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The Gods Which Are Not: Religious Boundaries and Exchange in Boccaccio's *Il Filocolo*[*]

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"Sepera le sante reliquie dalle inique, ché non è giusta cosa che una terra quella che l'altre occupi […] Voi le vedrete tutte vermiglie rosseggiare, come se di fuoco fossero, e quelle che così fatte vedrete, di quelle sicuri vivete che siano de' romani giovani morti in questo luogo."
    --Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, V.90.2-4[1]

After the numerous travels and trials at the heart of the *Filocolo*, the protagonists Florio and Biancifiore return to the field of battle where the *romanzo*'s events were set in motion, and where we as readers are presented precisely with the scene described above: a field covered in bones, "de' romani e degli spagnoli insiememente mescolate" ("of Romans and Spaniards mixed together," V. 88.5), with the bones of the Romans glowing vermilion. Yet as the text points out in its first pages, the difference imbued in those bones is not ethnic or political, but religious: their red phosphorescence is the reification of their sacredness, for they are the bones of Christians, and their holy quality is made visible by the program of religious conversion that undergirds the entirety of Giovanni Boccaccio's youthful *romanzo.* As much as it is a marker of the sacred, that red glow is a sign of anxiety concerning the need to separate the "sante" from the "inique," to not let those two spheres touch. While Boccaccio seeks to hold them apart, they are forever linked, for if the category of *sacer* is anything, it is ambivalent: at once holy and unclean, held together in a point of contamination.[2]

Written around 1335, the *Filocolo* tells the popular medieval tale of *Floire* (or *Floris*) *and Blancheflor,*[3] known throughout medieval Europe from various vernacular renditions but most famously from Old French verse tales.[4] It is one of two medieval Italian versions,[5] but is

[1] "Separate the holy relics from the wicked, for it is not just that one ground contain them both. […] You will see them blushing vermilion, as if they were of fire, and those that you see thus, you may be sure that they belong to the young Romans that died in this place." All citations of the *Filocolo* are from *Filocolo*, ed. A. Quaglio, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, Vol. I, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1967). English translations throughout are from the translation by Donald Cheney with the collaboration of Thomas G. Bergin, *Il Filocolo* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985).
[2] There has been much recent work on the so-called "ambivalence of the sacred," particularly in biopolitics. I follow the concept set out by Giorgio Agamben in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), in particular 75-80.
[3] Throughout this paper, as in most scholarly discourses on the tale, "*Floire and Blancheflor*" will be used to refer to the complex of tales about the characters Floire and Blancheflor. The names of the characters that appear in Boccaccio's text will be the Italian versions used by the author: Florio and Biancifiore.
[4] The most comprehensive study of the different variants is Patricia E. Grieves, '*Floire and Blancheflor' and the European Romance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
[5] The other Italian version is the *Cantare di Florio e Biancofiore*, a verse rendition in *ottava rima* of unknown authorship, believed to be either contemporary with or later than the *Filocolo*. For more on this other version, see Grieves, *Floire and Blancheflor,* 208; Victoria Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio's 'Filocolo' and the Art of Medieval Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 3; and Elissa Weaver, "A Lovers' Tale and Auspicious Beginning (*Filocolo*)," in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, eds. Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet Levarie Smarr (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 89.

also the first prose romance written by Boccaccio as well as the first to appear in the Italian vernacular.[6] Despite variations, these are tales of the medieval Mediterranean, a world of cultural, linguistic, mercantile, and religious exchange, characterized by permeability. Moreover, these are tales of conversion to Christianity. Although most versions of *Floire and Blancheflor* present a negotiation of the space between Islam and Christianity in the Mediterranean, the *Filocolo* presents a Mediterranean world governed by worship of pagan deities that, as in Boccaccio's later work, prefigure Christianity. It is a space that seems to consist of both the pre-Christian and the Christian. Such a barrier, etymologically speaking, would suggest permeability only in one direction: conversion from paganism to Christianity. Yet as those glowing bones remind us, the process of conversion reaffirms the ambivalence of the sacred. This essay will attempt to show that Boccaccio undermines his own revision of the *Floire and Blancheflor* tale by representing a space dependent upon the instability of this barrier, creating an imaginary Mediterranean susceptible to the same instabilities as the historic one through his active inclusion of the Roman deities. Or to put it another way: in trying to create a space that is ever moving towards Christian homogeneity, Boccaccio paradoxically represents the constant permeability of boundaries, engendered by various forms of exchange in the medieval Mediterranean. He does this in the text through his treatment of the Roman deities, a representation compounded by elements of heredity, trade, class, and social identity.

These various elements are integrated throughout the whole of the *Filocolo* and constitute slippages in the rhetoric of representation. The broad strokes of the text's story, however, remain similar to the source tales. A group of Catholics from Rome go on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain. En route, they are met and killed by the army of the Arab King of Spain, Felice, who thinks they are a foreign army. The only survivor is a pregnant woman who, revealing their identity as pilgrims, is taken in by the king. This woman gives birth to a daughter on the same day that the Spanish queen gives birth to a boy. As the children physically resemble each other, the Spanish prince is named Florio and the Christian girl is named Biancifiore. They are raised together and soon fall in love. Felice disapproves of this love and tries to separate them, first by sending Florio away to study, then by trying to frame Biancifiore for an attempted poisoning, and finally by selling Biancifiore as a slave to merchants. Florio sets off to find her, travels around the Mediterranean, and finally traces her to the harem of a sultan in Babylonia.

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[6] Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular,* 2. The critical bibliography on the *Filocolo* is notably less extensive than that on Boccaccio's other work, and has often been characterized as seeing a lack of structural coherence in the text. For a summary of the critical views on the *Filocolo*, see Steven Grossvogel, *Ambiguity and Allusion in Boccaccio's 'Filocolo'* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1992), 9-30, and Weaver, "A Lovers' Tale," 93. For the text's relation to the rest of Boccaccio's corpus, particularly in regard to the *Decameron,* as the *romanzo* has as its centerpiece a series of "Questioni d'amore," i.e. the questions of love narrated by various members of a *brigata*, see Kirkham; Gaetano Pastore, *Boccaccio romanziere* (Palermo: Herbita Editrice, 1980); and Grossvogel, *Ambiguity and Allusion*, 193-244. For the text in relation to the textual tradition of *Floire and Blancheflor,* see Grieves, '*Floire and Blancheflor'.* For Boccaccio's use of Virgil and of Latin learning, see James H. McGregor, *The Image of Antiquity in Boccaccio's 'Filocolo,' 'Filostrato,' and 'Teseida'* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1991), and *The Shades of Aeneas: Imitation of Vergil and the History of Paganism in Boccaccio's 'Filostrato,' 'Filocolo,' and 'Teseida'* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991). For the text's relation to broader European romance see Roberta Morosini, *"Per difetto rintegrare": una lettura del 'Filocolo' di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2004) and "La 'morte verbale' nel *Filocolo*: il viaggio di Florio dall' 'imagine' al 'vero conoscimento'," in *Studi sul Boccaccio* 27 (1999):183-203. The issue of Boccaccio's utilization of the Roman pantheon has also been of critical concern, appearing in Grieves, Grossvogel, and Kirkham; Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Janet L. Smarr, "Boccaccio's *Filocolo*: Romance, Epic, and Religious Allegory," *Forum Italicum* 12:1 (1978): 26-43; and Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

The two marry and begin the return journey to Spain, but while passing through Rome discover Biancifiore's Christian heritage and the Christian Gospel. The entire party subsequently converts to Christianity, and Florio eventually extends this to the entire kingdom of Spain.

The Roman deities, however, appear within the first lines of the *Filocolo*. Figured here allegorically as aspects of Christianity and Christian doctrine, they reveal a complicated representation of history that governs the entire text.[7] The work begins as follows: "Mancate già tanto le forze del valoroso popolo anticamente disceso del troiano Enea, che quasi al niente venute erano per lo maraviglioso valore di Giunone" ("By now so diminished were the forces of that brave race originally descended from Trojan Aeneas, that they had been virtually eradicated, all through the wonderful power of Juno," I.1,1). As should not be surprising to readers of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, these lines introduce a frame narrative instead of the story of Florio and Biancifiore. They are an account of contemporary fourteenth-century history viewed through the lens of the Roman origin myth of Aeneas, and introduce the scene of Boccaccio's love, Fiammetta, charging the author to write out the subsequent story. The proper action of the *Filocolo* is instead roughly set "during the reign of Justinian and shortly after the destruction of Florence by Totila…somewhere in the period 542-65."[8] Yet beyond the narratorial tension normally extant in such a structure, the presence of the Roman pantheon in both the frame and the tale proper suggests the centrality of this allegorical representation throughout the work. That is to say, this initial presentation begins to figure the historical matter of the *Filocolo*. The "maraviglioso valore" ascribed to Juno, as well as her syntactic emphasis, stress her over Aeneas's descendants, who eventually establish the Roman Empire. Thus, while a Virgilian lens is immediately applied to the view of history itself, the ideal history and the protagonist are decidedly not Virgilian, favoring instead the *Aeneid*'s antagonist, Juno. The next lines present a vague compression of recent political events in the Italian peninsula, further identifying the enemy as Manfred and the line of Swabian kings, before making the reference to Juno clear: "E posti i risplendenti carri agli occhiuti uccelli, davanti a sé mandata la figliuola di Taumante a significare la sua venuta, discese della somma altezza nel cospetto di colui che per lei tenea il santo uficio" ("Setting off in her splendid chariot with its many-eyed birds, and sending the daughter of Thaumas ahead to make known her arrival, she came down from her lofty heights and into the presence of the man who held the Holy Office on her behalf," I.1,3).[9] As Antonio Enzo Quaglio notes in his critical edition of the *Filocolo*, and as is further revealed through the course of the first chapter of Book I, Juno thus represents the Church, and the holy office mentioned is the papacy, putting her in opposition to the pagan Roman Empire.[10] As the speech

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[7] As James C. Kriesel notes, allegory was a central preoccupation of Boccaccio's entire literary career that is most fully formed in his *Genealogia deorum gentilium libri* (1350-1375). Contrary to other medieval theories of allegory that tended towards personifications, Boccaccio understood allegory in a basic way that was both literary and secular, as "that which can communicate beyond its literal sense or be interpreted beyond its literal sense." See Kriesel, "The Genealogy of Boccaccio's Theory of Allegory," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 37 (2009): 203. As shall be seen, while less rigorous in the *Filocolo*, allegory is nonetheless central to the text's operations. For more on the uses of allegory particularly in the *Filocolo*, see Grossvogel. For the full system of allegory employed in the *Genealogia*, see David Lummus, "Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*," *Speculum* 87.3 (July 2012): 724-765.

[8] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 25. The actual "historical time" of the plot's action is not necessarily so clear, as will be discussed later.

[9] Quaglio, *Filocolo,* 713, n.6.

[10] "La figura di Giunone che occupa la Roma pagana dei Cesari, vendicandosi delle antiche colpe di tutto quel popolo, e sottomette il mondo intero, simboleggia la Chiesa di Cristo, che è appunto, come la dea di Giove, sposa di Dio," ibid., 713, n. 4. See also Grossvogel, *Ambiguity and Allusion,* 45

of Juno's messenger Iris makes clear,[11] the reasons for Juno's renewed hostility comprise a "fantastica interpretazione storica" ("fantastical historical interpretation") that uneasily maintains both Juno's classical and allegorical significations.[12]

This complex and strangely classically-mediated lens thus questions exactly what is "history" within the *Filocolo*, as it is clear that this is closely related to the *Aeneid*, due to the immediate prominence of Virgilian allusions. The most thorough studies on Boccaccio's manipulation of history through classical referents are those of James McGregor, who, countering the traditional critical standpoint of the *Filocolo* as a "thinly disguised version of the Naples […] of his own day," argues for Boccaccio's influence by the Christian writer Paulus Orosius and his view of a providential Christian history.[13] Thus Boccaccio's re-appropriation and revision of the *Aeneid,* coupled with the signification of Roman deities for Christianity, places all history, even pre-Christian, in the realm of providence. This would then be a process of self-authorization: establishing history as continuous in Christian providence legitimates the use of pagans to represent Christianity, collapsing separate categories together in a common allegorical framework and thereby blurring their boundaries.[14] McGregor, however, finds a particular critical bent within this authorial choice:

> In general terms, once Boccaccio established a mode for depicting his characters
> and settings as Roman and pagan, the Orosian historical viewpoint permitted him
> to judge that past and discriminate those aspects of individual and social life that
> were in tune or in discord with this providential development. Such judgments
> form the basis of his critique of classical culture.[15]

Implicitly, then, the choice of using classical rhetoric and language becomes an attempt to represent antiquity and the Mediterranean of the late sixth century in an effort to critique it and to

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[11] "Io ancora ti prometto di commuovere con le infernali furie un'altra volta gli abondevoli regni in suo servigio, come già feci quando ne' paesi italici entrò il santo Uccello, la cui ruinizaione non permisi allora, volendogli prestare tempo nel quale potendosi pentere meritasse perdono, e ancora però che sentiva che di lui dovea discendere lo edificatore di questo luogo pontificale." ("I further promise to stir up these fertile realms with infernal furies once again in his service, as I did before when that sacred bird entered Italian territory. I did not permit their ruin then, wishing to give them time to repent and merit pardon, and knowing also that from that race was to descend the builder of this pontifical center," I.1.8).

[12] Quaglio, *Filocolo,* 715 n. 27.

[13] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 3. McGregor is not the only scholar to note a providential schema in the text, although he is the only to see this through Paulus Orosius; see also Kirkham and Smarr. Grossvogel focuses instead on the influence of Boethius and Aquinas: "In addition to creating a syncretic fusion of Roman and Christian cultures similar to the one Boccaccio could have easily assumed existed during the sixth century, the author is also adopting Boethius's philosophy for the themes of his own narrative," 34.

[14] For Kriesel, Boccaccio's fully developed understanding and utilization of allegory as semiotic in his later works employs the same "collapse" of history and fiction: "All literatures have the same fundamental materials, fiction and/or history, and signify in the same way, allegorically, no matter the genre or the author. Literature is simply a mix of history and fiction that is allegorical," 213. While Boccaccio is likely attempting the same process in this early work, this syncretism is one of the elements that opens the *Filocolo* into the broader significations that are explored in this paper.

[15] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 3. It is again worth acknowledging that Grossvogel makes the same general assessment, but aligns it as well with the courtly traditions woven into the text: "[t]he juxtaposition of two different, yet extremely important cultures also allows us to see the limitations of each. Hence our interpretation of the *Filocolo* becomes, as it were, a passing of judgment on the classical, courtly, and early Christian cultures of the protagonists," 30.

comment on the larger shape of providential history. While some things, such as the Roman deities, can presage the revelation of Christianity, others are denigrated. Without recognizing it as such, McGregor highlights the key operations of periodization: acknowledging ambiguous temporal boundaries in the design of providential history, Boccaccio nonetheless presents a rupture in the temporal flow of history that designates a "before" and an "after," and that the entire world should move from the "before" state of pre-Christian/classical to the "after" of Christianity. These two frameworks, while at the service of the same providential schema, nonetheless compete with each other to create the same friction that informs the ambivalence of the vermilion Roman bones.

The concept of periodization is certainly still at work in critical discourse today, most visibly in the idea of the medieval/modern duality. While that particular duality, which aligns a progression of medieval-sacred to modern-secular, stands opposed to the one constructed by Boccaccio, the basic function remains the same. As Kathleen Davis states in her study *Periodization and Sovereignty*: "The problem […] is that units such as sacred-medieval-feudal and secular-modern-capitalist […] exercise exclusionary force, and require alignment with historically particular cultural, economic, and institutional forms for entrance into an ostensibly global political modernity."[16] The issue is then that periodization involves a blurring of truths to ascribe to a particularly determined norm imposed by someone exercising sovereign power. This works rather easily in periodization, as the past can no longer defend itself. However, in tracing the patterns of periodization present throughout the *Filocolo*, it is possible to discern the "historically particular cultural, economic, and institutional forms" behind the periodizing process and, as it were, to see through the cracks of an imaginary representation of the Mediterranean to an Italian perspective on the Mediterranean circa 1330.

As has already been seen, the most direct indication of periodization is through Boccaccio's particular appropriation of the Roman deities in the *Filocolo*'s opening pages. It has been suggested up until now that this sort of reading of the Roman pantheon relies on a seeming one-to-one signification to Christian theology. However, Boccaccio constructs his periodization upon the inability of this system to function as a stable system of signs. This is evident when Boccaccio gives a summary of Christian history through the signifiers of Roman deities: Pluto functions reasonably as Lucifer, Antropos as Death, and certainly Jove as God, but this system breaks down with the insertion of Christ and the Incarnation within human history.[17] Boccaccio states: "Scese al comandamento del suo Padre l'unico Figliuolo dalla somma altezza in terra, a sostenere per noi la iniqua percossa d'Antropos" ("At his Father's command this only Son descended to earth from the heights, to take on for us the unjust blows of Antropos," I.3,7). The Roman pantheon cannot adequately signify Christian theology, and so within the first few pages of the text there is a breakdown of the allegorical schema presented as the foundational surface of interpretation for European space. McGregor is right in stating that for Boccaccio the Incarnation "decisively separated classical and Christian culture," and was furthermore a "fundamental change in human history," but he does not analyze the peculiarity of this particular retelling.[18] The Incarnation has always functioned as a decisive moment of periodization, albeit

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[16] Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 4.

[17] This section contrasts with an entirely revealed Christian telling of salvation history that occurs towards the end of the text, to be discussed later.

[18] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 3. It should be noted as well that all other scholars who have occupied themselves with the question of the pagan gods in the *Filocolo* have not accounted for the particularity of the Incarnation in the first Book.

not always consciously realized. Our own *anno domini* (A.D.) system of dating first appeared in the writings of Bede in the early eighth century, as Kathleen Davis aptly puts it, "attaching history, in the form of Christian politics, to the sacred at the point of a division in time."[19] In the *Filocolo,* the reference to the Incarnation occurs within the first lines of the tale proper of Florio and Biancifiore, thus placing the periodization as the instituting moment of the tale. In this way it can easily figure the pre/post divide as a movement of historical time and thus as conversion. However, the utilization of the Incarnation in the text has further peculiarities that warrant discussion.

Considered theologically, the Incarnation is the mystical union of the divine and human in the human body and can thus be considered outside natural order, as per any event deemed a miracle. The function of such an event can best be understood through the state of exception: the suspension of normal (typically juridico-political) order, which over time becomes the normative order.[20] Etymologically, exception comes from *exceptio*, or "taken (*ceptio,* from *capio)* out of (the prefix *ex-*)," and while Carl Schmitt's original formulation speaks specifically of juridical order as well as the nature and origin of sovereign power, the Incarnation functions as an exception "to the very order that constitutes law and politics."[21] Being such an originary exception, both theologically and textually, the Incarnation functions in the *Filocolo* as the operative principle that regulates the inherent order of the text. Yet as an exception the Incarnation is thereby removed from the "natural" order, constituting a space of signification that is beyond or outside the semiotic notion of allegory that forms the "order" of the text. This operation creates an inside-outside dynamic that, while potentially referring to geographical or spatial aspects of the text, complicates it. Simply put, the Incarnation is a bifurcation of the text's allegorical framework that simultaneously institutes and permits the various binaries identified by scholars—most notably that of *amor per diletto* versus *amor onesto*—whose tension and resolution govern the process of conversion.[22] While Boccaccio utilizes the unicity and radicality of the Incarnation as the fundamental element within a system of representation for the pagan gods as elements of Christian theology, the newly opened space poses a problem. It postulates an inside-pagan/outside-Christian division and simultaneously tries to allow the pagan to signify the Christian. The incompatibility of these operations creates textual slippage, or perhaps more aptly a point of contamination. The two systems cannot fit together successfully. To put it another

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[19] Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 1.

[20] The concept of the state of exception is discussed both in Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty,* 14, and in Agamben, *Homo Sacer,* 15-19. For the state of exception in the work of Carl Schmitt, see *Dictatorship: From the Origin of the Modern Concept of Sovereignty to Proletarian Class Struggle*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

[21] Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty*, 110.

[22] The original binary of *amor per diletto* (broadly speaking, courtly love) and *amor onesto* (Christian love) and its function within the text's paradigm of conversion was first identified by Victoria E. Kirkham, in "Reckoning with Boccaccio's 'Questioni d'Amore'," *Modern Language Notes*, 89 (1974): 47-59, and subsequently re-elaborated in *Fabulous Vernacular*. Her ideas formed the basis of Hollander's exploration of two Venuses in the text, one terrestrial and one celestial, and were then expanded by Smarr to a whole series of binaries in the text that create ambiguity (*Boccaccio and Fiammetta*, 37). While I agree with Grossvogel that this and other ambiguities are central to the text in the same sense of the ambivalence of the sacred (for example, "The ambiguity that Smarr noticed in the debate between Fiammetta and Caleone can be seen as a subtle recognition on the part of Boccaccio that *amor onesto* and *amor per diletto* are neither reconcilable nor completely divorced from each other: they both share an innate desire for beatitude, but totally different views of what beatitude is and how it is attained," 28), he nonetheless reads this ambiguity as always in service of Boccaccio's critique of the "classical, courtly, and early Christian cultures of the protagonists" (30).

way, as the text seeks to periodize the classical-pagan to medieval-Christian divide with the Incarnation of Christ as the exception, the classicizing rhetoric and representation removes the pagan-Christian discontinuity and allows for permeability between the two systems.

The inconsistency of the treatment of the pagan gods that scholars have long struggled with derives from this incompatibility. That is not to say Boccaccio was unaware of it, nor that periodization of history to providential history does not occur. Rather, the inconsistency is the opening-up of textual space, and it is these openings in the text that warrant our attention. A cloud, meant to be the voice of "Giovo," tells the doomed Christian pilgrims "tal volta conviene che 'l sangue d'uno uomo giusto per salvamento di tutto un popolo si spanda" ("sometimes it is fitting that the blood of a just man should be shed for the salvation of a whole people," I.25.9), giving a specifically Christian valence to their tragedy. In the tale of Florio and Biancifiore, the pagan gods are present in various ways, from invocation in prayer by Christian and pagan alike, to the direct intervention of several gods, namely Venus, Mars, and Diana.[23] Of these three, the most active is Venus, but all appear physically to the protagonists at various points. While these appearances can in many ways be ascribed to a furthering of providential history, this surface fails to account for the multifarious actions of the gods in Books II, III, and IV of the *Filocolo*.[24] Perhaps the most striking non-Christian action occurs just after Mars has helped Florio save Biancifiore from being burned at the stake by the evil seneschal of the king: "E Marte, che udite avea queste cose, con alta voce, non essendo da alcuno veduto se non da Florio, disse: -Sia questa l'ultima ora della sua vita: gittalo in quel fuoco ove egli fatta avea giudicare Biancifiore" ("And when he had heard these things, Mars said with a loud voice, unseen by anyone except Florio: 'Let this be the last hour of his life; throw him in that fire to which he had condemned Biancifiore'," II.70.2-3). This drastic action of condemning the seneschal to death is rather contrary to New Testament teachings, and is instead evocative of the God of the Old Testament. While it could be understood as a periodizing move with an eye to the Crusades—for the seneschal is called Massamutino, a name meant to sound Arabic—it is nonetheless counter to the larger dynamic of conversion present within the text, as Florio's carrying out of Mars's decree establishes further ambiguity in regards to the pagan gods and their potential virtues.[25]

As Florio rescues Biancifiore, Boccaccio begins a drawn out negotiation of the process of conversion within his established system of referents. While there are occasional moments where

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[23] Biancifiore's father prays: "[o] sommo Giovo, grazioso signore, per la cui virtù con perpetua ragione si governa l'universo" ("[o] mighty Jove, gracious Lord, through whose power the universe is governed in perpetual order," I.25.4). This prayer paraphrases Boethius's *De consolation philosphiae* 3m9 ("O qui perpetua mundum ratione gubernas"), and is merely one of Boccaccio's borrowings from Boethius's text. This textual presence adds further ambivalence to the religious levels in the text, particularly considering Grossvogel's assertion that "since Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* never refers to Christianity, Boccaccio might have regarded it as a syncretic fusion of pagan and early Christian philosophies representing a culture similar to the one he was trying to portray in the *Filocolo*," 31. For further information on the connection with Boethius, see notes 13 and 34.

[24] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 41. Kirkham views them similarly, although not in providential terms: "[t]he old polytheistic gods are not redundancies; they are a panoply necessary as the precondition for conversion and for a fully satisfactory resolution of the romance. They lead to its Christian denouement. In retrospect, [they] all reinforce the power of the Word, the power of the One" (*Fabulous Vernacular*, 276). Grossvogel argues that the gods as actors in plot can be read allegorically as "planetary influences affecting human behavior" and as "metaphors for the irascible and concupiscible appetites" of the characters, but acknowledges that they nonetheless are literal actors in the *romanzo*'s plot (101).

[25] As Grossvogel has shown, ambiguity pervades all levels of this scene, from both the figures of Mars and Florio, as well as the crowd itself (116-132). While he rightly views this ambiguity in relation to the suspect legal maneuvers Felice made to convict Biancifiore of treason, these actions can be understood within the framework of the state of exception.

difference between Christian and pagan is referenced after the birth of Biancifiore, they largely disappear until after Florio arrives in Babylon. Notably, in a dialogue between Biancifiore and her childhood nurse Glorizia, who grew up as a Christian in Rome, Biancifiore refers specifically to "quelli iddii" ("those gods," IV.113.5) in contrast to Glorizia's reference to "Iddio" ("God," IV.113.2). There are, however, slight indicators of difference, ones that fall outside the system that Boccaccio had carefully crafted earlier. Their appearance is followed by a profound intensification of the involvement of the pagan gods as Florio and Biancifiore are about to be burned to death by the Admiral:

> Mossero le voci di costoro i non crucciati iddii a degna pietà, e furono essauditi e con sollicita grazia aiutati, ben che assai gli aiutasse l'anello. Venere, intenta a' suoi suggetti, commosse il cielo, e per loro porse pietosi prieghi a Giove, col consentimento del quale e di ciascuno altro iddio, il necessario aiuto si dispose a porgere.

> The gods (who were not angry) were duly moved by these prayers, and were quick to hear them and provide gracious aid; although the ring was most helpful too. Venus was concerned for her subjects, and stirred up the heavens and made sympathetic exhortations to Jove on their behalf; the necessary aid was arranged. (IV.134.1)

In a statement meant to show the collective might of the Roman gods, their aid is contrasted with that of a ring with magical properties. Moreover, their power is not unitary, and the supplication of Jove is required. While Florio and Biancifiore are saved from the fire, the limitations of the pagan gods are shown. It is the last moment of pure intervention by the Roman deities, but not their last mention. They are invoked again in a peculiar story in the last book, in which a group of young maidens scorns the gods and is transformed into blocks of marble (V.6-28). Even though Florio refers to the punishment as "[o] giusta vendetta" ("[o] just vengeance," V.28.1), the fact that the events took place before the current events of the main plot emphasizes the past-ness of the Roman deities, eliding their allegorical function with the text's periodization. From there they fade away from the narrative, no longer active and hardly invoked.

Eventually, the protagonists make their way to Rome where Florio encounters a Christian named Ilario, who then explains to him the entirety of providential history in completely unveiled, purely Christian terms (V.53-54). While only spanning two chapters, the discourse runs over ten pages, surpassing the brief summary of Christian history that appears in Book I. From this point, Florio begins the process of conversion, and the pagan gods return no more. Rather than signifying their ultimate subsumption into agents of divine providence, the sudden disappearance of the Roman gods after a period of intensive action reiterates their fundamental incompatibility.[26] They are erased in the process of conversion, in an articulation of Incarnation told entirely in Christian terms.[27] Rather than being merely an ironic treatment, the development of the pagan gods over the course of the romance is a product of the state of exception instituted by the Incarnation and the process by which it may negotiate order.[28] The process of conversion

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[26] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 38-41.
[27] Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular,* 276: "The old polytheistic gods are not redundancies; they are a panoply necessary as the precondition for conversion and for a fully satisfactory resolution of the romance."
[28] Grieves, '*Floire and Blancheflor*',160-171.

thus imitates the process of the state of exception, i.e. the Christian world post-Incarnation, becoming instead the normative order.

The expansive project of periodization operates within the core of the *Filocolo* and, as has been seen, is exemplified in the process of conversion. Up until now the process of conversion has only been analyzed at the layer of divine presence, but the process occurs at the layer of the tale's major players, Florio and Biancifiore, as well. Their conversion is placed within intersecting matrices of genealogy, gender roles, history, and geography that, while representing on the surface the same one-way process of conversion and progress, hide the complexities of the medieval Mediterranean underneath its periodizing signification.

As the most emblematic marker of periodization, the extensive use of the Roman pantheon as signifiers for Christianity and the entrenched references to classical texts allow Boccaccio to encumber his *romanzo* with questions of heredity in an attempt to solidify the links between the pagan past and the Christian present in a typological relationship. While the process of genealogy is essentially one of creating links, it can potentially be problematic as well, for, as David Lummus observes while discussing Boccaccio's *Genealogiae*, "[a]ny genealogical approach to the past is directed toward the *telos* of the present state of things. Just as a genealogical approach has the power to uproot the present by unveiling the lack of an origin, it is also able to ground the present in the stories of the past and to trace the routes."[29] By and large, the presence of the pagan gods functions in this mode of allying them with providential history, namely the text's aim of the protagonists', and of Spain's, conversion to Christianity. Yet the issue remains that, at the text's allegorical level, Boccaccio must stress continuity over the fundamental discontinuity of the Incarnation.

This preoccupation with continuity through genealogy is manifest within the first lines of the text, but continues through the introduction of the principal characters and indeed throughout the course of action of the plot. The initial presentation of Juno and her opposition to the descendants of Aeneas is predicated upon the Virgilian source material: "Giunone, la quale la morte della pattovita Didone cartaginese non avea voluta inulta dimenticare e all'altre offese porre non debita dimenticanza" ("Juno, who was determined not to leave unavenged the death of Dido, the Carthaginian fiancée, or to grant unwarranted oblivion to other affronts," I.1,1). Juno, in figuring the Catholic Church, is also placed on the side of Carthage. Although there are several potential connections between Carthage and the Catholic Church upon which Boccaccio could here be drawing—such as Augustine of Hippo, or the various Synods of Carthage that addressed Donatism and Pelagianism and drafted the Biblical canon—the paucity of further textual referents makes unclear whatever link Boccaccio was trying to forge. If Carthage were only mentioned in this context for the duration of the text, it would suffice to exist solely metaphorically. However, the introduction of Biancifiore's father complicates this potential signification: "[r]isuona per Roma, com'è detto, la gran fama nella quale un nobilissimo giovane dimorava, il quale si chiamava Quinto Lelio Africano, disceso del nobile sangue del primo conquistatore dell'africana Cartagine" ("[t]here resounds through Rome, as is said, the great fame surrounding a noble youth named Quintus Lelius Africanus, a descendant of the noble line of the first conqueror of African Carthage," I.5,1). As the first Christian player introduced into the *Floire and Blancheflor* tale, it is rather shocking for him to be figured as a descendant of a conqueror of the land held dear by Juno. This would seem to present him as resembling Aeneas in his opposition to Juno, but the former's Christianity seems to negate this difference. His wife does not help untangle this picture either. She is presented as "una giovane romana nobilissima,

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[29] Lummus, "Allegories of History," 734.

nata della gente giulia" ("a most noble young roman woman born of the Julian line," 5,2), thereby tying her to the line of Roman emperors stated to be the enemies of Juno as well.[30] This figuration of genealogy causes the systems of signification of the Roman deities and the heredity of the characters to overlap, tying the deaths of Lelio and Giulia to the providential plan that undergirds the entire *romanzo* in problematic fashion. While their deaths unfold into the conversion of Florio and Biancifiore and eventually the entire kingdom of Spain, they are simultaneously doomed by Juno's grievance against their ancestry. In trying to trace the connections through Lelio's and Giulia's genealogies, Boccaccio instead destabilizes the category of "Christian" due to the ambivalent status of Juno as both pagan goddess and allegory.

This problem of representation is at the root of the textual preoccupation with Biancifiore's heritage. Florio's parents continually view her as a servant and deem her unworthy to marry their son: "[s]e una giovane di real sangue fosse da lui amata, certo tosto per matrimonio gliele giugneremmo; ma che è a pensare che egli sia innamorato d'una romana popolaresca femina, non conosciuta e nutricata delle nostre case come una serva?" ("[i]f a young lady of royal blood were loved by him, surely we would quickly unite them in matrimony; but what is to be thought of the fact that he is in love with a common Roman woman, someone of no name who has been brought up like a servant in our household?" II.7.10). Thus in the text not only is class an issue, as illustrated by the interesting word choice of "popolaresca," but so is the fact of Biancifiore's being "romana" in origin. This initially would seem to suggest that either quality in itself would be a sufficient reason for the characters not to marry. Florio, on the contrary, thinks that she is descended from nobles, and Biancifiore does not know whether she is or not: it is only when Florio and Biancifiore arrive at Rome in Book IV that the question of her heritage is resolved, and the consequence is conversion to Christianity. Thus, as Grieves remarks, the process of the *Filocolo* is a pilgrimage to Christianity, and as per the attempted synthesis of Roman deities and Christian theology, conversion attempts to provide resolution to seemingly non-negotiable difference.[31]

Yet the tangled questions of heredity are not isolated to Biancifiore alone. The father of Florio, Felice, is introduced as follows: "[i]l gran re Felice, reggitore de' regni di Speria, nipote di Atalante, sostenitore de' cieli, governava vicino a' colli d'Appennino una città chiamata Marmorina" ("mighty King Felix, ruler of the realms of Hesperia and descendant of that Atlas who holds up the heavens […] governor of a city named Marmorina near the Apennine hills," I.10,1). The text provides no Christian referent to Atlas, and so the claim that Felice, and thus Florio, are descended from a pagan entity who exists outside the potential allegorical valence of Christianity ties them to a pre-Christian time. Although this serves on the one hand to signify the difference between Felix's family and Lelio's, as well as others encountered throughout the *romanzo*, on the other hand it further underlines the incompatibility of the systems Boccaccio tries to superimpose upon one other. For this genealogy is not resolved either through Florio's or Felice's conversion. It is a manifestation of the text's syncretism, and thus exemplifies the fictional narrative space-time, or chronotope, in which the entirety of the *romanzo* occurs.[32]

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[30] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 26-7. Grossvogel sees this in relation to the astrological underpinnings of the text that come to fruition in the union of Venus and Jupiter in Book V, and thus to the recognition of Biancifiore's nobility: "Florio's mother and uncle (the Admiral of Alexandria) trace their origins to Jarba ("re de' Getoli") son of Jupiter (III 73, 1). Giulia, Biancifiore's mother, belongs to the *gens Julia*, descendants of Aeneas, the son of Venus," 69.

[31] Grieves, '*Floire and Blancheflor*', 179.

[32] The theoretical notion of the "chronotope" comes from Mikhail Bakhtin: "In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens,

This can perhaps be seen most clearly in Felice's court being situated in the city of Marmorina. Although never a name for any historical city, scholars have identified it as Verona from the geographical description and the name's etymology.[33] The suggestion that the king of Spain ruled in Verona, a city not under Spanish rule at any time, reminds us that the events of this story occur in a fictionalized Mediterranean space. The name of the city functions within the strategy of periodization to reduce all non-Christian entities to the same "time," and can thus represent multiple powers and influences. As McGregor remarks, it is simultaneously "Gothic hegemony" in Italy, but also "the center within Italy of the control and the intervention there of the Holy Roman emperors."[34] The majority of the action of the *romanzo,* then, takes place in a time outside of historical time, in which diverse polities can coexist. This is not merely inaccurate or anachronistic, but instead represents the reductive consequences of periodization, a manifestation of the fundamental ambivalence in the text's allegory. The chronotope established in the *Filocolo* through periodization allows the pagan enemies of Christian orthodoxy to be combined and maps the general distribution of power and religion in the Mediterranean, enabling both the critique of classical culture as well as the text's providential framework. In this regard it is not surprising that the identification of the action taking place occurs near the story's end in Book V.[35] Contrary to McGregor's argument, this setting does not remain unspecified until so late in the narrative for the purpose of emphasizing the non-historical nature of the represented Mediterranean world, but rather it ties the politics of time to Christianity.[36] If the project of the *Filocolo* is that of periodizing the pagan as part of a Christian world, then grounding the historical reality of the text to a point in time subsequent to the conversion to Christianity reiterates the originary exception of the periodization.

The consequence of this is that the same tension and ambivalence that manifests in the text's chronotope is a reification of difference. Considering the nature of the Mediterranean setting and the content of the other *Floire and Blancheflor* tales, these differences abound in racial, cultural, and ethnic forms, constituting a hierarchy within the text. Such difference occurs first within the battle between Lelio's and Felice's forces that leads to Giulia being taken into the Spanish court. The Spanish forces are presented as barbaric with respect to the Christians: "la canina gente" ("the dog-like race," I.26.16) possessing "de' barbari cuori" ("barbarous hearts," I.26.19) and having in their number figures such as "Scurmenide, potentissimo barbaro" ("Scurmenide, the strongest barbarian," I.26.17) and "uno ardito arabo, il quale Menaab" ("a bold Arab named Menaab," I.26.15). [37] Their representation is one of difference, but is only

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takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope." See *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 84.

[33] Virginio Bertolini, "Dalla 'Marmona' del Boccaccio all'appellativo di 'Città marmorea' dato a Verona nel Medio Evo," *Atti e memorie della Accademia di Agricoltura Scienza e Lettere di Verona*, VI:XVIII (1968): 321. Scholars agree Marmorina corresponds to Verona, but do not know Boccaccio's sources for this.

[34] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 27. Grossvogel offers a competing interpretation that both the location and the time of the *romanzo* coincide with historical events around Boethius's life, namely that the *romanzo* begins the year of his execution at the hands of Theoderic the Ostrogoth, whose rule was strongly associated with Verona; he acknowledges, however, that the *Filocolo* is not a historical epic within this setting, as there are discrepancies (34).

[35] McGregor, *Shades of Aeneas*, 25-6.

[36] Ibid., 26.

[37] The Latin *barbarus*, from which "barbaro" derives, appears in Roman literature in a complex of words that were used to distinguish foreigners of the Roman state. See David Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers*

negative in their not being Christian. The dead bodies of the warriors are, in fact, left intermixed on the battlefield ("Il quale il sole e la pioggia e 'l vento macera sopra la tinta terra, fastidiosamente mescolando le romane ceneri con l'arabiche non conosciuto," "and this the sun and the rain disintegrated on the discolored earth, into a disgusting mixture of the Roman ashes with those of unknown Arabs," I.32.8) and are equally feasted upon by various animals in a rather striking panoply that blurs geographic space: "[e] non solamente i lupi di Spagna occuparono la sventurata valle, ma ancora quelli delle strane contrade vennero a pascersi sopra' mortali pasti. E i leoni affricani corsero al triso fiato […] gli orsi […] i fedeli cani […] gli uccelli […] di tanti avoltoi" ("[a]nd not only did the wolves of Spain occupy this unfortunate valley, but those of foreign lands also came and devoured these meals of the dead. And African lions came running to the gruesome scent […] the bears […] the faithful dogs […] the birds […] many vultures," I.32.1-5). The process of conversion that makes the Christian bones glow vermilion near the text's end only serves to reaffirm the denigration of the Spanish forces.

The slaughter of the Christian party, while on the one hand showing a mode of exchange between pagan and Christian, is able to demonstrate the permeability of borders through the figure of the principal survivor, Giulia. She finds herself left among what she terms "gente araba diversa da' nostri costumi" ("Arab people alien to our customs," I.29.14). As she weeps over the dead, Felice sends one of his men, Ascalion, to see what is going on, and he speaks to her in Latin: "Giulia, udendo la romana loquela, la quale Ascalion, lungamente diromaro a Roma, impresa avea" ("[h]earing the Roman tongue which Ascalion had learned from a lengthy stay in Rome," I.30.12). Linguistic difference is positioned as culturally determined in the choice of the adjective "romana" rather than "latina," and is thereby suggested as a border that has to be breached. This kind of linguistic difference is a common feature of the *Floire and Blanchflor* tales, typically functioning as a defining feature of the burgeoning love between Floire and Blanchflor.[38] Yet, aside from this one reference, language never again arises as a barrier in Boccaccio's text, nor is the Latin language (or any other) referenced further. It becomes implicit that somehow both Florio and Biancifiore are raised knowing Latin, as a principal part of their education is "il santo libro d'Ovidio" ("the holy book of Ovid," I.45.6), but no further linguistic markers are given.

What arises instead is a further system of markers for ethnic difference, which all occur while the characters are in Babylon. While in the city and trying to find Biancifiore, Florio encounters an Arab: "Quivi abita uno arabo, da cui la torre è chiamata la Torre dell'Arabo, e egli è chiamato castellano di quella, e per propio nome Sadoc" ("Here there dwells an Arab, after whom the tower is called the Arab's Tower, and he is designated its Castellan, and his proper name is Sadoc," IV.86.1). As it becomes apparent that Florio will need Sadoc's help to gain access to Biancifiore, he has an internal argument with himself and states, "[n]on sai tu che negli arabi niuna fede si truova?" ("Don't you know that you can't trust the Arabs?" IV.89.7). While the trope of untrustworthy Arabs was common in epic romances and medieval songs, the use of "fede" implies that the Arabs are distanced from faith.[39] In a very subtle move, Boccaccio succinctly places the Arab as the other that is excluded from the providential history he seeks to

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(London: Duckworth, 2000), 1-3. Coupled with the cultural heritage from the sack of Rome, the word choice evokes a further opposition to 'Roman' and therefore 'Christian.'

[38] Sharon Kinoshita, "'In the Beginning was the Road': *Floire et Blancheflor* in the Medieval Mediterranean," in *Medieval Boundaries: Rethinking Difference in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 85.

[39] Quaglio, *Filocolo,* IV.89.7 n.4.

establish. This is not the only ethnic category that he excludes, however, and the exclusion of the others occurs in a similar way. As Florio and Biancifiore are about to be put to death in Babylon, two Libyans are introduced: "Ircuscomos e Flagrareo, venuti de' libiani popoli, nel viso bruni e feroci, co' capelli irsuti con gli occhi ardenti" ("Irscuscomos and Flargrareo, who had come from the Libyan peoples, and were dark and fierce in appearance, with heavy hair and burning eyes," IV.131.1). Their introduction is further tempered by comments on their difference. Quaglio notes that in the romance tradition Libyans are "famos[i] per la loro crudeltà" ("famous for their cruelty," IV.131.1), a suggestion taken up by the text when one of them is referred to as a "crudel barbaro" ("cruel barbarian," IV.138.4) by Ascalion, one of Florio's companions, as they do battle. The same battle occasions the appearance of another figure, "un turco chiamato Belial" ("a Turk called Belial," IV.138.12). There is no direct ethnic characterization beyond "turco," but the chosen name, Belial, is one traditionally associated with a demon. These presentations of negative difference all occur in Babylon, in explicit contrast with those that appeared earlier in the text. In the initial contact of Lelio and his company with Felice and his men, the same signifiers of Arabic and barbarian are used, as has already been discussed; yet their reappearance in the mouths of the men initially characterized by the same terms reveals a hierarchy of difference, moving from the Christian, to the Spanish-non-Christian but becoming Christian, and finally to the eminently pagan. This construction erases the initial difference between Felice's kingdom and the Christians to present the Libyans, Turks, and Arabs as a threatening non-Western European and non-Christian other who cannot be converted. They are a stable reference point of the pagan world and are thus excluded in the process of periodization. Their shared presence in Babylon, the only non-European locale visited within the text, reifies their position as other.

These structures of difference are once again complicated by the genealogies that permeate the text. When Florio finally locates Biancifiore, she is in the possession of the "amiraglio del possente re di Bambillonia" ("admiral of the powerful king of Babylonia," III.56.2). This Admiral is later presented as displaying two distinct genealogies. The first is revealed in an offhand comment describing the garden at the top of the Torre dell'Arabo, where a tree is magically able to tell if a woman is a virgin or not, according to the "petizione di Giove, antico avolo del nostro amiraglio" ("petition of Jove, ancient ancestor of our Admiral," IV.85.13). So Jove, who has mostly served to signify the Christian God, is suddenly qualified as an ancestor in the same way Atlas was, but not without creating some unfortunate problems for the logic of the narrative. In this case, Jove cannot merely refer to the Christian God, as all would be implicitly children of this same God. Moreover, this same ancestry is also meant to indicate the Admiral's high degree of nobility. The text never resolves this issue, but instead complicates it further when the Admiral reveals himself to be related to Florio: "O caro nipote! O gloria de' parenti miei! [...] Io, fratello alla tua madre" ("O dear nephew! O glory of my relatives! [...] I, brother of your mother," IV.152.3). Thus somehow Florio is "nipote dell'antico Atalante sostenitore de' cieli" (III.18.5) and also nephew ("nipote") of a descendent of Jove. The dual signification of "nipote" in Italian as both nephew and grandson adds to the genealogical complexity. Boccaccio, however, is not interested in resolving this, evocative as it is of classical genealogies. It is a peculiarity of the text, which nonetheless serves a purpose. As the Admiral is related to Florio, and in addition is a citizen of Babylon, the apparently constructed difference of pagan-Spaniard-Christian is short-circuited, because the pagan-Spaniard barrier is breached in the figure of the Admiral. The complex genealogies within the *Filocolo* reveal the inefficacy of the text's fundamental periodization and its project to reduce difference; they instead link

together degrees of difference in imitation of the true medieval Mediterranean, in which difference is an unstable category. Moreover, this familial connection undoes the necessary othering of the pagan, suggesting furthermore that the process of conversion, which seems so intrinsic to the romance's structure, is not merely a straightforward progression from pagan to Christian.

Ultimately, however, the problem of conversion lies in the fact that it has no clear markers, but rather is "a process the success of which can never be fully determined except by God."[40] This uncertainty is present within other versions of the source tale as well, and has been the focus of recent critical studies on *Floire et Blancheflor*. The dynamics of conversion in the *Filocolo* are markedly the same as in the Old French romance. Rather than the movement of conversion being signified as pagan to Christian, the romance must instead mark Florio's conversion as one of gender: it is the process of defining proper masculinity as well as proper kingship.[41] What occurs in the text is a feminization of Florio. Florio and Biancifiore are born on the same day, the "festa de' cavalieri" ("Knights' feast," I.39.1) which critics have identified as Pentecost, and are described as "simiglianti insieme" ("resembling one another," I.44.3).[42] Their similar appearance is a staple of all of the *Floire and Blancheflor* tales, and is a constant feature throughout the text ("Biancifiore, a cui, secondo il giudicio di Sisife, Filocolo molto risomigliava," "Biancifiore, whom [Sisife] thought Filocolo much resembled," IV.76.1). The text makes it explicit that Biancifiore does not seem masculine, as she is purchased at high cost due to her beauty (III.42-5).[43] Rather, Florio has a feminine appearance and is given a rather feminine name, which, in all versions of the tale is always that vernacular's word for "flower."

Thus Florio's initial characterization is feminine, which does not change when he is sent to nearby Montoro at the behest of his father, where he pines in inaction for Biancifiore. As one of the tales from the *Questioni d'amore*—the brief episode of novellas in the middle of the book—makes clear, masculinity in the *Filocolo* "points to agency through exaggerated movement," and specifically movement which occurs through one's own agency.[44] Florio is initially feminized by his father, both in his name and in being sent to Montoro; he lacks the agency to move freely. His first major action, saving Biancifiore from the fire, is a moment of agency and acquisition of virtue guided by Mars himself (II.57.7), but merely results in Florio remaining at Montoro and pining away even more. He begins to take agency, however, when he departs to find Biancifiore, in a move that acts against the wishes of the patriarch. First Florio declares, "[o]ra l'avete venduta e mandata in lontane parti, acciò che io pellegrinando vada per lo mondo" ("[n]ow you have sold her and sent her to distant regions, so that I must go on a

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[40] Lynn Shutters, "Christian Love of Pagan Transgression? Marriage and Conversion in *Floire et Blancheflor*," in *Discourses on Love, Marriage, and Transgression in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 100.

[41] Shutters, "Marriage and Conversion," 86. Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular,* 275. For an alternate reading on how conversion is signified through evocations of death and suicide in the *Filocolo* and other medieval French romances, see Roberta Morosini, "La 'morte verbale' nel *Filocolo*: il viaggio di Florio dall''imaginare' al 'vero conoscimento'," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 27 (1999):183-204.

[42] For a full look at the dynamics of the choice of Pentecost, different from the other European versions, see Grieves, '*Floire and Blancheflor',* 147, and Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular,* 251-76. The changing of their date of birth to Pentecost merely reemphasizes the periodization function of the text.

[43] The rhetoric of trade is prevalent throughout the *Filocolo* as well, and reveals other aspects of the medieval Mediterranean that Boccaccio periodizes.

[44] Andrea Rossi-Reder, "Male Movement and Female Fixity in the *Franklin's Tale* and *Il Filocolo*," in *Masculinities in Chaucer: Approaches to Maleness in the 'Canterbury Tales' and 'Troilus and Criseyde',* ed. P. Beidler (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1998), 106.

pilgrimage through the world," III.65.6), explicitly linking the process of recovering his love-object with one of pilgrimage and therefore conversion. However, he also adopts a different name for his travels, that of *Filocolo*, which Boccaccio etymologizes as "fatica d'amore" ("labor of love," III.75.4-5). In this move he evades patriarchal power and begins to establish his own agency, which is defined through movement, and specifically through "fatica" or labor. His journey becomes one of acquiring the virtue of masculinity, allowing him subsequently to convert, marry Biancifiore, sire children, and become the new king of Spain. When he is baptized, however, he removes his alias and reverts back to Florio (IV.72.2).[45] This gendered process of conversion is, as Lynn Shutters has aptly observed, a naturalization of conversion, "making it conform to a one-way linear model of human maturation" with the proof being the final masculine position of Florio.[46] The ironic consequence of this scheme is that the process of conversion, which the text so ardently exemplifies in its attempts to periodize, is shown to be a process of merely changing hats. If they are virtuous, then pagan or Christian can signify nearly identically; but the masculine-Christian is presented in the text as the preferred form through the suppression of the pagan.

Thus the *Filocolo* ends with the Christianization of not only the tale's protagonists but also all of Spain, a representation outside the historical reality of the time of composition and of the time(s) presented in the text. A close analysis of this process reveals that it is constructed on an elaborate series of associated binaries—the pre/post, pagan/Christian, European/non-European, feminine/masculine, classical/contemporary—that are intended by the author to support his attempted periodization of the medieval Mediterranean. While this process of periodization is supposed to be associated with an exclusion of the "pre-," Boccaccio's text instead presents a fluid Mediterranean resistant to such potential erasures of difference. The use of the Roman gods as an incommensurable allegory of unrevealed Christianity allows for a bi-directional flow of signification, which in turn permits the various categories of religion, gender, and ethnicity to be represented as porous, and thus to approximate the true reality of the medieval Mediterranean. After all, those bones remained "fastidiosamente mescola[te]" by "il sole e la pioggia e 'l vento" (I.32.8)—the very environment of the Mediterranean—before they were made to glow.

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[45] Up until this point, the text refers to him consistently as "Filocolo."

[46] Rossi-Reder, "Male Movement," 100.

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