to determine who was the single party responsible for the work's authorization. Brown does acknowledge the complex matrix of political, economic, and theological factors that lead up to the decision to initiate a second *rassettatura* of the *Decameron*, writing: “Come che sia, bisogna ad ogni modo ammettere un certo grado di sovrintendenza e controllo da parte dell'Inquisizione. E le testimonianze indicano che c'è stato del mercanteggiamento fra Francesco, l'Inquisizione, e il Salviati” [As it stands, one needs to admit a certain amount of guidance and control on the part of the Inquisition. And evidence indicates that there had been some dealings between Francesco de' Medici, the Inquisition, and Salviati]. At the same time, on his quest to identify the *vero promotore* of the text's reduction to its *vera lezione*, he cannot resist the urge to reduce this intricate web of intrigue to a single person. Thus, after claiming that “nessuno poteva avere maggiore interesse di Lionardo Salviati nel farsi preporre alla revisione di una nuova edizione del *Decameron*” [no one could be more interested than Lionardo Salviati in promoting his own revision for a new edition of the *Decameron*], Brown rather famously concludes his article with the pronouncement that “il vero promotore della «rassettatura» del «Decameron» nel 1582” [the real promoter of the 1582 *rassettatura* of the *Decameron*] is Lionardo Salviati himself. See Peter M. Brown, “I veri promotori della «rassettatura» del *Decameron* nel 1582,” *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 134 (1957): 314-32, here 331, 332, and 332, my translation.

Brown's focus on this issue has loomed large on subsequent scholarship. See, for example, Tim Carter, “Another Promoter of the 1582 'Rassettatura' of the *Decameron*,” *The Modern Language Review*, 81 (1996): 893-99, which directly addresses Brown's article; see also Giuseppe Chiecchi and Luciano Troisio, *Il Decameron sequestrato* (Milan: Edizioni Unicopli, 1984), especially 65-83.

detto libro, con tutte quelle conditioni et clausole che piaceranno al suo discreto iuditio” [with ample and free authority to correct and purge the book in question, with all those conditions and provisions that will be pleasing to his discreet judgment].¹²⁴ Left to his own devices, Salviati produced a volume that became the standard edition of the *Decameron* in the post-Tridentine world.¹²⁵

Such an odd series of events begs our attention. Indeed, for some time, scholars have been looking for a way to understand the Vatican’s surprising about-face in regards to the 1573 edition and its endorsement of Salviati’s work. Traditionally, scholars speak of the success of the Salviati edition in terms of “morality” and maintain that the 1582 *rassettatura* of the *Decameron* is “dominated by the principle that the function of literature was to give an ‘example’ and to provide moral instruction.”¹²⁶ As my own analysis will show, however, such a framework is insufficient for appreciating the complex expurgations of the *Decameron* carried out at the end of the sixteenth century.

My analysis of these volumes explores the tensions inherent in the simultaneous restoration and destruction of the *Decameron* by its official editors and expurgators at the end of the sixteenth century. I begin by asserting that both the *Deputati* and Salviati demonstrate a fidelity to Boccaccio’s language that is indicative of their own humanist sensibilities. To their own detriment, however, the *Deputati* frame

¹²⁴ Mandate of Francesco I de’ Medici quoted in Chiecchi e Troisio, *Decameron sequestrato*, 66.

¹²⁵ The edition itself was reissued about a dozen times between 1582 and 1638. The *Decameron* officially remained prohibited until the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

¹²⁶ Brown, “Aims and Methods,” 12.

their expurgation of the *Decameron's* content in a way that contradicts both their philological approach to the text and the *Decameron's* own take on censorship. These men further prohibit their own success by failing to impose any guidelines for the interpretation of the material that remained on the page after their strategic extractions, thereby failing to impose Vatican authority on the private space of reading. Salviati, in contrast, cunningly masks his expurgation in a tour-de-force of humanist rhetoric that cleverly, though dishonestly, sustains his commitment to offer readers an encounter with Boccaccio's original prose. Further, Salviati's work advances a specific method of reading, one that endorses an accord between personal judgment and ideological obligations. He reminds readers of the authorities that impose those obligations through an innovative exploitation of the printed page.

Sopra la lingua

Although the responses to their work differ greatly, the *Deputati* and Salviati employ similar techniques when editing the language of the *Decameron*. Notably, both the *Deputati* and Salviati understand the restoration of Boccaccio's language to be one of their primary concerns, as they consider the author's Trecento Tuscan to be the main attraction of the work itself. Borghini makes this focus known to Manrique: "E questo anche sia per notizia di Vostra Signoria Reverendissima, che e' si sono questi Deputati ingegnati di migliorarlo non poco nella correzione della lingua" [And this also serves to let Your Grace know that these *Deputati*, in the correction of the language, have

done everything possible to improve greatly the book].¹²⁷ Borghini himself notes in the same letter that this linguistic attention is imperative, “essendo il principale fine di questo libro la lingua” [since language is the principal purpose of this book].¹²⁸ As I will show, we must compare the approaches of the editors to the language of the *Decameron* in order to understand the scholars’ treatment of the *Decameron*’s content.

First of all, Borghini outlines two important principles for acting as a textual editor. Borghini, on the one hand, champions the meticulous and unapologetic elimination of errors that can be confidently attributed to an ignorant copyist, a sloppy editor, or a careless publisher. Driven by the desire to restore the *Decameron*’s philological “proprietà et natural purità della lingua” [the correctness and natural purity of the language], he laments the work’s dilapidated state and sympathetically identifies “il bisogno che haveva il libro, troppo mal concio et troppo trasformato dal nativo et primiero esser suo” [the need the book had, in so bad a mess and so transformed from its original and former state].¹²⁹ At the same time, sure of his knowledge of Due and Trecento Florentine, he insists on maintaining antique word forms and grammar structures that are original to Boccaccio’s own usage, even though such forms may seem odd and

¹²⁷ Vincenzo Borghini, “Letter to Thomas Manrique,” 2 July 1571, letter 4, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 3.

¹²⁸ Vincenzo Borghini, “Letter to Thomas Manrique,” 2 July 1571, letter 4, *Cartelle laurenziane*, p.8.

¹²⁹ Vincenzo Borghini, *Annotazioni et discorsi sopra alcuni luoghi del Decameron di Messer Giovanni Boccaccii* (Florence: Giunta, 1573); see also Giuseppe Chiecchi, ed., *Le annotazioni e i discorsi sul Decameron del 1573 dei deputati fiorentini* (Padua: Antenore, 2001), 9.

perhaps even grating or erroneous to the sixteenth-century reader. Borghini writes: “Diciamo che trovando noi ne’ testi scritti nel tempo dell’autore, o molto vicini, alcune voci et parlari nuovi, nuovi cioè a questi tempi, non habbiamo subito, come hanno fatto alcuni, credutogli errori et molto meno siamo corsi a corregerli, che sarebbe veramente un corromperli” [We state that finding in texts written in times contemporary, or almost contemporary, to that of our author, some new words and ways of speaking – new to these times, that is – we have not believed these passages to be errors, as many others have. We have been even less willing to correct rashly these places, which would really be corrupting them].¹³⁰ Borghini consistently insists throughout his career on the authority of antique manuscripts. Having the opportunity, then, to work “con l’aiuto d’un testo antichissimo e fedelissimo e scritto poco dopo la morte de l’autore” [with the aid of a very old and very faithful text written shortly after the death of the author] means that he can again defer to the writing of the ancestors, acting merely as a conduit between the modern reader and the ancient writer.¹³¹

These ideals guide the *Deputati* in their approach to the language of the *Decameron*, resulting in a restored Boccaccian prose that even Salviati later admires. In an opening letter addressed to the reader, Salviati acknowledges his debt to the work of the *Deputati* and at the same time lauds his own philological research. He writes:

Cio direm bene con sicuro animo, che il maggiore ardire,

¹³⁰ Borghini, *Annotazioni*, 25.

¹³¹ Vincenzo Borghini, “Letter to Thomas Manrique” 2 July 1571, letter 4, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 7.

che habbiamo preso nel correggere il testo, è stato d'un accento, o d'un punto, o d'una divisione: ne questo cotanto habbiamo fatto, senza ogni volta darne notizia al lettore. E piu tosto c'è piaciuto di lasciarci le difficultà, che di torle via, come si dice, a capriccio. Nella qual cosa di molta lode riputiam degni del 73 massimamente nelle cose più importanti.

Thus we confidently say that our greatest boldness in correcting this text has been in the use of a single accent or of a period or of a division, and we have not taken even these minor steps without giving notice to the reader every time. Moreover, it has pleased us to leave the discrepancies rather than to take them out, as we say, on a whim. In this most important issue, we find the editors of the 1573 edition to be worthy of great praise.¹³²

Orthographical inconsistencies, even apparent errors, do not warrant correction or resolution. Salviati does not stabilize spellings throughout the volume. Rather, he leaves certain discrepancies in the text, allowing it to replicate a natural, informal, and as he claims, originally Boccaccian speech pattern. Brown writes: "Hesitation in the text between different forms of words Salviati does not consider to raise the question of a 'correct' and an 'incorrect' version, but rather to indicate the existence, in Boccaccio's times, of these different forms which, being accepted by the author, can be perpetuated in a 'correct' text."¹³³ Salviati admits that his orthography is at times incoherent but defends his inconsistency by attributing it to Boccaccio:

¹³² Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Lionardo Salviati (Florence: Filippo e Iacopo Giunta, 1582), **3v. Salviati's praise for his editorial predecessors, however, lasts only to a certain point. When discussing the previous editions available to readers, Salviati makes the following comments: "Degli stampati fuor che 'l secondo e 'l 27. e quel del 73. non n'habiamo alcuno per buono: & il 27. riputeremmo, senza alcun fallo, per molto superiore al secondo" [Aside from the editions of 1527 and 1573, we do not have a single decent one, and the 1527 edition, without question, is the better of the two] (**3v).

¹³³ Brown, "Aims and Methods," 31.

Le abbiám ricevute nel nostro testo, estimando, che quei nomi, come molti de' tempi nostri, dal medesimo popolo si proferissero in più d'una maniera, ed in più d'una maniera per conseguente dall'autore s'esprimesson nella scrittura. La quale, se negli stessi nomi proprij non possiamo arrischiarci di ridur sempre una forma, quanto manco nell'altre voci, e nelle guise del parlare, e ne' concetti dovrem prender sicurezza di farlo?¹³⁴

We have incorporated them into our own text, judging that a single population pronounced those names in more than one way, just as happens with many of our own time, and so, as a result, an author could render them so in his writing. If we cannot risk reducing these names themselves to a single form, how could we ever safely do so with other words and concepts and ways of speaking?

Thus, at times Salviati keeps *priego* others, *prego*; spells the word *piccolo* and *picciolo*; uses both *propria* and *propia*. The reader is to witness Boccaccio's pristine language and style, even if certain elements of this work are later considered to be incorrect.

In neither edition, then, do the editors present themselves as stern grammarians, imposing a standardized order on the original work of the author. Rather, they claim the part of the enlightened pedagogue who, like Boccaccio himself, trusts his readers to find delight in the richness of the language while at the same time recognizing the finer points that are to be reproduced in the readers' own creations. The editors' work makes it possible for the reader to witness Boccaccio's original, to have access to the language as it first sat on the page, to witness the text, as completely as possible, in the moment of its creation. Both the *Deputati* and Salviati, then, hawk their volumes in the same way that previous publishers did, appealing

¹³⁴ Salviati, *Decameron*, **3v, my translation.

to what Thomas Greene has identified as the characteristic feature of the humanist movement. Greene writes:

The image that propelled the humanist Renaissance and that still determines our perception of it was the archaeological, necromantic metaphor of *disinterment*, a digging up that was also a resuscitation or a reincarnation or a rebirth. The discovery of the past led men literally to dig in the ground, and the recovery from it of a precious object needed only a touch of fancy to be regarded as a resurrection. But the resurrection of buried objects and buildings could not be sharply distinguished from the resurrection of literary texts as they were discovered, copied, edited, disseminated, translated, and imitated by the humanist necromancer-scholar.¹³⁵

The editors' work thus appeals to what Thomas Greene has identified as the characteristic feature of the humanist movement: the reader's desire to have access to the language as it first sat on the page, to witness the text, as completely as possible, in the moment of its creation.

Editors in sixteenth-century Venice and Florence had for some time been making claims to having chiseled away at the various forms of the *Decameron* in order to display to the literate public the body of text that was truly and originally crafted by Boccaccio. In 1522, for example, the firm of Aldus Manutius claims to have stripped away all the extraneous layers of editorial incompetence and to print the *Decameron* "nel suo primo stato; & alla sua vera & sana lettione ridotta" [in its original state, reduced to its true and pure reading].¹³⁶ In these two censored editions, Borghini and Salviati each takes his

¹³⁵ Thomas Greene, "Petrarch and the Humanist Hermeneutic," in *Italian Literature: Roots and Branches*, ed. Giose Rimaneli and Kenneth John Atchity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 206.

¹³⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Venice: Aldus Manutius, 1522), A3.

own turn at grave robbing, resuscitating the *Decameron*, even after the fatal blow from the *Index*, and bringing back to life a text reborn in a pure and uncontaminated Boccaccian glory.

More than mere words, the *Deputati's* damaged *Decameron*

This necromancy, however, must be qualified. Commissioned to produce the first expurgated editions of the *Decameron*, both the *Deputati* and Lionardo Salviati had to simultaneously preserve and destroy the text they so revered. Recall that the *Deputati* received strict and specific orders directly from the Master of the Sacred Palace to continue and complete the expurgation of the *Decameron's* narrative content that Manrique himself had already begun. From his very first letter to the Florentine scholars, dated March 10, 1570, Manrique concentrates his instructions on what had to be removed from the text.¹³⁷ This remains the dominant tenor of Manrique's letters throughout the nearly four years that it took to produce an expurgated volume.¹³⁸ In his first missive addressed directly to Vincenzo

¹³⁷ Licenza del Maestro del Sacro Palazzo: "Noi fra Tommaso Manrique, Maestro del Sacro Palazzo, per la presente concediamo libera licenza al Signor Filippo Giunti, che possi comunicar le cento Novelle del Boccaccio, da noi espurgate, con li Accademici di Firenze o con altri periti della lingua Toscana, a fine che, levate le cose da noi notate, si possino continuar dette Novelle e, fatta detta continuazione, si rimandino qua a noi, per dare poi ordine si stampino" [Permit from the Master of the Sacred Palace: "I, Brother Thomas Manrique, Master of the Sacred Palace, now give ample license to Mr. Filippo Giunti, that he may transfer Boccaccio's Hundred Tales, expurgated by me, to the members of the Florentine Academy, or to other experts of the Tuscan language, so that, after removing the passages that I indicated, they may continue through the aforementioned Stories and, having finished that continuation, they may send back them back to me here, so that I may then give the order that they be printed] (Thomas Manrique, "Licenza del Maestro del Sacro Palazzo," 3 October, 1571, Letter 1, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 3).

¹³⁸ In his "Avvertimenti per rassettare il Boccaccio" [Guidelines for Adjusting Boccaccio] for example, Manrique begins by saying: "Primo. Si ha da avvertire che tutti i luoghi ove sono le linee alle carte piegate si ha da levare la parola o parole quali sono sotto ditte linee, overo mutarle in altre che non dieno scandolo" [First, one

Borghini, for example, Manrique defines the goal of the *Deputati* as the production of a *Decameron* that can circulate “al mondo con nessuno scandolo” [through the world without giving any scandal].¹³⁹

Manrique’s order to the Accademici to rewrite and adjust the text so that “it causes no scandal” highlights the negative leitmotif in the correspondence between the Master of the Sacred Palace and the *Deputati*.

The Florentine editors, in turn, employ the same negative rhetoric to describe and discuss their approach to the text. Borghini responds to Manrique’s directive ensuring him that the group will produce a text “corretto e temperato in modo che e’ non possa, o poco, nuocere” [corrected and tempered in such a way that it cannot harm, or at least will not harm very much].¹⁴⁰ By consistently addressing what could *not* be included in an expurgated *Decameron*, Manrique establishes and encourages the editors to think of the project and of the text in terms of what the *Decameron* should *not* do and what its pages should *not* say. The commissioned scholars thus pursue a goal defined in negative terms, addressing only what effects the text cannot have.

The *Deputati* set out, then, on a campaign to systematically purge the *Decameron* of what Manrique identified as inappropriate

must demand that all of those underlined places lines on folded pages, you have the obligation to remove the word or the words which are so underlined, or rather turn them into other things that will not give scandal] (Thomas Manrique, “Avvertimenti per rassettare il Boccaccio,” Letter 2, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 4).

¹³⁹ The original Italian is notably negative here, saying that the *Decameron* circulate “with no scandal” (Thomas Manrique, “Letter to V. Borghini,” 23 June 1571, Letter 3, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 5).

¹⁴⁰ Vincenzo Borghini, “Letter to Thomas Manrique,” 7 July 1571, Letter 4, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 8.

material. The Master of the Sacred Palace specifically targeted the *Decameron's* irreverent parade of clergymen and cloistered women whose worldly disobedience paints a less-than-flattering, and less-than-licit, portrait of the Church. The *Deputati* developed various remedies for carefully reconnecting those segments of text that survived Manrique's initial pogrom. The rarest – though most effective – of these techniques is the use of little printed stars to suture together the disconnected bits of stories for which the *Deputati* found no other remedy but inelegant pruning.¹⁴¹

The reader first encounters an asterisk towards the end of *Decameron* 1.3, Filomena's debut as a narrator. This action prompts us to wonder what about this story merits its dissection. Pamela Stewart, comparing Filomena's story with various preceding versions, asserts that religious ambivalence is the most remarkable feature of the *Decameron's* tale. She writes: "Boccaccio's version of the parable is the most daring formulation of the tendential equivalence of the three biblical religions, and of human inability to argue convincingly for any single one of them."¹⁴² The *Deputati's* treatment of the story identifies the same threat.

In the story's full version, Filomena tells a story within a story. She tells of how a rich Jew named Melchisedech responds with a parable about a father who has three sons to a question from Saladin, asking him which of the three faiths he held to be "la verace, o la

¹⁴¹ These asterisks appear in only three of the *Deputati's* expurgated tales: 1.3, 1.6 (though a special case to be discussed below), and 3.10.

¹⁴² Pamela Stewart, "The Tale of the Three Rings (1.3)," in *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa Weaver (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 89-112, here 102.

giudaica, o la saracina, o la cristiana” [the true one, the Jewish, the Saracen, or the Christian] (1.3.8; 44). This father is the owner of a gold ring that has been passed down in his family from generation to generation, entrusted to a worthy recipient each time it is passed down. Filomena depicts how this father complicates the inheritance, however. Loving each son equally, he decides to satisfy each son’s request to be his heir by having two other rings made “li quali furono sí simiglianti al primiero, che esso medesimo che fatti gli aveva fare appena conosceva qual fosse il vero” [which were so much like the first one that he himself, who had had them made, could hardly tell which was the real one] (1.3.14; 45). He then tells each son individually that he has inherited the original. Once the father dies, the sons are not able to determine “qual fosse il vero erede del padre” [who the true heir was] (1.3.15; 45). Unlike their father, who was just able to tell the rings apart (“appena conosceva qual fosse il vero”), the three sons do not know how to recognize the original ring: “e trovatisi gli anelli sí simili l'uno all'altro, che qual fosse il vero non si sapeva cognoscere, si rimase la quistione, qual fosse il vero erede del padre, in pendente: e ancor pende” [They discovered the rings were so much alike that they could not recognize the true one, they put aside the question of who the true heir was and left it undecided, as it is to this day] (1.3.15; 45). Filomena’s repetition of the phrase “qual fosse il vero” recalls the father’s ability to recognize the original ring, emphasizing the fact that the true ring does exist, but the sons are incapable of recognizing which one it is. No one, not even the heir of the original ring, knows who is its new owner.

Melchisedech concludes his parable as the brothers discover the situation of their inheritance and immediately offers an explanation for his story:

E così vi dico, signor mio, delle tre leggi alli tre popoli date da Dio padre, delle quali la quistion proponeste: ciascun la sua eredità, la sua vera legge e i suoi comandamenti dirittamente si crede avere e fare, ma chi se l'abbia, come degli anelli, ancora ne pende la quistione. (1.3.16)

And let me say the same thing to you, my lord, concerning the three Laws given to three peoples by God our Father which are the subject of the question you put to me: each believes itself to be the true heir, to possess the true Law, and to follow the true commandments, but whoever is right, just as in the case of the rings, is still undecided. (45)

Just as the brothers do not know how to recognize the true ring (“sapere conoscere,” 1.3.16), no one, according to Melchisedech, knows how to recognize the true faith, even those who practice it. The questions of who is the real heir – of the ring and of the law – both remain pending. The Jew’s story and his explanation of it change the terms of Saladin’s question. Whereas Saladin asked the Jew for his opinion, asking which faith the Jew held (“reputare,” 1.3.8) to be the true one, the Jew responds by saying that he cannot offer a definitive answer.

In the original *Decameron*, this lack of definitive understanding is unproblematic because Filomena contains any confusion about the true faith within the fiction of her tale. She begins her tenure as narrator by saying that “già e di Dio e della verità della nostra fede è assai bene stato detto,” [God and the truth of our faith have already been well dealt with by us] (1.3.3, 43, emphasis added). Asserting that

the young Florentine narrators have already addressed the truth of their faith is analogous to saying that the brigata has already answered the question that Saladin will propose to Melchisedech in the upcoming story. Because the brigata has already spoken about the truth of their faith, Filomena asserts that the brigata now has license to wander into another realm with their stories: “il discendere oggimai agli avvenimenti e agli atti degli uomini non si dovrà disdire” [from now on nothing should prevent us from descending to the acts of men] (1.3.4; 43). The upcoming story about the shortcomings of the three sons is permissible because the brigata has already confirmed its own opinions about faith. The ten narrators are not like the three sons who cannot recognize the real ring nor are they like Melchisedech, who cannot identify the true faith. These young Florentines can move forward because they know the truth of their faith and have already spoken well about it.

The *Deputati*, however, are not as confident of contemporary readers of the *Decameron* as Filomena is of her fellow narrators. The *Deputati* do not assume that their readers come to the *Decameron* with their own religious convictions set in place. A parable that compares the Christian community to men who are unable to recognize the truth and potentially likens Christian laws to a counterfeit ring can threaten Church authority over readers inclined to agree with Filomena’s wise Jew. By carving out a passage of Filomena’s story and stuffing the resulting cavity with a small star, the *Deputati* neutralize this threat:

e trovatisi gli anelli *verso se* tanto simili. * E così vi dico, signor mio, delle tre leggi alli tre popoli date da Dio padre, delle quali la quistion proponeste... (italics original)

and they found the rings very similar *to each other*. * And let me say the same thing to you, my lord, concerning the three Laws given to three peoples by God the Father which are the subject of the question you put to me...

They *Deputati* truncate the story and eliminate the episode in which the sons are incapable of recognizing the real one. Thus, while the story maintains the claim that all three faiths are similar, the *Deputati* remove Filomena's claim that all religions are equally arbitrary. For the *Deputati*, a true heir and a true faith exist, and the small inked asterisk indicates an answer to Saladin's question for the reader even if Melchisedech does not provide one for the Sultan himself.

The *Deputati* do not only remove and negate when they exchange Boccaccian prose for a little star. This smallest of markings offers one of the *Deputati's* largest gesture towards positive instruction in the text. This little inked marking on the page, the first visible alteration of the text, inverts the threat posed by the Boccaccian original. The *Deputati* delete the threatening scene and replace it with a manifestation of Church authority, a sign of the power of the *Index* within the stories themselves. Leaving the asterisk behind in the text leaves behind a mark of expurgation, of intervention, of authority over the text and thus a reminder of authority over the reader. The passage, with its asterisk in place, now serves as a re-inscription of the authority that the original novella threatened to take away from the Church.

The group's most audacious abolition works to a similar end; it comes later on the first day, when the *Deputati* remove an entire novella. Between the fifth and seventh tales of the first day sits a

small notice to the reader, which unapologetically states “Novella sesta manca” [The sixth story is missing]. Removing an entire story in a work commonly referred to as the “cento novelle” [hundred stories] left the editors uneasy and concerned. The *Deputati* contemplated replacing this thoroughly sluiced novella with another tale and discussed substituting the story of Filippo Balducci as a way to fill in the space. They found even this re-arrangement to be ultimately dissatisfying:

Ma non si possono fare questi rappezzamenti senza danno d'una delle parti, il che non poco ci spaventava parendoci così storpiare un sano e non guarire affatto uno storpiato...Et in quetso noi andiamo continuamente pensando...fino che il libro non è sotto da stampa, sempre si può et si dee cercar di migliorarlo.¹⁴³

It is impossible to patch these pieces together without damaging either one, and we are very much afraid that doing so only seems a way to cripple a healthy man without healing one already lame...And so we will give constant thought to the situation...up until the very last moment when the book goes to press, always trying and doing our best to improve it.

After brooding over the possibility of picking a story from outside the *Decameron*, including the *Novellino*, the *Deputati* ultimately opted to leave the space blank, except for the missing novella's rather understated marker on the page. It is exactly this glaring lack that is effective here, just as it had been earlier with Melchisedech's story. While 1.3 posed a threat to the Church's authority over the text, 1.6 scathingly criticizes the infrastructure created to impose that authority. More directly, it takes a stab at the effectiveness of the

¹⁴³ *I Deputati*, “Letter to Thomas Manrique,” 1571, Letter 15, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 45.

Inquisition, the governors of the *Index*, identifying, in typical Decameronian fashion, the worldly flaws in a supposedly heavenly quest. Removing the tale removes this flippant depiction of greed and damaging portrayal of the misuse of power. Going one step further and replacing it with clear and distinct evidence of the censor's authority solves the problem of the text's insolence. What was once disobedient and potentially threatening becomes curbed, docile, and only a marker for the power of the Church. The institution leaves its mark on the page and, perhaps, on its readers, reminding them of the authority that controlled the fate of the text and made claims to controlling the fate of its readers.¹⁴⁴

The treatment of these stories on the *Decameron's* first day is all but unique, however, as not all of the *Deputati's* textual alterations are so successful in creating a flashy display of Inquisitorial authority.¹⁴⁵ On the whole, the *Deputati's* tactics for removing text are more akin to

¹⁴⁴ In regards to the *Deputati's* treatment of 1.6, see also Chiecchi and Troiosio, who write: "Il potere non può essere messo in discussione, epperò la novella sull'Inquisitore dell'eretica pravità (1, 6) viene bellamente soppressa per intero, *caso unico* in tutta la storia delle cinquecentine censurate. Questo totale *blanchissement* diventa ancor più clamoroso sfogliando l'indice delle rubriche, in cui non è riportato il titolo, ma deve sopravvivere il *numero* della novella, seguito da un 'manca' che luccica nella sua indicazione di assenza (probabilmente anche per un qualche ammiccamento involontario dell'esecutore-imbalsamatore) ammettendo nello stesso tempo l'impossibile forclusione" (*Il Decameron sequestrato*, 42). [Power cannot be questioned, and for this reason the story about the wicked Inquisitor, becomes beautifully suppressed in its entirety, *caso unico* in the entire history of the censored editions printed in the sixteenth century. This complete *blanchissement* becomes even more awkward skimming through the table of contents, in which the title is not reported but the number of the novella has to survive, followed by a "missing" that glistens in its indication of absence (probably also as an involuntary wink from the executioner-embalmer) admitting at the same time the impossibility of inclusion.]

¹⁴⁵ The only other story in the 1573 edition of the *Decameron* to suffer asterisks is Dioneo's tale about Alibech and Rustico (3.10). Again, I would argue that the markings serve a similar purpose. What was once a tale about rape and deception disguised as Christian instruction becomes a witness to the power and necessity of the *Index* and its enforcers.

a pilfering cat burglar than to a destructive General Sherman. These men are remarkably cagey in their extractions, creeping across the pages of the *Decameron* with an almost imperceptible stealth. The motive for such a covert operation, according to the *Deputati* themselves, is that they take great pains to consider the narrative flow of Manrique's altered passages. They carry tiny bits of text away with them in an attempt to preserve as best they can the uninterrupted arc of Boccaccio's original prose. In one case, for example, the *Deputati* explain their treatment of the Proem to Manrique by noting that they are trying to make their intervention in the text as unremarkable as possible. They write:

Nel *Proemio* si son levate le due parole segnate, senza mettervi scambio, perché ogni volta che, levatone il segnato, il senso continuava per se stesso in modo che non resti il senso interrotto, crediamo che sia molto meglio; et anche sappiamo che e' sarà con molta maggior soddisfazione dello universale non vi mettere altre parole. E generalmente quanto meno ve ne saranno aggiunte fuor di quelle dello autore, tanto meglio sarà sempre.

The two highlighted words from the proem have been removed without exchanging them for any others, because every time that, having removed the indicated words, the meaning continued on its own in a way that no part of the meaning seemed interrupted, we think this is much better. And we also know that it will be much more pleasing to the public to do things this way. And, in general, the fewer the words added to those original ones of the author, so much the better.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ *I Deputati*, "Breve nota mandata al Maestro del Sacro Palazzo sopra certi luoghi particolari del Boccaccio," 6 October 1571, Letter 11, *Cartelle laurenziane*, 25-26. As Chiecchi explains the situation: "Si tratta dell'espressione (Proem.10) *volendo e non volendo*, che, nella stampa del 1573, i Deputati cancelleranno, senza però sostituirla con la proposta di Manrique: *sempre svogliate*" [This concerns the passage (Proem. 10), *wanting and not wanting*, that, in the 1573 edition, the *Deputati* delete without

Notably, the *Deputati*'s hands-off tactics not only precludes the exchange of unnecessary words, but also the inclusion of the printed stars that indicate a deletion in the text. No little asterisk sits on the pages of the *Deputati* version of the proem to show where the missing words should be, nor do they show up later, in the second story of Day One, where the *Deputati* get rid of Neifile's depiction of sodomy in the Roman courts. The *Deputati* similarly excise the references to male homosexual activity in Dioneo's story on the Fifth Day without leaving any calling card behind their destructive visit.¹⁴⁷ The problem with such reductions is that they remove portions of the text without adding any positive elements back into it. They hide and deceive, in some cases they may even successfully prevent, but they do not rectify or correct. They do not offer the witness to authority and reminder of the Church's codified rules of behavior that the deceptively simple looking asterisks did. These reductions, then, only partially resolve the authoritative issues that triggered the *Decameron*'s initial placement on the *Index*.

Just as inadequate are those frequent passages when the *Deputati* modify the scenes that Manrique identified as problematic by

substituting it with Manrique's suggestion: *always disinterested*] Giuseppe Chiecchi, *Dolcemente dissimulando* (Padua: Antenore, 1992), Note 2, 32. emphasis original.

¹⁴⁷ In the original version, Dioneo concludes his tale: "Dopo la cena quello che Pietro si divisasse a sodisfacimento di tutti e tre m'è uscito di mente; so io ben cotanto, che la mattina vegnente infino in su la Piazza fu il giovane, non assai certo qual più stato si fosse la notte o moglie o marito, accompagnato" [What exactly Pietro had thought up to satisfy all three of them after supper now slips my mind; but I do know this much, though: on the following morning when the young man was returned to the main square, he found himself not quite sure about which one he had been with more that night, the husband or the wife] (5.10.63, 440). The 1573 edition reads: "'Dopo la cena quello che Pietro si divisasse a sodisfacimento di tutti e tre m'è uscito di mente" [What exactly Pietro had thought up to satisfy all three of them after supper now slips my mind].

recasting them as the secular adventures of an immoral laity. This first happens in the *Decameron's* second story, which in its original form credits the papal curia with a stunning catalogue of audacious sins. The Borghini edition, however, attributes all of the tale's lust and greed to the despicable actions of certain misbehaved courtiers in Rome.¹⁴⁸ Later that day, the brigade of Florentine expurgators change Dioneo's story about a sexually active Benedictine monk and his equally lecherous, though more adventurous, abbot into a tale about the racy adventures of a student and his teacher. Such alterations of titles or identities with no other intervention into the novella's story line continue throughout the rest of the *Decameron*. In the novella of Masetto da Lamporecchio (*Decameron* 3.1), for example, the *Deputati* change the abbess of the original tale into a widowed countess who takes impoverished young women of good birth into her home.¹⁴⁹ The

¹⁴⁸ The original tale reads: "Il giudeo montò a cavallo, e, come più tosto poté, se n'andò in corte di Roma, dove pervenuto da' suoi giudei fu onorevolmente ricevuto. E quivi dimorando, senza dire a alcuno perché ito vi fosse, cautamente cominciò a riguardare alle maniere del Papa e de' cardinali e degli altri prelati e di tutti i cortigiani" [The Jew got on his horse and set out as quickly as he could for the court of Rome, and upon his arrival, he was received with honor by his Jewish friends. While he was living there, without telling anyone why he had come, the Jew began carefully to observe the behavior of the Pope, the cardinals, and the other prelates and courtiers] (1.2.18-19; 27). The *Deputati* eliminate the mention of the pope and other ordained clergy, so that the text now reads: "Il giudeo montò a cavallo, e, come più tosto poté, se n'andò in corte di Roma, dove pervenuto da' suoi giudei fu onorevolmente ricevuto. E quivi dimorando, senza dire a alcuno perché ito vi fosse, cautamente cominciò a riguardare alle maniere de' cortigiani" [The Jew got on his horse and set out as quickly as he could for the court of Rome, and upon his arrival, he was received with honor by his Jewish friends. While he was living there, without telling anyone why he had come, the Jew began carefully to observe the behavior of the courtiers]. It should be noted at this point that 1.2 is an anomaly in the *Deputati's* work in that it is the only section of the text that the men change but do not indicate this change in the work. Whether this omission is intentional or rather a printer's error is not clear.

¹⁴⁹ The story opens in the *Deputati* edition: "In queste nostre contrade fu una Contessa, la non nomerò per non diminuire in parte alcuna la fama sua. Questa rimasa vedova haveva una usanza di ritenere appresso di se alcune damigelle povere, et ben nate, et esercitarle in lavorij, et ricami, et somiglianti opere femminili..." [In

1573 edition does not conceal these changes, but rather makes sure that the reader is keenly aware of them. The text indicates each altered name, title, and setting by printing each of the *Deputati's* interventions in a contrasting font.

This evidence of intervention, however, is more problematic and ultimately less effective than the asterisks. These changes are largely cosmetic. The text no longer allows priests and nuns to enjoy the rapturous physical pleasures to be had by disregarding traditional moral guidelines. These identity alterations, however, do nothing to determine a consistent and explicit value system within the *Decameron*. Here, then, is one of the real shortcomings of the *edizione dei Deputati*: it gives insufficient positive instruction. While the editors are very clear about what the reader should not be seeing - the misadventures of the *Decameron's* numerous wayward clerics - they are never instructive as to how to engage the glamorous depictions of sex and scandal that remain on the page. Readers are left to judge all the episodes for themselves, with no added reminders of what are the guidelines for licit and obedient judgment. Indeed, any mention of the clergy and the institutionalized Church and thus any reminder of the organization that demands a specific reading of the text, one in line with the moral guidelines that she herself maintains and poses, disappear from the text. Readers are left with fewer reminders of

our own region, there was once a countess, who I will not name so as to not diminish any part of her fame. This woman, being a widow, was of the habit of taking into her home certain poor young maidens, of good families, and employing them as seamstresses and giving them other feminine tasks...]. See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. *I Deputati* (Florence: Giunta, 1573), 141, my translation.

clerical authority in the *Deputati* edition of the *Decameron* than they had when reading the original.

Borghini's opening letter to the readers of the 1573 edition is thus indicative of the volume's fatal shortcomings. It reads:

S. Sant. Benignamente si contentò, che l'ordine già dato si eseguisse, & ne commise in Roma la cura a huomini suoi, Religiosi & intendenti, accioche di lui si levasse via quello che potesse negli animi de' semplici generare scandolo, o miscredenza della buona et santa Religione. I quali lettolo tutto, & accortamente riconosciutolo ne tolsero, dove parole, dove sententie, & dove parti intere, come stimarono convenirsi. Et di queste, ne più ne meno si trova il nobile Autore di presente scemo.

His Holiness benignly conceded, entrusting the work [of expurgation] to his own men in Rome, men focused on religion, having them remove from this work all that could cause scandal in the souls of simple readers or undermine their faith in the Holy Religion. Those men read the entire work and perspicaciously identified all parts that needed to be cut, those parts where certain words, sentences, or entire sections merited correction. And it is these specific episodes, no more and no fewer, that one finds the Author now to be without.¹⁵⁰

This is a very large claim, one that should rest uneasily on the ears of any reader of the *Decameron*, because such a declaration sits at odds with the text itself. In the Conclusion of the *Decameron*, the Author claims:

Niuna corrotta mente intese mai sanamente parola: e così come le oneste a quella non giovano, così quelle che tanto oneste non sono la ben disposta non posson contaminare, se non come il loto i solari raggi o le terrene brutture le bellezze del cielo. (Conclusionione dell'Autore, 11)

A corrupt mind never understands a word in a healthy

¹⁵⁰ *I Deputati, Decameron*, *4r, my translation.

way! And just as fitting words are of no use to a corrupt mind, so a healthy mind cannot be contaminated by words which are not so proper, any more than mud can dirty the rays of the sun or earthly filth can mar the beauties of the sky. (804)

No one, according to the Author, not even the holiest men in Rome, can determine what part of a text will “cause scandal in the souls of simple readers and undermine their faith in the Holy Religion.” The *Deputati* present their work in negative terms, describing it only in terms of what they have removed. Doing so, the *Deputati* expose their 1573 edition of the *Decameron* as an inept defense against the potential threat which literature poses to piety, morality, and clerical authority.

Salviati the butcher

While Salviati does take cues from the *Deputati*, he is far more extreme in his expurgation. He eliminates and rewrites an unprecedented percentage of the text, earning him the nickname “il macellaio” [the butcher] from Ugo Foscolo and prompting one scholar to refer to the 1582 edition as “ferociously expurgated.”¹⁵¹ Salviati hacks away at the *Decameron*. Not satisfied with trimming a little excess fat, this editor chops down to the bone and slathers little stars across the pages of the *Decameron* with greater largesse than the *Deputati* ever did. While Ser Cepparello managed to escape the *Deputati* largely unscathed, the *Decameron*’s first tale does not even present a complete rubric to its reader in Salviati’s edition. It

¹⁵¹ Ugo Rozzo, *Biblioteche italiane del Cinquecento tra Riforma e Controriforma* (Udine: Arti Grafiche Friulane, 1994), 272.

unapologetically reads: “Ser Ciappelletto con una falsa confessione inganna un santo frate, e muorsi *.” Salviati then removes the entire confession scene, replacing it with another asterisk, reducing Boccaccio’s complex tale about the limits of human acumen to the banal chronology of a measly sinner’s life and death.¹⁵² Later, in an extravagant display of the expurgator’s zeal, Salviati eradicates from tip to toe Melchisech’s problematic answer to Saladin’s prodding. While the rubric still promises the reader a story about three rings, Salviati trims Filomena’s tale to read: “Se io non erro, io mi ricordo aver molte volte udito dire * Il Saladino conobbe costui ottimamente esser saputo uscire del laccio il quale davanti a' piedi teso gli aveva” (1.3.10, 17). In this case, readers not only know that the text lacks something, they are even taunted by the knowledge of what is missing – Melchisedech’s story. These eliminations are not the subtle, unobtrusive incisions of the kind made, for the most part, by the *Deputati*. These are glaring, obvious cuts that attract the reader’s attention.

Unlike the *Deputati*, Salviati never takes responsibility for eliminating anything from the text, and through a clever manipulation of the vocabulary of humanist discourse, he instructs his readers on how to engage the gaping holes in the *Decameron*. Salviati claims that his edition lacks passages that, while they have come to be known as part of the *Decameron*, are not, in fact, present in the oldest

¹⁵² There is another asterisk after the visiting friar’s first gestures of comfort towards the dying Cepparello, and the text resumes with the administration of Cepparello’s last rights: “il cominciò a confortare. * veggendo il frate, non essere altro restate a dire a Ser Ciappelletto...”

manuscripts of the work. Salviati first addresses the missing bits of text in a letter to the reader that opens the 1582 edition. He writes: “La * generalmente significa mancamento: e trovandosi, per via di dire Man. * significa, che in quel testo non è quella parte, o parola, o altro di che si tratta” [The * generally means something is missing: and, when one sees the asterisk, it means that, in that text, which is to say the Manelli manuscript, there is no such part or word or other thing one might be dealing with].¹⁵³ At the end of the sixteenth century, the Manelli manuscript, a copy of the *Decameron* written out by Francesco Amaretto Manelli, was considered to be the definitive copy of Boccaccio’s hundred tales. Salviati boasts of using this document, along with several other important sources, to prepare his own edition of the *Decameron*.

While these manuscripts are venerable, they are also in poor shape, according to Salviati, on account of their age. He explains that the gaps in his edition show the missing bits of the most ancient manuscripts, which includes not only the Manelli edition, but also the other antique and authoritative precedents that he consulted: “Dove si troverà – ter. * o sec. * vuol dir, che quella parte, o parola, o altro, di che si tratta, non si legge in quel Testo: e continuando, sappia il Lettore, che in quel Testo mancherà qualche carta, o parte di carta. il che talora accade nel sec. e nel ter” [Where one will find “ter. *” or “sec. *” means that one does not read that part or word or other thing in that text; and furthermore, may the reader know that in that text there are some pages or pieces of pages that are missing, which sometimes

¹⁵³ Salviati, *Decameron*, **6v.

happens in the second and third].¹⁵⁴ While such claims are false, they cleverly disguise his role as expurgator, making it seem as if Salviati is showing the reader exactly what the *Decameron's* most authoritative sources look like, gaps and all.

The disinterred textual body that Salviati resurrects for his audience has rotted and decayed, and the clever editor displays the festered blotches as a desirable mark of authenticity. Salviati's asterisks are not a prohibition of offensive material, but are rather an aid to the reader who is most desirous of access to an authentic edition of the *Decameron*, because, according to Salviati, "dimostrano, che in quel luogo mancava, che che sia nel libro originale, che piu tosto si lascia imperfetto, che supplirlo di nostro, come alcuni hanno fatto" [they demonstrate that in that place, this part was missing in the original book, and that moreover we leave it imperfect rather than compensate for it with something of our own, like some people have done].¹⁵⁵ In these statements, Salviati focuses on the unauthorized license that he asserts many editors have taken with the *Decameron*, filling in certain holes in order to make the reading flow smoothly, but diluting the reader's encounter with Boccaccio's original.

By removing what he labels as the interventions of subsequent readers and editors of the *Decameron*, Salviati discredits previous editions, curbing a reader's temptation to check out what, in fact, is

¹⁵⁴ Salviati, *Decameron*, **6r. Salviati first makes mention of a "secondo" and "terzo" in his list of abbreviations that follow the "Avvertimenti al lettore." Peter M. Brown describes the two sources thusly: "The *Deo Gratias* printed edition of approximately 1470 is [Salviati's] "Secondo"; third ("il Terzo) came a MS now untraceable, which belonged to Lodovico Beccadelli." See Brown, "Aims and Methods," 22.

¹⁵⁵ Salviati, *Decameron*, **6v.

missing from an expurgated text. Salviati maintains that he is giving readers an unprecedented opportunity to encounter Boccaccio's unencumbered writings in printed form, to have a glimpse of the masterful fragments from which they have too long been deprived. The asterisks are a means by which the editor can reproduce and circulate the earliest sources as accurately as possible. Notably, then, Salviati uses the same humanist goal, the presentation of a text uninhibited by the corruption of subsequent editors, which he used to approach the language of the *Decameron* to justify and disguise his expurgation of Boccaccio's hundred tales.

Salviati the (re)writer

Just as the *Deputati* rewrote passages of the *Decameron*, altering names and titles and, at times, even settings, so too does Salviati take his own corrective pen to Boccaccio's pages. While we might call the *Deputati's* adjustments to the *Decameron's* writing cosmetic, those of Salviati seem nothing short of drastic. When rewriting these bits, Salviati spatially and temporally removes the tales even further from their original settings than did the *Deputati*. He turns Masetto, for example, into a wandering Arab named "Masèt" who sneaks into a harem on the Sinai Peninsula instead of into a Tuscan convent. Ferondo, the protagonist of the eighth story of the third day, fares no better in the hands of the expurgator. Salviati rigorously intervenes in this *novella*, transporting its contemporary Tuscan setting to Rhodes in the time of Tiberius. He then turns the monastery into an imperial villa and the abbot into the emperor's Greek doctor. Instead of going

to Purgatory, Ferondo is temporarily sent to an “altro mondo” [another world]. Such transformations occur in seven novelle in Salviati’s expurgated version of the *Decameron*.¹⁵⁶

Salviati’s interventions in these tales have already attracted a certain degree of scholarly attention. Peter M. Brown calls the transportation of these tales to “another time and clime” their “paganisation.” He writes: “By means of this stratagem (suggested perhaps by the fact that already a number of the *novelle* do take place in a pagan or classical setting) Salviati solves, at least for some of the stories, the pressing problem of the ‘example’ they set. For pagans, acting according to their ‘nature,’ can be allowed to present a ‘bad’ example.”¹⁵⁷ Further, Brown argues that this paganisation demonstrates Salviati’s commitment to “lay morality,” meaning that not only could priest and nuns not be shown in an unflattering light, but all Western Christians could only be depicted as exemplary models

¹⁵⁶ They are, as Brown points out: 1.4, the “monaco caduto in peccato” [monk reduced to sin] is placed in a pagan setting as a young man dedicated to the cult of a pagan goddess; 2.7, the Sultan’s daughter is going to “Colco” in “Trebisonda,” not to “Garbo.” In the original, though a pagan, she has numerous amorous adventures with Christians, even as near home as Salerno. Their behavior being generally reprehensible, they all become Turks; the novellas of Masetto di Lamporecchio and Ferondo already discussed; 4.1, Tancredi remains a “Signore assai humano” [most benevolent ruler] but “avanti ai consoli della città di Roma, in quella parte dell’Italia signoreggiò, e quindi forse il moderno titolo fu ripreso del principato” [before the time of the governance from the city of Rome, in that part of Italy he reigned, and therefore maybe the modern name was taken from the kingdom]; 4.2 “Frate Alberto” becomes “Alberto” who practices “Ne’ tempi adunque, che in Vinetia pure allora edificata, non era in guisa ricevuta la cristiana religione, che cacciata ne fosse, per la più parte, quella de’ falsi Iddij” [In the times after the construction of Venice but before the arrival of the Christian religion, and so when the worship of false idols still held strong in that town]; 9.2, the hypocritical abbeſs becomes the “madonna” [house mother] of the tower kept by the “Ammiraglio” [admiral], in which took place the adventures of Masetto da Lamporecchio, in ancient Babylon. See Peter Brown, “Aims and Methods of the Second ‘Rassetatura’ of the *Decameron*,” *Studi secenteschi*, 92.8 (1967): 1-42, here 9.

¹⁵⁷ Brown, “Aims and Methods,” 9.

of behavior. Confidently impressed with the drastic changes Salviati makes to the *Decameron*, Brown dubs the 1582 expurgated edition a “textbook of morality,” a moniker that holds strong in the study of the volumes even today.¹⁵⁸

While Brown’s idea does have merit, it is not without its problems. First of all, Brown predicates his claims on the fact that “pagan,” or at least non-Christian, and “anti-exemplary” are synonymous in the *Decameron*. In the tales he rewrites, Salviati does seem to draw this parallel. For example, the most extreme of his rewritings, the story about Frate Cipolla (6.10), defrocks Dioneo’s mendicant friar and changes him into a fraudulent clerical impersonator that offers to show his credulous audience “the wings of the phoenix” in return for their financial support and hospitality. Salviati then adds a character into the story, a local bishop who discovers Cipolla’s scam and saves the townspeople from the con artist’s nefarious plot. Condemning Cipolla to death, the bishop makes a spectacle of the destruction for his parishioners, and thus the text does for its audience. Cipolla’s death sentence shows the reader

¹⁵⁸ Brown, “Aims and Methods,” 11. Brown’s assessment of the censorship process enjoys an almost unquestioned stronghold over the ways in which Salviati’s *rassetatura* is examined and understood. For example, the latest investigations of Salviati’s handiwork come from Brian Richardson. In one of his most recent works, the 1994 *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600*, Richardson demonstrates the extent to which Brown’s assertions dominate subsequent studies on Salviati’s work. Richardson writes: “The Deputati had managed to persuade Manrique in 1571-72 that nobody saw the *Decameron* as a text which taught one how to live. This line was no longer tenable in 1580-81. If Salviati was to save as much as possible of the stories which Rome had wished to see deleted, he had to turn the *Decameron* into a work whose contents could, indeed should, be taken seriously. So it now became what Peter Brown has called ‘a textbook of morality’” (*Print Culture*, 171). Quoting the master directly, Richardson exposes the tendency of scholars to rely on the assumptions and observations of the founding father of studies on Salviati.

how not to behave, lest their greed and dishonesty lead them down the same path of destruction.

Similarly, Salviati doctors Fiammetta's story of Ricciardo and Catella's liaison in the bathhouse in order to show the readers the pain and suffering that awaits the sinner. The original version concludes by establishing a continuing love affair between the married woman and the lecherous and deceitful man. Salviati's adaptation of the tale, however, ends tragically. At the point where, in the original, Ricciardo begins to whisper sweet words to his sexual victim, Salviati changes the story. Catella leaves the bathhouse: "et a casa tornatasi, pensando alla sua sciocchezza, cadde in sì fiera malinconia, che n'infermò e morissi. E Ricciardo, essendo appunto in quei giorni rimaso vedovo, dolente del suo peccato, in un deserto, facendo penitenza, finì la vita sua" [and returned to her own home, thinking about her folly. She fell into such a grave melancholy that she took ill and died. Ricciardo, being himself a widower at that time and sorry of his sin, left to end his life doing penance out in the desert]. The forbidden tryst ends in calamity, a warning to those who would like physical desire, rather than social custom and religious obligation, to guide their sexual activities.

These changes, numerous and drastic though they may be, are insufficient to have the effects on the *Decameron* that Brown insists they do. In its un-expurgated state, the *Decameron* does not restrict non-Christian characters to anti-exemplary roles.¹⁵⁹ Boccaccio's

¹⁵⁹ See Janet Levarie Smarr, "Non-Christian People and Spaces in the *Decameron*," in *Approaches to Teaching the Decameron*, ed. James H. McGregor (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2000), 31-38.

stories portray Jews as wise and Saladin as a benevolent and munificent ruler. Tunisia and Rhodes are the exotic, but not hostile, backdrops for the happy resolutions of conflicts that could not settle themselves in the West. Salviati maintains these depictions in his expurgated volume, thus giving the reader no uniform internal standard that demarcates “Western” and “non-Western.” Further, Salviati’s adjustments are not consistent enough to turn the *Decameron* into a “textbook of morality” that reliably appropriates “lay morality.” Though Salviati banishes certain sexual from the realm of Christendom, the sultry adventures of Zeppo and Spinelloccio still happen in Siena. Peronella still enjoys her lover – on top of a barrel and in the presence of her husband – in Naples. Despite their Western – indeed Italian - settings, these tales of erotic adventures and transgressive behaviors are anything but virtuous domestic paradigms.

Salviati’s 1582 *rassettatura* of the *Decameron* is so unpredictable and at times even contradictory that it resists any comprehensive theory of expurgation. Any careful reader of Salviati’s work can thus only deem it an incoherent mish-mash of sixteenth-century cut and paste. Our job, then, is not to suggest a new model to supplant Brown’s, but rather to engage and understand this incoherence itself. Tracking Salviati’s meandering course through the *Decameron* reveals a method of expurgation dictated by no less an authority than the great text itself. Recall how the *Deputati* exposed their failure in their claim to have removed from the *Decameron* all that could be potentially dangerous, harmful, and offensive to any pious reader. The concept of

expurgation sat at odds with the way in which the *Decameron* appropriated its own interpretation. Salviati, however, embarks on a different project, one that focuses on the personal rather than the universal and accommodates, rather than affronts, the *Decameron's* own hermeneutic.

Salviati's expurgation is a demonstration of how the individual and community work together, as discussed earlier in this dissertation. His reading of the *Decameron* shows the experience of the innovative individual working in concert with the traditional social allegiances that bind him. Lionardo Salviati received authorization to expurgate Boccaccio's hundred tales from the Medici Grand Duke, Francesco I, himself commissioned by the Church to find a suitable expurgator. Rather than instructing Salviati to remove any passage that could be harmful or offensive to anyone, this charge requires Salviati to judge for himself which are the most inappropriate passages of the *Decameron*, those that are most in need of correction or elimination. Church and State entrust Salviati "con ampla et libera facultà di correggere et purgare detto libro, con tutte quelle conditioni, et clausole, che piaceranno al suo discreto iudicio" [with ample and free authority to correct and purge the book in question, with all those conditions and provisions that will be pleasing to his own discreet judgment].¹⁶⁰ The Grand Duke encourages Salviati to clip, cut, and rewrite those passages that he finds prick and sting most fiercely. Salviati's personal reading, however, is not exclusively individual.

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in Chiecchi and Troiosio, *Decamerone sequestrato*, 65-66. Also in the opening pages of the 1582 edition.

Salviati is so elected because the grand duke is “confidati nella dottrina et prudenza sua” [confident of his orthodoxy and prudence]. Salviati is the “persona idonea alla correzione del *Decameron*” [ideal person to correct the *Decameron*] because his own “discreto iuditio” is a trustworthy reflection of the powers that authorize his work. He is a man that reads and works on his own, but his personal work reflects and represents a larger established community and institution.

Rather than creating a consistent text, Salviati advances a specific method of reading. Notably, this method builds off of the *Decameron*'s own take on expurgation. The Author's Conclusion states: “Tuttavia che va tra queste [novelle] leggendo, lasci star quelle che pungono e quelle che diletmano legga” [However, whoever reads through these stories can leave aside those that sting and read those that delight] (Concl.19; 805).¹⁶¹ Salviati adds onto this foundation, identifying the post-Tridentine Catholic standard as the measure of each novella's prickliness. He also demonstrates how to use such ideological shears in the private and personal experience of reading, trimming and cutting back certain passages, reshaping and redesigning others. Salviati does not fruitlessly attempt to nip any future offensive reading at the bud. He creates a text that displays his own application of his patrons' ideals and policies, making the *Decameron* into fertile ground for cultivating the same allegiance in subsequent readers as it does in him.

¹⁶¹ Musa and Bondanella's decision to translate the reader as “he” is rather puzzling here, as the Author is addressing his female readers in this paragraph, an address made quite explicit in his previous remark to “semplici giovinette, come voi il più siete” [unassuming young ladies, as most of you are] (Conclusione dell'Autore/Author's Conclusion.18; 804).

Sitting on the edge: Marginal notes

As readers turn the pages of the 1582 edition of the *Decameron*, they find that Salviati all but abandons the tactics of deleting and rewriting that he had so vehemently, even if dishonestly, defended. The editor instead turns to the addition of marginal notes, a tactic not employed by the *Deputati*. These printed comments are Salviati's most obvious and most effective method of influencing his reader's engagement of the text.

This shift in technique happens at a moment in which the *Decameron* itself grapples with the difficulties of presenting irreverent material to a pious and impressionable audience. In the Conclusion of the Sixth Day, Dioneo, the *Decameron's* poster child for the obscene and the lascivious, proposes the next day's storytelling topic. He declares: "che domane si dica...delle beffe le quali o per amore o per salvamento di loro le donne hanno già fatte a' lor mariti, senza essersene essi o avveduti o no" [that tomorrow let us to talk about the tricks which, either in the cause of love or for motives of self-preservation, women have played upon their husbands, irrespective of whether or not they were found out] (6.Concl.6; 479). Fearful of the unidentified repercussions of such an endeavor, the text claims that: "Il ragionare di sí fatta materia pareva a alcuna delle donne che male a lor si convenisse, e pregavanlo che mutasse la proposta già detta" [Telling stories on such a topic seemed unsuitable to some of the ladies, and they begged Dioneo to revise the theme he had just proposed] [6.Concl.6; 479). Dioneo responds to these fears by drawing a sharp line between words and deeds: "pensando che il tempo è tale

che, guardandosi e gli uomini e le donne d'operar disonestamente, ogni ragionare è conceduto” [I believe that the times we live in permit all subjects to be freely discussed, provided that men and women take care to do no wrong] (6.Concl.8; 480).

Having separated these categories, Dioneo offers his own self as an illustration of his claims. Dioneo concludes his somewhat lengthy defense of his modest proposal with an absolutely erroneous bit of supporting evidence: “Senza che voi mi fareste un bello onore, essendo io stato ubidente a tutti, e ora, avendomi vostro re fatto, mi voleste la legge porre in mano, e di quello non dire che io avessi imposto” [You would be paying me a nice compliment if, having elected me as your king and law-giver, you were to refuse to speak on the subject I prescribe, especially when you consider how obedient I was to all of you] (6.Concl.14; 480). Dioneo has, of course, been anything but obedient to the previous monarchs. He has never spoken on command but rather, by claiming each day’s ultimate storytelling position, has placed himself outside of the monarch’s power. Nor is he in the habit of telling a story on a monarch’s chosen topic.¹⁶² In this statement, then, Dioneo demonstrates the viability of his own assertions - of the difference between speech and action.

Salviati picks up on Dioneo’s claims, making his own times just as appropriate a forum for freely discussed subjects as Dioneo made his. This approach is most clearly illustrated by Salviati’s marginal comments on Day Seven, the day that immediately follows Dioneo’s

¹⁶² Notably, he does stay on topic for Day Six, the day of witty retorts. At the same time, however, he does point out that his story is atypical for that day due to its length.

diatribe. Set in the idyllic *Valle delle donne* [Valley of the Ladies], Day Seven wanders into the realms of the rated-R, featuring cheating wives, jealous husbands, deceit, violence, and even brief nudity. Yet Salviati neither eliminates these elements nor recasts them into another “time and clime.” Rather, like Dioneo, he reminds the reader that these are simply stories, merely words, enjoyable fiction.

Salviati exploits the margins of the printed page to make sure the reader always remembers that he is reading a fictional text. By doing so, the censor is able to leave the page otherwise undisturbed. In the fourth story of that day, for example, Lauretta begins her tale by exhorting, even worshipping, a personification of Love: “O Amore, chenti e quali sono le tue forze, chenti i consigli e chenti gli avvertimenti!” [O Love, how manifold and mighty are your powers! How wise your counsels, how keen your insights!] (7.4.3; 503). Salviati’s only response to this blasphemy is a printed line at the side of the page: “Parlar poetico, e da una persona mondana” [Poetic speech, and from a person concerned with worldly matters].¹⁶³ This episode is harmless, offensive to neither the Church nor God, because it is a literary convention, an empty phrase from a created character. It can, therefore, remain unaltered. In another example, at the end of Day Seven, Salviati speaks to the reader from the margins alongside Filomena’s song: “Non prenda il lettore i concetti di questa canzone per cose dette da senno, ma per vanità poetiche, come sono la maggior parte delle ciance, che si cantano a ballo” [The reader should not take the arguments of this song as words of wisdom, but rather as poetic

¹⁶³ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Salviati, 363.

vanities, no different from most of the frivolous rubbish said when they sing and dance].¹⁶⁴ In this moment, Salviati takes the opportunity to comment not simply on the lines at hand, but on the larger work as well. Literary creation is itself taken to task and dismissed as lighthearted drivel.

Rendering the text a veritable orgy of fiction, however, has an effect beyond the literary liberation of the narrative's characters. Millicent Marcus points out a problem of authority inherent in the original *Decameron* that Salviati's reading of Day Seven would presumably replicate. She writes: "Boccaccio seeks to free his work from any absolute interpretive systems, demanding that the stories be read and received on their own terms, without recourse to extranarrative ideologies."¹⁶⁵ Even though Salviati could allow the various characters of the *novelle* and even the members of the *brigata* to deny extranarrative authority, he could not permit his sixteenth-century readers to do the same. Salviati's marginal notes resolve this problem, as they redefine the *Decameron's* promise to illustrate what to follow and what to avoid. Salviati gives his readers the positive instruction that the *Index* required but the *Decameron* lacked: look away from the glamorous portrayals of sin; look to the margins – to the manifestation of institutional power and authority – as a guide for right living.

¹⁶⁴ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Salviati, 398.

¹⁶⁵ Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the Decameron* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1979), 21.

Take, for example, Salviati's note to Fiammetta's introduction to the fifth story of Day Seven. In her opening comments, Fiammetta criticizes both spousal and legal authority. She begins:

Nobilissime donne, la precedente novella mi tira a dovere similmente ragionar d'un geloso, estimando che ciò che si fa loro dalla lor donna, e massimamente quando senza cagione ingelosiscono, esser ben fatto. E se ogni cosa avessero i componitori delle leggi guardata, giudico che in questo essi dovessero alle donne non altra pena aver costituita che essi costituirono a colui che alcuno offende sé difendendo: per ciò che i gelosi sono insidiatori della vita delle giovani donne e diligentissimi cercatori della lor morte. (7.5.3)

Illustrious ladies, I too am prompted...to tell you about a jealous husband, for in my estimation they deserve all the suffering their wives may inflict upon them...And if the lawgivers had taken all things into account, I consider that in this respect the punishment they prescribed for wives should have been no different from that which they prescribe for the person who attacks another in self-defense. For no young wife is safe against the machinations of a jealous husband. (508)

Salviati stands at the side of the page cautioning the reader:

“Avvertisca il lettore che costei non parla qui secondo il vero ne da senno, ma da persona mondana” [Let the reader be warned that she does not speak here according to the truth nor with wisdom, but rather as a person concerned with worldly matters].¹⁶⁶ While allowing the fictional Fiammetta to roam outside of moral and authoritative conventions, the Vatican censor blocks her rebellion from spilling out over the page. Truth, wisdom, and the powers that be may not influence Fiammetta, but they must influence her reader.

¹⁶⁶ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Salviati, 367.

Coda

The 1582 edition of the *Decameron* reminds its readers of the powers that hold authority over them. The volume opens with a long series of printed *privilegi*: government copyrights from the dukes of Milan and Mantova, the doge of Venice, the Medici, the d'Este - and many others.¹⁶⁷ These men, along with the Most Christian King of France and the Very Catholic King of Spain, fervently insist on the use of this expurgated text within their respective domains. This set of letters and the men, vassals of the pope and lords over Christendom, who signed them manifest the late-sixteenth-century readers' ideological obligations. Salviati's textual interventions operate in the same way; they indicate that the reader is beholden not to the text, but to a non-literary power. Salviati moves to deny the text any influence over the reader beyond the continued production of subsequent linguistically pure and stylish Tuscan prose.

Rather than attempting to control the text, Salviati reminds his readers of the controls already in place on them. The censored *Decameron* requires its readers to be well versed in their moral lessons before opening the book. Sixteenth-century readers must be confident of their ideological bearings, as the *Decameron* is no place to try to find them. The *rassetatura* only allows the meeting with a moral reader, not the creation of one. These readers must be able to remember and

¹⁶⁷ The list of *privilegi* and the men behind them are as follows: 1.) Milan, Don Sanchio di Guevarapadilla; 2.) Mantova, Guglielmo Gonzaga; 3.) Venice, Nicholas Deponte; 4.) Florence, Ferdinando I de' Medici; 5.) Ferrara: Alfonso II d'Este; 6.) Republic of Genova; 7.) Parma, Octavius Farnese; 8.) Urbino, Francesco Maria della Rovere; 9.) Piedmont e Savoia: Prince Carlo Emanuel; 10.) Republic of Lucca; 11.) Philip II of Spain; 12.) Henry III of France.

enforce the codified modes of behavior that rule their daily lives when facing the glamorous fictional portrayals of sin that abound in the *Decameron*. Ultimately, then, with the cunning work of Salviati, the *Decameron* becomes another vehicle for the Vatican to impose its authority on another cultural sphere, not because something has happened to the text, but by manipulating the printed book, the physical, technological, and visual means for presenting that text and manipulating the process of reading itself. These changes allow authority to establish itself not on Boccaccio's words, but on their readers, trying to ensure that each one of them reads the *Decameron* with that authority in mind.

CHAPTER FOUR

READING, WRITING, AND RESPONSIBILITY

In her work, *An Allegory of Form*, Millicent Marcus privileges the story of Griselda, because of its place of honor as the final of Boccaccio's hundred tales. Indeed, she alleges that her attention moves here because, as the ultimate story, Dioneo's story of Griselda "should be that tale which should retrospectively order the entire text in a coherent totality and complete its overall comic design."¹⁶⁸ But Marcus also admits that her expectations fall flat with this tale, that Dioneo's story does not offer any sort of finality or closure to the work as a whole, and that, it instead "raises many interpretive problems and calls into question those storytelling norms of the tenth day which had led [readers] to expect a satisfying and triumphant conclusion to the text."¹⁶⁹ It is exactly this disruption, this refusal of finality, that Marcus argues is the importance of the ever-enigmatic Griselda tale. She writes: "Dioneo denies closure on several levels, leaving open-ended his tale, the tenth day, and hence the text as a whole."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the Decameron* (Saratoga: Anma Libri, 1979), 104. Victoria Kirkham makes the same assertion, claiming that, "the final position is the point of a poet's greatest emphasis." See Victoria Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction*. (Florence: Olschki, 1993), 250. Robert Hollander and Courtney Cahill similarly insist that "a critical consideration of this last story is essential to a better understanding of the *Decameron*...because it is the last story and thus demands our attention as its endpiece." See Robert Hollander and Courtney Cahill, "Day Ten of the *Decameron*: The Myth of Order," in Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 137.

¹⁶⁹ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 102.

¹⁷⁰ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 102.

Marcus reads the Griselda story's resistance to closure as indicative of a larger resistance on the part of the *Decameron* as a whole. She continues:

Boccaccio builds into the work his awareness of the problematics of reading. And by refusing the *brigata* any resolution of its debate [over the Griselda tale], Boccaccio suggests the resistance of his text to any one absolute system of interpretation. Thanks to Dioneo, the *Decameron* remains open-ended, irreducible, and fodder for always another book on narrative technique.¹⁷¹

As might be ascertained from my writing thus far, there is much in these statements with which I wholeheartedly agree. Like Marcus, I read much of the *Decameron* as a self-conscious text that addresses the problems with and pleasures of reading. I also agree with what we might call Marcus's conclusion, that the *Decameron* will always prompt further debate and analysis, leading to no *final* conclusion or meaning.

Marcus's work suggests where further debate and analysis are necessary. In her commentary on the Griselda story, Marcus points out that: "If we read this tale as a lesson in reading, then several aspects of the narration gain new importance."¹⁷² One aspect central to Marcus's reading of the Griselda story, and thus to an understanding of the *Decameron* and its hermeneutic stance in general, is Dioneo's curious reference to Emilia's story on Day Seven about Gianni Lotteringhi, his wife Tessa, and her lover Federigo. According to Marcus, Emilia's tale is closely linked because, "Like the

¹⁷¹ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 102.

¹⁷² Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 105.

tale of Griselda, this story calls into question the stability of narrative discourse and the stock conventions of reading.”¹⁷³ Throughout her work, Marcus defines those “stock conventions of reading” as elements of the medieval exemplum tradition and considers the *Decameron’s* response to them, emphatically contending that the *Decameron* rejects the entire tradition.¹⁷⁴ She is particularly pointed in this stance in her closing chapter: “Serving as a model for human conduct, the exemplum posits a continuity between the work of art and the world beyond the text, thus violating the entire aesthetic of the *Decameron*, whose stories exist in a space apart from factual reality, told as they are ‘ne’ giardini in luogo di sollazzo, tra persone giovani.”¹⁷⁵ Using his position as the final narrator and buttressed by his reference to Emilia, “it remains for Dioneo to reassert the integrity of the text by separating it off, once and for all, from the tradition of the exemplum.”¹⁷⁶ Doing so, Boccaccio enacts, according to Marcus, a “radical departure from Dantesque influence and initiates a quest for another model.”¹⁷⁷ Marcus consequently insists the *Decameron* resists absolute systems of interpretation, literary models, and traditional reading practices. The *Decameron* aggressively frees itself from an aspect of its own literary heritage.

¹⁷³ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 103.

¹⁷⁴ For an alternative view, in which the author insists that Boccaccio relies heavily on maintaining the exemplum tradition, see Marcel Janssens, “The Internal Reception of the Stories Within the *Decameron*,” in *Boccaccio in Europe: Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, December 1975* (Louvain: Louvain University Press, 1977), 135-48.

¹⁷⁵ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 101.

¹⁷⁶ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 102.

¹⁷⁷ Marcus, *An Allegory of form*, 102, 112.

Separation and distance, refusal and denial, resistance and radical change are all central terms in Marcus's critical lexicon. These terms encourage me to go back to the text and to reconsider Marcus's comments as well as reevaluate the *Decameron* itself. Doing so leads me to propose that Marcus is too limited in her consideration of "stock conventions of reading." Judging the *Decameron's* lessons in reading only in terms of its negation of the exemplum tradition overlooks the ways in which the text also sustains other reading practices and thus distorts our understanding of the roles that the work plays in developing a humanist hermeneutic.

In this chapter, I expand our consideration beyond moments of resistance and radical change in order to help us appreciate the complex stance the *Decameron* takes on the practice of reading – a stance that endorses preservation and memory just as strongly as Marcus suggests it encourages denial and separation. In order to do so, instead of privileging the Griselda story, I see Dioneo's reference on Day Ten to one of Emilia's stories as a component in a much larger debate that spans the days of the *Decameron*. That debate engages the responsibilities of the effective speaker and careful reader, a debate that Pampinea explicitly initiates in the introduction to her story on Day One. Emilia links her story on Day Six to Pampinea's thoughts on responsible speaking and interpreting, but only does so to give a negative example of both. Dioneo, in turn, inverts Emilia's Day Six example in his own story on that day and then calls on her to begin the stories told on Day Seven. On this day, Emilia herself offers a depiction of crafty speaking and interpreting, expanding her take on

the responsibilities of the speaker and the reader as she does so. It is this expanded outline of the responsible use and reception of language that Dioneo recalls on Day Ten and uses as both a critique of Panfilo's story (10.9) and a source for some of the elements of his own tale (10.10). Focusing on these stories as parts of a dialogue demonstrates how the narrators both look backwards and forwards at the same time, a method of speaking and of interpreting that provides a final resolution for the *Decameron* itself.

One of these things is a lot like the other

Day One and Day Six are closely linked in the *Decameron*.¹⁷⁸ This link indicates how important it is for readers of the *Decameron* to keep in mind the material of previous days as they move forward in the text, for the narrators themselves, through the *Decameron*'s final tale, are constantly looking back as they move ahead. Both Day One and Day Six focus on the same topic, even though the narrators are not limited to a single theme on Day One. Fiammetta begins the introduction to her tale on Day One (1.5) making the comment: "Sì perché mi piace noi essere entrati a dimostrare con le novelle quanta sia la forza delle *belle e pronte risposte*..." [[Because] it pleases me that with our stories we have begun to show how powerful the force of *witty and ready retorts* may be] (1.5.4; 50, emphasis added). On Day Six, under the reign of Elissa, "si ragiona di chi con alcun leggiadro motto, tentato, si riscotesse, o con *pronta risposta* o avvedimento fuggì perdita

¹⁷⁸ For further information on the relationship between Days One and Six, see Pamela D Stewart, "La novella di Madonna Oretta e le due parti del *Decameron*," *Yearbook of Italian Studies* (1973/75): 27-67.

o pericolo o scorno” [stories are told about those who, having been provoked by some witty remark, have defended themselves with the same, or who, with a *ready reply* or some other shrewd move, have managed to escape danger, loss, or ridicule] (6.Intro.1; 444, emphasis added). Though Musa and Bondanella switch between “retort” and “reply,” the original Italian uses the same words in plural and singular form, “pronte risposte” and “pronta risposta,” linking the subject of Days One and Six together more closely than the translation would lead us to believe.

Beyond this, we can identify a striking consistency in the audiences that the narrators create for their quick replies on these days. On Day One, Filomena tells the first story of a witty retort (1.3) when Melchisedech tells a pointed story in order to escape one of Saladin’s traps. Following this tale, the narrators line up an international parade of wealthy and powerful men.¹⁷⁹ Each of these men changes or converts his life in some way once he has felt the sting – gentle though it may be – of a thoughtful reply.¹⁸⁰ In the last tale of Day One, Pampinea introduces an exception to this trend of savvy male addressees – the beautiful Bolognese widow Madonna Malgherida dei Ghisolieri and her genteel fellow ladies. These women provoke the

¹⁷⁹ 1.4, Dioneo: the abbot of a monastery in Lunigiana; 1.5, Fiammetta: the King of France; 1.6, Emilia: Florentine Inquisitor; 1.7, Filostrato: the abbot of Cluny and Messer Can della Scala (double audience); 1.8, Lauretta: Messer Ermino de’ Grimaldi, reputedly the richest man in Italy; 1.9, Elissa: the King of Cyprus.

¹⁸⁰ Saladin’s hostility changes to friendship (1.3); the abbot stops reprimanding the young monk and instead works out a plan for sharing the young girl (1.4); the King of France ends his lustful pursuit of the Marchioness of Monferrato; the Inquisitor’s aggression towards a rich young man changes to silent neglect (1.6); both the Abbot of Cluny and Can Grande della Scala change their inhospitable neglect to generous hospitality (1.7); Ermino de’ Grimaldi gives up his stinginess for gracious generosity (1.8); the King of Cyprus changes from a spineless wimp to a strong revenger (1.9).

aging doctor Maestro Alberto by mocking his affection for the lovely widow. The doctor quickly, though coyly and politely, responds with a commentary on women's eating habits that rebukes the ladies' lack of appreciation for his affection.¹⁸¹ The women, including Madonna Malgherida, reply to the Maestro. Madonna Malgherida acknowledges Maestro Alberto's courteous chastisement and changes her attitude towards his feelings for her.

We see a similar pattern develop on Day Six. While the source and style of their sharp retorts waiver – aristocratic women save their honor and their lives when they employ figurative language, a servant escapes punishment by improvising a droll witticism, a famous painter saves face with a prompt inversion of an insult – their receptive addressees, through the first seven stories, remain remarkably consistent: upper-class men. Filomena opens the day with an unnamed knight that she lauds as an astute listener. She depicts his transforming interpretation of Madonna Oretta's veiled criticism: "Il cavaliere, il quale per avventura era molto migliore intenditor che novellatore, inteso il motto e quello in festa e in gabbo preso, mise mano in altre novelle e quella che cominciata aveva e mal seguita senza finita lasciò stare" [The knight, who was fortunately much better at taking a hint than at telling stories, understood her witty remark, and taking it cheerfully and in a joking spirit, he began to talk of other things, putting aside the story he had begun and continued to tell so

¹⁸¹ For commentary on this story, see Millicent Marcus, "The Tale of Maestro Alberto," *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, ed. Elissa B. Weaver (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 222-40. See also Marilyn Migiel, "Figurative Language and Sex Wars in the *Decameron*," *Heliotropia* 2.2 (2004), 6 August 2009, <http://www.heliotropia.org/02-02/migiel.shtml>.

badly] (6.1.12; 448). Filomena's converted knight sets the tone for the whole day, setting a standard that is met by subsequent aristocratic male addressees: Messer Geri Spina; Antonio d'Orso, the bishop of Florence; Currado Gianfigliuzzi; Messer Forese da Rabatta; Piero di Fiorentino; and the unnamed judge in Prato. Note even the symmetry of this system: two unnamed men of high rank who speak outside of the city walls of Florence, frame four specifically identified male Florentine notables who speak inside the city walls.

As on Day One, conversion is an important and consistent response to a sharp quip. In 6.1, not only does the knight understand Madonna Oretta's comment as a request to stop narrating the story that he is telling so badly; he also moves on to recount other tales in a far more pleasing manner. His experience with the *leggiadro motto* transforms him from a bumbling idiot to an eloquent companion. Similar conversions happen in the subsequent tales: Messer Geri da Spina finds new respect for his humble colleague Cisti the baker; the bishop and viceroy of Florence run away in shame after Monna Nonna's rebuke to their obnoxious boasting; Currado Gianfigliuzzi's anger sublimates into delight; Messer Forese da Rabatta also finds himself quickly shamed and rebuked and guilty of the same ugliness for which he chides his talented compatriot; Michele Scalza transforms his betting competitors into elated comrades with a quick turn of phrase; and Madonna Filippa alters not only the judge's opinion, but indeed encourages changes in the laws of Prato while defending her adulterous exploits. Following a *leggiadro motto*, then, induces positive modifications in an attentive, male audience on Days Six, as it

had very similarly on Day One. As we shall see, however, not all audiences are such adept interpreters, and the requirements and responsibilities of productive interpretation preoccupy the narrators through the entire *Decameron*.

Cesca the exception

Day Six, like Day One, has a single exception to its fixed roster of alert male interpreters. Though her fellow narrators have established a model of converted male audiences, Emilia introduces a female addressee, Cesca. Cesca is the target of a *piacevol motto* [amusing remark] (6.8.4; 465) made by her uncle. Unfortunately, however, the girl does not follow her uncle's clever banter. Eugenio Giusti notes that Cesca's failure to understand and adapt to a witty remark makes her novella without compare in the entire *Decameron*. Giusti writes: "La novella di Cesca è l'unica in tutto il *Decameron* che termina nella completa incomprensione ed incomunicabilità delle due parti sul cui il dialogo si basa tutta la vicenda" [Cesca's novella is the only one in the entire *Decameron* that ends in the complete incomprehension and failed communication between the two parties on whose dialogue the entire episode bases itself].¹⁸² In my own analysis, I find that Emilia tempers Cesca's distinction, and thus the exceptionality of the novella itself, by strongly connecting this dense female protagonist to Pampinea's tale on Day One, the only other

¹⁸² Eugenio Giusti, "La novella di Cesca e la Sesta Giornata," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 18 (1989): 319-45, here 320. Kircher agrees: "Emilia's tale of Fresco and Cesca is the only one in the *Decameron* which displays the inefficacy of verbal wit, the *buon motto*." See Timothy Kircher, *The Poet's Wisdom: The Humanists, the Church, and the Formation of Philosophy in the Early Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 141.

instance on these days of a tale that depicts a female addressee.¹⁸³ In fact, Cesca, the girl who fails to understand because her interpretation is limited to literal understanding, is herself a portrayal of the unfortunately dimwitted women that Pampinea describes in the introduction to her tale on the first day.¹⁸⁴

Before launching into the tale proper, Pampinea offers a kind of soap-box commentary on women's relationships with witty quips. She laments that, while *leggiadri motti* are well suited to women's use, because no woman should ever speak at any real length, no female contemporary of hers is really skillful enough to understand such a remark directed at her or respond wisely to one. She bemoans the station of her fellow females when she says of *motti*: "oggi poche o niuna donna rimasa chi sia la quale o ne 'ntenda alcun leggiadro o a quello, se pur lo 'ntendesse, sappia rispondere: general vergogna è di noi e di tutte quelle che vivono" [these days few if any women understand a single witty remark or, if they do understand, know how to reply to one – a source of universal shame for us all and for every

¹⁸³ Here, then, we will see another strong and important connection between the women of Day Six and Pampinea's introduction to 1.10. In my analysis of the connection, I will focus on the understanding and interpretation of witty quips. For a discussion of their production and application by women, see Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), specifically Chapter 5, "Women's Witty Words: Restrictions on Their Use," 109-22, esp. 114-22.

¹⁸⁴ Giusti also notes a link between 1.10 and 6.8: "Il riferimento al volto di Cesca come bello ma non angelico ci ripropone la mediocrità non solo intellettuale ma anche fisica della donna con riferimento all'introduzione di Pampinea (1.10.5) [The reference to Cesca's face as beautiful but not angelic proposes again to us the mediocrity not only intellectual but also physical of the woman with reference to the introduction of Pampinea (1.10.5)]." Giusti, "La novella di Cesca," 323, note 7.

Kircher also finds precedents in the *Decameron* for Cesca. He does not compare her to Pampinea's impeded audiences, however. Instead, he links Cesca to the speaker of Emilia's ballad and to the narrator Emilia herself. See Kircher, *The Poet's Wisdom*, 139-43.

woman alive today] (1.10.4; 65). Pampinea continues to berate the dense and ignorant women she sees around her, gussied up like painted pigs but lacking any real conversational faculties: “queste così fregiate, così dipinte, così screziate o come statue di marmo mutole o insensibili stanno o sí rispondono, se sono addomandate, che molto sarebbe meglio l’aver taciuto” [these overdressed, painted, gaudy women either stand around like mute and insensitive marble statues or, if they reply when spoken to, it would be much better for them to remain silent] (1.10.6; 65).¹⁸⁵ These women who cannot thoughtfully interpret the word around them cannot judge themselves accurately either. They hold themselves in high esteem because of their extravagant trousseaus and insist that it is modesty, rather than any lack of intelligence, that limits their conversational skills. Oblivious to their own shortcomings, they display no potential of ever rectifying their regrettable inadequacy.

Pampinea’s introduction and her tale, however, do not follow directly along the same ideas; Madonna Malgherida does not display the faults that Pampinea so vociferously criticizes in her introduction.¹⁸⁶ Emilia’s Cesca, however, embodies the deficient ladies

¹⁸⁵ Pampinea actually compares the thick but well-groomed women she describes to donkeys (*asini*), but in keeping with the American convention to refer to “lipstick on a pig,” I choose to employ the porcine image.

¹⁸⁶ Migiel notes: “Pampinea disparages women because they do not speak well. But the narrative evidence from her story suggests a different motive. It is not that Madonna Malgherida lacks the instruments to speak effectively; it is that she does not respect the rule of male superiority. As far as one can see, Madonna Malgherida communicates her meaning plainly, both when she is mocking Mastro Alberto and when she apologizes. So it is unclear what it means that she speaks ‘badly,’ but for the fact that she dared to humiliate a man; she treated him like dirt” (*A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, 117).

Kircher makes a similar comment on Pampinea and 1.10: “The appearance of contradiction is heightened by her shift of focus. From impugning women for their

that so irritate and displease Pampinea.¹⁸⁷ Cesca is a tiresome fussbudget whose pride and cantankerous disposition make her entirely insufferable: “era tanto più spiacevole, sazievole e stizzosa che alcuna altra” [she was the most disagreeable, tedious, and insipid person herself] (6.8.5; 466). Despite such loathsome traits, Cesca holds herself in the highest esteem: “e tanto, oltre a tutto questo, era altiera, che se stata fosse de' Reali di Francia sarebbe stata soperchio” [moreover, she was so conceited that even in a member of the French royal family, such arrogance would have been considered excessive] (6.8.5, 466). Cesca, like the women of Pampinea’s Day One diatribe, suffers from an inaccurate estimate of her self worth. This estimate is connected to, if not grounded in, her sense of her own beauty and, most importantly, prohibits Cesca from any critical self-examination. Emilia introduces her main character by noting this problem: “ancora che bella persona avesse e viso, non però di quegli angelici che già molte volte vedemmo, sé da tanto e sí nobile reputava, che per costume aveva preso di biasimare e uomini e donne e ciascuna cosa che ella vedeva, senza avere alcun riguardo a se medesima” [While this girl had a beautiful face and figure – yet not in the same class with those angelic faces we often see – she had such a high and mighty

loss of words, she turns to advise them against speaking, be it incautiously or too often. Her story turns on the failed attempt by Malgherida dei Ghisolieri to rebuke a distinguished *maestro*: women should be careful not to transgress their social position before authority. Her opening account of women’s muteness and physical vanity has little to do with the final moral of their story and in fact conflicts with it” (*Poet’s Wisdom*, 132).

¹⁸⁷ This is not the only link between the two narrators in the *Decameron*. Brian Richardson connects the two narrators on Day Ten, identifying Emilia as the Ghibelline narrator who praises Pampinea’s story about Peter III of Aragon. See Brian Richardson, “The ‘Ghibelline’ Narrator in the *Decameron*,” *Italian Studies* 33 (1978): 20–28.

opinion of herself that she had become accustomed to criticizing every man, woman, and thing she laid eyes on, never noticing her own shortcomings] (6.8.5; 466). So important is Cesca's blinding mix of ignorance and arrogance that Emilia emphasizes it twice in the same sentence.

Cesca's uncle, however, does not share the confidence that his niece has in herself. Instead, he sees definite room for improvement and uses a *piacevol motto* to point out her disagreeable temperament in hopes of encouraging a change for the better.¹⁸⁸ Cesca unfortunately does not see the connection between her malcontent character and her uncle's admonition against looking in the mirror; she fails to understand his comment as an encouragement to self-betterment. Cesca understands her uncle's comment literally: "Ma ella, piú che una canna vana e a cui di senno pareva pareggiar Salamone, non altramenti che un montone avrebbe fatto intese il vero motto di Fresco, anzi disse che ella si voleva specchiar come l'altre. E cosí nella sua grossezza si rimase e ancor vi si sta" [But Cesca, whose head was more hollow than a reed, though she thought she was as wise as Solomon, understood the true meaning of Fresco's witty remark as well as some dumb animal might, and said that she intended to look at herself in the mirror just as other women would. And so she remained as stupid as she ever was, and continues to

¹⁸⁸ Cesca lets her uncle know that seeing disagreeable people upsets her. Emilia states: Alla qual Fresco, a cui li modi fecciosi della nepote dispiacevan fieramente, disse: "Figliuola, se cosí ti dispiaccion gli spiacevoli, come tu di', se tu vuoi viver lieta, non ti specchiare giammai" [To this remark Fresco, who was extremely displeased by his niece's disgusting attitude, replied: "My girl, if you find disagreeable people as disagreeable as you say you do, I suggest for your own happiness that you never look at yourself in the mirror again" (6.8.9; 466).

remain so to this day] (6.8.10; 467). Cesca's literal interpretation stymies her conversion, a conversion that we as readers might anticipate, given her churlish description, and have come to expect from the thoughtful interpretation of *leggiadri motti* by previous targets of them on Days Six and One.¹⁸⁹ Her inability to follow Fresco's quip beyond its literal meaning is anticipated, however, by Pampinea's rant; Cesca is as slow and dense as Pampinea's painted ladies who can neither understand nor respond effectively. Their connection is strengthened by the fact that both narrators liken their dull and obtuse addressees to animals. Pampinea compares them to an "asino" [donkey] (1.10.6), and Emilia says that Cesca understands as well as would have "un montone" [a ram] (6.8.10).

Though Emilia is especially critical of Cesca, the narrator makes it clear that her uncle Fresco is also at fault for this failure of communication. Emilia introduces her story by blaming Cesca for failing to understand her uncle Fresco's quip, saying that she is going to tell a story about "lo sciocco error d'una giovane" [the foolish error of a young girl] (6.8.4; 465). As we have noted earlier, however, Cesca wears her stupidity on her sleeve. Cesca's shortcomings preclude her from ever being a wise and witty interpreter. Added to this, of course, is the memory of Cesca's namesake, Francesca da Rimini, a woman

¹⁸⁹ I take my use of the word "literal" from Timothy Kircher, who identifies Cesca's error in terms of literal understanding. He writes: "Fresco's clever comment fails to spark genuine self-awareness in his niece. His remark is witty and true, but Cesca misses the pun and its ethical point, choosing only to hear its literal, physical meaning. She lacks the ability to perceive associative or poetic nuance, whereby a remark may be read 'by representing something through another.' She is so pleased with herself, so absorbed in her own image, that the figurative, reflected meanings do not touch her." See Kircher, *The Poet's Wisdom*, 141.

whose name is synonymous with problematic and unfinished reading. Despite all of these clues, however, Fresco decides to address his niece with a *piacevol motto*. In fact, it is because of Cesca's foibles – her “*modi fecciosi*” [disgusting attitude] (6.8.9; 466) – that Fresco employs the quick turn of phrase.

Fresco's failure reminds the audience of a speaker's fundamental responsibility to carefully consider the addressee in order to communicate effectively. Emilia thus provides another link to Pampinea's introduction in 1.10. Once Pampinea has completed her tirade against thick-headed women who cannot understand clever quips, she turns the course of her diatribe and opens her critique to include men as well as women:

È il vero che, così come nell'altre cose, è in questa da riguardare e il tempo e il luogo e con cui si favella, per ciò che talvolta avviene che, credendo alcuna *donna o uomo* con alcuna paroletta leggiadra fare altrui arrossare, non avendo ben le *sue* forze con quelle di quel cotal misurate, quello rossore che in altrui ha creduto gittare sopra sé l'ha sentito tornare. (1.10.7, emphasis mine)

It is true in this as well as in other matters, it is necessary to bear in mind the time and the place and with whom one is speaking, for it sometimes happens that when a *lady* or a *man* tries to make another person blush with some clever little remark, having misjudged the other person's powers, *she* finds that the blush which was intended to be put on the other person has been turned back and put on *herself*. (65, emphasis mine)

In their English language translation of this passage, Musa and Bondanella use only feminine singular pronouns to refer back to the speaker after Pampinea addressed her remarks to both women and

men.¹⁹⁰ This is unfortunate, because opening her audience to both women and men underlines the importance of what she is saying; it is a *universal* responsibility, a key feature of effective rhetoric, an obligation for *any* speaker looking to communicate.¹⁹¹ Pampinea then underlines this importance by telling a story in which Margherita de' Ghisolieri underestimates Maestro Alberto's powers to interpret and respond, leaving herself open to embarrassment. The narrator highlights her protagonist's flaw at the end of the story: "Così la donna, non guardando cui motteggiasse, credendo vincer fu vinta: di che voi, se savie sarete, ottimamente vi guarderete" [And so the lady, who had underestimated the one she chose to tease, instead of emerging victorious was herself defeated; and if you are wise, you will be very careful not to make the same mistake] (1.10.20; 67). Pampinea's last line reminds her fellow narrators that the speaker's accurate esteem of her or his audience is of critical importance. We see, then, that, when held up to the standards of effective communication established by Pampinea before her novella on Day

¹⁹⁰ The translators G.H. McWilliam and Guido Waldman both avoid this error by using the impersonal and changing from the singular to the plural. McWilliam writes: "In this as in other things one must, it is true, take account of the time and place and the person with whom one is speaking. For it sometimes happens that men or women, thinking to make a person blush through uttering some little pleasantry, and having under-estimated the other person's powers, find the blush intended for their opponent recoiling upon themselves" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam [London: Penguin, 1972], 108). Waldman translates: "Of course in this, as in everything else, some account must be taken of the time and place and who it is one's talking to, because it can happen to a woman, or man, that they're expecting to embarrass the other party with some offhand remark, but have failed to get the measure of the other party and end up put to the blush themselves" (Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, trans. Guido Waldman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 59).

¹⁹¹ In her speech, Pampinea does assume that the person being addressed is male; she cautions against misjudging the powers of "quel cotal" [that man]. The speaker, however, is a woman or man.

One, Fresco is just as poor a speaker as his niece is a reader. Thus, Emilia's story disrupts the line up of savvy male addressees on Day Six and links the story back to the *Decameron's* first day by sustaining images and descriptions first introduced by Pampinea.

Dioneo's two cents and a friar's hearty collection

Dioneo, the *Decameron's* ubiquitous bad boy, has a tendency to gum up any notions about consistency in the *Decameron*. Readers might expect this staunch separatist to undo any of the connections that other narrators make between their ideas and their stories. Certainly, in her own discussion of 6.10, Marcus emphasizes the significant changes that Dioneo makes on the mode of storytelling by comparing it to the *Decameron's* opening tale:

Whereas the example of Ser Ciappelletto generated a moralizing gloss which twisted the protagonist's mischief into perverse proof of divine benevolence, Cipolla's tale necessitates no exegesis. In the six days of storytelling which intervene between Ser Ciappelletto and Frate Cipolla, the frame story narrators have dispensed with the impulse to read providential significance into human fiction. They no longer feel the need to justify their artifacts in the name of an external system of meaning, and can now accept the absolute autonomy of their fictional construct.¹⁹²

Here, Marcus reads Dioneo's story as one of difference and separation, asserting that the later stories of the *Decameron* separate themselves from the previous tales within the work itself. This separation itself indicates a larger refusal on the part of the *Decameron* – a statement of the self-contained autonomy of the inapplicability of external systems

¹⁹² Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 66.

of meaning. Marcus does not include in her commentary, however, an examination of the important ways in which Dioneo also relates his Day Six story to previous tales in the *Decameron*. On this day, Dioneo, the typically dissident narrator, knowing that his audiences expect a rebel performance from him, explicitly declares his connection to his companion narrators.¹⁹³ Dioneo declines exemption from the topic that he notes that women have spoken so well about already. Closely examining Dioneo's story (6.10) about Frate Cipolla, his servant Guccio, and the ways the friar responds to a clever trick, we find that the topic to which Dioneo refers is not only the theme for Day Six, but also the broader discussion about effective communicative strategies and the obligations of careful interpretation and speaking that also preoccupies Emilia in her story of Cesca. He particularly underscores the crucial role the audience places in determining meaning.

Promising not to separate his story from its predecessors on Day Six, Dioneo makes multiple references to previous stories from many stories in the *Decameron*. At the most obvious level, Dioneo's story on Day Six is about the feathers of the angel Gabriel, someone who is impersonated by another immoral friar in Pampinea's story about Frate Alberto (4.2). Most of the connections, however, between Dioneo's tale and preceding ones of the *Decameron* are in reference to the servant Guccio Imbratta. Dioneo describes Guccio as being happier in the kitchen than a nightingale is on a green branch

¹⁹³ "Vezzose donne, quantunque io abbia per privilegio di poter di quel che piú mi piace parlare, oggi non intendo di volere da quella materia separarmi della quale voi tutte avete assai acconciamente parlato" [Pretty ladies, although I enjoy the privilege of speaking on whatever subject I please, I have no intention of straying from the topic on which all of you have spoken so admirably today] (6.10.3; 470).

(6.10.21), a description that has sexual connotations thanks to Filostrato's story on Day Five about Caterina da Valbona and Ricciardo Manardi (5.4).¹⁹⁴ Further, Guccio is a man "as ugly as the Baronci," a comparison that owes its punch to Fiammetta's story on Day Six (6.6).

Guccio's connections are strongest to the stories of Emilia. Dioneo alludes to his companion's narratives three times as he describes this greasy servant. First of all, the servant's name, Guccio Imbratta, comes from a character who Emilia introduces in her story on Day Four (4.7). Secondly, Guccio's dirty smock, blotted and mottled as if it had been dipped in the cauldron of the friars d'Altopascio (6.10.23), recalls Emilia's story on the first day in which the soup given out in charity is only a hypocritical sign of false generosity (1.6.19). Further, in a famously amusing litany of vices, Frate Cipolla lists his servant's flaws in rhyming triplicates: "egli è tardo, sugliardo e bugiardo; negligente, disubidente e maldicente; trascurato, smemorato e scostumato" [He's lying, lazy, and lousy; negligent, disobedient, and foul-tongued; heedless, careless, and bad-mannered] (6.10.17; 472). These three groups of three, as Vittore Branca indicates, recall Emilia's triune criticism of her ill-tempered protagonist: "la quale era tanto più spiacevole, sazievole, e stizzosa che alcuna altra" [she was the most disagreeable, tedious, and insipid person herself] (6.8.5; 466). Branca notes that "E per queste rime e assonanze in simili serie di aggettivi qualificativi cfr. VI 10, 17" [For such rhymes and assonances in similar series of adjectives see also

¹⁹⁴ In Filostrato's story (5.4), he uses the nightingale as a euphemism for the male member.

6.10.17] (751, note 4; my translation). Triplicate lists of quirks and shortcomings link together the servant and the shrew.¹⁹⁵

This link between Guccio and Emilia's stories, especially with the story of Cesca, is particularly important. It brings Dioneo's story into Emilia's discussion about Pampinea's rules for speaking efficiently. When Frate Cipolla opens his casket to find only a lump of coal where he expected a parrot's feather, he realizes he has been duped. He does not begrudge Guccio, however, for letting such a thing happen on his watch:

La quale come piena di carboni vide, non sospicò che ciò
che Guccio Balena gli avesse fatto, per ciò che nol
conosceva da tanto, né il maladisce del male aver guardato
che altri ciò non facesse, ma bestemmiò tacitamente sé,
che a lui la guardia delle sue cose aveva commessa,
conoscendol, come faceva, negligente, disubidente,
trascurato e smemorato. (6.10.35-36)

When he saw it was full of charcoal, he did not suspect

¹⁹⁵ Dioneo here both references and outdoes his model. Emilia rhymes two out of three words in her list; Dioneo rhymes all three. Emilia gives one set of triplets; Dioneo gives three of them. Imitating carefully, simultaneously Dioneo repeats and expands his model.

Marcus comments on Dioneo's adjectival triumvirate, but not in terms of its connection to Emilia. She writes: "In the three groups of rhymed triads which Cipolla uses to describe his benighted servant Guccio, Boccaccio offers a striking example of the friar's reduction of language to pure sound...So enchanting is this virtuoso performance in rhymed prose that we forget to consider its meaning. It is as if we are placed in an echo chamber where sounds are endlessly replicated – we admire the gimmick, but we do not ask what meaning it conveys" (*An Allegory of Form*, 70). Franco Fido looks at the two pairs together and argues that the two passages convey the narrators' contrasting attitudes towards their protagonists. He writes: "Now it seems clear to me that Cesca's sequence conveys the strong dislike of Emilia, the storyteller; for a character who, being a girl of her own age and social condition but unbearably tedious and fastidious, disgraces all Florentine ladies. In the nine adjectives used by Friar Cipolla for Guccio, on the contrary, we feel much indulgence and amusement, almost pride in his pet monster" (Franco Fido, "Boccaccio's *Ars Narrandi* in the Sixth Day of the *Decameron*," ed. Giose Rimaneli and Kenneth John Atchity, *Italian Literature, Roots and Branches: Essays in Honor of Thomas Goddard Bergin* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1976), 225-42, here 232-33).

that Guiccio the Whale had done this to him, for he knew him too well to believe he was capable of such tricks, nor did he even blame him for not keeping others from doing this; he merely cursed himself silently for having made him guardian of his belongings when he knew him to be so negligent, disobedient, careless, and absent-minded]. (475)

Cipolla repeats to himself his own description of his shoddy servant: negligent, disobedient, careless, and absent-minded. The friar blames himself for entrusting such a grave task as guarding the “relics” to such an unreliable fellow. Cipolla should have known better; like Cesca’s uncle, the friar should not expect from another what that person cannot give – whether it be dutiful vigilance or refined interpretation.

Unlike previous Decameronian characters, however, Cipolla is acutely aware of his mistake. While he erred like Fresco, Cipolla is not oblivious like Cesca. Dioneo thus adds a new element to the discussion on speaking and reading well: hope. His tale does not end with Cipolla’s mistake, nor does Dioneo use his protagonist only as a negative example. Instead, the story continues and Cipolla’s mistake reminds the friar of his obligations to judge his audience. Upholding the responsibility he previously neglected, the swarthy Cipolla ultimately benefits enormously from his loss, adroitly sizing up his new audience, the people of Certaldo, and using their shortcomings to his own advantage. Several times throughout the story, the population of Certaldo earns the description of devout but dense. At the opening of the story, Dioneo notes that, while Certaldo is a small village, “già di nobili uomini e d’agiati fu abitato” [was inhabited at one time by noble and well-to-do people] (6.10.5; 470). Later in the tale,

he notes that the crowd that welcomes Cipolla is full of “buoni uomini e donne” [good men and women] (6.10.8; 470). When they gather in front of the church to view the relic, however, Dioneo describes these same Certaldesi as “gli uomini e le femine semplici” [simple-minded men and women] (6.10.30; 474).¹⁹⁶ Dioneo exerts himself no little bit in order to illustrate just how sheltered and unaware this bumpkin-like population really is. Versed only in the local agricultural products of their local fields, these simple folk are entirely unaware of the luxury goods market that is expanding and developing around the world. As Dioneo says, “in quella contrada” [in that town] (6.10.28), the imported accoutrements of Eastern opulence that he calls “le morbidezze d’Egitto” [the luxuries of Egypt] (6.10.27) were all but unknown. So utterly ignorant are they of the ways of this world and yet so fervently desirous of earning themselves credit in the next, the people of Certaldo are ripe for deception.

Profiting from the Certaldesi’s twin features of ignorance and piety, Cipolla makes a great display of the charcoal that he finds in his casket, claiming it is from the coals that grilled Saint Lawrence to his martyrdom. The townsfolk are amazed and respond with great enthusiasm and even greater charitable offerings: “li quali poi che alquanto la stolta moltitudine ebbe con ammirazione reverentemente guardati, con grandissima calca tutti s'appressarono a frate Cipolla e, migliori offerte dando che usati non erano, che con essi gli dovesse toccare il pregava ciascuno” [The foolish throng gazed upon it in

¹⁹⁶ Here, not only are the men and women called “simple-minded,” but the women suffer a particular derision, enduring the derogatory label “femine” in place of the more respectable “donne” they had previously enjoyed.

reverent admiration, and they crowded around him and gave him larger offerings than they ever had before, begging him to touch each one of them with the coals] (6.10.53; 478). Aggrandizing on his audience's distinct characteristics and aware of their stupidity, Frate Cipolla makes out like a bandit. Dioneo creates a crafty friar who exemplifies the brilliant and effective orator. Notably, his success comes from pandering to his audience. He accurately judges their interpretive capabilities and motivations and so speaks to them at their own level. Where Fresco and Cesca fail, Frate Cippolla succeeds.

A ghost of a different color

Dioneo's hopeful and poignant response (6.10) to Emilia's negative story (6.8) does not go unnoticed by her. Dioneo, king for the *Decameron's* seventh day, calls on Emilia to be the first narrator of his reign, as if he is checking to see if his Day Six rejoinder and scandalous Day Seven topic have produced any change in his target. Indeed, it seems that Emilia reacts to the positive encouragement of his tale on day six as she opens the storytelling of day seven. We find Emilia in entirely different spirits now at the opening of Day Seven than she had been the day before. On Day Six, Emilia had been aloof and dejected when it was last her turn to tell a story, sighing as she starts to speak and admitting to being preoccupied by "un lungo pensier" [a heavy thought] (6.8.3-4). She opens the seventh day, however, "lietamente" [happily] and speaks "sorridente" [smiling] (7.Intro.10; 487). While such has been a common description of female narrators throughout the *Decameron*, it is the first time that

Emilia is depicted this way. Emilia thus exhibits a change in character.¹⁹⁷

The now-jovial Emilia begins her tale by connecting her title character with her previous protagonist as well as with Dioneo's pivotal story at the end of Day Six. Gianni Lotteringhi replicates Cesca's unfortunate shortcomings; he also shares the people of Certaldo's gullible stupidity. Emilia describes him as follows:

Egli fu già in Firenze nella contrada di San Brancazio uno stamaiuolo, il quale fu chiamato Gianni Lotteringhi, uomo più avventurato nella sua arte che savio in altre cose, per ciò che, tenendo egli del semplice, era molto spesso fatto capitano de' laudesi di Santa Maria Novella, e aveva a ritenere la scuola loro, e altri così fatti uficetti e vea assai sovente, di che egli da molto più si teneva: e ciò gli avveniva per per ciò che egli spesso, sí come agiato uomo, dava di buone pietanze a' frati. (7.1.4-5)

There once lived in the San Brancazio quarter of Florence a wool weaver who was called Gianni Lotteringhi, a man who was more successful in his trade than he was sensible in other matters, for although he was something of a simpleton, he was quite often elected leader of the laud-singers of Santa Maria Novella and had to oversee their performances and was frequently called upon to fulfill a number of other relatively unimportant duties, and as a result, he thought quite highly of himself; and yet the only reason these duties were given to him so often was that, being a man of means, he could provide the friars with some good meals. (488)

Like Cesca, Gianni is someone who has some merit, but is not truly praiseworthy. His mental capacity, sufficient to make him a successful businessman but not so great as to make him worldly and

¹⁹⁷ Typically, the Author does not describe Emilia's humor at the opening of her stories (2.6, 3.7, 4.7, 5.2). Previous to Day Six, the only exception is Day One, on which Emilia begins to speak "baldanzosamente" [boldly, confidently] (1.6.2). Confidence, however, does not imply or foreshadow Emilia's Day Seven happiness.

wise, is akin to Cesca's beauty, which made her attractive but not beautiful. Furthermore, like Cesca, Gianni has a woefully inflated opinion of himself, one that blinds him of his own ignorance.

Recalling Dioneo's story on Day Six, Gianni is "semplice" [a simpleton], as had been the people of Certaldo. Also, like the crowds that gave so generously to Frate Cipolla, Gianni is so strongly focused on religious practice that it blinds him to the fact that the friars are not honoring him but instead are actually taking advantage of him. Gianni's shortcomings curb his interpretive powers just as Cesca's foibles had limited her own; his stupidity and piety make him just as susceptible to deception as the people of Certaldo.

Gianni's narrow interpretive capacities, however, operate as fortuitous rather than catastrophic in this tale. In this story, Gianni is at home in bed with his wife Tessa, when Tessa's lover, Federigo di Neri Pegoletti, shows up knocking on their bedroom door. In order to calm both husband and lover, Tessa performs a mock exorcism. Her ritual acts as an explanation to both men, to Gianni for the knocking on the door and to Federigo for her refusal to open it. Beyond this, encoded in her prayer are directions for Federigo to follow in order to find his supper that night and Tessa again the next. Gianni engages his wife Tessa's speech at a superficial level and takes for granted the assumption that Tessa's words have only one meaning: there is a ghost outside, and we need to exorcise it. For the first time in one of Emilia's stories, however, the limited interpretive powers of a slow-on-the-trigger dolt do not result in some degree of calamity. In fact, Gianni's naivety seems to be without consequence. After Tessa

convinces her husband of the ghost's threat, recites an incantation, and Gianni punctuates the exorcism by strongly expectorating, the two simply return to bed. No catastrophe ensues; life returns to being normal.

In addition to a portrayal of limited interpretive capacities that is atypical in Emilia's stories, this tale evidences another striking novelty in Emilia's narrative trajectory. On Day Seven, Emilia adds a new figure to her repertoire: the knowing and clever interpreter, Federigo. Waiting outside Tessa's bedroom door, Federigo hears the same incantation that does Gianni, but gets much more out of it than does Tessa's dull husband. First of all, Federigo finds out that Tessa is not opening the door, because, despite the direction of the donkey's skull (the usual indicator of Gianni's whereabouts), Gianni is at home. Federigo, disappointed that he cannot enter the bedroom, is also reassured of his lover's devotion. Upon discovering that he is substituted by the husband and not replaced by another lover, Federigo's jealousy leaves him (7.1.28). Beyond these emotional reassurances, Federigo also collects a more tangible reward from Tessa's prayer: "Federigo, che con lei di cenar s'aspettava, non avendo cenato e avendo bene le parole della orazione intese, se n'andò nell'orto, e a piè del pesco grosso trovati i due capponi e 'l vino e l'uova a casa se ne gli portò e cenò a grande agio" [Federigo, who had not yet eaten supper, because he was expecting to do so with his lady, understood the words of the prayer very well, and so he went into the garden and at the foot of the large peach tree he discovered the two capons, the wine, and the eggs, and he took all of it home with him

and ate supper at his leisure] (7.1.30; 491). Following Tessa's words well leads him away from the bedroom to a peach tree, where he finds his supper waiting for him, and Federigo dines in luxurious ease.

Here, Emilia is making a distinction not only between literal and figurative language but is also demarcating the lines between words and their meanings. Just as the literal level of Tessa's speech (incantation) differed from its figurative meaning (instructions to her lover), so too do her words (directions to the peach tree) differ from the thing they point towards (Federigo's supper). While Gianni gets neither rewarded nor punished for understanding literally, Federigo gets handsomely rewarded for realizing the abundance of language and the multiple meanings that Tessa's words indicate. He recognizes an alternative meaning of Tessa's speech and, more generally, understands the relationship between words and their meanings. Language is dense and challenging, but ultimately ready to reward the reader who is prepared to follow where it leads.

Emilia's focus on the relationship between words and their meanings and the challenges that relationship presents is also a concern for Marcus. In her own reading of this tale, Marcus choose to not analyze the scene of the prayer but rather the donkey's spinning skull, which, she argues, exposes the instability of the linguistic construct, caused by the inevitable drift between the speaker and the audience. Her argument is worth quoting at some length here:

The position of the donkey's skull is a linguistic sign whose signifiatory function can be disrupted by the forces of accident and chance: a worker's caprice or a strong gust of wind. Language and linguistic constructs are thus

presented as anything but absolute, subject as they are to all kinds of external forces beyond the control of the writer. The instability of the linguistic construct, as revealed by the sign of the donkey's skull, is reflected on the formal level by Emilia's insistence that her tale is really an item of gossip – the most untrustworthy of human utterances. Though this may be another example of Boccaccio's self-deprecatory wit, it also testifies to the highly subjective, fluctuating quality of literary discourse. By reducing his storytelling to the level of hearsay, Boccaccio again discourages us from giving unequivocal authority to his narrative voice. His text comprises just one element in the chain of gossip, each link of which modifies and distorts stories like so many swipes at the donkey's skull.¹⁹⁸

In Emilia's story, a reader's judgment of the author's language is subject to unforeseeable distortion by mediating forces. Separated from the author's intent, the reader is both condemned and liberated at the same time. She is doomed never to have access to an original meaning, but as a result is liberated to enjoy an unlimited possibility of meanings. Marcus exhorts her readers to remember the lessons of this tale as they move on to consider others in the *Decameron*, namely that "no interpretation is absolute, that the linguistic sign is susceptible to infinite distortion and misunderstanding, and therefore that no version of the tale is final."¹⁹⁹ This reading is helpful inasmuch as it points to one of the central issues of the story: words and their multiple meanings. Marcus's analysis, however, has its drawbacks. Though a crucial element of Emilia's story, the failure of the donkey's skull as a reliable sign is not the tale's only component. Distilling Emilia's tale to the episodes with the donkey's skull – using this single sign as a metonymy for the whole of Emilia's story and

¹⁹⁸ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 104-5.

¹⁹⁹ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 105.

subsequently for the *Decameron* as a whole – handicaps Marcus’s thoughtful commentary of Boccaccio’s work, a work that consistently resists reduction and characterization.²⁰⁰

Expanding our analysis beyond the oscillating skull and engaging the episode at the bedroom door sustains the centerpiece of Marcus’s claims about the unstable signs and multiple meanings and at the same time draws out another explanation for that multiplicity. Tessa’s prayer, as I demonstrate in the section above, certainly offers a multiplicity of meanings. Hearing Federigo knocking at the door while she is in bed with her husband, Tessa offers a single prayer as a way to deceive her husband, as an attempt to get rid of her intruding lover, as a confirmation of her devotion to that lover, and as a veiled set of directions to his waiting supper. Multiplicity of meaning is an inherent feature of the prayer itself, not a condition that infects her words after she speaks them. Emilia thus adds another responsibility for the effective speaker. The successful speaker is someone who can appreciate and manage the abundance of language. Ultimately, it is the readers themselves – the gullible Gianni and the hungry Federigo – who determine what meaning they will take away from those offered by Tessa’s prayer. For Gianni, the exorcism is an invocation of divine power; for Federigo, the incantation is a coded message. Tessa offers it to them as both those things and more (a demonstration of her quick wit, evidence of her ability to deceive, etc.). Her words are a deftly presented deposit of potential meanings; it is the readers that

²⁰⁰ Note that Marcus calls the chapter in which she reads 10.10 and 7.1 as a linked pair, “The Marchioness *and the Donkey’s Skull*,” emphasis added.

choose and limit the meaning they find in them, to their own boon or bust.

Messer Torello goes to Alexandria

Dioneo recalls Emilia's Day Seven tale in his response to Panfilo's story on Day Ten: "Il buono uomo che aspettava la seguente notte di fare abbassare la coda ritta della fantasima, avrebbe dati men di due denari di tutte le lode che voi date a messer Torello" [The good fellow who was looking forward to lowering the ghost's stiff tail the following night wouldn't have give you two cents for all the praises you are lavishing upon Messer Torello] (10.2; 787). Though Dioneo directs this reference towards Panfilo's story, Marcus claims that Dioneo is linking his subsequent tale, the famous story of Griselda with key features of Emilia's story.²⁰¹ Again, Marcus makes an astute observation, but she chooses not to analyze an important feature of the passage she highlights. Dioneo's remarks do not just look forward to his upcoming tale; they also look back on the story Panfilo has just finished. It remains for us now to look back in and at the *Decameron* in order to analyze the relationship between this lightly lewd and derogatory comment with the central figure in the tale of munificence that precedes it. Using both Marcus's original commentary on the story of 7.1 as well as the expanded reading, I read Dioneo's zinger as a criticism of Messer Torello's inconsistent attitudes toward the

²⁰¹ Recall that Marcus writes: "An analysis of the tale of Gianni Lotteringhi will prove that Dioneo's allusion is by no means an arbitrary one. Like the tale of Griselda, this story calls into question the stability of narrative and the stock conventions of reading (*An Allegory of Form*, 103)."

influences on language as well as of his somewhat underhanded invitations to hospitality.

Messer Torello exhibits an inconsistent attitude towards the sway that external factors hold over speakers and their words. This inconsistency becomes evident comparing the scenes of Messer Torello's departure with the magnitude of his dependence on his own letter. As Messer Torello prepares to leave on crusade, Panfilo recounts a rather tender farewell between the knight and his wife, Adalieta. Adalieta promises constancy in her husband's absence, vowing that, even in the face of his death, she will remain always faithful to him and his memory. Messer Torello acknowledges his wife's sincerity: "Donna, certissimo sono che, quanto in te sar , che questo che tu mi prometti avverr " [Lady, I am convinced that if it were up to you, what you are promising would come to pass] (10.9.44; 776). At the same time, however, Torello exhorts her to consider the impact that her "fratelli e parenti" [brothers and relatives] (10.9.45; 776) will have on the course of her life. Since Adalieta is a beautiful young woman from exalted lineage, it is unlikely that her family will allow her not to remarry. In the end, it will be best for her to give in to their demands, and he tells her: "quantunque tu vogli...per forza ti converr  compiacere a' voler loro" [no matter what you want...of necessity you will have to comply with their wishes] (10.9.45; 776).

Torello's foresight hints at the definition of wisdom that Panfilo uses to introduce his suggestion that the brigata end their bucolic sojourn and return to Florence.²⁰² Rationally predicting the future,

²⁰² "Adorne donne, come io credo che voi conosciate, il senno de' mortali non consiste

Torello reminds his wife that the wise speaker considers not only personal desire when making a promise, but also weighs the import of external allegiances and obligations. Adalieta responds by qualifying her claim: “Io farò ciò che io potrò di quello che detto v'ho” [I shall do whatever I can to keep my promise] (10.9.46; 776). She incorporates the limitations on her will in this new statement and balances them with her own motivation; she will do as much as she herself can. As her speech is now wiser, it is also more beautiful, marked by rhyme and assonance. Even at the rhetorical level, then, Adalieta demonstrates the utility of recognizing the influence of her familial obligations on her future.

While Messer Torello acknowledges the impact that external forces can have on his wife's promise, he proves himself to be surprisingly unaware of the extent to which external factors can influence his own efforts to communicate. In other words, Messer Torello is oblivious to the lesson of the donkey's skull. The donkey's skull, as noted earlier, exemplifies the instability of language. It demonstrates the influence that external factors exert in the space between utterance and reception, namely that words are “subject...to

solamente nell'aver memoria le cose preterite o conoscere le presenti, ma per l'una e per l'altra di queste sapere antiveder le future è da' solenni uomini senno grandissimo riputato” [Lovely ladies, as I believe you know, human wisdom does not consist only in remembering past events or in knowing about present ones, but rather in being able, with a knowledge of both one and the other, to predict future events, which wise men consider the highest form of intelligence] (10.Concl.2; 799). I thus agree with Irene Eibenstein-Alvisi's reading of Panfilo's last tale, in which she points out various ways that Panfilo uses his story as a way to prepare the brigata for his suggestion to disband. My observation here adds another example to her list. See Irene Eibenstein-Alvisi, “The Dialogic Construction of Woman in the Italian Renaissance,” unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, August 2003, especially 95-114.

all kinds of external forces beyond the control of the writer.”²⁰³ Messer Torello underestimates the chances that the news he intended to reach his wife won’t get there. When Torello is a prisoner in Egypt, he can only think of his life in Pavia: “solamente in Pavia l’animo avea [he thought only of Pavia] (10.9.51; 777). Unable to escape and return home, he sends news of his survival back to his wife in the care of certain Genoese ambassadors who, in turn, would relay the information to Torello’s uncle, an abbot in Pavia.

Once Saladin recognizes Messer Torello, however, the knight no longer focuses as much on his life back home: “L’altezza della subita gloria, nella quale messer Torel si vide, alquanto le cose di Lombardia gli trassero della mente e massimamente per ciò che sperava fermamente le sue lettere dovere essere al zio pervenute” [The heights of this sudden glory in which Messer Torel found himself to some extent took his mind away from the affairs of Lombardy, especially since he fervently believed that his letters must have reached his uncle] (10.9.60; 778). One of the reasons for Torello’s shift in focus is his confidence, even if not his certainty, that his news has reached Pavia.²⁰⁴ He makes no other effort to send news to Pavia to follow up on his first set of letters. Messer Torello, however, soon learns the folly of his ways when he finds out that his letters never did arrive at their destination. A storm took the ship carrying the letters down and doomed all of its passengers to a watery grave (10.9.66), and, with no

²⁰³ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 104.

²⁰⁴ While the verb “sperare” can imply a degree of doubt, inasmuch as it means “to hope,” the adverb “fermamente” [solidly, really, firmly] qualifies the extent of that doubt, as does the use of the verb “dovere.” Messer Torello does not just “hope that the letters arrived,” he “firmly hoped that the letters had to have arrived.”

news of Messer Torello's survival, Adalieta is forced into a new engagement. In order to return to Pavia and reclaim his wife, Messer Torello must rely on the munificence of Saladin and the magic of the East. These supernatural machinations are the only means to make up for Messer Torello's misplaced and confident hopes that his letters would arrive at their destination. It is this naivety, in part, that Dioneo identifies when he says that Federigo di Neri Pegoletti (7.1) would not think Messer Torello worthy of the brigata's praise.

Further, as I have argued above, Federigo is not only a character who recognizes the instability of signs, he is also one that understands the abundance of meaning inherent in language and appreciates the benefits that abundance affords. Messer Torello, however, as my analysis of the tale will show, is a man who maneuvers around language so as to limit his public's possible responses, even to the point of avoiding language in order to guarantee and predict an outcome. When Messer Torello first encounters Saladin and his advisers travelling on the road to Pavia, the knight dupes the travelling ensemble into being his guests, having them brought to his home "senza che essi se n'accorgessero" [without their realizing it] (10.9.11; 770). This trick prompts Saladin, who Panfilo calls both a "valentissimo signore" [most worthy lord] (10.9.5; 769) and "accortissimo" [very astute] (10.9.13; 770), to comment on Messer Torello's motivations. Saladin: "s'avide che questo cavaliere aveva dubitato che essi non avesser tenuto lo 'nvito se, quando gli trovò, invitati gli avesse; per ciò, acciò che negar non potessero d'esser la sera con lui, con ingegno a casa sua gli aveva condotti" [realized that

this knight had been afraid they would not have accepted his invitation if he had invited them the first time they met. So in order to make it impossible for them to refuse to spend the evening with him, he cleverly had them brought to his home] (10.9.13; 770). Messer Torello's actions – having them brought to his home – reduces the possibilities of these men's reactions – they are not able to refuse spending the night with him. The knight restricts the agency of Saladin and his companions by foregoing a spoken invitation and determining the path of their travels for them. The next day, Messer Torello repeats the trick and constrains these travelers to be guests in his home. Panfilo describes their acceptance of hospitality in terms of defeat: "Il Saladino e' compagni vinti smontarono" [Overcome by all this, Saladin and his companions dismounted] (10.9.25; 772). Branca explains the term "vinti" as meaning "non potendo resistere" [not being able to resist].²⁰⁵ This term thus expresses the same restricted agency that hallmarks Saladin and his adviser's previous stay with Messer Torello. While Federigo benefited from Tessa's ability to manage the abundance of language, Messer Torello curbs potential responses.

Griselda and beyond

Dioneo identifies the dangerous potential in Messer Torello's playful tricks. The narrator then exaggerates this threat in his final tale depicting the relationship between Griselda, a peasant girl, and Gualtieri, the Marquis of Sanluzzo. Dioneo exposes the danger in Messer Torello's actions by exposing his mechanism of control.

²⁰⁵ Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, 1212, note 1.

Panfilo's great manipulator guides and limits his targets "senza che essi se n'accorgessero" [without their realizing it] (10.9.11; 770). It is only after Saladin and his companions are in a position in which they cannot refuse that they realize their options have been decided for them. Dioneo, however, highlights Griselda's submission to Gualtieri. Before marrying the young peasant girl, Gualtieri interviews Griselda in the presence of her father: "e domandola se ella sempre, togliendola egli per moglie, s'ingegnerebbe di compiacergli e di niuna cosa che egli dicesse o facesse non turbarsi, e se ella sarebbe obediante e simili altre cose assai, delle quali ella a tutte rispose di sì" [And he asked her, if he were to marry her, would she always try to please him, and would she never become angry over anything he said or did, and if she would always be obedient, and many other similar questions – to all of these she replied that she would] (10.10.18; 790). Gualtieri's limitations on Griselda are more extreme and their imposition more brash than are Messer Torello's on his guests. At the same time, both Gualtieri and Messer Torello severely restrict the possible responses of the people they invite into their homes. Griselda suffers so much in the story because she, like Saladin, has her options limited by an external force. While Saladin was fortunate enough to be subject to the machinations of a generous knight, Griselda subjects herself to the whims of a man who, according to Dioneo, is characterized by "una matta bestialità" [an insane cruelty] (10.10.3; 787). Torello's hospitable pranks become Gualtieri's onerous authority. In turn, Saladin's grateful debt becomes Griselda's steadfast obedience.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ As much as Griselda is similar to the Saladin of Panfilo's story, she is different

By expanding the examination of Dioneo's reference to Emilia's story and analyzing how it looks back to Panfilo's story as well as ahead to Dioneo's own, my reading adds to the assertions that Marcus originally made about the Griselda story. Marcus asserts that the key feature of the tale is Dioneo's effort to highlight the *Decameron's* multiplicity of meanings. She writes: "Far from unifying and justifying the preceding text, the teller opens it up to a multiplicity of possible interpretations."²⁰⁷ Beyond this, I assert that Dioneo emphasizes the reader's prerogative to witness that abundance of meaning. He references a story in which Emilia depicts the responsibility of the reader to engage the dense and rich language of a text and rewards Federigo for his adroit navigation of it. What Emilia depicts as a responsibility on Day Seven, Dioneo represents as a necessity. In order for readers to have the opportunity to reap the rewards the text has to offer, they must have unrestricted access to that text and the opportunity to judge and discern its multiplicity of possible interpretations.

In the conclusion to the *Decameron's* last day, the readers demonstrate that discernment:

La novella di Dioneo era finita, e assai le donne, chi d'una parte e chi d'altra tirando, chi biasimando una cosa e chi un'altra intorno ad essa lodandone, n'avevan favellato, quando il re...così cominciò a parlare...(10.Concl.1)

Dioneo's tale had ended, and the ladies, some taking one

from his Adalieta. As noted above, Messer Torello encourages his wife to balance personal desire with familial obligation. Griselda does not have this balance in the promises she makes to be an obedient wife to Gualtieri. She does not make a promise as a wise speaker.

²⁰⁷ Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 102.

side and some taking the other, some criticizing one thing about it and some praising another, had discussed the story at great length...when the King began to speak in this fashion...(798)

The brigata responds to the story with a discussion. They do not just praise, they debate; they see good points and bad in the story. The brigata reacts to the abundance of the text. They enact their responsibilities as an audience, to discern and appreciate as many aspects of the text as is possible for them and to respond appropriately to each individual piece. When the king does begin to speak, he proposes a return to Florence, a proposal that again sparks a discussion: “I ragionamenti furon molti tra le donne e tra' giovani, ma ultimamente presero per utile e per onesto il consiglio del re, e così di fare diliberarono come egli aveva ragionato” [The discussion between the ladies and the young men was long, but finally, having decided that the King’s advice was sensible and proper, they all decided to do as he had said] (10.Concl.8; 799). The brigata considers the King’s proposal before deciding that it is a helpful suggestion.

So the ten young narrators return to Florence, a city they had left, declaring it only a place of death and sorrow. Now, however, the group is perhaps better prepared to appreciate the potential of the city itself – to search for the good and the hopeful amid the destruction and grief. Having proven as narrators that they are accomplished practitioners of the “senno de’ mortali” – the judicious balance of looking forward and backward at the same time – Panfilo exhorts them to incorporate that same skill in their lives back in the city. They now face the challenge of recognizing the best path to navigate through

Florence's dangerous environs, but are prepared to accept that challenge, rather than run from or give in to it.

CONCLUSION

Having thought about the end of the storytelling days of the *Decameron*, I now must consider the end of my own efforts. Writing as I am now in the throes of an H1N1-virus outbreak in New York City and at the opening of a potentially cataclysmic climate crisis, my own twenty-first century circumstances recall some of the more gruesome aspects of the fourteenth-century Florence to which the young narrators return at the end of the *Decameron*. I regretfully lack, however, the aristocratic accoutrements – servants, country villas, gambling dice, etc. – that supported Boccaccio’s narrators as they evaded infection. At this point, I find greater affinity with the Author than I do with the narrators, as I employ a strategy of looking back to the beginning of his work now that we reach its end. The Author opens his concluding statements with a claim of satisfaction:

Nobilissime giovani, a consolazion delle quali io a così lunga fatica messo mi sono, io mi credo, aiutantemi la divina grazia, sì come io avviso, per li vostri pietosi prieghi, non già per li miei meriti, quello compiutamente aver fornito che io nel principio della presente opera promisi di dover fare: per la qual cosa Idio primieramente, e appresso voi ringraziando, è da dare alla penna e alla man faticata riposo. (Conclusione dell’Autore, 1)

Most noble ladies, for whose happiness I have set myself to this lengthy task, I believe that with the assistance of divine grace and your pious prayers, rather than my own merits, I have completely fulfilled what I promised to do at the beginning of the present work; now, after rendering thanks first to God and then to you, it is time for me to rest my pen and my weary hand. (802)

This statement, of course, recalls the *Decameron*’s proem, in which the Author promised lovelorn women “diletto” [delight] and “utile consiglio”

[useful counsel] (Proem, 14; 5). Earlier in my study, I pointed out the importance of the Author's initial guarantees and did my part to unpack the implications they have for the reader's experience of the text. Now, the Author's concluding remarks resonate with some of the arguments that I myself have presented in this study. His words and images, then, can serve as my starting point as I begin to look back over my own work.

Note, first of all, the Author's gratitude to his female public for their pious intercession on his behalf. The Author identifies a critical responsibility that the women have in the creation of the text and the successful execution of his project of offering pleasure and useful counsel. The Author thus acknowledges an active part – in this case support and encouragement – that the women play in the production of the text. Such an acknowledgement recalls my first chapter, in which I focused on the responsibilities of the reader. In my chapter, in which I use theories of parody and creative imitation as a way to discuss moments of the *Decameron* that thematize reading, I too identified an active reader, but of a different sort.

While the Author claims that his female public has offered support and encouragement, I assert in my first chapter that it is the reader's role as an alert and discerning critic of the text that makes for a productive reading experience. Readers must be prepared to judge perceptively the episodes before them rather than disposed to follow blindly any instruction that the stories may ostensibly propose as beneficial. This closing invocation by the Author highlights the moment of my chapter that denies the identification of any

consistently trustworthy guide through the *Decameron*. As the Author's Conclusion continues, the sexual innuendos of his language call into question what pleasures he is suggesting his female audience now support. Through the very end of the *Decameron*, then, we find that the reader's search for useful advice and pleasure in the Author's literary endeavors must be guided by careful eye.

Second, the Author's recognition of his own personal limitations and his reliance on female intercession reflects the *Decameron's* balance between the individual and the community that I made the focus of my second chapter. Recall that I argued that the *Decameron* does not consider its readers as insulated and isolated entities whose interpretive decisions reflect only personal will and desire, but rather as influenced and influential members of broader communities. I further have asserted that their participation in those communities is marked by gender – most especially in the ways that male and female narrators operate as monarchs and organize the storytelling activities. The opening lines of the Author's conclusion that credit his success the women's intervention is another example of a commitment to the idea that the larger community serves as a necessary supplement to an individual's own abilities.

While the *Decameron* does present its readers with multiple perspectives on communal participation – from within the stories, from between the narrators, and from the Author himself – it does not clearly resolve them. Instead, it lacks a final verdict on its different, sometimes even contradictory, proposals. Nor do I discern from the *Decameron* the endorsement of one method of communal organization

over another. That is to say, I do not readily find any single ideological category that ultimately dominates all of the others. Multiple perspectives within the text – of characters in the stories, of the story’s narrator, of the members of the brigata, of the Author – remind the reader that there are multiple possibilities of interpretation, such as influences of the Church, the reader’s family, the reader’s civic surroundings, and the reader’s own natural, especially sexual, desires. As an example of this dilemma, I remind my own readers of the opening of my study. What is most remarkable is the *Decameron*’s flexibility. That plasticity becomes apparent when comparing the ways that two groups as disparate as the American pornography industry and the post-Tridentine Catholic Church have used the *Decameron* to promote strikingly different agendas. *Playboy* corralled the stories to promote male-dominated sexual fantasies; the Vatican used it to circulate post-Reformation piety and express papal power and might. In order to advance each agenda, however, the active parties had to alter not only the text but also its physical representation, making the materiality of the text an integral element of the work’s relationship to ideological goals.

While the text itself does not identify a specific community, we must not disregard the ways in which the *Decameron* has been appropriated as a means of advancing, spreading, and evangelizing certain ways of thought. My work demonstrates that to do so, however, we must engage issues and questions that look beyond only the narrative elements of the text, and engage issues of the materiality of the text, issues that are usually limited to studies in history of the

book, and understand their influence on the experiences of reading and interpretation.

Multiple, simultaneous, even conflicting views are a hallmark of the *Decameron*. Perhaps readers should not be so surprised that the *Decameron* leaves certain ideological questions unresolved nor so concerned over the reduction of the text to a single moral lesson. For example, rather than debating whether or not the *Decameron* can be considered a feminist text, whether or not the *Decameron* supports sexual behavior practices codified by the Church, and whether or not the *Decameron* completely rejects clerical authority, we should be analyzing the tensions that these issues create in the *Decameron*. We must examine the complex ways these ideas develop in the stories over various days, between certain narrators, and in specific environments, including both the storytelling setting and the location of the tales themselves. Fretting over a single resolution to these issues denies the *Decameron* any authenticity in its status as a dialogue, when it is the discursive element of the text that raises its most engaging issues. Readers of the *Decameron*, from university students to veteran literary scholars, are wont to reference and analyze individual stories without considering their operation within the larger framework of the text. Here I do not simply mean a relationship with the frame-tale narrative, but indeed with the overall development of characters and ideas in the text as a whole – a move made by scholars like Marilyn Migiel who work to understand the larger dialogic elements of the *Decameron*.

The plague of selective, perhaps even reductive, reading of the text is not isolated to *Decameron* studies. John Najemy, in his study

of Leon Battista Alberti's *Libri della famiglia*, laments a similar trend in studies of that text and highlights the benefits of appreciating a work's obvious, though too often neglected, dialogic elements.²⁰⁸ He writes: "Social and intellectual historians with very different agendas frequently lift passages from the text and claim to find in them either a description of actual social practices and/or Alberti's prescription for the same."²⁰⁹ Offering his own study as a remedy to these trends, he asserts that, "in drawing attention to the obvious fact that Alberti's book is a series of dialogues, not a treatise, and that it is essential to look carefully at how the text constructs its characters" leads to what he calls "a more literary reading," the benefits of which include revealing "the complexity of the interaction among the speakers and thus the difficulty of seeing in the text the promotion of any particular ideology."²¹⁰ My final chapter moves *Decameron* studies in the direction indicated by Migiel and Najemy, a crucial move in developing our understanding of the way that the *Decameron* considers the presentation and interpretation of ideas.

Equally important is my focus on a reader whose interpretive strategies carefully balance communal standards and personal ambitions. Drawing attention to this figure prompts further investigation into the categories of the communal and the personal in the *Decameron* and how they influence the creation of meaning. Indeed, communal alliances tantalize the reader from the pages of the

²⁰⁸ See John Najemy, "Giannozzo and His Elders: Alberti's Critique of Renaissance Patriarchy," *Society and Individual in Renaissance Florence*, ed. William J. Connell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 51-78.

²⁰⁹ Najemy, "Giannozzo and His Elders," 53.

²¹⁰ Najemy, "Giannozzo and His Elders," 53.

Decameron. Certainly debates on gender and class merit further exploration, and the influences of civic, economic, religious, and family ties will undoubtedly induce analysis of the roles that still other categories play in the process of interpretation.

As our investigation proceeds, we must realize that these communal allegiances are not discreet categories, but indeed it is their interplay – the ways they overlap and the ways they contest each other – that will prove to be the most interesting. My prediction reflects the work of Linda Hutcheon who notes that all readers “belong to many overlapping and sometimes conflicting communities or collectives” which both affect and effect communication.²¹¹ The *Decameron* advances a reader grappling with what Hutcheon describes as “those strangely enabling constraints of discursive contexts,” including not only space and time, but also “class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual choice – not to mention nationality, religion, age, profession, and all the other micropolitical groupings in which we place ourselves and are placed by our society.”²¹² Recognizing the reader’s multiple allegiances, I would add, will offer another opportunity for evaluating our sense of the personal. It is the interplay of these influences that creates individuals for whom reading is not a selfish experience, but rather a moment to analyze, renew, and evolve their communal alliances.

While making contributions to the field of *Decameron* studies, my work also has wider appeal. My study of the *Decameron*’s censored

²¹¹ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994), 88.

²¹² Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, 88.

editions examines the fears and anxieties of the powers that be at a time of technological advancement and moral unrest. Surely the parallels of our own period cannot be overlooked. The access that the internet offers to uncontrollable resources and the panic that groups have over how to regulate and manage this access is manifest in the various campaigns to create a rating system for online material and the multiple blocking and surveillance programs used to police individual internet use. The unease and apprehension that lead to such supervision is perhaps not all that different from a sixteenth-century prelate's worries how the private experience of reading may tempt an unguarded reader towards sin or even encourage a disgruntled parishioner towards defiance.

Further, by placing such import on the materiality of the text, my work sets up interesting problems for the digital age. Teenagers set to do their first research reports in middle school are more likely to begin their work with a Google search than by pulling a leather-bound set of encyclopedias off the library shelf. Subway commuters who carry a Kindle in their messenger bags may perhaps become the most avid readers of the twenty-first century.²¹³ These new interfaces are changing the experience of reading and will continue to do so. It is perhaps this loss of the material element – or at least of the “printed book” element of the material – that make studies of the actual pages themselves most interesting and pressing.

²¹³ They may even become readers of the *Decameron*, which is currently available as a free download for Kindle owners.

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