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**Boccaccio the Philosopher:  
The Language of Knowledge in the *Decameron***

by

Filippo Andrei

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Romance Languages & Literatures

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Steven Botterill, Chair  
Professor Albert Russell Ascoli  
Professor Ignacio Enrique Navarrete

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Boccaccio the Philosopher: The Language of Knowledge in the *Decameron*

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by Filippo Andrei

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Romance Languages & Literatures

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Professor Steven Botterill, Chair

The dissertation examines the philosophical implications of the *Decameron* in connection with Boccaccio's minor works and ascertains his attitudes towards philosophy, in order to evaluate how a theoretical reflection on the nature of rhetoric and poetic imagination can ultimately elicit a theory of knowledge. Organized according to different aspects of the nature of the medieval philosophical project, the dissertation argues that the *Decameron* has a significant philosophical dimension which is concealed in the language and that the philosophical implications of the narratives can be understood in an epistemological approach to the text.

The first chapter ("Deified Men and Humanized Gods: The *Genealogies* and the Hermetic Veil of the *Fabula*") focuses on aspects of poetics and analyzes the language of literature as theorized in Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium* and *Trattatello in laude di Dante*. Boccaccio's speculation on the nature of poetry is paramount for the understanding of how knowledge is produced by the text. Both the *Genealogie* and the *Decameron* explore the mechanisms of acquisition of knowledge through similar modalities of discourse. The intrinsic obscurity of poetry, as theorized in the context of the *Genealogies*, refers to the hermetic idea of covert discourse, that is, the kind of literature whose language hides its meanings and the truth without completely denying knowledge and understanding. As Boccaccio maintains, the hermetic nature of poetry originates in the 'womb of God' and is given as a gift to a selected few; moreover, poetic imagination appears to be a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the power of the mind.

The second chapter ("Boccaccio's Mountain: The Voyage of the Soul and The Language of Literature") deals with psychology, intended, in the classical way, as the 'study of the soul.' The *Decameron* can be seen as a journey toward the acquisition of knowledge—be it moral, philosophical, or practical. In the Introduction to the *Decameron*, the famous simile comparing the interpretation of the text to the climbing of a mountain alludes to Dante's *Commedia* and justifies the necessity of the plague in eschatological terms, thereby defining the reader's experience as a sort of intellectual and spiritual progression and ascent. The Second Day of the *Decameron* and the narrative parables of the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine* and the *Amorosa visione* share the same modality of an allegorical voyage of the soul for the apprehension of knowledge.

The third chapter ("The Motto and the Enigma: Rhetoric and Knowledge in the Sixth Day") considers rhetoric as a form of knowledge analyzing the rhetorical devices of the *Decameron* and the many ways in which Boccaccio establishes a meaningful connection between rhetoric and knowledge. Rhetoric can be epistemic, and in this regard, the characteristics and formal features of the *motto*, or witty reply, in the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* show how this metaphorical tool can be considered not only a structuring device of Boccaccio's discourse, but also a 'veil,' a poetical strategy which is able to both conceal and to reveal philosophical knowledge. Boccaccio's *oeuvre* engages with several aspects of the relationship between philosophical and literary discourse as they come to him from contemporary debates about literature. In particular, the possibilities offered by epistemology in medieval thought and the role of allegory and mythology as poetical devices of a latent philosophical discourse are critical means to understanding Boccaccio's theory of the nexus between rhetoric and knowledge.

The fourth chapter ("The Variants of 'Honestum:' Practical Philosophy and Theory of Action in the *Decameron*") deals with ethics (the knowledge of the good; moral philosophy) in the *Decameron*. Here I argue that the characters of the *Decameron* experience cognitive journeys that embrace an ethical approach to the world. An attentive reading of the frame texts of the *Decameron* along with a proper understanding of the medieval concept of "honesty" suggests a well-defined model of life that can be traced back to the practical philosophy concerning which Boccaccio—as a reader of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas—had long meditated. The guiding principle of Natural Law evoked in the *Introduction* to the *Decameron* is most properly understood in relation to the Thomistic ethical system in which Nature and its earthly manifestations in human instincts are counterbalanced by the action of reason and free will, with the aim of achieving a practical knowledge that eventually leads to a new vision of the world. Finally, the possibilities offered by a reading of the *Decameron* as a journey toward the acquisition of knowledge elicit a theory of action that has significant implications for the transition from scholastic philosophy to humanism.

Dicebat Bernardus Carnotensis nos esse quasi nanos, gigantium humeris insidentes,  
ut possimus plura eis et remotiora videre, non utique proprii visus acumine,  
aut eminentia corporis, sed quia in altum subvenimur et extollimur magnitudine gigantea  
(John of Salisbury, *Metalogicon*)

*To my parents*  
*for their love and support*

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ASI</i>	<i>Archivio Storico Italiano</i>
<i>BSGRT</i>	Biblioteca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Medievalis</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</i>
<i>DAI</i>	<i>Dissertation Abstracts International</i>
<i>DEI</i>	C. Battisti - G. Alessio, <i>Dizionario etimologico italiano</i> , 4 voll., Firenze 1950-57
<i>DELI</i>	M. Cortelazzo - P. Zolli, <i>Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana</i> , 5 voll., Bologna 1979-1988
<i>DS</i>	<i>Dante Studies</i>
<i>ED</i>	<i>Enciclopedia Dantesca</i> , 6 voll., Roma 1984 <sup>2</sup>
fol. fols.	folio, folios
<i>GDLI</i>	S. Battaglia, <i>Grande dizionario della lingua italiana</i> , 14 voll., Firenze 1961-
<i>GSLI</i>	<i>Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana</i>
<i>MGH</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae historica inde ab anno Christi quingentesimo usque ad annum millesimum et quingentesimum. Scriptorum</i> , ed. G. H. Pertz, Hannover 1826-1934
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
ms., mss.	manuscript, manuscripts
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus</i> , a c. di J. P. Migne. <i>Series Latina</i> , Turnhout 1857-1904
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>RBLI</i>	<i>Rassegna Bibliografica della Letteratura Italiana</i>



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## INTRODUCTION

### The Language of Knowledge in the *Decameron*

Le vrai miroir de nos discours est le cours de nos vies  
(Montaigne, *Essais*, ed. Firmin-Didot frères, 1854, chap. 25, livre I, p. 74)

In the *Decameron*, as in other minor works of Boccaccio, the protagonists of the stories undergo epistemological experiences that may reflect those of their author. In the *Filocolo*, for instance, Idalogo narrates that he followed the teaching of his master Calmeta with the intent to build his astronomical knowledge and eventually become an expert in his field. Calmeta's teaching, however, did not exhaust his pupil's scientific thirst, as Idalogo says after his master has concluded a lesson:

Queste cose *ascoltai* io con somma diligenza, e tanto diletтарono la rozza *mente*, ch'io mi diedi a voler *conoscere* quelle, e non come arabo, ma seguendo con istudio il dimostrante: per la qual cosa di divenire esperto meritai. E già abbandonata la pastorale via, del tutto a seguitar Pallade mi disposi, le cui sottili vie ad *immaginare*, questo bosco mi prestò agevoli introducimenti, per la sua solitudine (*Filocolo*, 8).

As in Calmeta can be hidden, through a enigmatic language, the historical figure of Andalò del Negro, in the character of Idalogo can be the author himself, Boccaccio, who was really Andalò's pupil in Naples and benefitted from his astronomical teaching.<sup>1</sup> According to Idalogo's words, astronomical knowledge can be transmitted via the reading of erudite treatises or through devote listening to a master's teaching, while the process of apprehension, which is also a path toward change, from ignorance to knowledge, from pastoral life to the cultivation of knowledge and Wisdom ("a seguitar Pallade mi disposi"), is made of individual determination, exercise of the mind, and personal fulfilment. In Boccaccio's fervid literary imagination, his own epistemological longings can intermingle with those of his characters and create invented and fascinating figures such as that of Idalogo.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the philosophical implications of the *Decameron* in connection with Boccaccio's minor works and the prior literary tradition. Although Boccaccio is generally considered neither a philosopher nor a poet with manifest philosophical interests, this dissertation aims at ascertaining his attitudes towards philosophy in his literary works. Specifically, attention will be given to those works which deal mostly with allegorical aspects of life and poetry (*Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, *Amorosa Visione*, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*) in order to both understand the philosophical ideas that eventually emerge in the *Decameron* and evaluate how a theoretical reflection on the nature of rhetoric and poetic imagination can ultimately elicit a theory of knowledge.<sup>2</sup> Boccaccio is not a philosopher; or, at least, is not a philosopher

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. E. Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio* (Padova: Liviana, 1967), 39.

<sup>2</sup> Since I deal with both Italian and American scholarship, it should be noted that in Anglo-Saxon countries and North America the theory of knowledge is called epistemology, whereas in Italy the term epistemology essentially means that branch of gnoseology that deals with the scientific knowledge or, in an

at first glance. One hardly finds his name in manuals of philosophy, and both American and Italian scholarship, starting with De Sanctis, has been skeptical in identifying Boccaccio as a philosopher—at least, as much as Dante and Petrarch.<sup>3</sup> This study will not attempt to demonstrate that Boccaccio *is* a philosopher in the traditional sense. Rather, what will it try to do is evaluate the status of philosophy in Boccaccio's *Decameron* as well as its capacity to pose epistemological questions through the imaginative power of its language. Without attempting to present an exhaustive analysis, this study will try to identify the philosophical ideas of the *Decameron* from its literary aspects in relation to both Boccaccio's contemporary philosophical landscape and his literary sources. In particular, it will try to explain the undercurrent philosophical discourse that emerges from the tales and that can also be compared with Boccaccio's speculation on the art of making literature (prose and poetry). This is certainly a hard task; especially when a reader (specialized or not) expects to interpret Boccaccio from the perspective of the traditional representation of a philosopher. However, an attempt to better understand the mechanisms of Boccaccio's language in all its manifold connotations, allusiveness, metaphors and word puns, is a task worthwhile to be undertaken, not only with the aim of providing a further and possible reading of the *Decameron*, but also with the hope of reconsidering Boccaccio's masterpiece within the context of Italian literature, a context that embraces, not incidentally, the philosophical and epistemological traditions.

Philosophy is undoubtedly a vast subject matter, and so is epistemology. What I mean with philosophy, and how I intend to use it in interpreting the *Decameron* is not far from how it is nowadays understood. With 'philosophy,' I mostly intend to consider its product, namely, the knowledge that comes out of philosophical speculations. Accordingly, in the case of Boccaccio, I intend to study the knowledge that comes out of the language through an almost unknown and undefined mechanism of the mind; essentially, the author's mind. Modern epistemology is certainly helpful in studying the

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even more specific sense, the philosophy of science (see J. Sanguineti, *Introduzione alla gnoseologia* [Le Monnier: Firenze, 2003]).

<sup>3</sup> A certain bias against considering the philosophical aspects of Boccaccio's literary production seems to be born with F. De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Milano: BUR, 2006), I: 309-311. Countless are the studies on Dante as a philosopher; to mention only the most famous and influential, see É. Gilson, *Dante et la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1939), who was the first to call attention to a philosophical perspective of Dante distinguished from the theological; B. Nardi, *La filosofia di Dante* (Milano: Marzorati, 1954); id., *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Roma: Laterza, 1990); id., *Dal Convivio alla Commedia: sei saggi danteschi* (Roma: Ist. storico it. per il Medioevo, 1960). On the *Convivio* see C. Vasoli, *Otto saggi per Dante* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 1995); R. Imbach, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs* (Fribourg, Suisse: Ed. Univ. Fribourg, Suisse [u.a.], 1996); T. Ricklin, Thomas and R. Imbach, eds., *Das Schreiben an Cangrande della Scala: lateinisch-deutsch* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1993); T. Ricklin, and F. Cheneval, *Dante Alighieri. Das Gastmahl. Drittes Buch* (Hamburg: F. Meiner, 1998); T. Ricklin and R. Imbach, *Dante, Philosophische Werke* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004); R. Imbach, *Dante, Monarchia: lateinisch-deutsch; Studienausgabe* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2007). On Dante's identity as both 'philomythes' (a poet as lover of 'wonder' and 'knowledge') and 'philosopher', see P. Boyde, *Dante, Philomythes and Philosopher: Man in the Cosmos* (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1981). On Petrarch as philosopher see mainly C. Trinkaus, *The Poet As Philosopher: Petrarch and the Formation of Renaissance Consciousness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); T. Kircher, *The Poet's Wisdom: The Humanists, the Church, and the Formation of Philosophy in the Early Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). A recent bias against Boccaccio as philosopher has been expressed by F. Bruni, *Boccaccio, l'invenzione della letteratura mezzana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990), 263. The *Decameron's* rich philosophical offering stands as eloquent testimony to reconsidering and reevaluating the philosophical aspects of Boccaccio's literary production.

language of literature, in identifying some of the subjects of the literary analysis, and in defining its key concepts.<sup>4</sup> Yet modern epistemology is not enough, and sometimes can be deceiving, to explain the manifold implications, terminologies, and historical developments that a work like the *Decameron* can convey in its own historical and literary context.

Boccaccio showed no clear intention to emphasize that what he was doing was philosophy in the sense we now understand it. Indeed, his primary intent, as a writer and poet, was to compete with philosophers and theologians, as is shown by his defence of poetry in the *Genealogies*. Nevertheless, Boccaccio was certainly aware that his literary creations produced *knowledge*—in the same way philosophy does without using the powerful means of language and rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Dante and Petrarch never called themselves philosophers but only poets, yet they dealt with philosophical problems in their works, as critics have often emphasized in tracing the lines of their thought and poetical production. Therefore, since this dissertation deals mostly with both the philosophical aspects of the *Decameron* and its philosophical sources, and copes with the theoretical awareness that separating literature from philosophy is not always possible, or, at least, it was not within Boccaccio's intentions, I opted for "Boccaccio the Philosopher" as the first part of the title. This may simply have the advantage of both emphasizing the philosophical content of the *Decameron* and, at the same time, adding more information about one of the most important authors of the Italian literary tradition as an eclectic figure. In other words, Boccaccio could best be seen, then, not just as a moralist, mythographer, or poet, but also as a philosopher.<sup>6</sup>

### *Boccaccio as Philosopher*

In drawing Boccaccio's profile as a philosopher, it is inevitably necessary to deal with his biography. His philosophical formation was shaped by a variety of life experiences and travels.<sup>7</sup> However, it is not simply the philosophical readings, or the famous people he was acquainted with, that influenced him and contributed a unique value to his literary profile, but it is precisely the way he was able to make himself

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<sup>4</sup> Modern epistemology is the subject of a vast bibliography. For a rapid overview and a definition of 'epistemology' see R. Audi, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 273-278. A good introduction to the problems of modern epistemology, with annotated bibliography, is R. Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> From another perspective, we can also say that philosophy and literature convey the same contents, but with different means.

<sup>6</sup> V. Zaccaria, *Boccaccio narratore, storico, moralista e mitografo* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 2001), has recently emphasized the various aspects of Boccaccio's literary figure.

<sup>7</sup> The major sources of Boccaccio's biography are V. Branca, *Profilo biografico*, in G. Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, vol. I: 3-197 (reprinted also in V. Branca, *Giovanni Boccaccio: profilo biografico* [Firenze: G.C. Sansoni, 1977]) and G. Billanovich, *Restauri boccacceschi* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1947). But see also Branca, *Boccaccio medievale* (Milano: BUR, 2010); Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio*; Padoan, *Il Boccaccio, le Muse, il Parnaso e l'Arno* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1978); G. Velli, *Petrarca e Boccaccio: tradizione, memoria, scrittura* (Padova: Antenore, 1979); G. Martellotti, *Dante e Boccaccio e altri scrittori dall'umanesimo al romanticismo* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1983); P. G. Ricci, *Studi sulla vita e le opere del Boccaccio* (Milano: R. Ricciardi, 1985); Bruni, *Boccaccio*.

independent from those experiences that created an original philosophical attitude which inevitably emerges in his works.

Several events in Boccaccio's life and the influence of different literary figures, such as Petrarch and Dante, marked his progressive career as a philosopher. The study of Dante's work was certainly an experience that introduced him to many aspects of the philosophical scope, from metaphysics to ethics.<sup>8</sup> Boccaccio himself wrote to Petrarch that Dante was his "primus studiorum dux et prima fax" in his first literary steps in Florence.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the most fruitful period of Boccaccio's philosophical training, and the time of his first epistemological 'discoveries,' was probably during his stay in Naples where he moved with his family around 1327.<sup>10</sup> In Naples, besides working as an apprentice in his family trading business, Boccaccio started to attend the fashionable and noble circles of the Angevin court and befriended very important figures of the *Regno*. In this milieu, Boccaccio developed both his profound cultural engagement, as shown in the many autobiographical sections of the *Genealogies*, and his passion for poetry as an epistemological means; later, he conceived of poetry even as a "sacred philosophy" (*sacra filosofia*), as it is subsequently praised in the *Corbaccio*.<sup>11</sup>

When Boccaccio temporarily moved to Paris, in 1332, he intensified his humanistic studies, presumably by first getting in touch with the cultural and academic scene of the University of Paris.<sup>12</sup> Back in Naples, then, Boccaccio attended Cino da Pistoia's lessons. Cino influenced Boccaccio remarkably, as is shown by his *rime*, and possibly introduced him to a deeper knowledge of Dante, Cavalcanti and Guittone.<sup>13</sup> Most importantly, Boccaccio frequented the *Studium* of the *Biblioteca Reale*, where he met Paolo da Perugia, librarian and erudite scholar, and the monk Barlaam, who probably introduced him to Greek texts and Byzantine literature for the first time. At the *Studium* of the *Biblioteca Reale*, Boccaccio also became familiar with scientific, astrological,

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<sup>8</sup> Boccaccio's family was related to the family of Dante's Beatrice (see Branca, *Profilo*, 12).

<sup>9</sup> Petrarch, *Familiare* XXI, 15, 2. Cf. Branca, *Profilo*, 12.

<sup>10</sup> On the culture of Robert of Anjou's court in Naples during Boccaccio's stay (1327-1341), see F. Sabatini, *Napoli angioina. Cultura e società* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1975), 93-115. On Boccaccio's background literature and the Angevin court, see A. Altamura, *La letteratura dell'età angioina. Tradizione medievale e premesse umanistiche. (storia e testi inediti)* (Napoli: S. Viti, 1952); É. G. Léonard, *Boccaccio et Naples* (Paris: E. Droz, 1944). For a historical perspective on the culture of Naples, see A. Barbero, *Il mito angioino nella cultura italiana e provenzale fra Duecento e Trecento* (Torino: Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, 1983); J. Gillingham, *The Angevin Empire* (London: Arnold; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). On the library of the court, see C. C. Coulter, "The Library of the Angevin Kings at Naples," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 75 (1944): 141-155. On the figure of Robert of Anjou, see W. Goetz, *König Robert von Neapel. Seine Persönlichkeit und sein Verhältnis zum Humanismus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [P. Siebeck] 1910); S. Kelly, *The New Solomon Robert of Naples (1309-1343) and Fourteenth-Century Kingship* (Leiden: Brill, 2003). On the traces of a myth of Naples in Boccaccio's works, see R. Mercuri, "Avignone e Napoli in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio;" F. Torraca, *Giovanni Boccaccio a Napoli (1326-1339)* (Napoli: Tip. L. Pierro e Figlio, 1915); M. Pade, Hannemarie Ragn Jensen, and Lene Waage Petersen, eds., *Avignon & Naples: Italy in France, France in Italy in the fourteenth century* (Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> "Gli studii adunque alla sacra filosofia pertinenti, infino dalla tua puerizia, più assai che il tuo padre non arebbe voluto, ti piacquerò, e massimamente in quella parte che a poesia appartiene; la quale per avventura tu hai, con più fervore d'animo che con alteza d'ingegno, seguita" (*Corbaccio*, ed. Padoan, III, 127).

<sup>12</sup> E. Garin, "La cultura fiorentina nella seconda metà del Trecento e i barbari Britanni," *Rassegna della letteratura italiana* 64 (1960): 181-195, in part. p. 187 and note 16.

<sup>13</sup> Branca, *Profilo*, 32.

medical, and physical studies which extended his philosophical knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Among the most famous scholars that frequented the *Biblioteca*, it is worth mentioning Paolo dell'Abaco, Andalò dal Negro, Graziolo de' Bambaglioli (Dante's commentator), and Paolino Minorita.<sup>15</sup> Last but not least, the Augustinian Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, who taught theology in Paris and was an expert in classics, rhetoric, and philosophy,<sup>16</sup> introduced Boccaccio to an extensive study of Seneca, Augustine, and Petrarch.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, the acquaintance with Dionigi was paramount in Boccaccio's literary career in so far as it marked an evolution toward the representation, in literature, of the powerful link between poetry and philosophy.<sup>18</sup> According to Michelangelo Picone, who commented Boccaccio's letter *Mavortis miles extrenue* (1339), the encounter with Dionigi marked the passage from the emulation of Dante to a reconsideration of poetry and philosophy as embodied in the figure of Petrarch and reflected in allegorical poetry.<sup>19</sup> Finally, when Boccaccio later moved to Florence, although he was always nostalgic about his beautiful and carefree stay in Naples, he quickly got acquainted with the cultural context of the city, and deepened his knowledge of Dante's works, and possibly of the didactical and allegorical literature that was current in Florence at that time as witnessed by the texts transcribed in his *Zibaldone Laurenziano*.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio*, drawing from an episode in the *Filocolo* in which Idalogo, imprisoned in a pine tree, recalls the astronomic and astrological teachings of Calmeta, finds Boccaccio's philosophical sources in the culture of that time and analyzes the role of astronomy and astrology in his minor works. Quaglio also portrays the figure of the Genovese scientist Andalò del Negro and discusses his pupil's attitude towards him: Boccaccio was always enthusiastic and grateful to his master, especially during the Neapolitan period (the time in which the *Filocolo* is supposed to have been written). In particular, in the chapter: "Andalò del Negro e Giovanni Boccaccio astronomi e astrologi" (p. 127-206), Quaglio notices Boccaccio's shifting attitude toward astrology. Boccaccio was gradually less interested in astrology and more in the allegorical aspects of literature.

<sup>15</sup> Branca, *Profilo*, 34-35.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. F. Suitner, ed., *Dionigi da Borgo Sansepolcro fra Petrarca e Boccaccio: atti del convegno, Sansepolcro, 11-12 febbraio 2000* (Città di Castello: Petrucci, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Branca, *Profilo*, 37; M. Picone, "Dionigi amicus ymaginarius di Boccaccio," in Suitner, ed., *Dionigi da Borgo Sansepolcro fra Petrarca e Boccaccio*, 125-132.

<sup>18</sup> In the Middle Ages as well as in Antiquity, it was widespread belief that close ties bound poetry to philosophy. On the relationship between poetry and philosophy see E. R. Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino* (Scandicci: La nuova Italia, 1995), chap. XI: "Poesia e filosofia;" Z. G. Barański, *Dante e i segni: saggi per una storia intellettuale di Dante Alighieri* (Napoli: Liguori, 2000), 77-78, 87; Id., "'Per similitudine di abito scientifico': Dante, Cavalcanti, and the Sources of Medieval 'Philosophical' Poetry," in P. Antonello & S. Gilson, eds., *Literature and Science in Italian Culture: from Dante to Calvino. A Festschrift in Honour of Patrick Boyde* (Oxford: Legenda, 2004), 14-52; R. McKeon, "Poetry and Philosophy in the Twelfth Century: The Renaissance of Rhetoric," *Modern Philology* 43 (1946): 217-234; W. Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century; The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972); L. Sebastio, *Per una storia dell'idea di poesia nel Duecento* (Bari: Edizioni levante, 1983); A. J. Minnis, A. B. Scott, and D. Wallace, eds., *Medieval literary theory and criticism, c. 1100-c. 1375: the commentary-tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 113-164; J. Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1995); P. Von Moos, "Literary Aesthetics in the Latin Middle Ages: the Rhetorical Theology of Peter Abelard," in C. J. Mews, C. J. Nederman, R. M. Thomson, and J. O. Ward, eds., *Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West 1100-1540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), 81-97.

<sup>19</sup> Picone, "Dionigi amicus," 129 and 131.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Branca, *Profilo*, 57.

## *The Manuscript Tradition*

To properly reassess Boccaccio's biography *sub specie philosophiae*, it is paramount to consider the manuscript tradition of his works and readings. According to what we know about manuscripts and books that Boccaccio read and/or possessed, and despite the old and traditional image of Boccaccio as not being a philosopher, the number of his philosophical readings is impressive.<sup>21</sup> The study of the manuscript tradition, especially Boccaccio's autographs in Italy, is very important in order to characterize the Author's thought. Boccaccio's philosophical background had a great part in the making of the *Decameron* and also in structuring the rhetorical bases of his vernacular prose. The study of Boccaccio's autographs and library catalogues turns out to be illuminating in assessing the author's medieval and early modern readings.<sup>22</sup> First of all, three manuscripts written by the author and held in the Florentine Laurenziana Library attest to the author's interests in philosophy and his study of medieval poetical-philosophical texts. The so-called *Zibaldone Laurenziano* (Cod. XXIX 8, famous for the documents collected by Boccaccio on Dante's biography) contains materials on Petrarch and the *Liber de dictis philosophorum antiquorum*.<sup>23</sup> The Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. XXXIII 31, contains, among other works, the *De mundi universitate* (*Microcosmus et Megacosmus*) by Bernard Silvestris.<sup>24</sup> We should also mention a manuscript held in Florence in the

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio con particolare riguardo alla storia della erudizione nel Medio Evo e alle letterature straniere, aggiuntavi la bibliografia delle edizioni* (Trieste: Julius Dase, 1879); Billanovich, *Restauri boccaceschi*; Id., "La tradizione del 'Liber de dictis philosophorum antiquorum' e la cultura di Dante, del Petrarca e del Boccaccio," *Studi Petrarqueschi* 1 (1948): 111-123; A. Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libraria' di Santo Spirito e la biblioteca di Boccaccio," *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 9 (1966): 1-74.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. E. Ianni, "Elenco Dei Manoscritti Autografi Di Giovanni Boccaccio," *MLN* 86, The Italian Issue (1971): 99-113; Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libraria';" P. O. Kristeller, *Le Thomisme Et La Pensée Italienne De La Renaissance* (Montréal: Institut d'études médiévales, 1967), in part. p. 70, with notes on the ms. Ambrosiana, cod. lat. A, 204, inf. containing Aristotle's Ethics and Thomas Aquinas' commentary transcribed by Boccaccio; A. M. Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf: un autografo del Boccaccio," *Archivio Storico Lombardo* s. IX, vol. V-VI, 1966-67, anni XCIII-XCIV, p. 69-100.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. E. Franceschini, "Il *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*," *Atti della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei* 327 (1930), Serie VI, Memorie della Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, III: 355-399.

<sup>24</sup> The Biblioteca Laurenziana, Cod. XXXIII 31 is a Latin miscellany and contains an anthology of classic and medieval Latin writers, bearing witness to the eclectic and singular cultural interests of Boccaccio, who prepared and copied it in several stages and different circumstances. The volume includes Fulgentius' *Expositio sermonum antiquorum* (fols. 1r-3r), Persius' *Satirae* (4r-16v), several texts from the *Appendix Vergiliana* (*Culex* and *Dirae*, 17r-27v; *Priapea*, 39r-45v), Ovid's *Ibis* (46v-9r) and *Amores* (49v-59r), the *De mundi universitate* [*Microcosmus et Megacosmus*] by Bernard Silvestris (59v-67r), the medieval plays *Geta* by Vital of Blois (67v-9r), *Alda* by William of Blois (69v-71v) and *Lydia* by Arnulf of Orléans (71v-3v), a collection of aphorisms and various poems from the *Anthologia Latina*. This collection is exceptional due also to the fact that several minor texts in it have been handed down to us solely through this manuscript (or very few others). Examples include the tetrastich in honour of St Minias (fol. 3v), the *Lamentatio Bertoldi*, a scholastic cento of classical and middle-Latin quotations (ibid.), and the sole extant fragment of Lovato Lovati's poem on Tristan and Isolde (fol. 46r). Boccaccio's hand has been identified not only in the text, but also in the numerous marginal and interlinear notes, which provide evidence of his graphic and decorative talent. In the margins of fol. 4r the glosses are arranged so as to form a 'jug', a flower, a trilobite leaf (left margin) and other geometric shapes. The *maniculae* in a variety of gestures and positions are also in Boccaccio's own hand (fol. 12v shows a three-button sleeve). The fate

Biblioteca Nazionale, the so-called *Zibaldone Magliabechiano* (Bibl. Naz. B. R. 50), a folio-sized manuscript written by Boccaccio, where he also copied a speech on poetry delivered by Zanobi da Strada in 1355, and reported a collection of quotations from Seneca as well as ethical-philosophical sentences on poverty and love. Additionally, another fundamental source, specifically for the making of the *Decameron*, is the ms. Paris, BNF, Ms. Ital. 482, which Vittore Branca identified as an early authorial redaction (years 1349-1351) of the collection before the definitive version transmitted by the codex Hamilton 90 of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz of Berlin;<sup>25</sup> this manuscript, now held in Paris, was written by Giovanni d'Agnolo Capponi sometime during 1365-1369.

To understand the reasons and modalities of Boccaccio's interest in this kind of philosophical culture, the history of his manuscripts is enlightening. Antonia Mazza has reconstructed the story of Boccaccio's library. When Boccaccio died, he bequeathed his manuscripts to Friar Martino da Signa. Although we do not know exactly what these manuscripts were and to which of the extant manuscripts they corresponded, Boccaccio's biographers insisted on emphasizing his indefatigable activity as a scribe. After Friar Martino da Signa's death (1387), according to an inventory dating from 1451, Boccaccio's manuscripts entered the library of Santo Spirito. The inventory includes items from various sources, among which 81 manuscripts may well be attributed to Boccaccio.<sup>26</sup> Although a number of Boccaccio's books was not considered in the bequest, and maybe a handful were taken out, neither Boccaccio's nor other authors' vernacular works (including Boccaccio's transcriptions of Dante's works) were included in the bequest. Moreover, Boccaccio's *De montibus*, the Latin Miscellany, the *Aeneid*, Cassiodorus' *Institutiones*, Columella, the manuscripts of Tacitus and Apuleius, Varro, Euripides (translated by Leonzio Pilato), the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and Aristotle's *Ethics* are not included in the inventory, yet we know that they were known by the certaldese. Not surprisingly, for its importance and the number of items, among Boccaccio's books we find a big collection of Petrarch's writings. Eventually, in the 1500s, the gradual dispersal of Santo Spirito books, and Boccaccio's library, begun.

Studies on Boccaccio's manuscripts thrived during the 1960s and 1970s. Today, we can say that we know a lot about Boccaccio's readings and about the way that his books have moved from the author's personal library to their later and different locations. We also know a lot about how the author read and glossed his primary sources, and how these texts were rewritten and elaborated into the original synthesis that is Boccaccio's

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of this codex is entwined with that of the so-called *Zibaldone Laurenziano*, Plut. 29.8. The two manuscripts, which were once joined, were both made in part with palimpsest leaves from a 13th-century gradual in Beneventan script. The codex belonged to Antonio Petrei (1498–1570), scholar and canon of the Florentine basilica of San Lorenzo, as indicated in the ownership inscription on fol. ivr (but actually vr), and in the erased note on fol. 1r. The Biblioteca Laurenziana obtained it, along with 19 other manuscripts owned by Petrei, in the third quarter of the 16th century. The manuscript is open at fol. 4r, with the incipit of Persius' *Satirae*.

<sup>25</sup> V. Branca, "Studi sul testo del "Decameron," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 13 (1981-82): 21-158; V. Branca and M. Vitale, *Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni* (Venezia: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2002), Vol. I: M. Vitale, *La riscrittura del Decameron: i mutamenti stilistici*; vol. II: V. Branca, *Variazioni stilistiche e narrative*.

<sup>26</sup> Goldmann was the first to publish, in 1887, the 1451 inventory contained, with that of the bibliotheca maior, in a manuscript held in the Laurenziana (Ashburnham 1897). Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libraria'," edited the inventory reporting the variants of Goldmann, Hecker and Gutiérrez.



literary works. After the interest for the study of the "human comedy" of the *Decameron*, which flourished in the 1930s-50s, it is with the 'new philology' (*nuova filologia*) and the *critica degli scartafacci* (Gianfranco Contini, Cesare Segre, and others) that the study of Boccaccio's manuscripts was recuperated, and some canonical perspectives that influenced later studies were imposed: new manuscripts were attributed to the author (even those that do not appear in the famous inventory) through the observation of Boccaccio's writing. These manuscripts were also studied as collections of erudite and varied materials, and for the intrinsic amount of intertextuality that they showed; or they were analyzed and studied as rewritings of Boccaccio's (or other authors') texts. More recently, critical attention has been given to the 'structures' as decisive elements of the literary works in so far as they constitute a "system of writing" (the study of Boccaccio's anthologies, notes and glosses).<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the importance of knowing Boccaccio's manuscripts and their history is emphasized by Manlio Pastore Stocchi. First, he proves wrong the legend of Boccaccio impoverished and personally compelled to copy his books due to a lack of monetary resources. During his mature years, Boccaccio was a well-respected and influential citizen: in taking on the burden of transcribing his books, Boccaccio was not trying to resolve individual needs by saving money, but was undertaking a voluntary and conscious cultural and artistic effort. Under this perspective, even the copying of classical texts takes the form of a critical-philological reconstructive operation, certainly comparable to the activity of the later humanists.<sup>28</sup> Particularly, according to Pastore Stocchi, the large size of the Hamilton 90 containing the *Decameron* is the most prominent indicator of the prestige and the literary value that Boccaccio attributed to his *novelle* in comparison to other Latin and vernacular texts.<sup>29</sup>

Judging from the books that belonged to Boccaccio's library, and from those that we know he read and transcribed, Boccaccio had an extraordinary philosophical culture in addition to literary interests. According to the information contained in the inventory commented by Antonia Mazza, Boccaccio owned numerous works of philosophical and, particularly, ethical interest, including authors such as Aristotle (*Politics*, *De animalibus* in the translation by Michael Scot), Algazel (*Metaphysics*), Plato (*Timaeus* in the translation by Calcidius), Seneca (*Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, *Naturales quaestiones*, *Hercules Furens* and *Hercules Oetaeus*), Horace (*Ars poetica*), Cicero (*De officiis*, *De senectute*, *De finibus* and *De inventione*), Macrobius (*Commentariorum in Somnium Scipionis*), Augustine (*De civitate Dei*, *Enarrationes in Psalmos*), Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*De ecclesiastica hierarchia* in the translation by Johannes Scotus Eriugena), Boethius (*De consolazione philosophiae*), the *Liber de causis* (in the translation by Gerardo da Cremona), the *Liber de dictis philosophorum*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Alain de Lille (*De planctu naturae* and *Anticlaudianus*), Iohannes Folsham (*De naturis rerum*), Hermes Trismegistus (*Corpus Hermeticum*), William of Auxerre (*Summa Theologica*).<sup>30</sup> Thus, particularly, Boccaccio read Aristotle and, during the years of the

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. V. Branca, intr. to C. Cazalé-Bérard and M. Picone, eds., *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura: atti del seminario internazionale di Firenze-Certaldo, 26-28 aprile 1996* (Firenze: F. Cesati, 1998), 5-10.

<sup>28</sup> M. Pastore Stocchi, "Su alcuni autografi del Boccaccio," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 10 (1977-78): 123-143, in part. 126-127.

<sup>29</sup> Pastore Stocchi, "Su alcuni autografi del Boccaccio," 139.

<sup>30</sup> Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio*; Billanovich, *Restauri boccacceschi*; Mazza, "L'inventario della parva libraria." G. Auzzas, "I codici autografi. Elenco e bibliografia," *Studi sul*

composition of the *Decameron*, even copied the commentary to the *Nicomachean Ethics* written by Thomas Aquinas. The manuscript of the *Nicomachean Ethics* studied by Boccaccio is now held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan.<sup>31</sup>

### *Knowledge and Interpretation*

Overall, we can reconstruct Boccaccio's historical and philological relationship with philosophy by studying his readings and looking at his biographical data; yet the image of Boccaccio as philosopher that comes out of this operation does not entirely fit any of the traditional doctrines that Boccaccio could have possibly assimilated, and does not provide us with an unified vision of his thought. Apparently, Boccaccio's intent was not that of creating a new and completely different philosophical system, and this could explain why elements of Aristotelianism and Thomism are combined with Neo-Platonism, Averroism and Epicureanism all over his production and among the eclectic interests of his readings.<sup>32</sup> Besides, we could also say that the manifold philosophical

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*Boccaccio* 7 (1973): 1-20, describes Boccaccio's autograph manuscripts. Among those containing philosophical works, the Firenze, Bib. Med. Laur., Plut. XXIX.8, the Firenze, Bib. Med. Laur., Plut. XXXIII.31, the Firenze, Bib. Naz. Centrale, B.R. 50, the Firenze, Bib. Riccardiana, 1230, and the Milano, Bib. Ambrosiana, A.204 part. inf..

<sup>31</sup> The text of the *Ethics* is on one column in Gothic writing; in the margin, surrounding the text, Aquinas' commentary in cursive Gothic writing with red and blue initials. Boccaccio could be the transcriber of both the text of the *Ethics* and Aquinas' commentary; the copy possibly took place around 1338/40 for his personal usage (O. Hecker, *Boccaccio-Funde* [Braunschweig, Westermann, 1902], 28; Kristeller, *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, 70; *Mostra di manoscritti, documenti e edizioni: VI centenario della morte di Giovanni Boccaccio; Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 22 maggio - 31 agosto 1975*. 1: *Manoscritti e documenti*. Certaldo: Comitato Promotore, 1975, 139-140, numero 112; Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf.," 85). It must be said that Boccaccio used to live in Naples in this period. In Naples, there was a royal library full of classical works and fervent of philosophical and literary culture (C. C. Coulter, "Boccaccio and the Cassinese Manuscripts of the Laurentian Library," *Classical Philology* 43 (1948): 217-221; ead., "The Library of the Angevin Kings at Naples"). There resided Paolo from Perugia, librarian of the king and erudite fond of classical studies, who Boccaccio cites in his *Genealogies* (Proemium, and LXV, 6, p. 761). Boccaccio could also have gone to the nearby library of the monastery of Monte Cassino, which notoriously possessed inestimable books. Furthermore, Dionigi from Borgo Sansepolcro, theologian, and astrologer of the king, famous for his studies on Aristotle, was active in Naples at that time (Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf.," 93. See also G. Padoan, "Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale nell'ideologia e nell'arte di Giovanni Boccaccio." *Studi sul Boccaccio* 2 [1964]: 81-216, in part. p. 83). Strangely enough, however, the *Ethics* owned by Boccaccio did not appear in the lists of books belonged to him and bequeathed to Friar Martino da Signa for the library of Santo Spirito in Florence. We do not know how the manuscript ended up in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. The text transcribed by Boccaccio is a copy of the translation by William of Moerbeke that Thomas Aquinas used as the basic text on which to write his commentary between 1266 and 1272 (Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf.," 100).

<sup>32</sup> While Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic elements in Boccaccio have been studied by various critics, the major interpretation of Boccaccio as Averroistic philosopher is that of A. Gagliardi, *Giovanni Boccaccio. Poeta Filosofo Averroista* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1999). As for the influence of epicurean thought in the *Decameron* see M. Veglia, "*La vita lieta*": una lettura del *Decameron* (Ravenna: Longo, 2000); Z. Barański, "«Alquanto tenea della opinione degli Epicuri»: The *auctoritas* of Boccaccio's Cavalcanti (and Dante)," *Zeitschrift für deutsche philologie* 126, Beiheft xiii (2006): 280-325; Id., "Boccaccio and Epicurus," in J. Kraye e L. Lepschy, eds., *Caro Vitto: Essays in Memory of Vittore Branca. The Italianist* 27, special supplement 2 (London: The Warburg Institute, 2007), 10-27; A. R. Ascoli, "Auerbach fra gli epicurei: dal canto X dell'*Inferno* alla VI giornata del *Decameron*," *Moderna* 11 (2009):

system that comes out from the language of the *Decameron* is, in turn, reflected into the heterogeneity and manifold nature of the collection of tales. The meanings of the *Decameron* should then be found independently from a supposed unifying idea of Boccaccio's philosophical discourse. While modern philosophy always looks like an effort after another to be, on the one hand, original or different, and on the other, to provide the reader with a unified system—and so did, and probably should actually do, literary critics in finding common patterns and coherent ideas that can explain an author's thought—in my opinion Boccaccio's thought cannot be entirely circumscribed within the canons of a well-defined doctrine. If I were to find a *unifying* vision of the *Decameron*, I would then emphasize the creation of knowledge in all its possible manifestations as an *open* process; namely, a creative process, as we shall see, that becomes explicit both from studying Boccaccio's poetics and from the reading of the tales. As the multiplicity of the storytellers' reactions to the tales shows, the reading of the tales, indeed, is intended by the author as a way to exercise the capacity of interpreting the text in order to provide a philosophical or moral knowledge. Although it is likely that the effort to define a unifying epistemology may be vain—especially because Boccaccio never explicitly elaborated a theory of knowledge—I intend to search for a coherent philosophical vision reflected in the *Decameron* and at the same time to analyze Boccaccio's discourse. I believe that it is precisely Boccaccio's language that is able to both create knowledge and facilitate the interpretation of the text.

The idea of considering Boccaccio's theory of knowledge stems from reading the Sixth Day of the *Decameron*, the Day of the *motto*, but then extends to the entire collection. In the Sixth Day, in particular, the general interest for the philosophical aspects of the *Decameron* is coupled with the fascinating mechanisms of the language that emerges when attempting to explain the mysterious and peculiar features of the *motto*. The literal interpretation of some of the witty remarks with which the characters escape from difficult situations does not appear satisfactory enough to explain their usage in the context and to understand the tales in which they were used. When Madonna Oretta is offered a ride by a knight who also attempts to tell a story yet tells it poorly, Oretta's remark begging the knight to put her down (“Messere, questo vostro cavallo ha troppo duro trotto; per che io vi priego che vi piaccia di pormi a piè” [VI.1.11] [Sir, this horse of yours has too rough a trot, so I beg you, please, to set me down]) evokes meanings that go beyond the literal sense of the story to involve metaliterary reflections on the art of narration and the philosophical tradition.<sup>33</sup> Or when Guido Cavalcanti rebukes with a witty remark a Florentine *brigata* who comes upon him by surprise (“Signori, voi mi potete dire a casa vostra ciò che vi piace” [Gentlemen, in your own house you may say to

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91-108. On medieval attitudes to Epicureanism, see Z. Barański, "Appendix: Epicurus, Averroes, Cavalcanti," in "Cavalcanti and his first readers," 172-175; S. Marchesi, "*Epicuri de grege porcus*: Ciaccio, Epicurus and Isidore of Seville," *Dante Studies* 117 (1999): 117-131; A. Mazzeo, "Dante and Epicurus: The Making of a Type," in *Medieval Cultural Tradition in Dante's "Comedy"* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1960), 174-204; A. Murray, "The Epicureans," in P. Boitani and A. Torti, eds., *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe* (Tubingen: Narr; Cambridge: Brewer, 1986), 138-163; M. R. Pagnoni, "Prime note sulla tradizione medioevale ed umanistica di Epicuro," *Ann. della Sc. Norm. Sup. di Pisa, Cl. di Lett. e Filos.*, s. III, 4 (1974): 1443-1477.

<sup>33</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. V. Branca (Torino: Einaudi, 1992). Text references are to Day, tale, and paragraph of this edition. The English translation is taken from G. Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. J. M. Rigg (London: Dent, 1978).

me whatever you wish]), the presence of the characters among the tombs in front of the Florentine Baptistery, and the fact that Cavalcanti is also a philosopher, invite to reflect on the significance of the story beyond the pure entertainment of the narration. The enigmatic aspect of these *motti*, along with the peculiar and powerful usage of the language involved, tells us that something else is at stake and stimulates us to explore both their nature as signs (bearers of hidden meanings) and their philosophical implications.

Epistemology is admittedly the theory of knowledge.<sup>34</sup> Knowledge is the central organizing principle and focus of this dissertation. Knowledge, here, is intended both as a philosophical experience (the capacity of understanding, the goal of human comprehension) and as a poetical structure (the language of literature). Additionally, knowledge can be considered the product of an 'activity': the activity of the mind and the act of reading the text. Accordingly, I intend to analyze how knowledge is produced, how it is concealed through peculiar figurative mechanisms of the language, and what the means of this production (and concealment) consists of. To this purpose, the features of the *motto* should be analyzed in connection with one of the main powers operating in the *Decameron*, *Ingegno*. As the critical scholarship has so far convincingly established, Love, Fortune,<sup>35</sup> and *Ingegno* are the most relevant and recognizable of these powers. Indirectly represented by the people who are affected by their sway, they organize, and operate in, this most famous collection of tales in Italian Literature, the *Decameron*.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> As already noticed, the bibliography on modern and contemporary epistemology is huge. On medieval epistemology much less has been written: see A. Broadie, *Notion and Object: Aspects of Late Medieval Epistemology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); C. J. Cummings, *Medieval Epistemology and the Rise of Science* (2003); L. E. Hunt, *Secrets of Divine Wisdom: The Use of the Figura and Exemplum in Medieval Epistemology*, Ph. D. dissertation (University of Georgia, 2001). As for the Renaissance, cf. J. Hendrix, and C. H. Carman, *Renaissance Theories of Vision* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010). On the ways in which knowledge can be mistaken, see G. R. Evans, *Getting It Wrong: The Medieval Epistemology of Error* (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

<sup>35</sup> Ferdinando Neri ("Il disegno ideale del *Decameron*," in F. Neri, *Storia e poesia: La rinascita medievale. Fiabe. Dugentismo. Il disegno ideale del Decameron. La Contessa di Challant. Panurge. Il contrasto dell'amore e della follia. La sorte del Rotrou. Il De Sanctis e la critica francese* [Torino: Chiantore, 1944], 71-82, in part. p. 76-77) indicates the theme of Fortune as the main structural feature of the *Decameron*, while Mario Baratto (*Realtà e stile nel Decameron* [Vicenza: N. Pozza, 1974], 15-18, 31-34 and 47) maintains that the interaction of Nature and Fortune is the double narrative device that structures the collection—the former being an element internal to the individuals, the latter external.

<sup>36</sup> If Natalino Sapegno ("Il realismo del *Decameron*," in *Il Trecento, Storia letteraria d'Italia*, [Milano: Vallardi, 1934], 351, 355-356) and Umberto Bosco (*Il "Decameron": Saggio* [Rieti: Bibliotheca Editrice, 1929], chap. VIII, pp. 190-195: "Il poeta dell'intelligenza") were the theorists of *intelligenza* in the *Decameron*, Giuseppe Petronio (G. Boccaccio, *Il Decameron*, a cura di Giuseppe Petronio [Torino: Einaudi, 1950], 22-25, 54) identifies in the *saviezza* an "ammirazione spregiudicata per l'intelligenza" that "a tutti i sentimenti può unirsi, dai più disinteressati ai più egoistici, dai più nobili ai più volgari," thus linking Boccaccio's privileged motif of intelligence with the realistic attitude of his literary art. On the organizing principles and key motives of the *Decameron* see also C. Muscetta, "Giovanni Boccaccio," in Id., ed., *Letteratura italiana Laterza* (Bari: Laterza, 1989), 157, and Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 31-36 ("Coerenza ideale e funzione unitaria nell'Introduzione"). R. A. B. Hastings, *Nature and Reason in the Decameron* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), 74, n. 116, is more specific as far as the terms used to designate 'intelligence': in the *Decameron*, "*Ragione* designates the use of the intellect, or rational faculty in general, to control natural instinct. It also means 'reasonableness' and 'rightfulness', qualities derived from the enlightened use of these reasoning faculties in the conscious and proper direction of the will . . . *Ingegno* and *senno* usually refer to active, operative intelligence, resourcefulness and ingenuity: *ingegno* in fact frequently means a ruse, trick or stratagem. It may, however, also refer to wit and

Without denying the import of the potent forces of Love and Fortune, this dissertation aims to explore an aspect specifically connected to the so-called *Ingegno*; more precisely, one of its products: human knowledge. Thus, considering an epistemological perspective, the production of knowledge may constitute another actor/power operating in the *Decameron* through the mechanisms of the language and in connection with the philosophical background of the author.

Besides being inspired by the language of poetry and its strict connection with philosophy in the Italian tradition,<sup>37</sup> Boccaccio's speculation on the nature of poetry—which, in short, is the means conceived by the author to convey philosophical contents—is paramount for the understanding of how knowledge is produced by the text.<sup>38</sup> The myth of the birth of Minerva, the goddess generated from the head of Jove,<sup>39</sup> wonderfully narrated in the *Genealogies*, can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the birth of knowledge and beautifully epitomize the author's thought. Considering the manifold literary representations of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio's text has the power to generate from itself 'something' else, like in the myth of Minerva; in other words, the narratives of the *Decameron* are able to create further meaning, or knowledge, in addition to the literal by simply stimulating the reader's imagination. In this respect, and to explain it better, it is interesting to see how Boccaccio interprets the meaning of Minerva's myth in the *Genealogies*. Minerva represents wisdom, as she is born from Jove's head (*Genealogies*

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repartee. *Sapere* indicates 'know-how', ability, expertise. *Sagacità* indicates care, caution, circumspection and deliberation. *Saviezza* usually means reflective wisdom . . . but it is also used in the sense of *discrezione* . . . *Discrezione* signifies discretion, but also discernment, perspicacity. *Avvedimento* may mean a number of things: shrewdness, perspicacity and discernment; resourcefulness and ingenuity; or an expedient, ruse or stratagem." On the semantic varieties of the terms related to wisdom see also C. Brucker, *Sage et sagesse au moyen âge (XIIIe et XIIIe siècles): étude historique, sémantique et stylistique* (Genève: Droz, 1987).

<sup>37</sup> From the famous *tenzone* between Bonagiunta Orbicciani and Guido Guinizzelli, to the philosophical poetry of Guido Cavalcanti's *Donna me prega* and Dante's sustained philosophical verse of the *Commedia*, Duecento Italian poetry certainly constitutes a model for Boccaccio, not only traceable in his *Rime* but also in the construction of the prose of his narrative works. Even the poets of the Sicilian School weaved strands of philosophical matter into their love poetry: see R. Arquès, *La poesia di Giacomo da Lentini: scienza e filosofia nel XIII secolo in Sicilia e nel Mediterraneo occidentale: atti del convegno tenutosi all'Università autonoma di Barcellona (16-18, 23-24 ottobre 1997)* (Palermo: Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani, 2000); E. Musacchio, "Passione d'amore e scienza ottica in un sonetto di Giacomo da Lentini," *Letteratura italiana antica* 4 (2003): 337-369; E. Lombardi, "Traduzione e riscrittura: da Folchetto al Notaio," *The Italianist* 24 (2004): 5-19.

<sup>38</sup> On the relationship between poetry and philosophy in the Middle Ages, see McKeon, "Poetry and philosophy in the twelfth century;" Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century*; Boyde, *Dante, Philomythes and Philosopher*, chap. 1 and 2; Sebastio, *Per una storia dell'idea di poesia nel Duecento*; Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, eds., *Medieval literary theory and criticism*, 113-164; Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*; von Moos, "Literary aesthetics in the Latin Middle Ages," 81-97; Baranski, "'Per similitudine di abito scientifico'," 14-52.

<sup>39</sup> The same myth is later on reconsidered in the Renaissance Platonism. See Marsilio Ficino, "Five Questions Concerning the Mind" (*Epistolae*, Book 2, No. 1 [ed. Venice, 1495], fols. xxxviii ff., *Opera*, ed. Basel, 1576, pp. 675), eng. trans. in E. Cassirer and P. O. Kristeller, eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man: Selections in Transl.; Petrarca, Valla, Ficino, Pico, Pomponazzi, Vives* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Pr, 1971), 193-214, in part. p. 193: "Wisdom, sprung from the crown of the head of Jove, creator of all, warns her philosophical lovers that if they truly desire ever to gain possession of their beloved, they should always seek the highest summits of things rather than the lowest places; for Pallas, the divine offspring sent down from the high heavens, herself frequents the high citadels which she has established."

II, 3, 5); she is also represented as a virgin, in so far as wisdom/knowledge is never contaminated by earthly things, but is always pure, bright and perfect (*Genealogies* II, 3, 6). Most importantly, Minerva is covered with three veils, meaning that the words of wise men—especially the poets—who transmit Minerva's knowledge, can convey several different meanings through poetry (II, 3, 7). Thus, the nature of the myth itself is polysemous (*Genealogies* I, 3),<sup>40</sup> as Boccaccio emphasizes it with regard to the meanings which he explains throughout the *Genealogies*. Therefore, knowledge is not only linked to the cognitive mechanisms of the wise men/poets, but it is also something that must be interpreted as well as something that can have various interpretations.

Besides the *Genealogies* and its representations of knowledge mediated by the theory of poetry, the philosophical aspects of the *Decameron* are evident from its very beginning, in the *Proemio*, where the author, posing as an *alter* Boethius, illustrates the consolatory nature of his work and explains how narrative can be considered a means of philosophy:

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. . . . ho meco stesso proposto di volere, in quel poco che per me si può, in cambio di ciò che io ricevetti, ora che libero dir mi posso, . . . a quegli almeno a' quali fa luogo, *alcuno alleggiamento prestare*. . . . Adunque, acciò che in parte per me s'amendi *il peccato della fortuna* . . . intendo di raccontare cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo . . . (emphasis mine)

But the knowledge produced by the reading of the tales transpires primarily in Boccaccio's very intention to communicate his vision of the world, and what he has learnt (his knowledge), to everybody:

. . . nondimeno parmi quello doversi più tosto porgere dove il bisogno apparisce maggiore, sì perché più utilità vi farà e sì ancora perché più vi fia caro avuto. . . . delle quali le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, 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: le quali cose senza passamento di noia non credo che possano intervenire.

More generally, as Boccaccio had recently undergone a painful and difficult period of life due to love sufferings, but he had fortunately recovered from it, he appears now ready to share his wisdom with other lovers in need for help. Particularly, the message that the *Decameron* tries to convey is meant to edify female readers (the *lettrici*) and to have them acquire a better worldview, to have them understand the dangers of life in order to overcome that "vizio di fortuna" that makes them unable to enjoy existence as much as men do.

The peculiar relationship established by the author with the readers at the very beginning of the *Decameron* is indicative of a 'cognitive' attitude on the part of the author to expand the possibilities of production of meaning. It is the reader himself that must be able to produce more knowledge, a knowledge which is different than that contained in

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<sup>40</sup> The usage of the word 'polysemous' in *Genealogie*, I, 3 may also be drawn from Dante's *Ep.* 13 to Cangrande, as C. G. Osgood notices (*Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio's Genealogia Deorum Gentilium in an English Version with Introductory Essay and Commentary* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1978), xvii, n. 9).

the poetic, and literal, understanding of the text, a knowledge, then, which can have practical implications. In the Middle Ages as well as in the Renaissance, independently from the biblical exegesis which was practiced by professional theologians, it was common opinion that a text may contain various degrees of truth, namely, that even an apparently simple narrative can convey symbolic, metaphorical, or even ethical contents at the same time. Besides imposing limits to the inter-subjectivity of interpretation on the level of the encyclopedic culture and the practice of allegory, medieval thinking used to recognize a criterion of multi-interpretability whereby a text can be interpreted in different ways yet according to well-defined rules, and not indefinitely.<sup>41</sup>

The process of building on the tales, as Texts, or 'open' texts, is enacted by the storytellers of the *Decameron* who tell each other stories and, then, manifest and share their different reactions and interpretations on various subjects. (This dialogic representation of the process of narrating, however, does not prevent the reader from extracting a unifying interpretation of the tales, of a single Day, or of a specific subject.) Interpretation, therefore, depends on understanding the dialogic narrative of the *Decameron* in which different perspectives and interpretations are intertwined. Furthermore, the modality of interpretation is also identified in the modality of the commentary. As is well known, the medieval exegetical tradition developed the modality of the commentary of literary and religious works,<sup>42</sup> and the Italian tradition developed the same modality applied to literary works that comment themselves (for instance,

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<sup>41</sup> On the aesthetics and semiotics of the multi-interpretability linked to the medieval theory of allegory, see U. Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1984), chap. "Simbolo" (Eng. trans.: *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984]); Id., "L'epistola XIII e l'allegorismo medievale," in *Sugli specchi e altri saggi* (Milano: Bompiani, 1962), 215-241; Id., *Arte e bellezza nell'estetica medievale* (Milano: Bompiani, 1997) [Eng. trans.: *Art and beauty in the Middle Ages*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.], chap. 12. Considering the perspective of hermeneutics as a philosophy of interpreting the text, the mechanism of understanding Boccaccio's text can be viewed not only according to the medieval exegetical canons but also in the same way as that described by Barthes, in an already famous article (1979), for understanding the literary work as opposed to the text. See R. Barthes, "From Work to Text," in Josue V. Harari, ed., *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Poststructuralist Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1979), 73-81. According to Barthes, a 'work' is something that no one can modify; a 'text,' instead, is something whose meaning can be renewed by many readers. The reading, moreover, should reflect an active way of interacting with a text. There may be 'text' in a very ancient work, while many products of contemporary literature are in no way texts. Evidently, Barthes thought that the Text is a 'methodological field' rather than a portion of the space of books, that is the work. Something comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, can be said from the semiotic point of view, considering the text as a sign. Umberto Eco developed his ideas on the "open" text in his *Opera aperta (Loose work, 1962)*, where he argued that literary texts are 'fields' of meaning, rather than 'strings' of meaning, that they are understood as open, internally dynamic and psychologically engaged fields. Literature, which limits one's potential understanding to a single, unequivocal line, the *closed text*, remains the least rewarding, while texts that are the most active between mind and society and life are the most lively and best, although valuation terminology is not his primary area of focus. Ultimately, Eco emphasizes the fact that words do not have meanings that are simply lexical, but rather, operate in the context of utterance.

<sup>42</sup> B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, In: Notre Dame University Press, 1964); R. Gameson, *The Early Medieval Bible: Its Production, Decoration, and Use* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1994); R. McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Minnis, Scott, and Wallace, eds., *Medieval literary theory and criticism*.

Dante's *Vita nova*, the *Convivio*, etc.).<sup>43</sup> Boccaccio's *Decameron* recreates the same attitude of commenting (and interpreting) the tales narrated within the *cornice* through the dialogues and the different interpretations of the storytellers, even through the mechanisms of commentary and interpretation of the characters emphasizing the various voices of the tales. In a sense, in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio epitomizes his experience as both commentator of vulgar poetry (see, for instance, his *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia di Dante*) and compiler of historical and mythological narratives. In turn, the perspectival interplay of several voices and narratological layers of the *Decameron*, a kind of *construction en abîme*, multiplies, for the discourse, the possibilities of begetting narratives, and, for the narrative, of stimulating its commentary.<sup>44</sup> The mechanism of having the stories told by one storyteller after another, and the consequent phenomenon of the storytellers' reactions to the narration, enacts a cognitive process in which the information provided by the narrator is submitted to the attention of the listeners, and ends up feeding into the production of knowledge through the dialogic confrontation. The *Decameron's* epistemology is thus achieved precisely in this process of sharing and interpreting the information.<sup>45</sup>

### *Rhetoric and Epistemology: Knowledge as Philosophy of Language*

In connection with the study of Boccaccio's philosophical background, it is worthwhile to analyze the rhetorical devices of the *Decameron* and the many ways in which Boccaccio establishes a meaningful connection between rhetoric and knowledge.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> On the modality of the auto-commentary in Dante see A.R. Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), chap. 4: "Auto-commentary: Dividing Dante." On the modality of the commentary in epic poetry see R. Ricci, *Scrittura, riscrittura, autoesegesi: voci autoriali intorno all'epica in volgare. Boccaccio e Tasso* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2010). As for the commentary as 'secondary' literary form, cultural artifact, commentary 'on commentary,' and as a form of self-authorization in Boccaccio's *Teseida*, see J. T. Schnapp, "A Commentary on Commentary in Boccaccio," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 91.4 (1992): 813-834.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. C. Cazalé-Bérard, "Sistema del sapere e istanze narrative nella novellistica toscana medievale," in M. Picone, ed., *L'enciclopedismo medievale. Atti del Convegno «L'Enciclopedismo Medievale», San Gimignano, 8-10 ottobre 1992* (Ravenna: Longo, 1994), 329-359, in part. p. 349. For the structure of the *Decameron's* cornice see Picone, "Preistoria della cornice del '*Decameron*'", in P. Cherchi e M. Picone, eds., *Studi di Italianistica in onore di Giovanni Cecchetti* (Ravenna: Longo, 1988), 91-104; F. Fido, *Il regime delle simmetrie imperfette: studi sul "Decameron"* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1988).

<sup>45</sup> The *Decameron*, in other words, is a text that contains in itself both the literary exposition, in the form of the narration, and the interpretation of this exposition, the collaborative reading of a Text that contains a Work as an object of consumption. Eco defines the text as "una macchina pigra" since he maintains that the meaning of a text is determined only partially by the structures, or by the potential directions of meaning built by the writer/sender of a message. A fundamental role is played, instead, by the reader of a text, without whose intervention the text would remain meaningless. Therefore, the construction of the meaning is achieved in the dialectical process between the rhetorical-textual structures and the interpretative strategies of the reader (on the principle of the "interpretative cooperation" in the narrative text see also U. Eco, *Lector in fabula: la cooperazione interpretativa nei testi narrativi* [Milano: Bompiani, 1979]). In *Opera aperta*, Eco elaborates an esthetics of the textual reception whereby the role of the reader is active and creative towards the definition of the meaning.

<sup>46</sup> P. M. Forni, *Adventures in Speech: Rhetoric and Narration in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) uses the notion of rhetoric as a guiding principle for a critical assessment of the *Decameron*. He explores the discursive tools with which the narrators connect the contents of their stories to their audience's environment, and goes on to argue that the book is



Rhetoric can be epistemic, and in this regard, the characteristics and formal features of the *motto*, or witty reply, in the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* show how this metaphorical tool can be considered not only as a structuring device of Boccaccio's discourse, but also a 'veil,' a poetical strategy which is able to both conceal and reveal philosophical knowledge. Boccaccio meditated at length on the relationship between philosophical and literary discourse, and not only in the *Genealogies*. His *oeuvre* engages with several aspects of this relationship as they come to him from contemporary debates about literature. Particularly, the possibilities offered by epistemology in medieval thought and the role of allegory and mythology as poetical devices of a latent philosophical discourse are critical means to understanding Boccaccio's innovative theory of the nexus between rhetoric and knowledge.

Through the narration of the stories and the joyful conversations of the storytellers, the *Decameron* can illustrate how and why rhetoric is related to knowledge as a sort of philosophy of language. The verbal media most represented in the collection is primarily the enjoyable conversation of the story-tellers. Through conversation, the story-tellers develop and deepen their understanding; through the dialogical form, they involve the participation of their companions and reinforce their knowledge of the world by debate, revealing a progressive spiritual growth among the interlocutors themselves. In this respect, the parallel with Augustine's personal and literary experience, with which certainly Boccaccio was familiar (starting from his Neapolitan studies), and specifically with Augustine's idea of conversation can be enlightening.<sup>47</sup> According to Augustine, the believer's knowledge of God may be deepened by meditation as well as by conversation. Meditation, too, has a social function within the community of believers, in which the contemplative must serve others with his voice and pen; he must share his words with others so that all may share the same knowledge and joy.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, Augustine

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significantly marked by Boccaccio's habit of exploring the narrative potential of rhetorical forms. Puzzling narrative segments and stories make new sense once they are understood to dramatize or enact metaphors and other figures of speech. Besides Forni's work, we must emphasize a dearth of academic consideration with respect to the connection between rhetoric and philosophy in the *Decameron*. Even when contemplating the rhetorical features of the *Decameron*, scholars such as A. Cecere ("Usi retorici boccacciani nel Proemio del *Decameron*," *Annali Istituto Universitario Orientale*. Napoli. Sezione Romanza. June. 31. 1 [1989]: 147-159.), B. L. Blackburn ("The Eighth Story of the Tenth Day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*: An Example of Rhetoric or a Rhetorical Example?" *Italian Quarterly*, 27:106 [1986]: 5-13), J. T. S. Wheelock ("The Rhetoric of Polarity in *Decameron* III,3," *Lingua e Stile* 9 [1974]: 257-74), and Forni (*Adventures in Speech*) have not fully acknowledged the connection with the literary tradition as a primary methodological approach in interpreting the usage of rhetoric. On the epistemological aspects of rhetoric, see two groundbreaking articles by R. L. Scott, "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic," *Central States Speech Journal* 18 (1967): 9-16, and "On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic: Ten Years Later," *Central States Speech Journal* 27 (Winter, 1976): 258-266. According to Scott, truth is relative to situated experiences, and rhetoric is necessary to give meaning to individual circumstances. On rhetoric and epistemology in the Renaissance, see the classic work of Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism; The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrarch to Valla* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Augustine's conversation with Monica in *Confessionum*, ed. L. Verheijen, 9, 10, 23-24 (CCSL, 27). In elaborating his ideas of poetical solitudes (*Genealogie*, XIV, iv, 28), Boccaccio could have also drawn from Augustine's theory of meditation.

<sup>48</sup> *Confessionum*, ed. L. Verheijen, 9, 13, 37 (CCSL, 27); 10, 3, 3-4; 10, 3, 6; cf. M. L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language; A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (Yale historical publications. Miscellany, 88. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 35.

defines meditation as interior speech;<sup>49</sup> since it is a way of knowing God involving the structures of language, meditation is a form of verbal expression too. Likewise, in the *Decameron*, conversation, which can be seen as a form of meditation of the storytellers in their countryside retreat, embodies the mechanism of knowledge and embraces all the epistemological variety of Boccaccio's philosophical discourse. In the *Decameron*, language assumes many forms, each one expressing a variety of possible ways to communicate knowledge to readers.

### *The Object of Knowledge and 'How' it can be Produced*

According to modern epistemology, the object of cognition, which by definition is an act, is knowledge. Knowledge can be also defined as the abstract and exterior representation of the content of cognition, a content that can also be unnecessary. But there can also be another object produced by cognition, which is not simply an exterior description of the content still remaining in general terms and whose character is necessary. That object is the truth.

The act of knowing, or cognition, illustrates *how* human knowledge can be achieved. Boccaccio's most frequent metaphor for the act of cognition in the *Decameron* and in his minor literary production is the activity of the "eye of the mind." The protagonists of the *Decameron* understand the world around them through the eye of the mind, that is through their intellects or intellectual vision. The origins of this trope stem from the Neoplatonic intellection<sup>50</sup> and the Augustinian 'illumination' of the mind<sup>51</sup> which had a great philosophical currency throughout the centuries, and especially in the fourteenth century.<sup>52</sup> Some of the tales of the Second, Sixth, and Tenth Days in the *Decameron* are significantly representative of the characters' attitude to literalize the act of apprehension by means of the metaphor of the "eye of the mind." Besides the numerous opportunities Boccaccio had to experiment with this metaphor in his minor works (*Amorosa visione*, *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*), let us consider the following examples from the *Decameron*:

[Cisti] Il che quanto in poca cosa Cisti fornaio il dichiarasse, gli occhi dello 'ntelletto rimettendo a messer Geri Spina . . . Il che rapportando il famigliare a messer Geri, subito gli occhi gli s'apersero dello 'ntelletto (VI, 2, 26)

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<sup>49</sup> *Confessionum*, ed. L. Verheijen, 10, 2, 2 (CCSL, 27); *De trinitate*, ed. W.J. Mountain and F. Glorie, 15, 10, 18 (CCSL 16: 1-2).

<sup>50</sup> N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge* (London: Methuen, 1962). See also B. P. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), V, 1; X, 4; XIII, 17-18.

<sup>51</sup> R. H. Nash, *The Light of the Mind; St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1969); B. Bubacz, *St. Augustine's Theory of Knowledge: A Contemporary Analysis* (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1981). On the illumination of the mind, see also *Hermetica* X, 4-5; XIII, 18.

<sup>52</sup> See J. Owens, "Faith, ideas, illumination, and experience," in N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg, eds., E. Stump, associated ed., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy: from the rediscovery of Aristotle to the disintegration of scholasticism, 1100-1600* (Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University press, 1982), 442. On the 'eye of the mind' see also Boethius, "the darkened eye of the mind;" Dante, *Convivio* II, iv, 16-17. Ameto uses this expression when he understands the allegorical and spiritual implications of his experience, and recognizes in the seven nymphs the cardinal and theological virtues, thus becoming a civilized man from a brute (cf. *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, xlvi, 3; see J. L. Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator As Lover* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986], 195-196).

[Mitridanes] . . . Idio, più al mio dover sollicito che io stesso, a quel punto che maggior bisogno è stato gli occhi m'ha aperto dello 'ntelletto, li quali misera invidia m'avea serrati" (X, 3, 28)<sup>53</sup>

By using this metaphor, what Boccaccio probably meant to emphasize is, first, the fact that truth, as the necessary product of cognition, is not what appears; second, it is not what the actual and physical eyes can see. Truth hides behind reality, material existence, and is produced by the mind through the mechanisms of language. Obviously, truth cannot do without sensitive cognition, but eventually has to be produced by the mind according to the power of intelligence. In fact, it is not difficult to find in the collection many stories in which the characters have to cope with other characters' deceitful intentions. In many instances, the reader wonders what the truth is; then, he easily realizes that the truth that comes out of the tale—any kind of truth, actually, be it practical, related to a challenge, or one that deals with the fulfilment of a hidden love—is always counterfeited by someone who wants to trick, or by someone who wants to deceive. Truth and deception are often the two sides of the same coin. Yet, while the latter—deception—is often a negative one, the former—truth—always produces a positive outcome in the story.

The Neoplatonic metaphor of intellection (the 'eye of the mind') may also have been mediated by its recent reinterpretation in the doctrine of the direct intellectual cognition of material singulars, which was officially adopted by Franciscan theologian-philosophers starting from the 1280s.<sup>54</sup> Strictly related, and of some import for the *Decameron*, is the relationship between cognition of particulars/individuals and the concept of science—i.e., demonstrative science, which is capable of producing necessary knowledge. If the content of science is only universal and necessary, the knowledge produced by human beings in their acts of cognition of particulars is not. Under this perspective, the *Decameron* could be reflective of the interests of medieval philosophers in how we are able to define scientific premises but also to acquire the knowledge of

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<sup>53</sup> For other examples in Boccaccio's minor works see chapters 2, 3, and 4. As for the *Decameron*, consider also the following passages: Ghismonda's words to Guiscardo: "Ahi! dolcissimo albergo di tutti i miei piaceri, maladetta sia la crudeltà di colui che con gli occhi della fronte or mi ti fa vedere! Assai m'era con quegli della mente riguardarti a ciascuna ora" (IV, 1, 51); Lisetta to friar Alberto: "Deh, messer lo frate, non avete voi occhi in capo? paionvi le mie bellezze fatte come quelle di queste altre?" (IV, 2, 13); Lauretta on wrath: ". . . ogni vizio può in gravissima noia tornar di colui che l'usa e molte volte d'altrui. E tra gli altri che con più abbandonate redine ne' nostri pericoli ne trasporta, mi pare che l'ira sia quello; la quale niuna altra cosa è che un movimento subito e inconsiderato, da sentita tristizia sospinto, il quale, ogni ragion cacciata e gli occhi della mente avendo di tenebre offuscati, in ferventissimo furore accende l'anima nostra" (IV, 3, 4); Giotto: ". . . avendo egli quell'arte ritornata in luce, che molti secoli sotto gli error d'alcuni, che più a diletta gli occhi degl'ignoranti che a compiacere allo 'ntelletto de' savi dipignendo . . ." (VI, 5, 6); a woman to a jealous husband: "Credi tu, marito mio, che io sia cieca degli occhi della testa, come tu se' cieco di quegli della mente?" (VII, 5, 53); Lidia: ". . . molto meglio sarebbe a dar con essa in capo a Nicostrato, il quale senza considerazione alcuna così tosto si lasciò abbagliar gli occhi dello 'ntelletto: ché, quantunque a quegli che tu hai in testa paresse ciò che tu di', per niuna cosa dovevi nel giudizio della tua mente comprendere o consentir che ciò fosse" (VII, 9, 78); the scholar: ". . . ma le tue lusinghe non m'adombreranno ora gli occhi dello 'ntelletto, come già fecero le tue disleali promessioni: io mi conosco, né tanto di me stesso apparai mentre dimorai a Parigi, quanto tu in una sola notte delle tue mi facesti conoscere" (VIII, 7, 85).

<sup>54</sup> J. F. Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," in Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg, and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*, 461 ff.. For the possible influence of Franciscan theologians in Boccaccio see Veglia, "La vita lieta", passim.

contingent facts about individuals and their existence. The fourteenth century was particularly rich in controversies about knowledge; but the problem of knowledge of existents, in fact, emerged as one of the main concerns of the major theories of intuition.<sup>55</sup> Specifically, as for the fundamental distinction between intuitive and abstract cognition, which is the difference between knowing what is actual and knowing what is merely possible or necessary, Boccaccio's poetics seems to be more interested in placing the emphasis on the experience of the real—as the world of the *Decameron* clearly illustrates. If, though, an abstractive cognition is possible, there also exists an independent intuitive cognition.<sup>56</sup> Abstract cognition involves no claims about existence: what is possible can be non-actual, and what is actual cannot be impossible. Whereas intuitive cognition involves a judgment of existence with an admixture of what is possible.<sup>57</sup> The *Decameron's* fictional world does not care for the actual; what it really concerns itself with, instead, is the possible.

Another important issue at stake in medieval and early modern epistemological debates is the difference between the concepts of *visio* and *imaginatio*. The perception of real things is differentiated from a form, or representation of them, that can take place in their absence: the memory of experience.<sup>58</sup> The literary representation of the difference between vision and imagination is exemplarily illustrated in Boccaccio's works. For a complete rhetoric of vision, we should consider Boccaccio's allegorical works, the *Amorosa visione* and the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*. As for the imagination, one should simply read that masterpiece of imagination and psychological discourse which is the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*. In the *Decameron*, the possible different cases representing the dichotomy of vision and imagination multiply. Fiammetta's psychological training in imagination is exemplary reinterpreted in various characters of the *Decameron*, from Ghismonda's monologues to the laments of Beritola abandoned on an island. In the *Decameron*, the representation of vision encompasses an entire gamut of literary tones: from the serious infernal hallucinations of the otherworld, such as those of Nastagio degli Onesti (V, 8), to the parodic visions in Ferondo's tale where the Abbot makes him believe that he is in Purgatory (III, 8), or the tale of Talano d'Imola who dreams that a wolf rips apart his wife's throat and face (IX, 7). Boccaccio offers different stories in which individuals struggle for knowledge and experience different ways of reaching an understanding of the world.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," in Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg, and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*, 460 and 462-463.

<sup>56</sup> As Duns Scotus maintained, see Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," in Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg, and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*, 466.

<sup>57</sup> Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," in Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg, and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*, 466 on Duns Scotus.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Boler, "Intuitive and Abstractive Cognition," in Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg, and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge history of later medieval philosophy*, 465. On the importance of imagination in the figure of Fiammetta see Gagliardi, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, 22-25.

<sup>59</sup> On optics and visual theories from the mathematical, physical, and physiological point of view in the Medieval period and the Renaissance see D.C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976). Among medieval thinkers, the importance of the vision in order to obtain knowledge is emphasized by William of Conches and William of Saint-Thierry. See T. Ricklin, "Vue et vision chez Guillaume de Conches et Guillaume de Saint-Thierry: le récit d'une controverse," in *La visione e lo sguardo nel Medio Evo = View and Vision in the Middle Ages. Micrologus* V, I (Firenze: SISMEL - Ed. del Galuzzo, 1997), 19-41. Vols. V and VI of *Micrologus* contains various

The vision intended as the observation of the cosmos is at the very origin of philosophy. According to Plato's *Timaeus* (47a-b), sight is the first and fundamental moment of observation of the cosmos. In Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (I, 1, 980a), sight is the most refined sense and the best means to acquire knowledge. Intellectual knowledge is always bound to the semantics of the vision. One of the most influential treatise on optics in the fourteenth century, Witelo's *Perspectiva*, which is, not surprisingly, among the number of Boccaccio's readings (Mazza, 1966: 24, n. II, 13), still tends to link the new optical discoveries with a philosophical reflection on the nature of vision. The active role of the senses in producing knowledge is unavoidable, as much as the role of sight in the cognitive process. Through the 'visual' features of apprehension we can assign a degree of certitude superior to that of discursive, logical-deductive knowledge.<sup>60</sup> As Giacinta Spinosa puts it, "Intorno alla nozione di conoscenza intuitiva, immediata ed evidente, sia sensibile che intellettuale, e attraverso la distinzione rispetto alla conoscenza discorsiva e astrattiva si sarebbe attuata la svolta del pensiero medievale fra fine Duecento e XIV secolo,"<sup>61</sup> namely with Ockham's and Nicola d'Autrecourt's thought which prefigures Hume's empiricism.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the concept of vision sets itself as the organizational center of the aesthetical speculation on art, in particular within the Franciscan Order. The image becomes the technical foundation of verisimilitude, as the 'reality' of art.<sup>63</sup> This has certainly influenced the composition of a few tales featuring famous, or less-famous, painters. The tale of Giotto and Forese Donati plays on the meaning of exterior appearances and on how a person can be deceived by false impressions.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Calandrino's cycle begins with a scene in which the character, absorbed in his own thoughts, is portrayed in front of a fresco, and, in the same famous tale, one possible interpretation of the heliotrope concerns invisibility and deception.<sup>65</sup>

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papers on the theory of vision from the philosophical, theological and scientific perspectives (vol. V), and on the "act of seeing" from interdisciplinary perspectives, such as hagiography, iconography, medieval literature (vol. VI). William of Conches and William of Saint-Thierry elaborate their own conceptions both by considering the Platonic idea of the *simulacrum* (see Calcidius' commentary on *Timaeus*, 42) and the Aristotelian speculation on the mechanisms of the vision based on reflection, and by drawing on Constantine the African's physiology of the sight. William of Conches, in particular, takes advantage of the importance of the visual attributed in the *Timaeus*. He maintains that vision is the cause of philosophy, even if, later, he slightly changes his mind downplaying the role of senses in order to reach spiritual happiness. Differently, William of Saint-Thierry inscribes the reflection on vision within the discourse upon the soul. See Ricklin, "Vue et vision chez Guillaume de Conches et Guillaume de Saint-Thierry," 38-40, where he summarizes William's thought.

<sup>60</sup> G. Spinosa, "Visione sensibile e intellettuale: convergenze gnoseologiche e linguistiche nella semantica della visione medievale," in *La visione e lo sguardo nel Medio Evo*, V.I, 119-134.

<sup>61</sup> Spinosa, "Visione sensibile e intellettuale," 134.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. É. Gilson, *Storia della filosofia medievale* (Milano: Sansoni, 2005), 767-769, and 819-820.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. R. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia* (Napoli: Loffredo, 1978), 143 ff.; U. Panziera, "Della mentale azione," in *Mistici del Duecento e del Trecento*, 272-273; G. Petrocchi, *ascesi e mistica trecentesca* (Firenze: F. Le Monnier, 1957), 35 ff. On vision, perception, sensation, as well as theoretical and philosophical bases for Renaissance art, see J. Hendrix and C. H. Carman, *Renaissance Theories of Vision* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. P. D. Stewart, "L'inganno delle apparenze: Giotto e Forese," in *Retorica e mimica nel Decameron e nelle commedia del cinquecento* (Firenze: Olschki, 1986), 83-102, and 94-95.

<sup>65</sup> N. Land, "Calandrino as Viewer," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 23.4 (2004): 1-6. See also R. L. Martinez, "Calandrino and the Powers of the Stone: Rhetoric, Belief, and the Progress of *Ingegno* in *Decameron* VIII.3," *Heliotropia* 1.1 (2003): 1-24, for interesting epistemological implications on the tale.

By and large, the narration of a tale in the *Decameron* has the function of stimulating the understanding of a certain truth. All this is realized within the epistemological functions of the *novella*. Through the interpretation of a short tale narrated by a character, another character of the story understands the entire thing at stake, be it a trick, a moral teaching, or a certain philosophical idea. Therefore, the narration of a tale, even through the mechanism of the *mise-en-abîme*, has a cognitive function, which is emphasized many times by Boccaccio through the very attitude of the characters who come to a full comprehension after a significant narration or a witty answer. Consider, for instance, Melchisedech, a Jew who escapes from a trap set for him by Saladin by narrating the tale of the three rings (I, 3); or, in the First Day, the story about Primasso and the Abbot of Cluny addressed to Can Grande in which Bergamino rebukes an unusual fit of avarice (I, 7).

It is precisely in the *exemplum* tradition that Boccaccio finds this peculiar power of the narrative to stimulate cognitive capacities in the reader, yet he eventually reinterprets it in his *novelle*. As the *exemplum* was typically considered both a passive means to convey popular or pedagogical wisdom, and an active literary tool to instruct and communicate philosophical knowledge through easy, mediated, understanding, and through the power of entertainment, the totally renewed concept of the *novella* in the *Decameron* is now able to bring this natural process of expansion to a nobler and more meditated literary form.<sup>66</sup> By exploring the possibilities offered by the tradition of short narratives and reflecting on the many aspects of the epistemological power inherent to the *exemplum*, Boccaccio reshapes the *novella* through an extraordinary knowledge and understanding of the philosophical tradition. From a tool of persuasion—such as the *exemplum*—in the hands of rhetoricians and preachers,<sup>67</sup> the *Decameron's* *novella* becomes a laboratory of auto-disciplined and original understanding of the world, a tool in the hands of the readers to develop their own cognitive experiences. Ultimately, Boccaccio is able to create a complex organism of tales regulated by a significant exterior, macrotextual, structure—the *cornice*—which defines the overall understanding of the *Decameron* as well as regulates the internal, microtextual, and peculiar relations among the tales.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> According to S. Battaglia, "L'esempio medievale," *Filologia romanza* 6 (1959): 45-82, the *exemplum* epitomizes the way in which medieval man comprehends reality and organize his knowledge of it; the *exemplum* is "un metodo che la mentalità medievale ha applicato alla sua cognizione della realtà etica e pratica" (71). For an interesting and multi-faceted study on the literary form of the Italian sixteenth century novellas in their direct affiliation to Boccaccio's *Decameron*, see R. Bragantini's *Il riso sotto il velame* (Firenze: Olschki, 1987).

<sup>67</sup> Carlo Delcorno (*La predicazione nell'età comunale* [Firenze: Sansoni, 1974]) maintains that the *exemplum* tradition originates from ancient rhetoric and is conceived from the very beginning as an instrument of persuasion for rhetoricians and preachers.

<sup>68</sup> For the *exemplum* literature, see M. Picone, "Il racconto," in C. Di Girolamo, ed., *La letteratura romanza medievale: una storia per generi* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 193-247; S. Battaglia, "Dall'esempio alla novella," *Filologia romanza* 7 (1960): 21-84, now in *La coscienza letteraria del Medioevo* (Napoli: Liguori, 1965), 487-547; C. Del Corno, *Exemplum e letteratura tra medioevo e rinascimento* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989); Id., "Modelli agiografici e modelli narrativi. Tra Cavalca e Boccaccio," in E. Malato, ed., *La Novella Italiana: Atti del Convegno di Caprarola, 19-24 settembre 1988* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1989), 337-363. According to T. Kircher, "The Modality of Moral Communication in the *Decameron's* First Day, in Contrast to the Mirror of the Exemplum," *Renaissance Quarterly* 54.4 (2001): 1035-1073, the research of these scholars does not elaborate upon the nature or the implications of the opposition between the *Decameron* and medieval *exempla*. While the passages recounted by Del Corno and Battaglia

### Methodological Clarifications

In reviewing the works of Francesco Bruni (*Boccaccio, l'invenzione della letteratura mezzana*), Robert Hollander (*Boccaccio's Last Fiction. 'Il Corbaccio'*), Janet Levarie Smarr ("Ovid and Boccaccio: a Note on Self-Defense"), and Renzo Bragantini ("Appunti sul *Corbaccio*"), Pier Massimo Forni identifies a thread (more or less aware and explicit on the part of the authors) that leads to a rhetorically directed reading of Boccaccio's works—particularly the *Decameron*—and draws attention to the philosophical implications of Boccaccio's discourse ("asserti filosofici del discorso boccacciano").<sup>69</sup> Specifically, Bruni's book (1990), which is certainly one of the best studies and a strong basis for the interpretation of Boccaccio's work after Branca's *Boccaccio medievale* (1956), needs, according to Forni, a reconsideration of some of its interpretations, for instance that of the total absence of a philosophical discourse in the *Decameron*.<sup>70</sup> Bruni, in fact, identified two phases in Boccaccio's literary production inspired by two distinct poetics. The first phase, the poetics of Boccaccio's early production, was under the sign of the Ovidian elegy and Dante's *Vita Nova*. This poetics was inextricably linked to the myth of the Angevin court and the *servizio d'Amore*, and was represented by a philogynist and erotic literary production intended as a form of entertainment (and thence, according to Bruni, "mezzana") between epic and the humble form of popular expressions. In this category Bruni includes Boccaccio's early works and the *Decameron*. The second type of poetic was of a misogynistic and antiheroic character dealing with moral and philosophical issues in a serious manner; the categories of the theoretical dignity of poetry expressed by the author in the *Genealogies* (e.g. poetry intended as the main bearer of ethical values) can be applied only to this second type of

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underscore Boccaccio's knowledge and revision of individual exempla and saints' lives, their assessments do not engage the broader, formal relation between the *Decameron* and this tradition. In fact the *Decameron* exploits the characteristics of Trecento exempla, especially their purpose of teaching moral acts through a prescribed visual model, in order to express a new modality of moral communication. Del Corno has recognized this quality of the *Decameron*, but his studies of its treatment of the exemplum concentrate on identifying sources of separate stories, not to the thematic relation among them: "Ironia/parodia" in Bragantini and Forni, ed., *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 179. In another essay that investigates more general features of Trecento piety, Del Corno emphasizes the amplitude and coherence of the literary manipulation and of the ideological demystification exercised by Boccaccio on the corpus of exemplary literature (see Del Corno, "Metamorfosi boccacciane dell' 'exemplum'," in *Exemplum e letteratura*, 1989, 269). The essay however overlooks the stylistic invention of the *Decameron*, especially the interplay among narrator, brigata, and reader, focusing instead on the sources of specific novelle, in isolation from one another and the larger work. Battaglia's "Dall'esempio alla novella" also devotes its attention to a single episode, the friendship of Titus and Gisippus in *Decameron* X, 8, 509-525.

<sup>69</sup> P. M. Forni, "Boccaccio retore," *MLN* 106.1: Italian Issue (1991): 189-201. The works reviewed by Forni are: F. Bruni, *Boccaccio, l'invenzione della letteratura mezzana* (1990), R. Hollander, *Boccaccio's Last Fiction. 'Il Corbaccio'* (1988), J. Levarie Smarr, "Ovid and Boccaccio: a Note on Self-Defense," *Mediaevalia* 13 (1989, for 1987): 247-255, and R. Bragantini, "Appunti sul Corbaccio," manoscritto inedito di una comunicazione data il 20 Aprile 1990 al Convegno dell'American Association for Italian Studies in Charlottesville, Virginia.

<sup>70</sup> ". . . ma se è senz'altro seducente la prospettiva dell'iscrizione dell'opera nel grande ed illustre registro della retorica, eviterei tuttavia formule che dichiarino l'estraneità del *Decameron* alla filosofia." The accusations of superficiality charged to Boccaccio probably derived from De Sanctis (cf. A. D. Scaglione, *Nature and love in the late middle ages: An Essay on the Cultural Context of the Decameron* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963], 48-49).

production. Furthermore, according to Bruni, in the *Decameron*, no explicit morality can be drawn from the stories (Bruni, 1990: 249); the *Decameron* was only the product of a rhetorical mind that explored the realm of the possible, which, as such, is manifold and even contradictory. The ethical and philosophical disengagement of the *Decameron*, its theoretical evasiveness, were connected to the controversy tradition that emerged in Boccaccio's early works (see, for instance, the so-called *questioni d'amore* in the *Filocolo*).<sup>71</sup> In sum, according to Bruni (1990: 263), the *Decameron*, alien to theology and philosophy, relied mostly on rhetoric intended as an exploration of possible events. Hence, removed from the tendential univocality of theological speculation and philosophy, Boccaccio promoted a kind of literature that was far from the "poesis" theorized in the *Genealogies* as "stabilis et fixa scientia, eternis fundata atque solidata principiis" (*Genealogies* XIV, iv, ii, p. 688, 35-36), so that the flexible and elastic versatility of the narrator could triumph in the *Decameron* (Bruni, 1990: 263).

In contrast to Bruni's manichean view, Forni calls for the study of the problems inherent in the "foundation of the philosophical implications" of the work of the Certaldese, or even of the "status of the truth" (and, consequently, the meaning) in Boccaccio's text (Forni, 1991: 196). In other words, Forni suggests the need to avoid formulas that declare the *Decameron* extraneous to philosophy. However, of Bruni's theory, he keeps the emphasis on rhetoric as a privileged category for the interpretation of the text. According to Forni, we should pursue the "critical reason" of Boccaccio, identify the philosophical roots of his discourse, analyze the ways of the reader's appropriation of his thought, and eventually interpret the reasons of the author's choices ("bisognerà poi perseguire quella ragione critica, individuare cioè le radici filosofiche dell'operazione del Boccaccio, studiare, per quel che è possibile, i modi di appropriazione di quel pensiero, interpretare infine le ragioni di quella scelta" [Forni, 1991: 197]). Based on these premises, Forni advocates a research on the rhetoric of knowledge within the narrative rhetoric of the *Decameron* (Forni, 1991: 198). The *Decameron's* reality is made of contradictions and possibilities, is based on a notion, as it were, of composite truth, which is known and given by means of complementary and antithetical units. In short, Forni wonders whether the reality that appears in the tales can be traced back to the tradition of rhetorical-sophistic thought. A possible point of reference for this tradition is Ovid. The *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris* together provided Boccaccio with an instance of extremistic relativism and a poetics of opposites (cf. *Remedia amoris*, 43-44)<sup>72</sup> that apparently influenced the *Author's Conclusion*, the section of the *Decameron* which is more steeped in rhetorical-sophistic spirit. Janet Levarie Smarr, in fact, acutely highlighted the Ovidian nexus of the analogical arguments used by the author to defend

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<sup>71</sup> On rhetoric and the "spirito di controversia" see M. Corti, "Il genere disputatio e la transcodificazione indolore di Bonvesin da la Riva," in *Il viaggio testuale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1978), 257-288, in part. p. 259; E. Garin, "La dialettica dal secolo XII ai principi dell'età moderna," *Rivista di filosofia* 49 (1958): 228-253; L. Surdich, *La cornice di amore. Studi sul Boccaccio* (Pisa: ETS, 1987), in part. chap. 1: "Il *Filocolo*: le questioni d'amore e la quête di Florio," 13-75. For the influence of the rhetorical-juridical culture on Boccaccio's imagination, see F. Chiappelli, "Discorso o progetto per uno studio sul *Decameron*," in P. Cherchi and M. Picone, eds., *Studi di italianistica in onore di Giovanni Cecchetti* (Ravenna: Longo, 1988), 104-111.

<sup>72</sup> As Forni notices, Durling insisted on the rhetorical nature of Ovid's work with explicit reference to the sophistic tradition (R. Durling, *The Figure of the Poet in Renaissance Epic* [London: Oxford University Press, 1965], 40).



his work. Boccaccio draws from Ovid not only the topos of the defense of the work within the work, but also his detailed argumentations for that defense: compare "Niuna corrotta mente intese mai sanamente parola" (Conclusioni dell'autore, 11) with "Sic igitur carmen, recta si mente legatur, / constabit nulli posse nocere meum" (*Tristia* II, 275-6). Finally, in contrast to Bruni's argument, Forni concludes: "Che avviene di quello schema conoscitivo, stile conoscitivo che fa della ricerca della verità e della stessa verità gioco e risposta di voci? Insomma, i giovani narratori decameroniani sono forse anche retori di una corte d'Amore, ma nei loro *lieti conversari* e nelle loro fasciose narrazioni che cosa rimane della potentissima rivelazione sofistica, attestata dal romanzo giovanile, che il vero e offerta intellettuale che attende offerta di segno contrario? Forse molto, forse poco; a che livello, poi? Urge, a mio avviso, una ricerca sulla retorica della conoscenza all'interno della retorica della narrativa del Boccaccio maggiore" (Forni, 1991: 198). If we accept Forni's invitation to investigate the rhetorical-philosophical implications of the *Decameron*, and, as a working hypothesis, we momentarily leave aside Bruni's thesis of a double poetic in Boccaccio's literary career, the epistemological inquiry will appear clearer and easier. Therefore, I shall analyze the theory of knowledge following the hypothesis of a *continuity* of the philosophical 'implications' of the *Decameron* with respect to Boccaccio's so-called minor works.

To answer the question of *how* knowledge is produced in the *Decameron* it is necessary to tackle the problem of methodology. First of all, I will adopt an interdisciplinary approach which combines formal analysis of the text with philological and historical verification. Second, I will tackle the problem of knowledge in the *Decameron* through the analysis of its language. I intend to argue that it is precisely in the usage of the language that the significance of the *Decameron's* philosophy is concealed and that the philosophical implications of the narratives can be understood in relation to the theory of knowledge.<sup>73</sup> Third, concerning the question of how to read the tales and how to analyze them in relation to one another, a possible answer suggests that the reading and interpretation of the tales can be done along multiple threads and multiple directions. As the notion of *macrotesto* applied to the *Decameron* shows, the meaning of a single tale is expandable to the meaning of the following (or previous) tale as well as to the tales of other Days; the frame texts, too, influence the reading of the entire collection as well as the reading of any other individual tale.<sup>74</sup> Consequently, choosing as the object of analysis arbitrary sections of the collection, such as a tale, a Day, or a group of tales with analogous topic or the same protagonist (the Calandrino cycle, for instance), is

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<sup>73</sup> After the classic *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1921) by Ludwig Wittgenstein, which developed the thesis that 'All philosophy is "Critique of Language"', that is, that philosophy can only be undertaken through the critical study of language, conceptions of language and of philosophy (or the philosophical approaches to language) have been developed together until involving semiotics: see, for instance Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*.

<sup>74</sup> The macrotext is a notion introduced by Maria Corti, *Il viaggio testuale*; for the *Decameron* see M. Picone, "Il *Decameron* come macrotesto: il problema della cornice," in M. Picone and M. Mesirca, eds., *Introduzione al Decameron: Lectura Boccaccii Turicensis* (Firenze: Cesati, 2004), 9-33; G. Cappello, *La dimensione macrotestuale: Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarca* (Ravenna: Longo, 1998). The notion of macrotext is also extensively illustrated in A.R. Ascoli's essay "Pyrrhus' Rules: Playing with Power from Boccaccio to Machiavelli," *MLN* 114. 1, Italian Issue (1999): 14-57, which (regarding later discussions), in relation with Boccaccio's use of (pseudo-) Greek and his etymological use of names.

certainly a valid method to understand and explain the text as a whole using some of its peculiar aspects.

A further example that Boccaccio's *novelle* can also stand as independent narrative units comes, interestingly, from a modern 'forgery.' Sicilian writer Andrea Camilleri wrote *La novella di Antonello da Palermo*, which he jokingly pretends to have been one of Boccaccio's tales that was not included in the final collection.<sup>75</sup> The tale tells the story of Antonello Marino da Palermo who, being in love with Iancofiore, wife of the physician Pietro Paolo Losapio, and pretending to be sick, manages to make love with her. Even an invented tale, such as that of Camilleri, can perfectly fit the theoretical system of the collection and be easily inserted within the general plot of the *Decameron's cornice*. This may exemplarily demonstrate that the single units of the *Decameron* represented by the tales can be both *independent* of each other and *part of* a broader systematization. It may also entail that the analysis of a tale, or a group of tales, outside the final disposition of the author (namely, the ten-day framework) might not be a risky operation. In fact, as Padoan and Asor Rosa emphasized,<sup>76</sup> the *Decameron* originates from a cluster of ideas put together to form a group of tales not related to each other; then, it constituted an incomplete collection, and finally it was unified in a harmonized grouping under the secure label of certain themes.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Maria Picchio Simonelli argues convincingly that there can be no critical edition of the *Decameron* until the textual history of each novella has been separately reconstructed, since the work circulated in parts and was excerpted at will by copyists.<sup>78</sup> Giorgio Padoan also argues for a gradually evolving text, written and circulated by Boccaccio in separate segments possessing internal coherence.<sup>79</sup>

### *Overview of Chapters*

Therefore, the *Decameron* lends itself to multiple levels of analysis which additionally emphasize aspects of the novelty of Boccaccio's philosophical discourse. As a result of this flexibility to approach the reading of the *Decameron*, I decided to illustrate Boccaccio's philosophy through different aspects of the philosophical scope, which also form the following divisions of the dissertation: (a) the first chapter focuses on aspects of

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<sup>75</sup> A. Camilleri, *Boccaccio: la novella di Antonello da Palermo: una novella che non poté entrare nel Decamerone* (Napoli: Guida, 2007). This story exemplifies the possibilities offered by the chronology of composition of the *Decameron*, which, as is known, had two different redactions. In fact, Camilleri imagines that the tale was brought to Northern Italy in 1351, when Boccaccio travelled to Tyrol as ambassador of Florence, and then was completely forgot.

<sup>76</sup> Padoan, *Il Boccaccio, le Muse, il Parnaso e l'Arno*; A. Asor Rosa, "Decameron di Giovanni Boccaccio," in *Letteratura italiana. Le opere* (Torino: Einaudi, 1992), I (Dalle origini al Cinquecento): 473-474.

<sup>77</sup> On the early diffusion of the *Decameron's* tales, see M. Picchio Simonelli, "Prima diffusione e tradizione manoscritta del *Decameron*," in M. Cottino-Jones, and E. F. Tuttle, eds., *Boccaccio: secoli di vita: atti del Congresso internazionale Boccaccio 1975, Università di California, Los Angeles, 17-19 ottobre 1975* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 125-142. On the compositional history of the *Decameron*, G. Padoan, "Sulla genesi del *Decameron*," in Cottino-Jones and Tuttle, eds., *Boccaccio: secoli di vita*, 143-176.

<sup>78</sup> Picchio Simonelli, "Prima diffusione e tradizione manoscritta del *Decameron*," 142-142.

<sup>79</sup> Padoan, "Sulla genesi del *Decameron*," 148 and 154. Furthermore, Padoan finds themes and issues in Boccaccio's earlier poetry that come to fruition in the *Decameron* and posits the influence of Elegiac comedy (known, but unperformed, in Boccaccio's days) on the construction of particular stories.

Poetics (and aesthetics); (b) the second chapter deals with Psychology, intended, in the classical way, as the 'study of the soul'; (c) the third considers Rhetoric as a form of knowledge; (d) the fourth deals with Ethics (the knowledge of the good; moral philosophy) in the *Decameron*.

In the previous paragraphs, I have summarily described a series of starting points of my investigation, which conceal Boccaccio's highly complex and multifaceted intellectual and artistic process. I have also considered theoretical issues with the aim of guiding the reading of the following chapters, issues which undoubtedly need to be clarified and exemplified further in the following four chapters. Since the dissertation deals with the problem of knowledge, but within different aspects within the scope of philosophy, each of the four chapters could stand on its own although having a similar inspiration.

*Chapter 1.* What Boccaccio meant by knowledge and how he represented it through his discourse are the main concerns of my analysis. The first chapter ("Deified Men and Humanized Gods: The *Genealogies* and the Hermetic Veil of the *Fabula*") reflects on how these forms are theorized in a unifying poetics in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium* and *Trattatello in laude di Dante* as well as on the many forms that poetical imagination takes in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.<sup>80</sup> The secondary intent of the chapter is to observe the modalities with which the mechanisms of language can lead to the creation of knowledge. In this respect, Boccaccio's speculation on the nature of poetry is paramount for the understanding of how knowledge is produced by the text. Chapter one will deal with the contemporary philosophical debate on the autonomy or independence of poetry from philosophy, and will try to elucidate Boccaccio's stance with the aid of the texts that expose his theory of poetry in relation to philosophy. In some of his later works, Boccaccio seems to bring forth a conception of poetry as a means to reach a knowledge of the world that ultimately leads to an understanding of the totality of existence—God included.

*Chapter 2.* Boccaccio's intention to write a text which provides a certain type of knowledge—be it moral, philosophical, or practical—is even clearer when compared to the narrative parables of the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine* and the *Amorosa visione*, which share the same modality of an allegorical voyage for the apprehension of knowledge, or with the medieval allegorical tradition, whose most famous instance is Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, which narrates a voyage of Wisdom personified. Specifically, the creation of knowledge in all its possible manifestations is a process that comes out of the language of literature, as we can read in Boccaccio's allegorical poems, but is also a product of the act of reading the tales, as we find in the *Decameron*. This same act, in particular, is intended by Boccaccio as a way both of exercising reason and of shaping human behaviour in order to acquire a philosophical or moral knowledge. As the second chapter will clarify (*Boccaccio's Mountain: The Voyage of the Soul and The Language of Literature*), the dissertation intends to analyze how knowledge is produced through peculiar figurative mechanisms of the language.

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<sup>80</sup> The term 'poetics,' here, is not used in the meaning a medieval reader would have understood, that is, meaning a treatise on the technical aspects of poetic composition. I use this term in the meaning of "the theory of poetry . . . the concept of the nature and function of the poet and of poetry" as defined by Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 173.

*Chapter 3.* In connection with the study of Boccaccio's philosophical background, the dissertation analyzes the rhetorical devices of the *Decameron* and the many ways in which Boccaccio utilized them in order to establish a meaningful connection between rhetoric and knowledge. In the third chapter (*The Motto and the Enigma: Rhetoric and Knowledge in the Sixth Day*), I analyze the characteristics and formal features of the *motto*. Besides being the subject that guides the story-telling of the day, the *motto* is also closely related to rhetoric, in so far as rhetoric is the art and practice of formal speaking with ability and effectiveness, an art that originated in the ancient and medieval Latin schools. The meaning of the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* can perhaps best be understood in virtue of its opposition to and symmetrical correspondence with the First Day on the basis of direct affinities between rhetoric and dialectic. Eventually, such correspondences allow rhetoric to become an allegorical 'veil', namely a poetical means for evoking further meanings and hiding knowledge, which serves as the main structuring device for Boccaccio's discourse.

*Chapter 4.* Overall, the *Decameron* impresses us with its wit and grace, and with its humorous tricks, as well as with the depth of its portraits of human vices and virtues. Moving from the interpretation of the "natural ragione" which is brought forward by the character Pampinea in order to provide a motive for flight from the city oppressed by the plague, the fourth chapter (*The Variants of 'Honestum:' Ethics and the Theory of Action in the Decameron*) reflects on the ethical aspect of the *Decameron* through a close reading of its frame texts and a meditation on their philosophical sources. The *Decameron* suggests a well-defined model of life which can be traced back to the practical philosophy that Boccaccio—as a reader of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas—had long meditated. Moreover, in order to decipher Boccaccio's ethical code, it is crucial to analyze the notion of Natural Law as reflective of the *Lex divina* (Divine Law) and examine the frame texts of the *Decameron* in so far as they provide us with a key to the understanding of the entire work. The use of reason is one of the main aspects of the action of the storytellers and characters of the tales as well as an essential element that underlies the ethical system of the *Decameron*. Reason in the *Decameron* is best understood in terms of the Thomistic ethical system in which Nature and its earthly manifestations in human instincts are counterbalanced by the action of reason and free will with the aim of achieving a practical knowledge that eventually results in a new vision of the world.

## Chapter 1

### Deified Men and Humanized Gods: The *Genealogies* and the Hermetic Veil of the *Fabula*

My teacher, Hermes—often speaking to me in private, sometimes in the presence of Tat—used to say that those reading my books would find their organization very simple and clear when, on the contrary, it is unclear and keeps the meaning of its words concealed (*Corpus Hermeticum* XVI, 1)

Qui sim quemve sequar callem, stylus ipse tacente me loquitur. (Petrarca, *Epistola a Zoilo* [Metr. 2, 10], vv. 265-266)

A hermetic vein of thinking and creating meanings seems to permeate the modern intellectual tradition and to have relevant repercussions in the humanities. According to Antoine Faivre,<sup>1</sup> hermetic writings have always been present, openly or secretly, in Western culture and brought a significant contribution to the development of modern science ever since the Renaissance, especially but not exclusively, with the Latin translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by Marsilio Ficino.<sup>2</sup> By setting the hermetic writings within a historical framework, Mirko Sladek has noted that some sort of dissociation between western dialectical thought and symbolic modern thinking incarnated by hermetism bore witness to the disappearance of the latter only with the establishment of a scientific and mechanistic view of the world.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, according to Paul Colilli, who developed a semiotic theory to reconstruct the origins of modern thought, the hermetic way of thinking has never been defeated by Cartesian rationalism, and through its association with other doctrines, beliefs and practices—such as the Christian Kabbalah and modern esotericism—has become a living element of contemporary thought thanks to an epistemology mediated by the thinking-by-images and

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<sup>1</sup> A. Faivre, "The Children of Hermes and the Science of Man," in *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1995), 55-73. On the history of Hermetism see also P. Lucentini, I. Parri, V. Perrone Compagni, eds., *Hermetism from late antiquity to humanism = La tradizione ermetica dal mondo tardo-antico all'umanesimo: atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, Napoli, 20-24 novembre 2001* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> See also F. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2002). On the role played by Hermetism in the Renaissance and in the following times see D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism from the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972); E. Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano: ricerche e documenti* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1979); E. Garin, *Medioevo e rinascimento: studi e ricerche* (Roma: Laterza, 1980); E. Garin, *Ermetismo del Rinascimento* (Roma: Editori riuniti, 1988); D. Cantimori, *Umanesimo e religione nel Rinascimento* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1975); L. Lazzarelli, Ludovico, F. d'Ana, H. C. A. von Nettesheim, and E. Garin, eds., *Testi umanistici su l'ermetismo: testi di Ludovico Lazzarelli, F. Giorgio Veneto [e] Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim* (Roma: Bocca, 1955); C. Vasoli, *Magia e scienza nella civiltà umanistica* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1976).

<sup>3</sup> M. Sladek, *L' étoile d'Hermès fragments de philosophie hermétique* (Paris: Michel, 1993), 13.

mnemonics of Giambattista Vico.<sup>4</sup> But when we take a small step backward, chronologically, as Umberto Eco manages to do, we realize that even Antiquity—dissatisfied with the rationalistic principles established, above all, by Aristotelianism, with the law of identity, the principles of non-contradiction and the excluded middle—had experimented with the idea of a continuous metamorphosis of language and philosophy symbolized by the god Hermes, an ambiguous god whose development of logical chains denies any finite causality.<sup>5</sup> And if we move forward, and look at the patristic period until at least the Middle Ages, one could also say that hermetic thought has never disappeared.<sup>6</sup> Thus, in addition to the systematic doubt that questions rationalism, which, as we have seen, pervades Antiquity, Middle Ages, and moreover, all modern and contemporary science, hermetism also establishes as its key feature the concealment of the truth (a rational or irrational truth) under the veil of a compelling narrative. In other words, hermetism intends to conceal and reveal a philosophical secret only to a selected audience.

*Poetry, Conviviality and Secrecy: Hermes and the Storytellers*

If we want to know what form hermetism took in the fourteenth century, that is, at the beginning of its full deployment throughout Europe, we must also think of Boccaccio. Specifically, in order to know what Boccaccio means by wisdom, what his philosophy of language is, and how he tries to represent it in the literary discourse of the *Decameron* through various forms of poetic imagination, we must turn our attention to the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*.<sup>7</sup> But before getting into the core issue of knowledge in the

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<sup>4</sup> P. Colilli, *Signs of the Hermetic Imagination* (Toronto: Toronto Semiotic Circle, 1993); Id., *Vico and the Archives of Hermetic Reason* (Welland, Ont: Éditions Soleil Pub, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Eco, "La semiosi ermetica e il 'paradigma del velame'," in M. P. Pozzato, U. Eco, and A. Asor Rosa, *L'idea deforme: interpretazioni esoteriche di Dante* (Milano: Bompiani, 1989), 12.

<sup>6</sup> In patristic literature, numerous are the traces inherent to hermetic literature. Augustine, condemning hermetism in his *De civitate Dei*, quotes passages from the *Asclepius*. In Lactantius' *Divinae institutiones* are there long fragments of the *Corpus Hermeticum* translated into Latin. Eusebius shows to be familiar with hermetic literature, and the alchemist Zosimus alludes to a collection entitled *Poimandres*. Cyril, too, knows Hermetism and says that Hermes Trismegist was the founder of every civilization. But it is with Stobaeus' *Florilegium* that we find the greatest part of hermetic fragments recollected. In the Byzantine area, only Michael Psellus seems to have known hermetism. Cf. P. Scarpi, intr. to Ermete Trismegisto, *Poimandres*, ed. P. Scarpi (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 1988), 31 ff. Considering the period between the twelfth and the thirteenth century—when philosophy flourished and created interesting premises for later Scholastic developments—various esoteric implications, more or less convincing, have been elaborated on the philosophy of the *Commedia*: cfr. R. Guénon, *L'Esotérisme de Dante: 3e édition* (Paris: les Éditions traditionnelles [impr. de Jouve], 1949); P. Vitellaro Zuccarello, *Sotto il velame: Dante fra universalità esoterica e universalismo politico* (Milano: Mimesis, 2007); A. Graf, *Il mito esoterico del paradiso terrestre* (Torino: Nino Aragno, 1997). More specifically, Paolo Valesio tracks a philosophical 'hermetic vein' in Dante's thought. Besides the structural features of the *Commedia* notoriously identified in the poetic moment of conversion and in the subsequent moment of Augustinian confession that is meant to convey, to the reader, what Dante himself has learned, one can also identify an architecture of the 'initiation' understood as the "way of the hermetic discourse" (P. Valesio, "La vena ermetica della *Commedia*," *Annali d'italianistica* 8 [1990]: 278-299). On the poetics of conversion, see the classical study of J. Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations will be drawn from V. Zaccaria edition of the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, a cura di Vittore Branca (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1967-98), voll. vii-viii, tt. 1-2. For a recent English translation see

*Genealogies*, a brief introduction to this text will not only provide the historical background of the composition and its narrative framework but will also clarify the strict parallelism with the *Decameron*. In the *Genealogies*, a long text of unparalleled scholarship and knowledge of the ancient Latin and Greek world,<sup>8</sup> composed in different periods between 1305 and 1375 (almost simultaneously with the *Decameron*), Boccaccio aims to expound, first to the commissioner of the work, Hugh IV, King of Cyprus, and then to his readers, the history of the descendants of the pagan gods and heroes of Antiquity as recounted by ancient poets and authors. At the same time, he intends to uncover the meaning that these authors wanted to communicate under the veil of poetry (*Genealogie*, I, Proemio, i, 1).<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, the plot and structure of the *Genealogies* recall the biblical model of the book of *Genesis*, where the genealogies of Israel are exposed and intermingled with the stories of various characters; on the other hand, they may echo the *Decameron* itself and its ten-day structure, each Day containing, in turn, ten short stories.<sup>10</sup>

When considering the overall approach to the narration of the forgotten past of men and gods, a new rational attitude unknown to the most authoritative structural models (i.e. Herodotus, Lactantius, and possibly Hesiod) pervades the entire erudite discussion and clashes with the irrational presence of multiple interpretations of the myths. Boccaccio's scientific attitude appears already emphasized in the proem, where Boccaccio both belies the madness of the ancients who believed they descended from the blood of the gods (I, Proemio, i, 4) and mocks—later on he will de facto confute them—the ridiculous argument that, under the bark of narration, the ancients had only wanted to invent stories devoid of any further meaning and content (I, Proemio, i, 16). But that attitude, as we shall see later, never excludes any possibility of irrational alternatives. Boccaccio is ready to write a work so daring and demystifying that, in many ways (including its difficulty), is similar to that of a theologian (I, Proemio, i, 18). He does so by setting the proper historical and rational background, even assuming the loss of many works and documents that could have recounted the facts of ancient history which time (I, Proemio, i, 32), or specifically, Christianity (I, Preface, i, 28), with the intention of proclaiming the truth of a single god, had destroyed or passed over silence. In fact, hidden under the language of poetry, and under the metaphors of navigation in the

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Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods. Volume I. Books I-V*, ed. Jon Solomon (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Boccaccio's exceptional knowledge of Latin, as well as Greek (mainly in translation), sources, is attested not only by the huge amount of references in the text of the *Genealogie* but also by the author's very defense who states that he founded the information of his text on the direct reading of the sources (*Genealogie*, XV, vii, 2); this statement, however, is confirmed by the number of books present in the catalogue of the so-called *parva libraria* of Santo Spirito (cfr. Mazza, *L'inventario*).

<sup>9</sup> Although in a first, but not ultimate, definitive form, as witnessed by the autograph ms. Laurenziano, Plut. 52, n. 9 (dated from 1365 to 1370), the *Genealogie* seem to have been composed during a very long span of time, first in the form of schedules, and then as a partially complete work. The long time of composition bears witness to the great attention that the author conferred to his work (the dates of composition are those proposed by the last editor of the text, Vittorio Zaccaria, *Genealogie*, nota la testo, p. 1592 ff.).

<sup>10</sup> According to G. Mazzotta, "Boccaccio: the mythographer of the city," in J. Whitman, ed., *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 349-364, in part. p. 363, the fifteen-book structure of the *Genealogies* echoes the fifteen books of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and at the same time represents the historical process of formation of the cosmos, from the origins until the present.

proems to the various books (that certainly emphasize the difficulty of the work), there is concealed a scholarly, historical, and rational work of restoration which is meant to explain a vast material whose current condition is the scattered fragments of a large shipwreck, a daring work that required the skills of a divine personality like Prometheus, the only one able to reassemble them properly (I, Proemio, i, 40-42). Boccaccio does not aspire to be compared to a god, rather, more modestly, he puts himself only in the guise of a young doctor who wants to reassemble the *membra disiecta* of the body of the gods, as in the past the semigod Aesculapius (or Asclepius, the founder of medicine) rearranged that of Hippolytus (I, Proemio, i, 50). To the multiplicity of the scattered body parts of the myth is associated the multiplicity of interpretations that the ancients wanted to bequeath to their successors, just as one can see in the polysemy of the sacred Word that is hidden under the veil of allegory (I, Proemio, i, 43).

The nautical image of the sea journey in the proem of the *Genealogies*, although typical of classical Greek-Roman poetry,<sup>11</sup> echoes analogous metaphors of the journey also present in the *Filocolo*,<sup>12</sup> in the *Decameron* (Proemio, 5), especially in the Second Day (see chap. 2), and the experience of the storytellers in the Florentine countryside (cf. fig. 1 [Antoine Vérard, 1498]). The metaphor of navigation, however, in the *Genealogies* as in the *Decameron* alike, sets itself as the cipher of the hermeneutic experience related to poetry; an experience made of ramifications and alternative cognitive directions.<sup>13</sup> In addition to sailing the sea of the genealogies of the pagan gods, the author intends to find out their meanings in order to offer to the reader his personal interpretations. His is not only a scholarly exposition, it is also an existential journey of a person who observes and reflects on the condition of antiquity, on its current state of incomprehension on the part of the *litterati*, and on the abysmal failure to recall its lost values, as shown by the almost elegiac portrait of the decline of the ancient cities described directly by the panoramic

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<sup>11</sup> "Sit michi splendens et immobile sydus et navicule dissuetum mare sulcantis gubernaculum regat, et, ut oportunitas exiget, ventis vela concedat, ut eo devehar, quo suo nomini sit decus, laus et honor, et gloria sempiterna, detrectantibus autem delusio, ignominia, dedecus, et eterna damnatio!" (I.Proemio.i.51). On the nautical metaphors in Antiquity and in the Italian literature see Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 147-150. For a trans-historical, politico-philosophical overview of the nautical metaphor, cf. M. Vito, *Sea and Land, Collectivity and Individual: Metaphors at Odds in the Political Field*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> "Adunque, o giovani, i quali avete *la vela della barca della vaga mente* dirizzata a' venti che muovono dalle dorate penne ventilanti del giovane figliuolo di Citea, negli amorosi pelaghi dimoranti disiosi di pervenire a porto di salute con istudioso passo, io per la sua inestimabile potenza vi priego che divotamente prestate alquanto alla presente opera *lo 'ntelletto*" (*Filocolo*, I, 2) (emphasis mine).

<sup>13</sup> On the philosophical and epistemological purposes of poetry see J. Chydenius, *The Theory of Medieval Symbolism* (Helsingfors: Academic Bookstore, 1960); G. Mazzotta, "Dante e la critica americana di Charles Singleton," *Lecture Classensi* 18 (1989): 195-209, in part. p. 201; F. Tateo, *Retorica e poetica fra medioevo e rinascimento* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1960); G. Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche sulla poesia: (Mussato e Petrarca)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1976), 14 and passim. On the epistemological purpose of poetry in Dante see Barański, *Dante e i segni*, 77-78, 87; id., "Benvenuto da Imola e la tradizione dantesca della Commedia," in P. Palmieri and C. Paolazzi, eds., *Benvenuto da Imola lettore degli antichi e dei moderni: atti del convegno internazionale, Imola 26 e 27 maggio 1989* (Ravenna: Longo, 1991), 215-230; Cazalé-Bérard, "Sistema del sapere e istanze narrative nella novellistica toscana medievale." On the history of humanist poetics cf. C. C. Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250-1500* (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, 1981), in part. p. 110-128 on Boccaccio's poetics; Wallace, Minnis, Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 373-519.



view of the author.<sup>14</sup> Boccaccio's ability to organize his knowledge of the gods—and consequently to devise a system in the shape of an upside-down family tree which arranges neatly the genealogical relations—requires an ordered structure comparable to an encyclopedia. This structure implies the presence of a cognitive aptitude to arrange knowledge into a more easily recognizable and accessible system that privileges and facilitates memory.<sup>15</sup> In other words, not only does Boccaccio aim to inform his readers, but he is also concerned with how to preserve more easily the memory of the knowledge he presents.<sup>16</sup>

When providing the first explanation of a myth, there comes to Boccaccio the need to account for the conception of the *fabula*, which he refers to as objectively known by tradition, while it actually proved to be a fully original idea.<sup>17</sup> The old fables are

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<sup>14</sup> "Inde repente reolutus in litus, aspexi non dicam Athinas, sed earum dum fere consumptum parvumque vestigium intuerer. Risi nostre mortalitatis insana iudicia, quibus decepta vetustas, dum illas futuras perennes arbitraretur, primo deos in litem nominis imponendi traxit, inde eas vocavit eorum sententia immortales; nunc, paucis elapsis seculis, ruinis suum finem venisse testantur. In mortem profecto nos et nostra corruunt omnia celeri passu." (V, Proemio, 3-4) Cf. T. Hyde, "Boccaccio: The Genealogies of Myth," *PMLA* 100 (1985): 737-745, in part. p. 738. Mazzotta, "Boccaccio: the mythographer of the city," 356-357 (who does not comment on the passage about the decadence of the ancient cities) notices an elegiac connotation as well as an element of crisis in Boccaccio's perspective on the glories of Antiquity: human history and the myth, as far as the history of human creative imagination, are subject to the inexorable flowing of time and for that reason are destined to die.

<sup>15</sup> This aptitude certainly derives from the classical culture: see Hesiod and how he had ordered his mythography. Besides showing a special interest for genealogy, Hesiod's *Theogony* has certain similarities with Boccaccio's *Genealogies*, yet we do not know if Boccaccio ever read Hesiod in translation or through the mediation of his Greek *magister*. In *Theogony* 26-28, the Muses ask the poet to expound the genealogies of the gods as well as the knowledge of the cosmos ("... Ed esse, spargendo / l'ambrosia voce, prima l'origine cantan dei Numi, / cui generò da prima la Terra col Cielo profondo: / così nacquer gli Dei, che largiscono agli uomini i beni. / E Giove cantan poi, degli uomini padre e dei Numi, / e quanto egli è più forte dei Numi, quanto è più possente. / Cantan degli uornini poi la progenie, poi dei Giganti." Trans. P. Sanasi). Another analogies with Hesiod's text can be found in *Theogony* 22-25 and 30, where poetry is said to be a gift from the Muses ("... e a me diedero un ramo di florido alloro, stupendo, / ch'io ne tagliassi uno scettro, m'infusero in seno la voce / divina, ond'io potessi cantare il presente e il futuro, / mi disser di cantare la stirpe dei Numi immortali...").

<sup>16</sup> Baranski, *Dante e i segni*, "La vocazione enciclopedica;" Cazalé-Bérard, "Sistema del sapere e istanze narrative," 346 and 358. On Dante and encyclopedism see also G. Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), cap. 1: Poetry and the Encyclopedia, which shows how the medieval epistemological system interacted with poetry so that to put the *Commedia* in the position of being a structural element of other literary forms of discourse on knowledge. The encyclopaedic system, moreover, besides the ancient and medieval traditions, is also part of the Dantean model that Boccaccio had evidently at hand.

<sup>17</sup> Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, 27 (final remarks on p. 157-160) shows how Boccaccio's conception of the *fabula* can be considered an original element within the panorama of reflections on the nature of poetry, and how this conception is projected forward to the future speculations of Humanism. On the theme of the 'ancient fables' and the role of the pagan gods between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance see E. Garin, "Le favole antiche," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento: studi e ricerche*, 63-84; Coluccio Salutati, *De laboribus Hercules*, ed. B. L. Ulman (Turici [Zurich]: In aedibus Theasauri mundi, 1951); Michael Tarchaniota Marullus, *Carmina*, ed A. Perosa (Roma [u.a.]: Ed. Antenore, 2001); J. Seznec, *La survivance des dieux antiques: essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l'humanisme et dans l'art de la Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1940) [it. trans.: *La sopravvivenza degli antichi dei: saggio sul ruolo della tradizione mitologica nella cultura e nell'arte rinascimentali* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1990)]; A. Renaudet, *Dante humaniste* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952); Y. Bâtard, *Dante, Minerve et Apollon; les images de la Divine comédie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952); N. Lenkeith, *Dante and the Legend of Rome* ([London]: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1952; Supplement II of *Medieval and*

evidently reflective of that time of human history when a fervid imagination could see into nature's hidden meanings and catch signs of life and mysteriously divine presences in every aspect of the world, signs that the imagination was, then, able to represent by words and rhythm. Yet, a certain polysemy that is bound to the sense of the fable has to be added to the power of imagination. The meaning of the fable is fully conventional and can be traced, through the metaphor of the cortex and the medulla, back to the Medieval fourfold system of allegory, which was applied to the Bible, and in which a literal (or historical) sense is distinguished by the allegorical—and in turn divided into moral, allegorical and anagogical (I, iii, 7-9). According to tradition, the purpose of the explanation of the fables of the ancients is to isolate the truth by removing it from the bark (the cortex) of fiction. This is something that Boccaccio is prepared to do with the stories of the gods. But before doing that, and that is where we can see a significant element of originality in Boccaccio's poetics, it is necessary to go one step further, namely, to understand why the ancient poets wanted to create and promote the obscurity of poetry.<sup>18</sup> In other words, it is not simply a matter of unveiling hidden meanings—a thing that everyone had tried to accomplish, even the late-Antique commentators of classical texts—but most importantly to question the reasons and purposes of so much obscurity in order to see if this was meant to convey other meanings. Poets do not just cover up the truth with the veil of allegory as if a natural inclination to poetry required them to delight themselves in creating fiction, but mostly because, as confirmed by Macrobius, it is the very essence of Nature, represented by the poets, to create mysteries by covering the truth and hiding it from human intelligence and comprehension. Thus, the mystery of fable is hidden 'naturely' to the eyes of the profane, and only the initiates are allowed to see into the arcane: "Sic ipsa *misteria* fabularum cuniculis operiuntur, ne vel hoc *adeptis* nudam rerum talium natura se prebeat, sed summatibus tantum viris *sapientia* interprete, veri *archani* consciis contenti sunt reliqui" (I, iii, 5-7). It is obvious, then, that among the initiates are included both Boccaccio and Hugh IV, King of Cyprus, to whom Boccaccio presents his work along with the right clues to unravel its hidden meanings: "confido, quoniam tibi nobile sit ingenium, quo possis quantumcunque parvis datis *indiciis*, in quoscunque *profundissimos sensus* penetrare" (I, iv, 14). Boccaccio speaks of *misteria*, which may well be mystical truths, but also speaks significantly of *archana*, and intends to penetrate *profundissimos sensus*, intending to evoke quite different contexts.

The language of poetry is full of secret elements; the romance vernacular tradition is not excluded. The troubadours themselves, beyond the courtly elements that emerge in their poetry, bring forth a spiritual, symbolic, sapiential discourse that should not be overlooked and that was certainly influential among the *stilnovisti* as much as the writers

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*Renaissance Studies*); B. Croce, "Gli dei antichi nella tradizione mitologica del Medio Evo e del Rinascimento," in B. Croce, *Varietà di storia letteraria e civile: serie seconda* (Bari: G. Laterza, 1949), 50-65; J. Huizinga, *L'Autunno del medioevo*, ed. Ludovico Gatto (Roma: Newton Compton, 1992), 459 ff.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the various ancient and medieval conceptions of poetry as bearer of obscure meanings and secret wisdom based on the conviction that the gods manifested themselves to mankind in enigmatic forms (Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 229-230), Albertino Mussato described the ancient poets as inventors of enigmas (*Epistolae*, VII, vv. 15-22, quoted by Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche sulla poesia*, 21). The first edition of Mussato's works dates back to 1635 and was reproduced in J. G. Graevius, *Thesaurus Antiquitatum et Historiarum Italiae*, vol. VI, part 2 (Leyden, 1722).

of the fourteenth century.<sup>19</sup> In the Latin Middle Ages, John of Salisbury, defining ancient allegorism, wrote that poetry contains secret wisdom and knowledge of universal things: Mercury symbolically joins in marriage with Philology in order to seek the truth, while the so-called 'lies of the poets' do not deceive because they are limited to the service of truth.<sup>20</sup> Alain de Lille further develops this same idea: "Virgilius musa mendacia multa colorat / Et facie ueri contextit pallia falso." The same theory is also found in Carolingian times, in Theodulf of Orléans for instance.<sup>21</sup> Poetry offers an indirect route to the "secrets of philosophy," either by arousing the wonder, as Jean de Meun maintains, or by functioning as a fictional veil for philosophical truths, as in Albert the Great.<sup>22</sup> Dante acknowledges this latter feature: "O voi ch'avete li 'ntelletti sani, / mirate la dottrina che s'asconde / sotto 'l velame de li versi strani" (*Inferno*, IX, 61-63). Moreover, Dante's poetry contains mysteries and enigmas that have still to be unraveled.<sup>23</sup> The poetry of the so-called *Fedeli d'Amore*, whether real or invented, still gives rise to the desire to investigate the hidden secrets of the poetic text.<sup>24</sup>

However, the obscurity of poetry in the context of *Genealogies* seems to refer, as I would like to demonstrate, to the hermetic idea of obscure discourse; that is, to the kind

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<sup>19</sup> Going beyond the values reflected in courtly literature, N. D'Anna, *Il segreto dei trovatori: sapienza e poesia nell'Europa medievale* (Rimini: Il cerchio, 2005) emphasizes the spiritual aspects of troubadour lyric and their sapiential symbolic meanings.

<sup>20</sup> "Ut sit Mercurio Philologia comes, / Non quia numinibus falsis reverentia detur, / Sed sub verborum tegmine vera latent. / Vera latent rerum variarum tecta figuris, / Nam sacra vulgari publica jura vetant (*Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum*, ll. 184-190, quoted by Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 230). On the lies of the poets at the service of truth cf. Giovanni di Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. Webb, I, 186, 12.

<sup>21</sup> Alain de Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, SP, II, 278 (PL, 210, 451B); Theodulf of Orléans, *Poetae*, I, 543, 19 ff., both quoted by Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 230).

<sup>22</sup> Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose* [ed. Lecoy], vv. 7137-40: "Bien l'entendras [i.e. the truth], se bien repetes / Les integumanz aus poetes. / La verras une grant partie / Des secrez de philosophie." Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I, 2, 6 [ed. Geyer]: "ipse philomythos secundum hunc modum philosophus est, quia fabula sua construitur ab ipso ex mirandis. Dico autem philomython poetam amantem fingere fabulas. . . . Sicut in ea parte logicae quae poetica est, ostendit Aristoteles, poeta fingit fabula, ut excitet ad admirandum et quod admiratio ulterius excitet ad inquirendum et sic constet philosophia." Both passages are quoted by Baranski, "Per similitudine di abito scientifico," 14.

<sup>23</sup> To mention just a few, the so-called *enigma forte* of *Purgatorio*, XXXIII, v. 49 ff. (cf. E. Minguzzi, *L' enigma forte: il codice occulto della Divina Commedia* [Genova: Ed. Culturali Internazionali Genova, 1988]); and various prophecies throughout the *Commedia* (cf. E. Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006], 92-109).

<sup>24</sup> The attention to the so-called *Fedeli d'Amore* was brought by Gabriel Rossetti's contention that the Italian love literature was essentially symbolic and employed a secret language to convey a mystic philosophy. On the *Fedeli d'Amore* see L. Valli, *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore* (Roma: Optima, 1928; recently reedited: Milano: Luni, 2004); A. Ricolfi, *Studi sui fedeli d'amore*, vol. 1: *Le Corti d'amore in Francia ed i loro riflessi in Italia* (Roma: Albrighi, Segati e C., 1933); vol. 2.: *Dal problema del gergo al crollo d'un Regno* (Roma: Albrighi, Segati e C., 1940); both vols. are reprinted as *Studi sui fedeli d'Amore: dai poeti di corte a Dante: simboli e linguaggio segreto* (Foggia: Bastogi, 1997). A. Liborio, *Dante e i fedeli d'amore* ([S.l. : s.n., 1930?]; Extract from: *Convivium*, 6 [1930]). G. Gambuto, *Cenni sui Fedeli d'amore e simmetrie della croce e dell'aquila nella Divina Commedia* (Roma: Olimpica poligrafica, 1994); M. Cima, A. Iacomini, T. Riva, and F. Riva, *Opere e linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d'Amore straordinari rischiaratori dell'universo*, a cura di Associazione Culturale "Segrete Storie Italiane", coordinatore della ricerca Giuseppe Riva (Latina, Il Levante, 2007); M. Ciavoletta, "Il testo moltiplicato: interpretazioni esoteriche della *Divina Commedia*", *Tenzone. Revista de la Asociación Complutense de Dantología* XI (2010): 227-246.

of literature whose language hides its meanings and the truth without completely denying their knowledge and understanding. In other words, the author himself who hides the meaning in his poem would also be the first to reveal the truth in one way or another. The Latin *Asclepius* recalls this concept while, at the same time, warning that the hermetic idea of obscurity is not to be confused with that of abstruseness of the sophists, which instead drives away from the true, pure, sacred philosophy:

—Quomodo ergo multi incomprehensibilem philosophiam afficiunt aut quemadmodum eam multifaria ratione confundunt? —O Asclepi, hoc modo: in varias disciplinas nec comprehensibiles eam callida commentatione miscentes ἀριθμητικὴν et musicen et geometriam . . . sophistarum calliditate decepti, a vera, pura sanctaque philosophia auertentur. (*Asclepius*, 12-14)

[What is it that the many do to make philosophy incomprehensible? How do they obscure it in the multiplicity of their reasoning? In this way, *Asclepius*: by combining it through ingenious argument with various branches of study that are not comprehensible – *arithmētikē* and music and geometry . . . Accordingly, the people who will come after us, deceived by the ingenuity of sophists, will be estranged from the true, pure and holy philosophy.]

The *Asclepius* (also called *Perfect Discourse*), along with the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Stobei Hermetica* and the *Testimonia*, is part of the so-called *Hermetica*, a set of philosophical and theological writings composed in Late Antiquity.<sup>25</sup> The dissemination in the West of the Hermetic philosophy seems to have been limited almost exclusively to the *Asclepius*, a Latin translation of a lost original Greek text falsely attributed to Apuleius of Madaura. For Renaissance writers, and for Boccaccio, who knew the corpus at least in its Latin part,<sup>26</sup> the author of these writings, a mysterious Hermes Trismegistus,<sup>27</sup> was considered a contemporary of Moses, and his philosophy was seen as an ancient theological doctrine as important as the Bible, so much so that it was thought to merge with Platonism and anticipate the doctrines of Revelation. Interestingly, the *Asclepius*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus in the Middle Ages,<sup>28</sup> and

<sup>25</sup> On the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the monumental work of A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris, J. Gabalda, 1949-1954) still remains unequalled. See also the English translation, with introduction and commentary, by Brian P. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica* (Cambridge: University Press, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> Mazza, *L'inventario*, 52, n. 4. Boccaccio quotes Hermes three times in the text of the *Genealogie* (V, xxi, 2; VII, xxxiv, 1; VII, xxxvi, 1) and states he saw his *de Ydolo* ("ego librum hunc Hermetis Trimegisti ... vidi;" the *de Ydolo* is the *Asclepius*; cf. Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio*, 456 e III, 26, n. 68 e VII, 34). Boccaccio wrote that Hermes was a pious man, educated and revered by the Egyptians who never named him in order to respect his sanctity and not to reveal his mortality.

<sup>27</sup> Cicero (*De natura deorum*, III, 56) confirms the ancient identification of Hermes Trismegist with the Egyptian god Toth, symbol of the sun, the light, and the truth through the word. This assimilation was probably based on a peculiar link with the "word," the "discourse," the "interpretation," which ancient Greeks used to assign to Hermes (cf. Plato, *Cratylus*, 407 E-408 A) in order to make him an interpreter of the Logos and, therefore, of the universal order (cfr. P. Scarpi, intr. to *Poimandres*, 24).

<sup>28</sup> According to the *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, a work known by Boccaccio (Zibaldone Laurenziano XXIX, 8; cfr. Mazza, *L'inventario*, 36-37, n. 15), even Hermes is included among the great philosophers of the past: "HERMES in Egipto natus fuit, et Hermes in greco dicitur, Mercurius latine, et in ebrayco Enoch; qui fuit filius Jared, filii Macthalaleb, filii Quenam, filii Enoy, filii Sed, filii Adam. Et fuit ante magnum diluvium quod mundum submersit; post quod fuit aliud diluvium quod

the *Decameron* begin in much the same way. In the *Asclepius*, four semi-divine characters meet and discuss about the cosmos, the nature of God, and man's place in the universe, without allowing anyone else to participate in the discussion. In the *Decameron*, a group of seven women and three men meet in a church, then flee to a country retreat where they tell each other stories while remaining away from the plague-stricken city of Florence. The conviviality, the philosophical character of the situation and, at the same time, the elitist aspect of their gathering secluded from the rest of the community constitute salient features of the framework of both texts. Let us consider the beginning of the *Asclepius*:

Quo ingresso Asclepius et Hammona interesse suggestit. Trismegistus ait: — Nulla invidia Hammona prohibet a nobis; etenim ad eius nomen multa meminimus a nobis esse conscripta, sicuti etiam ad Tat amatissimum et carissimum filium multa physica exoticaque quam plurima. tractatum hunc autem tuo scribam nomine. praeter Hammona nullum vocassis alium, *ne tantae rei religiosissimus sermo multorum interventu presentiaque violeatur*. tractatum enim tota numinis maiestate plenissimum inreligiosae mentis est multorum conscientia publicare. (*Asclepius*, 1)

[“Now go out for a moment, Asclepius, and call Tat to join us. When Tat came in, Asclepius suggested that Hammon also join them. Trismegistus said: “No jealousy keeps Hammon from us; indeed, we recall having written many things in his name, as we have also written so much on physical and popular topics for Tat, our dearest and most loving son. But this treatise I shall write in your name. Call no one but Hammon *lest the presence and interference of the many profane this most reverent discourse* on so great a subject, for the mind is irreverent that would make public, by the awareness of the many, a treatise so very full of the majesty of divinity.” (Trans. B. P. Copenhaver)]<sup>29</sup>

Although remaining at the paratextual level, it is important to emphasize that the aspect of conviviality that pertains to the *Decameron's* framework is also present in the tutelary deity of the collection, that is, the eloquent Mercury (the Greek Hermes, perhaps not coincidentally) that hovers enigmatically at the beginning, on Wednesday (in Italian, *Mercoledì* being the day of Mercury), of the storytellers' journey in the *Decameron*, and who presides over the social and narrative communication.<sup>30</sup> If it were not for the same

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submersit Egiptum tantum. Et recessit Hermes de Egipto et ambulavit totam terram octoginta et duobus annis, invitans omnes ad obediendum Deo cum septuaginta et duabus linguis, et construxit centum et octo villas et *instruxit eas scientiis*. Et fuit primus *inventor scientie stellarum*; et stabilivit omni populo cuiuslibet climatis legem pertinentem et convenientem suis opinionibus. Cui obedierunt reges et tota terra, et habitantes insulas maris. Et invitavit omnes ad legem Dei et ad confitendum veritatem, et ad horrendum mundum et observandam iusticiam et querendam salvationem alterius mundi.”(E. Franceschini, "Il *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*," *Atti del Reale Istituto Veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti* 91.2 [1931-1932]: 398-588, in part. p. 402-403).

<sup>29</sup> The same aspects of conviviality and segregation of the dialoguing mini-community from the rest of the society is also present in Plato's *Symposium* ("... when suddenly there was a great knocking at the door of the house, as of revellers, and the sound of a flute-girl was heard. Agathon told the attendants to go and see who were the intruders. 'If they are friends of ours,' he said, 'invite them in, but if not, say that the drinking is over.'" (*Simposio*, xxx, trans. B. Jowett); or even within the romance literature, metaphorized in the meal offered to the fairies, and in the conviviality of the *Confrérie* during the banquet in the tavern in Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la feuillée* (cf. ed. J. Dufournet [Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1991]).

<sup>30</sup> C. Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica: Mercurio, Orfeo, Giasone, tre chiavi dell'avventura ermeneutica," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 277-306, in part. p. 293, 296-297. Boccaccio (*Genealogie*,

symposium frame which is also present in another text known to Boccaccio, the *Saturnalia*, and for the same philosophical connotation, it would appear that the idea for the *Decameron's* setting be derived from the *Asclepius*.<sup>31</sup> However, since it is here more relevant to define the characteristics of Boccaccio's thought, rather than to attribute his conception to any particular source, it will be most appropriate to emphasize the philosophical features common to the *Asclepius* and Boccaccio's poetics in order to better understand the nature of the philosophical thought that emerges, primarily, from his *Genealogies*, and, in hermeneutic perspective, in the *Decameron*.

In order to compare the two texts, it will be useful, first, to look at their epistemological language. According to several scholars, the Latin language of cognition, perception and intuition of the *Asclepius* is somewhat vague, yet one can recognize some trends that may help account for similar meanings in the *Genealogies*. (Analogous problems, however, existed in Greek for the same concepts.<sup>32</sup>) In Greek, there is a large group of terms related to the word *nous* (mind), and to the noun *gnosis* (knowledge). In Latin, and particularly in the *Asclepius*, it is possible to connect the word *sensus* with the Greek *nous*, translating it mostly with 'intellect,' 'divine power of intuition,'<sup>33</sup> but the word *sensus* also has countless connotations which mean 'sense,' 'faculty,' 'meaning,' etc.<sup>34</sup> Yet, if we focus on the first group of meanings of the term *sensus*, we realize that it acquires a peculiar emphasis in the *Asclepius*. In particular, the human ability of intuition (the *sensus*), according to the *Asclepius*, was given to man, and to him alone, so that he can understand the evil of the world and fight it. Consciousness, learning and understanding are the means that human beings have to use against evil; and this is also the main indirect response to the presence of evil in the world:

prouisum cautumque est, quantum rationabiliter potuisset a summo deo, tunc cum *sensu*, disciplina, intellegentia mentes hominum est munerare dignatus. hisce enim rebus, quibus ceteris antestamus animalibus, soli possumus malitiae fraudes, dolos uitique vitare. ea enim qui, antequam his implicitus est, ex aspectu uitarit, *is homo est diuina intellegentia prudentiaque munitus*; fundamentum est enim disciplinae in summa bonitate consistens. (*Asclepius*, 16)

[Acting as reasonably as possible, the supreme god took care to provide against evil when he deigned to endow human minds with *consciousness*, learning and understanding, for it

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VII, xxxvi, 3) reports Petrarch's interpretation (*Invectivae in medicum*) on the nature of the god Mercury as the lord of eloquence and protector of merchants.

<sup>31</sup> Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Ragionare nel giardino: Boccaccio i cicli pittorici del "Trionfo della morte"* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1987), maintains that the idea of the *Decameron's* conviviality came to Boccaccio from the *Trionfo della morte*, the fresco cycle in the monumental cemetery of Pisa. On another possible influential text, i.e. the *Aenigmata*, see also chapter 3 ("The *Motto* and the Enigma: Rhetoric and Knowledge in the Sixth Day"). The symposium as a framework for a philosophical work dates back from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai* (3rd c. BC), Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (5th c.), up to the twelfth century *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (see *Il Libro dei ventiquattro filosofi*, ed. P. Lucentini (Milano: Adelphi, 1999).

<sup>32</sup> Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica*, 96, commentary to *Corpus Hermeticum*, I, 1, and 217-218, commentary to *Asclepius* 3.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. A.-J. Festugière, commentary to *Asclepius*, in *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A.D. Nock (Paris: Le Belles Lettres, 1945), II, 359, n. 26 and 363, n. 53.

<sup>34</sup> Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica*, 218, commentary to *Asclepius*, 3. Among other terms used in the *Asclepius* to refer to cognitive and intuitive processes, see also: *mens* (mind), *animus* (thought, thinking, soul), *cognitio* (knowledge), *contemplatio* (contemplation), *intellectus* (understanding), *intentio* (concentration, intention, effort), *nosco* (know), *percipio* (grasp), *ratio* (reason).

is these gifts alone, by which we surpass other living things, that enable us to avoid the tricks, snares and vices of evil. He that avoids them on sight, before they entangle him, that person has been fortified by divine understanding and foresight, for the foundation of learning resides in the highest good.]

This multiplicity of meanings related to the Latin term *sensus* could partly account for the use that Boccaccio makes of it in the *Genealogies* to charge its discourse with hidden meanings and to link it to the scope and activities of the mind.

Directly related to the meaning of the term *sensus* is also the semantic scope of the *fabula* which, according to the quadripartite definition given by Boccaccio, also appears to imply indirectly a distinction between 'sense' and 'truth'. Poetry makes 'sense,' but what makes sense does not necessarily contain truth. Although it does not seem to have specific authoritative sources,<sup>35</sup> the *divisio fabularum* that Boccaccio suggests defines the characteristics of each type of fable on the basis of its content of truth: the first kind of fable has no truth in its 'bark;' the second compounds imagination and truth on its surface; the third is more like history because it mainly relates events; and the fourth contains no truth at all in either its surface or inside of it and, not accidentally, consists of foolish old wives' tales (XIV, ix, 5-7). The fourth type of fable, at first sight, seems to be excluded from the domain of poetry in so far as it is totally divorced from any content of truth. But if one looks at what Boccaccio will later say about the content of the old wives' tales, we realize that these, too, are worth our attention since they are not totally outside the domain of poetry (XIV, x, 7). As Thomas Ricklin acutely observes, the fables of the *vetulae* are, at first, condemned (XIV, ix, 11) only for strategic purposes linked to promoting Boccaccio's argument against hypothetical detractors.<sup>36</sup> Soon afterward, in fact, Boccaccio enumerates the cases in which fables, even when devoid of meaning, demonstrate to have other relevant functions (consolatory, didactic, etc.) beyond the presence of a content of truth, so that the ignorant person would be delighted, while the learned one would practice the discovery of its hidden meanings. In this way, the appreciation of the various functions of the fables, beyond that of bearing the truth, can also be used to restore dignity to the fable of the fourth type (that one narrated by old wives) and bring it into the domain of poetry. This might also have some implications for the tales of the *Decameron* and the list of story types given in the Proemio ("novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie"). Indirectly, therefore, in addition to the tales drawn from Ovidian fables (see *Decameron*, V, 10 and VI, 2), even the tales of the *Decameron* that apparently do not convey a meaning are saved. By doing so, the tales of the *vetulae* regain poetic dignity, but solely and exclusively in the domain of meaning, that is, the *sensus*, and not in that of the truth.<sup>37</sup> In sum, Boccaccio refashions the domain of the fable first by distinguishing between the concept of truth and that of meaning, and secondly by privileging meaning as the basis of the conception of poetry. The criterion of truth that was central to Dante's vision is no longer paramount, now giving way to the

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. P. Dronke, *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 27 and n. 3.

<sup>36</sup> T. Ricklin, "Vetulae et fables dans les *Genealogiae deorum Gentilium*: Boccace entre Dante et Pétrarque," in J. Biard et F. Mariani Zini, eds., *Ut philosophia poesis. Questions philosophiques dans l'oeuvre de Dante, Pétrarque et Boccace* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), 191-211, in part. 202-204.

<sup>37</sup> Ricklin, "Vetulae et fables," 205.

*sensus*—an element inclined to be associated with the domain of language—so that even the tales of the *vetulae* are raised to the dignity of poetry.

### *Poetry, Secrecy and the Psychology of Language*

Besides the amusement provided by witty answers, mockeries, and even obscene stories, the *Decameron* stimulates the mind and attracts us, especially when the author shows his mastery in using the Italian language for illusionistic purposes. Since it deals with poetry and the language of literature, the poetics expressed in the *Genealogies* has very close ties with the narrative of the *Decameron* and with the way in which the reader is invited to discover the meanings within it. The first tale of the First Day, the story of Cepparello (to name just one example), nicely illustrates how the artificial usage of the discourse can have multiple effects and signify both one thing and its opposite. In this regard, Kurt Flasch skillfully identified in the story of Cepparello a trap conceived for the reader, built with sophistication, and orchestrated on the problematic nature of the relationship between words and things. In the first tale, the relationship between language, thought, and objects does not reflect any longer the univocal relationship typical of the thirteenth century; language has now unveiled its ambiguity, and a chasm has opened between words and things. Since the inner life of the individual has entered into a hidden and unfathomable sphere, the error of Cepparello's confessor consisted of believing in a real repentance where there was nothing else but deception.<sup>38</sup> In the wake of Foucault's idea that the fundamental conventions of culture impose an order on our cognitive experience and understanding, Flasch identifies in the *Decameron* a disruptive moment of transformation of the world and society that is based on the very relation that words establish with what they want to, or should, signify.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Italian literary culture, even prior to the mid-fourteenth century, and in particular the Neapolitan milieu where Boccaccio was raised, had accepted, and in a way assimilated, the findings of the new English logic which problematized the relationship between words and things. In a famous letter, the *Mavortis miles extrenue*, a letter to an unknown person written in 1339,<sup>40</sup> Boccaccio shows how logic (or dialectics) is essential for a poet's own formation. According to Boccaccio, who gives us here an anticipation of his later reflections on poetics, the new dialectic for which Ockham constitutes a model should be a guide to the poet. In this case, the logic for which Ockham is placed next to Boethius and Cicero is the logic of language, namely, the philosophy of language that is responsible for investigating the relations between terms (the *terminus* as words, phrases, predicates), things and meanings, and for tracing their transformational rules. We do not know exactly what Boccaccio read of Ockham (in the letter, he mentions him with regard with the logic: the *Summa Logicae?*), but he could very well have been influenced by his practical, methodical distrust of the reality of the general concepts.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> K. Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste: saggio su Boccaccio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1995), 93.

<sup>39</sup> Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*, chap. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Cited by C. Vasoli. See Boccaccio, *Opere*, vol. V:1, p. 118.

<sup>41</sup> Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*, 91-92. The *Mavortis miles* is part of a group of four letters dated 1339 and copied in two fascicules of the Zibaldone Laurenziano XXIX 8. *Crepor celsitudinis*, *Mavortis miles extrenue* e *Nereus amphytritibus* are part of the same palimpsest quaternion at ff. 51r-52r; the *Sacre famis* is copied at f. 65r-v. In the *Mavortis miles*, Boccaccio appeals to an erudite scholar resident in Avignon, a person known through a common friend. Analogies with Petrarch biography (*De vita*) allow us



In 1954, Eugenio Garin identified Boccaccio as a key thinker and scholar of mythology, and drew attention to these two letters in order to highlight the influence of English philosophy on fourteenth-century Florentine culture. Garin also mentioned the presence of two autographs of Boccaccio in the form of a philosophical, theological and poetical medley held in the Laurenziana Library in Florence. These manuscripts are indicative of Boccaccio's interest and speculations on medieval texts dealing with philosophy and poetics as well as on the eclectic culture of the Angevin Neapolitan court. The Zibaldone Magliabechiano of the National Library of Florence also contains historical and mythological notes on poetry and a speech delivered in 1355 by Zanobi da Strada as well as a collection of ethical and philosophical quotations on poverty and love by Seneca.<sup>42</sup>

The use of allegory, the *velamen*, and the *fictio* have important cognitive implications that are worth exploring in the *Genealogies*. Following the immediate enjoyment resulting from the reading of poetry in its literal meaning, from the aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of mythological or imaginary figures, from the fascination of the poetic metre that amazes and attracts the attention, there is a moment, conscious or unconscious, in which the educated reader understands that fiction hides, beneath its peculiar language, something else behind the literal. It is precisely in this second cognitive phase that a special capacity inherent in the mechanisms of poetry is carried out. This capacity of poetry stimulates the reader to reflect on the meanings veiled in the literary expression. This cognitive aspect of fiction was already clear to Mussato. And Boccaccio experimented with it before in the *Filocolo* with the figure of Florio, whose epistemological *quête* urges him to gain knowledge of the divine mysteries through a love conversion; or in that of Idalogo, a living allegory of the poetic discourse which explores the potentiality of the ornate words, an allegory whose hidden truth Florio himself intends to reveal to the ignorant.<sup>43</sup> Yet, now, in the *Genealogies*, when faced with the interpretation of myth, the cognitive aspect of fiction is charged with more philosophical implications—which even verges on mystery connotations—and acquires a clearer epistemological value. The cognitive process of fiction is fulfilled here in what Boccaccio calls 'composition' and 'elocution,' which are cognitive operations in so far as the judgment (the active intellect, in the Thomistic sense) presides over them. The *fictio* is an aggregate of *inventiones* that must be dominated by an act of judgment in order to be set in the body of the fable. The act of judgment is finally associated with the use of *artes* accredited with scientific (i.e., epistemological) validity.<sup>44</sup>

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to identify this character in Petrarch himself. Abandoned by his lover and seeking tranquility for his studies, Boccaccio asks Petrarch for help. Behind this apparently banal request a meta-literary allusion has been seen, an allusion whose purpose was to "registrare, attraverso il gioco delle personificazioni, il passaggio tra due tempi della propria esistenza: quello passato, contraddistinto dalla passione d'amore e da un esercizio delle lettere eminentemente lirico; quello del tempo a venire, segnato dalla libertà e da una pratica poetica più elevata" (Cf. C. Cabailot, "La *Mavortis Miles*: Petrarca in Boccaccio?," in M. Picone e C. Cazalé-Bérard, eds., *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura: atti del seminario internazionale di Firenze-Certaldo, 26-28 aprile 1996* (Firenze: F. Cesati, 199), 129-139, quoted at p. 135.

<sup>42</sup> Garin, "Le favole antiche," in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 66-89; id., "La cultura fiorentina nella seconda metà del Trecento e i barbari Britanni," 187 and note 16.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica: Mercurio, Orfeo, Giasone, 287-288; *Filocolo*, V, 7, p. 557.

<sup>44</sup> Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 153, n. 63, and 154-155 compares the aesthetic conception of Boccaccio to the Thomistic whereby one can formulate an objective aesthetic judgment through the

If we look at the closest predecessors of Boccaccio in relation to the problem of poetry and knowledge, we find that Petrarch, in his *Invective contra medicum*, focuses on the rational aspects proper to any poetic creation because they allow him to introduce a comparison between poetry and the other sciences. The outward and inward form—the formal aspect and the content—of poetry are not juxtaposed but complementary, because both of them jointly concur in establishing an essential linkage between 'word' and 'concept,' that is, between form and content in every kind of poetry. Moreover, even before Petrarch, embracing a symbolic-exegetical epistemology, Dante claimed for poetry the epistemological primacy over other speculative disciplines due to its ability to address universal knowledge and to unite in itself literary form and symbolic content of the secular world with regard to the truth.<sup>45</sup> In this way, it became possible to assign a specific epistemological function to poetry. Poetry made its entrance among the sciences in so far as it encompassed notions of philosophical, historical, moral, and even theological nature that made it constantly relevant to its own age.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Boccaccio, too, reasserts the solid unity of form and content describing poetry as *exquisita locutio*, a sort of Aristotelian *synolon* of form and content.<sup>47</sup>

The notion of the obscurity of poetry, besides being part of a well-established epistemological tradition, has a psychological advantage for the act of comprehension over the limited potentialities that can be achieved with the clarity of the letter. Gregory the Great maintains that the obscure divine discourse is useful because it sharpens the wits: the fatigue and the difficulty of understanding enable the mind to apprehend what it could not grasp in a state of rest.<sup>48</sup> We find the same notion also in Mussato.<sup>49</sup> According to Augustine of Hippo, on the one hand, the lack of a precise meaning in the text of the Holy Scriptures produces a variety of interpretations, and on the other hand, it does not aim to confuse the readers, but rather to sharpen their wits so that they can derive more

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categories of *proportio*, *integritas* and *claritas*. He also points out (p. 89 ff.) the key role of the *artes* in the mechanism of creation of poetry, and how a scientific characterization is given to them.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Baranski, *Dante e i segni*, 84-87, 101; Mazzotta, "Dante e la critica americana," 201.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche*, 100-101. In addition to placing poetry within a vast panorama of epistemological activities and assigning to poetry a specific epistemological function, C. Cazalé-Bérard, "Riscrittura della poetica e poetica della riscrittura negli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio," in M. Picone and Cazalé-Bérard, eds., *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio*, 425-453 makes the hypothesis that Boccaccio's poetics were influenced, too, by a direct knowledge of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

<sup>47</sup> On the concept of poetry as *synolon* of form and content cf. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 29-30.

<sup>48</sup> Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Ezech.* 1, 6, 1 (*PL*, 76, col. 829).

<sup>49</sup> *Epistulae*, VII, 31-34 e IV, 59. Mussato's texts, edited again after the Venetian *editio princeps*, 1630, can also be read in P. H. Wicksteed and E. Garratt Gardner, eds., *Dante and Giovanni Del Virgilio, Including a Critical Edition of the Text of Dante's "Eclogae Latinae" and of the Poetic Remains of Giovanni Del Virgilio* (Westminster: A. Constable & Co, 1902). On Mussato's poetics in relation to the pre-humanist and Renaissance poetics see P. O. Kristeller, *Studi sul pensiero e la letteratura del Rinascimento*, Roma, 1956; P. O. Kristeller, *Otto pensatori del Rinascimento italiano*, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1970; R. Weiss, *L'aube de l'humanisme en Italie*, Londra, 1947 [Italian ed.: *Il primo secolo dell'umanesimo*, Roma, 1949; engl. ed.: *The Spread of Italian Humanism*, London, Hutchinson: 1964]; R. Weiss, *La découverte de l'Antiquité classique à la Renaissance*, Oxford, 1969 [engl. ed.: *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1969]; R. Bordone e B. Garofani, "Les chroniqueurs Italiens," in I. Heullant-Donat, ed., *Cultures Italiennes (XIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2000); L. Gualdo Rosa, "Préhumanisme et humanisme en Italie: Aspects et problèmes," in I. Heullant-Donat, ed., *Cultures Italiennes (XIIe-XVe siècle)*, 87-120; R. G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients. The Origins of Humanism From Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

spiritual wealth.<sup>50</sup> Petrarch, too, expresses these views in his *Oratio capitolina* as well as in the epistle to the Visconti (*Collatio* 9, 8; Metr. 2, 10, v. 162-163), wherefrom Boccaccio probably took it. In the *Genealogies*, however, Boccaccio still seems to ask himself: why must poetry be obscure? (XIV, 18) Poetry is ambiguous and obscure in so far as it represents nature, the truth of reality, which appears enigmatic to the eye of the poet as if he saw it in a dream.<sup>51</sup> Yet poetry needs to be obscure because this very feature makes it more interesting and attractive (*elocutio exquisita*), and stimulates the reader's mind. In order to validate his ideas, as Stefanelli pointed out,<sup>52</sup> Boccaccio cites various sources in support of his psychological theory of the *obscuritas* (see XIV, xii, 9-112 and XIV, 13, where he cites various texts of Augustine).<sup>53</sup> In fact, and from another perspective, this concept is one of the theoretical principles for the reading of the *Decameron*: the initial and 'obscure' account of the plague is conceived with the intent to establish a background for the reading of the tales, that is, to stimulate the mind. Besides stimulating the reader to establish a meaningful relation between this account and the rest of the *Decameron*, reading about the moving description of the plague disaster allows for a better appreciation of what follows in the narration and to better understand it, also, from the intellectual point of view. Moreover, the need for the presence of a mountain (a sort of materialization of the account of the plague) at the beginning of the narrative journey of the *Decameron* constitutes a necessary step to understand the journey of the human condition itself, especially to improve the cognitive power of the reader's mind (cf. chap. 2).

From this point of view, a reconsideration of the theory of knowledge of the *Hermetica* is enlightening to better understand Boccaccio's theory of poetry and his discourse on the obscure quality—the *velamento*—of his literary production in connection with the activities of the mind. The psychological dimension involved in the cognitive act of man towards reality (which, therefore, does not appear fully rational) is beautifully illustrated in the studies of Jung on hermetism. "Whereas the scientific attitude seeks, on the basis of careful empiricism, to explain nature on her own terms, Hermetic philosophy," Jung says, "had for its goal an explanation that included the psyche in a total description of nature." Thus, we can understand the importance of a philosophy that focuses on the psyche, a philosophy that regards "these psychic premises, the archetypes, as inalienable components of the empirical world-picture."<sup>54</sup> The vision of

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<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 11, 19; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 126, 11; 146, 12. These passages, as we shall see, are quoted also in *Genealogie*, XIV, xii, 9-12. On the same concept cf. also *Trattatello*, 1, 139, and *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, I (2), 8-9, where Macrobius is quoted.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 166.

<sup>52</sup> Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 166-167.

<sup>53</sup> Gagliardi, *Boccaccio*, cap. 1, maintains that Boccaccio makes a revision of St. Augustine's Christian doctrine according to which the esthetic experience is instrumental to men's spiritual ends; literature, moreover, like prophetic writings, is the nexus between mankind and God (cf. *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. Robertson, bk. I, chap. 3). This view, very pervasive in medieval theories of esthetics, is of considerable influence on the last two books of the *Genealogie*. See also Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, "Poesia e favola nella poetica del Boccaccio," 62-202.

<sup>54</sup> C. G. Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, in *Collected works*, ed. H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953-, vol. 13: *Alchemical Studies*, 1967, p. 288-289. The original title of this work is *Der philosophische Baum*. This essay was originally written to celebrate the 70th birthday of Gustav Senn, professor of botany at the University of Basel. Owing to the death of Professor Senn, the *Festschrift* did not appear, but was later published in *Verhandlungen der Naturforschenden Gesellschaft*

poetry as science—as cognitive discipline—in the *Genealogies* has something similar to Jung's conception. In the process of poetic creation, the emphasis is placed on the creative moment, namely, on that *fervor* that characterizes the creation as an act not fully rational, but covertly psychological. If we look at Boccaccio's literary career since his first poetical experiences (from the *Elegia di Constanza* and *Allegoria mitologica* to the *Ninfale fiesolano* and *Buccolicum carmen*), it seems that he consistently wanted to dramatize a poetics that reconciles the 'fervor' of writing with the interior refinement, the existential with the formal quest, through a meditation on the mystery of archetypal origins in search of a sapiential matter hidden beneath the veil of poetic fiction.<sup>55</sup>

Jung also explains how, within the formative process of the dream, the emergence of the unconscious is a process of separation and alienation. The emergence of "the unconscious usually begins in the realm of the personal unconscious, that is, of personally acquired contents which constitute the shadow, and from there leads to archetypal symbols which represent the collective unconscious. The aim of the confrontation is to abolish the dissociation. In order to reach this goal, either nature herself or medical intervention precipitates this conflict of opposites without which no union is possible. This means not only bringing the conflict to consciousness; it also involves an experience of a special kind, namely, *the recognition of an alien 'other' in oneself*, or the objective presence of another will. The alchemists, with astonishing accuracy, called this barely understandable thing Mercurius, in which concept they included all the statements which mythology and natural philosophy had ever made about him: he is God, daemon, person, thing, and the innermost secret in man: psychic as well as somatic. He is himself the source of all opposites, since he is duplex and *utriusque capax* ("capable of both"). This elusive entity symbolizes the unconscious in every particular, and a correct assessment of symbols leads to direct confrontation with it."<sup>56</sup> The confrontation with the unconscious—Jung reiterates it in his conclusion—is both an irrational experience and a cognitive process. Again, the formative process of the dream may have an analogy with the creative process by which the poet, driven by an unconscious and relentless force, then taken by the sacred fervor, feels the need to communicate—by removing himself from it—the inner product of his knowledge in poetic forms. And this inner product, as for a kind of inexpressible desire, seems eventually estranged from the individual who generated it. Even the concept of *exquisita locutio*, according to its etymology, implies a will of the subject to seek (from the verb *exquiro*), or even to 'desire,' and thence to know, his poetic product in order to then express it by *detaching* himself from it (note the separative feature of the prefix *ex-* to the verb *quaero* in the word *exquisita*).

The link between the secrecy of poetry and the truth hidden beneath a veil, then, is poetically illustrated in the explanation that Boccaccio provides of the nature of

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(*Basilea*), vol. 56, n. 2, p. 411-423 (1945). A revised and expanded version appeared in *Von den Wurzeln des Bewusstseins. Studien über den Archetypus*, "Psychologische Abhandlungen", vol. 9 (Zurigo 1954), from which the English translation is taken. On the *The Philosophical Tree*, see also D. Verardi, "L'albero filosofico. C.G. Jung e il simbolismo alchemico rinascimentale," *Psychofenia* XII.21 (2009): 51-64.

<sup>55</sup> Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica," 281.

<sup>56</sup> Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 348. Boccaccio, in *Genealogie*, VII, xxxvi, 4, reports, among other interpretations, a peculiar feature of the god Mercury. Mercury is *trophonum*, that is "convertible," which for him could perfectly fit the ability of merchants to adapt to the customs of many countries and to exercise their profession and business with intelligence and astute manipulation of the discourse.

dreams. According to Macrobius, Boccaccio says, there are several types of dreams, but there is one (called *somnium*) that reveals real things hidden under a veil (I, xxxi, 12); and another for which the soul, detached from the body when it sleeps, goes toward his divine origin and, through the power of the intellect, is able to see the truth concealed to mankind: "Per hos versus vult Porphyrius somnia omnia vera esse, sentiens quod anima, sopito corpore, tanquam paululum solutior in suam divinitatem nitatur, et in latens humanitatem verum aciem omnem dirigat intellectus, et non nulla videat et discernat, et plura videat quam discernat, seu longius abdita sint, seu densiori tegmine occultata." (I, xxxi, 16). And it is Mercury, according to the ideas of the ancients mentioned by Boccaccio, who is responsible for summoning the souls back to their bodies with his rod after their death and purification (II, vii, 7); it is to Mercury that pertains the ability to preside over the formation of the fetus in the womb and the ability to infuse the rational soul to the *conceptus* (II, vii, 8).

The secrecy inherent in the concept of poetry—as Boccaccio envisions it—and in the power of allegory to veil a hidden meaning—as evidenced in the conception of the *Genealogies*—have their spiritual counterpart in the secrecy of religious ritual. The meaning of the Latin *sacer/sanctus* contains the connotation of a hidden place, a secrecy, intended as the thing that is kept separate from the world in order to be given to the gods.<sup>57</sup> 'Sacred' and 'holy,' therefore, are associated with secrecy. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (a text well known to Boccaccio according to the catalogue of books of the *parva libraria*) recounts the ritual of the sacraments as described in the *Ecclesiastical hierarchy*.<sup>58</sup> The secrecy, the exclusion of the 'non-perfect' (or 'imperfect') from the rite of the sacraments, has also a symbolic explanation in the secrecy with which Christ 'veils' the Eucharist at the Last Supper, and excludes from it the apostle Judas, in so far as he is 'imperfect' and 'non-elected.' The body of Christ, in essence, besides being sacred, must also be removed from the eyes of the unworthy and from those who are not ready to accept it. The veiling of the Eucharist, moreover, is reflected in the *velamen* of Scriptures.<sup>59</sup> The beauty of God, then, along with the sanctity and fragrance of the spirit, according to Pseudo-Dionysius, are things to be kept hidden (see also 2 *Cor.* 2, 14-15). A mention of the religious, and therefore secret, characteristics of poetry is again present in the *Genealogies* (XIV, v, 1) when Boccaccio gives us a reason to hide the meaning of a poem in a language difficult to decipher. Yet, the desire to create a secret discourse reserved to few adepts in a sacred temple, and to consider the proffered words of wisdom as a gift to be given to the gods, is peculiar to hermetic philosophy (cf. the second passage taken from the *Asclepius* at p. 12).

Amid the proliferation of theories on poetics that recur in the literary, philosophical and aesthetic traditions, it is necessary to distinguish in the *Genealogies* the elements related to the defense of poetry that were already present in the medieval

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion: With an Appendix on the Religion of the Etruscans* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), I, 129-130. On the ambivalence of the figure of the *homo sacer* from Antiquity to modernity see G. Agamben, *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Torino: Piccola biblioteca Einaudi, 2005).

<sup>58</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius, *Gerarchia ecclesiastica*, in *Tutte le opere: Gerarchia celeste, Gerarchia ecclesiastica, Nomi divini, Teologia mistica, Lettere*, ed. E. Bellini (Milano: Rusconi, 1981), III, iii, 12-13; IV, ii; IV, iii and passim.

<sup>59</sup> Even today, during the mass according to the Catholic rite, the priest covers the host to remove the veil only after the ceremony of consecration of the Eucharist.

tradition from the new elements that Mussato and Petrarch added to the debate. By doing so, we can isolate those novel features which Boccaccio proposes with the aim of reading them in relation to his poetry and the understanding of myth. It is important, furthermore, to work on that palimpsest of traditions and speculations of medieval poetics and rhetorics which is now ready for a new upsurge of enthusiasm with Petrarch, just before the rise of the humanist fervor for the new poetics. Thus, even the text that Boccaccio submits to the attention of the literary community (the *Genealogies*) can be understood as a palimpsest whose strata deriving from different traditions need to be analyzed separately in order to bring out the originality of its author.<sup>60</sup> Besides being the first to discuss systematically the problems of poetic theory, Boccaccio brought to the aesthetic reflection on poetry a novelty that is, in my view, to be ascribed specifically to his philosophical and epistemological understanding. The discussion with Petrarch on the role and function of poetry certainly merges in numerous theoretical reflections of the *Genealogies*. The *theologia poetica* expressed by Boccaccio in the *Trattatello* and in the *Genealogies* clearly derives from Petrarch's letter to his brother Gherardo (*Familiare*, X, 4), which in turn was inspired by the well-known, and revolutionary for that epoch, theories of Mussato.<sup>61</sup> Boccaccio takes possession of the theories of Mussato, of Petrarch, and of the philosophical-patristic tradition—he really does not hide his use of them—but he also develops his thinking while keeping an eye to the *reading* of the mythological stories, on which it operates his own allegorical hermeneutic. In order to unravel the myth, however, according to Boccaccio, it is necessary to go further and look into the 'recesses' of the poetic language to explore 'other' meanings. Moreover, it is essential for the readers of the *Decameron* to adopt the same way of reading in order to increase their knowledge and multiply the levels of understanding of the tales.

*The Humanized Gods: The 'Womb of God' and the Tree of Wisdom*

If *Sapientia* and *Prudentia* are clearly synonyms in the *Genealogies*, as well as light very often features the state of the wise man (cf. XIV, ii, 5; XIV, iii, 6), myth, wisdom and the creative human potentiality are frequently bound together in describing the characteristics proper to the gods. We almost never know whether the gods are indeed

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<sup>60</sup> To cite just an instance of critical bias against the originality of Boccaccio on poetics, it suffices to mention Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 251-253, who claimed that the defense of poetry in the Italian fourteenth century was not original since it repeated the old argument of the conflict between poetry and philosophy. According to Curtius, although these authors acted as if they wanted to promote new ideas, their arguments and the theory of the poet-theologian were limited to develop a defense against the allegations of the Scholastics, who believed instead that poetry has no epistemological content.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. G. Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato* (Roma: Edizioni di "Storia e letteratura", 1947), 121 ff. Petrarch's letter, *Familiare*, XXI, 15, constitutes instead a response to Boccaccio's *Trattatello* (cf. C. Paolazzi, "Petrarca, Boccaccio e il *Trattatello* in laude di Dante," *Studi Danteschi* 55 (1983): 165-249). On the relationship between medieval poetry and theology, see D. J. Niles, *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry* (Leeds: F. Cairns, 1993); F. Stella, *Poesia e teologia: l'Occidente latino tra IV e VIII secolo* (Milano: Jaka Book, 2001); F. Stella, *La scrittura infinita: Bibbia e poesia in età medievale e umanistica: atti del convegno di Firenze, 26-28 giugno 1997, promosso dalla Fondazione Carlo Marchi ... [et al.]* (Tavarnuzze [Firenze]: SISMEL, 2001). On Petrarch's use of the poetic theology and to some degree its relationship to Dante, Mussato, and Boccaccio, see A.R. Ascoli, "Blinding the Cyclops: Petrarch After Dante," in Z. Baranski and T. Cachey, eds., *Petrarch & Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 114-173.

creatures of the imagination or truly transcendent entities. Moreover, we fail to distinguish their divine nature from the human. Thus, a god often merges with a human being, so that the euhemeristic explanation that describes the gods as deified men is not fully accepted by Boccaccio and does not serve to explain the totality of the divine cosmos; nor can the 'theological physiology,' which explains the myths as natural phenomena, provide all solutions. If we look at the symbolic and historical evolution of the figure of Hermes Trismegistus (literally, "the thrice-great"), sometimes considered human and sometimes divine, at the origins of the diffusion of the *Hermetica*, we see both a process of euhemerism whereby Hermes was treated as a deity, the Olympic Mercury or the Egyptian Thoth, and its reverse process whereby Hermes represented a god in his fall into human history, that is, the humanization of a deity. These opposite processes had inevitably created fluctuations and had encouraged the proliferation of fluid genealogies and the appearance of various forms of Greek Hermes.<sup>62</sup> From this point of view, and considering only the god Hermes, confused or equated with the Trismegistus, it does not seem difficult to account for a similar proliferation of various gods or mythological figures with the same name in the *Genealogies*, and consequently a proliferation of explanations as to their nature, human or divine, which they inevitably carry within themselves in all their ambiguities. Yet, in the *Genealogies*, neither the euhemerism, according to which a man is deified, nor the 'counter-euhemerism', according to which a god is humanized, proves to be valid heuristic explanation for the cosmos on which Boccaccio wants to base his account; rather, they are two opposite and contradictory phenomena of the evolution of the universe that serve to enliven the story of the divine genealogies and the origins of life itself. Thus, Boccaccio does not show a preference for the euhemeristic solution to explain the nature of the gods; rather, he merely represents the opposing forces of the world in a twofold process that goes from God to man and vice versa.<sup>63</sup>

At the origin of all gods there is the belief in a deity, earthy by nature, yet joint with a divine and intelligent mind that epitomizes the wisdom of the world (I, Proemio, iii, 3). The Demogorgon whereof Theodontius speaks<sup>64</sup> is a monadic and cosmic divinity

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<sup>62</sup> Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes*, 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> Zaccaria, *Boccaccio narratore, storico, moralista e mitografo*, xii, defined Boccaccio's attitude toward the different possible interpretations of the myths in the *Genealogies* as a "cautious euhemerism." D. G. Lummus, *Boccaccio's Human Mythology: History and the Mythic Imagination in the Genealogia Deorum Gentilium of Giovanni Boccaccio*, Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 2008, following Mazzotta ("Boccaccio: the mythographer of the city"), who reads the *Genealogies* as a history of the human creative imagination, attempts to interpret euhemeristically Boccaccio's vision on the nature of the gods making reference exclusively to the power of human imagination that created a plethora of divine and mythological characters.

<sup>64</sup> Theodontius was author of a now lost Latin work on myth. Boccaccio wrote he knew it from Paolo da Perugia's *Collectiones*. Paolo da Perugia was the librarian at the Angevin court whose literary and historical work was burnt by his wife right after his death (*Genealogie*, XV, 6). In mentioning the legend of Batillo, who was born from Forco and a marine monster, Boccaccio complains of the fact that Theodontius was illegible (*Genealogie*, X, 7). From this fact on can infer that he could have consulted a manuscript or, at least, read some of Theodontius' works. M. Pastore-Stocchi, instead, maintains that this constitutes the evidence that Boccaccio knew Theodontius through Paolo da Perugia (M. Pastore-Stocchi, "Teodonzio, Pronapide e Boccaccio," *Quaderni Petrarqueschi* 12-13 [2002-2003] 187-211). Some scholars, however, maintain that Boccaccio invented this source. Besides the *Genealogies*, there existed a Theodontius who wrote on Troy's war, as reported by Servius in his commentary to *Aeneids* I, 28. And Domenico Bandini, a fourteenth century author of an index to the *Genealogies*, calls him "Teodontius Campanus diligens

that symbolically embraces heaven and earth. Demogorgon's mysteriousness eludes any characterization, but the imaginary etymology of the name that Boccaccio provides, the 'God of the earth' or 'the wisdom of the earth,' suggests an implication related to wisdom: "Nam *demon deus*, ut ait Leontius, *gorgon* autem *terra* interpretatur; seu potius *sapientia terre*, cum sepe *demon sciens* vel *sapientia* exponatur." (I, Proemio, iii, 11). Other important deities symbolize wisdom in the *Genealogies*. Among the various attributes of mythological Minerva, Boccaccio draws attention to Minerva as daughter of Jupiter. The myth recounts that Minerva, wisdom, was born from the brain of Jupiter. Ancient natural philosophers, who believed that the mind (as intellectual faculty) resided in the brain, imagined that wisdom—personified as Minerva—was actually originated from the brain (of Jupiter), that is, symbolically from the depths of divine wisdom (II, iii, 5).

Even the story of Prometheus—demigod and demiurge, who created the individual from dirt and water, and stole the fire from the gods to infuse it into the human chest (IV, xlv, 1 and 5)—refers to the meaning of wisdom concealed in the deeds of mythological characters.<sup>65</sup> First of all, Prometheus is a historical figure—almost a prefiguration, as it were, of Boccaccio's biography. In fact, Prometheus, refusing to pursue the profession of his father Iapetus, follows his natural inclination and devotes himself to sciences and knowledge in a remote place on the top of the Caucasus. There, he acquires the astrological knowledge that later he transmits to the uneducated men of Assyria thus becoming a civilizing hero (IV, xlv, 8-9). Prometheus, the prototype of the learned man, educates humanity, and it is as if he created it a second time through science and virtue. The presence of a strong link with wisdom is confirmed, then, by Minerva's intervention in the story: she rises Prometheus to the sky in order to give to him what will be necessary to perfecting human nature, namely the guidance of wisdom that is nurtured by perfect substances and by the light of heaven, that is, the truth (IV, xlv, 13). Truth and wisdom, whose eternal natures are represented by the wheel of the sun, are apprehended in the sky, namely, in meditative retreat, where Prometheus steals the fire from the gods; wisdom is acquired almost in secret, like the theft of fire:

Non enim in theatris vel plateis et in propatulo veritatis claritatem adipiscimur, quin *imo in solitudinibus semoti*, et exquisita taciturnitate speculamur, et crebra meditatione rerum naturas exquirimus; et quia ista talia *clam fiunt*, quasi *furari* videmur, et ut appareat unde

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investigator poetici figmenti." In 1930, even Carlo Landi, in the work entitled *Demogòrgone. Con saggio di nuova edizione delle "Genealogie deorum gentilium" del Boccaccio e silloge dei frammenti di Teodonzio* (Palermo: Casa editrice remo Sandron, 1930), maintained that Boccaccio's Theodontius was a philosopher from Campania who lived between the ninth and eleventh century. According to Landi, Theodontius may have provided Boccaccio with euhemeristic and naturalistic interpretation of the myth and inspired his philosophical speculation on mythology. Landi mentions the now lost Greek historian Philochorus. More significantly, Philochorus may have been Boccaccio's source for the idea that all gods were descended from Demogorgon, which Theodontius instead referred to Pronapides from Athens. According to another explanation, Boccaccio is the only responsible for the diffusion of the narrative attributed to Theodontius that makes Demogorgon the progenitor of all heavenly gods—that narrative would be based on an error in the writing of a scholion to Statius, who meant instead to give credence to Plato's Demiurge. All this may have given way to a long lasting literary and iconographic tradition until John Milton and Shelley (cf. M. Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods, How Renaissance Artists Rediscovered the Pagan Gods* [Oxford: UP, 2005], 22).

<sup>65</sup> The same Christian authorities quoted by Boccaccio—Augustine, Rabanus Maurus, Ivo of Chartres, Eusebius, Servius, Lactantius, Pliny—confirm that Prometheus was a learned and wise man (IV, xlv, 19 ff.).



*sapientia* veniat in mortales, dicit quod a rota solis, id est e *gremio Dei*, a quo omnis sapientia est, ipse enim verus est sol 'qui illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum,' (Io. 1, 9) cuius eternitatem per rotam non habentem principium neque finem designare voluere, et hoc apposuisse ut de ipso vero Deo et non de sole creato acciperemus dictum. (IV, xliv, 14-15)

And with the wisdom (the fire) received from God, the wise man (Prometheus) gives life to the appeased soul of the man made of mud and clay, that is, of the ignorant man (IV, xliv, 16). That the fire is associated with life and the soul is also found in the *vitalis calor* that Vulcano instilled in Psyche in Martianus Capella's *De Nuptiis*, and that Eriugena and Remigius of Auxerre interpreted as the heat present in every creation. Fire is the source of vitality and generation, but also of *ingenium* in humans, of the power of understanding and imagination. Moreover, according to Eriugena, the *igniculi* preserve the memory of the soul's original dignity before the fall to earth.<sup>66</sup>

The opening of the fourteenth book of the *Genealogies*, best known for the defense of poetry, is charged with cosmological meanings and demiurgic connotations assigned to the work of the author.<sup>67</sup> The panoramic view of the author focuses on the narrative path he has taken, from the dark caverns of hell to the heights of heaven, through seas, valleys, cities, forests and mountains, up to a flight among the abodes of the gods where one can admire the harmony of the rotating spheres. The author's journey is not simply an erudite description or an informative compilation. It is, precisely, a 'demiurgic' undertaking which provides the history of 'creation' from primordial chaos. Namely, behind the metaphor, it consists in reassembling into a single body the shipwrecked fragments of the genealogy of the gods with the aim to show them in a orderly, detailed, reasoned work of interpretation. And that the operation is a demiurgic one is confirmed by the penetrating gaze of the erudite poet that benefits no less than from divine inspiration; his meditation on the nature and destiny of the gods is illuminated from above ("divina tamen luce previa perambulavimus"); his vision is sharpened in order to move freely among the vast mythological geographies ("ac insuper eius profundissimos gurgites adeo *perspicaci* quadam indagatione sulcavimus" [XIV, Proemio, 1-3]). Before reaching the well-deserved harbor after a daring navigation, the defense of poetry that is about to follow to this 'cosmic' introduction is inspired by the divine intelligence ("Attamen consilium longe probabilius *menti* desuper *infudit deus*" [XIV, Proemio, 4]), so that the work will religiously pass into the sacred hands of the Creator ("in sacras Celsitudinis tue manus . . .") before gracefully arriving into those of the king of Cyprus, who will be pleased to see, at last, that the ancient poets were men of learning possessing divine art and intellectual faculties ("Et forsans legens latentes nuper sub rudi cortice sensus nunc productos in lucem, non aliter, quam si ex igneo globo recentes scaturire latices videas, mirabundus aspicias, teque ipsum modesta quadam delectatione laudabis, quod iam dudum de poetis vera arbitratus sis, eos scilicet non

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. Cora E. Lutz (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 13; Remigius of Auxerre, *Commentum in Martianum Capellam, libri I-II*, ed. Cora E. Lutz (Leiden: Brill, 1962), p. 79, quoted by Wetherbee, in Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, intr., 41.

<sup>67</sup> Boccaccio theoretically elaborates his defense of poetry over the course of his career in different works: in the *Trattatello*, in the last two books of the *Genealogies*, and in his commentary to Dante's *Commedia* (Accessus, Canti I, II, and IV).

fabulosos simpliciter fuisse homines, ut invidi quidam volunt, sed eruditissimos quidem atque divino quodam animo et artificio preditos" [XIV, i, 1-2]).

Then, the defense of poetry against the ignorant begins (XIV, ii), a defense against those who want to appear wise (XIV, iii), and against the jurists eager to accumulate money (XIV, iv). Starting from the well-known Horatian conception of an artistic product intended as unusual joining of words (the *callida iunctura*), Boccaccio comes to locate the domain and role of poetry in the highest sky, and to identify the divinity with the *Primo mobile* of poetic inspiration. Here, like in the hermetic view, poetry is the privilege bestowed on a few exceptional and elected minds that the divine intelligence is able to guide:

Si nesciunt isti, poesis maioribus vacat, nam, cum celos inhabitet divinis inmixta consiliis, *paucorum* hominum mentes ex alto in desiderium eterni nominis movet, et sua pulchritudine in sublimes cogitationes impellit, tractisque *inventiones peregrinas* ostendit, atque ex *ingeniis egregiis sermones exquisitos* emittit. (XIV, iv, 9)

[But, though my opponents may not be aware of it, Poetry devotes herself to something greater; for while she dwells in heaven, and mingles with the divine counsels, she moves the minds of *a few men* from on high to a yearning for the eternal, lifting them by her loveliness to high revery, drawing them away into the discovery of *strange wonders*, and pouring forth most *exquisite discourse* from her exalted mind.]

The aspiration to the heavenly heights does not simply have a Christian meaning. It has a religious character, though it does not seem to be intended to achieve the knowledge of God. Poetry intended as wisdom, as well as aspiring to consider heavenly things, is directed to stimulate the mind and to the meditation (XIV, iv, 11) that takes advantage of natural solitudes ("Illi turbelis inmixti et frequentia fori apud rostra insistent, calore etiam venali; poete in silvis et solitudinibus ocia meditationibus terunt." XIV, iv, 28); it is a science based on unchangeable and stable principles (XIV, iv, 12).<sup>68</sup> Poetry possesses features in common with philosophy, the most important among these being its cognitive capacity and its meditative dimension. Furthermore, poetry is distinct from philosophy, and is independent, in so far as it is defined by the uniqueness of its language. Yet, poetry does not bring material wealth because, as with other speculative disciplines (i.e., philosophy and theology), it has another purpose (XIV, iv, 7-8).

Although not inspired by the true God, ancient poetry, in so far as it was produced by human beings, was able to create exceptional poetic products, just like the human body is able to generate the exceptional fruit of its womb ("Gentiles fuere homines, non Christum noverere, suam extulere, quam sacram arbitrabantur, religionem, fisiones edidere, gratissimos et commendabiles *utero* persepe gerentes fructus" [XIV, xviii, 5]). Poetry, in other words, is not simply a gift from God, but derives precisely from His womb (*gremio Dei, sinu Dei*):

. . . ut appareat unde *sapientia* veniat in mortales, dicit quod a rota solis, id est e *gremio Dei*, a quo omnis sapientia est . . . (IV, xliv, 14-15; quoted extensively above)

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<sup>68</sup> As for meditation and solitude, the concept is again emphasized in XIV, xi, 4.

This metaphorical language of the 'womb of God' is not secondary, and rather seems to have a Platonic, and even a hermetic, connotation.<sup>69</sup> (After all, Neoplatonists considered the books of Hermes a text inspired by the heaven, and used to see humanity in its struggle to regain from the sky its lost "source."<sup>70</sup>) Moreover, if it is true, and not coincidental, that in modern Italian the expression "to come from the womb of God" means 'something whose origin is completely ignored,' and that the womb is the part of human body where procreation takes place, it seems reasonable to think that Boccaccio wanted to connect the concept of poetry as an unknown generative act to the equally mysterious and unknown generative act of the creation of the gods. Thus, poetry is just like creation, like a generative act, whose origin is lost in the mists of time, and whose beginning is still unknown, despite all the efforts of rational reconstruction of the various genealogies. It is no coincidence, then, that Boccaccio, after reporting all the various theories about who was the first poet, leaves the issue unresolved and limits himself to expressing his thoughts without substantiating them. Most importantly, the term 'womb of God' can also have an explanation in relation to the Platonic conception of matter as the 'womb', or receptacle, that receives the form for the creation of life. Indicative of this aspect are certain expressions in Bernard Silvestris's *Cosmographia* where Nature is depicted as "blessed fruitfulness of my (i.e. of Noys) womb" (*uteri mei beata fecunditas* [*Cosmographia*, p. 69]), or the figure of Hyle as the "inexhaustible womb of generation" (*Cosmographia*, p. 70), expressions that are furthermore contaminated with a Marian vision of Nature.<sup>71</sup> Poetic creation is also similar to the divine act of creating the soul, as shown by the ontological speculations of Marius Victorinus: it is from the womb of God that the soul is breathed into the human body, precisely from the innermost part of God.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Also for Mussato, poetry is a gift from heaven, but it does not derive from its womb. Cf. Mussato's words (quoted by Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 240): "Haec fuit a summo demissa scientia caelo, / Cum simul excelso ius habet illa Deo." An neither Petrarch uses such an expression; cf. *Familiars*, X, 4: "Miraris? parum abest quin dicam theologiam poeticam esse de Deo;" and *Collatio laureationis*, 2, 6: "Quanta, inquam, sit naturaliter difficultas propositi mei ex hoc apparet quod, cum in ceteris artibus studio et labore possit ad terminum perveniri, in arte poetica secus est, in qua nil agitur sine interna quadam et divinitus in animum vatis infusa vi." According to Mazzotta, "Boccaccio the mythographer of the city," 351-352, the idea of the myth as philosophical speculation on the structure of the cosmos and the form of human life within it derives, in Boccaccio, from the school of Chartres and the debates on myth and symbolism during the twelfth century. According to Mazzotta, the authors of the school of Chartres linked myth and literature with philosophy with the awareness that fictions and fables convey philosophical and ethical truths.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Scarpi, intr. to *Poimandres*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> R. Kraye, *Frauenlob und die Natur-Allegorese; Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchungen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antiken Traditionsgutes* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1960); W. Wetherbee, "The Function of Poetry in the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alain de Lille," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 87-126. The relation between form and matter (as 'receptacle,' 'wet-nurse,' or 'mother [cf. 51a]) was already explained through the simile of the three elements of human generation (father, mother and son) in Plato's *Timaeus* (48e-49a e 50cd) and then in Calcidius' commentary (chaps. 273 and 330). In the *Timaeus*, matter is compared to the mother, the forming model (the idea) to the father, and the nature intermediate between the two to the son (cf. 50d). Calcidius' commentary (*Commentario al Timeo di Platone: testo latino a fronte*, eds. Claudio Moreschini, Lara Nicolini, and Ilaria Ramelli [Milano: Bompiani, 2003], CCCXXX-CCCXXXI) draws on this distinction and uses the term "gremius" to qualify the nature of matter (also called "silva") as receptacle.

<sup>72</sup> Fuerunt enim omnia in Deo. Eorum enim omnium quae sunt, λόγος semen est. Λόγος enim in Deo: in operatione, id est in virtute Dei, qui est filius Dei, apparuerunt omnia quae facta sunt. XXVI. Sed dicunt quidam sacrilegi: Si circa Deum fuit λόγος, et supra gremium Dei existens filius, non intus in

Yet the generation of human being and matter from the womb of God is peculiar to the speculation of Hermetism. Here, the term 'womb' (*sinus*) acquires precisely the characteristics of 'unknown' and 'mysterious' whose connotations are also reflected in the *Genealogies*. See, for example, what the *Asclepius* says, replacing the term 'womb' with the more poetical *sinus*:

sic ergo et mundus, quamuis natus non sit, in se tamen omnium naturas habet, utpote qui his omnibus ad concipiendum *fecundissimos sinus praestet*. hoc est ergo totum qualitatis materiae, quae creabilis est, tametsi creata non est. (*Asclepius*, 15)

[Therefore, although matter did not come to be, it nonetheless has in itself the natures of all things inasmuch as it furnishes them most fertile wombs for conceiving. The whole of matter's quality, then, is to be creative, even though it was not created]

And also see how *Hermetica XIII* begins:

1. Tat: [Now] in the General Sermons, father, thou didst speak in riddles most unclear, conversing on Divinity; and when thou saidst no man could e'er be saved before Rebirth, thy meaning thou didst hide. Further, when I became thy Suppliant, in Wending up the Mount, after thou hadst conversed with me, and when I longed to learn the Sermon (Logos) on Rebirth (for this beyond all other things is just the thing I know not), thou saidst, that thou wouldst give it me – "when thou shalt have become a stranger to the world". Wherefore I got me ready and made the thought in me a stranger to the world–illusion. And now do thou fill up the things that fall short in me with what thou saidst would give me the tradition of Rebirth, setting it forth in speech or in the secret way. I know not, O Thrice–greatest one, from out what matter and *what womb Man comes to birth, or of what seed*.

2. Hermes: *Wisdom* that understands in silence [such is the matter and the womb from out which Man is born], and the True Good the seed. (Trans. G.R.S. Mead)

The acquisition of wisdom, and therefore salvation, is like a rebirth, as the womb is nothing but wisdom itself. Similarly, the bond that the *Genealogies* establishes between the gods and the human body is very close and presents significant meanings. The author himself is responsible for reconnecting the limbs of a disconnected body in order to form a whole, as we have already noticed in the initial metaphor of the *membra disiecta*. However, the metaphor of the body extends to the whole system of the *Genealogies* so as to involve its conception and the general architecture of the narrative.

If we look at the autograph manuscript of the *Genealogies*, which is accompanied by genealogical diagrams—probably designed by Boccaccio himself—<sup>73</sup> illustrating the various genealogies, and we notice how Boccaccio decided to arrange the overall narrative according to a hierarchical tree with its roots placed in the sky, everything may

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gremio, sed foris intelligitur. Quid vero? Anima homini inspiravit Deus ex se, ex intus: omnium autem creatorem, liberatorem ac sanctificatorem illius ipsius animae, et totius corporis redemptorem et erectorem, non ex intus? Nonne angelicam naturam ex intus emisit? Quando autem hominem de terra formavit, et altera pecora et quadrupedia, et rursus ex aqua animantia cuncta, et caeterorum in aere ea ex alio in aliud, et illud ex quo primum ex iis quae non sunt: Jesum vero unde dicis? Ante omnia namque filius" (Marius Victorinus, *Liber de generatione Divini Verbi, Ad Candidum Arianum*, PL 8, cols. 1031D-1033A).

<sup>73</sup> Hecker, *Boccaccio-Funde*, 94-95, and tab. XIX (ms. Laurenziano, Pluteo 52, n. 9, f. 31b); E. H. Wilkins, *The Trees of the Genealogia Deorum of Boccaccio* (Chicago: The Caxton club, 1923); E. H. Wilkins, "The Genealogy of the Genealogical Trees of the "Genealogia Deorum," *Modern Philology* 23.1 (1925): 61-65.

become clearer: "In arbore signata desuper ponitur in culmine Demogorgon *versa in celum radice*, nec solum infra descripte progeniei sed deorum omnium gentilium pater, et in ramis et frondibus ab eo descendentibus describuntur eius filii et nepotes de quibus omnibus hoc in primo libro prout signati sunt, distincte describitur" (I, Proemio, iii, rubrica; see also I, Proemio, i, 47, and each initial section, or rubrica, of books II-XIII). The *stemma deum* of the descent of the gods is beautifully represented, for example, in the autograph Laurenziano, Pluteo 52, No 9, f. 31b, or in the Egerton 1865 of the British Library, as a huge inverted tree whose unique root at the top is constituted by the presumed father of the gods, Demogorgon, and whose lower branches are formed by various descendants, divine, heroic and, finally, human or semidivine like Asclepius (see fig. 2; ms. Egerton 1865, f. 59v). The idea of the symbolic tree is certainly no novelty. For instance, there was the famous so-called Tree of Jesse, which refers to the biblical tradition (cf. Isaiah 11:1; or the story of the book of *Genesis* as the generation of Adam). Another well-known tree is that of the third century Neo-Platonist Porphyry, a pupil of Plotinus, who defines the hierarchy of the ontological predicates (the categories of being) in order to support the explanation of Aristotle's categories.<sup>74</sup> For its 'cascade' conception, this tree, whose idea was suggested by Porphyry in his *Isagoge* (a text which was considered the textbook of logic in the Middle Ages) and then represented visually by other unknown scribes in the Middle Ages, has a close analogy with the same kind of representations, from top to bottom, in the *Genealogies*. But in merely chronological terms, the inspirational model closer to Boccaccio may probably be that of Dante, who in the Garden of Eden evokes a tree that symbolizes several things at the same time, namely the knowledge of good and evil, and humanity in the ages of its history ("... una pianta dispogliata / di fiori e d'altra fronda in ciascun ramo" [*Purgatorio*, XXXII, 38-39]), or even metaphorizes the whole structure of Paradise as an inverted tree that feeds on the top, as shown by Cacciaguیدا's words to Dante describing the fifth heaven, the heaven of Mars ("El cominciò: 'In questa quinta soglia / de l'albero che vive de la cima / e frutta sempre e mai non perde foglia...'" [*Paradiso*, XVIII, 28-30]). The Paradise, in fact, is

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<sup>74</sup> The text was translated into Latin and commented by Boethius. On the Porphyrian Tree cf. U. Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, 91-106; E. Stump, *Differentia and the Porphyrian Tree: Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, UP, 1978). On Porphyry's thought, A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); G. Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio: mediazione fra henologia platonica e ontologia aristotelica* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1996). On the studies on Porphyry see G. Girgenti, *Porfirio negli ultimi cinquant'anni: bibliografia sistematica e ragionata della letteratura primaria e secondaria riguardante il pensiero porfiriano e i suoi influssi storici* (Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1987); A. Smith, "Porphyrian Studies since 1913," in W. Haase, ed., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt (ANRW): Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung. Teil II, Principat: Band 36, Philosophie, Wissenschaften, Technik: 2. Teilband: Philosophie (Platonismus [Forts.]; Aristotelismus)* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1987), 717-773. The Porphyrian Tree was also used by Ramon Llull in his *Ars magna* to catalogue the entire system of sciences in the so-called "arbor scientiae" (cf. F. A. Yates, "The Art of Ramon Llull. An Approach to it through Lull's Theory of the Elements," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17 [1954]: 115-173; S. Weigel, "Genealogie. Zu Ikonographie und Rhetorik einer epistemologischen Figur in der Geschichte der Kultur- und Naturwissenschaft," in H. Schramm, ed., *Bühnen des Wissens. Interferenzen zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst* (Berlin: Dahlem Univ. Press, 2003], 226-267; T. Macho, "Stammbäume, Freiheitsbäume und Geniereligion. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte genealogischer Systeme," in S. Weigel, ed., *Genealogie und Genetik. Schnittstellen zwischen Biologie und Kulturgeschichte* [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002], 15-43). Porphyry is quoted many times in the *Genealogies*, maybe indirectly through Augustine, Fulgentius and Macrobius (cf. *Genealogie*, indice degli autori).

presented metaphorically as a tree that receives its nourishment from above (the Empyrean). The image of the inverted tree, then, echoes the same words of Cacciaguida in the precedent *canto*, this time, though, referring to Dante ("O cara piota mia che sí t'insusi..." [*Paradiso*, XVII, 13]). These metaphors of the tree, like that of the plant, have their natural reference in the shape of the human body. The whole heaven is represented as an inverted tree, and the pilgrim is compared to a root that "s'insusa." Furthermore, in the *Commedia*, Adam and St. Peter are compared with two roots of the glowing rose of the Empyrean ("Quei due che seggon là sú piú felici / per esser propinquissimi ad Augusta, / son d'esta rosa quasi due radici" [*Paradiso*, XXXII, 118-120]) thus emphasizing the climax of the poetic upside-down vision of Paradise.

As Jung puts it, the idea of an inverted tree with the roots in place of the crown evokes a psychoid ancient archetype symbolizing growth, life, the maternal aspect, personality, death and rebirth, which are all formed in that mitopoietic laboratory which is called the collective unconscious.<sup>75</sup> All this may also open a hermetic perspective on Dante's work, as Paolo Valesio maintains. In the alchemical tradition, the philosophical tree (*arbor philosophica*) is an image that alludes to the crowning achievement of the philosophical work, that is, the philosopher's stone (*lapis philosophorum*),<sup>76</sup> but can also have linkages with the conformation of the human body.<sup>77</sup> The metaphor of the philosophical tree specifically suggests an analogy between the natural process of growth of the psyche and that of the plant; alchemists, according to Jung, venturing to discover the secrets of matter came also upon the notion of the unconscious.

The idea of a human being as an inverted tree seems to be widespread in the Middle Ages.<sup>78</sup> The tree is often represented as an individual in various cultures, and as a symbol of human life.<sup>79</sup> Besides the biblical Tree of Jesse already mentioned, also

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<sup>75</sup> Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 311-315 and 349.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*; and in particular the pictures described on p. 256; cf. also Verardi, "L'albero filosofico," 58; Valesio, "La vena ermetica della *Commedia*," 294.

<sup>77</sup> The Platonist Gerard Dorn conceives of the tree branches as "the veins spread through the different limbs" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 287); moreover, the body can be interpreted as "a metaphorical form of the arcane substance, a living thing that comes into existence according to its own laws, and grows, blossoms, and bears fruit like a plant," inserted "in that more comprehensive, Platonic nature as Dorn understood it, that is, in a nature that includes psychic 'animalia,' i.e., mythologems and archetypes" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 291 and 292).

<sup>78</sup> As Jung reports, according to the humanist Andrea Alciati († 1550) who wrote *Emblemata cum commentariis*, "it pleased the Physicists to see man as a tree standing upside down, for what in the one is the root, trunk, and leaves, in the other is the head and the rest of the body with the arms and feet" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 312) Furthermore, it is possible to identify a unique thread that, passing through Plato, goes back to the ancient Indian conceptions. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, the divine Krishna says: "I am the Himalaya among mountains and the *ashvattha* among trees. The *asvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*) pours down from above the drink of immortality, soma" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 312-313) Moreover in the *Bhagavadgītā* (xvi. 1 e 2), the god says: "There is a fig tree / In ancient story / . . . Rooted in heaven, / Its branches earthward . . ." (Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 313).

<sup>79</sup> "Like the vision of Zarathustra, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and the report of Bardesanes (A.D. 154-222) on the god of the Indians, the old rabbinic idea that the tree of paradise was a man exemplifies man's relationship to the philosophical tree. According to ancient tradition men came from trees or plants. The tree is as it were an intermediate form of man, since on the one hand it springs from the Primordial Man and on the other it grows into a man. Naturally the patristic conception of Christ as a tree or vine exerted a very great influence. In *Pandora*, as we have said, the tree is represented in the form of a woman, in agreement with the pictures reproduced in the first part of this essay, which, unlike the alchemical pictures, were done mostly by women" (Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 337-338).

Joachim of Fiore, in his *Liber figurarum*, uses the tree of human history and the genealogies of Christ to comment and illustrate his own prophecies.<sup>80</sup> The *Liber figurarum*, beautifully copied, among many others, in two manuscripts from Reggio Emilia (Seminario Vescovile Urbano), in a manuscript from Oxford (Corpus Christi College, 255 A), and in a manuscript from Dresden (Library of Dresden, Ms. A 121), looks remarkably like Boccaccio's tree for its structure, use of colors in relation to the different levels of descent, and for the shape and style of the foliations (see fig. 3, ms. from Reggio Emilia [tree of humanity ending with the second coming of Christ]; and fig. 4, Plate no. XXV, ms. from Dresden [allegorical interpretation of the divine chariot of Ezekiel]). Yet we do not know when the Tree of Jesse, and that of Joachim, assumes the upside-down form as portrayed in Dante's Empirean tree. In the *Genealogies*, the various trees of the gods, for their taxonomic intent, may have been inspired by the biblical Tree of Jesse, or that of Joachim, or the so-called *arbor iuris* of the medieval legal tradition.<sup>81</sup> However, the analogy of the tree representing gods' descendants using the shape of the human body, whose limbs can be associated with the branches and roots, assumes nearly magical-alchemical connotations, which, moreover, are reinforced by the demiurgic attitude of Boccaccio himself who wants to carry out a sort of 'alchemical' operation of reconstruction in a single body of the *membra disiecta* of pagan mythology.

#### *Deified Men: The Power of the Mind*

The focus of the *Genealogies* is not only the gods. Humans also have an essential part in the harmony of the described cosmos; and, above all, they are the protagonists of the cognitive experience of philosophy. Although built on the image and likeness of gods' abodes, the house of philosophy is right here on earth (XIV, v, 1). Philosophy reigns over this house holding a scepter and a book; and to those who are willing to listen, she points out human morals, the forces of nature, the true good, and the heavenly secrets (*celestia docet arcana*). Anyone who enters this house is aware of being in a highly revered shrine (*sacrarium . . . dignissimum videas*), just like a shrine is the place where Hermes' interlocutors get together in the *Asclepius*.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, if a person looks around in this house, one can see the greatness of human knowledge, the speculations of the great geniuses, and everything that the intellect can comprehend. Philosophy deals with rational things, yet is also a sacred thing in so far as it is a divine gift.<sup>83</sup> The house itself is a representation of the whole in the one, namely, the representation of the divine mind: "et adeo miraberis, ut tecum dicas unum totum continens domum esse, imo ipsam fere divine mentis effigiem" (XIV, v, 2). One aspect not to be overlooked is the Christian-pagan syncretism of the language adopted by Boccaccio, or the neo-Platonic connotations of associating philosophy with the sacred representation of a deity to worship. Above all,

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<sup>80</sup> L. Tondelli, *Il libro delle figure dell'abate Gioachino da Fiore*. Vol. 1: Introduzione e commento; le sue rivelazioni dantesche (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1953); L. Tondelli, M. Reeves e B. Hirsch-Reich, *Il libro delle figure dell'abate Gioachino da Fiore*. Vol. 2: Tavole XXIX, di cui XIII a colori; testo relativo su grafici (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1953); M. Reeves and B. Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>81</sup> Wilkins, *The Trees of the Genealogia Deorum of Boccaccio*; Wilkins, "The Genealogy of the Genealogical Trees of the *Genealogia Deorum*."

<sup>82</sup> Cf. *Asclepius*, 1, quoted above.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. the 'sacred philosophy' of *Asclepius*, 14.

it is worth noting the hermetic aspects of certain terms which link the message unraveled by philosophy with the mystery and secrecy of divine truth (*celestia . . . arcana*), or an allusion to the concept of the union of the One with the Whole (*unum totum continens*):

et adeo miraberis, ut tecum dicas *unum totum continens* domum esse, imo ipsam fere *divine mentis effigiem* (XIV, v, 2)

which appears with similar words also at the very beginning of the *Asclepius*:<sup>84</sup>

Deus te nobis, o Asclepi, vt diuino sermoni interesses adduxit, eique tali, qui merito omnium antea a nobis factorum vel nobis diuino numine inspiratorum videatur esse religiosa pietate diuinior. quem si intellegens videris, eris omnium bonorum tota mente plenissimus — si tamen multa sunt bona et non unum, in quo sunt omnia. alterum enim alterius consentaneum esse dinoscitur, *omnia unius esse aut unum esse omnia*; ita enim sibi est utrumque conexum, ut separari alterum ab utro non possit. sed de futuro sermone hoc diligenti intentione cognosces. tu vero, o Asclepi, procede paululum, Tatque, nobis qui intersit, euoca. (*Asclepius*, 1)

[God, Asclepius, god has brought you to us so that you might join in a divine discourse, such a discourse as, in justice, seems more divine in its reverent fidelity than any we have had before, more than any that divine power inspired in us. If you are seen to understand it, your whole mind will be completely full of all good things – assuming that there are many goods and not one good in which all are. Admittedly, the one is consistent with the other: *all are of one or all are one*, for they are linked so that one cannot be separated from the other. But you will learn this by careful concentration from the discourse to come.]

Last but not least, not only is philosophy the object of veneration, but it is indeed man himself who is revered so that he even sits on a high place, on an elevated seat, behind the queen of the house:

Et inter alia, summa veneratione dignissima, sunt ibi post dominam celsiore in sede locati *homines*, non multi tamen, mites aspectu atque eloquio et morum etiam gravitate, tanta honestate atque vera humilitate spectabiles, *ut credas deos potius quam mortales*. Hi iam presidentis dogmatibus pleni, abunde aliis ingerunt, que noverunt. (XIV, v, 3)

[Among other objects of great veneration there, behind the mistress of the household, are certain men seated in high places, few in number, of gentle aspect and utterance, who are so distinguished by their seriousness, honesty, and true humility, *that you take them for gods not mortals*. These men abound in the faith and doctrine of their mistress, and give freely to others of the fullness of their knowledge.]

Here, one can perceive the real cosmic meaning of human nature. Man—venerated, deified, wise, of honest morals—is the human model of divine knowledge. As a microcosm, in the Chartrian way, he reflects the essence of the totality, but he is also the one who, as a mediating and eloquent Mercury, is responsible for communicating to

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<sup>84</sup> On this concept see also *Asclepius*, 1 and 2, quoted above; cf. also *Hermetica*, XII, 8; but above all *Hermetica*, XVI, 3, which seems to echo literally Boccaccio's words. Boccaccio will later mention the One again (XIV, viii, 4), with regards to how the first men used to wonder on its nature.



others what he has learned in accordance with the Hermetic doctrine.<sup>85</sup> Ultimately, Boccaccio's demi-god man is an admirable prefiguration of the deified man typical of some aspects of the Renaissance philosophy of man.<sup>86</sup> And such a half-divine man, however, is not to be confused with the false wise men who, according to the discussion that follows, only simulate their wisdom (paragraphs 4-14).<sup>87</sup>

When Boccaccio enters the core of his exposition of poetic creation summarizing his findings in a mini-*Pro Archia* condensed into three paragraphs, and it comes to discussing the essence, origin, and function of poetry, his language, as well as conveying the more traditional concepts of poetry as *velamen*, which only considers the finished artistic product, also involves the cognitive dimension of the creative process by emphasizing the moment of imagination as an activity of the mind and putting human faculties in competition with the divine:

Poesis enim, quam negligentes abiciunt et ignari, est fervor quidam exquisite inveniendi atque dicendi, seu scribendi, quod inveneris. Qui, ex sinu dei procedens, paucis mentibus, ut arbitror, in creatione conceditur, ex quo, quoniam mirabilis sit, rarissimi semper fuere poete. Huius enim fervoris sunt sublimes effectus, ut puta mentem in desiderium dicendi compellere, peregrinas et inauditas inventiones excogitare, meditata ordine certo componere, ornare compositum inusitato quodam verborum atque sententiarum contextu, velamento fabuloso atque decenti veritatem contegere. Preterea, si exquirat inventio, reges armare, in bella deducere, e navalibus classes emittere, celum, terras et equora describere, virgines sertis et floribus insignire, actus hominum pro qualitatibus designare, irritare torpentes, desides animare, temerarios retrahere, sotes vincere, et egregios meritis extollere laudibus, et huiusmodi plura; si quis autem ex his, quibus hic infunditur fervor, hec minus plene fecerit, iudicio meo laudabilis poeta non erit. Insuper, quantumcunque urgeat animos, quibus infusus est, perraro impulsus commendabile perficit aliquid, si instrumenta, quibus meditata perfici consuevere, defecerint, ut puta grammaticae precepta atque rethorice, quorum plena notitia oportuna est, esto non nulli mirabiliter materno sermone iam scripserint et per singula poesis officia peregerint. Hinc et liberalium aliarum artium et moralium atque naturalium saltem novisse principia necesse est; nec non et vocabulorum valere copia, vidisse monumenta maiorum, ac etiam meminisse et hystorias nationum, et regionum orbis, marium, fluviorum et montium dispositiones. Preterea delectabiles nature artificio solitudines oportune sunt, sic et tranquillitas animi et secularis glorie appetitus, et persepe plurimum profuit etatis ardor, nam si deficiant hec, non nunquam circa excogitata torpescit ingenium. Et, quoniam ex fervore hoc, ingeniorum vires acuate atque illustrante, nil nisi artificiatum procedit ars ut plurimum vocitata poesis est. Cuius quidem poesis nomen non inde exortum est, unde plurimi minus advertenter existimant, scilicet a poio pois, quod idem sonat, quod fingo fingis, quin imo a poetes; vetustissimum Grecorum vocabulum Latine sonans exquisita locutio. (XIV, vii, 1-3)

[This poetry, which ignorant triflers cast aside, is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention,

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<sup>85</sup> On man as God's image, see *Hermetica*, I, 12; X, 23-24. According to *Hermetica*, I, 27, for instance, human beings, after having acquired knowledge, are inevitably drawn to communicate it to humanity.

<sup>86</sup> See, for instance, Pico della Pirandola's *Oration*, or Marsilio Ficino's *Five questions concerning the mind* (*Epistulae*, II, 1), translated and commented in E. Cassirer, P. O. Kristeller, and J. H. Randall, eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. Selections in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>87</sup> Boccaccio speaks about the union of philosophy and wisdom as a divine gift in XIV, vi, 3. Here again, the emphasis is placed, not simply on poetry, but rather on human knowledge whose product (the effect) is poetry.

with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented. It proceeds from the bosom of God, and few, I find, are the souls in whom this gift is born; indeed so wonderful a gift it is that true poets have always been the rarest of men. This fervor of poesy is sublime in its effects: it impels the soul to a longing for utterance; it brings forth strange and unheard-of creations of the mind; it arranges these meditations in a fixed order, adorns the whole composition with unusual interweaving of words and thoughts; and thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction. Further, if in any case the invention so requires, it can arm kings, marshal them for war, launch whole fleets from their docks, nay, counterfeit sky, land, sea, adorn young maidens with flowery garlands, portray human character in its various phases, awake the idle, stimulate the dull, restrain the rash, subdue the criminal, and distinguish excellent men with their proper meed of praise: these, and many other such, are the effects of poetry. Yet if any man who has received the gift of poetic fervor shall imperfectly fulfil its function here described, he is not, in my opinion, a laudable poet. For, however deeply the poetic impulse stirs the mind to which it is granted, it very rarely accomplishes anything commendable if the instruments by which its concepts are to be wrought out are wanting — I mean, for example, the precepts of grammar and rhetoric, an abundant knowledge of which is opportune. I grant that many a man already writes his mother tongue admirably, and indeed has performed each of the various duties of poetry as such; yet over and above this, it is necessary to know at least the principles of the other Liberal Arts, both moral and natural, to possess a strong and abundant vocabulary, to behold the monuments and relics of the Ancients, to have in one's memory the histories of the nations, and to be familiar with the geography of various lands, of seas, rivers and mountains. Furthermore, places of retirement, the lovely handiwork of Nature Herself, are favorable to poetry, as well as peace of mind and desire for worldly glory; the ardent period of life also has very often been of great advantage. If these conditions fail, the power of creative genius frequently grows dull and sluggish. Now since nothing proceeds from this poetic fervor, which sharpens and illumines the powers of the mind, except what is wrought out by art, poetry is generally called an art. Indeed the word poetry has not the origin that many carelessly suppose, namely *poio, pois*, which is but Latin *tingo, tingis*; rather it is derived from a very ancient Greek word *poetes*, which means in Latin exquisite discourse (*exquisita locutio*).]

As one can notice in Boccaccio's theoretical complexity, poetry is indeed the result of various elements. With his words, the poet manages to create an unusual weave (easily to be compared with the Horatian *callida iunctura*) whereby he intends to convey hidden truths. Truth, in turn, is covered by the veil of the fable. While poetry as fervor is a well-known concept in the ancient tradition and in the subsequent medieval and Renaissance views,<sup>88</sup> Boccaccio does not seem to indulge in speculations that would represent it as an absolute madness in which each link with reason is cut off. Most likely, on the one hand he acknowledges the moderate tradition of the *sapiens* Ulysses consecrated by Horace (*Epist.* 1, 2), and, on the other hand, he corroborates Horace's polemic against the Democritean-Platonic tradition which considered poetry as the product of mad men (*Ars poetica*, 295-304 and 453-476). The hermetic nature of poetry as originating in the womb of God and given as a gift to a selected few has already been discussed. It remains to explain how the mind is involved in the poetic production/creation (the sublime effect), how it is able to make human beings imagine and then express their thoughts, and why

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<sup>88</sup> On poetry as folly in the late-antique and medieval literary production see Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 527-528. The concept of poetry as *furor* was theorized in Plato's *Phaedrus* and will be later elaborated with the second generation of humanists, with Marsilio Ficino, Cristoforo Landino and Politian (cf. Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* (Torino; G. Einaudi, 1983), 50-54 e 321.

Boccaccio repeatedly focuses on the activity of the mind. The latter could also specifically explain why Boccaccio rejected the idea of poetic inspiration as folly.

After having set out in a sort of mini-catalog the outcomes of poetry in its various poetic genres (epic, pastoral, mythological, penegirical, moral: "reges armare, in bella deducere . . . et huiusmodi plura"<sup>89</sup>), Boccaccio repeats, albeit indirectly, that poetry is not uncontrolled insanity/folly but needs to be guided by the knowledge of art so that it can express itself without leaving images in the mind ("perraro impulsus commendabile perficit aliquid, si instrumenta, quibus meditata perfici consuevere, defecerint"). This knowledge consists of all the available instruments for composition, that is, the historical disciplines, grammar, rhetoric, geography, natural science, morality, which become *ancillae* of poetry and allow for images first to be designed in the mind and subsequently to be expressed. Everything contributes to the achievement of an act that can be considered purely mental. What is necessary to the realization of this act, then, are solitude, peace of mind, the desire for glory (not to mention the ardor of young age), which all together promote creativity and prevent the energies of the mind from becoming numb ("si deficiant hec, non nunquam circa excogitata torpescit ingenium"). All the logic of this discourse contributes to the exaltation of the mental stage, and, in turn, the exaltation of poetry as a pure act of the mind. The fervor itself intensifies and illuminates the intellectual forces ("ex fervore hoc, ingeniorum vires acuate atque illustrante"), namely it constitutes itself as the founding moment of the creative act, albeit limited to be merely the initial phase. By recalling the etymology of the word 'poetry,' Boccaccio suggests that the domain of art relates only to a limited part of creation, that is, the name of poetry, not the concept; poetry takes its name from its effects, that is, from its outcomes. Therefore, what matters most is what is created in the moment of the *acies mentis*. Art and technique have contributed only to the completion of the poetical product and cannot claim any other major role. Finally, Cicero's words reflecting those of the poet Archia, contribute to restate the total supremacy of the *ingenium* and the mind of the poet against doctrine, precepts and technique: "ceterarum rerum studia et doctrina et preceptis et arte constare, poetam natura ipsa valere, et mentis viribus excitari, et quasi divino quodam spiritu inflari" (XIV, vii, 6).<sup>90</sup>

In sum, poetry is an art (*facultas*), whose inspiration is a gift that comes from the womb of God, and whose meaning is covered by a veil (XIV, vii, 5-8). But poetry is also a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the power of the intellect. It may have well been known to Boccaccio that ancient Hermetism proposed to its followers the prospect of salvation, in the gnosis, through intuitive knowledge.<sup>91</sup> At this point of the *Genealogies*, Boccaccio enquires about who were the first poets, and here not only does he confirm that they were also theologians,<sup>92</sup> but also he describes how divine poetical inspiration

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<sup>89</sup> V. Zaccaria, intr. to *Genealogie*, 32, observes that this passage constitutes a sort of catalogue of poetical genres to which also Boccaccio's preferred authors could be referred to (Virgil, Ovid, Statius, Claudian and Homer).

<sup>90</sup> The erroneous etymology of the word poetry from "poetes" is derived from Petrarch (*Familiars*, X, 4, 4), who in turn draws it from Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 8, 7, 1-3). This etymology was present in a manuscript possessed by Petrarch (Paris, BNF, 7595, f. 76r; cf. Rossi's note in his edition of the *Familiars*).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Scarpi, intr. to *Poimandres*, 28.

<sup>92</sup> Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 983b, 29) was the first to define these poets 'theologians,' meaning those ones who first made the gods the object of their meditations. Yet 'theologians' means also

captured their minds and stimulated the writing of poems. Musaeus, Linus and Orpheus were driven by a certain impulse of the mind to compose verses in praise of God ("Museus, Lynus, et Orpheus, quadam *divine mentis instigatione conmoti*, carmina peregrina mensuris et temporibus regulata finxere et in dei laudem invenerunt" [XIV, viii, 6]), and in order to make the mysteries of God more authoritative and religiously respected they covered them with beautiful words ("ut amplioris essent autoritatis, sub verborum cortice excelsa divinatorum misteria posuere," XIV, viii, 6). The power of the mind, however, differs depending on the type of inspiration one has received. Boccaccio does not believe that the ancient Greeks were the first inspired poets; rather, he believes—perhaps even in a contradictory way, considering the previous glorification of the pagan poets,<sup>93</sup> or maybe even for a certain fear of antagonizing the ecclesiastical authorities—that the first ones were the holy prophets, like Moses, who, under the inspiration of God, wrote the entire Pentateuch. The pagan poets simply followed the example of the prophets, the only difference being that while the prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit, the pagan poets composed, instead, with the power of the mind: "Quorum ego, nec forsan insipide, reor poetas gentiles in componendis poematibus secutos vestigia; verum ubi divini homines Sancto pleni Spiritu, eo impellente, scripsere, sic et alii *vi mentis*, unde vates dicti, hoc urgente fervore, sua poemata condiderunt" (XIV, viii, 12-13).

The emphasis on the power of the mind is temporarily interrupted when Boccaccio moves to the exposition of fable. Then, he goes back to it again, using the language of the eyes of the mind and the light, and making reference to some of his concepts on poetics that will later reappear, as we shall see, at key points in his minor works and in the *Decameron* (see chapter 2). First of all, obscurity should not be condemned as the poets' flaw. The language of poetry is as obscure as that of philosophy and sacred texts (XIV, xii, 2-3). The inability to understand a text should not make us believe that it is defective. It is rather the human eye that is imperfect, just like when it attempts to observe the solar disk. The obscurity of the text, therefore, relates to the ability of intellectual vision and not to the incomprehensibility of the text (XIV, xii, 6-7). Second, there remains to consider why poets wanted to cover their truths with the veil of fable. Here, again, Boccaccio explains that the veil of fable is necessary to give more dignity to the truth, and to prevent it from the sight of those who would not comprehend it due to their little understanding ("ab oculis torpentium auferre," XIV, xii, 9). If the power of intellectual sight is necessary for the understanding of a text, equally necessary is the health of the mind—on this concept Boccaccio reveals the influence on his cognitive theory of an Augustinian source. Poets have hidden the truth as the Holy Spirit has concealed the meaning of Scripture in order to protect it and to increase its meanings:

Quod longe magis Sanctum fecisse Spiritum unusquisque, cui *sana mens* est, debet pro certissimo arbitrari. Quod per Augustinum in libro *Celestis Ierusalem* XI firmare videtur, dum dicit: "Divini sermonis *obscuritas* etiam ad hoc est utilis, quod plures sententias veritatis parit et *in lucem notitiae* producit, dum alius eum sic, alius sic intelligit." Et alibi

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'scholars/researchers of the origin of the world,' as Curtius notices (*Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 243).

<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that even the Judaic-Christian apologetical literature maintained that the Ancient Testament was more ancient than the works of classical poets (Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 245).

Augustinus idem *super Psalmo CXXVI* dicit: "Ideo forte *obscurius* positum est, ut multos intellectus generet, et ditiores discedant homines, qui clausum invenerunt, quod multis modis aperiretur, quam si uno modo apertum invenirent." (XIV, xii, 10)

[In a far higher degree is this the method of the Holy Spirit; nay, every right-minded man should be assured of it beyond any doubt. Besides it is established by Augustine in the *City of God*, Book Eleven, when he says: "The obscurity of the divine word has certainly this advantage, that it causes many opinions about the truth to be started and discussed, each reader seeing some fresh meaning in it." Elsewhere he says of Psalm 126: "For perhaps the words are rather obscurely expressed for this reason, that they may call forth many understandings, and that men may go away the richer, because they have found that closed which might be opened in many ways, than if they could open and discover it by one interpretation."]

Poets, therefore, are *not* mendacious because they lack the intention to lie (XIV, xiii, 2-3); similarly, the Scripture does not lie simply because it veils the eye of the intellect, or the truth itself, with its poetical *figurae* ("Si me hoc velint credere, nil aliud erit quam mendacio velare michi oculos intellectus, uti illa [scil. figura] velant suppositam veritatem." XIV, xiii, 6). In conclusion, the accusation of obscurity ascribed to poetry is conceived only by those who do not understand (par. xiv), by those who want to judge things that they do not know (par. xv); hence, we should blame their behavior, not poetry.

This 'mental' and cognitive conception of poetic creation, and this constant recourse to the Platonic and hermetic language, seems quite original compared to Petrarch and Mussato. In their conceptions, poetic *furor* has a divine origin—the poet is indeed the repository of the divine spirit—but they do not formulate any kind of reflection on the elaboration of the poetic material in the mind. It is Boccaccio, then, who first draws attention to the role of the mind. If Christian poets are inspired by the Holy Spirit, pagan poets, instead, are captured by a certain divine fervor that sharpens their minds, enlightens them (to use a peculiarly Augustinian term), and stimulates them to act and express their poetic efforts. Thus the mind becomes an organ that produces poetry. But before that, the mind forms poetic images which can be transformed into literary products through the use of art and rhetoric, otherwise remaining unexpressed. In other words, the mind, having as its primary function that of producing images and meanings, behaves also as an epistemological tool. It is the mind that fulfills the cognitive functions of the human being regardless of the dictates of God.

### *The Realism of Knowledge*

Following the thread of a hypothetical movement that goes from the study of the *Genealogies* to the interpretation of the *Decameron* in epistemological terms, it is worth reconsidering the theoretical reflection on poetic production in view of the literary outcome that Boccaccio achieves in the *Decameron* and in view of the kind of outlook that the author seeks to take on the reality he represents. The so-called '*disposizione realistica*' of Boccaccio, as it was called by Sapegno,<sup>94</sup> can become an epistemological

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<sup>94</sup> N. Sapegno, intr. al *Decameron di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Torino: Unione tipografica editrice torinese, 1956), 14 and *passim*. On Boccaccio's realism: E. Auerbach, "Frate Alberto," in *Mimesis; the Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953), 203-231; P. M. Forni, "Retorica del reale nel 'Decameron'," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 17 (1988): 183-202; and more recently, A.

mode, rather than an issue of a hypothetical realism, and in this way appearing revolutionary and completely original on the literary scene of the fourteenth century. The so-called realism of the *Decameron* is not born from a spontaneous instinct to represent reality as it is (so much so that the reality of the *Decameron* is often invented), nor aims to describe reality in its minute detail in order to provide a scientific valuable snapshot of the world. Instead, Boccaccio's realistic attitude appears to arise primarily as *a way of facing* reality, to observe, to probe, dissect, and then transpose it into an artistic prose in order to provide a processed image that has the ability to exercise cognitive skills. The truth, or reality, which Boccaccio seeks to represent according to the theory developed in the *Genealogies*, is an 'intellectual' truth that, in a way, distances itself from the 'real' truth—the scientific, current, truth—just enough to stimulate the production of more truth, that is, the understanding of the mechanisms of reality. The production of a reflective mechanism of the mind, therefore, produces knowledge. Boccaccio's realism, in essence, is one with an epistemological function, active and dynamic like a story, and not frozen and still like a photograph.

While for Dante the realism of representation consisted in a modality of his poetry, a way to communicate his prophetic truth as poet, *viator*, theologian, and so on, for Boccaccio it serves a communicative function that is meant not so much to convey the author's idea—which, after all, remains almost always hidden in the multiplication of the narrative points of view—but rather to emphasize and encourage the reader's vision to reach the individual comprehension (or even the comprehension of any author or reader). Thus the literary product, which is also a product to be interpreted, specifically sets itself as a 'means' to reach this comprehension, and then knowledge. Vittore Branca grasped the power of Boccaccio's gaze on reality by specifically identifying in him a 'historic' lens attentive to social structures. Boccaccio, in essence, captured the historical essence of his times, its conflicts and achievements, projecting them in the *Decameron* and thus providing us with an image, as Branca puts it, of the Waning of the Middle Ages. But in trying to grasp the realism underlying this vision, Branca also dissolved the simple taste of reality inherent in the epistemological attitude of the *Decameron* and in the desire to create a literary product with the intention of better understanding, socially and historically, the world around the author. According to Branca, Boccaccio becomes even capable of turning imagination into reality, subverting the very notion of realism, namely, by adapting imagination to historical truth, as is also confirmed by the poetic theory of the *Genealogies*.<sup>95</sup> In this way, it is also through the author's realistic attitude that one can find a deep epistemological implication in Boccaccio's work, and particularly in the *Decameron*.

Closely related to realism is the concept of truth, and the reality of nature, which in Scholastic and pre-Scholastic medieval thought is indicated by the term *verum*, and whose reality is consequently called *veritas*.<sup>96</sup> Not much different from contemporary epistemological reflection, then, the medieval appears to be attentive to the concept of

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R. Ascoli, "Auerbach fra gli epicurei: dal canto X dell'*Inferno* alla VI giornata del *Decameron*," *Moderna* 11 (2009): 91-108.

<sup>95</sup> In noting these aspects of Branca's criticism, Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, 185-186, commented that even Moravia (*Il Trecento. Libera cattedra di storia della civiltà fiorentina* [Firenze: Sansoni, 1953], now in *L'uomo come fine* [Milano: Bompiani, 1964]) sensed a similar attitude toward reality in Boccaccio, an attitude peculiarly opposite to realism. See also Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 110.

<sup>96</sup> Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 165.

knowledge, which is not only that in which we believe, but, above all, is the knowledge of what is true as rationally (or scientifically) justified. Accordingly, poetry must seek the truth, know it deeply, justify it, and above all preserve it in its particular form ("Veritatis quippe optima indagatrix phylosophia est, comperte vero sub velamine servatrix fidissima est poesis; si minus recte sentiat illa, non potuit rectum ista servasse" [XIV, xviii, 12]). Poetry is obscure only to the extent that it represents in itself a complex, varied and difficult to understand, reality. But the obscure aspect of poetry, along with adapting to the content it represents, also serves as a cognitive stimulus to better understanding reality (XIV, xii, 9). Accordingly, we can also speak of a cognitive stimulus for the *cornice*. In fact, another epistemological characteristic of the poetry of the *Decameron* can be found in the function of the framework. On this subject, Getto identified a function of detachment, or estrangement, in the *cornice* that allows the poet to distance himself from the various worlds he describes,<sup>97</sup> not so much with the intent to make his description more objective, but with the aim of observing it from afar and contemplating it by giving to his readers, as the final result of his art, the "puro autonomo gusto del reale."<sup>98</sup> Thus, Boccaccio's realism can also dissolve into a contemplative gesture of the author observing the world from a distance, a gesture that metaphorizes the broader epistemological function of the *Decameron's* framework.

#### *Mythicized Poets: The Function of the Poet*

So far we have explored the hermetic nature of poetry as originating in the womb of God and given as a gift to a selected few. Poetry appears to be a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the power of the intellect. Boccaccio repeatedly focuses on the activity of the mind involved in poetic creation (the sublime effect), which is able to make human beings imagine and then express their thoughts. Poetry and cognition, in sum, contribute to the achievement of an act that can be considered purely mental. What is necessary to the realization of this act, then, are solitude, peace of mind, and desire for glory, which all together promote creativity and enhance the energies of the mind. This, in turn, contributes to the exaltation of the mental stage as well as the exaltation of poetry as a pure act of the mind. Within this system, human nature assumes a cosmic aspect whereby Man is venerated and deified as a model of divine knowledge. What remains to be considered are the implications for the function of the poet in the poetics of the *Genealogies*.

Boccaccio expresses his initial intention of reflecting on the meaning of poetry in his biography of Dante. In fact, the *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (first conceived around 1350) manifests the awareness and intention to create a true legend from the experience and poetic biography of Dante.<sup>99</sup> The human and literary figure emerging from the *Trattatello* is that of a great literary personality whose importance has not been adequately recognized and appreciated in the midst of the moral deluge of Florentine

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<sup>97</sup> G. Mazzotta, "The Marginality of Literature," in *The World at Play in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1986), 47-74 speaks of the marginality of literature with respect to historical reality, yet from an 'anthropological' point of view which is reflected in the *Decameron*.

<sup>98</sup> G. Getto, *Vita di forme e forme di vita nel 'Decameron'* (Torino: Petrini, 1986), 248-249.

<sup>99</sup> G. Billanovich, "La leggenda dantesca del Boccaccio dalla lettera di Ilaro al *Trattatello in laude di Dante*," *Studi danteschi* 28 (1949): 45-144. The edition of the text I used is *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, in Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, vol. X.

society. The plague that affects the city is not only physiological but is also a moral disease related to its dissolute customs, and in the midst of the "furori" and "impeti" of Fortune, no one can recognize the proper merits and virtues of the Poet, merits which are granted instead to dishonest and criminal men.

Almost ten years before, in 1342, Boccaccio wrote a biography of Petrarch.<sup>100</sup> The episode of his life that constitutes the occasion for the composition, and on which the biography focuses, is the awarding of the poetic laurel to Boccaccio's *magister* on the Capitol of Rome in 1341. The importance given to this event in Petrarch's biography illustrates the relevance that Boccaccio attributed to poetry and to the recognition of the poet's merits within the civic virtues. The narrative of biographical events (paragraphs 1-17), the physical and moral portrait of Petrarch (paragraphs 18-27) and the catalogue of his works (paragraphs 28-30), are amalgamated into a coherent and functional unity which perfectly associates poetry with the poet's personal glory. In addition to being the poet-theologian who is able to reveal historical and meta-historical truths,<sup>101</sup> Boccaccio's admired teacher appears in the guise of an alter-Cicero, or an alter-Seneca (see par. 9), who at the peak of his experience is preparing to confront himself with both the past and the future. Petrarch is not only *the* poet, but, first and foremost, is the wise man (paragr. 18) who lives his philosophical experience honestly (paragr. 19) by combining wisdom and integrity of customs,<sup>102</sup> by mastering all the philosophical disciplines, especially ethics and theology.<sup>103</sup> Boccaccio also narrates Petrarch's stay in Naples at the Angevin court of King Robert where he received the poetic crowning, and persuaded the court that poetry is a form of knowledge. Furthermore, the fact that King Robert acknowledged poetry with a high recognition, the *laurea*, within the liberal arts is revealing of the environment wherein Boccaccio had been formed. In fact, the cultural milieu of the Neapolitan court was connected, thanks to diplomatic relations, travels and the remarkable intellectual resources of its library, with the most innovative artistic and intellectual centers of that time: Florence, Paris, Avignon and Oxford.

The function of the poet, as was intended by Boccaccio, can be better understood within a full reevaluation of the subject that produces poetry against the Thomistic aesthetic conception, which emphasized the reality of the artistic product and faded the figure of poet into the background. The novelty of Boccaccio's conception—in accordance with Petrarch—can be interpreted as an appreciation of the subject of the aesthetic judgment, and the pursuit of morality in the subject-author.<sup>104</sup> From this point of

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<sup>100</sup> On the time of composition of this work, two hypotheses are presented. Some critics think that the work was written in the years 1342-43; other lean for the years 1348-50 (cf. *Vite di Petrarca, Pier Damiani e Livio*, ed. R. Fabbri, in *Tutte le opere*, V, 1, p. 881-885 nn.; G. Villani, intr. a G. Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca* [Roma: Salerno editrice, 2004], 20-30). Villani (ibid., p. 30) maintains that the 1344 could be the *terminus ante quem* of the composition, and the period 1349-50 the *terminus* for additions and amendments.

<sup>101</sup> Villani, intr. a Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca*, 20.

<sup>102</sup> This assessment was later confirmed in *Genealogie*, XIV, xix, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*, 243. All these interests are, after all, confirmed in the *Lettera ai posteri* (*Seniles*, XVIII), which constitutes the spiritual legacy of Petrarch (cf. *Lettera ai posteri*, in Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca*, ed. Villani, par. 11).

<sup>104</sup> On the defense of poetry in relation with the emergence of the intellectual figure of the poet, see É. Gilson, "Poésie et vérité dans la Genealogia de Boccaccio," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 2 (1964): 253-282; Branca, "Motivi preumanistici," in Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 331-356; Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, 157 ff.; G. Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte tra il Petrarca e il Boccaccio," in *Medioevo e*



view, it is significant that Boccaccio does not emphasize the importance of poetry as much as that of the poets, and makes constant reference to the *ingenium*, to the poet's *ardor*, the *fervor*, and to the need to remain in *solitudines*.<sup>105</sup> Poetry, thanks to its refined discourse (*exquisita locutio*), has its genesis in the innate ability of the poet to meditate inventions, that is, from his productive *ingenium*. Consequently, the personality of the poet is emphasized, unlike in the Thomistic conception according to which artistic perfection lies, not in the artist, but in the finished product of his work. In other words, according to Thomistic aesthetics, perfection lies in the object, and not in the subject to which the validity of the creative moment is denied.<sup>106</sup> Boccaccio, rather, restores the personality of the artist in the field of aesthetics, as is also evident in the representations of writers and artists in the *Decameron*, from Giotto to Cavalcanti. And the personality of the poet, in the *Genealogies*, is called to investigate aspects of reality by making reflections on knowledge, which are peculiarly the terrain of philosophical speculations.

The emphasis on the poet as a creative subject, then, is coupled, and sometimes confused, with the commingling of mythical with historical (even autobiographical) aspects. For instance, the figure of Orpheus, whose authority sets himself as one of the oldest poets, can be described as half legendary and half historical (V, xii). Claude Cazalé-Bérard draws attention to this figure which incorporates the complementary dimensions of the epistemological and the poetical quest, and whose motives and exemplary story is along the lines of the representation of the nobility of poetry and the dignity of the poets.<sup>107</sup> Orpheus is a leading character in the theoretical system of the *Genealogies* since he receives the lyre from Mercury-Hermes: he becomes his heir and also inherits his obscure and polysemous discourse which, according to Cazalé-Bérard, stimulates and enhances hermeneutic activity.<sup>108</sup> The centrality of the myth of Orpheus bears witness to an initiatic conception of poetry alien to the universal project of Dante; it also demonstrates how much Boccaccio was aware of having started a fruitful tradition of

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*Rinascimento, Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1955), vol. 1: pp. 1-76; and then in *Petrarca e il primo Umanesimo*, Padova 1996 (Studi sul Petrarca, 25), pp. 459-524; Gagliardi, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, 46, n. 3; G. Martellotti, "La difesa della poesia e un giudizio su Lucano," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 6 (1967): 256-79 [then in Id., *Dante, Boccaccio e altri scrittori dall'Umanesimo al Romanticismo* (Firenze: Olschki, 1983), pp. 163-83]; Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche*, 7 ff.; A. Buck, "Boccaccios Verteidigung der Dichtung in den *Genealogie deorum*," in G. Tournoy, ed., *Boccaccio in Europe. Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, December 1975* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1977); Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 155-157; C. Peirone, "Il *poetarum officiorum* del Boccaccio," in G. Barberi Squarotti, ed., *Metamorfosi della novella* (Foggia, Bastogi, 1985), 53-78; Asor Rosa, "La fondazione del laico," in *Letteratura italiana*, vol. V: *Le questioni* (1986), pp. 17-124. Susanna Barsella analyzes the different ways in which Petrarch and Boccaccio consider the life of Peter Damian, the Camaldolese theologian and Church reformer of the eleventh century. She maintains that only with Petrarch there has been an evolution toward a social and intellectual role of the poet of a humanistic type (S. Barsella, "Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Peter Damian: Two Models of the Humanist Intellectual," *MLN* 121.1 [2006]: 16-48).

<sup>105</sup> Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 77.

<sup>106</sup> Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 79. On Thomistic aesthetics in relation to the poetic product, see Eco, *Arte e bellezza nell'estetica medievale*, 94-95. Aquinas' negative judgment on the dignity of poetry as a cognitive means is notorious (see *ST*, I-II, 101, 2, ad. 2: "poetica non capiuntur a ratione humana propter defectus veritatis qui est in eis").

<sup>107</sup> Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica," 299-300. On the myth of Orpheus between Middle Ages and Renaissance see S. Ferrarese, *Sulle tracce di Orfeo: storia di un mito* (Pisa: ETS, 2010).

<sup>108</sup> Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica," 300.

theologizing poetry based on the recovery of esoteric or mystical contents whose religious and philosophical syncretism is alien from Scholastic rationalism.<sup>109</sup>

As this chapter has argued, the obscurity of poetry in the context of the *Genealogies* refers to the hermetic idea of obscure discourse, that is, the kind of literature whose language hides its meanings and the truth without completely denying their knowledge and understanding. Before the rediscovery of Hermetism in the Renaissance in the wake of Marsilio Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (1471) and the flourishing of humanistic treatises on poetics, the hermetic nature of poetry is theorized as originating in the 'womb of God' and as being given as a gift to a selected few; moreover, poetry appears to be a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the power of the intellect. Finally, one may wonder who would hand on, after Orpheus, the baton of a theologizing and potentially hermetic poetry which convey hidden contents. When Boccaccio is called in to make his case on a personal level, he justifies his choice to pursue a career as writer and poet with the theory of natural inclinations and the *ingenium*. Every individual pursues the studies for which he/she is naturally inclined. It is Mother Nature who generates different natural inclinations with the aim of ensuring the conservation of the human species (XV, x, 2). Although individuals are also equipped with free will with which they are able to oppose the forces of nature, the natural inclination is, however, for them a kind of invincible force that draws them to their predestined goals (XV, x, 5). Boccaccio, too, was prepared by nature, in "his mother's womb," to follow his natural inclinations, that is, to follow poetic meditations ("Verum ad quoscunque actus natura produxerit alios, me quidem experientia teste ad poeticas meditationes dispositum *ex utero matris* eduxit et meo iudicio in hoc natus sum" [XV, x, 6]). Therefore, he could not have followed the *mercatura* as his father wanted, but he devoted himself to literary studies and to poetry, driven by an uncurbed desire to write (XV, x, 8), and, specifically, to keep the meaning of his words concealed.

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<sup>109</sup> Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica," 304.

## Chapter 2

### Boccaccio's Mountain: The Voyage of the Soul and the Language of Literature

Physis knew that she would not go astray in creating  
the lesser universe of man if she took  
as her example the pattern of the greater universe  
(Bernardus Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, p. 121)

You could not discover the limits of soul,  
even if you travelled by every path in order to do so;  
such is the depth of its meaning.  
(Heraclitus, *Fragments*, 45)

Et eunt homines admirari alta montium et ingentes fluctus maris  
et latissimos lapsus fluminum et oceani ambitum et giros siderum,  
et relinquunt se ipsos.  
(Petrarca, *Fam.* IV.1 = Agostino, *Conf.* X.8.15)

The utopia of Tommaso Campanella is beautifully represented by a city located on top of a promontory. More than a hill, however, one could call it a mountain. Its inhabitants live on high, in the city surrounded by massive ramparts of stone. The mountain sides that separate the city from the rest of the world, and from the plains, are not empty, but structured with terraces, which make the steep topography of the land reminiscent of Dante's Mountain of Purgatory. The same steep sides simultaneously allow access to the city while neatly separating it from the rest of the world. The inhabitants of the City of the Sun live in a state of perfection acquired by an intelligent regulation of all human, civil, sexual, and educational activities; they live an orderly life established by the civilizing action of men and supported by the redemptive power of divine Grace. Campanella's city clearly reflects the philosophical ideology of the writer, who interprets history by anchoring it to reality through an invented ideal. However, the city is and always remains, an utopia. Even in its most accurate, realistic or verisimilar details, the world he describes remains an ideal world, gradually separated from the real world. The walls that surround and protect the city, along with the height of the mountain, clearly and symbolically locate the City of the Sun in an elevated position separated from the rest of the land. "The greater part of the city is built upon a high hill, which rises from an extensive plain, but several of its circles extend for some distance beyond the base of the hill, which is of such a size that the diameter of the city is upward of two miles, so that its circumference becomes about seven. On account of the humped shape of the mountain, however, the diameter of the city is really more than if it were built on a plain. . . . On the top of the hill is a rather spacious plain, and in the midst of this there rises a temple built with wondrous art."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tommaso Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, in *Ideal Commonwealths: Comprising More's Utopia, Bacon's New Atlantis, Campanella's City of the Sun, and Harrington's Oceana* (New York: Colonial Press, 1901), 141-143. "Sorge nell'alta campagna un colle, sopra il quale sta la maggior parte della città; ma arrivano i suoi giri molto spazio fuor delle radici del monte, il quale è tanto, che la città fa due miglia di diametro e più, e viene ad essere sette miglia di circolo; ma, per la levatura, più abitazioni ha, che si fosse in piano. . . . Nella sommità del monte vi è un gran piano ed un gran tempio in mezzo, di stupendo

The representation of Campanella's mountain is definitely not the only one in the history of literature, but it is certainly one of the most evocative. What apparently is only a descriptive element of the landscape—a mountain, which is geographically and visually opposed to plains, hills, rivers, highlands, forests, and to all the typical elements of the territory—in the hands of the philosopher becomes a poetical image, more meaningful than any one endowed with a mere topographical connotation. The ascent to the mountain, then, evokes the arduous journey toward a special city; a city that in turn symbolizes the path toward the perfection of human life, the attainment of spiritual beatitude for the Christian faithful who is well integrated into society, and, finally, for wisdom itself. After a long journey, the inhabitants of the city escaped from tyranny in order to live a peaceful life: "This race of men came there from India, flying from the sword of the Magi, a race of plunderers and tyrants who laid waste their country, and they determined to lead a philosophic life in fellowship with one another."<sup>2</sup>

One certainly recalls similar imaginative representations; Campanella's city, for instance, is reminiscent of Augustine's divine Jerusalem, or equally of other material cities characterized by imaginative beatitude and spiritual perfection. This spiritual city contrasts with all the earthly places where people are simply satisfied by temporary pleasures and where anxiety, pain, fatigue, and hard work reign undisturbed. The list of literary and philosophical representations of the mountain, and the joyful plateaux associated with it, could be endless. But before getting to the point which I would like to discuss, it should be noted that all these poetical images, endowed with more or less allegorical meanings, constitute a metaphorical and archetypal unity which, in the hands of the poet-philosophers, captures a variety of naturalistic forms always fertile and worthy of exploration. In particular, medieval imagination—which Boccaccio perfectly manages to partake in—could look at the *sensus inditus* that brings prestige to literary forms, and certainly reveled in offering a way to decipher the allegories that, from time to time, decorated any sort of literary text.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the plain, the mountains and the plateau, more or less elevated, acquire additional significance and are endowed with meanings in all *directions*, even geographical. The city, as an entity made out of stones, has clearly its own intrinsic and material meaning, yet even the voyage toward it has an equally important symbolic meaning. Going to a city situated on top of a mountain is not merely an athletic performance or an exercise of alpinism, but very often (or almost always)

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artificio" (Tommaso Campanella, *La città del sole, e Scelta d'alcune poesie*, ed. A. Seroni [Milano: Feltrinelli, 2009], 33-34). Campanella's reflections on poetics have been influenced by Boccaccio's *Genealogies* according to A. Minicucci, "I libri XIV e XV della *Genealogia* deorum gentilium e gli scritti di poetica di Tommaso Campanella," in G. Tournoy, ed., *Boccaccio in Europe: Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, December 1975* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1977), 165-190.

<sup>2</sup> Campanella, *The City of the Sun*, 147 (= *La città del sole*, 38). The title 'City of the Sun' clearly alludes to the knowledge of the spirits of the circle of the Sun.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *La filosofia dell'arte cristiana ed orientale*, ed. G. Marchianò (Milano: Abscondita, 2005), and *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York: Dover, 1956). Scholarly studies on medieval allegory are countless. However, for the modern attitude to refuse allegory and for its hermeneutical aspects cf. F. Zambon, "'Allegoria in verbis.' Per una distinzione tra simbolo e allegoria nell'ermeneutica medievale," in D. Goldin, C. Segre, M.-C. Artaud, eds., *Simbolo, metafora, allegoria: atti del 4. Convegno Italo-Tedesco (Bressanone, 1976); premessa di G. Folena* (Padova: Liviana Ed., 1980) 75-106; B. Pérez-Jean, ed., *L'allégorie de l'antiquité à la renaissance: [actes du colloque qui s'est tenu à l'Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier 111, du 10 au 13 janvier 2001]* (Paris: Champion, 2004); A. Strubel, *Grant senefiance a: allégorie et littérature au moyen âge*. Paris: Champion, 2002.

conceals a spiritual journey for the acquisition of knowledge.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the opposite movement, the descent, not only describes the last moment of the journey, the one toward the well-deserved rest after a hiking trip, but has also an existential significance just as worthy of exploration as the ascent, a significance that I want to discover here following the footsteps of Boccaccio's imagination in the *Decameron*.

Generally speaking, if it is admittedly important to identify/qualify the nature of the space described in a poetic or philosophical form in many literary works, it is equally important to pause and reflect on the directions of the bodies. The movement of the characters within the narrative space may tell us, albeit indirectly, something about the author's thought, or possibly about the readings that influenced him. The movement of men in the world, moreover, along with the discovery of it, is sometimes, and easily, considered archetypal of the universal narrative.<sup>5</sup> Just think of the *Canterbury Tales'* frame story, where the author imagines that a few storytellers will tell stories as a pastime during their pilgrimage trip, *in itinere*, or even the *Arabian Nights*, whose framing device

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<sup>4</sup> The spiritual itinerary of Petrarch on the Mont Ventoux is notorious. Behind the alpinistic performance, Petrarch's intent is to transform the observation of the landscape and the ascent into the mirror of his soul through an epistemological process. In his famous letter to his brother Gherardo (*Familiare*, X, 4, 38-41; year 1347), Petrarch uses a double image, "andara ai monti" and "discendere alle valli," to signify two extremes of his literary activity, and then he clarifies the concept in the ensuing commentary by explaining that, with the former, he means the activity of studying (the mountains), and, with the latter (the valleys), the constant and practical activity of poetry. All this is perfectly in accordance with the inspiration of the symbolic geography of the *Decameron* and with the alternating movement of its characters, storytellers, and the author himself through valleys, mountains and plateaus. Cf. R. M. Durling, "The Ascent of Mt. Ventoux and the Crisis of Allegory," *Italian Quarterly* 18.69 (1974): 7-28 (then translated into Italian as "Il Petrarca, il Ventoso, e la possibilità dell'allegoria," *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 23 [1977]: 304-23); A. R. Ascoli, "Petrarch's Middle Age: Memory, Imagination, History, and the 'Ascent of Mount Ventoux,'" *Stanford Italian Review* 10 (1991): 5-43; F. P. Botti, "Le misure della rappresentazione del mondo nell'epistola del Ventoso," in *Alle origini della modernità: studi su Petrarca e Boccaccio* (Napoli: Liguori, 2009), 1-41.

<sup>5</sup> The consciousness that the literary work belongs to space is only an assumption of the last century. By speaking of space, places, real topographies and symbolic maps, critics actually mean to emphasize the capacity of the literary work to configure a space and rebuild it by collecting the data of the entire objective reality—places and names, maps and journeys, structures and backdrops—yet transforming them into a new representation. This new image of the world is not only the outcome of personal imagination, but also an ideological project, the product of strong ideas which aspire to define the human society as well as the destinies of the community. Thus the writer entrusts his ideological project and personal conception of life to structuring space. Accordingly, the structure of the language imitates the modalities of space and alludes to a peculiar vision of the world. S. Maxia, ed., *Letteratura e spazio* (2008), in *Moderna* 9 (2007), is dedicated to the representation of space in literature. See also C. Dionisotti, *Geografia e storia della letteratura italiana* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1967), who contributed to improve the knowledge of the geographically plural and ragged Italy against the unifying literary critical tradition which started from De Sanctis. M. M. Bakhtin, *Estetica e romanzo* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1979), emphasizes the importance of time in the development of the European novel with his theory of the "chronotope," a critical category that deals with the interconnection of spatial and temporal relations within the literary text. According to A. Carta, *Letteratura e spazio: un itinerario a tappe* (Catania: Villaggio Maori, 2009), the American critic Joseph Frank was the first theorician of the twentieth century to start analyzing literature and space in his article "Spatial Form in Modern Literature: An Essay in Three Parts," *The Sewanee Review* 53 (1945): 221-240; 433-456; 643-653. See also G. Cavallo, C. Leonardi, E. Menestò, P. Boitani, M. Mancini, A. Vårvaro, and M. Capaldo, eds., *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo* (Roma: Salerno, 1992-); and F. Moretti, *Atlante del romanzo europeo: 1800-1900* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1997), who explores the fascinating connections between literature and space in the nineteenth century European novel.

includes the narration of Sindbad's adventures and travels.<sup>6</sup> Boccaccio himself, moreover, in some of his works, devotes himself to exploring the geography of the entire world, with erudite taste, yet with the same desire to unravel the secrets that hide behind earthly appearances. In the *De Canaria*, Boccaccio offers an innovative contribution to exploration literature, a contribution that still deserves to be reassessed. Furthermore, in the *De montibus*, the same exegetical attitude toward the Greek-Latin myth that was previously experimented in the *Genealogies* leaves space to the exploration of the geographical particularities of earth and to the discovery of their meanings.<sup>7</sup>

Keeping in mind this broad background, it remains to be seen the topographical space of Boccaccio's tales in order to observe the *directions* and *movements* of his characters in the *Decameron*, and to see how these can become, in an epistemological perspective, the cipher for understanding the mechanisms of reason and knowledge. After the *Proem*,<sup>8</sup> the *Introduction* beautifully defines the geographic coordinates of the

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<sup>6</sup> M. Picone, "Tre tipi di cornice novellistica: modelli orientali e tradizione narrativa medievale," *Filologia e critica* 13 (1988): 3-26; Picone, "Preistoria della cornice del 'Decameron'," in Cherchi and Picone, eds., *Studi di Italianistica in onore di Giovanni Cecchetti*, 91-104; M. Picone, "La novella-cornice di Madonna Oretta (VI.1)," in *Boccaccio e la codificazione della novella: letture del "Decameron"*, ed. N. Coderey, C. Genswein and R. Pittorino (Ravenna: Longo, 2008), 257-268.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Boccaccio, *De montibus*, in *Tutte le opere*, vol. vii-viii: 2. The geographical aspects of Boccaccio's literary production, his curiosities and cultural interests for distant places and populations are variously analyzed in R. Morosini and A. Cantile, eds., *Boccaccio geografo: un viaggio nel Mediterraneo tra le città, i giardini e... il mondo di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Firenze: M. Pagliai, 2010). R. Morosini, "Penelopi in viaggio 'fuori rotta' nel *Decameron* e altrove. 'Metamorfosi' e scambi nel Mediterraneo medievale," *California Italian Studies Journal* 1.1 (2010): 1-32, dwells on women travels in the Mediterranean as are narrated by the tales of the *Decameron*. Her thesis that the *Decameron* female travellers in the Mediterranean never decide to travel and never undergo a transformation after their journeys is not completely convincing. Just to consider the Second Day, the character of Madama Beritola, the abandoned heroine, after her experience in the wild, undergoes a transformation into a brute that constitutes the transitional moment in which she decides to travel in order to find her children. Another example could be that of the king of England's daughter, who, in the disguise of an abbot with the aim to avoid the dangers of travelling, decides to take Alessandro for her husband instead of taking the husband that the pope would propose to her ("io ho diliberato di volere te avanti che alcuno altro per marito", II.3.33). In the *Decameron*, women travel out of despair but also following their desire of adventure, like the innocent and slandered wife of Bernabò da Genova who flees to Alexandria of Egypt (II, 9). See also the pilgrimage of the "gentil donna di Guascogna [...] al Sepolcro", with a stop "in Cipri," in tale I, 9.

<sup>8</sup> 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. Per ciò che, dalla mia prima giovinezza infino a questo tempo oltre modo essendo acceso stato d'altissimo e nobile amore, forse più assai che alla mia bassa condizione non parrebbe, narrandolo, si richiedesse, quantunque appo coloro che discreti erano e alla cui notizia pervenne io ne fossi lodato e da molto più reputato, nondimeno mi fu egli di grandissima fatica a sofferire, certo non per crudeltà della donna amata, ma per soverchio fuoco nella mente concetto da poco regolato appetito: il quale, per ciò che a niuno convenevole termine mi lasciava un tempo stare, più di noia che bisogno non m'era spesse volte *sentir mi facea*. 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*. Ma si come a Colui piacque il quale, essendo Egli infinito, diede per legge incommutabile a tutte le cose mondane aver fine, il mio amore, oltre a ogn'altro fervente e il quale niuna forza di proponimento o di consiglio o di vergogna evidente, o pericolo che seguir ne potesse, aveva potuto né rompere né piegare, per sè medesimo in processo di tempo si diminuì in guisa, che sol di sè nella mente m'ha al presente lasciato quel piacere che egli è usato di porgere a chi troppo non si mette né suoi più cupi pelaghi navigando; per che, dove faticoso esser solea, ogni affanno togliendo via, *dilettevole il sento esser rimaso*. (*Proemio.2-5*<sup>8</sup>) (emphasis mine)

collection's frame story by clearly leading the movements of the storytellers to the fore of the literary scene. With one look at the plot of the frame story, in which a group of seven young women and three young men fled from plague-ridden Florence to take refuge in a villa outside of the city walls, it becomes immediately apparent that the terms of reference of the *Decameron's* geographical territory are reversed with respect to those of Campanella's utopia. In the *Decameron*, a city ravaged by the plague constitutes the background of Boccaccio's stories. Florence is located on a plain surrounded by hills. As it appears from Boccaccio's description, the depiction of the city is representative of the morally degraded human condition, thus symbolizing the 'low' as the emblematic place of suffering, personal and collective tragedy, or the fatigue of quotidian life. The variety and truth of the tragic experience of the plague is described in minute details. As the symptoms of the disease are scrupulously enumerated as well as its consequences, what is truly highlighted is the miserable conditions of a humanity degraded by the plague. Boccaccio's city is made of countless corpses abandoned on the streets, of desperate people leaving their houses, of Manzonian *monatti* roaming through the streets like psychopomp ghosts in search of corpses, or possibly their own peace. Even the derelicts, who go on a binge by partying in the taverns, struggle to exorcise the atrocities of a disease whose cure seems hopeless.

The 'low' of the degraded and corrupt human experience is represented along the lines of the Stoic-Aristotelian theory of the appetites: when left unrestrained, appetites lead to the mental and physical degeneration of the citizens and to the end of any possibility of salvation. The metaphorical 'low', moreover, is not limited to the physical descriptions of places in the *Decameron*, it reaches literary heights with many different forms throughout the collection, starting with the human moral 'low' as portrayed in the figure of Cepparello in the first tale, to the gratuitously cruel and beastly brutal behaviour of the Marquis of Saluzzo in the last one. The city in the *Decameron* does not always metaphorize the degraded human condition, or the lowermost stage of existence waiting to go up again, as one can read in the representation of some cities such as that of Bengodi in Calandrino's tale, or the Angevin Naples in Andreuccio da Perugia's adventure. What profoundly affects the reading of the collection, since its very beginning, is the sharp contrast between the living conditions of the inhabitants of Florence and the

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(Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; seeing that from my early youth even to the present I was beyond measure aflame with a most aspiring and noble love more perhaps than, were I to enlarge upon it, would seem to accord with my lowly condition. Whereby, among people of discernment to whose knowledge it had come, I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering, not indeed by reason of cruelty on the part of the beloved lady, but through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress. In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations, that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead. But, as it pleased Him, who, being infinite, has assigned by immutable law an end to all things mundane, my love, beyond all other fervent, and neither to be broken nor bent by any force of determination, or counsel of prudence, or fear of manifest shame or ensuing danger, did nevertheless in course of time abate of its own accord, in such wise that it has now left nought of itself in my mind but that pleasure which it is wont to afford to him who does not adventure too far out in navigating its deep seas; so that, whereas it was used to be grievous, now, all discomfort being done away, I find that which remains to be delightful).

state of pure regeneration that the ten young storytellers experience by fleeing to the surrounding hills.

### *The Voyage of the Soul*

The horrifying images of the plague, which have done so much to exercise the hermeneutical acumen of the critics, have certainly a meaning and a function within the narrative system of the *Decameron*. It is not my intention to recall all the possible interpretations of the plague as was narrated by Boccaccio; that would inevitably lead us elsewhere.<sup>9</sup> What is relevant here, instead, is to understand how these images symbolizing the existential 'low' embodied in the city are contrasted, immediately after the description of the plague, with others of opposite nature, yet equally existential, and located on 'high.' Beyond their beautiful and stylized harmony, those geographical and spiritual places of the *Decameron* located on 'high' dwell on communicating the idea of a happier human existence, a joyful fulfillment of desires, a rest from the agony of life on earth, or the attainment of the object of love which so often in life is denied to us, but sometimes is captured by a painter's imagination (cf. fig. 5). It is precisely within a set of oppositions between high places and low places in the *Decameron* that the presence of a mountain should be understood as the inevitable turning point between two opposite human conditions and as a territory to be explored before reaching a specific goal. Boccaccio speaks directly about this turning point to his readers by explaining the reasons why he started the *Decameron* with the narration of the plague, and by providing them with some clues on how to read this painful re-enactment:

Quantunque volte, graziosissime donne, meco pensando riguardo quanto voi naturalmente tutte siete pietose, tante conosco che la presente opera al vostro iudicio avrà grave e noioso principio, sì come è la dolorosa ricordanza della pestifera mortalità trapassata, universalmente a ciascuno che quella vide o altramenti conobbe dannosa, la quale essa porta nella fronte. Ma non voglio per ciò che questo di più avanti leggere vi spaventi, quasi sempre sospiri e tralle lagrime leggendo dobbiate trapassare. Questo orrido cominciamento vi fia non altramenti che a' camminanti una montagna aspra e erta, presso alla quale un bellissimo piano e dilettevole sia reposto, il quale tanto più viene lor piacevole quanto maggiore è stata del salire e dello smontare la gravezza. E sì come la estremità della allegrezza il dolore occupa, così le miserie da sopravveniente letizia sono terminate. (I.intr.2)

[As often, most gracious ladies, as I bethink me, how compassionate you are by nature one and all, I do not disguise from myself that the present work must seem to you to have but a heavy and distressful prelude, in that it bears upon its very front what must needs revive the sorrowful memory of the late mortal pestilence, the course whereof was grievous not merely to eyewitnesses but to all who in any other wise had cognisance of it. But I would have you know, that you need not therefore be fearful to read further, as if your reading were ever to be accompanied by sighs and tears. This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to wayfarers is a steep and rugged mountain, beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent does but serve to render more agreeable to them; for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow, so misery has ever its sequel of happiness. (trans. J.M. Rigg)]

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<sup>9</sup> On the possible meanings of the plague in the *Decameron*, cf. F. Cardini, *Le cento novelle contro la morte: Giovanni Boccaccio e la rifondazione cavalleresca del mondo* (Roma: Salerno, 2007); Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*; Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, chap. "Plague and Play."



In addition to sympathize with women's tender feelings and feel sorry for them when they become upset in reading, or recalling the atrocities of the plague, Boccaccio establishes a mode incorporating in a synthetic, but eloquent, image what will be, or should be, for the gracious ladies, the reading of his collection of stories. Besides entertainment, the forthcoming experience will begin by climbing a steep mountain, but will later consist of a journey through the Days of the *Decameron*, a journey that the readers will complete by making a few stops.

Readers, however, are likened to 'walkers,' the "camminanti." Who else could they be if not medieval pilgrims who are the travelers par excellence according to the medieval view?<sup>10</sup> For medieval travelers, leisure trips, free from any commitment like those of modern times, were not conceivable, and each trip was linked to an inner and recognizable meaning, primarily that of the Christian spiritual pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Likewise, the "camminanti" of Boccaccio's *Introduction* cannot be simple hikers, but also, perhaps, spiritual readers, that is, readers attentive to a meaning other than physical and, more specifically, to any meaning hidden in the literary text. And even Dante's characters, which Boccaccio had certainly in mind, were not just hikers. Precisely, in the metaphor of the journey in general (and the "camminanti," in particular) are hidden Dantean watermarks that, like many other allusions to the *Commedia*, remain vague and shaded yet somehow clear and eloquent. To begin to unravel them bit by bit, it is worth noting that in Dante's *Convivio*, the image of the mountain is associated with the voyage of the soul. Here, the soul, freed from the burdens and troubles of earthly life, is waiting to get to the peace of death, imaginatively represented by the community of the city of God:

4. E in ciò avemo da la nostra propria natura grande ammaestramento di soavitate, ché in essa cotale morte non è dolore né alcuna acerbitate, ma sì come uno pomo maturo leggiermente e senza violenza si dispicca dal suo ramo, così la nostra anima senza doglia si parte dal corpo ov'ella è stata. Onde Aristotile in quello De Iuventute et Senectute dice che "sanza tristizia è la morte ch'è ne la vecchiezza". 5. E si come a colui che viene di lungo cammino, anzi ch'entri ne la porta de la sua cittade, li si fanno incontro li cittadini di quella, così a la nobile anima si fanno incontro, e deono fare, quelli cittadini de la eterna vita; e così fanno per le sue buone operazioni e contemplazioni: ché, già essendo a Dio renduta e astrattasi da le mondane cose e cogitazioni, vedere le pare coloro che appresso di Dio crede che siano. 6. Odi che dice Tullio, in persona di Catone vecchio: "A me pare già vedere e levomi in grandissimo studio di vedere li vostri padri, che io amai, e non pur quelli [che io stesso conobbi], ma eziandio quelli di cui udi' parlare". 7. Rendesi dunque a Dio la nobile anima in questa etade, e attende lo fine di questa vita con molto desiderio e uscir le pare de l'albergo e ritornare ne la propria mansione, *uscir le pare di cammino e tornare in cittade*, uscir le pare di mare e tornare a porto. O miseri e vili che con le vele alte correte a questo porto, e là ove dovereste riposare, per lo impeto del vento rompete, e perdetes voi medesimi là dove tanto *camminato* avete! (*Convivio* IV, 28, 5-7)

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<sup>10</sup> It is worth reminding, here, that in the Middle Ages the word "camino" is often synonymous of pilgrimage, like, for instance, in "el camino de Santiago." On medieval pilgrimages, there is an enormous amount of scholarship. However, a stimulating reading for several aspects related to the crusades is A. Dupront, *Il sacro: crociate e pellegrinaggi - linguaggi e immagini* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1993). It is also worth mentioning here Petrarch's letter to his friend Mandelli (1358), which is a guide for pilgrims visiting the Holy Lands (see T. J. Cachey, ed., *Petrarch's Guide to the Holy Land. Itinerary to the Sepulcher of Our Lord Jesus Christ* [Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002]).

[Here our own nature accords us a great lesson in gentleness, for in such a death as this there is no suffering or any harshness; but just as a ripe apple drops from its bough gently and without violence, so without suffering our soul separates itself from the body in which it has dwelled. Hence in his book *On Youth and Old Age* Aristotle says that "death that takes place in old age is without sadness." And just as a man returning from a long journey is met by the citizens of his city as he enters its gates, so the noble soul is met, as it should be, by the citizens of the eternal life. This they do by means of their good works and thoughts: for having already surrendered itself to God and disengaged itself from worldly matters and preoccupations, the soul seems to see those whom it believes to be with God. Hear what Tully says, in the person of Cato the Elder: "I seem to see already, and I lift myself with the greatest longing to see your fathers, whom I loved, and not only them, but also those of whom I have heard speak." The noble soul, then, surrenders itself to God in this age of life and awaits the end of this life with great desire, and seems to be leaving an inn and returning to its proper dwelling, seems to be coming back from a journey and returning to the city, seems to be coming in from the sea and returning to port. O you miserable and debased beings who speed into this port with sails raised high! Where you should take your rest, you shipwreck yourselves against the force of the wind and perish at the very place to which you have so long been journeying! (trans. R. Lansing)]

Furthermore, Dante represents the voyage of the soul within the discussion on wealth and the endless desire to possess it:

Per che io dico che non solamente ne l'acquisto de la scienza e de le ricchezze, ma in ciascuno acquisto l'umano desiderio si sciampia, avvegna che per altro e altro modo. 14. E la ragione è questa: che lo sommo desiderio di ciascuna cosa, e prima da la natura dato, è lo ritornare a lo suo principio. E però che Dio è principio de le nostre anime e fattore di quelle simili a sé (si come è scritto: "Facciamo l'uomo ad imagine e similitudine nostra"), essa anima massimamente desidera di tornare a quello. 15. E si *come peregrino* che va per una via per la quale mai non fue, che ogni casa che da lungi vede crede che sia l'albergo, e non trovando ciò essere, dirizza la credenza a l'altra, e così di casa in casa, tanto che a l'albergo viene; così *l'anima nostra*, incontanente che nel nuovo e mai non fatto *cammino di questa vita* entra, dirizza li occhi al termine del suo sommo bene, e però, qualunque cosa vede che paia in sé avere alcuno bene, crede che sia esso. 16. E perché la sua *conoscenza* prima è imperfetta, per non essere esperta né dottrinata, piccioli beni le paiono grandi, e però da quelli comincia prima a desiderare. Onde vedemo li parvuli desiderare massimamente un pomo; e poi, più procedendo, desiderare uno augellino; e poi, più oltre, desiderare bel vestimento; e poi lo cavallo; e poi una donna; e poi ricchezza non grande, e poi grande, e poi più. E questo incontra perché in nulla di queste cose truova quella che va cercando, e credela trovare più oltre. 17. Per che vedere si può che l'uno desiderabile sta dinanzi a l'altro a li occhi de la nostra anima per modo quasi piramidale, che 'l minimo li cuopre prima tutti, ed è quasi punta de l'ultimo desiderabile, che è Dio, quasi base di tutti. Si che, quanto da la punta ver la base più si procede, maggiori appariscono li desiderabili; e questa è la ragione per che, acquistando, li desiderii umani si fanno più ampî, l'uno appresso de l'altro. 18. Veramente così questo *cammino* si perde per errore come le strade de la terra. Che si come *d'una cittade a un'altra* di necessitate è una ottima e dirittissima via, e un'altra che sempre se ne dilunga (cioè quella che va ne l'altra parte) e molte altre quale meno allungandosi e quale meno appressandosi, così *ne la vita umana sono diversi cammini*, de li quali uno è veracissimo e un altro è fallacissimo, e certi meno fallaci e certi meno veraci. 19. E si come vedemo che quello che dirittissimo vae a la cittade, e compie lo desiderio e dà posa dopo la fatica, e quello che va in contrario mai nol compie e mai posa dare non può, così ne la nostra vita avviene: lo *buono camminatore* giugne a termine e a posa; lo erroneo mai non l'aggiugne, ma con molta fatica del suo animo sempre con li occhi gulosi si mira innanzi. 20. Onde avvegna che questa ragione del tutto non risponda a la questione mossa di sopra, almeno apre la via a la risposta, ché fa vedere non andare ogni nostro desiderio dilatandosi per un modo. (*Convivio* IV, 12)

[And so I say that human desire is increased not only by the acquisition of knowledge and of riches, but by every kind of acquisition, although in different ways. The reason is this: that the supreme desire of each thing, and the one that is first given to it by nature, is to return to its first cause. Now since God is the cause of our souls and has created them like himself (as it is written, "Let us make man in our own image and likeness"), the soul desires above all else to return to him. And just as the pilgrim who walks along a road on which he has never traveled before believes that every house which he sees from afar is an inn, and finding it not so fixes his expectations on the next one, and so moves from house to house until he comes to the inn, so our soul, as soon as it enters upon this new and never travelled road of life, fixes its eyes on the goal of its supreme good, and therefore believes that everything it sees which seems to possess some good in it is that supreme good. Because its knowledge is at first imperfect through lack of experience and instruction, small goods appear great, and so from these it conceives its first desires. Thus we see little children setting their desire first of all on an apple, and then growing older desiring to possess a little bird, and then still later desiring to possess fine clothes, then a horse, and then a woman, and then modest wealth, then greater riches, and then still more. This comes about because in none of these things does one find what one is searching after, but hopes to find it further on. Consequently it may be seen that one object of desire stands in front of another before the eyes of our soul very much in the manner of a pyramid, where the smallest object at first covers them all and is, as it were, the apex of the ultimate object of desire, namely God, who is, as it were, the base of all the rest. And so the further we move from the apex toward the base, the greater the objects of desire appear; this is the reason why acquisition causes human desires to become progressively inflated. We may, however, lose this path through error, just as we may the roads of the earth. For just as from one city to another there is only one road which is of necessity the best and most direct, and another which leads completely away (namely the one which goes in the opposite direction), and many others, some leading away from it and some moving toward it, so in human life there are different paths, among which only one is the truest way and another the falsest, and some less true and some less false. And just as we see that the path which leads most directly to the city fulfills desire and provides rest when work is finished, while the one which goes in the opposite direction never fulfills it nor provides rest, so it is with our life. A wise traveler reaches his goal and rests; the wanderer never reaches it, but with great lethargy of mind forever directs his hungry eyes before him. Thus although this explanation does not entirely answer the question raised above, it at least opens the way for an answer because it shows that our desires do not all increase in the same way. (trans. R. Lansing)]

The souls naturally yearns to return to his first cause, but its journey towards God is made of various recognitions (from one city to another) wherefrom the object of desire progressively comes to the mind of the wise traveler.

If we move from the *Convivio* to the *Commedia*, one easily realizes that the voyage of the soul is embodied not only in the metaphor of human life as a "cammino" ("nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita") but also in the character of Dante himself, a spiritual traveler, a *viator*, who overcomes his physical and human limitations and follows a path of ascension that allows him to eventually reach God.<sup>11</sup> Dante, as a character, is also a pilgrim who makes a journey, literally traveling on foot through the earth; moreover, his personal journey toward God is allegorically conceived as the biblical exodus from Egypt.<sup>12</sup> Dante's journey, in essence, is thus spiritual as well as

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<sup>11</sup> On the *homo viator* in the Middle Ages, see G. B. Ladner, "Homo Viator: Mediaeval Ideas on Alienation and Order," *Speculum* 42.2 (1967): 233-259. On Petrarch as spiritual traveller, see T. M. Greene, "Petrarch 'Viator': The Displacements of Heroism," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 12: Heroes and the Heroic Special Number (1982): 35-57.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Singleton, "*In exitu Israel de Aegypto*," now in J. Freccero, ed., *Dante* (Englewood: Cliffs N.J., 1965), 102-121; G. Mazzotta, *Dante, Poet of the Desert: History and Allegory in the Divine Comedy*

physical at the same time ("... e io sol uno / m'apparecchiava a sostener la guerra / sì del cammino e sì de la pietate, / che ritarrà la mente che non erra" [*Inf.* II, 3-6]).

Various, or perhaps, endless are the metaphors of the journey in the *Commedia*; but, just to name a few, the first obstacle to Dante's climb made by the leopard at the beginning of his supernatural journey (identified, again, as a "cammino") are unforgettable and fascinating ("Ed ecco, quasi al cominciar de l'erta, / una lonza leggiara e presta molto, / che di pel macolato era coverta; / e non mi si partia dinanzi al volto, / anzi 'mpediva tanto il mio cammino, / ch'i' fui per ritornar più volte vòlto" [*Inf.* I, 31-36]). Besides the various metaphors of the voyage associated with the pilgrimage all over the *Commedia*, a character in particular stands out; a Dantean, universal character representative of all the metaphors of the journey and of the search for knowledge, a character who stops just when he comes into view of a mountain. Ulysses stands out as the champion of intellectual curiosity who is drawn to the most difficult enterprises. He pushes his companions to experience the entire existential development of man, from the primitive state of brutes to the heights of knowledge and virtue, and encourages them with his oratory to long for the accomplishment of a journey that, rationally, might seem impossible:

Considerate la vostra semenza:  
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,  
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza".  
Li miei compagni fec' io sì aguti,  
con questa orazion picciola, *al cammino*,  
che a pena poscia li avrei ritenuti... (*Inf.* XXVI, 118-123)

["Consider how your souls were sown:  
you were not made to live like brutes or beasts,  
but to pursue virtue and knowledge."  
'With this brief speech I had my companions  
so ardent for the journey  
I could scarce have held them back. (trans. Hollander)]

This particular episode of the *Commedia* has inspired volumes of interpretive literature over the years,<sup>13</sup> and yet only a few modern critics have provided useful

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(Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979). Cf. also the theme of the *itinerarium mentis in Deum* as is developed by Saint Bonaventure.

<sup>13</sup> D. S. Avalle, "L'ultimo viaggio di Ulisse," *Studi danteschi* 43 (1966): 35-68; U. Bosco, "La 'follia' di Ulisse," *Lettere italiane* 10 (1958): 417-430; A. K. Cassell, "The Lesson of Ulysses," *Dante Studies* 99 (1981): 113-131; A. M. Chiavacci Leonardi, "The New Ulysses," in P. Boitani and A. Torti (eds.), *Intellectuals and Writers in Fourteenth-Century Europe: The J.A.W. Bennett Memorial Lectures, Perugia, 1984* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1986), 120-137; M. Corti, "Tre versioni dell'Aristotelismo radicale nella *Commedia*," in M. Corti, *Dante a un nuovo crocevia* (Firenze: Libreria Commissionaria Sansoni, 1981), 77-101; F. Forti, "Ulisse," in U. Bosco *Dante nella critica d'oggi: risultati e prospettive* (Firenze: Le Monnier, 1965), 495-517; H. H. Friedrich, "Ulisse nell'Inferno (Dante *Inf.* XXVI)," *Sigma* 24 (1969): 3-50; M. Fubini, "Ulisse," in M. Fubini, *Due studi danteschi* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1951), 5-23; A. Iannucci, "Ulysses' 'folle volo': The Burden of History," *Medioevo romanzo* 2 (1976): 410-445; J. M. Lotman, "Il viaggio di Ulisse nella Divina Commedia di Dante," in *Testo e contesto: semiotica dell'arte e della cultura*, trans. S. Salvestroni (Roma: Laterza, 1980), 81-102; R. Montano, "Il 'folle volo' di Ulisse," in R. Montano, *Suggerimenti per una lettura di Dante* (Napoli: Conte, 1956), 131-166; B. Nardi, "La tragedia di Ulisse," in *Dante e la cultura medievale: nuovi saggi di filosofia dantesca* (Bari: G. Laterza, 1942), 89-99; G. Padoan, "Ulisse 'fandi factor' e le vie della sapienza," *Studi danteschi* 37 (1960): 21-61; J. A. Scott, "L'Ulisse

guidelines to interpret its spatial dimension. First, the presence of an allegorical meaning to be deciphered is considered part of Dante's intentions; second the symbolism related to knowledge is the peculiar trait of Ulysses' journey.<sup>14</sup> We could, then, go further and read the episode as the soul's voyage represented in Neoplatonic terms; an experience, however, doomed to failure because it is not supported by divine guidance.<sup>15</sup> But what is the distinctive character of Dante's journey with respect to Boccaccio's? Why should the *Decameron's* characters differ from other spiritual travelers? As a matter of fact, Boccaccio explores territories other than Dantean ones. Boccaccio's characters appear to be on a real journey, at least at a first level of interpretation.

Yet, Boccaccio's journeys are also interlaced with liminal experiences. The journeys made by the *Decameron's* characters always remain in the dimension of reality, that is, the historical dimension (or presumably so); these journeys narrate facts that may be true (and sometimes they are, as they are historically documented), and come to good or bad ends following a thread that draws an accurate picture of the human experience in a given moment of its existence. Nevertheless, during these journeys, there occur events or experiences whose explanation requires a leap of imaginative understanding. Even though the *Decameron's* characters follow a physical path, they sometimes stop and cross the threshold of reality without ever completely leaving the real world behind, as in the tale of Nastagio degli Onesti. It is the language of the *Decameron*, above all, that makes us imagine intangible horizons beyond the threshold of physical reality. The powerful mechanisms of the *Decameron's* discourse and allusiveness stimulate the reader to reflect on issues that one would never expect to consider in a story aimed at pure entertainment as the author would have us believe at first sight.<sup>16</sup> Boccaccio expects his readers to remain down to earth, in the physical reality, because leisure is, truly, the primary purpose of his work. However, he also wants them to consider philosophical or metaphysical horizons in order to tickle their cognitive appetites, just as the poet does, remaining on earth, and yet enjoying the company of the Muses on the Parnassus (cf. IV.35). Thus, an intertextual reading of the *Decameron* may consist in a sort of alternating movement of ascent and descent, from Parnassus down to earth, from the sky to the ground, a progression and pause, a rest over the plains, and a flight over the mountain slopes. The process of reading that Boccaccio presents us recalls, in a sense, what Peter Damian, in his commentary on *Numbers 33*, describes on the spiritual journey of the Christian that consists in going and staying, *ire et manere*, travelling and resting, inseparable from one another. In fact, according to Peter Damian, in order to progress in faith, it is necessary to wait until the practice of virtue becomes a habit. To persist and persevere, one must also stop.<sup>17</sup> In essence, the 'liminal' allusiveness of storytelling in

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dantesco," in J. A. Scott, *Dante magnanimo: studi sulla Commedia* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1977), 117-193; G. Vinay, "Dante e Ulisse," *Nova Historia* 12 (1960): 32-49.

<sup>14</sup> Padoan, "Ulisse 'fandi ficator'", 33, 39, 46, has clearly emphasized the epistemological character of Ulysses' experience, which has relevant implications not only for universal literature but particularly for the *Commedia*. Unfortunately, we cannot know Boccaccio's interpretation of this episode, as his *Esposizioni* are incomplete, stopping at canto XVI.

<sup>15</sup> Freccero, *Dante the Poetics of Conversion*, 15 ff.

<sup>16</sup> ". . . le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, 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 . . ." (Proemio.14)

<sup>17</sup> Pier Damiani, *In Numeros* 19,1 (PL 145, col. 1051-64), quoted by Boitani, in P. Boitani and M. Simonetti, *Il viaggio dell'anima* (Milano: Fondazione L. Valla, 2007), 326-329. Susanna Barsella, "The

Boccaccio's text makes the reader remain always anchored to reality, yet allows him/her sometimes to estrange and think about far higher matters.<sup>18</sup>

The *Decameron's* simile comparing the interpretation of the text to the climbing of a mountain ("Questo orrido cominciamento vi fia non altramenti che a' camminanti una montagna aspra e erta" [I.intr.2]) defines the reader's experience as a sort of intellectual and spiritual progression and ascent. Moreover, this textual journey where a mountain is evoked conveys an additional meaning to be discovered: "You cannot but think of the 'harsh' forest and the 'delightful' mountain of the first canto of the *Divine Comedy*, especially since the action takes place for both writers [i.e. Dante and Boccaccio] midway upon the journey of their lives, at the age of thirty-five years."<sup>19</sup> Vittore Branca's commentary gives us the coordinates which place this literary allusion. Yet he does not comment on the motif of the journey, which is strictly tied to the metaphor of the narrative, and certainly does not tell us why Boccaccio chose to mention a mountain right at the beginning of the First Day of the *Decameron*. Thus, the mountain is one of the most eloquent images to indicate the continued presence of Dante in Boccaccio's work, a discreet presence that functions as an indicator to identify readings alternative to the simple representation of the geographical background of the text. But, above all, it shows the author's intention to convince the readers of the need to change their perspective on the world, the need to establish different points of reference and determine the coordinates of a path, from plains to mountains, and vice versa. Readers should turn their eyes not only from the bottom up, but also from the top to bottom, from the plains up onto the mountain, or down from the mountain. The mountain, thus, may become a speculation point where man reflects upon the world, like the man who sits in silence on top of a mountain to contemplate the world with the power of his inner eye as in the anthropomorphic representation of the soul in a miniature of the famous Stuttgart Psalter (see fig. 6).

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Myth of Prometheus," 127-128, emphasized the fact that Boccaccio translated, and even rewrote, a life of Pier Damiani in which the image of the saint is mixed with the classical ideal of the wise man: "In 1361 Boccaccio, who was then in Ravenna, received Petrarch's request to research San Peter Damiani. Petrarch was in Milan and intended to use this information for his *De vita solitaria*. Boccaccio found Giovanni da Lodi's *Vita*, Peter Damiani's contemporary friar of Fonte Avellana, and rewrote it. He introduced *ex novo* a chapter on the vanity of earthly goods (IV) and one on the benefits of the solitary life (VI) with the overt intention to adapt the Saint's life to the *topoi* of Christian hagiography. In 1362 he sent Petrarch his *Vita sanctissimi Pier Damiani* accompanied by epistle XI. In Boccaccio's rewriting the saint had become a figure in which the *topos* of the ascetical anchorite had merged with the classical model of the sage. The anchorites and the Desert Fathers were symbols of the purity of early Christianity. These figures in many ways overlapped with the classical ideal of the wise man." If Boccaccio committed to translate Pier Damiani's life after 1360, one may assume that he read the works of the saint even before that year, at least at the time of the composition of the *Decameron*.

<sup>18</sup> What I call 'liminality' is not marginality as theorized by Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, "The Marginality of Literature," 47 ff., as a reflection on the meaning of literature: "the retreat to the garden is a dramatic strategy than enables Boccaccio to reflect on history and to find in this condition of marginality, of provisional separation from the historical structures, a place for secular literature" (*The World at Play*, 49).

<sup>19</sup> "Non si può non pensare alla selva 'aspra' e al 'diletto' monte del canto introduttivo della *Divina Commedia*: tanto più che l'azione si svolge per ambedue gli scrittori nel mezzo del cammino della vita, a trentacinque anni." *Decameron*, ed. Branca, p. 13, n. 10. Cf. also Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 34 ff.; *Filocolo* V, 31; Ovid, *Met.* VIII, 517 ff.

The allegorical meaning of the mountain could be manifold. If one tries to understand it through the mediation of Dante's model, the mountain can be immediately identified with that of Purgatory, which appeared to Ulysses as "una montagna, bruna / per la distanza" (*Inferno* 26.133).<sup>20</sup> Otherwise, it could be an image modeled on Mount Sinai, the ultimate goal of all searches, from that of Ulysses to the Promised Land of the Jews.<sup>21</sup> If one observes the nature of movement in the *Commedia*, one may also conceive of Dante's pilgrimage as the voyage of the mind in the form of a spiral that mimics the movement of the heavens and the *Anima Mundi*.<sup>22</sup> A similar spiral movement could also be found in the cosmic movements described by the ancient Platonics, or the three movements of the mind of Saint Bonaventure.<sup>23</sup>

However, continuing in the exegesis of the first paragraph of the First Day, it must be noted that, in the imaginary pilgrimage prepared for the female readers of the *Decameron*, immediately after the initial metaphorical difficulty in climbing the mountain, there appears an easier way, that of a beautiful and delightful plain ("un bellissimo piano e dilettevole"). In other words, the painful and horrific reading of the account of the plague is concentrated only in the opening section of the *Decameron*, while immediately after, the readers should expect an easier and comfortable walk. In fact, after leaving the horrors of the city behind, the merry brigade decides to retreat on the top of the hill, far away, in a serene environment that recall the wonders of Campanella's utopian City of the Sun:

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. also *Purg.* 3.6 and 76, 4.88, 23.125. See Ottimo, on *Purg.* 21.42: "la santa regola e osservanza del monte dove l'anime si purgano," mentione in *ED*, s.v. "montagna," p. 1011.

<sup>21</sup> According to C. V. Kaske, "Mount Sinai and Dante's Mount Purgatory," *Dante Studies*, with the Annual Report of the Dante Society, 89 (1971): 1-18, in part. 10, Dante's mountain represents the mountain of the Law as a model of virtues, and is based on the model of Mount Sinai which is traditionally considered the ultimate goal of Exodus.

<sup>22</sup> J. Freccero, "Pilgrim in a Gyre," in *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. On the *anima mundi* in medieval philosophy and in William of Conches' thought, see T. Gregory, *Anima mundi: la filosofia di Guglielmo di Conches e la scuola di Chartres* (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1955).

<sup>23</sup> *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, I.2, quoted by Freccero, *Dante the Poetics of Conversion*, 80-81. On the presence of Dante in Boccaccio's works and in the *Decameron*, see Billanovich, *Restauri*, 49-58; Billanovich, "La leggenda dantesca del Boccaccio," 45-144; Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 23-24, 34, 252, 258-261; Padoan, *Il Boccaccio, le Muse, il Parnaso e l'Arno*, chap. 1: "Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale," and chap. 6: "Boccaccio fedele di Dante" (with a bibliography on Boccaccio's *dantismo*). More recent studies are R. Ferreri, "Appunti sulla presenza del *Convivio* nel *Decameron*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 19 (1990): 63-77; Bruni, *Boccaccio*, 289-302; A. Bettinzoli, "Per una definizione delle presenze dantesche nel '*Decameron*,'" *Studi sul Boccaccio* 13 (1981-82): 267-326 and *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983-84): 209-40; R. M. Durling, "Boccaccio on Interpretation: Guido's Escape," in A. S. Bernardo and A. L. Pellegrini, eds., *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio. Studies in the Italian Trecento In Honor of Charles S. Singleton* (Binghamton: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1983), 273-304; Hollander, "Boccaccio's Dante: Imitative Distance;" Hollander, "*Decameron*: the Sun Rises;" Hollander, "*Utilità*;" R. Hollander, "Boccaccio's Dante: Imitative Distance (*Decameron* I, 1, and VI, 10)," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 13 (1981-82): 169-198; F. Fido, "Dante personaggio mancato del *Decameron*," in M. Cottino-Jones, and E. F. Tuttle, eds, *Boccaccio: secoli di vita: atti del Congresso internazionale Boccaccio 1975, Università di California, Los Angeles, 17-19 ottobre 1975* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 177-189; R. Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977); Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, passim; F. Mazzoni, "Giovanni Boccaccio fra Dante e Petrarca," *Atti e Memorie della Accademia Petrarca di Lettere, Arti e Scienze*, ns, 42 (1976-78): 15-42; A. R. Ascoli, "Auerbach fra gli epicurei: dal canto X dell'*Inferno* alla VI giornata del *Decameron*," *Moderna* 11 (2009): 91-108.

E ordinatamente fatta ogni cosa opportuna apparecchiare, e prima mandato là dove intendevan d'andare, la seguente mattina, cioè il mercoledì, in su lo schiarir del giorno, le donne con alquante delle lor fanti e i tre giovani con tre lor famigliari, usciti della città, si misero in via; né oltre a due piccole miglia si dilungarono da essa, che essi pervennero al luogo da loro primieramente ordinato.

Era il detto luogo sopra una piccola montagnetta, da ogni parte lontano alquanto alle nostre strade, di vari albuscelli e piante tutte di verdi fronde ripiene piacevoli a riguardare; in sul colmo della quale era un palagio con bello e gran cortile nel mezzo, e con logge e con sale e con camere, tutte ciascuna verso di sé bellissima e di liete dipinture raguardevole e ornata, con pratelli da torno e con giardini maravigliosi e con pozzi d'acque freschissime e con volte piene di preziosi vini: cose più atte a curiosi bevitori che a sobrie e oneste donne. Il quale tutto spazzato, e nelle camere i letti fatti, e ogni cosa di fiori, quali nella stagione si potevano avere, piena e di giunchi giuncata, la vegnente brigata trovò con suo non poco piacere. (I.intr.89-91)

What follows, then, is the narration of the tales, between ups and downs, joys and sorrows, up to the end of the ten Days without any major changes of tone. If one takes these few words of Boccaccio literally, the *Decameron* appears to have a happy ending, one that can make us forget the sad account of the plague in the *Introduction*.

However, the "beautiful and delightful plan" will not be without its pitfalls, and eventually the end of the *Decameron* will not even be one of the happiest, if one considers the painful, yet controversial, experience of Griselda. Therefore, we should rather focus on a narrative path metaphorically situated on a plain, which is alternately blocked by rivers and hills, and should be cautious in expecting a joyous finale. We should simply remain in the belief that Boccaccio wanted to imitate the alternating movement of joy and pain of the human condition (cf. the landscape of the countryside as depicted in fig. 11). When Boccaccio states: "E sì come la estremità della allegrezza il dolore occupa, così le miserie da sopravveniente letizia sono terminate," it looks like the announcement of a happy ending for the long series of tales. Yet, the apparent contradiction between Boccaccio's optimistic words and the final bitter outcome of his collection, as we shall see, can be resolved by thinking about the significance of the vicissitudes of Fortune variously represented in the work, by thinking about the changing trend of the storytellers' 'walk' and the 'mountain.' In fact, the whole lay of the land and the directions of the storytellers who enjoy the various nature all around Florence will be gently interrupted by a series of valleys, hills, and plans; their walk on these routes will not have anything but rest and the harmony of entertainment:

E da seder levatasi, verso un rivo d'acqua chiarissima, il quale d'una montagnetta discendeva in una valle ombrosa da molti arbori fra vive pietre e verdi erbette, con lento passo se n'andarono. Quivi, scalze e colle braccia nude per l'acqua andando, cominciarono a prendere vari dilette fra sé medesime. E appressandosi l'ora della cena, verso il palagio tornatesi, con diletto cenarono. (I.concl.15-16)

Le donne risposono che erano apparecchiate; e chiamata una delle lor fanti, senza farne alcuna cosa sentire à giovani, si misero in via; né guari più d'un miglio furono andate, che alla Valle delle donne pervennero. Dentro alla quale per una via assai stretta, dall'una delle parti della quale correva un chiarissimo fiumicello, entrarono, e viderla tanto bella e tanto dilettevole, e specialmente in quel tempo che era il caldo grande, quanto più si potesse divisare. E secondo che alcuna di loro poi mi ridisse, il piano che nella valle era, così era ritondo come se a sesta fosse stato fatto, quantunque artificio della natura e non manual paresse; ed era di giro poco più che un mezzo miglio, intorno di sei montagnette di non



troppa altezza, e in su la sommità di ciascuna si vedeva un palagio quasi in forma fatto d'un bel castelletto. Le piaggie delle quali montagnette così digradando giù verso 'l piano discendevano, come ne' teatri veggiamo dalla lor sommità i gradi infino all'infimo venire successivamente ordinati, sempre ristignendo il cerchio loro. (VI.concl.19-21)

The mountain, the walk, the plains are clearly metaphors of the voyage, but also signs; namely, epistemological devices of the search for meaning.<sup>24</sup>

In this chapter, then, I will devote my attention to reflect on the significance of the voyage in the *Decameron*—a theme which, by looking at the author's words at the very beginning of his work, and by the load of literary references that goes with it, seems to have particular importance. Starting from the meaning of the mountain and its intertextual relationships with Dante's *Commedia*, I will extend the analysis to the representation and meaning of the mountain in Boccaccio's minor literary production. Finally, I will consider the Second Day of the *Decameron* as a privileged moment of synthesis of an ongoing cognitive discourse produced, on the one hand, by the nature of Boccaccio's language, and on the other, in relation to the acquisition of knowledge. It will be clear, then, that the theme of the voyage is placed side by side with that of Fortune in the *Decameron* and, in particular, in the Second Day. In the reading of the tales, the theme of the voyage and that of Fortune will serve to elicit the epistemological mechanisms that Boccaccio tries in every way to communicate with his language and imagination to his readers. Specifically, the *Decameron*—but in particular the Second Day—can be read as an *itinerarium* toward the acquisition of a certain knowledge, a journey that begins, not surprisingly, with the necessity to climb a mountain, like in the first canto of Dante's *Commedia*. Furthermore, as we shall see, the *Decameron* can be seen also as a journey into learning, a journey whose object is, indeed, apprehension itself, and whose goal is reached when some knowledge is acquired.

Boccaccio's imagination allows his readers to play with words, especially with their meanings. Boccaccio's prose is able to create highly evocative poetical figures which allude to a universe that goes beyond the mere geographical world. One example will suffice to show this evocative feature of his language. At the dawn of a new day, light appears from the mountains, allowing us to 'know' all the beauties of the landscape:

Già nella sommità de' più alti monti apparivano la domenica mattina i raggi della surgente luce e, ogni ombra partitasi, manifestamente le cose si conosceano, quando la reina levatasi con la sua compagnia, primieramente alquanto su per le rugiadoso erbe andarono, e poi in su la mezza terza una chiesetta lor vicina visitata, in quella il divino officio ascoltarono; e a casa tornatisene, poi che con letizia e con festa ebber mangiato, cantarono e danzarono alquanto, e appresso, licenziati dalla reina, chi volle andare a riposarsi potè (VIII.intr.2)

The beauties of the landscape are those of nature, but also intellectual ones, related to the mind, that the author wants to communicate to his privileged reader. That Boccaccio's intent was also to emphasize the potential ambiguities of the verb 'to know' (the verb does

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<sup>24</sup> Just remember Renzo, in Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, and what his mountains mean for him. But particularly meaningful for his formative journey is the sound of the river Piave in the episode in which he walks all night until he reaches the River Adda after he had fled an inn in Gorgonzola. The sound of the river constitutes the backdrop, or the objective correlative that mirrors his frightened emotions during his flee from Milan to Bergamo. Also remember the more famous episode of the flight from the village, in the first chapter, with its poetical description of the landscape around Lecco, the mountain Resegone and the lake Como, which prelude to the journeys that the betrothed will have make.

not simply look like a synonym for 'to see') is confirmed by the fact that the possible intertexts of this charming landscape picture have never been verified. On the one hand, Hollander recalls a well-known line of Dante's *Paradise* ("Surge ai mortali per diverse foci / la lucerna del mondo . . ." I, 37-38), but soon afterwards he has doubts about his discovery and wonders why, unlike in other landscape beginnings, this time Boccaccio decides not to use Dante.<sup>25</sup> On the other, Branca recalls a verse of the *Aeneid* ("Postera uix summos spargebat lumine montis / orta dies, cum primum alto se gurgite tollunt / Solis equi lucemque elatis naribus efflant." XII, 113 ff.), which better fits the text of the *Decameron*, but certainly does not emphasize the metaphorical image which revolves around the verb to 'know'.<sup>26</sup> On the allusiveness and suggestive power of Boccaccio's discourse, it is also worth mentioning an extreme example. The obscene language of Tindaro and Licisca epitomizes the cognitive mechanisms and expressive potentiality of the verb *conoscere*: "Madonna, costui mi vuol far *conoscere* la moglie di Sicofante; e né più né meno, come se io con lei usata non fossi, mi vuol dare a *vedere* che la notte prima che Sicofante giacque con lei, messer Mazza entrasse in *Monte Nero* per forza e con ispargimento di sangue; e io dico che non è vero, anzi v'entrò pacificamente e con gran piacere di quei d'entro" (VI.intr.).<sup>27</sup>

Looking at the previous literary tradition and, specifically, at the Platonic and patristic traditions, one realizes that the journey, in the form of the climbing of a mountain, very often symbolizes the soul's voyage toward knowledge and is sometimes connected with various forms of observation of the cosmos. It may be worth here to digress a little from the *Decameron* and to follow the thread of a few literary works whose scope made them unique in the panorama of universal literature, and which besides having been important in the literary tradition possibly influenced Boccaccio's imagination—I am referring to works known by the author (cf. Mazza, 1966: 15-51, nn. I, 4; II, 1; II, 11; III, 6; VII, 3). Among the first voyages of the soul, one can surely include Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Timaeus*. In the former, Socrates explains to his friend Phaedrus that the soul is like a force in the shape of a winged chariot pulled by horses and driven by a charioteer; the soul flies up to the sky, toward what is good, beautiful and wise, because these things are the nourishment of its wings. The soul flies toward the sky only if it is perfect and not burdened by the weight of the body. Once it reached the top of the sky, the soul revolves around the heavens and contemplates the supreme Being that really is, which can only be contemplated by the intellect, or the guide to the soul (the charioteer). All souls seek to have the vision of the Being in the "plain of the Truth," because that is the place where the wings are fed with the grass of the lawn (*Phaedrus*, 245c, 2-248c, 1). In the *Timaeus*, too, a text known by Boccaccio through Calcidius' Latin translation (Mazza, 1966: 23, n. II, 11), the voyage of the soul is described in its ascent toward the divine. In its circular motion around the sky, the soul achieves the full

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<sup>25</sup> R. Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press), 1997, 64-65.

<sup>26</sup> *Decameron*, ed. Branca, VIII.intr.2, n.

<sup>27</sup> As Mazzotta observes ("Allegory and the Pornographic Imagination," in *The World at Play*, 105-130), the mountain can also become an obscene object which complete the entire range of possible tones in the *Decameron*. See also another exemple in which Friar Cipolla possibly alludes to sodomy: ". . . e quindi passai in terra d'Abruzzi, dove gli uomini e le femine vanno in zoccoli su pe' monti, rivestendo i porci delle lor busecchie medesime; e poco più là trovai gente che portano il pan nelle mazze e 'l vin nelle sacca: da' quali alle montagne de' bachi pervenni, dove tutte le acque corrono alla 'ngiù" (VI.10.40).

contemplation of the Being and the Truth.<sup>28</sup> The journey of the soul can also take the form of a dream, as in Plato's *Phaedrus* (245c2-248c1), or in the *Somnium Scipionis*; the latter, though, may have inspired more directly Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione*.<sup>29</sup>

However, the image of the voyage of the soul becomes definitely important with Plotinus, and from here on it will be assimilated in the patristic tradition still conveying epistemological connotations. In the *Enneads*, echoing a line from Homer, Plotinus urges the reader to go to the superior native land, the Good; not on foot, with the body, or other means of transportation, but through the transformation of our sight into the inner eye.<sup>30</sup> For its peculiar emphasis on the motif of travel, it is interesting to look at the exegetical insight of Origen. Interpreting Israel's journey in the desert, Origen sees the soul's journey towards knowledge as, not only a journey of wisdom, but also a journey of life (cf. Origen, *In Num.* 27.6 e 27.12). For Origen, man is a *viator* always on the road, in a longlasting search significantly represented by the image of the tent (*tabernaculum*) in the desert.<sup>31</sup> Afterwards, given the literary currency of this symbolism, the flight of the soul with the aid of the inner eye is taken, almost verbatim, by Saint Ambrose.<sup>32</sup> The flight of the soul is intertwined, then, with the theme of navigation, which becomes an additional means to describe the voyage of knowledge, like the interior voyage of Dante's Ulysses. Saint Ambrose, in fact, refers to the myth of Daedalus to describe the liberation of the soul from the weight of matter, and uses the expression "remigium alarum."<sup>33</sup> In another passage, Ambrose connects the climb of the mountain with the removal of the veil, the unveiling. The mountain, in this case, is that of the Transfiguration.<sup>34</sup> Augustine, then, drew from Ambrose,<sup>35</sup> and so did Bernard Silvestris in his commentary on the *Aeneid*.<sup>36</sup> This last image linked to navigation may have fascinated Boccaccio so much that he could have likened it to his inner experience with the simile of navigation and the port of destination in the prologue of the *Genealogies*.<sup>37</sup> Finally, Gregory the Great

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Boitani and Simonetti, eds., *Il viaggio dell'anima*, xii-xiii.

<sup>29</sup> On the philosophical issue of the nature of the human soul, even other works by Plato could be taken into account (cf. Plato, Mark Smith, and Peter Cohen, eds., *Voyage of the Soul: Five Tales*. [S.I.]: Petrarch Press and Apollo Bindery, 1996: the true earth [*Phaedo*]—The charioteer [*Phaedrus*]—The cave [*Republic VIII*]—The naked soul [*Gorgias*]—The tale of Er [*Republic X*]), yet, for our purposes, these works would not be as much interesting as the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>30</sup> Plotino, *Enneadi*, eds. R. Radice, G. Reale, and G. Girenti (Milano: A. Mondadori, 2003), I, 6, 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Boitani and Simonetti, *Il viaggio dell'anima*, xxvi-xxx.

<sup>32</sup> *Liber de Isaac et anima*, VIII, 79 (PL 14, col. 559). P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur les Confessions de Saint Augustin* (Paris: de Boccard, 1950), chap. 3, section 2, p. 106 ff., brings the attention to the importance of Plotinus' passage on the inner eye for Ambrose, and emphasizes the fact that this passage will have a remarkable influence on Augustine and the Patristic tradition. On the theme of the flight of the souls see also Freccero, *Dante the Poetics of Conversion*, chap. 1: *The Prologue Scene*, 6-7, who analyzes the spiritual and moral journey of Dante as influenced by Augustine's interior experience in the opening episode of the *Commedia*.

<sup>33</sup> Ambrose, *De virginitate*, XVIII.115-116 (PL 16, col. 296); *Hexameron*, V.14.45 (PL 14, col. 225). Cf. Freccero, *Dante the Poetics of Conversion*, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Ambrose, *Exp. in Luc.* VII, col. 1702 (PL 15) on *Luc.* 9:31, and *Comm. in Ep. ad Cor. Secundam*, col. 287-288 (PL 17) on *II Cor.* 3.

<sup>35</sup> *De ordine*, II.12.37; *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, CXVIII.14.89 (cf. P. Courcelle, "Quelques symboles funéraires du neo-platonisme latin." *Revue des études anciennes* 46 [1944] 65-93, in part. p. 68).

<sup>36</sup> *Commentum super sex libros Eneidos Virgilio*, ed. Riedel, p. 37.

<sup>37</sup> "Iussu igitur tuo, montanis Certaldi cocleis et sterili solo derelictis, tenui licet cimba in vertiginosum mare crebrisque implicitum scopulis novus descendam nauta, incertus, num quid opere

(*Moralia in Job* VI.37 [on *Job* 5:26]), speaks of a beast that reaches Mount Sinai in order to elevate its mind to contemplation.

Within the medieval allegorical tradition, the modalities of the allegorical voyage for the apprehension of knowledge are paradigmatically represented by Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*, which narrates a voyage of Wisdom personified (Phronesis, Prudentia) through the heavens and back to earth. In the poem, Reason, guided by Prudence, discovers the truths of the physical order, but to have the knowledge of religious truths, she must appeal to Faith. It is here, then, that the mission of Wisdom fits in, a mission which, relying on several orders of reality, consists in a voyage through material and spiritual spheres. The soul is described as a substance created from nothing, unbegotten, simple, without a cause (I, 381). The goddess Minerva orders the virtues to build the chariot with which Wisdom flights across space and reaches out to contemplate the secrets of Nous (i.e., the divine Wisdom; Wisdom, instead, is her human counterpart) (II, 363).<sup>38</sup> Reason subdues the horses of the chariot (IV, 213), and then Wisdom sees the eternal species, the heavenly ideas, the origins and causes of things, the seminal reasons, the chronological sequence of events, and the decisions of God (VI, 216). After the prologue, where the author warns his readers of the hermetic and obscure content of his work, the poem actually begins with the appearance of Nature personified, who complains about the chaos that reigns in the world, and with the description of her palace located on the top of a mountain:

In medio nemoris euadit in aera montis  
Ardua planicies et nubibus oscula donat.  
Hic domus erigitur Nature, si tamen isto  
Nomine censeris fas sit, cum numine possit  
Sydereas superare domos superumque penates,  
Nec sibi dignetur conferre palacia regum. (I, 107-112)

[At the grove's centre a mountain, topped with high plateau, rises to the sky and kisses the clouds. Here the home of Nature rises on high, if indeed one may call it by that name since by its god-like majesty it can surpass the starry dwellings and the abode of the gods and does not deign to compare itself with kings' palaces. (trans. J. J. Sheridan)]

In that building, a place separated from the rest of the world (I, 55-56) described as a *locus amoenus* (Curtius 219-223), the virtues descended from their heavenly seats gather. That place apart from the world, as I mentioned above, is obviously an ontologically different space, a realm of eternal spring and renewal; a place that, for its ideal beauty, may well be seen as the archetype of Botticelli's *Primavera*, of the City of the Sun, or even of the country withdrawal represented by the *Decameron's* gardens:

Est locus a nostro secretus climate longo  
Tractu, nostrorum ridens fermenta locorum:

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precium facturus sim, si omnia legero litora et montuosa etiam nemora, scrobes et antra, si opus sit, paragravero pedibus, ad inferos usque descendero, et, Dedalus alter factus, ad ethera transvolavero; undique in tuum desiderium, non aliter quam si per vastum litus ingentis naufragii fragmenta colligerem sparsas, per infinita fere volumina deorum gentilium reliquias colligam, quas comperiam, et collectas evo diminutas atque semesas et fere attritas in unum genealogie corpus, quo potero ordine, ut tuo fruaris voto, redigam" (*Genealogie*, I, Proemio, i, 40).

<sup>38</sup> Wisdom, as the protagonist of the poem, represents man's soul on a journey to see God and rediscover her divine origin.

Iste potest solus quicquid loca cetera possunt;  
 Quod minus in reliquis melius suppletur in uno;  
 Quid prelarga manus Nature possit et in quo  
 Gracius effundat dotes, exponit in isto,  
 In quo, pubescens tenera lanugine florum,  
 Sideribus stellata suis, succensa rosarum  
 Murice, terra nouum contendit pingere celum.  
 Non ibi nascentis expirat gracia floris  
 Nascendo moriens; nec enim rosa mane puella  
 Vespere languet anus, sed uultu semper eodem  
 Gaudens, eterni iuuenescit munere ueris.  
 Hunc florem non urit hyems, non decoquit estas.  
 Non ibi bacchantis Boree furit ira, nec illic  
 Fulminat aura Nothi, nec spicula grandinis instant.  
 Quicquid depascit oculos uel inhebrat aures,  
 Seducit gustum, nares suspendit odore,  
 Demulcet tactum, retinet locus iste locorum.  
 Iste parit, nullo uexatus uomere, quicquid  
 Militat aduersum morbos nostramque renodat,  
 Instantis morbi proscripta peste, salutem.  
 Non uulgus uerum, uerum miracula gingnens  
 Sponte nec externo tellus adiuta colono,  
 Nature contenta manu Zephirique fauore,  
 Parturit et tanta natorum prole superbit. (I, 55-80)

[There is a place apart, far distant from our region, a place that smiles at the turmoils of our lands. That place by itself has the power of all other places combined; what is in short supply in the others will be found in greater abundance in this place. In this place Nature shows what her bounteous hand can do and where she is most pleased to pour out her gifts. There the earth, clothed in flowers of tender down, glittering with its own stars, afire with purple of roses, tries to fashion a second heaven. There the charm of the budding flower does not perish by a birth-death, for the rose is not a maid at morn, a tired crone by eve, but rejoicing in a never-changing appearance, stays young with the gift of eternal Spring. Winter does not nip this flower nor Summer parch it. The fury of mad Boreas does not rage there; Notus does not bring his lightning nor do haildarts beat upon it. That place of places has and holds everything that feasts the eye, intoxicates the ear, beguiles the taste, catches the nose with its aroma and soothes the touch. Untroubled by ploughshare, this land produces everything that was against disease and, banishing the bane of harassing illness, restores our health. Without the extraneous aid of husbandman, content with Nature's hand and the favouring Zephyrus, the land bears and gives birth not indeed to common produce but to things wondrous and it prides itself on a progeny so large. (trans J. J. Sheridan)]

Another text, theoretically close to the *Decameron*, is Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto*. This text has been considered a repository of knowledge and wisdom, and has certainly influenced the encyclopedic narrative tradition, from Dante on.<sup>39</sup> The allegorical narration of the *Tesoretto* begins just like the *Commedia*, with a forest, but also with a mountain. Brunetto, who has lost his way, finds himself in a forest, and turns to look at the mountain with the mind's eye ("puosi mente"):

E io in tal corrocto,

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<sup>39</sup> On the *Tesoretto*, the most recent and up to date collection is that of Julia Bolton Holloway, ed., *Il tesoretto = The little treasure* (New York: Garland Pub, 1981). Cazalé-Bérard, "Sistema del sapere e istanze narrative nella novellistica toscana medievale, 333, emphasizes the role and importance of the *Tesoretto* in medieval encyclopedic literature.

Pensando a capo chino,  
 Perdei il gran cammino,  
 E tenni a la traversa  
 D'una selva diversa.  
 Ma tornando a la mente  
 Mi volsi e puosi mente  
 Intorno a la montangna;  
 (*Il Tesoretto*, ed. J. Bolton Holloway, vv. 186-193)

[And I, in such anguish,  
 thinking with head downcast,  
 Lost the great highway,  
 And took the crossroad  
 Through a strange wood.  
 But coming to my senses,  
 I turned and collected my wits  
 Near the mountain;  
 (trans. J. Bolton Holloway)]

After having seen all sorts of beast, he meets Nature who tells him of the origins of the cosmos and history. Her iridescent look symbolizes regeneration and universal becoming, just like in the *Anticlaudianus*.

Visions and sightings of the mountain in literature are somewhat everywhere, yet they all seem to have an epistomeological undercurrent meaning and refer mostly to Platonic origins. Ancient Platonism comes to Boccaccio from different sources. From Lattantius (Mazza, 1966: 32, n. IV, 1), Plato's *Timaeus* translated by Calcidius (Mazza, 1966: 23, n. II, 11), Alain de Lille (Mazza, 1966: 20, n. II, 3; 23, n. II, 10; 51, n. VII, 3), Dionysius the Areopagite (*Genealogies* XIV, 18; Mazza, 1966: 28, n. III, 6); from the versions linked to optics studies, the works of Algazel, whose *Tahafut al-Falasifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*) revolutionized islamic epistemology (Mazza, 1966: 17, n. I, 9), Witelo's *Perspectiva* (Mazza, 1966: 24, n. II, 13),<sup>40</sup> and, finally, from the unknown and misterious Hermes Trismegistus (Mazza, 1966: 52, n. VII, 4). This last author, known and quoted by Boccaccio (*Genealogies* V, 21), exposes a religious-mysteric Platonic doctrine, probably inspired by the *Timaeus*. Lattantius is surprised that Hermes identified the divinity almost as the Christian Trinity: Hermes calls his deity as God and Father, he says He is one and unbegotten, author of the world through the Word,

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<sup>40</sup> Witelo, in polish Erazmus Ciolek Witelo, also known as Vitellione, Vitellio or Vitello (Borek, near Breslavia, 1230 c. - post 1280 / ante 1314), dedicated to William of Moerbeke (the famous translator of Aristotle and Proclus) his work on optics in ten books Περὶ ὀπτικῆς (*Peri optikes*), better known as the *Perspectiva* (first published in Nuremberg in 1535), which deals with diffraction and other physical phenomena of the light and was completed between 1270 and 1278. The *Perspectiva* is largely based on the arabic works of Alhazen and contains ideas related, on the one hand, to epistemology, as the way not only to see objects but also to understand them, and, on the other, to psychology, such as the embrional idea of the subconscious. This work is mainly influenced by neoplatonic metaphysics, as Witelo maintains the existence of forms and bodies, linked together by causality, and emanated by God as intelligible light. He distinguishes divine light from sensitive light, the latter being a manifestation of the former and representing it in the sensitive entities of the cosmos. Witelo's ideas conform to those of Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon, yet they will have an influence on scientists and philosophers such as Tycho Brahe, Kepler, Patrizi, Galilei, Descartes and Huygens. See Witelo, *Witelonis Perspectivae Liber Quintus = Book V of Witelo's Perspectiva: an English Translation, with Introduction and Commentary and Latin Edition of the First Catoptrical Book of Witelo's Perspectiva*, ed. A. Mark Smith (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1983).

and made divine to manifest Himself; He made man in His image, making him part divine and part mortal (*Epitome* IV; I, 6; IV, 6; II, 10; VI, 25). Lactantius also found in Hermes' thought the theory of the immortality of the soul (VII, 13) as well as the chronological data on the end of time in surprisingly Christian terms (VII, 18). Even just from these few aspects described by Lactantius, it seems that both the religious character and the Platonism of Boccaccio's theological poetry derive from Hermes Trismegistus rather than from other forms of platonism or Plotinus's *Enneads*. If Plotinus' text deeply affected the Renaissance thought, we do not know if it was known to the certaldese. In any case, Boccaccio seems to be a precursor of that Neo-Platonic Renaissance humanism that placed man at the center of the universe, as a separate semi-divine entity endowed with all the potentialities to rise to heaven (cf. chap. 1).

*"Con gli occhi riguardando e con la mente:" The Minor Works*

After having looked at the philosophical and literary traditions which possibly influenced the representation of the vision of the mountain and the metaphor of the journey in the *Decameron*, we can now consider the narrative experience of some of the characters in Boccaccio's minor texts. Boccaccio's intention to write a text which provides a certain type of knowledge—be it moral, philosophical, or practical—is even clearer when compared to the narrative parables of the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, *Amorosa visione*, and *Filocolo*. These so-called minor texts clearly represent a symbolic journey toward the attainment of a certain knowledge and establish the necessary premises for the journey of knowledge in the *Decameron*.<sup>41</sup>

The *Amorosa visione* begins as the account of a dream: "In ciò vegghiando, in le membra mi venne / non usato sopor tanto soave, / ch'alcun di loro in sé non si sostenne" (I, 16-18).<sup>42</sup> The Platonic vision of solemn and wise revelations begins precisely with

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. Analyses of Boccaccio's minor works in the perspective of a general reinterpretation of the *Decameron* can be found in Gagliardi, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, and Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta*.

<sup>42</sup> Giuseppe Velli, "L'Ameto e la pastorale: il significato della forma," in M. Cottino-Jones, ed., *Boccaccio: Secoli Di Vita: Atti Del Congresso Internazionale: Boccaccio 1975, Università Di California, Los Angeles 17 - 19 Ottobre, 1975* (Ravenna: Longo, 1977), 67-80, analyzes the combination of the pastoral with the dream vision modality in the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*. Another great dream of the so-called Boccaccio's minor production is the *Corbaccio*. Here, the visionary poetical language reveals transcendental truths hidden in the several frameworks of the work. According to E. L. Giusti, *Dall'amore cortese alla comprensione: il viaggio ideologico di Giovanni Boccaccio dalla "Caccia di Diana" al "Decameron"* (Milano: LED, 1999), 58 ff., the narrative experience of the narrator of the *Corbaccio* unfolds throughout the comprehension of the reality in which he lives. On the medieval vision poetry in general, see H. R. Patch, *The Other World According to Descriptions in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge: Mass., Harvard University press, 1950); K. L. Lynch, *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy, and Literary Form* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1988); D. D. R. Owen, *The Vision of Hell; Infernal Journeys in Medieval French Literature* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1971); P. Piehler, *The Visionary Landscape: A Study in Medieval Allegory*. London: Edward Arnold, 1971); F. X. Newman, *Somnium: Medieval Theories of Dreaming and the Form of Vision Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University, Dept. of English, 1962). On the *Decameron*, in particular, see B. Jones, "Dreams and Ideology: *Decameron* IV,6," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 10 (1977-1978): 149-161; F. Cardini, "Sognare a Firenze fra '300 e '400," *Quaderni medievali* 9 (1980): 86-120; V. Branca, "L'Amorosa Visione (tradizione, significati, fortuna)," *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa* ser. II, vol. 11 (1942): 20-47. On the Islamic tradition of divinatory art, and on its influence into the medieval Italian tradition of visions, see also the recent studies by V. Cappozzo, "Islamic Intersections: the Conquest of Dream Sciences in Medieval Italian

unexpected drowsiness; the eyelids are lowered as if made heavy by the torpor of the senses, while the mind is raised up, like at the beginning of Hermes Trismegistus' vision in which the eager initiate is instructed by Poimandres on the "things that are." Besides being a sort of dialogue between master and follower (Poimandres and Hermes, respectively), the mysteric vision consists in a sort of lesson about the origins of the world, about things that are, and takes place through the modalities of listening and seeing: to see and to hear, then, are the key vehicles for the communication of knowledge (*Corp. Herm.* I.1).<sup>43</sup>

The dream of the *Amorosa visione* is also a journey of the mind ("Move nuovo disio la nostra mente, / donna gentile, a volervi narrare / quel che Cupido graziosamente / in vision li piacque di mostrare / all'alma mia, per voi, bella, ferita / con quel piacer che ne' vostri occhi appare" [I, 1-6]), in which the narrator sees his own soul separating from the body ("Così dormendo, in su liti salati / mi vidi correr, non so che temendo / pavido e solo in quelli abbandonati, / or qua or là, null'ordine tenendo" [I, 22-25]).<sup>44</sup> The first stage of the journey consists in the renunciation of earthly goods, which, as we shall see, will never be totally abandoned by the narrator, and in entering a wonderful castle placed on a 'high ground:'

– Ecco –, risposi, – donna, il mio disio  
 è di cercar quel ben che tu prometti,  
 se a' tuoi passi di dietro m'invio –.  
 – Lascia –, diss'ella, – adunque i van diletti  
 e seguitami verso *quell'altura*  
 ch'opposta vedi qui a' nostri petti –.  
 Allor lasciar pareami ogni paura  
 e darmi tutto a seguir costei,  
 abbandonando la strana pianura.  
 Poi che salito fui dietro a costei  
 non già per molto spazio, il viso alzai  
 istato basso infin li verso i piei:  
 rimirandomi avanti, i' mi trovai  
 venuto a piè d'un nobile castello,  
 sopra al sogliar del quale io mi fermai.  
 Egli era grande ed altissimo e bello  
 e spazioso, avvegna che alquanto  
 tenebroso paresse entrando in quello. (I, 46-63)

The neophyte turns his eyes up, and his path toward knowledge is qualified, not surprisingly, as a "cammino" of the soul whose points of departure and arrival are located

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Miscellanies," paper presented at *The 39th Annual Medieval Studies Workshop*, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, October 14-16, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> B. P. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, with Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> On dreams and visions in the Middle ages, see S. F. Kruger, *Il sogno nel medioevo* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1996); T. Gregory, ed., *I sogni nel medioevo seminario internazionale Roma, 2-4 ottobre 1983* (Roma: Ed. dell'Ateneo, 1985). In particular, see how Boccaccio deals with dreams in the par. *De somno* in his *Genealogis*, in which he mentions classical texts, Macrobius, and biblical texts. Specifically, Boccaccio draws on the aristotelian theories of the somatic stimulation at the origin of dreams.



from the bottom to the top (notice "lassuso"/ "quaggiuso" in emphasized rhyme position, at the end of the line):

Ed ella allora: – Più mirabil cosa  
veder vuoi prima che giunghi *lassuso*,  
dove *l'anima* tua fia gloriosa.  
Noi cominciammo pur testé *quaggiuso*  
ad entrar a quel ben: quest'è la porta:  
entra sicuro omai nel *cammin* chiuso. (I, 67-72)

[And she in reply: A still more wondrous thing  
will you see before you reach the high place  
where your soul will be in glory.  
We have only just begun down here  
to accede to that good; this is the gateway:  
now enter confidently on this secret path. (trans. Hollander-Hampton-Frankel)]

As in Platonic visions, the journey of the soul (or of the mind) is directed upwards and starts from a mountain, or from a hill (cf. *Anticlaudianus* above). Afterwards, in a beautiful portrait which one would easily define allegorical, seven women appear to encircle Wisdom ("Là vid'io pinta con sottil diviso / una donna piacente nell'aspetto, / soave sguardo avea e dolce riso." IV, 25-27). They are the seven liberal arts ("Ma dal sinistro e dal suo destro lato / sette donne vid'io, dissimiglianti / l'una dall'altra in atto ed in parato" [IV, 34-36]). With this representation, Boccaccio seems to accept the traditional hierarchy of the arts as well as the superiority of the speculative ones (philosophy in particular) with respect to those related to literature, such as poetry.<sup>45</sup>

In the *Amorosa visione*, the narrative dynamic related to sight is fundamental. The peculiar language that focuses on the action and direction of the eyes is particularly evident when it comes to the narration of the unfortunate mythological figures that probably inspired Petrarch's *Triumphs*, and confirms that we are constantly in the presence of a text of epistemological significance:

Quella parte dov'io or mi voltai  
con gli *occhi* riguardando e con la *mente*,  
di storie piena la vidi e d'assai. (XV, 1-3)

[That place to which I now turned my attention,  
looking with my eyes and with my mind,  
was, I saw, full of many most worthy histories.]

Levando adunque gli *occhi* inver l'altura  
vidi quel Giove che 'n forma di toro  
non già rubesto mutò sua figura... (XVI, 52-54)

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<sup>45</sup> The inferiority attitude of the writer/poet, *vis-à-vis* thinkers/philosophers, as Dante and Petrarch are considered, is also evident in the defense of poetry in the *Genealogies* (XV, 10; Intr., XIV, 19 e 22; XV, 6). In chap. IV, Boccaccio mentions Avicenna among other philosophers. In a note to lines 82-88, Branca maintains that Boccaccio be indifferent to arabic philosophers and compares such an allusion to the brief mention of Avicenna in *Rime*, 86 and *Esposizioni* IV, esp. litt., 365. According to Branca, Boccaccio's disdain for arabic culture will grow stronger over the years. If Dante's veneration is evident, Boccaccio's knowledge of Averroes is limited to very brief mentions, so that Branca casts doubt on the possibility that Boccaccio could have actually read his texts (cf. *Esp.* IV, esp. litt. 253; IV, esp. litt. 368 sgg.). Even Petrarch was suspicious against Averroes (cf. *De suis ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, Parigi, 1906, p. 68 ff.).

[Raising my eyes on high,  
I saw great Jove, who had changed his shape  
for that of a bull, but was not yet fierce . . .]

Io, che andava avanti *riguardando*,  
vidi quivi Teseo nel Laberinto  
al Minutauro pauroso andando (XXII, 4-6)

Nel quale, avendo già l'animo pregno  
del piacer di Adriana, lei lasciare  
*vedea* dormendo e girsene al suo regno.  
Gridando desta la *vedeva* stare,  
e lui chiamava piangendo e soletta  
sopr'un deserto scoglio in mezzo mare (XXII, 13-18)

It is not possible, here, to comment on all the passages where the author evidently insists on terms related to 'sight;' passages which, after all, are not alien to vision literature. What is particularly striking, instead, is the dynamic of the observation, which involves the mythological characters as a sort of transfer mechanism. In other words, the mythological characters establish a particular relationship of observation with each other in the same representation:

Spesso li suo' cape' con ordinato  
stile acconciava e, della sua bellezza  
prima *l'occhio allo specchio consigliato*,  
adorna venia innanzi alla mattezza  
bestiale... (XXII, 34-38)

Era di dietro a lei, *con gli occhi fissi*  
*sopra 'l suo padre*, Mirra scellerata,  
né da lui punto li teneva scissi. (XXII, 43-45)

Narcisso vidi quivi ancor sedendo  
sopra la nitida acqua a riguardarsi,  
di sé oltre 'l dovuto modo ardendo. (XXII, 55-57)

Yet another function of the gaze and sight is to involve the erotic dimension in the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*. Sight, here, is mostly that of the mind. Yet it becomes so "keen" as to search the innermost intricacies of the female material body:

Egli poi rimira le braccia e le bellissime mani non isdicevoli al formoso busto, e lei cinta d'uliva considera, e in ogni parte mirando, ove potesse entrare *la sottile vista*, di passare s'argomenta. Così fatte bellezze li fanno migliori sperare le nascose e in sé o l'uso o la vista di quelle con più focoso appetito cercare. Egli si pensa che cotale apparisse Danne agli occhi di Febo o Medea a que' di Giansone, e più volte dice fra sé: - O felice colui a cui è data sì nobile cosa a possedere! - E quindi all'altra salta con lo 'ntelletto e lei, come stupefatto, per lungo spazio rimira, lodando l'abito, le maniere e la bellezza di quella, simile a qualunque deà; e se quivi la sua Lia non vedesse, quasi essa essere estimerebbe (Comedia ninfe XII, 15-17)

Moreover, the shape of the body and the finest clothing of the women are such to encourage the exercising of sight and discovering, with the power of imagination, the

body's hidden secrets. Here, however, the intellect is in charge of discovering the hidden parts, and not the physical eye:

E poi ch'egli con sottili avvedimenti ha le scoperte parti guardate, alle coperte più *lo 'ntelletto* che l'occhio dispone. Egli non guari di sotto la scollatura discerne le rilevate parti in picciola altezza e con *l'occhio mentale* trapassa dentro a' vestimenti e con diletto vede chi di quello rilievo porga cagione, non meno dolci sentendole ch'elle siano (*Commedia ninfe* XII, 27-28)

In this case, it is the eye of the mind that sees, with the aid of imagination, what is covered:

E per quelle aperture mettendo l'occhio, di vedere s'argomenta ciò che uno bianchissimo vestimento, al verde dimorante di sotto, gli nega, e ben conosce che il frutto di ciò c'ha veduto è riposto *nelle parti nascose*; il quale non altri che Giove reputa degno di possedere (*Commedia ninfe* XII, 30)

Attracted by the feminine beauty, Ameto's staring at the nymph is a real apotheosis of epistemological virtues (cf. fig. 9). Further in the text, however, the story of Mopsa (Wisdom? Poetry?), who is in love with Affron, temporarily subverts and parodies the action of knowledge. To convince her lover to come towards her on the sea, Mopsa does not hesitate to undress in front of his eyes (*Comedia ninfe* XVIII, 33-35).<sup>46</sup>

Despite the presence of the allegorical veil, the power and variety of human actions are strongly represented in the *Amorosa visione* in all their earthly dimensions, as we will then see also in the *Decameron*. It is no coincidence, therefore, that we can hear from a character like Orpheus, whose story notoriously ends tragically, the praise of Love described as a god who speaks to the wise, to those who can listen to him (the "savi"). The essence of Love, however, principally consists of the light that pervades Love himself and the woman loved by the poet:

Amor, *de' savi graziosa luce*,  
tu se' colui che 'ngentilisci i cori,  
tu se' colui che 'n noi valore induce.  
Per te si fugano angosce e dolori,  
per te ogni allegrezza ed ogni festa  
surge e riposa dove tu dimori.  
O spegnitor d'ogni cosa molesta,  
o *dolce luce mia*, questa Erudice  
lunga stagion con gioia la mi presta! (XXIII, 16-24)

We can also listen to the Platonic metaphors of knowledge in the heartfelt words of the abandoned Briseis:

Non mi lasciar morire in tanti guai,  
Acchille, aggi piatà di me dolente  
che t'amo più che donna uom giammai!  
Deh, guardami con *l'occhio della mente*,  
e prendati pietà di me alquanto (XXIV, 37-41)

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<sup>46</sup> After this performance, can one be completely sure that Mopsa personify knowledge, as the traditional interpretation maintains? (cf. Branca, *Comedia ninfe*, n. 12, p. 925).

In the path towards knowledge of the *Amorosa visione*, two different movements are spatially contrasted. On the one hand, there is the ascent of the mind to the heights of knowledge: this is a unidirectional movement based on the stability of spiritual goods, a movement that allows to reach a long-lasting and all-encompassing knowledge. On the other hand, there is the circular movement of the world represented by the movement that inspired the theme of the Wheel of Fortune:

Ivi vid'io dipinta, in forma vera,  
 colei che muta ogni mondano stato,  
 tal volta lieta e tal con trista cera,  
 col viso tutto d'un panno fasciato,  
 e leggermente con le man *volvea*  
*una gran rota* verso il manco lato.

...  
*volvendo* sempre ora 'n dietro ora avanti  
 la rota sua senza alcun riposo,  
 con essa dando gioia e talor pianti.  
 «Ogni uom che vuol *montarci su* sia oso  
 di farlo, ma quand'io 'l *gitto a basso*  
 inverso me non torni allor cruccioso.

...  
 ... Così immaginai  
 ch'ella dicesse, perché riguardando  
 dintorno ad essa vi vid'io assai,  
 i qua' *su per la rota aderpicando*  
 s'andavan con le man con tutto ingegno,  
 fino alla sommità d'essa *montando*.  
 Saliti su pareo dicesser: «Regno»;  
 altri *cadendo en l'infima cornice*  
 pareo dicessero: «Io son senza regno» (XXXI, 16-21; 28-33; 37-45)

The man who stops to contemplate worldly goods has no guarantees of being able to maintain them, and thus he is always metaphorically forced to move from top to bottom and vice versa. Today he has the highest glory; tomorrow everything is gone causing him to fall into disfavour (cf. fig. 7).<sup>47</sup> This movement, therefore, is cyclical (from bottom to top and vice versa). The knowledge of things related to it is not supposed to last. One owns this knowledge, only to lose it again; it is an expression of the precarious things of existence, the fruit of knowledge is apprehended in the wrong way, with a clouded mind. The motif of the power of earthly glory is expressed through the recounting of the grandeur of human actions as witnessed by poets and historians, together with the power

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<sup>47</sup> On the theme of Fortune, cf. Dante, *Inf.* VII, 85-96; V. Cioffari, "The Conception of Fortune in the *Decameron*," *Italica* 17 (1940): 129-137; V. Cioffari, "The Function of Fortune in Dante, Boccaccio and Machiavelli," *Italica* 24 (1947): 1-13; Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Literature*; Patch, *The Tradition of the Goddess Fortuna in Medieval Philosophy*; T. Barolini, "The Wheel of the *Decameron*," *Romance Philology* 36 (1983): 521-539; R. L. Greene, s.v. "Fortune," in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 3, Joseph R. Strayer, ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1983), 145-47; M. J. Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the Decameron* (Saratoga, Calif: Anna Libri, 1979), chp. 2. On the image of the wheel of Fortune, Boethius, Lancelot and Dante's *Commedia*, see G. Desideri, "Et indefessa vertigo," *Critica del testo* 1 (2005): 389-426. On Boethius, J. Marenbon, *Boethius*, Great medieval thinkers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

of Fortune, which exalts and brings down as the Wheel. This leaves no doubt about the Boethian inspiration of the *Amorosa visione*:

E' mi par pur che tal vista sospinto  
t'abbia in falsa oppinion *la mente*,  
ed ogni altro dovuto ne sia stinto.  
Adunque torna in te debitamente:  
ricorditi che morte col dubioso  
colpo già vinse tutta questa gente.  
Ver è ch'alcun più ch'altro valoroso  
meritò fama, ma se 'l mondo dura  
e' perirà il suo nome glorioso. (XXX, 16-24)

Per quel potrai veder vero, pensando  
quanto sia van quel ben che' vostri petti  
va senza ragion nulla stimolando;  
onde, seguendo que' beni imperfetti  
*con cieca mente*, morendo perdete  
il potere acquistare poi i perfetti.  
In tal disio mai non si sazia sete:  
dunque a quel ben, che sempre altrui tien sazio  
e per cui acquistar nati ci sete,  
dovrebbe ognuno, mentre ch'egli ha spazio,  
affannarsi ad avere.... (XXX, 55-65)

Finally, the vision reaches a Boethianly canonical conclusion:

Intendi adunque e vedi che felice  
costei non puote giammai fare alcuno,  
posto che del mondan sia donatrice. (XXXII, 34-36)  
Ricchezza adunque, quand'ella è assai,  
più fa indigente il suo possessitore,  
con più pensier, con più cura e più guai.  
Colui che vuol per dignitate onore,  
veggian, se la Fortuna gliel concede,  
s'egli avrà quel che e' disia nel core.  
Or non *agli occhi di qualunque vede*  
è manifesto che tornan viziosi  
tantosto che neuna ne possiede? (XXXII, 58-66)

While Boethius minimized earthly glory with the lure of spiritual goods whose enjoyment can overcome the action of Fortune—she dispenses, instead, material goods<sup>48</sup>—Boccaccio emphasizes the importance of earthly glory, so evident in the deeds of ancient heroes praised by the classical authors. In the *Amorosa visione*, earthly glory stands out displaying all its fascination in the passionate, erudite descriptions of the protagonists of the myth parading in front of the author. The enjoyment of spiritual goods appears to never completely exceed the full enjoyment of earthly glory.<sup>49</sup> Finally,

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Boethius, *De consolatione philosophie*, II, 5. But see also Dante, *Convivio* IV, xi; *Inferno* VI, 67; *Monarchia* II, ix, 8.

<sup>49</sup> In an advanced age, Boccaccio will be more sensitive to the fascination of earthly glory, as it appears in his letters in general (Branca, *Profilo*, 186), or in his correspondence with Petrarch (Branca, *Profilo*, 187; Billanovich, 35).

according to a revisited Boethian perspective, the theme of Fortune is also linked to the personal and unfortunate experience of the poet. As we have seen, Fortune makes harm only to those who hold on to worldly goods, yet the autobiographical theme of poverty and misfortune is developed by Boccaccio along the lines of Boethius' own misfortune:<sup>50</sup>

Tra l'altre creature a cui mi pare  
dover portar più odio, questa è dessa,  
però ch'ogni sua forza ed operare  
ell'ha contra di me opposta e messa:  
né prieghi, né saper, né forza alcuna  
pacificar mi può giammai con essa. (XXXI, 52-57)

Il dir Fortuna è un semplice nome,  
il posseder quel ch'ella dà è vano,  
o senza frutto affanno se ne prome. (XXXI, 73-75)

The knowledge that the narrator attains at the end of his journey belongs to the intellect, yet is also entrusted to the guidance of Love. The contemplation of the dance of the famous women provides the poet with an image of love for pleasure which must then be superseded, yet it constitutes a first step towards the intellectual sublimation of Love through the placement of the material object of knowledge in the place where the imaginative faculty operates:

Sempre con *l'occhio* quelle seguitando  
m'andava io, e *dentro lo 'ntelletto*  
*la lor bellezza giva immaginando;*  
e di quella prendea tanto diletto  
in sé, ch'alcuna volta fu che io,  
a tal piacer, credetti far subbietto  
alla mia voglia quiveritta il mio  
libero arbitrio: ma pur si ritenne  
con vigorosa forza il mio disio. (XLI, 73-75)

The passion of the poet in his service of love concludes with the description of the first encounter with Fiammetta ("onesta e graziosa umilmente, / una donna sedere il cui aspetto / tutto dintorno a sé facea lucente" [XLIV, 37-39]) whose ineffability takes, once again, the form of a dream, the same dream wherefrom the narrative had begun:

Dond'io fra me spesse volte dicea:  
«Sogni tu? o se' qui come ti pare?»  
«Anzi ci son», poi fra me rispondea.  
In cotal guisa spesso a disgannare  
me quella donna gentile abbracciava  
e con disio la mi pareva basciare,  
fra me dicendo ch'io pur non sognava,  
posto che mi pareva grande tanto  
la cosa, ch'io pur di sognar dubbiava. (XLVI, 34-42)

The soul, thus, has finished her journey. Love has opened her eyes to knowledge:

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<sup>50</sup> Before Boethius, however, Ovid had already experimented and described the misfortunes of the goddess of chance: cfr. *Tristia* V, 8, 1-7.

la donna inver di me disse: – Ora dimmi,  
 come venisti qui, *anima mia?* –  
 Ond'io a lei: – Poi *ch'Amore aprimmi*  
*gli occhi a conoscer* la vostra biltate,  
 a cui io per mia voglia consentimmi,  
 nel cerchio della vostra potestate  
 entrato con affanno e con sospiri,  
 sempre sperando en la vostra pietate,  
 ò lui pregato che a' miei martiri  
 dia fine grazioso, ed e' menato  
 m'ha qui per fine porre a' miei disiri. (XLVI, 52-60)

But the vision, as in dreams, will remain imperfect, leaving in the heart the desire to repeat the experience, perhaps after death:

. . . e già saria finita  
 la vita mia, se non che a quel loco  
 veracemente spero che reddita  
 ancor farò *con essenza perfetta*,  
 allor prendendo quella gioia compita,  
 nella quale *ora dormendo imperfetta*  
*stetti*. E questo *l'amorosa mente*  
 solo disia e fermamente aspetta,  
 ove Colui, che di tutto è potente,  
 mi rechi e servi nella vostra grazia  
 quanto vi piace, madonna piacente,  
 nella qual sempre fia *la mente sazia*. (XLIX, 77-88)

Even the song of Teogapen in the *Commedia delle ninfe* well illustrates the beneficial effects of the power of Love, here personified by the goddess Venus. Love elevates the human soul, makes it generous, just and wise. Love affects the intellect and makes it forget worldly goods;<sup>51</sup> it also manages to regulate the passions so as to prevent them from falling into excesses.<sup>52</sup> To benefit from Love's virtues is nothing but going 'up' to Love's kingdom: "Con questo poi al suo beato regno / tira chi segue lei, la qual seguire / con ogni forza e con ciascuno ingegno / ci dobbiamo sforzar; sì che salire, / quando che sia, possiamo alle bellezze / del regno suo . . ." (XI, 70-75). Ameto's song (ch. XVI), then, summarizes the stages of the journey and the deployment of the civilizing power of Love. Love removes men from bestiality and error:

E tu, da me non conosciuto, Amore,  
 da poco tempo in là, il qual m'hai tratto  
 dalla vita selvaggia e dallo errore,  
 istato rozzo infino allora e matto,  
 ché col suo canto e con gli occhi la via  
 m'aperse Lia a darmiti *con atto*

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<sup>51</sup> "E quivi dove il raggio d'esta giace, / calcati i ben mondan con lo 'ntelletto, / sollecito si sale all'alta pace" (XI, 40-42); "L'animo suo in alto sollevando / magnanimo diventa, giusto e saggio, / a tutti eguale, ciascuno onorando" (64-66).

<sup>52</sup> ". . . e Bacco in lui, sì come dio sospetto, / e ancor Cerer prende con misura, / temendo il lor disordinato effetto. / Negli ornamenti ha sollecita cura / ched e' non passin la ragion dovuta, / fuor ch'adornar la divina figura; / sempre fuggendo, quanto può, l'arguta / voglia del generare al qual s'accende / quanto concede la regola avuta" (XI, 43-51).

*non istinguibil della mente mia,  
non notar ciò che la mia voce canta,  
ma ciò che 'l cuor, subietto a te, disia (XVI, 22-30)*

The transformation from beast to lover happens through the singing of poetry and through the sight of beauty (the physical action of the eye); then the act of the mind completes this epistemological transformation. Thus, in changing from brute to man, Ameto uses the word "intelletto" when he understands the spiritual-allegorical meaning of his story and recognizes that the seven cardinal and theological virtues are symbolized by the nymphs:

Egli, in se stesso facendo della sua primitiva vita comparazione alla presente, sé medesimo schernendo ramemora; e quale, tra' fauni e i satiri, per li boschi già sé col tempo perdesse cacciando vitupera; e qui la paura debitamente avuta de' cani delle donne ancora nel pensiero lo spaventa, poi fra sé si ride del suo ardire avuto a prendere il laudevole amore; e con vista serena *conosce* l'udita prima canzone della sua Lia. Quindi i canti de' pastori, che solamente l'orecchie di lui aveano dilettrate, quanto sieno utili al cuore sente con sommo frutto. Similmente vede che sieno le ninfe, le quali più all'occhio che allo 'ntelletto erano piaciute, e ora *allo 'ntelletto piacciono* più che all'occhio (*Commedia ninfe* XLVI, 2-3).

Thus, Boccaccio's so-called minor works give us a picture of an author who has already developed his epistemological thinking and, moreover, has already experimented in his poetry and literary representation of the vision. Finally, in the *Filocolo*, Florio's personal development toward the acquisition of maturity takes him from the *immaginare* to the *vero conoscimento* and wisdom.<sup>53</sup> Before moving to the *Decameron*, then, Boccaccio experimented his poetic art in describing and representing literary experiences through the means of an epistemological language. These works benefited from a Platonic lexicon related to the language of intellectual vision. Although filtered by Augustinian Platonism and the Fathers of the Church, these texts of Boccaccio turned out to acquire recognizable Dantean watermarks. The mechanisms of the mind and imagination are all already there, ready to be adapted to new contexts, and to convey additional meanings. The same modalities in the use of a certain epistemological language will be also recognizable elsewhere; particularly, they will be evident in the *Decameron's* prose as useful means to discover various connotative mechanisms and different intents.

### *Filippo and Ghismonda's Voyage*

Boccaccio, once again, sets the *Decameron* in relation to Dante's masterpiece in the introduction to Day IV by mentioning the modest style of his tales which clearly alludes to the modest style of the *Commedia*. Regarding the "stile umilissimo e rimesso," there is a direct and obvious reference to the "remissus" and "humilis" style of the *Epistle to Can Grande*.<sup>54</sup> Now, Boccaccio deals with the defence of his work from the "wind" of

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<sup>53</sup> R. Morosini, *Per difetto reintegrare. Una lettura del Filocolo di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Ravenna, Ed. Longo: 2004) provides an original reading of the *Filocolo* by describing the gradual process of Florio's coming of age, from his fallacious "imaging" to his acquisition of "real knowledge."

<sup>54</sup> "Nam si ad materiam respiciamus, a principio horribilis et foetida est, quia *Infernus*; in fine prospera, desiderabilis et grata, quia *Paradisus*; ad modum loquendi, remissus est modus et humilis, quia loquutio vulgaris, in qua et mulierculae communicant" (Dante, *Epistole*, XIII, 31). On the *Epistle to Can Grande* cf. Hollander, "Imitative distance," in *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, 25;



envy, which affects even those who simply act in absolute humility. Boccaccio, again, describes the stream of his thinking by using the figurative language of the voyage, in this case by talking about his journey as an author:

Per ciò che, fuggendo io e sempre essendomi di fuggire ingegnato il fiero impeto di questo *rabbioso spirito*, non solamente *pe' piani*, ma ancora *per le profondissime valli* tacito e nascoso mi sono ingegnato d'andare. Il che assai manifesto può apparire a chi le presenti novelle riguarda, le quali, non solamente in fiorentin volgare e in prosa scritte per me sono e senza titolo, ma ancora *in istilo umilissimo e rimesso* quanto il più possono. Né per tutto ciò l'essere da *cotal vento* fieramente scrollato, anzi presso che diradicato e tutto da' morsi della invidia esser lacerato, non ho potuto cessare. Per che assai manifestamente posso comprendere quello esser vero che sogliono i savi dire, che sola la miseria è senza invidia nelle cose presenti (IV.Intr.3)

Boccaccio confines himself to traveling through plains and deep valleys without aspiring to reach the highest peaks of literary excellence. Is this just a modesty topos? Or does one find hidden in the language an intent to work as an *accessus* to the reading of the tales, a function that is also reflected in the tone and apparently modest literary quality of the tales? The allusion to the humble style of the stories seeks to establish a comparison with the 'modest' style of the *Commedia*, and the allusion to "walking through the plains," instead of climbing a mountain, reinforces the comparison that Boccaccio wants to establish with Dante's literary production in order to distance himself from him. As a matter of fact, certain analogies with Dantean similes concerning the image of the wind did not elude the critics.<sup>55</sup>

In this introduction to Day Four, the author intervenes in the narration by truly becoming a storyteller, yet insisting in pointing out that the short story he is about to tell, not being a complete story, is not intended to be considered like the others. Moreover, Boccaccio sets himself in the same predicament of other characters of his work who cope with difficult situations. In fact, the defense against the scathing disapproval of his detractors is reminiscent, for its language, of similar defenses made by the protagonists of the Sixth Day, characters who escape with their intelligent responses from the danger and the *motti* of their antagonists (cf. chapter 3). The envious words of the detractors, as well as taking the form of a mighty wind, are also described with the same words with which the *motti* were described ("... diradicato e tutto da' *morsi* della invidia esser lacerato..." [IV.intr.4]; "Adunque da cotanti e da così fatti soffiamenti, da così *atroci denti*, da così aguti, valorose donne, mentre io ne' vostri servigi milito, sono sospinto, molestato e infino nel vivo trafitto" [IV.intr.8]; cfr. VI.3.3: "... vi voglio ricordare essere la natura de' *motti* cotale, che essi come la pecora *morde* deono così *mordere* l'uditore..."). Therefore, if he wants to defend himself and get out of this embarrassing predicament, Boccaccio must respond with a *motto*; namely, a *motto* that, this time, takes the form of a tale, that of Filippo Balducci. Thus, Boccaccio's response will be simple, smart and quick like the *motti* of the *Decameron*: "... senza rispondere quanto si converrebbe, con alcuna *leggiera risposta* torgli dagli orecchi, e questo far senza indugio" (IV.intr.9).

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A. R. Ascoli, "Tradurre l'allegoria: *Convivio* II, 1," *Critica del testo* 14 (2011): *Dante, oggi*, vol. 1: 153-175.

<sup>55</sup> "Questo tuo grido farà come vento, / che le più alte cime più percuote; / e ciò non fa d'onor poco argomento" (*Par.* 17, 133-135).

Even in this novella-*motto* is possible to identify mechanisms and strategies of knowledge production. After the death of his wife, Filippo Balducci chooses, precisely, to climb a mountain somewhere around Florence in order to devote himself to contemplative life:

Costui per la morte della sua donna tanto sconsolato rimase, quanto mai alcuno altro amata cosa perdendo rimanesse. E veggendosi di quella compagnia la quale egli più amava rimasto solo, del tutto si dispose di non volere più essere al mondo, ma di darsi al servizio di Dio, e il simigliante fare del suo piccol figliuolo. Per che, data ogni sua cosa per Dio, senza indugio se n'andò sopra Monte Asinaio, e quivi in una piccola celletta si mise col suo figliuolo, col quale di limosine in digiuni e in orazioni vivendo, sommamente si guardava di non ragionare là dove egli fosse d'alcuna temporal cosa né di lasciarne alcuna vedere, acciò che esse da così fatto servizio nol traessero, ma sempre della gloria di vita eterna e di Dio e de' santi gli ragionava, nulla altro che sante orazioni insegnandoli; e in questa vita molti anni il tenne, mai della cella non lasciandolo uscire, né alcuna altra cosa che sé dimostrandogli. (IV.intr.14-15)

Because of his congenital *naïveté* and absolute ignorance of the world deliberately induced by his father, Filippo's son can be certainly associated with the figure of Ameto, who at the beginning of his journey is just a brute who leaves in a primordial and wild state of nature. The cognitive process activated in this mini-tale is comparable to that, more complex though, of Ameto in the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, not only for the same modalities of the process of falling in love, which is conducted through sight,<sup>56</sup> but also for the epistemological function that the power of love operates in the individual. In Filippo Balducci's apologue, however, the cognitive process endowed with a primordial character and, like in Ameto, bound by the process of getting out of the primitive state, occurs through a mechanism of descent which is not merely geographical. Filippo's son *descends* from the mountain together with his father, and when in town he learns of the existence of things that he has never known before. By looking at many different objects (buildings, houses, churches) a desire to know their names arouses in him. One may recall Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, in which the process of knowledge is configured as the ability to assign a name to things. However, looking at the women brings out the innate "concupiscent" appetite in Filippo's son, an appetite that causes the desire for knowledge to transform into a desire for associating with them. The mechanisms of the vision—the privileged means of knowledge—are triggered during Filippo's and his son's journey down the mountain, and are already in full operation when they arrive in town. Yet, when Filippo's son sees the women, and his father asks him to lower the "eyes on the ground" while changing into "goslings" the name of the women, the father's words clip the wings of his son's desire: "Figliuol mio, *bassa gli occhi in terra*, non le guatare, ch'elle son mala cosa" (IV.intr.21). Upon sight of the women, however, a particular cognitive mechanism is triggered ("Maravigliosa cosa a udire! Colui che mai più alcuna veduta non n'avea, non curatosi de' palagi, non del bue, non del cavallo, non dell'asino, non de' danari né d'altra cosa che veduta avesse, subitamente disse: - Padre mio, io vi priego che voi facciate che io abbia una di quelle papere" [IV.intr.24]). The natural appetite is associated with intelligence according to certainly innate modalities of human development. Filippo's ingenuity is no longer enough to overwhelm both the natural appetite and the intellect of his son: "Disse il padre: - Io non voglio; tu non sai donde elle

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<sup>56</sup> These, in turn, may be traditional too; just think, for instance, about the vernacular lyric tradition and the rules theorized by Andreas Capellanus.

s'imbeccano -; e sentì incontanente più aver di forza la natura che il suo ingegno; e pentessi d'averlo menato a Firenze" (IV.Intr.29).

The cognitive mechanism of Filippo's son, who for the first time feels the desire to love when seeing the women, is reflected, then, in the way Boccaccio describes his own mechanism of falling in love, particularly with the epistemological and psychological processes involved:

Riprenderannomi, morderannomi, lacerrannomi costoro se io, il corpo del quale il ciel produsse tutto atto ad amarvi, e io dalla mia puerizia *l'anima vi disposi* sentendo *la virtù della luce degli occhi vostri*, la soavità delle parole melliflue e la fiamma accesa da' pietosi sospiri, se voi mi piacete o se io di piacervi m'ingegno, e *specialmente guardando* che voi prima che altro piaceste ad un romitello, ad un giovinetto senza sentimento, anzi ad uno animal salvatico? Per certo chi non v'ama, e da voi non desidera d'essere amato, sì come persona che i piaceri né la virtù della naturale affezione né sente né conosce, così mi ripiglia, e io poco me ne curo (IV.Intr.32)

The individual entrusts his soul to the power of his love for a woman. Love attraction, carried out by virtue of the light ("la virtù della luce degli occhi vostri"), and not merely by the sight, goes beyond mere curiosity, but involves the soul and the body, the latter through natural instincts. For Ameto as much as for Boccaccio, the attractive force of the eyes acquires an emphasized position in the process of falling in love, up to the point of becoming almost an inevitable moment of the process, between the spiritual and the physical.

The existence of an ontological duality between the essence of the women and that of the Muses may refer to the hierarchy that exists between things and ideas in the Platonic theory. The former (the women) are finite beings, mortals, and part of the material world; the latter (the Muses) are the eternal patrimony of the Olympic deities. The same duality can be found in the hierarchies of the Pseudo-Dionysius (another author known to Boccaccio; see Mazza, 1966: 28, n. III, 6) in which the entities of the world stand out hierarchically according to their proximity or distance from God, a distance measurable thanks to the quantity and quality of the light He lavishes.<sup>57</sup> The existence and ideal similarity of the women ("cosa che le somigli") are tied to the existence of the Muses. Both entities are necessary, yet on different ontological levels, for life and art:

Che io con le Muse in Parnaso mi debbia stare, affermo che è buon consiglio, ma tuttavia né noi possiam dimorare con le Muse né esse con esso noi; se *quando avviene che l'uomo da lor si parte*, dilettersi di veder *cosa che le somigli*, questo non è cosa da biasimare. Le Muse son donne, e benché le donne quello che le Muse vagliono non vagliano, pure esse hanno nel primo aspetto *simiglianza* di quelle; sì che, quando per altro non mi piacessero, per quello mi dovrebbero piacere. Senza che le donne già mi fur cagione di comporre mille versi, dove le Muse mai non mi furon di farne alcun cagione. Aiutaronmi elle bene e mostraronmi comporre que'mille; e forse a queste cose scrivere, quantunque sieno umilissime, si sono elle venute parecchie volte a starsi meco, in servizio forse e in onore della *simiglianza* che le donne hanno ad esse; per che, queste cose tessendo, né dal *monte Parnaso* né dalle Muse non mi allontano, quanto molti per avventura s'avvisano. (IV.Intr.36)

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<sup>57</sup> In the twelfth century, the Victorine mouvement distinguished itself for the rediscovery of the pseudo-Dionysian theory of the hierarchy of the Being, which they advocate against the chartrian theory of the immanent order of the cosmos as the basis and foundation of reality (cf. M. D. Chenu, *La Teologia nel Dodicesimo Secolo* [Milano: Jaca Book, 1986], 39).

The two species of Muses seem to relate to each other through the concept of *similitudo*, just like the two hierarchies (angelical and ecclesiastical) are related through both their ontological diversity and their likeness of divine creatures.<sup>58</sup>

In summary, the argumentative discourse of the introduction to the Fourth Day benefits from a well-recognized and effective metaphorical language articulated in two stages. In the first stage the envious slanders of Boccaccio's detractors blow like the 'wind,' and are expressed through various metaphors of the wind. In the second stage the movement of going up and down from/to the mountain (the Parnassus or the Mount Asinaio) accompanies the narrative's underlining steps for the understanding of Boccaccio's defense of his work; yet the mechanism of understanding embodied in the experience of Filippo's son finds expression in a downward movement that metaphorizes the descent of the Muses from Mount Olympus to the creative mind of the poet. The lesson that we derive from these lines of argumentation filled with poetic and suggestive language is that Boccaccio's detractor's lies (like the wind) reverse the epistemological process directing it upward and metaphorically bringing the poet (compared to the humble dust) to the top, raising him to heaven. Therefore it is precisely the Muses that must descend from the mountain in order to provide the poet with inspiration, and not the other way around. Perhaps, Boccaccio the poet does not want to be on high; in fact, he is right at home among women. (This, however, does not mean that sometimes he cannot even go to Parnassus.) Although his inspiration is nourished by the heights of poetry, Boccaccio is at ease on earth. But if his detractors insist with their false opinions, their calumnies too can make him fly high:

E volendo per questa volta assai aver risposto, dico che dallo aiuto di Dio e dal vostro, gentilissime donne, nel quale io spero, armato, e di buona pazienza, con esso procederò avanti, dando le spalle a questo vento e lasciandol soffiare; per ciò che io non veggio che di me altro possa avvenire, che quello che della minuta polvere avviene, la quale, spirante turbo, o egli di terra non la muove, o se la muove, *la porta in alto*, e spesse volte sopra le teste degli uomini, sopra le corone dei re e degli imperadori, e talvolta sopra gli alti palagi e sopra le eccelse torri la lascia; delle quali se ella cade, più giù andar non può che il luogo onde levata fu. (IV.Intr.40)

At the beginning of the narrative of the Fourth Day, namely, the first story, one can notice that the dual spatiality of high/low is metaphorized by portraying characters of different social rank. The Prince of Salerno, Tancredi, father of Ghismonda, slays his daughter's lover, Guiscardo, and sends her his heart in a golden goblet. Ghismonda then pours upon it a poisonous distillation, which she drinks and dies. In this tale, we find a character of high social standing, Ghismonda, who lowers herself for love in order to see Guiscardo, a humble servant of her father. Moreover, the two lovers's furtive encounters take place following a movement of ascent and descent, from/to the cave/chamber of Ghismonda with the aid of a rope:

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<sup>58</sup> On the concept of *similitudo* in the Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, see E. Bellini, in Dionigi Areopagita, *Tutte le opere*, intr., p. 38. Such a concept is also shared by hermetic philosophy; according to hermetism, each element of the cosmos is in relation with the entities of the heavens, or with other elements of the cosmos, in virtue of its similarity and thanks to the conception of the universal analogy (cf. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 41; Eco, "La semiosi ermetica e il 'paradigma del velame'," 12-16).

Era allato al palagio del prenze *una grotta cavata nel monte*, di lunghissimi tempi davanti fatta, nella qual grotta dava alquanto lume uno spiraglio fatto per forza nel monte, il quale, per ciò che abbandonata era la grotta, quasi da pruni e da erbe di sopra natevi era riturato; e in questa grotta *per una segreta scala*, la quale era in una delle camere terrene del palagio, la quale la donna teneva, si poteva andare, come che da un fortissimo uscio serrata fosse. Ed era sì fuori delle menti di tutti questa scala, per ciò che di grandissimi tempi davanti usata non s'era, che quasi niuno che ella vi fosse si ricordava; ma Amore, agli occhi del quale niuna cosa è sì segreta che non pervenga, l'aveva nella memoria tornata alla innamorata donna (IV.1.9-10)

Alla qual cosa fornire Guiscardo, prestamente ordinata *una fune* con certi nodi e cappi *da potere scendere e salire* per essa, e sè vestito d'un cuoio che da' pruni il difendesse, senza farne alcuna cosa sentire ad alcuno, la seguente notte allo spiraglio n'andò, e accomandato ben l'uno de' capi della fune ad un forte bronco che nella bocca dello spiraglio era nato, per quello *si collò* nella grotta ed attese la donna" (IV.1.12)

. . . mandate via le sue damigelle e sola serratasi nella camera, aperto l'uscio, *nella grotta discese*, dove trovato Guiscardo, insieme maravigliosa festa si fecero (IV.1.13)

Guiscardo poi, la notte vegnente *su per la sua fune salendo*, per lo spiraglio donde era entrato se n'uscì fuori e tornossi a casa (IV.1.14)

The tale of Ghismonda and Guiscardo plays on the representation of the great-heartedness of the protagonists, who are eventually able to affirm, albeit tragically, the importance of love and desire. Although based entirely on the wisdom learned from the classics, Ghismonda shows an exceptional great-heartedness:

. . . ma, il ver confessando, prima con vere ragioni difender la fama mia e poi con fatti fortissimamente seguire la grandezza dello animo mio. Egli è il vero che io ho amato e amo Guiscardo, e quanto io viverò, che sarà poco, l'amerò; e se appresso la morte s'ama, non mi rimarrò d'amarlo . . . (IV.1.31-32)

Conobbe il prenze la grandezza dell'animo della sua figliuola . . . (IV.1.46)

Between the lines of her rhetoric, one can recognize Boethius' rhetorical discourse on Fortune. Not surprisingly, in Ghismonda's speech appears a first hint to the theme of Fortune in the *Decameron*: "In che non ti accorgi che non il mio peccato ma quello della Fortuna riprendi, la quale assai sovente li non degni ad alto leva, a basso lasciando i dignissimi." (IV.1.38). Like Boethius in prison, Ghismonda must react using the power of her soul. When her father cruelly puts to a test his daughter's intelligence by handing her a goblet containing the heart of Guiscardo (" - Il tuo padre ti manda questo, per *consolarti* di quella cosa che tu più ami, come tu hai lui consolato di ciò che egli più amava" [IV.1.47]), the desperation and terror that the daughter suffers activates a mechanism of recognition based on the faculties of the mind, a mechanism that marks the end of that life journey that Fortune had prepared for the two lovers:

- Ahi! dolcissimo albergo di tutti i miei piaceri, maladetta sia la crudeltà di colui che *con gli occhi della fronte or mi ti fa vedere!* Assai m'era *con quegli della mente* riguardarti a ciascuna ora. Tu hai *il tuo corso fornito*, e di tale chente la fortuna tel concedette ti se' spacciato; venuto se' *alla fine alla qual ciascun corre*; lasciate hai le miserie del mondo e le fatiche, e dal tuo nemico medesimo quella sepoltura hai che il tuo valore ha meritata (IV.1.52)

The souls of the two lovers, then, will be able to go together on their journey, which will be a happy one only in the afterlife:

. . . e dateleti, senza alcuno indugio farò che *la mia anima* si congiugnerà con quella, adoperandol tu, che tu già cotanto cara guardasti. E con qual compagnia ne potrete' io andar più contenta o meglio sicura *ai luoghi non conosciuti* che con lei? Io son certa che ella è ancora quinciento e riguarda i luoghi de' suoi dilette e de' miei; e come colei che ancor son certa che m'ama, aspetta la mia, dalla quale sommamente è amata (IV.1.53-54)

O molto amato cuore, ogni mio ufficio verso te è fornito; né più altro mi resta a fare se non di venire con la mia *anima* a fare alla tua compagnia (IV.1.57)

### *Decameron Second Day*

The theme chosen by Filomena for the Second Day of the *Decameron* is to tell stories about people "who having gone through a series of misfortunes come to an unexpected happy end" (I.concl.10-11). And the many different cases of Fortune are part of the storytellers' discussion throughout the Day. However, as I intend to argue, the theme of the voyage, although not agreed by the storytellers as the topic of the Day, could easily take the place of that of Fortune and easily replace the Day's rubric title. In fact, the Second Day of the *Decameron* portrays a world of vast dimensions in which each protagonist undertakes a voyage. Fabulous adventures and heroic journeys made by all the characters are set up as mini-Odysseys within the main articulation of the collection. Led by inscrutable mechanisms of Fortune, each protagonist starts a voyage that takes him/her away, but that ultimately makes him/her return safely to the point of departure.<sup>59</sup> The theme of the voyage inevitably leads us to explore additional epistemological mechanisms of the *Decameron* that can be viewed through the lens of psychology intended as the 'discourse on the soul.' Boccaccio allows his characters to embark on physical and tangible journeys, while their experiences also involve their human condition and soul. The landscape described in the Second Day is not only physical, but also reflective of the spiritual inner geography of its characters expressed through their cognitive abilities.

As an unconscious desire for knowledge, just like the *curiositas* of Dante's Ulysses,<sup>60</sup> curiosity triggers the action of the Second Day of the *Decameron* providing three jesters, Stecchi, Martellino and Marchese, with a reason for leaving: "Li quali quivi non essendo stati giammai, veggendo correre ogni uomo, si maravigliarono, e udita la cagione per che ciò era, disiderosi divennero d'andare a vedere (II.1.6)." The three tumblers of the first story of the Day decide to go see the deposition of Saint Arrigo ("E poste le lor cose ad uno albergo, disse Marchese: - Noi vogliamo andare a veder questo santo; ma io per me non veggio come noi vi ci possiam pervenire . . ." [II.1.7]). They

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<sup>59</sup> On the Second Day of the *Decameron*, in general, see T. Barolini, "'Le parole son femmine e i fatti sono maschi': Toward a Sexual Poetics of the *Decameron* (*Decameron* II, 10)," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 21 (1993): 175-97; S. L. Clark e J. N. Wasserman, "*Decameron* 2.4: The Journey of the Hero," *Mediaevalia* 1:2 (1975): 1-16; J. M. Ferrante, "Politics, Finance and Feminism in *Decameron*, II, 7," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 21 (1993): 151-74.

<sup>60</sup> On curiosity, and on the relationship between curiosity and imagination in Early Modern Italy, see A. M. Capodivacca, *Curiosity and the Trials of the Imagination in Early Modern Italy*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of California, Berkeley: 2007).

pretend to be crippled through the use of disguises in order to pilgrimage with the faithful and thus stage a fake healing at the end of the journey. Then, the three of them will be exposed as a fraud, but thanks to Fortune the story will end well and the three will return to Florence safe and sound (" . . . oltre alla speranza di tutti e tre di così gran pericolo usciti, sani e salvi se ne tornarono a casa loro." [II.1.33]). Presented in the form of a parody of a pilgrimage, the theme of travel, thus, starts here and will be developed in different ways throughout the Second Day. Not surprisingly, jesters ideally represent medieval travelers as much as pilgrims: the jester is one of the medieval travelers *par excellence* in so far as his profession requires him to travel to different courts in order to earn a living by entertaining his audiences (" . . . uomini li quali, le corti de' signori visitando, di contraffarsi e con nuovi atti contraffacendo qualunque altro uomo li veditori sollazzavano" [II.1.6]). As mentioned before, the motivation that drives the three jesters to visit the body of Saint Arrigo is pure curiosity, the desire to see something new. Albeit in a more primitive state and probably motivated by mere entertainment, their desire for knowledge stimulates the unfolding of events and, in the narrative, sets the first steps in the voyage of the *Decameron*.

By mentioning from its start Saint Julian, patron saint of hospitality for travelers, the second story of the Day continues dealing with saints.<sup>61</sup> However, Filostrato shifts the focus of the tale towards the theme of love and claims that he narrate his story for "coloro li quali per li dubbiosi paesi d'amore sono camminanti" (II.2.3). In the story of Rinaldo d'Asti, the allusion to the theme of travel and the peculiar usage of the term "camminanti" with its epistemological connotations virtually connect the story to both the spiritual journey of the *Decameron* and the theme of pilgrimage as was parodied in the first tale of the Day. This time, however, a journey for love is involved. The protagonist, Rinaldo d'Asti, is a merchant, hence a representative of another category of travelers. The theme of the voyage as pilgrimage emerges in the words of some unknown robbers who, in order to commit their crime, approach Rinaldo with the excuse to ask him what kind of prayers he used to say when "walking;" to which Rinaldo replies by saying that he prays Saint Julian (II.2.6). Although the bandits' intent is to rob Rinaldo, and certainly not to make his acquaintance, the language of knowledge involved assumes significant aspects through the action of the tale. Once robbed, Rinaldo is left in his underwear and mocked with these strange words: "Va e sappi se il tuo san Giuliano questa notte ti darà buono albergo, ché il nostro il darà bene a noi" (II.2.13).

The theme of hospitality is developed along with that of love, when Rinaldo, who has just been robbed, is offered lodging by a widow. The importance of hospitality is symbolically represented by image of the heat evaporating from the bath that revived Rinaldo's body. But, to emphasize the deliberate insistence on the semantic field of the pilgrimage, it is worth noting the presence of a "camminata," that is, a great room with a fireplace,<sup>62</sup> where Rinaldo and the widow set their intimacy: "Appresso questo la donna

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<sup>61</sup> It is worth noting that Boccaccio himself copied the legend of the saint in his *Zibaldone Magliabechiano* (Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale, B. R. 50).

<sup>62</sup> The same usage of the term "camminata" in Dante, *Inferno* 34, 97. On the etymology of the term "camminata" see *Dizionario etimologico*. In ancient Italian, the term "camino," although sometimes written with double 'm' (see OVI), is not etymologically related to the verb "camminare." "camino," as a pre-indoeuropean word, derives from the Latin *caminum*, 'fireplace,' and from the Greek *káminos*, 'oven,' 'smithy,' 'forge;' whereas the word "cammino," from which is presumably derived the term "camminata" meaning the hall, the room, where one walks, derives from the vulgar Latin \**camminum*, of Gaulish origins

alquanto riposatasi, avendo fatto fare un grandissimo fuoco in una sua *camminata*, in quella se ne venne, e del buono uomo domandò che ne fosse" (II.2.28) (The lady meanwhile took a little rest, after which she had a roaring fire put in one of her large rooms, whither presently she came, and asked her maid how the good man did). Thus, the images of the 'heat,' 'hospitality,' and the 'travel' are metaphorized in one word: the *camminata*.

However, as often is the case, Boccaccio immediately subverts the morale tone that was already taking over the tale. The widow, who was waiting for her lover, the marquis, to satisfy her sexual desires, does not hesitate to take pleasure with Rinaldo. Rinaldo wears the clothes of the widow's dead husband and feels resuscitated. Again, the objects (as signs) of the *Decameron* conceal hidden meanings: "Ed egli questo, senza più inviti aspettare, di voglia fece; e tutto dalla caldezza di quello riconfortato, *da morte a vita* gli parve essere tornato. La donna gli fece apprestare panni stati del marito di lei, poco tempo davanti morto, li quali come vestiti s'ebbe, a suo dosso fatti parevano" (II.2.27) (Gladly he did so, awaiting no second invitation, and was so much comforted by its warmth that he seemed to have passed from death to life. The lady provided him with a suit of clothes, which had been worn by her husband shortly before his death, and which, when he had them on, looked as if they had been made for him). From this point onward, Rinaldo's experience, favoured by Fortune, takes a new turn. The death of the saint, allusively evoked in the first novella, here takes a new metaphorical form, that of rebirth. Given the attractiveness of Rinaldo, the widow decides to listen to the words of her maid, and understands that Fortune has presented her with an opportunity not to be missed, and, with a compensation to her failed sexual intercourse with the marquis:

Egli era grande della persona e bello e piacevole nel viso e di maniere assai laudevoli e graziose e giovane di mezza età; al quale la donna avendo più volte *posto l'occhio addosso* e molto commendatolo, e già, per lo marchese che con lei dovea venire a giacersi, il concupiscibile appetito avendo desto *nella mente*, dopo la cena, da tavola levatasi, colla sua fante si consigliò se ben fatto le paresse che ella, poi che il marchese beffata l'avea, usasse *quel bene che innanzi l'avea la fortuna mandato*" (II.2.35)<sup>63</sup>

Rinaldo, who has just been metaphorically resurrected, immediately understands the situation and cannot say no: "Rinaldo, queste parole udendo e *il lampeggiar degli occhi* della donna veggendo, come colui che mentecatto non era, fattolesi incontro colle braccia aperte . . ." (II.2.38) (Rinaldo, hearing these words, and marking the flame which shot from the lady's eyes, and being no laggard, came forward with open arms . . .).

After having seen the first episodes of 'recognition' in the stories of the jesters and Rinaldo, in the third tale of the Day, the theme of Fortune is eventually declared in the words of Pampinea. According to the evident intention of the storyteller, the theme of

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(cf. M. Cortelazzo and P. Zolli, eds., *Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana* [Bologna: Zanichelli, 1999]). It is not to be excluded, however, that ancient vocabularies (Uguccione da Pisa, *Derivationes*, for instance) link etymologically the two terms. In the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, 2a edizione, the "camminata" is linked to the verb "camminare:" "da CAMMINARE. Stanza maggior della casa, che noi diciam, SALA, detta così, perchè vi si può comodamente andare, e passeggiar per entro. Lat. ambulatio, ambulacrum. Esempio: Bocc. n. 12. 13. Avendo fatto fare un grandissimo fuoco in una sua camminata. Esempio: Cr. 8. 3. 4. Facciassi ancor nel detto giardino un palagio. con cammináte, e camere di soli arbori, ec. Misurinsi, e segninsi tutti gli spazj della cammináta, e delle camere. Esempio: Dan. Inf. c. 34. Non era cammináta di palagio, La' v'eravam, ma natural burélla, Ch'avea mal suolo, e di lume disagio."

<sup>63</sup> On the motif of Fortune see note 47.



Fortune turns out to be the main theme of the Day operating as a key device of the narrative machine. At the very beginning of the tale, Pampinea mentions the power of Fortune as an instrument of divine providence. This superior force operates according to a mind hidden to men, yet clear to Providence's perspective:

Valorose donne, quanto più si parla de' fatti della Fortuna, tanto più, a chi vuole le sue cose ben riguardare, ne resta a poter dire; e di ciò niuno dee aver maraviglia, se discretamente pensa che tutte le cose, le quali noi scioccamente nostre chiamiamo, sieno nelle sue mani, e per conseguente da lei secondo il suo occulto giudizio, senza alcuna posa d'uno in altro e d'altro in uno successivamente, senza alcuno conosciuto ordine da noi, esser da lei permutate" (II.3.4)

Here, too, the theme of the voyage is beautifully inserted into the plot of the tale, especially when it opens out the action into geographical areas, larger than those of the previous tales.

The main character, Alessandro, meets his future wife during a trip, in "cammino" (II.3.20) (Notice the anaphoric insistence of the word "camminando" in 3.18, 3.20 and 3.24.) Moreover, a cryptic phrase, full of meaning, urges the final recognition and reveals that the abbot of the company with whom Alessandro traveled is nothing but a woman in disguise; namely, the daughter of the King of England: ". . . *conosci* quello che io nascondo" (II.3.31). The sexually and vaguely parodic sentence epitomizes the significance of the nature of Fortune, that is, her "occulto iudicio," as Pampinea puts it. The protagonist discovers the real gender of the abbot, but if one thinks about what is going to happen afterwards, it is easy to understand that he also knows the occult "iudicio" that Fortune held for him. The surprises that Fortune has in store, thus, are hidden like the real sexual nature of the abbot. Yet, there comes the time when Fortuna will reveal her obscure intent ("Idio ha mandato tempo a' miei disiri" [II.3.28], the woman says), and this is when she puts Alessandro before the eyes ("avanti agli occhi") of the lady. In the pope's presence, the lady introduces Alessandro as her husband: "E così disposta venendo, Iddio, il quale solo ottimamente conosce ciò che fa mestiere a ciascuno, credo per la sua misericordia, colui che a lui piaceva che mio marito fosse mi pose *avanti agli occhi*; e quel fu questo giovane - e mostrò Alessandro - il quale voi qui appresso di me vedete . . ." (II.3.39)." Thus, the lady manages to interpret the will of Fortune, and hence the will of God. Evidently, the action of Fortune is not sufficient to change the course of events. It is men who act in the world; therefore, it is essential that they know their desires and how to understand the course of events and make their own choices accordingly. Through the action of Fortune, the individual is allowed to know his soul and interpret the course of events that, from any given moment, will take place. Knowledge, in this case, becomes the knowledge of the events related to a change in men's destiny.

In the Second Day of the *Decameron*, the ups and downs of fortune—the duality of two states of existence in the characters' lives—clearly allude to the topos and iconography of the Wheel of Fortune, according to which one can be exalted to the highest honors or lowered to the state of a beggar. Accordingly, the man who becomes king is always on top of the wheel, while the man who becomes a beggar remains at the bottom; these two opposite figures always alternate according to the circular movement

of the wheel from top to bottom and viceversa (fig. 7).<sup>64</sup> Lauretta's considerations at the beginning of II.4, and how she contrasts the regal condition with abject poverty, illustrates the movement of the Wheel: "Graziosissime donne, niuno atto della Fortuna, secondo il mio giudicio, si può veder maggiore, che vedere uno *d'infima miseria a stato reale elevare*, come la novella di Pampinea n'ha mostrato essere al suo Alessandro addivenuto" (II.4.3). Yet, in the fourth tale, Fortune's mechanisms are analyzed from other perspectives.

Landolfo Rufolo is impoverished, becomes a pirate, and is shipwrecked. Fortune continues to influence world events. If Boccaccio plays with the double meaning of the word Fortuna, whose Latin etymological counterpart means precisely 'storm' (lat. fortuna='chance,' but also 'storm'), Fortune actually influences Landolfo's fate by changing the wind that brings the storm or lead the ship to another direction.<sup>65</sup> Like in the previous tale, the individual can always choose to act regardless of Fortune or try to interpret her movements. Trusting that he will be saved by Fortune, Landolfo decides not to challenge her further and therefore to retire from piracy ("Per la qual cosa, gastigato dal primo dolore della perdita, conoscendo che egli aveva assai per non incappar nel secondo, a sé medesimo dimostrò quello che aveva, senza voler più, dovergli bastare; e per ciò si dispose di tornarsi con esso a casa sua" [II.4.11]). Therefore, even here, the narrative metaphorizes an epistemological mechanism of understanding represented by a man who interprets chance's signs and, accordingly, decides his course of actions. If previously his decisions were simply dictated by the desire to get rich, to possess more and more, even if it meant stealing from others and losing his soul ("... ve n'ebbe già uno il quale fu ricchissimo, chiamato Landolfo Rufolo; al quale non bastando la sua ricchezza, desiderando di raddoppiarla, venne presso che fatto *di perder* con tutta quella *sé stesso*" [II.4.5]; "... e diessi a far sua della roba d'ogni uomo, e massimamente sopra i turchi" [II.4.9]), Landolfo, now faced by the danger of death, wants to remain alive at all costs and no longer cares about his possessions. Paradoxically, in order to save his own life (and soul), he clings to the crate (objective correlative of the riches) which, unbeknownst to him, will make him rich again:

... quantunque oscurissima notte fosse e il mare grossissimo e gonfiato, notando quelli che notar sapevano, s'incominciarono ad appiccare a quelle cose che per ventura loro si paravan davanti. Intra li quali il misero Landolfo, ancora che molte volte il di davanti *la morte* chiamata avesse, seco eleggendo di volerla più tosto che di tornare a casa sua *povero come si vede*, *vedendola presta* n'ebbe paura; e, come gli altri, venutagli alle mani una tavola, a quella s'appiccò, se forse Iddio, indugiando egli l'affogare, gli mandasse qualche aiuto allo scampo suo; e a cavallo a quella, come meglio poteva, veggendosi sospinto dal mare e dal vento ora in qua e ora in là, si sostenne infino al chiaro giorno" (II.4.17-18)

... e vide da se molto dilungata la tavola; per che, temendo non potere ad essa pervenire, s'appressò alla cassa la quale gli era assai vicina, e sopra il coperchio di quella posto il petto, come meglio poteva, colle braccia la reggeva diritta" (II.4.20)

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<sup>64</sup> On the implications of the image of the wheel for the structure of the *Decameron* and as a symbol of the movement of life and renovation, cf. Barolini, "The Wheel of the *Decameron*," 534 and passim.

<sup>65</sup> "Il dì seguente, mutatosi il vento, le cocche ver ponente venendo fer vela: e tutto quel di prosperamente vennero al loro viaggio; ma nel far della sera si mise un vento tempestoso, il qual facendo i mari altissimi, divise le due cocche l'una dall'altra" (II.4.16).

Fortune, whose metaphor is traditionally the image of the sea storm, assumes the function of a cognitive agent. By casting men to the brink of death, Fortune makes them change their minds. Like other characters, Landolfo undergoes a transformation. While Fortune is truly unexpected, as stated by the theme of the Day, it is man's duty to interpret her movements and understand the real nature of their desires. Without human action, events would probably take another course.

In the fifth tale, Fortune decides the destiny of Andreuccio da Perugia, who, compared to Landolfo, appears to be a less active character.<sup>66</sup> That of Andreuccio is a real journey through the streets of Naples for the acquisition of knowledge, an educational training that leads him to become, from a young provincial and naive buyer of horses ("... per mostrare che per comperar fosse, sì *come rozzo e poco cauto* più volte in presenza di chi andava e di chi veniva trasse fuori questa sua borsa de' fiorini che aveva" [II.5.3]), to a shrewd expert of the pitfalls of big cities such as Naples. Andreuccio goes to Naples to buy horses, but he suffers three unfortunate incidents in only one night. Andreuccio's journey in Naples is portrayed by three symbolic 'descents' to the underworld: the fall into the alley latrine, the fall into the well, and the descent into the ark. Obviously, the ark symbolizes death and echoes the marble tombs of Cavalcanti's tale.<sup>67</sup> However, Andreuccio's journey of knowledge is accomplished in three phases of infernal descent which may follow the thread of an imaginary para-etymological trope based on the 'falls' of Fortune ('caso' from the Latin *casus* = 'what happens,' 'opportunity,' but also 'fall', from "cadere"). To have a better idea, it is worth seeing them in detail.

In the first fall, the splash into the latrine enlightens him on the trick arranged by Fiordaliso: "... *chiara vedea* la sua disavventura" (II.5.42). In the second, instead, Andreuccio gets shrewd and, with an athletic gesture, escapes from remaining prisoner in the well by clinging to the rim and scaring the night watchmen—to continue on the thread of the 'arks,' one perceives here again a vague reminiscence of Cavalcanti's athletic gesture ("Come Andreuccio *si vide* alla sponda del pozzo vicino così, lasciata la fune, con le mani si gittò sopra quella" [II.5.68]). In the third situation, although Andreuccio demonstrates to have become already a clever character by hiding the ring of the bishop in order to sneak out of the ark, he unavoidably remains locked up inside (here, therefore, Fortune temporarily has the upper hand); soon afterward, upon the arrival of other robbers ready to plunder the tomb, Andreuccio scares them off and flees.

The mechanisms of 'recognition' alternate and vary throughout the tale. Fiordaliso begins to gather information in order to better devise her scam when she notices that

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<sup>66</sup> On the fifth tale of the Day cf. F. Cerreta, "La novella di Andreuccio: problemi di unità e di interpretazione," *Italica* 47 (1970): 255-264; G. Cavallini, "Parole del Boccaccio. 'Vedere' e 'guardare'." *Lingua nostra* 36 (1975): 7-12; Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 207 ff.; C. Segre, *Avviamento all'analisi del testo letterario* (Torino: Einaudi, 1985), 111 ff.; L. Rossi, "I tre 'gravi accidenti' della novella di Andreuccio," *Strumenti critici* 20 (1996): 385-400.

<sup>67</sup> On the ark as a symbol of death cf. Durling, "Boccaccio on Interpretation;" P. F. Watson, "Architettura e scultura e senso della narrazione: Guido Cavalcanti e le case dei morti," in V. Branca, ed., *Boccaccio visualizzato: narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento* (Torino: G. Einaudi, 1999), vol. 1, pp. 75-84; id., "On seeing Guido Cavalcanti and the houses of the dead," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 18 (1989): 301-318. In the Patristic tradition, the sepulcher symbolizes contemplative life. In so far as opposite to active life, contemplative life is completely concentrated on the activities of the mind that concerns afterlife, and therefore death (cf. Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job*, VI, 37, PL 76, col. 684B).

Andreuccio is acquainted with an old lady from Sicily.<sup>68</sup> The graverobbers, in the other hand, become aware of Andreuccio's presence from his stench. In the narrative, when Fiordaliso fakes to recognize Andreuccio as her brother, and Andreuccio talks with the neighbors trying to return home after falling into the latrine, the text plays with the multi-faceted etymological meaning of "conoscere" and "vero." Thus Fiordaliso's speech begins: "Andreuccio, io sono molto certa che tu ti maravigli e delle carezze le quali io ti fo e delle mie lagrime, sì come colui che *non mi conosci* e per avventura mai ricordar non m'udisti" (II.5.18). Andreuccio seems convinced that the story be true:

Andreuccio, udendo questa favola così ordinatamente, così compostamente detta da costei, alla quale in niuno atto moriva la parola tra' denti né balbettava la lingua, e ricordandosi esser *vero* che il padre era stato in Palermo e per se medesimo de' giovani *conoscendo* i costumi, che volentieri amano nella giovinezza, e veggendo le tenere lagrime, gli abbracciari e gli onesti basci, ebbe ciò che ella diceva *più che per vero*. E poscia che ella tacque, le rispose: - Madonna, egli non vi dee parer gran cosa se io mi maraviglio: per ciò che *nel vero*, o che mio padre, per che che egli sel facesse, di vostra madre e di voi non ragionasse giammai, o che, se egli ne ragionò, a mia notizia venuto non sia, io *per me niuna consocienza aveva* di voi se non come se non foste; e emmi tanto più caro l'avervi qui mia sorella trovata, quanto io ci sono più solo e meno questo sperava. E nel vero io *non conosco* uomo di sì alto affare al quale voi non doveste esser cara, non che a me che un picciolo mercatante sono. Ma d'una cosa vi priego mi *facciate chiaro*: come *sapeste* voi che io qui fossi?" (II.5.26)

Then, Fiordaliso reinforces her scam, while Andreuccio sinks into his credulity: "Appresso queste parole ella cominciò distintamente a domandare di tutti i suoi parenti nominatamente, alla quale di tutti Andreuccio rispose, per questo ancora più *credendo* quello che meno di *creder* gli bisognava" (II.5.29). After falling into the well, Andreuccio despairs, beginning to understand that it was a setup: "Di che egli piagnendo, come colui che *chiara vedea* la sua disavventura, cominciò a dire: - Oimè lasso, in come piccol tempo ho io perduti cinquecento fiorini e una sorella!" (II.5.44); and then searches in vain for help from the neighbors: "Oh! disse Andreuccio - o *non mi conosci* tu? Io sono Andreuccio, fratello di madama Fiordaliso" (II.5.46). "Credere," "conoscere" and their derivatives, frequently and obsessively reiterated in this story, develop the multi-faceted educational training of Andreuccio through various false recognitions.

In another tale, the story of Madonna Beritola, Boccaccio portrays vast physical landscapes and features a wide variety of characters. But the proemial words of Emilia make explicit that Fortune not only operates in world events, but also awakens human minds:

Gravi cose e noiose sono i *movimenti varii della Fortuna*, de' quali però che quante volte alcuna cosa si parla, tante è *un destare delle nostre menti*, le quali leggermente s'addormentano nelle sue lusinghe, giudico mai rincrescer non dover l'ascoltare e a' felici e agli sventurati, in quanto *li primi rende avvisati e i secondi consola*. (II.6.3)

[Grave and grievous are the vicissitudes with which Fortune makes us acquainted, and as discourse of such matter serves to awaken our minds, which are so readily lulled to sleep by her flatteries, I deem it worthy of attentive hearing by all, whether they enjoy her favor or endure her frown, in that it ministers counsel to the one sort and consolation to the other.]

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<sup>68</sup> "La giovane, che prima la borsa d'Andreuccio e poi la contezza della sua vecchiaia con lui aveva veduta, per tentare se modo alcuno trovar potesse a dovere aver quelli denari, o tutti o parte, cautamente incominciò a domandare chi colui fosse o donde e che quivi facesse e come il conoscesse" (II.5.7).

The movements of Fortune awaken human minds. But above all, Fortune acts differently depending on how people cope with her mechanisms. Fortune makes the unfortunate person wiser, while leaving the happy ones to sleep on her flatteries. (Changes of Fortune evidently allude to the famous turning of the Wheel and to the alternate movement of her favor, but also to the varied narrative trend of the Second Day.) Therefore, Fortune influences the mind. Madonna Beritola undergoes a change when she realizes that she has been abandoned on an island: turning her eyes towards the sea, she 'knows' her unfortunate fate:

Madama Beritola, finito il suo diurno lamento, tornata al lito per rivedere i figliuoli, come usata era di fare, niuna persona vi trovò; di che prima si maravigliò, e poi, subitamente di quello che avvenuto era sospettando, *gli occhi infra 'l mare sospinse*, e vide la galea, non molto ancora allungata, dietro tirarsi il legnetto; per la qual cosa *ottimamente cognobbe*, si come il marito, aver perduti i figliuoli." (II.6.11)

[so that, when Madam Beritola, her wailing for that day ended, returned, as was her wont, to the shore to solace herself with the sight of her sons, she found none there. At first she was lost in wonder, then with a sudden suspicion of the truth she bent her eyes seaward, and there saw the galley still at no great distance, towing the ship in her wake. Thus apprehending beyond all manner of doubt that she had lost her sons as well as her husband.]

Her first moment of terror is described as a sway of lost spirits before they gather again into her soul:

Quivi non era chi con acqua fredda o con altro argomento le smarrite forze rivocasse; per che a bello agio poterono *gli spiriti andar vagando* dove lor piacque; ma, poi che nel misero corpo le partite forze insieme colle lagrime e col pianto tornate furono, lungamente chiamò i figliuoli, e molto per ogni caverna gli andò cercando (II.6.12).

From this moment on, the abandoned woman changes, she is forced to live in a primitive state: ". . . essa, che la sera avanti cenato non avea, da fame costretta, a pascere l'erbe si diede; e, pasciuta come poté, piagnendo, a vari pensieri della sua futura vita si diede" (II.6.14); "E così dimorando la gentil donna divenuta fiera . . ." (II.6.17). But Fortune does not cancel her maternal feelings, nor frustrate her hopes of being able to see her children again. Sheltered in a cave, she begins to breast-feed two roebucks, so that she was "Cavriuola dinominata" (II.6.25).

The wisdom in the characters' conduct transpires throughout the tale, and appears for the first time in the wise manner in which the nurse behaves. By attentively considering their dangerous situation and the new circumstances, the nurse acts wisely as she decides to hide the real identity of Beritola's sons in her custody, and to delay the moment of revealing it:

Ma, poi che vide le lacrime niente giovare e sé esser serva con loro insieme, ancora che povera femina fosse, pure *era savia e avveduta*; per che, prima come poté il meglio riconfortatasi, e appresso riguardando dove erano pervenuti, *s'avvisò* che, se i due fanciulli conosciuti fossono, per avventura potrebbero di leggiere impedimento ricevere; e oltre a questo *sperando che*, quando che sia, *si potrebbe mutar la fortuna* ed essi potrebbero, se vivi fossero, nel perduto stato tornare, pensò di non palesare ad alcuna persona chi fossero, *se tempo di ciò non vedesse*; e a tutti diceva, che di ciò domandata l'avessero, che suoi figliuoli erano (II.6.29-30)

Moreover, wisdom is transmitted to Beritola's sons through the teaching that the nurse gives them (" . . . la qual cosa il fanciullo, che *intendente* era, secondo l'ammaestramento della *savia balia* ottimamente faceva" [II.6.30]). That the characters of the tale are truly 'wise,' and not motivated by greed of riches like in other tales of the Day—see the tale of Landolfo Rufolo, for instance—is finally made explicit by Giannotto's words: "Currado, né cupidità di signoria né desiderio di denari né altra cagione alcuna mi fece mai alla tua vita né alle tue cose insidie, come traditor, porre" (II.6.53).

Beritola's motherliness comes out in the final moment of recognition of one of her children: an occult, unfathomable virtue allows her to recognize him after many years, while the unexpected happiness that follows makes her faint for an excess of joyful feelings:

Allora Currado l'una e l'altra donna quivi fece venire. Elle fecero amendune maravigliosa festa alla nuova sposa, non poco maravigliandosi, quale spirazione potesse essere stata che Currado avesse a tanta benignità recato, che Giannotto con lei avesse congiunto. Al quale madama Beritola, per le parole da Currado udite, cominciò a *riguardare*, e da *occulta virtù desta* in lei alcuna rammemorazione de' puerili lineamenti del viso del suo figliuolo, senza aspettare altro dimostramento, colle braccia aperte gli corse al collo; né la soprabondante pietà e allegrezza materna le permisero di potere alcuna parola dire, anzi si *ogni virtù sensitiva* le chiusero che *quasi morta* nelle braccia del figliuol cadde" (II.6.66)

An excess of joy neutralizes not just Beritola's sensation, but particularly her sensitive soul ("virtù sensitiva"), which according to Aristotle is one of humans three types of soul.<sup>69</sup> Beritola can now say to have completed her voyage; as she finds her children, one might say that she does not need to live further. Her life seems to metaphorically end here ("quasi morta nelle braccia del figliuol cadde").

To clarify the modalities of Beritola's transformation, the symbolism of the deer, in my view, is illuminating. The deer traditionally symbolizes the soul's journey towards death, as can be seen, for instance, in the scene of the deer drinking from the spring in the book of Psalms (Psalms 41:2: "Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum: ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus;" cf. fig. 6 [The Stuttgart Psalter]; cf. also *Is.* 35:6, and *Lam.* 1:6), or in the symbolism, maybe a little less known, of the hunt of the white stag in Chretien de Troyes' *Erec et Enide*, which is mixed with the traditional *symbols* of the Celtic supernatural.<sup>70</sup> In the *Edda*, moreover, the deer symbolizes the sun and the light, thus acquiring also a meaning linked to knowledge. The function of the deer (or the roebuck) is also that of the messenger/guide from the otherworld, as can be seen in Chretien, or in mythology, where the deer is associated with Mercury, both messenger and mediator.<sup>71</sup> In Beritola's tale, the deer may allude to the soul, and, indirectly, to

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<sup>69</sup> According to Aristotle (*De anima*, II, 3), humans possess a vegetative, a sensitive, and a rational soul, capable of thought and reflection.

<sup>70</sup> Chretien, de Troyes, *Erec and Enide*, trans. C. W. Carroll (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987), p. 3-5, 7, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. *The complete dictionary of symbols*, Jack Tresidder, general editor (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2005). Yet, the deer may also symbolize sanctity in hagiographical texts (C. Pschmidt, *Die Sage von der verfolgten Hinde, ihre Heimat und Wanderung, Bedeutung und Entwicklung... Inaugural-Dissertation... von Carl Pschmidt* [Greifswald: Druck von J. Abel, 1911]; A. Murray, *Ragione e società nel Medioevo*, trans. M. Lucioni [Roma: Editori Riuniti, 1986], 384), or can be one of the ambivalent manifestations of the magical deer/doe, of the fairy hunt, or the sexual appetite (S. Cigada, *La leggenda*

motherhood. In fact, an unfathomable mother-child connection, through a synesthesia of feelings that even involves the smell, attracts all the senses thus enabling her children to recognize her: "Il quale, quantunque molto si meravigliasse, ricordandosi d'averla molte volte avanti in quel castello medesimo veduta e mai non riconosciutola, pur non dimeno *conobbe* incontanente *l'odor materno* e sé medesimo della sua preterita trascutaggine biasimando, lei nelle braccia ricevuta lagrimando teneramente baciò" (II.6.67) (Giannotto, who had often seen her in the castle and never recognised her, marvelled not a little, but nevertheless it at once flashed upon him that 'twas his mother, and blaming himself for his past inadvertence he took her in his arms and wept and tenderly kissed her). But Beritola's journey ends in a metaphorical death of the soul which consists in the exaltation of her own maternal instincts and in the fulfillment of an inner peace resulting in living happily with her children. Thus, Beritola's soul comes at the end of its voyage and becomes metaphorically satisfied with inner peace and full enjoyment of a regained happiness.<sup>72</sup>

With a sudden change of tone, the symbolic voyage of the soul and the reflections on the importance of wealth as the riches of Fortune (II.7.3-6) continue in the story of Alatiel.<sup>73</sup> The Sultan of Babylon sends his daughter, Alatiel, overseas, with the aim of

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*medievale del Cervo bianco e le origini della "matière de Bretagne,"* Atti dell'Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Memorie, Classe di Scienze Morali, storiche e filologiche, Serie VIII – Vol. XII, fasc. I [Roma, Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1965]; L. Harf-Lancner, *Morgana e Melusina: la nascita delle fate nel Medioevo*, trans. S. Vacca [Torino: Einaudi, 1989], 275 ff.; J. P. Clébert, *Bestiaire fabuleux* [Paris: A. Michel, 1971], 90). The motif of the 'epic deer' has been analyzed by J. Baroin, "A propos du cerf épique," in *Mélanges de langue et de littérature françaises du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance offerts à Charles Foulon* [Rennes: Institut de Français, Université de Haute-Bretagne, 1980], II, *Medievalia* 80 (1980): 5- 15.

<sup>72</sup> In relation to the tale of madonna Beritola, D. McGrady, "Boccaccio Repeats Himself: "Decameron" II, 6 and V, 7," *MLN* 116: 1, Italian Issue (Jan., 2001): 193-197, maintains that tales II.6 and V.7 have the same plot structure. Moreover, Beritola's tale shows a few similarities with the legend of Saint Eustace, or the knight Placidus. While hunting a stag in Tivoli near Rome, Placidus saw a vision of Jesus between the stag's antlers. He was immediately converted, had himself and his family baptized, and changed his name to Eustace. Later, Eustace's wife was kidnapped by the captain of a ship, and his two sons were taken away by a wolf and a lion until, after various adventures, the family finally reunited. The story is narrated in *Legenda Aurea*, 161 and 130, in *Gesta Romanorum*, n. 110, and in the *Vite dei santi padri*, IV, 49-53 (cf. Lee, 34; see also Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 200, n. 2). Placidus' story—similar, too, to that of Job—appears to be very close to Boccaccio's tale, so that it has been considered the source of Beritola's tale.

<sup>73</sup> Branca (*Decameron*, 224, n. 3) identified symbolic and allusive connotations in the adventurous journey of Alatiel through the Mediterranean: "si potrebbe forse anche vedere, più o meno deformata, una qualche filigrana del viaggio simbolico e allusivo, attraverso lo stesso mare, così spesso usato sulle orme di quelli di Enea e di Ulisse—nella letteratura medievale sacra e profana con riferimenti spirituali, mondani, religiosi e antropologici." On the tale of Alatiel see G. Barberi Squarotti, "L'orazione di Alatiel," *Il potere della parola. Studi sul «Decameron»* (Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1983): 64-96; F. Brambilla Agno, "Una fonte della novella di Alatiel," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 10 (1977-78): 145-48; M. Picone, "Il romanzo di Alatiel," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995): 197-217; L. Vagheti, "La filosofia della natura in Boccaccio," *Nuova Antologia*, dir. Cosimo Ceccuti, volume 585°, fascicolo n. 2215, Luglio-Settembre 2000, p. 283-302. On the overlapping issues of silence and female agency, see L. Benedetti, "I silenzi di Alatiel," *Quaderni d'italianistica* 13.2 (1992): 245-55; D. Cavallero, "Alatiel e Zinevra: Il 'peso' del silenzio, la leggerezza dei 'vestiti,'" *Romance Languages Annual* 11 (1998): 165-70; M. Marchesini, "Le ragioni di Alatiel (*Decameron* II.7)," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 257-76; and M. J. Marcus, "Seduction by Silence: A Gloss on the Tales of Masetto (*Decameron* III, 1) and Alatiel (*Decameron* II, 7)," *Philological Quarterly* 58.1 (1979): 1-15. Joan Ferrante gives a tour-de-force reading of Alatiel as an allegory of Florence, in "Politics, Finance, and Feminism in *Decameron* II, 7," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 21 (1993): 151 -

marrying her to the King of Algarve. In the space of four years she goes through different adventures that put her in the hands of nine different men at different times. At last she is restored to her father, for whom she pretends to be a virgin so that she fulfills her marriage vow to the king of Algarve. In the longest tale of the collection, the winds and the sea storm causes Alatiel's shipwreck, and delay the end of her journey (a "cammino"):

I marinari, come videro il tempo ben disposto, diedero *le vele a' venti* e del porto d'Alessandria si partirono e più giorni felicemente navigarono; e già avendo la Sardigna passata, *parendo loro alla fine del loro cammino esser vicini*, si levarono subitamente un giorno *diversi venti*, li quali, essendo ciascuno oltre modo impetuoso, si faticarono la nave dove la donna era e' marinari, che più volte per perduti si tennero. (II.7.10)

[. . . but when they had passed Sardinia, and were beginning to think that they were nearing their journey's end, they were caught one day between divers cross winds, each blowing with extreme fury, whereby the ship laboured so sorely that not only the lady but the seamen from time to time gave themselves up for lost.]

Like Beritola, Alatiel is a liminal character. He never speaks, except in the end of the tale; she is even unable to understand others.<sup>74</sup> Alatiel seems confident; thanks to her instinct, but also to her ability to observe what is going on around her, she decides her fate from the outset by granting her favours to all who desire her:

Il che la donna veggendo, e già quivi per alcuni giorni dimorata, e per li costumi *avvisando* che tra cristiani era e in parte dove, se pure avesse saputo, il farsi conoscere le montava poco, *avvisandosi* che a lungo andare o per forza o per amore le converrebbe venire a dovere i piaceri di Pericon fare, con altezza d'animo seco propose di *calcare la miseria della sua fortuna*, e alle sue femine, che più che tre rimase non le ne erano, comandò che ad alcuna persona mai manifestassero chi fossero" (II.7.23)

"Calcare la miseria della . . . fortuna" means to despise, and bring to the extreme, the action of Fortune by indulging in everything she offers. This may sound rather comical, if one considers what it is about and knows that she would pass through the hands of nine different men. And even more comical, if one also compares it with the comments of the storyteller who invites readers to accept 'everything' that God (Fortune) gives us, He being the only one capable to meet our needs:

E acciò che io partitamente di tutti gli umani disideri non parli, affermo niuno poterne essere con pieno avvedimento, sì come sicuro da' fortunosi casi, che da' viventi si possa eleggere; per che, se dirittamente operar volessimo, *a quello prendere e possedere ci dovremmo disporre che Colui ci donasse, il quale sol ciò che ci fa bisogno conosce e puolci dare* (II.7.6)

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74. Cesare Segre gives a narratological analysis of *Decameron* II.7 in "Comical Structure in the Tale of Alatiel," in his *Structures and Time: Narration, Poetry, Models*, trans. John Meddemmen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 122–35; at p. 135, Segre considers the narrative's spatial and temporal emplotting to reduce Alatiel's wanderings and experiences around the Mediterranean, following her homecoming, to zero: "It is as if the four years had never been, as if the sea had closed over them as over a wake some thousands of leagues in length."

<sup>74</sup> "Era Pericone uomo di fiera vista e robusto molto; e avendo per alcun di la donna ottimamente fatta servire, e per questo essendo ella riconfortata tutta, veggendola esso oltre ad ogni estimazione bellissima, dolente senza modo che lei intendere non poteva né ella lui, e così non poter saper chi si fosse, acceso nondimeno della sua bellezza smisuratamente, con atti piacevoli e amorosi s'ingegnò d'inducarla a fare senza contenzione i suoi piaceri" (II.7.22).



That Alatiel is not a honest woman is made clear by Boccaccio in all possible ways (II.7.27, 29 ecc.). Precisely, Alatiel is defined as a "lieta" woman (II.7.27 e 50), as the tale says (but it can also be inferred by anagrammatizing her name: Alatiel = la lieta), and her lovers will become "lieti" too as they will enjoy her favours (II.7.77, e 121). Madly infatuated, Perdicone manages to make Alatiel drunk, "ed ella, che di ciò non si guardava, dalla piacevolezza del beveraggio tirata, più ne prese che alla sua onestà non sarebbe richiesto; di che ella, ogni avversità trapassata dimenticando, divenne lieta, e veggendo alcune femine alla guisa di Maiolica ballare, essa alla maniera alessandrina ballò" (II.7.27). Finally, Alatiel comes to enjoy the pleasure that Fortune has destined for her: ". . . più giorni la bella donna pianse la sua disavventura; ma pur poi da Constanzio riconfortata, come l'altre volte fatto avea, s'incominciò a prendere piacere di ciò che la fortuna avanti l'apparecchiava" (II.7.75).

The author's attention toward the mechanisms of knowledge in this tale moves from the figure of the protagonist to that of her lovers. Alatiel is a liminal character not only for her silence. Like a fairy, she does not say a word, and no one can refrain from gazing at her ("A cui il prenze rispose: Molto più; ma di ciò non le mie parole, ma *gli occhi tuoi* voglio ti faccian fede. . . . e in mezzo di loro fattala sedere, non si potè di ragionar con lei prender piacere, per ciò che essa poco o niente di quella lingua intendeva" [II.7.49-50]).<sup>75</sup> Her wondrous beauty enchants men, enough to instill poison into the one who gazes at her ("Per che ciascun lei, sì *come maravigliosa cosa guardava*, e il duca massimamente, il quale appena seco poteva credere lei essere cosa mortale; e non accorgendosi, riguardandola, dell'*amoroso veleno che egli con gli occhi bevea* . . ." [II.7.50]). Men are fascinated by her beauty to the point of doing anything in order to possess the sexual riches to which happiness is so often associated with.<sup>76</sup> Her beauty is the object of contemplation; it seems to attract curiosity, thereby developing the desire:

E questo fatto, manifestamente conoscendo sé non esser stati né dalla donna né da altrui sentiti, prese il duca un lume in mano, e quello portò sopra il letto, e chetamente tutta la donna, la quale fisamente dormiva, scoperse; e *riguardandola tutta*, la lodò sommamente, e se vestita gli era piaciuta, oltre ad ogni comparazione ignuda gli piacque" (II.7.56)

E avendo molte volte udita la donna di maravigliosa bellezza commendare, *disideraron di vederla* e il duca pregarono che loro la mostrasse. Il quale, mal ricordandosi di ciò che al prenze avvenuto era per averla mostrata a lui, promise di farlo . . . E sedendo Constanzio con lei, la *cominciò a riguardare* pieno di maraviglia, seco affermando mai sì bella cosa non aver veduta, e che per certo per iscusato si doveva avere il duca e qualunque altro che, per avere una così bella cosa, facesse tradimento o altra disonesta cosa; e *una volta e altra mirandola*, e più ciascuna commendandola, non altramenti a lui avvenne che al duca avvenuto era" (II.7.66-67)

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<sup>75</sup> On fairies and related themes in the Middle ages see the classic study by L. Harf-Lancner *Les fées au moyen âge: Morgane et Mélusine; la naissance des fées* (Paris: Champion, 1984).

<sup>76</sup> "E poi che da lei insieme col prenze partito si fu ed ebbe spazio di poter pensare seco stesso, estimava il prenze sopra ogni altro felice, sì bella cosa avendo al suo piacere; e, dopo molti e vari pensieri, pesando più il suo focoso amore che la sua onestà, diliberò, che che avvenir se ne dovesse, di privare di questa felicità il prenze e sé a suo potere farne felice" (II.7.51).

The silence is broken only at the end, when Alatiel meets Antiochus who knows her language and can communicate with her;<sup>77</sup> we are informed that the two speak to each other; yet, even here, we are not allowed to read a word pronounced by Alatiel. Alatiel speaks only when she meets Antigonus, her father's old servant, to whom she reveals her true story on condition that he not tell anyone about it: ". . . e per ciò quello che nella mia malvagia fortuna ho sempre tenuto nascoso, a te, sì come a padre, paleserò. Se *vedi*, poi che udito l'avrai, di potermi in alcuno modo nel mio pristino stato tornare, priegoti l'adoperi; se nol *vedi*, ti priego che mai ad alcuna persona dichì d'avermi veduta o di me avere alcuna cosa sentita." (II.7.100-101). The condition that Alatiel imposes is reminiscent of that of the fairies, who traditionally require their lovers not to reveal their identity. Here, however, the fairy theme is parodied, as the secret consists simply in hiding the loss of her virginity. Alatiel's speech to Antigonus revolves around the theme of the lost of virginity along with the possibility to recuperate it through a manipulation of the truth. Antigonus is called to come up ("vedere") with a trick in order for Alatiel to regain her virginity, at least in front of her father's eyes. Eventually, Antigonus and Alatiel will succeed, by lying, to make everyone believe that Alatiel is still a "pulcella," and Alatiel will become queen of Garbo.<sup>78</sup>

In the tale of Gualtieri, Count of Antwerp, the tone is once again changed. Laboring under a false accusation, the Count goes into exile. He leaves his two children in different places in England, and takes service in Ireland. Upon his return to England as an unknown man, he finds his son and daughter prosperous. After he had served as a groom in the army of the King of France, his innocence is established, and he is restored to his former honors. As appears even from a brief summary, the nobleness and high sentiment of the protagonists are not riches bestowed by Fortune. For that reason, the Count and his sons (Perotto and Giannetta) constitute shining examples in contrast to the mediocrity of certain characters such as Giachetto (Giannetta's husband) or his parents. In addition to the more general theme of the upheaval of Fortune, another important theme of this tale is the recognition of the value and nobleness of the soul.<sup>79</sup> Even here, Fortune in the hands of God influences the fate of the characters. After a life of wandering and various adventures, the protagonists can finally be recognized for whom they really are and thereby recuperate their pristine state.

Even this tale is full of recognitions whose literary representation helps us better understand the epistemological journey of the Second Day. After the Count has changed the names of his children and left them in the custody of other more fortunate guardians, the hapless protagonists will eventually find themselves (and 'recognize' themselves) only after life-long sufferings and wanderings. The value and nobility of Perotto and Giannetta are eventually acknowledged, so that both will later have a successful life. Even those who do not possess the ability to recognize at first sight the true merit of a good person, like Giachetto and his parents, will be equally led by Fortune to reward the unfortunate protagonists in another way: Giannetta will be given in marriage to Giachetto to save him from his love-sickness. The well-being pertaining to the aristocratic status, which at first

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<sup>77</sup> ". . . e sappiendo la lingua di lei (il che molto a grado l'era, sì come a colei alla quale parecchi anni a guisa quasi di sorda e di mutola era convenuta vivere, per lo non aver persona inteso, né essa essere stata intesa da persona), da amore incitato, cominciò seco tanta familiarità a pigliare . . ." (II.7.80).

<sup>78</sup> Maybe the king of Garbo is not very much interested in the real virginity of his future wife!

<sup>79</sup> On the nobleness of the soul cf. also *Convivio* bk. IV, in part. IV.16.

is lost but eventually recovered, is metaphorized by the symbolic image of the dress—a regal dress in a period of good fortune, or the "paltone" (the beggar's dress worn by the Count) in a period of bad luck. The Count becomes "paltoniere" (beggar), but ultimately is gloriously coated when imparting wisdom about the true value of nobility ("Prendi cotesti doni dalla magnificenza di monsignore lo re, e ricordera'ti di dire a tuo padre che i tuoi figliuoli, suoi e miei nepoti, non sono per madre nati di paltoniere" [II.8.99]).

The theme of the voyage is once again developed along with the specific motif of the "cammino." The broadness of the theme of Fortune remarked by the storyteller at the beginning of the story ("*Ampissimo campo è quello per lo quale noi oggi spaziando andiamo, né ce n'è alcuno, che, non che uno aringo, ma diece non ci potesse assai leggiermente correre, sì copioso l'ha fatto la Fortuna delle sue nuove e gravi cose . . .*" [II.8.3]) is reflected, in this as in other stories, in the vast geographical space of the countries traveled by the characters. The wise and experienced Count of Antwerp is left to govern France in the place of the king who engages in a war against the Germans (II.8.4). Meanwhile, the queen falls in love with the Count ("la donna del figliuol del re gli pose *gli occhi addosso* e con grandissima affezione la persona di lui e i suoi costumi *considerando*, d'occulto amore ferventemente di lui s'accese" [II.8.7]), but, as she is rejected by him, she falsely accuses him of rape (II.8.21). After the Count of Antwerp is being forced to flee, however, the story acquires the aspect of a hagiographical legend. After several 'pilgrimages,' the Count, disguised as a beggar, returns to his land in order to look for his children and grandchildren, and ends up living with them as a servant without being recognized. Besides being a well-known hagiographical motif (consider, for instance, Saint Alexis' story), that of the Count is also a folkloric motif in which a character tests the morale of his loved ones, a motif comparable to the episode of the disguise of Ulyseus who, upon returning from his long journey, decides to test his wife and all the court in Ithaca.

Like in II.6.67, the same mysterious mechanism of recognizing a person belonging to the same kinship is described in the tale of the Count of Antwerp. The recognition operates, as it were, on the psychological level, unconsciously, as if their respective souls were able to recognize a similarity based on their kinship. The grandchildren immediately act lovingly towards the Count to the point that they no longer want to be separated from him, even though they do not know that the Count is their grandfather ("Li quali, come videro il conte mangiare, così tutti quanti gli fur dintorno e cominciarogli a far festa, quasi da *occulta virtù* mossi avesser sentito costui loro avolo essere" [II.8.78 ff.]). Here hindered by the passing of the years that makes people different, the motif of recognition is exalted in the end through the usual (that is, for the Second Day) metaphor of the 'gaze' and the 'eyes:'

Giachetto adunque col conte e con Perotto appresso venne davanti al re e offerse di presentargli il conte e i figliuoli, dove, secondo la grida fatta, guiderdonare il dovesse. Il re prestamente per tutti *fece il guiderdon venire maraviglioso agli occhi di Giachetto*, e comandò che via il portasse dove con verità il conte e i figliuoli dimostrasse come promettea. Giachetto allora, voltatosi indietro e davanti messori il conte suo ragazzo e Perotto, disse: - Monsignore, ecco qui il padre e 'l figliuolo; la figliuola, ch'è mia moglie, e non è qui, con l'aiuto di Dio tosto vedrete. Il re, udendo questo, *guardò* il conte e, quantunque molto da quello che esser solea *trasmutato fosse*, pur, *dopo l'averlo alquanto guardato, il riconobbe*; e quasi con le lagrime in su gli occhi, lui che ginocchione stava levò in piede, e il baciò e abbracciò, e amichevolmente ricevette Perotto, e comandò che incontanente il conte di

vestimenti, di famiglia e di cavalli e d'arnesi rimesso fosse in assetto, secondo che alla sua nobilit  si richiedea; la qual cosa tantosto fu fatta (II.8.96-98)

The character of Ambrogiuolo, in the ninth story, seems to be portrayed upon contradictory and ambiguous features. By representing two characters that are not entirely positive or entirely negative, the mechanisms of Fortune, which initially seemed to help deserving individuals while punishing undeserving ones, here are subtly questioned. The ambiguity of the tale is built upon the ambiguity of the representation of the characters; the tale's charm has obviously struck both Shakespeare, who reproduced it in his *Cymbeline*, and Florentine artists, who often represented it in the *cassoni* next to the stories of Adalietta and Griselda (see fig. 8).<sup>80</sup> Bernab  of Genoa, deceived by Ambrogiuolo, loses his money and commands his innocent wife to be put to death. Apparently, Ambrogiuolo is a negative character; as a matter of fact, he is punished by the Sultan, and then by Fortune, for two reasons: he mocks the sincere marital feelings of Bernab  and his wife, and he contrives a very unorthodox trick to win the bet with Bernab . But the philosophy that Ambrogiuolo promotes in order to motivate his bet seem more convincing than that of Bernab  (II.9.13; 14; 17; 19; 20), and, moreover, it is consistent with the philosophy of the author in many passages of the *Decameron*.

Ambrogiuolo's argument is the following: natural instincts, which in Filippo Balducci's son had already raised the desire for women, are as strong in men as in women. Therefore, one does not see why Ambrogiuolo should not be right and why even Bernab 's wife should not naturally follow these instincts. Ambrogiuolo's allegations, which for this reason does not make him so deserving of punishment, are then verified by Dioneo telling the following story where Bartolomea's infidelity produces the opposite effect, namely, the punishment of her husband. Bernab , instead, appears to be the positive character of the tale. At first, he says that he is convinced of Zinevra's faithfulness, which for him is a gift of God (II.9.12), and swears on her honesty (II.9.10); whereas, soon afterwards, not only does he make a bet on the fidelity of his wife, but also, when he believes to have lost her due to her infidelity, he plans and, more seriously, premeditate to kill her out of anger. The story also reinforces these negative traits with various allusions to Bernab 's bestiality (II.9.54; II.10.3; II.concl.1) that seems to be similar to that of the Marquis of Saluzzo (X.10.3). Finally, it is explicitly stated that Bernab  is not worthy of his wife's forgiveness (II.9.68 and 71). Why, then, is Ambrogiuolo punished so fiercely, so horribly put to death, while Bernab , who had even tried to kill his wife, is instead exalted and forgiven?<sup>81</sup> Ambrogiuolo's fault is by no means more serious than that of many other characters in the *Decameron*, who constantly and with impunity play tricks, even cruel ones, to characters that are easy to be deceived—the tricks played to Calandrino being the most representative. The

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 482-483.

<sup>81</sup> "Il soldano appresso comand  che incontanente Ambruogiuolo in alcuno alto luogo della citt  fosse al sole legato ad un palo e unto di mele, n  quindi mai, infino a tanto che per s  medesimo non cadesse, levato fosse; e cos  fu fatto." [II.9.72]; "Ambruogiuolo il di medesimo che legato fu al palo e unto di mele, con sua grandissima angoscia dalle mosche e dalle vespe e da' tafani, de' quali quel paese   copioso molto, fu non solamente ucciso, ma infino all'ossa divorato; le quali bianche rimase e a' nervi appiccate, poi lungo tempo, senza esser mosse, della sua malvagit  fecero a chiunque le vide testimonianza" (II.9.75).

manipulation of the theme of Fortune confirms, therefore, that Fortune does not always reward only deserving individuals (see also Giachetto in II.8).

Inevitably, even in this story, epistemological discoveries have a decisive influence. At the beginning, the acquisition of a certain knowledge is concealed under the form of Ambrogiuolo's nocturn and parodic voyeurism, then it becomes more complex involving all the characters. Ambrogiuolo manages to enter Zinevra's chamber by being hidden in a chest and, at night, sneaking out of it, he lifts the sheets of the bed and watches the woman's naked body (cf. fig. 8, detail)<sup>82</sup> in order to be able to then describe it to Bernabò:

Quindi, avvicinandosi al letto e sentendo che la donna e una piccola fanciulla, che con lei era, dormivan forte, pianamente scopertola tutta, vide che così era bella ignuda come vestita, ma niuno segnale da potere rapportare le vide, fuori che uno ch'ella n'avea sotto la sinistra poppa, ciò era un neo d'intorno al quale erano alquanti peluzzi biondi come oro; e, ciò veduto, chetamente la ricoperse, come che, così bella vedendola, in disiderio avesse di mettere in avventura la vita sua e coricarlesi allato (II.9.27)

(The theme of death is here anticipated with the deception conceived by Ambrogiuolo: a chest symbolically foreshadows his death.) But when Zinevra, managing to escape from death, runs away disguised as a man and calling herself Sicurano (II.9.42-43), the story takes another turn, and here, too, the characters, rather than being punished or rewarded according to Fortune's will, pass through special recognitions induced by the intelligent actions of Zinevra. From the story of Ambrogiuolo, Zinevra, in the disguise of Sicurano, finally understands why her husband has tried to kill her ("Sicurano, udendo questo, prestamente comprese qual fosse la cagione dell'ira di Bernabò verso lei e manifestamente conobbe costui di tutto il suo male esser cagione; e seco pensò di non lasciargliele portare impunita" [II.9.55]). Under the pressure of the Sultan's questions, Ambrogiuolo fears for his fate (II.9.66). Bernabò repents and falls at his wife's feet (II.9.71). But the way in which the Sultan understands both the complexity of the deception and the way in which Zinevra, in her ironic final speech, is able to resolve the situation deserves a close look, at least for its particular language:

- Signor mio assai chiaramente potete *conoscere* quanto quella buona donna gloriar si possa d'amante e di marito; ché l'amante ad una ora lei priva d'onore, con bugie guastando la fama sua, e diserta il marito di lei; e il marito, più *credulo* alle altrui falsità che alla verità da lui per lunga esperienza potuta *conoscere*, la fa uccidere e mangiare a' lupi; e oltre a questo tanto il bene e l'amore che l'amico e 'l marito le porta, che, con lei lungamente dimorati, niuno la *conosce*. Ma per ciò che voi ottimamente *conosciate* quello che ciascun di costoro ha meritato, ove voi mi vogliate di spezial grazia fare di punire lo 'ngannatore e perdonare allo 'ngannato, io la farò qui in vostra e in loro presenza venire. (II.9.64-65)

According to Zinevra, neither Ambrogiuolo nor Bernabò are worthy of her love. They are not even worthy of being praised: Ambrogiuolo for deceiving her, and Bernabò for not

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<sup>82</sup> References to other tales are frequent, however, it is worth noticing a similar voyeuristic scene in Alatiel's tale: "E questo fatto, manifestamente conoscendo sé non essere stati né dalla donna né da altrui sentiti, prese il duca un lume in mano e quello portò sopra il letto, e chetamente tutta la donna, la quale fisamente dormiva, scoperse; e riguardandola tutta la lodò sommamente, e se vestita gli era piaciuta, oltre a ogni comparazione ignuda gli piacque" (II.7.56). The story of Ambrogiuolo and Zinevra is beautifully depicted in a fourteenth century *cassone* (1370-1430/40) by Giovanni Toscani now held in the National Gallery of Scotland in Edinburgh.

putting his trust in her. The fact that Bernabò has not entrusted his wife is particularly significant, for the sin that will lead him to act recklessly against Zinevra, again, is described by the usage of the verb 'to know' (" . . . più *credulo* alle altrui falsità che alla verità da lui per lunga esperienza potuta *conoscere* . . ."), indeed a suggestive mode of expressing a whole series of conjugal mechanisms involving not only the sexual but also the moral aspect of the marriage. In other words, the knowledge that Bernabò had of his wife—a knowledge supported by experience and a long life together, something that would inevitably lead him to have an absolute certainty of the truth—is however misguided by a ruse that could have been easily uncovered with a little more intelligence.

Moreover, that 'knowing' the partner is not only a necessity of a couple but also a narrative device happily adopted by Boccaccio is demonstrated by the fact that, even in the following tale, the ignorance of the moral condition and needs of the spouse are expressed in similar terms (see below II.10.31). It is interesting to see, then, how the Sultan will operate his justice on the case:

Il soldano, il qual sempre per uomo avuta l'avea, questo *vedendo* e udendo, venne in tanta maraviglia, che più volte quello che egli *vedeva* e udiva *credette* più tosto *esser sogno* che vero. Ma pur, poi che la maraviglia cessò, la *verità conoscendo*, con somma laude la vita e la constanzia e i costumi e la virtù della Zinevra, infino allora stata Sicuran chiamata, commendò.

Thus the Sultan understands how things happened, but also recognizes Sicurano's merit (now Zinevra again in female attire) and rewards her desire to regain her husband by punishing the deceiver. To say the least, the language is, once again, unusual. The repetition of same terms related to knowledge and belief connotes the entire passage with an aura of fairytales and dream visions, but also insists on the theme of the characters' voyage towards knowledge.

Finally, the absurdity of the recognition mechanisms is brought to extremes in the tale of Paganino, Bartolomea and Riccardo of Chinzica (II.10). Knowing, recognizing, and cognition blend together into the deception of appearances when Riccardo's wife pretends to not recognize her husband (II.10.25, 27, 30) and finally declares that she no longer intends to return home and be with him:

La donna incominciò a ridere e, senza lasciarlo dir più, disse: - Ben *sapete* che io non sono sì smimorata, che io non *conosca* che voi siete messer Ricciardo di Chinzica mio marito; ma voi, mentre che io fu' con voi, mostraste assai male di *conoscer* me, per ciò che se voi eravate *savio* o sete, come volete esser tenuto, dovavate bene aver tanto *conoscimento*, che voi dovavate vedere che io era giovane e fresca e gagliarda, e per conseguente *conoscere* quello che alle giovani donne, oltre al vestire e al mangiar, bene che elle per vergogna nol dicano, si richiede; il che come voi il faciavate? voi il vi *sapete*. E s'egli v'era più a grado lo studio delle leggi che la moglie, voi non dovavate pigliarla; benché a me non parve mai che voi giudice foste, anzi mi parvate un banditore di sagre e di feste, sì ben le *sapavate*, e le digiune e le vigilie (II.10.31-32)

According to Francesco Bruni,<sup>83</sup> when Bartolomea pretends not to recognize her husband, Riccardo does not understand and reflects on the reason of the supposed misrecognition ("Il che *vedendo* il giudice, che aspettava di dovere essere con grandissima festa ricevuto da lei, si maravigliò forte, e seco stesso cominciò a dire: -

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<sup>83</sup> Bruni, *Boccaccio*, 289-290.

Forse che la malinconia e il lungo dolore che io ho avuto, poscia che io la perdei m'ha *si trasfigurato* che ella non mi *riconosce*." [II.10.23]). Then he uses words that, in a certain way, parody, or overturn, the language of 'transfiguration' which Dante adopts in the *Vita nova* (XIV, 1) when he describes his transformation and emotional turmoil provoked by the sight of Beatrice. But parody is also extended to the painful language of love that Sir Riccardo uses when he tries to convince his wife to return home: "Deh, cuor del corpo mio, *anima mia* dolce, speranza mia, or non riconosci tu Ricciardo tuo che t'ama più che sé medesimo? Come può questo essere? Son io *così trasfigurato*? Deh, *occhio mio* bello, guatami pure un poco" (II.10.30); "Deh, *anima mia* dolce, che parole son quelle che tu di? Or non hai tu riguardo all'onore de' parenti tuoi e al tuo?" (II.10.35). Perhaps, it is not by chance that the language of transfiguration is here coupled with the representation of the beloved woman as the "anima" of Riccardo.

The bestiality of the previous tale represented by the figure of Bernabò, rewarded by Fortune, now becomes a "mattezza" as one can see in Riccardo's behavior. At the end of the story, Riccardo manages to comprehend what his mistake was really about, yet he is punished by Fortune as he fails to recover his wife and ends his life dismayed by the pain:

Messer Ricciardo, veggendosi a mal partito e pure allora *conoscendo* la sua follia d'aver moglie giovane tolta essendo spossato, dolente e tristo s'uscì della camera e disse parole assai a Paganino, le quali non montarono un frullo. E ultimamente, senza alcuna cosa aver fatta, lasciata la donna, a Pisa si ritornò, e in tanta *mattezza* per dolor cadde che, andando per Pisa, a chiunque il salutava o d'alcuna cosa il domandava, niuna altra cosa rispondeva se non: - Il mal foro non vuol festa; - e dopo non molto tempo si morì (II.10.42)

In this story, the mechanisms of Fortune are complicated by the mechanisms of time. The image of the calendar of festivities imposed on the woman, during which both the woman and her husband should abstain from sex, not only metaphorizes the absurdity of such an abstention, but also the possibility to catch the right moments offered by Fortune. It is the woman herself who then refers to the opportunity to react timely (" - Del mio onore non intendo io che persona, *ora che non si può*, sia più di me tenera; fossonne stati i parenti miei quando mi diedero a voi!" [II.10.37]). Is Boccaccio, thus, a forerunner of the philosophy of "occasioni" of Fortuna as it is later elaborated by Machiavelli?

### *The Voyage and Dante's Mountain*

Over the course of this analysis, from the so-called minor literary works to the Second Day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, I tried to reflect on the spatial bottom/top dynamics typical of the narratives symbolizing the voyage of the soul. From the alternating accidents of Fortune to the harmonious walks in the hills and plans around Florence that the storytellers joyfully experience, the journey that the *Decameron* describes metaphorizes the path of life. Specifically, this journey symbolizes the human condition on earth, which consists of an endless search that never attains a steady all-encompassing knowledge of things. The characters of the *Decameron* embark on individual journeys for the apprehension of knowledge through all the stages that Boccaccio already experimented in his minor works. Through the mechanisms of recognition described by the author with a language that aims at conveying alternative meanings, even related to otherworldly, or metaphysical, knowledge of things, these

characters suffer the course of earthly events but eventually react. By also trying to interpret the movement of supernatural forces such as Fortune, they act accordingly in order to escape from dangerous situations or to improve their status. The metaphors of vision, which constantly allude to the achievement of something greater or hidden (very often, what is hidden is the mechanism of Fortune), represent peculiar mechanisms of the language, and define the reader's experience as a sort of intellectual and spiritual progression. Moreover, the metaphors of vision are conceived according to the linguistic and rhetorical ability of the characters, hence serving the function to stimulate the intuition of the readers, who may well imagine hidden perspectives that go beyond the mere narration of the facts.

Thus, in a sense, Boccaccio's mountain, which we have seen triggering the narrative and imposing its presence in the work, may appear to represent Dante himself. Ultimately, Dante's poetry, and all that it represents metaphorized in the mountain as the goal of the voyage for the attainment of knowledge, is quickly dismissed by Boccaccio in the pages of the *Introduction* and through the description of the plague. The experience of the *Commedia*, which was certainly unique in literature, is over, like the plague that once devastated the entire world but is passed in the mind of the writer. The language of knowledge, which is reflected in the theme of the journey in the Second Day, takes advantage of Dante's experience, but surpasses it, and sometimes parodies it in a variety of human and adventurous cases. Dante's personal experience in the *Commedia*, his spiritual journey that unfolds naturally from the climbing of a mountain to the vision of God, multiplies in the *Decameron* and appears fragmented into a variety of real characters that live their individual lives and display a world view inevitably different from that of Dante. Boccaccio's vision, or rather the multiple visions made possible through his characters, does not involve anything as sublime as the vision of God. Yet, the language of knowledge, although alluding to the metaphysical realities on which Dante magnificently builds his poem, now serves the function of entertainment; the entertainment of the heart, but especially of the mind. Is Boccaccio's mountain the conscious failure of the Dantesque allegorical model of ascending to knowledge? Does it constitute the breakdown of traditional Christian models of language and allegory as represented by the typological experience of Dante? Through the metaphor of the mountain, is Boccaccio trying to hint to something new, to a new use of language and literature in order to both represent the manifold aspects of life and explain them?



### Chapter 3

#### The *Motto* and the Enigma: Rhetoric and Knowledge in the Sixth Day of the *Decameron*

Facilis igitur est distinctio ingenui et inliberalis ioci.  
Alter est, si tempore fit, ut si remisso animo,  
<gravissimo> homine dignus, alter ne libero quidem,  
si rerum turpitude adhibetur aut verborum obscenitas.  
(Cicero, *De officiis* 29, 104)

#### *Rhetoric and Dialectics of Oppositions*

Rhetoric has been part of the philosopher's education ever since its remote origins in the ancient Greek world.<sup>1</sup> During the golden age of Latin literature, rhetoric gains new elements of meaning through the forensic practice of rhetoricians and politicians,<sup>2</sup> and then the Middle Ages ultimately inherits the study and practice of the discipline while elaborating further developments.<sup>3</sup> After a long series of historical transitions, not only classical scholarship but also contemporary critical theory keeps debating about both the meaning of rhetoric in the past ages and the new features it gained over time, about its definition in relation to dialectics, and about what it has now become. Contemporary studies of rhetoric address a more varied range of domains than was the case in ancient times. While classical rhetoric trained speakers to be effective persuaders in public forums and institutions like courtrooms and assemblies, contemporary rhetoric investigates human discourse on a large scale. A useful and original overview of the significance of rhetoric in relation to the issues raised over time is an article by Stanley Fish which reviews several theories of modern critics and convincingly shows how the controversy about rhetoric has always dealt with either the same *kind* of issues—although framed with different perspectives—or the same *dynamic* of oppositional categories that, even after many years, re-appear in all their speculative strength and inexhaustible insolubility.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, commenting on a famous passage from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Fish argues that the figure of the daemon Belial—beyond the mere poetic fact—is a metaphor of the deceptiveness of rhetoric: Belial speaks with a persuasive accent in the

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle considers rhetoric as the counterpart, the countermelody (*antistrophos*), of dialectic insofar as they both have as their objects the same *topoi*, or commonplaces, to find arguments, and defines rhetoric as the faculty of discovering all the available means of persuasion (*Rhetoric* I.1.1354a). Cf. G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 78.

<sup>2</sup> In ancient Rome, rhetoric follows the teaching of Isocrates and is a part of political science. Cf. Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. Hubbell, book 1; J. J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of the Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 8.

<sup>3</sup> Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, part two: "Medieval Rhetorical Genres;" C. Vasoli, *La dialettica e la retorica dell'Umanesimo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1968); P. E. Prill, "Rhetoric and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages," *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 129-147. On rhetoric and epistemology in the Renaissance, see Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism*.

<sup>4</sup> S. Fish, "Rhetoric," in F. Lentricchia and T. McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 203-222.

rhythms of the chant ("he pleas'd the ear, / And with persuasive accent thus began") and manages to convince his audience by manipulating reality. In addition to emphasizing the pejorative connotation of rhetoric as a means of obscuring the truth, the figure of Belial allows us to extrapolate from a single poetic image almost all the 'binary oppositions'—as Fish defines them—whereby rhetoric received its definitions. In other words, rhetoric can be a means of deceiving instead of discovering the truth by virtue of its double nature, made of both "a truth that exists independently of all perspectives" and "the many truths that emerge and seem perspicuous." Indeed, it is precisely the understanding of the linguistic possibilities and inherent dangers of rhetoric that generates—primarily, in the intentions of critics—a series of efforts to build a language from which every prejudice of perspective is eliminated, a language that is able to create a form of communication which helps us to both determine what is absolutely and objectively true; namely, a form of communication that is the real antithesis of rhetoric in its structure and operations.<sup>5</sup>

The relationship between rhetoric and knowledge (a true knowledge) is one of the oldest and most interesting problems. The modern stereotype of rhetoric as 'deceiving speech' or 'empty speech' reflects an essential division of rhetoric from knowledge that has had influential adherents within the rhetorical tradition, most notably Plato.<sup>6</sup> The negative side of rhetoric, so well dramatized by Belial, appears in a clearer light if we observe how closely it is linked to philosophy and dialectics, ever since its origins. Particularly, dialectics, whether intended as either the practical application of logic or the argumentative method of philosophy, makes use of oppositional categories (or opposing assertions, the so-called 'horns of a contradiction') which not only must necessarily be two in numerical terms (*tertium non datur*, Aristotle would say) but which also can become both true through either a demonstration or the exchange of arguments in which the ability, or the convincing strength, of the speaker emerges and overcomes his/her opponent. Well before Belial, ancient dialectics already revealed a destructive face and demonstrated how its practical application in discourse—at least in the Greek world—did not lead to resolution of any type of dispute through rational discussion; nor did it facilitate, ultimately, the search for truth or achieve any objective knowledge. To create an image of the negative side of dialectics in the mind—an image as representative as that of Belial, but more instructive for the purpose of confronting it with the *Decameron*—a philosophical anecdote attributed to Aristotle's lost dialogue *On poets* deserves mention.<sup>7</sup> The anecdote exemplifying the destructive power of dialectics was also known by Boccaccio, who reports it in his commentary of Dante's *Commedia*.<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>5</sup> Fish, "Rhetoric," 205.

<sup>6</sup> Plato, in his *Gorgias*, criticised the sophists because he believed that rhetoric was simply too dangerous, being based on skill and common opinion (*doxa*). In the *Phaedrus*, Plato set out to instead discover *episteme*, or 'truth,' through dialectical method. Since Plato's argument has shaped western philosophy, rhetoric has mainly been regarded as an evil that has no epistemic status (Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 58 ff.).

<sup>7</sup> Aristotle, *Liber de poetis*, in *Aristotelis fragmenta selecta*, ed. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), fragm. 8 (= Ps.-Plutarch, *Vita Homeri*, 3-4). The anecdote is translated in English by W. D. Ross, in *The Works of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908), vol. 12, p. 76-77, and by G. Colli, *La sapienza greca* (Milano: Adelphi, 1977), 346-349. For a study of ancient dialectics and its destructive potentialities see G. Colli, *La nascita della filosofia* (Milano: Adelphi, 1978); the anecdote is mentioned here on p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Boccaccio narrates the anecdote indicating Callimachus as his source: "Della morte sua, secondo che scrive Callimaco, fu uno strano accidente cagione: per ciò che, essendo egli in Arcadia ed andando solo

is the famous enigma about the legendary death of Homer that was transmitted throughout the Middle Ages without any significant alteration. A Delphic pronouncement once warned the poet that he would die on the island of Ios, and urged him to beware of a riddle posed by some young fishermen. As predicted, at an advanced age, Homer finds himself on Ios by the sea, where he asks some fishermen what they have caught. They pose him a riddle: "We have what we did not find; what we did find we left behind." The fishermen have been fishing without success, and meanwhile spend some time searching themselves for lice before meeting Homer. They leave behind the lice they found, but the undiscovered vermin are still in their clothes. Unable to solve the riddle posed by the fishermen, Homer slips in the mud and dies soon afterwards, vexed that his famous mental powers have failed him.<sup>9</sup> The anecdote later passed into medieval tradition, but according to the account of an unidentified Virius Nicomachus Flavianus (*De vestigiis et dogmatibus philosophorum*), reported by John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, the name of Homer was replaced by that of Plato, possibly with the intention of giving the anecdote a

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su per lo lito del mare, senti pescatori, li quali sopra uno scoglio si stavano, forse tendendo o raconciando lor reti; li quali esso domandò se preso avessero, intendendo seco medesimo de' pesci. Costoro risposero che quegli, che presi aveano, avean perduti, e quegli, che presi non aveano, se ne portavano. Era stata fortuna in mare e però, non avendo i pescatori potuto pescare, come loro usanza è, s'erano stati al sole e i vestimenti loro aveano cerchi e purgati di que' vermini che in essi nascono: e quegli, che nel cercar trovati e presi aveano, gli aveano uccisi e quegli, che presi non aveano, essendosi ne' vestimenti rimasi, ne portavan seco. Omero, udita la risposta de' pescatori ed essendogli oscura, mentre al doverla intendere andava sospeso, per caso percosse in una pietra, per la qual cosa cadde e fieramente nel cader percosse e di quella percossa il terzo dì appresso si morì. Alcuni voglion dire che, non potendo intender la risposta fattagli da' pescatori, entrò in tanta maninconia che una febbre il prese, della quale in pochi dì si morì e poveramente in Arcadia fu seppellito; onde poi, portando gli Ateniesi le sue ossa in Atene, in quella onorevolmente il seppellirono" (G. Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca [Milano: A. Mondadori, 1967-98], vol. VI, IV.i. esp. litt.105-107). In a marginal note of the so-called *Zibaldone Magliabechiano* (Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze, B.R. 50), c. 227r, Boccaccio corrects a false attribution of the anecdote to Diogenes by a Venitian Chronographer (cf. F. Macri-Leone, "Il zibaldone Boccaccesco della Magliabechiana," *GSLI* 10 [1887]: 1-41, in part. p. 36). In the manuscript containing Terence's comedies (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, XXXVIII 17, f. 84v), Boccaccio briefly narrates two anecdotes on Homer, one about his birth and the other about his death caused by the fishermen's riddle, as well as two greek epigrams (cf. H. Hauvette, "Notes sur des manuscrits autographes de Boccace à la Bibliothèque Laurentienne," in *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire de l'école française de Rome* 14 (1894): 87-145, now in *Études sur Boccace, 1894-1916* [Torino: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1968], 67-125, tav. III/5; Hecker, *Boccaccio-Funde*, tav. XI; Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio*, 340; F. Di Benedetto, "Presenza di testi minori negli Zibaldoni," in C. Cazalé-Bérard and M. Picone, eds., *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura: atti del seminario internazionale di Firenze-Certaldo, 26-28 aprile 1996* [Firenze: F. Cesati, 1998], 21).

<sup>9</sup> See also Valerius Maximus, *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, ed. Briscoe, 9.12 ext. 3: "Non uulgaris etiam Homeri mortis causa fertur, qui in Io insula, quia quaestionem a piscatoribus positam solvere non potuisset, dolore absumptus creditur;" and Plutarch, *Vita Homeri*, 14 (1062). The riddle, according to a gloss on Johannes of Hauvilla's *Architrenius*, 6.488-495 (ed. Paul Gerhard Schmidt, 231, 339): "Quotquot non cepimus, habemus et quos cepimus, non habemus." John of Salisbury talks about this story of Homer's death in his *Policraticus*, ed. Webb, I.141 and II.111, and gives as its source Flavianus, *De vestigiis philosophorum*. According to Webb, John's original source was Pseudo-Herodotus' *Vita Homeri*, in *Homeri Opera*, ed. Thomas W. Allen (Oxford 1912), 5.184. For Homer's troubles, see the letter of pseudo-Cornelius Nepos to Sallust appended to Dares Phrygius, *Anonymi historia Troyana Daretis Frigii*, ed. Juergen Stohlmann, in *Untersuchungen und kritische Ausgabe* (Wuppertal-Duesseldorf 1968) = *Beihefte 1 zum Mittellateinischen Jahrbuch*.

stronger philosophical emphasis.<sup>10</sup> Thus, it is not by chance that John of Salisbury is considered one of the authors of the so-called literary and philosophical renaissance of the twelfth century and one of the promoters of the triumphant affirmation of the dialectics—at the time called logic—within the medieval disciplines. He insisted on the necessity of unifying dialectics with rhetoric within the well-established set of *artes liberales*, and emphasized the importance of linking them to philosophy as a means for the search of knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

Because of its well-structured framework and the rhetorically elaborated language of the tales and the *cornice*, the *Decameron* has been studied as a typical expression of the *artes rhetoricae* of the fourteenth century, and, more recently, as a literary work worthy of interpretation according to the modern methods of rhetorical analysis.<sup>12</sup> A reading in parallel—and at the same time contrastive—of the Sixth Day of Boccaccio's *Decameron* along with the texts of the collection's framework—namely, the *Introduzione*, the *proemio* and the *Conclusioni*—both gives us the possibility of speculating on the meaning and literary treatment of rhetoric in a specific medieval fictional context, and allows us to understand the manifold applications of rhetoric in a *constructive* perspective—as opposed to the negative side of rhetoric that we have paradigmatically recognized in Milton's Belial. Moreover, a contrastive reading of this kind allows us to observe the peculiar rhetorical features of Boccaccio's language in his capacity of multiplying the meaning of the tales throughout the simple juxtaposition of the texts within the collection. In fact, in the medieval tradition, the nature of rhetoric is deeply present in the mind of the authors insofar as it has been inherited directly from the ancients, and is intended—at least in the majority of literary and philosophical texts—as a constructive instrument of production of meaning, and not as something destructive (or even deconstructive). It suffices to recall a textual instance that had a longstanding literary currency in the Middle Ages, namely the famous definition of the rhetorician given by Quintilian—who, in turn, used a sentence attributed to Cato—in which he

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<sup>10</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, I.141, 1 ff.

<sup>11</sup> See Curtius, *Letteratura europea e Medio Evo latino*, 62-63.

<sup>12</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 29-70; Chiappelli, "Discorso o progetto per uno studio sul Decameron," 105-11; E. Sanguineti, "Gli 'schemata' del 'Decameron'," in *Studi di filologia e letteratura dedicati a V. Pernicone* (Genova: Tilgher, 1975), 141-53; Surdich, *La cornice di amore*. C. De Michelis, *Contraddizioni nel Decameron* (Milano: Guanda, 1983); L. Badini Confalonieri, "Madonna Oretta e il luogo del Decameron," in G. Getto, *L'arte dell'interpretare: studi critici offerti a Giovanni Getto* (Cuneo: L'arciere, 1984), 127-143; R. Barilli, "Semiologia e retorica nella lettura del Decameron," *Il Verri* 35-36 (1970): 27-48; C. Coulter, "Boccaccio's knowledge of Quintilian," *Speculum* 33 (1958): 490-496; P. M. Forni, "Retorica del reale nel 'Decameron'," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 17 (1988): 183-202; Forni, *Adventures in Speech*; R. Kleszczewski, "Antike und Mittelalterliche Traditionen in der Menschendarstellung bei Boccaccio: Das Porträt Ser Ceparellos," in H. L. Scheel, W. Hirdt, and R. Kleszczewski, eds., *Italia viva: Studien zur Sprache und Literatur Italiens: Festschrift für Hans Ludwig Scheel* (Tübingen: G. Narr, 1983), 225-36; C. Muscetta, "Giovanni Boccaccio," in Muscetta, ed., *La letteratura italiana: storia e testi* (Bari [then:] Roma; Bari: Laterza, 1970-1980), vol. 2, t. 2: *Il Trecento: dalla crisi dell'età comunale all'umanesimo*, ed. C. Muscetta and A. Tartaro (Bari: Laterza, 1972), 305-311; A. Schiaffini, *Tradizione e poesia nella prosa d'arte italiana dalla latinità medievale a Giovanni Boccaccio* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura, 1943), in part. p. 187-197, and 193-203; A. Stäuble, "Strutture retoriche in cinque orazioni boccacciane," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 19 (1990): 47-61; Stewart, *Retorica e mimica nel "Decameron" e nella commedia del cinquecento*; M. Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron* (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

unifies in the same formula both the ethical and the technical sphere of rhetoric: the *homo rhetoricus* described by Fish, in Quintilian's words becomes the “vir bonus dicendi peritus,” namely, somebody whose technical skills are consequently able to promote the benefit of the community.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Cicero elaborated another constructive attitude. His *De oratore*, for instance, reflected the need to create a wider and nobler culture than that represented by the usual Roman curriculum and reflected the successful blending of a new educational theory regarding the two rival disciplines of the time: rhetoric (more practical), and philosophy (more speculative). Thus, the moral perspective and the emphasis on values were the hallmark of the active and educated man.<sup>14</sup>

Generally speaking, rhetorical analysis makes use of rhetorical concepts to describe the social or epistemological functions of discourse. The first task of rhetorical analysis is to describe the claims and arguments advanced within discourse, and, most importantly, to identify the specific semiotic strategies employed by the author to accomplish specific persuasive goals. Second, a rhetorical analysis identifies a peculiar use of language that is particularly important in achieving persuasion, and typically deals with the question of 'How does it work'? Accordingly, I will first focus on identifying some rhetorical strategies adopted in the First Day of the *Decameron*, and afterward will move to identifying the form of Boccaccio's language that is most representative and effective in achieving persuasion and producing knowledge. Furthermore, I will try to show how some rhetorical oppositions are at stake in the *Decameron's* framework, oppositions which are applied to construct an expository discourse with the aim of leading the reader to the actual narrative. I will also demonstrate how the application of these rhetorical features is achieved for the sake of a philosophical dualism manifested in the agonism of the characters, and oriented, not simply to convince the reader with the aid of rhetoric, or to embellish the discourse with cleverly organized tropes, but rather to bestow upon the narrative discourse a further meaning related to knowledge. Thus—going beyond a mere reading of the framework—it will be clear that a sort of connotative language that the reader is solicited to decipher, a language coherent and specular to the very structure of rhetoric, is directed towards leading the reader to the correct and broader understanding of the entire collection.

Let us begin with identifying the arguments and the specific strategies employed by the author to accomplish his persuasive goals. The reading of any kind of literary text—particularly a medieval text—indicates that, in order to catch the attention of the reader, proems are always the privileged place for rhetorical display. According to the peculiar language of the introductory paragraph, the Proem of the *Decameron* seems to be one of those places:

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

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<sup>13</sup> Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria*, ed. H. E. Butler, XII.1.1: “Sit ergo nobis orator quem constituimus is qui a M. Catone finitur vir bonus dicendi peritus, verum, id quod et ille posuit prius et ipsa natura potius ac maius est, utique vir bonus.”

<sup>14</sup> N. R. Pascal, "The Legacy of Roman Education," *The Classical Journal* 79 (1984): 351-355. Cf. M. Porcius Cato, *Libri ad Marcum filium (fragmenta in aliis scriptis seruata)*, ed. W. D. Hooper, fragm. 14, p. 80, line 1: "Orator est, Marce fili, vir bonus dicendi peritus. Rem tene, verba sequentur." Cf. also Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Controuersiae*, ed. Winterbottom, I, 9.

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. Per ciò che, dalla mia prima giovinezza infino a questo tempo oltre modo essendo acceso stato d'altissimo e nobile amore, forse più assai che alla mia bassa condizione non parrebbe, narrandolo, si richiedesse, quantunque appo coloro che discreti erano e alla cui notizia pervenne io ne fossi lodato e da molto più reputato, nondimeno mi fu egli di grandissima fatica a sofferire, certo non per crudeltà della donna amata, ma per soverchio fuoco nella mente concetto da poco regolato appetito: il quale, per ciò che a niuno convenevole termine mi lasciava un tempo stare, più di noia che bisogno non m'era spesse volte *sentir mi facea*. Nella qual noia tanto refrigerio 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*. Ma sì come a Colui piacque il quale, essendo Egli infinito, diede per legge incommutabile a tutte le cose mondane aver fine, il mio amore, oltre a ogn'altro fervente e il quale niuna forza di proponimento o di consiglio o di vergogna evidente, o pericolo che seguir ne potesse, aveva potuto né rompere né piegare, per sè medesimo in processo di tempo si diminuì in guisa, che sol di sè nella mente m'ha al presente lasciato quel piacere che egli è usato di porgere a chi troppo non si mette né suoi più cupi pelaghi navigando; per che, dove faticoso esser solea, ogni affanno togliendo via, *dilettevole il sento esser rimaso*. (*Proemio.2-5*) (emphasis mine)

'Tis humane to have compassion on the afflicted; and as it shews well in all, so it is especially demanded of those who have had need of comfort and have found it in others: among whom, if any had ever need thereof or found it precious or delectable, I may be numbered; seeing that from my early youth even to the present I was beyond measure aflame with a most aspiring and noble love more perhaps than, were I to enlarge upon it, would seem to accord with my lowly condition. Whereby, among people of discernment to whose knowledge it had come, I had much praise and high esteem, but nevertheless extreme discomfort and suffering, not indeed by reason of cruelty on the part of the beloved lady, but through superabundant ardour engendered in the soul by ill-bridled desire; the which, as it allowed me no reasonable period of quiescence, frequently occasioned me an inordinate distress. In which distress so much relief was afforded me by the delectable discourse of a friend and his commendable consolations, that I entertain a very solid conviction that to them I owe it that I am not dead. But, as it pleased Him, who, being infinite, has assigned by immutable law an end to all things mundane, my love, beyond all other fervent, and neither to be broken nor bent by any force of determination, or counsel of prudence, or fear of manifest shame or ensuing danger, did nevertheless in course of time abate of its own accord, in such wise that it has now left nought of itself in my mind but that pleasure which it is wont to afford to him who does not adventure too far out in navigating its deep seas; so that, whereas it was used to be grievous, now, all discomfort being done away, I find that which remains to be delightful.

When considering the opening rhetorical structure of the *Decameron*, we notice the usage of the *cursus* at both the beginning (“degli afflitti”) and the end (“sentir mi face”) of the first textual element in the first paragraph, which develops the universal theme of compassion<sup>15</sup> and the pain of love, and the same device at both the beginning (“che io non sia morto”) and the end (“il sento esser rimaso”) of the second textual element of the

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<sup>15</sup> For an interpretation of this opening sentence of the Proem and its Oratian tradition see R. Hollander, "Utilità in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 15 (1985-1986): 215-233, in part. p. 215, n. 2. Giusti, *Dall'amore cortese alla comprensione*, 88, reads this opening section of the *Decameron* in parallel with the proem of the *Corbaccio*: while in the *Decameron* the theme of gratitude is functional to provide a benefit for the readers—both pleasure and useful advice—, in the *Corbaccio* the impossibility of overcoming the pains of love originates the writing of the work, now conceived as a sort of outburst of resentment.

same paragraph, focused, instead, on the particular, and personal, theme of relief from the suffering of love, which is in turn a biographical reference to Boccaccio as actual character.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the opening section of the *Decameron* presents a chiasmic rhetorical structure that ends up in a stylistic device—the *cursus*, which is at the same time a ten-syllable verse—typical of artfully elaborated prose works (“dilettevole il sento essere rimaso”).<sup>17</sup> And we can recognize the same scheme in the second paragraph: here, however, the universal theme is gratitude, while the particular theme is Boccaccio’s willingness to give relief to someone’s pain.<sup>18</sup> Thus, even from the very first two paragraphs of the Proem, it is easy to catch a glimpse of the usage—at the level of the disposition of the arguments—of a poetics of oppositions. In these two particular cases, the opposition of universal vs. particular is applied and presented with the typical means of medieval rhetoric.

In Boccaccio’s creative mind, this poetics certainly takes its origins from his literary education, the school of rhetoric of Boncompagno da Signa along with the apprenticeship of the rhythmic prose of Paolo da Perugia and Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro in Naples,<sup>19</sup> and from the constant practice of what the Latin manuals of rhetoric used to call the art of *dispositio*.<sup>20</sup> The same poetics of oppositions multiplies on the level of the diegetical text. The stories themselves could also be considered, broadly, as a dialectical genre that dramatizes a human contrast, a divergence of interests to be resolved, and a dispute to be sorted out, almost always with the aid of the persuasive

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<sup>16</sup> For the relation of the theme of relief with Ovid’s *Remedia Amoris* see R. Hollander, *Boccaccio’s Last Fiction, “Il Corbaccio”* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 36, and id., “The Proem of the *Decameron*: Boccaccio between Ovid and Dante,” in A. Paolella, V. Placella, G. Turco, and S. Pasquazi, eds., *Miscellanea di studi danteschi: in memoria di Silvio Pasquazi* (Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1993), 423-438, in part. p. 427-428; J. L. Smarr, “Symmetry and Balance in the *Decameron*,” *Mediaevalia* 2 (1976): 159-187, in part. p. 176.

<sup>17</sup> For the usage of the *cursus* in the *Decameron*, see Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 45 ff..

<sup>18</sup> “Ma quantunque cessata sia la pena, non per ciò è la memoria fuggita de’ benefici già ricevuti, datimi da coloro à quali per benivolenza da loro a me portata erano gravi le mie fatiche: ne passerà mai, sì come io credo, se non per morte. E per ciò che la gratitudine, secondo che io credo, trall’altre virtù è sommamente da commendare e il contrario da biasimare, per non parere ingrato ho meco stesso proposto di volere, in quel poco che per me si può, in cambio di ciò che io ricevetti, ora che libero dir mi posso, e se non a coloro che me atarono alli quali per avventura per lo lor senno o per la loro buona ventura non abbisogna, a quegli almeno a qual fa luogo, alcuno alleggiamento prestare. E quantunque il mio sostentamento, o conforto che vogliam dire, possa essere e sia à bisognosi assai poco, nondimeno parmi quello doversi più tosto porgere dove il bisogno apparisce maggiore, sì perché più utilità vi farà e si ancora perché più vi fia caro avuto” (Proemio.6-8) (Emphasis mine.) (But the cessation of the pain has not banished the memory of the kind offices done me by those who shared by sympathy the burden of my griefs; nor will it ever, I believe, pass from me except by death. And as among the virtues gratitude is in my judgment most especially to be commended, and ingratitude in equal measure to be censured, therefore, that I show myself not ungrateful, I have resolved, now that I may call myself free, to endeavour, in return for what I have received, to afford, so far as in me lies, some solace, if not to those who succoured me, and who, perchance, by reason of their good sense or good fortune, need it not, at least t such as may be apt to receive it. And though my support or comfort, so to say, may be of little avail to the needy, nevertheless it seems to me meet to offer it most readily where the need is most apparent, because it will there be most serviceable and also most kindly received).

<sup>19</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 45-46.

<sup>20</sup> From the *dispositio* of every part of the discourse derives the *compositio* as a constructive act of setting up ‘together’ the various parts in order to achieve a coherent unity of signifiers and signified (cf. Curtius, *Letteratura europea*, 73 ff.).

power of the word. In this sense, Boccaccio continues the spirit of medieval controversy, according to which secular things are configured as describable by a binary discourse that, with an antinomian structure, becomes the form of content in the rhetorical, philosophical, and juridical culture.<sup>21</sup> In sum, from the very beginning, Boccaccio's rhetoric of oppositions not only becomes fully comprehensible in the medieval context, but is also defined as a means in the hands of the author to complete the narrative movement of the collection. The oscillating movement of knowledge is rhetorically presented so that the author's personal experience becomes the cipher of an epistemological duality of particular and universal. With the experience of the particular, the biographical element constitutes only the preliminary step of a narrative journey in search for knowledge. The dynamic of contrastive actions that permeates the collection's framework will then be reflected singularly in each tale, in the different way each character understands the world, and will be mirrored in the dynamism of society as described by Boccaccio.

Following Vittore Branca, we can see that there are other aspects of the rhetoric of oppositions that point out the structural and functional analogy between Boccaccio's Proem and the beginning of Petrarch's *Canzoniere*.<sup>22</sup> It is thus possible to recognize a keen play of intertextuality realized through a rhetorical technique made of oppositions—an intertextuality which cannot be accidental or fortuitous, given both Boccaccio and Petrarch's contemporaneity with each other and the fact that the latter's lyrics used to circulate among friends and poets well before being collected in the famous song book.<sup>23</sup> In fact, in both the *Decameron* and the first lyric of the *Canzoniere*, we notice an artful rhetorical changing of the subject (from the "Voi . . ." to "Ma ben veggio . . ." in Petrarch; from the "Umana cosa è aver compassione . . ." to ". . . io sono uno di queglii", in Boccaccio). On the level of meaning, moreover, the opposition is established between two different chronological and existential moments of the poet's life: in Petrarch, from the earliest "giovanile errore" to the later maturity of his conscience; in Boccaccio, from the initial affliction of love to the eventual relief provided by the help of friends. Alluding and paying homage to Petrarch would therefore center Boccaccio's poetics on seeking to create an alternative to that of Petrarch.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> M. Corti, "Il genere 'disputatio' e la transcodificazione indolore di Bonvesin della Riva," in *Il viaggio testuale*, 259.

<sup>22</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. G. Contini (Torino: Einaudi, 1992): "Voi ch'ascoltate in rime sparse il suono / di quei sospiri ond'io nudriva 'l core / in sul mio primo giovanile errore / quand'era in parte altr'uom da quel ch'i' sono, / del vario stile in ch'io piango et ragiono / fra le vane speranze e 'l van dolore, / ove sia chi per prova intenda amore, / spero trovar pietà, nonché perdono. / Ma ben veggio or sí come al popol tutto / favola fui gran tempo, onde sovente / di me mesdesmo meco mi vergogno; / et del mio vaneggiar vergogna è 'l frutto, / e 'l pentersi, e 'l conoscer chiaramente / che quanto piace al mondo è breve sogno."

<sup>23</sup> On the diffusion and fortune of Petrarch's lyrics and on the making of his songbook, see E. H. Wilkins, *The Making of the "Canzoniere" and Other Petrarchan Studies* (Roma, Edizioni di Storia e di Letteratura, 1951). More recently: M. Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima: storia e racconto nel Canzoniere di Petrarca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992); C. Bologna, *Tradizione e fortuna dei classici italiani*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), vol. 1: Dalle origini al Tasso, p. 277 ff.

<sup>24</sup> On the artful rhetorical changing of the subject and the ideological opposition with the tradition cf. Gaspara Stampa's proemial sonnet: "Voi, ch'ascoltate in queste meste rime, / in questi mesti, in questi oscuri accenti / il suon degli amorosi miei lamenti / e de le pene mie tra l'altre prime, / ove fia chi valor apprezzi e stime, / gloria, non che perdon, de' miei lamenti / spero trovar fra le ben nate genti, / poi che la



The contrast of rhetorical oppositions continues in the Introduction; after the “*orrido cominciamento*”, necessarily follows the “*dolcezza e il piacere*”:

Quantunque volte, graziosissime donne, meco pensando riguardo quanto voi naturalmente tutte siete *pietose*, tante conosco che la presente opera al vostro iudicio avrà *grave* e *noioso* principio, sì come è la dolorosa ricordazione della pestifera mortalità trapassata, universalmente a ciascuno che quella vide o altramenti conobbe dannosa, la quale essa porta nella fronte. Ma non voglio per ciò che questo di più avanti leggere vi spaventi, quasi sempre sospiri e tralle lagrime leggendo dobbiate trapassare. Questo *orrido cominciamento* vi fia non altramenti che a' camminanti *una montagna aspra e erta*, presso alla quale un bellissimo piano e dilettevole sia reposto, il quale tanto più viene lor piacevole quanto maggiore è stata del salire e dello smontare la gravezza. E sì come la estremità della allegrezza il dolore occupa, così le miserie da sopravveniente letizia sono terminate. A questa breve *noia* (dico breve in quanto poche lettere si contiene) seguita prestamente la dolcezza e il piacere quale io v'ho davanti promesso e che forse non sarebbe da così fatto inizio, se non si dicesse, aspettato. E nel vero, se io potuto avessi onestamente per altra parte menarvi a quello che io desidero che per così *aspro sentiero* come fia questo, io l'avrei volentier fatto: ma ciò che, qual fosse la cagione per che le cose che appresso si leggeranno avvenissero, non si poteva senza questa ramemorazion dimostrare, quasi da necessità costretto a scriverle mi conduco. (I.intro.2-7) (emphasis mine)

As often, most gracious ladies, as I bethink me, how compassionate you are by nature one and all, I do not disguise from myself that the present work must seem to you to have but a heavy and distressful prelude, in that it bears upon its very front what must needs revive the sorrowful memory of the late mortal pestilence, the course whereof was grievous not merely to eyewitnesses but to all who in any other wise had cognisance of it. But I would have you know, that you need not therefore be fearful to read further, as if your reading were ever to be accompanied by sighs and tears. This horrid beginning will be to you even such as to wayfarers is a steep and rugged mountain, beyond which stretches a plain most fair and delectable, which the toil of the ascent and descent does but serve to render more agreeable to them; for, as the last degree of joy brings with it sorrow, so misery has ever its sequel of happiness. To this brief exordium of woe—brief, I say, inasmuch as it can be put within the compass of a few letters—succeed forthwith the sweets and delights which I have promised you, and which, perhaps, had I not done so, were not to have been expected from it. In truth, had it been honestly possible to guide you whither I would bring you by a road less rough than this will be, I would gladly have so done. But, because without this review of the past, it would not be in my power to shew how the matters, of which you will hereafter read, came to pass, I am almost bound of necessity to enter upon it, if I would write of them at all.

This passage certainly recalls the beginning of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (the “*selva selvaggia e aspra e forte / che nel pensier rinova la paura*” [*Commedia* I, 5-6]), not simply on the subject of bitterness (“*Tant' è amara che poco è più morte*” [*Commedia* 7]), but particularly on the necessity for the reader to go through a sad preliminary experience, an inevitable, but necessarily arduous, moment followed by the pleasure of a final fulfillment in joy. Both the analogy of the terms coupled with the presence of a mountain to climb, and also the evoked (or re-evoked) narrative structure emphasize an initial

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lor cagione è sì sublime. / E spero ancor che debba dir qualcuna: / - Felicissima lei, da che sostenne / per sì chiara cagion danno sì chiaro! / Deh, perché tant'amor, tanta fortuna / per sì nobil signor a me non venne, / ch'anch'io n'andrei con tanta donna a paro?” (Gaspara Stampa, *Rime*, ed. M Bellonci e R. Ceriello [Milano: Rizzoli, 1954]).

suffering and a final joy as foundational moments. Thus, just as the first paragraph of the Proem establishes a sort of intertextuality with the Petrarchan sonnet, now the metaphorical process in progress multiplies, suggesting another indirect quotation (or an allusion) to an equally important author of the literary tradition: Dante. (Just to emphasize the concurrence of rhetorical artifice and construction of the meaning, this paragraph, not accidentally, ends with a *cursus planus*.) Apparently, the dialectics of oppositions that Boccaccio is trying to establish is not limited to the very first meaning of the text, but expands beyond the mere juxtaposition of an abstract concept to a sensible/physical element. Moreover, the parallel involves the most authoritative poets of the literary tradition by means of an intertextual discourse which is Boccaccio's preferred solution, not only in order to build up the various aspects of the universal theme through the recalling of the particular, but also through a process of partial modification of the meaning that had remained impressed in the tradition in concrete images: now the dark forest is no longer that of Dante, but is instead both Boccaccio's personal dark forest and that of the world contemporary with him.

The first character to speak in the *Decameron* is Pampinea. The name of Pampinea, 'the flourishing' according to a medieval etymology, introduces the problem of the interpretation of names in the *Decameron*.<sup>25</sup> According to the medieval tradition, names reflect the nature of things ("nomina sunt consequentia rerum");<sup>26</sup> the *interpretatio nominis* also becomes itself one of the noblest exercises of rhetoric.<sup>27</sup> Pampinea's speech is rhetorically elevated, but it is as rhetorically 'abundant' as Pampinea's name, in the same way the tendency to exuberance of the so-called Asianism of the Hellenistic period were identified, whose characteristics are known to us through the classical and medieval tradition.<sup>28</sup> Passion and frightening feelings are the main levers of persuasion both in Pampinea's speech and in the *suasoriae* of the rhetoricians of the Asian schools: "E, se alle nostre case torniamo, non so se a voi così come a me adiviene: io, di molta famiglia, niuna altra persona in quella se non la mia fante trovando, impaurisco e quasi tutti i capelli addosso mi sento arricciare; e parmi, dovunque io vado o dimoro per quella,

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<sup>25</sup> On etymology and its connotations, see F. Ageno, "Riboboli trecenteschi," *Studi di filologia italiana* 10 (1952): 413-454; G. Herczeg, "I cosiddetti «nomi parlanti» del Decameron", in C. Battisti, ed., *Atti e memorie del VII congresso internazionale di scienze onomastiche* (Firenze 4-8 aprile 1961) (Firenze: Ist. di glottologia dell'Univ. degli Studi, 1963), III: 189-99.

<sup>26</sup> The maxim is cited by Dante (*Vita nova*, ed. Gorni, 13, 4). The dictum has also been identified as a commonplace of Roman law (see B. Nardi, "Nomina sunt consequentia rerum," *GSLI* 93 (1929): 101-105; id., *Dante e la cultura medievale*, 218-223).

<sup>27</sup> The concept espoused here, incidentally, is also clarified by Boccaccio in introducing the storytellers: "E 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 di nominarle: delle quali la prima, e quella che di più età era, Pampinea chiameremo e la seconda Fiammetta, Filomena la terza e la quarta Emilia, e appresso Lauretta diremo alla quinta e alla sesta Neifile, e l'ultima Elissa non senza cagion numeremo" (I.intro.51) (Wherefore, that what each says may be apprehended without confusion, I intend to give them names more or less appropriate to the character of each. The first, then, being the eldest of the seven, we will call Pampinea, the second Fiammetta, the third Filomena, the fourth Emilia, the fifth we will distinguish as Lauretta, the sixth as Neifile, and the last, not without reason, shall be named Elisa).

<sup>28</sup> For the Asian rhetoricians in Rome such as Hortensius Hortalus, cf. Cicero, *Orator*, eds. G. L. Hendrickson and H. M. Hubbell, 25. Tacitus, *Dialogus de oratoribus*, eds. M. Hutton and R. M. Ogilvie, 36, laments of the decadence of eloquence because of the disappearance of this practice in political activity. See also Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 38-41.

l'ombre di coloro che sono trapassati vedere, e non con quegli visi che io soleva, ma con una vista orribile, non so donde il loro nuovamente venuta, spaventarmi” (I.intro.59) (Or go we home, what see we there? I know not if you are in like case with me; but there, where once were servants in plenty, I find none left but my maid, and shudder with terror, and feel the very hairs of my head to stand on end; and turn or tarry where I may, I encounter the ghosts of the departed, not with their wonted mien, but with something horrible in their aspect that appals me). In structuring his discourse, Boccaccio constantly uses the rhetorical oppositions that we have discussed above. The terrible visions and the fear that rages in the city are ultimately opposed to the place of pleasures and happiness in the Florentine countryside, a goal of secure refuge:

Quivi s'odono gli uccelletti cantare, veggionvisi verdeggiare i colli e le pianure, e i campi pieni di biade non altramenti ondeggiare che il mare, e d'alberi ben mille maniere, e il cielo più apertamente, il quale, ancora che crucciato ne sia, non per ciò le sue bellezze eterne ne nega, le quali molto più belle sono a riguardare che le mura vote della nostra città. Ed evvi oltre a questo l'aere assai più fresco, e di quelle cose che alla vita bisognano in questi tempi v'è la copia maggiore, e minore il numero delle noie. Per ciò che, quantunque quivi così muoiano i lavoratori come qui fanno i cittadini, v'è tanto minore il dispiacere quanto vi sono, più che nella città, rade le case e gli abitanti. E qui d'altra parte, se io ben veggio, noi non abbandoniam persona, anzi ne possiamo con verità dire molto più tosto abbandonate; per ciò che i nostri, o morendo o da morte fuggendo, quasi non fossimo loro, sole in tanta afflizione n'hanno lasciate. (I.intro.66-69)

There we shall hear the chant of birds, have sight of verdant hills and plains, of cornfields undulating like the sea, of trees of a thousand sorts; there also we shall have a larger view of the heavens, which, however harsh to usward, yet deny not their eternal beauty; things fairer far for eye to rest on than the desolate walls of our city. Moreover, we shall there breathe a fresher air, find ampler store of things meet for such as live in these times, have fewer causes of annoy. For, though the husbandmen die there, even as here the citizens, they are dispersed in scattered homesteads, and 'tis thus less painful to witness. Nor, so far as I can see, is there a soul here whom we shall desert; rather we may truly say, that we are ourselves deserted; for, our kinsfolk being either dead or fled in fear of death, no more regardful of us than if we were strangers, we are left alone in our great affliction.

The reaction, and the consequent invitation to yield to the new life, is emphasized by the anaphoric repetition of the place ("Quivi . . . Ed evvi . . . quivi . . . E qui"), a repetition that certainly increases the pathos and underscores the contrast (and rejection) against the suffering.

Pampinea speaks as an old rhetorician, or, as it were, as a lawyer, for she uses a language that goes beyond that of ordinary life, and sounds, rather, like the language we hear in a court of law; specifically, a language full of rhetorical questions: "E se così è (che essere manifestamente si vede) che faccian noi qui? che attendiamo? che sognamo? perché più pigre e lente alla nostra salute, che tutto il rimanente de' cittadini, siamo? reputianci noi men care che tutte l'altre? o crediam la nostra vita con più forti catene esser legata al nostro corpo che quella degli altri sia, e così di niuna cosa curar dobbiamo, la quale abbia forza d'offenderla?" (I.intro.63-65) (If such be our circumstances—and such most manifestly they are—what do we here? what wait we for? what dream we of? why are we less prompt to provide for our own safety than the rest of the citizens? Is life less dear to us than to all other women? or think we that the bond which unites soul and body is stronger in us than in others, so that there is no blow that may light upon it, of which

we need be apprehensive?). A language full of logical and consequential deductions: "Niuna riprensione adunque può cadere in cotal consiglio seguire; dolore e noia e forse morte, non seguendolo, potrebbe avvenire. *E per ciò*, quando vi paia, prendendo le nostre fanti e con le cose oportune faccendoci seguitare, oggi in questo luogo e domane in quello quella allegrezza e festa prendendo che questo tempo può porgere, *credo che sia ben fatto a dover fare*; e tanto dimorare in tal guisa, che noi veggiamo (se prima da morte non siam sopraggiunte ) che fine il cielo riserbi a queste cose. *E ricordivi* che egli non si disdice più a noi l'onesta mente andare, che faccia a gran parte dell'altre lo star disonestamente" (I.intro.70-72) (emphasis mine) (No censure, then, can fall on us if we do as I propose; and otherwise grievous suffering, perhaps death, may ensue. Wherefore, if you agree, 'tis my advice, that, attended by our maids with all things needful, we sojourn, now on this, now on the other estate, and in such way of life continue, until we see—if death should not first overtake us—the end which Heaven reserves for these events. And I remind you that it will be at least as seemly in us to leave with honour, as in others, of whom there are not a few, to stay with dishonour).

In order to better understand the rhetorical nature of Pampinea's speech, a reliable comparison would certainly be with the rhetoric used by Alatiel in *Decameron* II, 7.<sup>29</sup> But there are other, and even more illustrious, examples of an excellent usage of oratory in the *Decameron*. For instance, consider the speech of the queen of France who reveals her love for the Count of Antwerp (II.8). Here, the rhetorical and bombastic style of the queen, akin to that of Pampinea, can only sound trivial and parodic at the same time (cf. II.8.12 ff.), for it appears out of place insofar as it is applied to a declaration of love; moreover, the parody seems to be confirmed by the subsequent reaction of the queen who pretends to be raped by the Count. The oratory of the Queen in tale II, 8 is instead transformed by Boccaccio and made consistent with the content of the story in Ghismonda's speech to her father (IV.1), which also looks like a tricky harangue in her defense—a sort of ciceronian oration *pro amore suo* (see IV.1.31 ff.). But we cannot notice here the traits of a parody: the arguments adopted by Ghismonda demonstrates that the father should complain of the fortune that brought Guiscardo and Ghismonda together—since Guiscardo is not of noble origins—and that nobility depends upon virtue and not upon lineage. The oratory of Ghismonda, therefore, focuses on moral content, the concept of nobility, virtue, and poverty. Ghismonda's rejoinders to all the accusations made by her father have such a seriousness that she comes to confess herself ready to commit suicide. Nevertheless, perhaps the most emblematic case of forensic language applied to a sermon is that extraordinary oratorical speech of Friar Cipolla (VI.10), in which a vein of cunning expressiveness and the jargon of slums is added to the rhetorically elevated language.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the forensic discourse reappears elsewhere. Branca remarks that, in the tale of Paganino (II.10), Riccardo legally argues against Bartolomea's preferences and makes subtle distinctions between concubinary repudiations and marriage rights.<sup>31</sup> When rejected, despite his civil peroration, Riccardo

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<sup>29</sup> See G. Barberi Squarotti, "L'orazione di Alatiel," in *Il potere della parola. Studi sul Decameron*, 64-96.

<sup>30</sup> See Ageno, "Riboboli trecenteschi," 413-454.

<sup>31</sup> V. Branca, "Una chiave di lettura del Decameron", intr. a G. Boccaccio, *Decameron* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), xxviii-xxix.

falls into the repetitive dementia of a sententious judgment, almost like a code, which alludes to his marital affair in para-judicial terms: ". . . a chiunque il salutava o d'alcuna cosa il domandava, niuna altra cosa rispondeva se non: - Il mal foro non vuol festa; - e dopo non molto tempo si morì" (II.10.42) (. . . when he was met by any with greeting or question in the street, he made no other answer than 'the evil hole brooks no holiday,' and soon afterwards died). The caricature of the legal profession is noticeable here through the parody of a famous *topos* in the Hellenistic and romance-chivalric literature up to the *Filocolo*, namely that of the beloved women sold or stolen by pirates, with the ensuing *quête* made by the lover or the husband. The mockery of the judicial representatives—perhaps resulting from Boccaccio's expertise on canon law and his familiarity with the technical language—is expressed in the characterization of Judge Nicola da San Lepidio, a shriveled and "beccone" judge who "essendo al banco teneva ragione" (VIII.5.1) (he is administering justice on the bench). Branca finally points out that the legal language is used for expressive purposes in other tales (II.9.23 and 55; IV.4.12-13 and 26; IV.7.16 ff.; V.4.43 ff.; V.7.28 ff.; VIII.1.15-16; VIII.2.14 and 33; VIII.10, *passim*; X.8.48-49, 80 and 97 ff.; X.10.42), on which we will not dwell.<sup>32</sup> Ultimately, in the tenth tale of the First Day (I.10.83-84), we observe a new reprimand uttered by Pampinea, this time against the few and not very graceful words of women who consider themselves equally honest. According to Padoan, this *novella*, like all those of the First Day, follows the common thread of parodic subversion through the theme of the mocker and the mocked.<sup>33</sup>

The "palagio" to which the merry brigade withdraws finally comes to finalize the first stage of Boccaccio's rhetorical construction. The palace is described as a *locus amoenus*, a place in perfect harmony with the allegorical significance of the characters who narrate the stories. The palace itself can be considered an allegory, and not a real country retreat, not only because it does not seem to have a direct correspondence to any of the historic or existing villas of the Florentine country, but especially because it performs a perfect antithetical function in opposition to the sad and dying reality of the city invaded by the plague.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the *dispositio* of the two oppositional moments (the tragedy of the plague and the joy of the country retreat) seems to be consequential; we have two different times, the one a prerequisite to the other for the ultimate fulfillment

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<sup>32</sup> Branca, "Una chiave di lettura del Decameron," xxx.

<sup>33</sup> Padoan, "Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale," 164-165.

<sup>34</sup> "Era il detto luogo sopra una piccola montagnetta, da ogni parte lontano alquanto alle nostre strade, di varii albuscelli e piante tutte di verdi fronde ripiene piacevoli a riguardare; in sul colmo della quale era un palagio con bello e gran cortile nel mezzo, e con logge e con sale e con camere, tutte ciascuna verso di sé bellissima e di liete dipinture raguardevole e ornata, con pratelli da torno e con giardini maravigliosi e con pozzi d'acque freschissime e con volte piene di preziosi vini: cose più atte a curiosi bevitori che a sobrie e oneste donne. Il quale tutto spazzato, e nelle camere i letti fatti, e ogni cosa di fiori, quali nella stagione si potevano avere, piena e di giunchi giuncata, la vegnente brigata trovò con suo non poco piacere" (I.intro.90-91) (The estate lay upon a little hill some distance from the nearest highway, and, embowered in shrubberies of divers hues, and other greenery, afforded the eye a pleasant prospect. On the summit of the hill was a palace with galleries, halls and chambers, disposed around a fair and spacious court, each very fair in itself, and the goodlier to see for the gladsome pictures with which it was adorned; the whole set amidst meads and gardens laid out with marvellous art, wells of the coolest water, and vaults of the finest wines, things more suited to dainty drinkers than to sober and honourable women. On their arrival the company, to their no small delight, found their beds already made, the rooms well swept and garnished with flowers of every sort that the season could afford, and the floors carpeted with rushes).

of happiness, summed up by the image of the garden of delights. On another level of understanding, the two different moments can be seen as an allegory of regeneration in Bachtinian terms,<sup>35</sup> as a passage from life to death, from pain to happiness, from Dante's Hell, which is recalled by the image of the harsh mountain, to the enjoyment of the *otium* accomplished through a human itinerary that benefits from human references to personal experience. Whatever the correct and more significant interpretation may be, there seem to emerge from the outset two different moments arranged in opposition to each other in order to outline a sort of renewal of a condition of human suffering, both physical and spiritual. In Bachtin's terms, we could define the two moments as two necessary steps to the accomplishment of an entire cycle of death and regeneration, a cycle wherein the plague, as Branca emphasizes, has the providential function of putting to a test the bourgeois structures of the Florentine society.<sup>36</sup>

The completion of Boccaccio's rhetorical construction is certainly accomplished in his Conclusions to the collection. In the end, Boccaccio defends himself against unknown accusations of licentiousness in two ways. On the one hand, he claims the right to achieve the perfect matching of language and matter, what we might call modern descriptive realism: "Primieramente se alcuna cosa in alcuna n'è, la qualità delle novelle l'hanno richiesta, le quali se con ragionevole occhio da intendente persona fien riguardate, assai aperto sarà conosciuto (se io quelle della lor forma trar non avessi voluto) altramenti raccontar non poterle" (*Conclusioni*.4-5) (In the first place, if aught of the kind in any of these stories there be, 'twas but such as was demanded by the character of the stories, which let but any person of sound judgment scan with the eye of reason, and 'twill be abundantly manifest that, unless I had been minded to deform them, they could not have been otherwise recounted); and he responds to the charges of licentiousness by impudently mocking his accusers: "E se forse pure alcuna particella è in quelle, alcuna paroletta più liberale che forse a spigolistra donna non si conviene, le quali più le parole pesano che fatti e più d'apparer s'ingegnano che d'esser buone, dico che più non si dee a me esser disdetto d'averle scritte, che generalmente si disdica agli uomini e alle donne di dir tutto di 'foro' e 'caviglia' e 'mortaio' e 'pestello' e 'salciccia' e 'mortadello,' e tutto pieno di simiglianti cose" (*Conclusioni*.5) (And if, perchance, they do, after all, contain here and there a trifling indiscretion of speech, such as might ill sort with one of your precious prudes, who weigh words rather than deeds, and are more concerned to appear, than to be, good, I say that so to write was as permissible to me, as 'tis to men and women at large in their converse to make use of such terms as hole, and pin, and mortar, and pestle, and sausage, and polony, and plenty more besides of a like sort). On the other hand, using traditional motifs found in medieval poetry, he says that everything is good in and of itself, but if badly used, can be harmful and damaging: "Ciascuna cosa in sé medesima è buona ad alcuna cosa, e male adoperata può essere nociva di molte; e così dico delle mie novelle" (*Conclusioni*.13) (Everything is in itself good for somewhat, and being put to a bad purpose, may work manifold mischief. And so, I say, it is with my stories). What is certainly an argument in defense of the content of his tales could also be considered an argument in defense of both the constructive nature of rhetoric and the

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. M. M. Bakhtin, *L'opera di Rabelais e la cultura popolare: riso, carnevale e festa nella tradizione medievale e rinascimentale* (Torino: Einaudi, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Branca, "Una chiave di lettura del Decameron," viii.

good intentions that the author assigns to it. Hence we can establish a parallel between the twofold meaning of the tales from a semantic perspective, and the twofold usage of rhetoric. Rhetoric can have either a constructive or a destructive intent—Quintilian's "vir bonus dicendi peritus" may be an instance—while in Boccaccio it only appears constructive, as he implicitly advocates for the correct and honest use of language. In the end, however, irony appears to add meanings to the construction of the discourse and rhetoric is now used to overthrow the content of all allegations as in a petty legal contest. The conclusions of the *Decameron* become once again the cipher of the physical and moral subversion of the city besieged by the plague, or the reversal of all the expectations found plenty of times in the tales of the collection. Parody and caricature become the favorite means of rhetoric in order to create, within the framework, the subversion of the reality described in the tales, which Bakhtin identified as typically medieval—in order to exist, even the 'upside-down world' motif needs the devices of rhetoric.

From the very beginning, what the author in the rhetoric of the *Decameron* thus outlines is a dialectic of oppositions wherein the moment of change and transformation is fundamental and necessary. Boccaccio's rhetoric aims to build a complex discourse that produces meaning in a constructive way, a discourse that builds on itself as it develops new implications with references to the content of the tales, to the literary tradition, and the many interdiscorsivities within the tales. These rhetorical oppositions are not detached from one another; rather, they constitute *two essential and necessary moments* creating both an earthly and spiritual itinerary of *tension* and *resolution* that unfolds from pleasure to pain, from the throes of love to reflection and relief, from the time of Death to that of Life, from the tragedy of the plague in Florence to the delights of withdrawal to the country. Thus far I have analyzed the rhetorical strategies of the first moment of this dialectic of tension and resolution in the frame texts of the *Decameron*. What the second fundamental moment is, and how it will be attained in the collection, is the matter of the following discussion.

### *Form and Symmetries*

The very concept of opposition presupposes that of symmetry. Thus, it is easy to identify—as many critics have done—the parts of the *Decameron* that are conceived and arranged symmetrically for rhetorical purposes.<sup>37</sup> The Sixth Day of the *Decameron* is commonly remembered as the day of the *motto*, that is, the witty answer with which the characters of the tales escape from potentially dangerous or embarrassing situations. Since the Sixth Day introduces the second part of the collection, it can be considered a useful example to clarify the connections and symmetries between the first half—from the First to the Fifth Day—and the second half—from the Sixth to the Tenth Day—of Boccaccio's work. Among these connections, I shall consider those that will be useful for explaining not only Boccaccio's rhetorical attitudes in arranging the narrative materials

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<sup>37</sup> An excellent overview of many aspects and implications related to the symmetries of the *Decameron* is Fido, *Il regime delle simmetrie imperfette*. But see also G. Almansi, *The Writer as Liar: Narrative Technique in the Decameron* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), and P. D. Stewart, "La novella di madonna Oretta e le due parti del *Decameron*," *Yearbook of Italian Studies* (1973-75): 27-40, then reprinted in ead., *Retorica e mimica nel "Decameron" e nella commedia del Cinquecento* (Firenze, Olschki, 1986), 19-38.

of his collection, but also his concerns for the literary form of the tale. Since it appears that Boccaccio intended to establish a complex linkage between the first and the second part of the collection, it will be useful to emphasize some aspects of knowledge that emerge as characteristics of the *motto* in the Sixth Day. Taking advantage of a formal approach that I consider necessary to interpret this Day of the *Decameron*, I will argue that Boccaccio, in structuring the entire collection, intended to establish a meaningful connection between literary form and knowledge, which in turn results in moral teaching. Eventually, through a formal reading of the text, it will become apparent how rhetoric and narrative form in the *Decameron* go hand in hand in the construction of the literary work, as well as how the literary form necessarily reflects the content that it aims to represent.

Literary form is a fundamental aspect of rhetoric and dialectics.<sup>38</sup> Like in the *Introduzione*, both the First and the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* pay conspicuous attention to literary form and allow us to reflect on Boccaccio's intentions and willingness to create connections. In the Sixth Day, Boccaccio proves himself capable of writing tales that are very short but dense in meaning (the Sixth Day, actually, is the shortest of the ten). Brevity is the soul of wit; thus it is not by chance that the ideal of good eloquence and perfect discourse we read in the First Day's tale from Pampinea's speech<sup>39</sup> is symmetrically reproduced almost with the same words in Filomena's introduction to the Sixth Day, and embellished with a simile: "Giovani donne, come ne' lucidi sereni sono le stelle *ornamento* del cielo e nella primavera i fiori de' verdi prati, e de' colli i rivestiti albuscelli, così de' laudevoli costumi e de' ragionamenti belli sono i *leggiadri* motti, li quali, per ciò che *brevi* sono, tanto stanno meglio alle donne che agli uomini, quanto più alle donne che agli uomini il molto parlar si disdice" (VI.1.2) (emphasis mine) (As stars are set for an *ornament* in the serene expanse of heaven, and likewise in springtime flowers and leafy shrubs in the green meadows, so, damsels, in the hour of *rare and excellent discourse*, is *wit* with its bright sallies. Which, being *brief*, are much more proper for ladies than for men, seeing that prolixity of speech, where brevity is possible, is much less allowable to them). Instead of drawing attention to the implications of this distinction between men and women in their use of discourse, it is worthwhile to emphasize brevity and the art of narration, since the attention to literary form, which for Boccaccio implies being able to speak fittingly and with proper words ("i *leggiadri motti*"), constitutes, in my opinion, the main topic of the Sixth Day. This is

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<sup>38</sup> For a general meditation on issues related to the importance of form in art and prose, see V. Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose* (Elmwood Park, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990) as the most representative instance among the formalist approaches.

<sup>39</sup> "Valorose giovani, come ne' lucidi sereni sono le stelle ornamento del cielo e nella primavera i fiori de' verdi prati, così de' laudevoli costumi e de' ragionamenti piacevoli sono i *leggiadri motti*. Li quali, per ciò che *brevi* sono, molto meglio alle donne stanno che agli uomini, in quanto più alle donne che agli uomini il molto parlare e lungo, quando senza esso si possa fare, si disdice, come che oggi poche o niuna donna rimasa ci sia, la quale o ne 'ntenda alcuno *leggiadro* o a quello, se pur lo 'ntendesse, sappia rispondere: general vergogna e di noi e di tutte quelle che vivono" (I.10.3-4) (As stars in the serene expanse of heaven, as in spring-time flowers in the green pastures, so, honourable damsels, in the hour of rare and excellent converse is wit with its bright sallies. Which, being brief, are much more proper for ladies than for men, seeing that prolixity of speech, when brevity is possible, is much less allowable to them; albeit (shame be to us all and all our generation) few ladies or none are left to-day who understand aught that is wittily said, or understanding are able to answer it).



particularly true for the tales of Cisti fornaio, in which the baker responds with a single phrase to an unreasonable request; and in the tale of Giotto, in which the painter being a human incarnation of the beauty of artistic form makes fun of Forese da Rabatta with a quick reply. The beauty of form, as represented in many tales, is also opposed to the ugliness of the Baronci (VI, 6)—an exception that proves the rule—, but Baronci's ugliness is seen as something extraneous to the subject, as something we have to exorcise or observe from afar. However, the first tale of the Sixth Day, namely the tale of Madonna Oretta (VI.1), appears to be the most important one, both because it contains the key for the interpretation of the entire Day and because of its narratological implications. Guido Almansi defines it a “meta-novella”, that is, a tale that deals with the art of narrating and through which Boccaccio expresses his concerns for the literary form.<sup>40</sup>

The relationship-symmetry of both theme and structure between the First and the Sixth Day has frequently been remarked. The First Day, indeed, does not have a theme as explicitly defined by Boccaccio, but has a certain thematic unity that has been traced several times in the last decades by critics, especially by Cok Van der Voort who summarizes and demonstrates the many convergences.<sup>41</sup> Besides the symmetry of Pampinea's (I.10.3-40) and Filomena's speeches (VI.1.2) discussed above, there are other thematic connections. For instance, the tales of Ser Ciappelletto in the First Day (I.1) and Frate Cipolla in the Sixth Day (VI.10) represent two comic characters who—being also physically similar—are able to hide a deceiving truth through their ability to manipulate discourse. Then we have a connection between the erotic tales of the two Days (I.4 and VI.7) that the merry brigade comments upon with the same words.<sup>42</sup> On another level, it may also be possible to establish a connection about the importance of the usage of discourse: in I.5, Fiammetta reaffirms the value of ready answers (“Si perchè mi piace noi essere entrati a dimostrare con le novelle quanta sia la forza delle belle e pronte risposte . . .” [I.5.4] [The line upon which our story-telling proceeds, to wit, to shew the virtue that resides in apt and ready repartees, pleases me well]). She alludes to the four previous tales and shows how the proper use of discourse is able to get us out of dangerous situations. Various critics have noticed how the proper use of discourse is the unifying theme of the First Day and have emphasized that it is linked to the brilliant usage of the articulate and convincing reasoning and to the use of discourse that emerges from the rubrics.<sup>43</sup> To these correspondences, nevertheless, we could also add some diversities, and it is Boccaccio himself who introduces them at the end of the Fifth Day in order to

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<sup>40</sup> Almansi, *The Writer as Liar*, 23. See also Stewart, "La novella di madonna Oretta."

<sup>41</sup> C. Van der Voort, "Convergenze e divaricazioni fra la prima e la sesta giornata del Decameron," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 9 (1979-80): 207-241; in part. see pp. 223-226, and his conclusions at p. 240-241. See also Stewart, "La novella di madonna Oretta."

<sup>42</sup> "La novella da Dioneo raccontata, prima con un poco di vergogna punse i cuori delle donne ascoltanti e con onesto rossore ne' loro visi apparito ne diedon segno" (I.5.2) (The story told by Dioneo evoked at first some qualms of shame in the minds of the ladies, as was apparent by the modest blush that tinged their faces); and: "La novella da Filostrato raccontata prima con un poco di vergogna punse li cuori delle donne ascoltanti, e con onesto rossore ne' lor visi apparito ne dieder segno." (VI.8.2) ('Twas not at first without some flutterings of shame, evinced by the modest blush mantling on their cheeks, that the ladies heard Filostrato's story).

<sup>43</sup> S. Battaglia, "Giovanni Boccaccio", in S. Battaglia, ed., *La Letteratura italiana* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1971), I: 250; Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron*, 204.

contrast the new subject with the old one.<sup>44</sup> Yet, what is more important for the scope of my analysis is the shift in the function of the discourse from the First to the Sixth Day: the focus moves from punishing the vice to defending someone's own integrity; in other words, from the practice of an *ars puniendi* to the practice of an *ars defendendi*.<sup>45</sup> In addition to diversity, there is also opposition, made more evident by the progressive perspective of the disposition of the narrative materials in the collection: the narrative moves from the negative moment of punishing—the First Day—to the positive moment of personal rehabilitation (the getting out of a danger) and ultimately to the conquest of a peculiar knowledge—the Sixth Day. Moreover, oppositional features can also be found within the Sixth Day: the anonymous knight incapable of narrating in the first tale (VI.1) is faced with the eloquent Frate Cipolla of the last tale of the Day (VI.10). While the knight is unfit to speak, Cipolla is the champion of eloquence. Thus, at the level of characterization we find again the rhetorical procedure *de oppositis*, as well as a negative initial moment that builds a positive final moment, which then realizes the full exaltation of the character's intelligence.

As mentioned above, symmetries and references internal to the collection have been identified by critics, but the contrast between oppositional elements seems to prevail as a formal device for the structure of the *Decameron* instead of the *variatio*. This device is, after all, well known in Boccaccio's literary production and in the literary and philosophical tradition of his epoch. Consider, for instance, the structure of the *questioni d'amore* of the *Filocolo*, where we can read both a vast survey of love questions and a catalog of possible narrative situations. The contrastive device *de oppositis*, as a corresponding rhetorical device applied to fiction, possibly draws from (or is inspired by) the dialogic structure of philosophical medieval literature, or from the treatises on morality, and exists in numerous narrative works:<sup>46</sup> the aim of the dialogic narrative is, in both cases, didactic (or maieutic, if we want to liken it to the Socratic dialogues). But a closer parallel can be established with the method exposed in the *quaestiones et responsiones* that were practiced on a large scale in most medieval universities. All these rhetorical features are evidently part of a common philosophy and teaching practice, for were also fed by exegetical biblical methods that were well known to writers in the vernacular and were part of their school education before studying jurisprudence or the classics. An apt comparison can certainly be found in the way holy texts were read at that

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<sup>44</sup> “Noi abbiamo già molte volte udito che con be' motti e con risposte pronte o con avvedimenti presti molti hanno già saputo con debito morso *rintuzzare gli altrui denti o i sopravvegnenti pericoli cacciar via*; e per ciò che la materia è bella, e può essere utile, voglio che domane, con l'aiuto di Dio, infra questi termini si ragioni, cioè di chi, con alcuno leggiadro motto tentato, *si riscosse, o con pronta risposta o avvedimento fuggì perdita, pericolo o scorno*” (V, concl., 3) (emphasis mine) (Ofttimes, quoth she, have we heard how with bright sallies, and ready retorts, and sudden devices, not a few have known how to repugn with apt checks the bites of others, or to avert imminent perils; and because 'tis an excellent argument, and may be profitable, I ordain that to-morrow, God helping us, the following be the rule of our discourse; to wit, that it be of such as by some sprightly sally have repulsed an attack, or by some ready retort or device have avoided loss, peril or scorn).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Van der Voort, “Convergenze e divaricazioni,” 227.

<sup>46</sup> See N. Baranda and V. Infantes, eds., *Narrativa popular de la Edad Media: Doncella Teodor, Flores y Blancaflor, Paris y Viana* (Torrejon de Ardoz: Akal, 1995), 11; M. L. Meneghetti, “Il romanzo”, in C. Di Girolamo, ed., *La letteratura romanza medievale: una storia per generi* (Bologna: Mulino, 1994), 120-216.

time, namely through a parallelism with other biblical texts, the texts of the Church Fathers, or through the method of typology, which, from Saint Paul on, had allowed for a 'correct' interpretation of the Bible and opened the way to the allegorical medieval interpretation.<sup>47</sup> Inevitably, even in the *Decameron* the meaning is augmented by the parallelism of the tales.

### *What is Knowledge? The Motto and the Enigma*

After having considered some examples of formal features and symmetries among the texts that constitute the framework of the collection with their relations to the First and Sixth Day, I now turn to the characteristics of the *motto*. In reading the various *motti* of the Sixth Day, we become fully aware of the active role of the subject who pronounces the *motto*. Notice the character of playful judgment of the *motto*, the combination of dissimilar elements, the contrast of representation and the sense of absurd involved. These same characteristics are precisely some of the features of the *Witz* studied by Freud and used as a critical framework to study analogous jokes in the *Novellino*.<sup>48</sup> Evidently, the contrast of representation, the opposition of dissimilar elements is in perfect accordance with the rhetoric *de oppositis* we have just analyzed, and with the comic elements of the *Decameron*. Yet, rather than using psychoanalytical categories, which are certainly applicable to the *motto* of the Sixth Day as well as to its oppositional rhetorical elements, let us first establish a parallel with a rhetorical feature of ancient Greek philosophy, the enigma, in order to describe the formal and narrative characteristics of the *motto*, and try to trace an ideal continuity from Antiquity to Middle Ages. At the beginning of this chapter, I mentioned the famous riddle that provoked Homer's death: "We have what we did not find; what we did find we left behind." After a day of fishing without success and spending some time searching themselves for lice, the fishermen leave behind the lice they had found. Is this just a riddle, an enigma? Is nothing else involved? According to Eleanor Cook, the enigma can be considered a form of the speech, or a trope.<sup>49</sup> The enigma also takes the literary form of a tale. According to Giorgio Colli, the knowledge that comes from the Delphic oracles or the prophecies of Dionysus in the form of enigmas is made by the *combination of opposites*; namely, the combination of things that conflict with each other and are not understandable, and he clearly shows the connection of the enigma with Mysteries in the pre-Socratic philosophy. The combination of contradictory elements is indeed the essence of the paradox, which is also at the origin of the enigma and the ancient knowledge.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the enigma of the Ancient World produces knowledge that must be deciphered.

Going back to the *Decameron*, it is precisely by virtue of a paradox that Madonna

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<sup>47</sup> See Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, chap. 1, 26 ff.

<sup>48</sup> A. Paoletta, "Modi e forme del Witz," *Strumenti critici* 36-37 (1978): 214-235. Cf. S. Freud, *Il motto di spirito e la sua relazione con l'inconscio* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1975). In his introduction to the Italian translation of Freud's *Der Witz (Il motto di spirito)*, 19-20), Francesco Orlando emphasizes the rhetorical aspects of Freud's interpretation of jokes and points out the implications of his thought for a new general rhetoric of the discourse influenced by the unconscious.

<sup>49</sup> E. Cook, "The Figure of Enigma: Rhetoric, History, Poetry," *Rhetorica* 19 (2001): 349-378.

<sup>50</sup> Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*, 56-68.

Filippa, although guilty, testifies in her trial and is declared *not* guilty (VI.7);<sup>51</sup> it is a paradox that makes the coal of Frate Cipolla become a source of inspiration for the final *motto* (VI.10); it is by virtue of a paradox that Currado's clapping should make the crane's leg appear in the tale of Chichibio (VI.4).<sup>52</sup> But paradox is just an aspect of the same rhetorical feature involved in the *motto*. Alan Freedman has found an opposition/polarity played out in the theme of eloquence between VI.1 and VI.10,<sup>53</sup> but has not noticed that this same polarity/opposition concerns the whole structure of the *Decameron*. In fact, an opposition between the First Day and the Sixth Day can also be established through the references to eloquence and its existing forms both in the *Introduzione* (and I.1) and in the introduction to the Sixth Day (and VI.1 itself). However, Freedman has brilliantly found the source of the first tale of the Sixth Day in an enigma of the medieval tradition. The famous tale of Madonna Oretta is not only a *myse en abime*

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<sup>51</sup> "La donna, senza sbigottire punto, con voce assai piacevole rispose: 'Messere, egli è vero che Rinaldo è mio marito e che egli questa notte passata mi trovò nelle braccia di Lazzarino, nelle quali io sono, per buono e per perfetto amore che io gli porto, molte volte stata, né questo negherei mai;' . . . 'Adunque' seguì prestamente la donna 'domando io voi, messer podestà, se egli ha sempre di me preso quello che gli è bisognato e piaciuto, io che doveva fare o debbo di quel che gli avanza? debbo io gittare a' cani? non è egli molto meglio servirne un gentile uomo che più che sé m'ama, che lasciarlo perdere o guastare?'" (VI, 7, 13 and 17) (The lady, no wise dismayed, and in a tone not a little jocund, thus made answer: 'True it is, Sir, that Rinaldo is my husband, and that last night he found me in the arms of Lazzarino, in whose arms for the whole-hearted love that I bear him I have oftentimes lain; nor shall I ever deny it;' . . . 'Then,' promptly continued the lady, 'if he has ever had of me as much as sufficed for his solace, what was I or am I to do with the surplus? Am I to cast it to the dogs? Is it not much better to bestow it on a gentleman that loves me more dearly than himself, than to suffer it to come to nought or worse?') For a discussion of the tale and its relation to the argumentative structure of the discourse, see N. Giannetto, "Madonna Filippa tra 'casus' e 'controversia'. Lettura della Novella VI 7 del Decameron," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 32 (2004): 81-100, and R. Morosini, "'Bone eloquence' e mondo alla rovescia nel discorso 'semblabile a la reisun' nella novella di Madonna Filippa ('Decameron VI.7)," *Italica* 1 (2000): 1-13. According to K. Pennington, "A Note to Decameron 6, 7: The Wit of Madonna Filippa," *Speculum* 52 (1977): 902-905, Madonna Filippa's *motto* echoes *Matthew 7:6* and play on the meaning of the word "sanctum" in order to allude to the female body.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Cipolla's words: "Vera cosa è che io porto la penna dell'agnol Gabriello, acciò che non si guasti, in una cassetta e i carboni co' quali fu arrostito san Lorenzo in un'altra; le quali son sì simiglianti l'una all'altra, che spesse volte mi vien presa l'una per l'altra, e al presente m'è avvenuto: per ciò che, credendomi io qui avere arrecata la cassetta dove era la penna, io ho arrecata quella dove sono i carboni. Il quale io non reputo che stato sia errore, anzi mi pare esser certo che volontà sia stata di Dio e che Egli stesso la cassetta de' carboni ponesse nelle mie mani ricordandom'io pur testé che la festa di san Lorenzo sia di qui a due dì. . . . voglio che voi sappiate che chiunque da questi carboni in segno di croce è tocco, tutto quello anno può viver sicuro che fuoco nol cocerà che non si senta." (VI.10.49-52) (and to tell you the truth I carry the feather of the Angel Gabriel, lest it should get spoiled, in a casket, and the coals, with which St. Lawrence was roasted, in another casket; which caskets are so like the one to the other, that not seldom I mistake one for the other, which has befallen me on this occasion; for, whereas I thought to have brought with me the casket wherein is the feather, I have brought instead that which contains the coals. Nor deem I this a mischance; nay, methinks, 'tis by interposition of God, and that He Himself put the casket of coals in my hand, for I mind me that the feast of St. Lawrence falls but two days hence. . . . I would have you know, that whoso has the sign of the cross made upon him with these coals, may live secure for the whole of the ensuing year, that fire shall not touch him, that he feel it not); and Chichibio's *motto*: "Messer sì, ma voi non gridaste 'ho, ho!' a quella d'iersera; ché se così gridato aveste ella avrebbe così l'altra coscia e l'altro piè fuor mandata, come hanno fatto queste" (VI.4.18) (Ay, Sir; but you cried not, oho! to our crane of yestereve: had you done so, it would have popped its other thigh and foot forth, as these have done).

<sup>53</sup> A. Freedman, "Il cavallo di Boccaccio: fonte, struttura e funzione della metanovella di Madonna Oretta," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 9 (1975): 225-241.

of the composition of the entire collection, or a reflection on the art of narrating, it is also the literary representation of an enigma. The motifs of this enigma have been found in works of the oriental tradition such as the *Book of Delight* by Yosef ibn Zabara,<sup>54</sup> or in Latin and Occitan texts such as the *Lai du Trot* and the *De Amore* by Andreas Capellanus in which the same subject is combined with the myth of the infernal hunt.<sup>55</sup> In the tale of Enan in the *Book of Delight*, the giant traveling with Zabara pronounces a sort of challenge: "I will bring you or you will bring me." Zabara is then puzzled, because they are both on horse-back. So Enan narrates a story in order to explain the mysterious sentence. The solution to his mysterious saying is finally revealed: "this means... that... a man narrates a tale to another while traveling."<sup>56</sup> In the tale of Madonna Oretta (VI.1), a knight, unable to narrate a story, is silenced by the lady he accompanies in his journey with an ironic and smart justification: "Messere, questo vostro cavallo ha troppo duro trotto; per che io vi priego che vi piaccia di pormi a piè" (VI.1.11) (Sir, this horse of yours trots too hard; I pray you be pleased to set me down). The art of narrating and the literary form is so important that the knight's incompetence provokes a painful reaction in the lady while listening to him: "Di che a madonna Oretta, udendolo, spesse volte veniva un sudore e uno sfinimento di cuore, come se inferma fosse stata per terminare; la qual cosa poi che più sofferir non poté, conoscendo che il cavaliere era entrato nel pecoreccio . . ." (VI.1.10) (. . . insomuch that Madonna Oretta, as she listened, did oft sweat, and was like to faint, as if she were ill and at the point of death). Boccaccio collected in a single sentence ("Madonna Oretta, quando voi vogliate, io vi porterò, gran parte della via che ad andare abbiamo, a cavallo, con una delle belle novelle del mondo" [VI.1.7] [Madonna Oretta, so please you, I will carry you great part of the way a horseback with one of the finest stories in the world]) the two enigmatic elements of his source, namely the challenge of narrating a story ("io porterò te o tu porterai me") and the solution ("questo vuol dire . . . che . . . viaggiando un viandante racconta una novella o simile all'altro"), and then forged a mysterious sentence ("Messere, questo vostro cavallo ha troppo duro trotto; per che io vi priego che vi piaccia di pormi a piè" [VI.1.11])<sup>57</sup> using the same mechanism of condensation and substitution analyzed by Freud for the joke.<sup>58</sup>

If Freedman recognized the source of the first tale, I would like to use the characteristics of the enigma to explain the formal features of the *motto* in the Sixth Day. According to Carlo Muscetta, the idea of the Sixth Day probably came to the mind of Boccaccio from Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, which contained a book (bk. 2) entirely devoted

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<sup>54</sup> Freedman, "Il cavallo di Boccaccio"; Picone, "Preistoria della cornice del "Decameron," 103-104.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. W. A. Neilson, "The Purgatory of cruel Beauties," *Romania* 39 (1990): 140-145.

<sup>56</sup> The Latin version of the same enigma from the *Compilatio singulorum exemplorum* which reproduces the same narrative materials and could better suit Madonna Oretta's *motto*, is also worth mentioning. The knight says to the bride: "Abreviate nobis viam." Then he says: "Portate me aliquantulum de via ista et ego tantundem portabo vos." Later, she asked him: "Nonne dixistis michi quod abreviarem vobis viam illam et quod portarem vos et vos me portaretis?" Then the bride explains the enigma: "Quando duo milites equitant et unus narrat aliquod pulchrum exemplum, dicitur socium portare eum et viam abreviare." The Latin tale's text in A. Hilka, "Neue Beiträge zur Erzählungsliteratur des Mittelalters (Die *Compilatio singularis exemplorum* der Hs. Tours 468, ergänzt durch eine Schwesterhandschrift Bern 679)," *Jahresbericht der schlesischen Gesellschaft für vaterländische cultur* 90 (1912): 1-24.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Freedman, "Il cavallo di Boccaccio," 234.

<sup>58</sup> Freud, *Il motto di spirito*, 44-58.

to jokes.<sup>59</sup> Luisa Cuomo thinks it came from a group of tales in the *Novellino*.<sup>60</sup> But the veiled significance hidden in the *motto* is likely to be taken from a more ancient atmosphere whose origins are probably to be identified in a primordial epoch. The *motto* could be considered a particular form of the ancient enigma—and not a variant of the riddle<sup>61</sup>—that the Middle Ages preserved; thus, it could also be considered the unifying element of the Sixth Day insofar as it involves knowledge.

Before analyzing the Sixth Day, it is worth considering how Boccaccio could have known of the tradition of the enigma, both in literary and rhetorical texts. Besides the anecdote on Homer's death, Boccaccio certainly knew some of the texts of medieval literary theory. Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Priscianus' and Donatus' grammars, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, and Goffredo of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* appear among the books possessed by Boccaccio.<sup>62</sup> Giovanni of Garlandia's *Poetria* is reflected in Boccaccio's poetic theory.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the theorization of wit and humor, which probably came to Boccaccio's knowledge from Cicero's *De oratore* (II.54-71), he may have also reflected on the nature of the enigma as it is described by Cicero in his *De divinatione* (2.131-133), in the *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*, which reports ten of Symphosius' enigmas (chaps. 42 and 43), in the *Gesta romanorum*, a thirteenth century collection of moral tales inspired by Roman history and legends which reports another three of Symphosius' riddles, as well as by the authors of medieval *artes dictaminis*. In fact, Cicero follows Aristotle in connecting the enigma with the metaphor, but warns about its misuse (*De oratore* III.42.167). Moreover, in the *De divinatione* (2.131-133), Cicero talks about the obscurity of dreams and their utility in divination, again mentioning the enigma as an example of incomprehensible language.

Donatus mentions the enigma among the seven types of allegory; according to him, an enigma occurs when an obscure thought is concealed within an expression because of certain resemblances.<sup>64</sup> Matthew of Vendôme mentions the figure of the enigma in his *Ars Versificatoria* (3.18-44) as one of the thirteen rhetorical tropes.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> C. Muscetta, "Introduzione alla VI giornata del Decameron," in *Ritratti e letture* (Milano: Marzorati, 1961), 245.

<sup>60</sup> L. Cuomo, "Sillogizzare motteggiando e motteggiare sillogizzando: dal 'Novellino' alla VI Giornata del Decameron," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 13 (1982): 217-265.

<sup>61</sup> Enigmatists maintain that there is a difference between enigma and riddle. They define 'riddle' as a short, humorous, and double-sense text of not more than 4/6 lines. They define 'enigma,' instead, as a short poem (longer than the riddle, though) whose context has a more important, even tragic, stake. See S. Bartezzaghi, *Lezioni di enigmistica* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001), 50, 294. In *Incontri con la Sfinge: Nuove lezioni di enigmistica* (Torino: Einaudi, 2004), Bartezzaghi analyzes the intricacies of language, in the belief that language, like enigma or enigmatistic games, is a tool for saying, but also for not saying; to explain, but also to deceive. Most of our modern puzzles have a noble origin that stems from the time when the wisdom of myths reigned, and although today they are largely devoid of their arcane mysteries, they still contain an echo of those antique devices.

<sup>62</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 117 ff., discusses at length Boccaccio's rhetorical readings. For the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* see Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libraria'," 22, 32, 33, 35, 66. For Priscianus and Donatus, Mazza, *ibid.*, 31, 36. For Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria*, Mazza, *ibid.*, 50. For Goffredo of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*, Mazza, *ibid.*, 16 and 61.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. G. Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, parr. 14 and 18.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. W. M. Purcell, *Ars Poetriae: Rhetorical and Grammatical Invention at the Margin of Literacy* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 27, and 156.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Purcell, *Ars Poetriae*, 65.

According to Gervasius of Melkley's *Ars poetica*, the enigma is a kind of *transsumptio orationis*, a trope that involves the transformation of a phrase from its conventional meaning; in particular, the enigma is defined as "any obscure statement which tries the cleverness of the one guessing."<sup>66</sup> Dante elaborated the prophecy of a saviour both at the beginning of the first and at the end of the second *cantica* using enigmas, but apparently he used the term in the meaning defined by Isidore (*Etymol.* I, xxxvii, 26), that is, as an obscure statement. Besides the various enigmas of the *Commedia*, the "veltro" of *Inferno* I, 10, which Boccaccio glosses in his *Esposizioni*, in *Purgatorio* XXXIII, 50 the word "enigma forte" is used in reference with the "cinquecento diece e cinque, / messo di Dio" of the lines 43-44. Boccaccio was certainly familiar with Dante's poetics of enigmas and his peculiar use of the *enigma forte*, yet reconstructing the directions of Dante's influence on Boccaccio will require further investigation.<sup>67</sup>

Boccaccio's prose often features the characteristics of the language typical of the enigmatists. Boccaccio's ability to forge acrostics is shown in his *Amorosa visione* (see the indication of the proemial sonnet). Boccaccio could have been in touch with the riddle tradition in many ways, both through the classical and medieval tradition. Vergil's Third *Eclogue* (lines 104-107) contains a famous pair of riddles, at least one of which has never been satisfactorily solved.<sup>68</sup> Ovid has a few riddles in *Fasti* 3.339-342, and 4.663-672. There is a brief discussion of the riddle in Aulus Gellius' *Noctes atticae* 12.6.1-3. Other enigmas can be found in Petronius' *Cena Trimalchionis* (56.7-9, and 58.7ff).<sup>69</sup> However, besides the cryptic aspect of the Sixth Day's *motti*, which each have their own transposed meaning, a clear and conclusive instance of the discourse comparable to the riddle is evident in Frate Cipolla's speech that exemplary concludes the Day. His imaginative vein enigmatizes superfluous or even elementary information: "arrivai in quelle sante terre dove l'anno di state vi vale il pan freddo quattro denari e il caldo v'e' per niente" (VI.10.43) (I turned back, and so came at length to the Holy Land, where in summer cold bread costs four deniers, and hot bread is to be had for nothing).<sup>70</sup> What does the "sante terre" stand for? Even the *canzoni* at the end of each Day of the

<sup>66</sup> Gervasius of Melkley, *Ars poetica*, quoted by Purcell, *Ars Poetriae*, 110-111.

<sup>67</sup> The scholarship on Dante's enigmas is huge. However, on his *enigma forte* see E. Cook, "Scripture as enigma: biblical allusion in Dante's Earthly Paradise," *Dante Studies* 117 (1999): 1-19; Cook, "Case study I. Enigma in Dante's Eden ("Purgatorio" 27-33)," in *Enigmas and riddles in literature*, 92-109; Minguzzi, *L'enigma forte*; S. Pasquazi, "Il canto dell'"enigma forte" ("Purg." XXXIII)," *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 38 (1986): 25-42; M. Picone, "L'"enigma forte": una lettura di "Purg." XXXII e XXXIII," *L'Alighieri. Rassegna dantesca* 49, n.s., 31 (2008): 77-92; A. M. Pizzaia, *A Ghibelline Interpretation of Dante's Enigma Forte and John's Apocalyptic 666* (Melbourne: Prosdocimus Publications, 1996); W. Pötters, "L'"enigma forte" di Dante: un caso di polisemia poetica," *Studi Danteschi* 73 (2008): 1-17; P. Rembadi Damiani, "Un cinquecento diece e cinque": un'ipotesi per risolvere l'"enigma forte" di Dante," *Studi Danteschi* 70 (2005): 103-117.

<sup>68</sup> A. La Penna, "Lettura della terza bucolica," in M. Gigante, ed., *Lecturae Vergilianae* (Napoli: Giannini, 1981), I: *Le Bucoliche*, 152 ff., 168 ff.

<sup>69</sup> For an overview of the riddle tradition in classical and medieval Latin literature, see G. Polara, "Aenigmata," in G. Cavallo, C. Leonardi, and E. Menestò, eds., *Lo spazio letterario del Medioevo*. 1. *Il Medioevo latino* (Roma: Salerno, 1993), vol. I: *La produzione del testo*, t. II, 197-216.

<sup>70</sup> G. A. Rossi, *Storia dell'enigmistica: con una antologia di giochi moderni* (Roma: Centro Editoriale Internazionale, 1971), 228-229, emphasizes the enigmatic usage of Frate Cipolla's language. Cf. also M. Palumbo, "«I motti leggiadri» nella Sesta giornata del *Decameron*," *Esperienze letterarie* 33.3 (2008): 3-23, in part. p. 15.

*Decameron* can be seen as poetical instances of the language of the riddles. A clear example could be found at the very beginning of the first ballad, in which the reader is undoubtedly challenged to understand the real identity of the *Io* and the nature of *quel ben*:

Io son sì vaga della mia bellezza,  
che d'altro amor giammai  
non curerò, né credo aver vaghezza.  
Io veggio in quella, ogn'ora ch'io mi specchio,  
quel ben che fa contento lo 'ntelletto,  
né accidente nuovo o pensier vecchio  
mi può privar di sì caro diletto.

[So fain I am of my own loveliness,  
I hope, nor think not e'er  
The weight to feel of other amorousness.  
When in the mirror I my face behold,  
That see I there which doth my mind content,  
Nor any present hap or memory old  
May me deprive of such sweet ravishment.]

Besides the correspondence of the mirror theme, the analogies with the poetic style of Symphosius' enigmas<sup>71</sup> are astounding, and not just for the typical first-person mode of speaking:

LXIX. SPECULUM

Nulla mihi certa est, nulla est peregrina figura.  
Fulgor inest intus radianti luci coruscus,  
qui nihil ostendit, nisi si quid viderit ante.

[No fixed form is mine, yet none is stranger to me. My brightness lies within sparkling with radiant light, which shows nothing except what it has seen before. (trans. Ohl<sup>72</sup>)]

We do not know if Boccaccio knew Symphosius' text, yet the similarities with its enigmatic language, its ability to convey both an apparent and a real meaning, as well as the wide diffusion of Symphosius' riddles in the European literary tradition could advocate, if not for a direct and specific knowledge, at least for a certain acquaintance.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Caelius Firmianus Symphosius, *Aenigmata Symposii: la fondazione dell'enigmistica come genere poetico*, ed. M. Bergamin (Tavarnuzze [Firenze]: SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005).

<sup>72</sup> R. T. Ohl, *The Enigmas of Symphosius*, Ph.D. dissertation (Philadelphia, 1928).

<sup>73</sup> The ability to convey both apparent and real meanings of Symphosius' riddles is emphasized by Bergamin, in her edition of Symphosius, *Aenigmata*, xxx-xxxii. Symphosius was the founder of a genre destined to have a long life and extensive circulation in Europe. He is a late antique writer about whom nothing is known, not even the century in which he wrote: dates as early as the second century AD and as late as the 6th have been proposed. Since the author's identity is uncertain, Symphosius' enigmas have been also attributed to Lactantius (Boccaccio knew Lactantius' *Divinarum Institutionum Libri VII*; see Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libraria,'" 32). Symphosius' riddles survive in the collection known as the Latin Anthology. Each of the hundred riddles is a triplet of dactylic hexameters. Symphosius claims he made them up from the riddles he heard at a drinking party during the Saturnalia. He is also the founder of a genre destined to have great success in the seventh and eighth century England. Aldhelm's *Aenigmata* (one hundred verse riddles in Latin) show the influence of Symphosius. His work reflects and foreshadows the



Moreover, the literary framework that introduces the enigmas in Symphosius' collection not only refers to the Saturnalia tradition that Boccaccio certainly knew through other texts such as Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (the second book actually begins with a collection of *bons mots*) and Martial's *Epigrams* (which, incidentally, were also characterized by their biting and often scathing sense of wit<sup>74</sup>), but also, and most strikingly, recall similar features in the Decameron's *cornice*. Like the storytellers of the *Decameron*, the imagined characters of Symphosius tell enigmas each one in turn after the banquet, and a witty spirit of challenge is involved in trying to solve them:

[Haec quoque Symphosius de carmine lusit inepto. Sic tu, Sexte, doces; sic te deliro magistro.] Annu Saturni dum tempora festa redirent perpetuo semper nobis sollemnia ludo, post epulas laetas, post dulcia pocula mensae, deliras inter vetulas puerosque loquaces, cum streperet late madidae facundia linguae, tum verbosa cohors studio sermonis inepti nescio quas passim magno de nomine nugas est mediata diu; sed frivola multa locuta est. Nec mediocre fuit; magni certaminis instar, ponere diverse vel solvere quaeque vicissim. Ast ego, ne solus foede tacuisse viderer, qui nihil adtuleram mecum quod dicere possem, hos versus feci subito de carmine vocis. Insanos inter sanum non esse necesse est. Da veniam, lector, quod non sapit ebria Musa.

[These bits, too, of trifling verse Symphosius has done in sport. So you, Sextus, teach; so with you as an exemplar I proceed in my folly.] While Saturn's festive season was making its yearly return, always for me a holiday on unbroken fun, after joyous banquets and the dinner's dulcet draughts, when amid doting old women and prattling children there clamored far and wide the eloquence of intoxicated tongues, then the wordy gathering in their fondness for verbal quip mulled over long at random some trifles with grand titles; but foolish were the many jests they made. No small matter was it, but like a great contest, to set or solve in various ways each one in turn. But I, who had brought along with me nothing that I could proffer, lest I seem to be the only one to have kept silence in disgrace, made these verses from their off-hand conundrums. One must not be wise amid the otherwise. Pardon, reader, the indiscretions of a tipsy Muse. (trans. Ohl)

The banquet is the privileged context in which the challenge, the philosophical

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popularity of the riddle in Old English. Aldhelm's style shows the 'Hisperic' tendency towards rare—even bizarre—words. Hwaetberht was the author of a collection of sixty riddles, known as the *Enigmata Eusebii*, written under the pen-name of Eusebius. These were written as a supplement to forty riddles written earlier by Tatwine, archbishop of Canterbury. According to Bede's commentary, Tatwine was a man notable for his prudence, devotion and learning, qualities that were displayed in the two surviving manuscripts of his riddles and four of his Grammar. His riddles deal with such diverse topics as philosophy and charity, the five senses and the alphabet, and a book and a pen. The riddles are formed in acrostics. The text of Aldhelm is in R. Ehwald, ed., *Aldhelmi Opera*, MGH, *Scriptores, Auctores antiquissimi* 15 (Berlin, 1919). Aldhelm's enigmas are also recently edited along with the other Old English enigmas in *Variae collectiones aenigmatum Merovingicae aetatis*, CCSL 133 and 133A. See also Polara, "Aenigmata." R. E. Gleason, *Per Speculum in Enigmate: Runes, Riddles, and Language in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Doctoral Dissertation (Northwestern University: 1997) describes the Old English enigmas as a genre and define their epistemological characteristics.

<sup>74</sup> Martial, *Epigrams*, bks. 13 and 14. See M. Citroni, "Marziale e la Letteratura per i Saturnali (poetica dell'intrattenimento e cronologia della pubblicazione dei libri)," *Illinois Classical Studies* 14 (1989): 201-226; id., *Poesia e lettori in Roma antica: forme della comunicazione letteraria* (Roma: Ed. Laterza, 1995), 440. On Boccaccio's discovery of Martial, see Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato*, 263-264. Boccaccio held and glossed a manuscript of Martial's *Epigrams*: see Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libreria,'" 49, and M. Petoletti, "Le postille di Giovanni Boccaccio a Marziale," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 34 (2006): 103-184.

contest and the enigma join together.<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, the Middle Ages developed allegorical aspects of the language that, according to Bergamin, were already operating in Symphosius' enigmas. The concept of art as *integumentum veri, fabulosa narratio veritatis*, was certainly familiar to Boccaccio.<sup>76</sup> If Cicero developed the concept of allegory as the veiled language connected to the enigma,<sup>77</sup> and later on, as we have seen before, the enigma was classified as one of the species of allegory, the patristic tradition had a great part in developing an attitude to read the Bible not only as a sacred text, but also as an obscure one, whose understanding requires particular knowledge and wisdom.<sup>78</sup> Augustine, in particular, maintains that one cannot understand the famous Epistle to the Corinthians (I Cor. 13.12: *videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate*) without also knowing the rhetorical doctrine of the enigma.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the enigma becomes the privileged rhetorical figure through which to read the Bible, and the idea of conveying hidden meanings through the power of language could similarly have influenced the definition of the *motto* in the *Decameron*.

The *motto* is not simply a type of metaphor, as both Freedman and Bosetti assume,<sup>80</sup> for the metaphor is a rhetorical figure based on a relation of similarity. The metaphor is a rhetorical trope that describes something as *being* or *equal to* something else in some way, whereas the *motto*, like the enigma, is a combination of different and irreconcilable elements and, most important, cannot exist outside a well-defined context that provides an explanation.<sup>81</sup> Reading Oretta's *motto*, one wonders how trotting can be related to narration. We definitely need an explanation. Here, it is useful to recall Aristotle's definition of the contradictory nature of the enigma and the impossibility of connecting it 'directly' to the metaphor: "For the essence of a riddle [i.e. enigma] is to express true facts under impossible combinations. Now this cannot be done by any arrangement of ordinary words, but by the use of metaphor it can. Such is the riddle: 'A man I saw who on another man had glued the bronze by aid of fire,' and others of the same kind" (*Poetics*, 1458.a.26-30).<sup>82</sup> The elements involved in the enigma can exist in a relation of similarity, but since this similarity combines dissimilar elements and is not understood, it has to be explained; moreover, the supposed metaphor may well be confused with the metonymy, as there can be a transposition between an object and an

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<sup>75</sup> Like the *Decameron's* one hundred tales, Symphosius' *Aenigmata* include one hundred riddles which, according to medieval numerological interpretation, could symbolize eternity or perfection (Bergamin, *Aenigmata*, xxxvii). Moreover, J. Relihan, "Rethinking the History of the Literary Symposium," *Illinois Classical Studies* 17 (1992): 213-244, suggests adding to the so-called Symposium-Literatur (Martin 1931) even the *Cena Cypriani*, a medieval banquet full of allusions to the Bible.

<sup>76</sup> See his poetic theory in the *Genealogie*, bk. XIV, and *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, in G. Boccaccio. *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. V. Branca (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1967-98), vol. III, passim.

<sup>77</sup> *De oratore* III.42.166-7, *Letter to Atticus* 2.20.3, *Orator* 27-94, mentioned by Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature*, 34-35. Even Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.52, links the enigma to allegory.

<sup>78</sup> Just to mention a few instances, let us consider Augustine, *De trinitate* XV.9 ff., Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon* VI.3 ff., Aquinas, *Summa* I.q.1.a.9, and *Quodlibetales* (VII.a.15-16), Dante, *Convivio* II.1. See also Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 344n.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Bergamin, *Aenigmata*, xxxi; Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 352 and 362.

<sup>80</sup> G. Bosetti, "Analyse 'Structurale' de la Sixième Journée du Decameron," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 7 (1975): 141-58; in particular p. 148. Freedman, "Il cavallo di Boccaccio," 226-227, 234.

<sup>81</sup> See also Cook, "The Figure of Enigma," passim.

<sup>82</sup> The solution is 'the blood-sucker.' Cf. Colli, *La sapienza greca*, fr. 7, A, 26, p. 357.

idea, as in the first tale (“Messere, questo vostro cavallo ha troppo duro trotto; per che io vi priego che vi piaccia di pormi a pie” [VI.1. 11]) where the object 'horse' is primarily aligned with the concept of 'to ride,' and only secondarily with the concept of 'to recount.'

Rather than making a list of all the witticisms of the Sixth Day—which are, incidentally, notorious—let us look at the contextual features that they share with the enigma. First of all, the tales of the *motto* typically involve a challenge between two wise men and display the same agonistic features of the ancient philosophical contests.<sup>83</sup> In this respect, it is interesting to consider an anecdote about Calchas reported by Hesiod: the soothsayer Calchas arrived in Claro where he found the wise Mopsus. After having challenged Mopsus with an enigma, Calchas died for the shame of his defeat:

“Sono meravigliato nel mio cuore, di quanti frutti possa avere questo fico selvatico, pur essendo piccolo: sapresti dirmene il numero? – Sono diecimila di numero, mentre la loro misura è un medimno: uno però cresce, e questo non potrai aggiungerlo. Così parlò, e per loro risultò vero il numero attribuito alla misura. E allora, ecco, il sonno della morte ottenebrò Calcante.” (Colli, 7 [A, 1], p. 341)

[“I am filled with wonder at the quantity of figs this wild fig-tree bears though it is so small. Can you tell their number?” And Mopsus answered: “Ten thousand is their number, and their measure is a bushel: one fig is left over, which you would not be able to put into the measure.” So said he; and they found the reckoning of the measure true. Then did the end of death shroud Calchas.]

Likewise in the *Decameron*, Guido Cavalcanti’s tale (VI.9) can be considered the best example of agonism in a philosophical contest.<sup>84</sup> Sir Betto Brunelleschi and his fellows challenge Guido Cavalcanti: (“Andiamo a dargli briga;” and “. . . quando tu avrai trovato che Idio non sia, che avrai fatto?” (VI.9.11) (. . . when thou hast proved that God does not exist, what wilt thou have achieved?).<sup>85</sup> The wise Guido is also defined as a great philosopher: “Tralle quali brigate n’era una di messer Betto Brunelleschi, nella quale messer Betto e’ compagni s’erano molto ingegnato di tirare Guido di messer Cavalcante de’ Cavalcanti, e non senza cagione: per ciò che, oltre a quello che egli fu un de’ miglior loici che avesse il mondo e ottimo filosofo naturale (delle quali cose poco la brigata curava), si fu egli leggiadrissimo e costumato e parlante uom molto e ogni cosa che far volle e a gentile uom pertinente seppe meglio che altro uom fare” (VI.9.8) (Messer Betto and his comrades had striven hard to bring Guido, son of Cavalcante de’ Cavalcanti, and

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<sup>83</sup> D. B. Levine, “Poetic Justice: Homer’s Death in the Ancient Biographical Tradition,” *The Classical Journal* 98 (2002-2003): 141-160. Richard P. Martin, “The Seven Sages as Performers of Wisdom,” in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke, eds., *Cultural Poetics in Archaic Greece: Cult, Performance, Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 108-128, 120, has recently defined as “agonistic” the nature of wisdom which is characteristic of the Seven Sages of the archaic period.

<sup>84</sup> As J. Burkhardt, *Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, pt. 2, emphasized, the culture of Renaissance Florence was an agonistic one. Similarly, by analyzing practical jokes in their historical and cultural context in early modern Italy, Peter Burke, “Frontiers of the Comic in Early Modern Italy, c. 1350-1750,” in J. N. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg, eds., *A Cultural History of Humour: From Antiquity to the Present Day* (Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press, 1997), 66, defines the *beffa* as an expression of a “culture of trickery,” as an appropriate form of joking in a competitive society such as the Florentine.

<sup>85</sup> The epistemological implications and the power of eloquence of this novella are well exposed by Durling, “Boccaccio on Interpretation: Guido’s Escape.” In particular, Durling (*ibid.*, p. 276 and n. 8) calls attention to the meaning of “dare briga” whose original sense was closer to quarrel or fight.

not without reason, inasmuch as, besides being one of the best logicians in the world, and an excellent natural philosopher (qualities of which the company made no great account), he was without a peer for gallantry and courtesy and excellence of discourse and aptitude for all matters which he might set his mind to, and that belonged to a gentleman). Michele Scalza provokes the discussion among his fellows (“ . . . si cominciò tra loro una quistion così fatta . . . ” [VI.6.5] [. . . they fell a disputing together on this wise . . .]) and accepts the challenge, whose stake is a dinner, of showing how the Baronci are the most gentle and noble family of Florence: "Ora avvenne un giorno che, essendo egli con alquanti a Montughi, si cominciò tra loro una quistion così fatta: quali fossero li più gentili uomini di Firenze e i più antichi" (VI.6.5) (Now it so befell that one day, he being with a party of them at Mont' Ughi, they fell a disputing together on this wise; to wit, who were the best gentlemen and of the longest descent in Florence). Sir Forese da Rabatta, described as "di tanto sentimento nelle leggi, che da molti valenti uomini uno armario di ragione civile fu reputato" (VI.5.4) (so conversant . . . with the laws, that by not a few of those well able to form an opinion he was reputed a veritable storehouse of civil jurisprudence), disputes with Giotto—himself described in equally praiseworthy terms as “una delle luci della fiorentina gloria” (VI.5.6) (he may deservedly be called one of the lights that compose the glory of Florence)—and “bites” him with a *motto* noting that his haggard appearance was not suited to his greatness as an artist. Chichibio, who got in trouble for stealing a thigh of the crane he had later cooked for his master, accepts the paradoxical challenge of demonstrating to Currado Gianfigliuzzi that all cranes have one leg: “Come diavol non hanno che una coscia e una gamba? Non vid'io mai più gru che questa?” Chichibio seguitò: - ‘Egli è, messer, com'io vi dico; e quando vi piaccia, io il vi farò veder ne’ vivi’” (VI.4.11-12) (‘What the devil?’ rejoined Currado in a rage: ‘so the crane has but one thigh and one leg? thinkst thou I never saw crane before this?’ But Chichibio continued: “’Tis even so as I say, Sir; and, so please you, I will shew you that so it is in the living bird’). The baker Cisti undertakes a courtesy contest with Messer Geri Spina displaying its magnificent wine and then, with a quick response, succeeding to gain the respect of the Florentine noble (“Messer Geri ebbe il dono di Cisti carissimo e quelle grazie gli rendé che a ciò credette si convenissero, e sempre poi per da molto l'ebbe e per amico” [VI.2.30] [Messer Geri set great store by Cisti's gift, and thanked him accordingly, and ever made much of him and entreated him as his friend]). Monna Nonna de’ Pulci with a quick response gains the victory over the bishop of Florence who made a rude provocation (“Nonna, che ti par di costui? Crederrestil vincere? . . . Messere, e’ forse non vincerebbe me, ma vorrei buona moneta” [VI.3.9-10] [Nonna, what thinkst thou of this gentleman? That thou mightst make a conquest of him? . . . Perchance, Sir, he might not make a conquest of me; but if he did so, I should want good money]).

If it is likely that, by the time of Boccaccio, most of the ancient significance of the enigma has been lost, especially its mythical atmosphere and the direct connection with philosophy, the connection between *motto* and enigma is nevertheless preserved in the hints Boccaccio makes about his protagonists’ wisdom—that of Guido Cavalcanti in particular among the nobles, but also that of Cisti and Forese among the humbles. The connection with the sphere of philosophy, however, is preserved in a certain novelistic and exemplary tradition like that of the Latin *Compilatio singulorum exemplorum*, a vast repertoire of materials for sermons that could have been one of the sources of

Boccaccio's VI.1,<sup>86</sup> or the Judeo-Spanish tale of Zabara, and the *Donzella Teodor*, the wise girl who wins various tests of wisdom.<sup>87</sup> The tales of the *motto*, in other terms, are no longer a contest about knowledge, but they here take the literary form of a witty challenge to be performed in order to obtain a practical knowledge for ordinary life. On the level of the literary form, however, the linkage between the agonistic attitudes of the pre-Socratic enigma and the witty contest of the Florentine life still remains strong; above all, the connection between agonism and dialectics finally ends up in morality. It is worth, thus, recalling the words of Giorgio Colli on the development of wisdom: "The dialectic is born on the ground of agonism. When the religious background has faded and the cognitive impulse no longer needs to be stimulated by a challenge of the god [Apollo], when a contest for knowledge among men no longer requires that they be diviners, here appears an only human agonism."<sup>88</sup> The main feature, or function, of Boccaccio's character—be it a male or a female character—is that of manifesting himself through eloquence—and therefore through his intelligence. The challenge of wise men ending with the *motto* requires a certain intellectual equality of the two contenders, and therefore it differs from the characteristics of the *beffa*, in which the mocked person (the *beffato*) is humiliated for his/her stupidity.<sup>89</sup>

It is worth noting a similar agonistic attitude in tales other than those of the Sixth Day. In *Decameron* I.3, Saladin summons Melchisedech, welcomes him, and addresses him with these words: "Valente uomo, io ho da più persone inteso che tu se' savissimo e nelle cose di Dio senti molto avanti; e per ciò io saprei volentieri da te quale delle tre leggi tu reputi la verace, o la giudaica o la saracina o la cristiana" (I.3.8) (My good man, I have heard from many people that thou art very wise, and of great discernment in divine things; wherefore I would gladly know of thee, which of the three laws thou reputest the true law, the law of the Jews, the law of the Saracens, or the law of the Christians?). Saladin's words hide a sort of riddle, and even a challenge which bears traces of the archaic function of the riddle as a ritualized contest, whereby knowledge of the origin of things and of the order of the world could be attained.<sup>90</sup> Equally traditional is the

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<sup>86</sup> Freedman, "Il cavallo di Boccaccio," 231-32.

<sup>87</sup> *Historia de la Dozella Teodor*, in *Narrativa popular de la Edad Media*, 59-84. The wise girl who marries the king is, however, a folkloristic theme.

<sup>88</sup> "La dialettica nasce sul terreno dell'agonismo. Quando lo sfondo religioso si è allontanato e l'impulso conoscitivo non ha più bisogno di essere stimolato da una sfida del dio, quando una gara per la conoscenza fra uomini non richiede più che essi siano divinatori, ecco apparire un agonismo soltanto umano" (Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*, 75).

<sup>89</sup> Cf. A. Fontes-Baratto, "Le thème de la 'beffa' dans le Décaméron," in A. Rochon, ed., *Formes et significations de la "Beffa" dans la littérature italienne de la Renaissance*, 1: *Formes et significations Boccace, Machiavel* (Paris: Univ. de la Sorbonne, 1972), 11-44 and 35; and Van der Voort, "Convergenze e divaricazioni," 212.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens; A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), 108-109, 113: "The riddle is a sacred thing full of secret power, hence a dangerous thing. In its mythological or ritual context it is nearly always what German philologists know as the Halsrätsel or "capital riddle", which you either solve or forfeit your head. The player's life is at stake. A corollary of this is that it is accounted the highest wisdom to put a riddle nobody can answer. . . . Gradual transitions lead from the sacred riddle-contest concerning the origin of things to the catch-question contest, with honor, possessions, or dear life at stake, and finally to the philosophical and theological disputation"; See also F. Masciandaro, "Melchisedech's Novelletta of the Three Rings as Irenic Play (Decameron I.3)," *Forum Italicum* 37 (2003): 20-39, 26-27.

suddenness with which the solution comes to Melchisedech's mind: ". . . aguzzato lo 'ngegno, gli venne prestamente avanti quello che dir dovesse..." (I.3.9-10) (. . . concentrating all the force of his mind to shape such an answer as might avoid the snare, he presently lit on what he sought. . .).<sup>91</sup> The solution to Saladin's riddle is notorious, and consists of telling the story of the three rings.

Danger and violence are also involved in this fight for knowledge. If the ancient wise man of the pre-Socratic tradition risks dying if he is unable to solve the enigma, likewise, the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* represents dangerous situations that befall the protagonists of the tales. Cichibio, for instance, runs a big risk for having taken away a leg from his lord's crane (" . . . e io il voglio veder domattina e sarò contento; ma io ti giuro in sul corpo di Cristo, che, se altramenti sarà, che io ti farò conciare in maniera che tu con tuo danno ti ricorderai, sempre che tu ci viverai, del nome mio" [VI.4.13] [Since thou promisest to shew me in the living bird what I have never seen or heard tell of, I bid thee do so to-morrow, and I shall be satisfied, but if thou fail, I swear to thee by the body of Christ that I will serve thee so that thou shalt ruefully remember my name for the rest of thy days]) and then with his words puts himself into a dangerous escalating situation wherefrom he eventually comes out with a witty remark.<sup>92</sup> Madonna Filippa risks dying on the gallows unless she manages to escape from her dangerous situation with a quick and clever remark that arouses the mayor and the people's generosity. Frate Cipolla could be lynched by the mob of Certaldo if the people discovered the falsity of his relic. The Florentine brigade that puts Guido to a test approaches him with a playful assault: ". . . e spronati i cavalli a guisa d'uno assalto sollazzevole gli furono, quasi prima che egli se ne avvedesse, sopra . . ." (VI.9.11) (So they set spurs to their horses, and making a mock onset, were upon him almost before he saw them). Besides resulting from a dangerous situation, violence is contained in the nature of the *motto* itself, and in the way it operates against the person teased. The action of the *motto* is always compared to a bite: "oltre a quello che de' motti è stato detto, vi voglio ricordare essere la natura de' motti cotale, che essi come la pecora *morde* deono così *mordere* l'uditore, e non come 'l cane; per ciò che, se come il cane mordesse il motto, non sarebbe motto ma villania" (VI.3.3) (emphasis mine) (wherefore to that which has been said touching the nature of wit I purpose but to add one word, to remind you that its *bite* should be as a *sheep's bite* and not as a dog's; for if it bite like a dog, 'tis no longer wit but discourtesy). This violent reaction can even be indirectly perceived when it provokes a sort of psychosomatic reaction in a character, as with Oretta's reaction to the bad tale narrated by the knight: "Di che a madonna Oretta, udendolo, spesse volte veniva un sudore e uno sfinimento di cuore, come se inferma fosse stata per terminare" (VI.1.10) (Madonna Oretta, as she listened, did oft sweat, and was like to faint, as if she were ill and at the point of death).

From his attentive reading of the introduction to the Sixth Day, Cok Van der Voort infers a thematic bipartition that divides the narrative model of the Sixth Day in two variants: the 'provocation' and the 'threat:' "voglio che domane, con l'aiuto di Dio,

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<sup>91</sup> Cf. Huizinga, *Homo ludens*, 110: "The answer to an enigmatic question is not found by reflection or logical reasoning. It comes quite literally as a sudden solution—a loosening of the tie by which the questioner holds you bound."

<sup>92</sup> Giovanni Getto, *Vita di forme e forme di vita nel 'Decameron'*, 149, compares the action of Cichibio's tale with a gamble in which the character eventually wins, albeit in the last game.

infra questi termini si ragioni, cioè di chi, con alcuno leggiadro motto tentato, si riscosse, o con pronta risposta o avvedimento fuggì perdita, pericolo o scorno” (V.concl.3) (I ordain that to-morrow, God helping us, the following be the rule of our discourse; to wit, that it be of such as by some sprightly sally have repulsed an attack, or by some ready retort or device have avoided loss, peril or scorn).<sup>93</sup> And in fact, the use of the *motto* appears in two variants, addressing either a provocation or a threat. But a perfect parodic prologue to the Sixth Day (as well as the first enigma of the Day) is the quarrel between Tindaro and Licisca which summarizes all the themes involved in the *motto*, such as knowledge and the violence of sex. At the rising of the sun, just when the *lieta brigata* is discussing about the beauty of the narrated tales and is preparing to reconvene, we suddenly hear "un gran romore": here are Tindaro and Licisca quarrelling over somewhat spicy matters. When asked about the reasons for the dispute, Licisca answers: “Madonna, costui mi vuol far *conoscere* la moglie di Sicofante; e nè più nè meno, come se io con lei usata non fossi, mi vuol dare a *vedere* che la notte prima che *Sicofante* giacque con lei, messer *Mazza* entrasse in *Monte Nero* per forza e con *ispargimento di sangue*; e io dico che non è vero, anzi v'entrò pacificamente e con gran piacere di quei d'entro” (VI.intr.8) (emphasis mine) (Madam, this fellow would fain *instruct* me as to Sicofante's wife, and—neither more or less—as if I had not *known* her well—would have me believe that, the first night that Sicofante lay with her, 'twas by *force* and not without *effusion of blood* that *Master Yard* made his way into *Dusky Hill*; which I deny, averring that he met with no resistance, but, on the contrary, with a hearty welcome on the part of the *garrison*). A supposed sexual defloration obviously hides behind the metaphorical and obscene language, but the way in which places and characters are expressed in this context takes the formal appearance of the impossible and paradoxical discourse that requires a special context-bound acumen to be understood. The enigma sets itself as a challenge, albeit low and vulgar, between two contenders, and results in the merry brigade to understand the *motto* (“Mentre la Licisca parlava, facevan le donne sì gran risa, che tutti i denti si sarebbero loro potuti trarre” [VI.intro.11] [While Licisca thus spoke, the ladies laughed till all their teeth were ready to start from their heads]) and with Dioneo to give the victory to Licisca (“Madonna, la sentenza è data senza udirne altro; e dico che la Licisca ha ragione, e credo che così sia com'ella dice; e Tindaro è una bestia” [VI.intro.13] [Madam, replied Dioneo forthwith, I give judgment without more ado: I say that Licisca is in the right; I believe that 'tis even as she says, and that Tindaro is a fool]), who in turn puts the shame of the defeat on Tindaro (“Occi ben lo diceva io; vatti con Dio; credi tu *saper* più di me tu, che non hai ancora rasciutti gli occhi?” [VI.intro.14] [Now did I not tell thee so? quoth she. Begone in God's name: dost think to know more than I, thou that art but a sucking babe?]). This brief introductory narration, therefore, is not an alien or out-of-place element of the Day, as some critics maintain, but is a perfect parodic *mise en abîme* of what the *motto* will be in its literary form in the narration of the tales. Not surprisingly, the significance the *motto* attaches to knowledge is already highlighted by the words that refer to 'knowledge' and 'sight'.

Giorgio Colli reviews the terms that identify the enigma: the Greek sources sometimes use the term *próblema*, which means ‘obstacle,’ or something that is projected

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<sup>93</sup> Van der Voort, "Convergenze e divaricazioni," 213.

forward.<sup>94</sup> As a matter of fact, the enigma is an obstacle, a test Dionysus sets up and the philosopher has to overcome. Indeed, a test, or obstacle, is the subject of the Sixth Day, since all the characters have to overcome a difficult situation using their wit. The characteristic of the enigma as a hostile intrusion of the divine in the human sphere—in other terms, the god's challenge—is possibly reflected in the role played by the Goddess Fortune in creating obstacles. It is Fortune that plays a fundamental role in this Day, since it is the force which sets a series of obstacles. It gives, for instance, an ugly appearance to exceptional figures such as Giotto, or attributes a low social rank to gracious souls such as Cisti (“Belle donne, io non so da me medesima vedere che più in questo si pecchi, o la natura apparecchiando a una nobile anima un vil corpo, o la fortuna apparecchiando a un corpo dotato d'anima nobile vil mestiero, sì come in Cisti nostro cittadino e in molti ancora abbiamo potuto vedere avvenire; il qual Cisti, d'altissimo animo fornito, la fortuna fece fornaio” [VI.2.3] [Fair ladies, I cannot myself determine whether Nature or Fortune be the more at fault, the one in furnishing a noble soul with a vile body, or the other in allotting a base occupation to a body endowed with a noble soul, whereof we may have seen an example, among others, in our fellow-citizen, Cisti; whom, furnished though he was with a most lofty soul, Fortune made a baker]). Moreover, in the ancient and medieval Aristotelian traditions, the term *pròblema* indicates the formulation of a query, precisely the dialectic query that starts a discussion.<sup>95</sup> Likewise, in the tales of the *motto*, the first question a character asks to another may be the opening question of a dialectic contest, a provocation or a challenge. Luisa Cuomo has emphasized the elements of a typical dialectic controversy in the tale about the nobility of the Baronci family (VI.6); here, the two opposite assertions the contenders bring forward have the same probability of being true, but a syllogism is finally needed to demonstrate the thesis: namely, that the Baronci, insofar as they are the most ancient among all the families, are also the noblest.<sup>96</sup> But all the discussion is also charged with a parodic connotation consisting in the “gap between the seriousness of the correct terminology of the scholastic deductive processes and the comic of both the parody of the basic arguments and the expressive language loaded with emotional connotations,” which leads to the direct consequence that the friends of Scalza will laugh at the *motto*, thus recognizing its validity and parodic meaning.<sup>97</sup>

The formulation of the enigma is as contradictory as the formulation of the dialectic question, which presents two alternative terms. The knowledge produced by the understanding of the *motto* is ambiguous, indirect and oblique as much as the knowledge provided by Dionysus or the nature of Apollo mediated by Orpheus among men.<sup>98</sup> The message transmitted by the *motto* is not immediately understandable—who among us did not stop and reread the *motto* pronounced by Forese and addressed to Giotto? “Giotto, a che ora venendo di qua allo 'ncontro di noi un forestiere che mai veduto non t'avesse, credi tu che egli credesse che tu fossi il miglior dipintor del mondo, come tu se'?” (VI.5.14) (Giotto, would e'er a stranger that met us, and had not seen thee before, believe,

<sup>94</sup> Colli, *La nascita della filosofia*, 78.

<sup>95</sup> The same term *pròblema* is also used in the Vulgate and Septuagint versions of the Bible (Cook, “The Figure of Enigma,” 366).

<sup>96</sup> Cuomo, “Sillogeizzare motteggiando,” 252 ff..

<sup>97</sup> Cuomo, “Sillogeizzare motteggiando,” 255 (translation mine).

<sup>98</sup> Colli, *La sapienza greca*, 37.



thinkst thou, that thou wert, as thou art, the greatest painter in the world). The *motto* is a device that *hides* knowledge by virtue of its rhetorical form and needs to be explained by someone else in the narrative. The wisdom that the wise Cavalcanti communicates with his *motto* needs to be explained by Betto to his companions.

Traditionally, in order to be solved, the enigma needs a narrative to accompany it, or at least an explanation whose didactic function has typically been present since antiquity. (From this point of view, although we may laugh a lot, it seems that the Sixth is the most serious day of the *Decameron*.) The knowledge of the mocker is not the same as that of the mocked person. The latter has to undergo a gnoseological transformation in order to understand the wit and to reach the same level of knowledge. (Sometimes, though, the mocked fails to increase his knowledge if he does not understand the *motto*; then, an explanation is provided by adding a parodic value to the narrative.) Furthermore, it is possible to interpret the function of the *motto* as a peculiar literary form of recognition that leads the characters of the tales to a *shift* from ignorance to knowledge. Therefore, Boccaccio seems to portray an ideal situation in which the character, as a man, gains a new knowledge through a transformation (which sometimes ends with a laugh). In particular, let us focus on the figure of the defeated, and see how both the comprehension of the *motto* and the declaration of the defeat work in each tale of the Sixth Day:

Il cavaliere anonimo —Il cavaliere, il qual per avventura era molto migliore *intenditore* che novellatore, *inteso* il motto, e quello in festa e in gabbo preso, mise mano in altre novelle, e quella che cominciata avea e mai seguita, senza finita lasciò stare (VI.1.12) (The gentleman, being perchance more quick of apprehension than he was skilful in narration, missed not the meaning of her sally, and took it in all good and gay humour. So, leaving unfinished the tale which he had begun, and so mishandled, he addressed himself to tell her other stories);

Geri Spina —Il che rapportando il famigliare a messer Geri, subito *gli occhi* gli s'apersero dello '*ntelletto*... (VI.2.26) (Which being reported by the servant to Messer Geri, the *eyes* of his *mind* were straightway opened . . .);

Antonio d'Orso e Dego della Ratta —La qual parola udita il maliscalco e 'l vescovo, sentendosi parimente *traffitti*, l'uno siccome factore della disonesta cosa nella nepote del fratel del vescovo, e l'altro sì come ricevitore nella nepote del proprio fratello, senza guardar l'un l'altro, *vergognosi e taciti* se n'andarono, senza più quel giorno dirle alcuna cosa (VI.3.11) (The answer stung both the marshal and the bishop to the quick, the one as contriver of the scurvy trick played upon the bishop's brother in regard of his niece, the other as thereby outraged in the person of his brother's niece; insomuch that they dared not look one another in the face, but took themselves off in shame and silence, and said never a word more to her that day);

Forese da Rabatta—Il che messer Forese udendo, il suo error riconobbe, e *videsi* di tal moneta pagato, quali erano state le derrate vendute (VI.5.16) (Which hearing, Messer Forese recognized his error, and perceived that he had gotten as good as he brought);

I pratesi—Eran quivi a così fatta essaminazione, e di tanta e sì famosa donna, quasi tutti i pratesi concorsi, li quali, udendo così piacevol risposta, subitamente, dopo molte risa, quasi ad una voce tutti gridarono la donna aver ragione e dir bene (VI.7.18) (Which jocund question being heard by well-nigh all the folk of Prato, who had flocked thither all agog to see a dame so fair and of such quality on her trial for such an offence, they laughed loud and long, and then all with one accord, and as with one voice, exclaimed

that the lady was in the right and said well);

Betto Brunelleschi e gli altri compagni—“Allora ciascuno intese quello che Guido aveva voluto dire e *vergognossi* nè mai più gli diedero briga, e tennero per innanzi messer Betto sottile e intendente cavaliere” (VI.9.15) (Then none was there but understood Guido's meaning and was abashed, insomuch that they flouted him no more, and thenceforth reputed Messer Betto a gentleman of a subtle and discerning wit);

Giovanni del Bragoniera e Biagio Pizzini—Li quali stati alla sua predica e avendo udito il nuovo riparo preso da lui e quanto da lungi fatto si fosse e con che parole, avevan tanto riso che eran creduti smascellare. E poi che partito si fu il vulgo, a lui andatisene, con la maggior festa del mondo ciò che fatto avevan gli discoprirono, e appresso gli renderono la sua penna; la quale l'anno seguente gli valse non meno che quel giorno gli fosser valuti i carboni (VI.10.55) (They, indeed, being among his hearers, and marking his novel expedient, and how voluble he was, and what a long story he made of it, laughed till they thought their jaws would break; and, when the congregation was dispersed, they went up to him, and never so merrily told him what they had done, and returned him his feather; which next year proved no less lucrative to him than that day the coals had been).

The transformation can also be simply ideal, as when an obtuse person is not able to understand the *motto*:

Cesca—“Ma ella, più 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 così nella sua grossezza si rimase e ancor vi si sta” (VI.8.10) (But she, empty as a reed, albeit in her own conceit a match for Solomon in wisdom, was as far as any sheep from apprehending the true sense of her uncle's jest; but answered that on the contrary she was minded to look at herself in the glass like other women. And so she remained, and yet remains, hidebound in her folly);

Otherwise, the transformation can be parodic, as when the defeated understands the burlesque sense of the *motto* and laughs at it as in the tale of Chichibio or Scalza:

Currado Gianfigliuzzi—Chichibio, tu hai ragione, ben lo dovea fare (VI.4.19) (Chichibio, quoth he, thou art right, indeed I ought to have so done);

I compagni di Michele Scalza—Della qual cosa, e Piero che era il giudice, e Neri che aveva messa la cena, e ciascun altro ricordandosi, e avendo il piacevole argomento dello Scalza udito, tutti cominciarono a ridere e affermare che lo Scalza aveva la ragione, e che egli aveva vinta la cena, e che per certo i Baronci erano i più gentili uomini e i più antichi che fossero, non che in Firenze, ma nel mondo o in maremma (VI.6.16) (By which entertaining argument Piero, the judge, and Neri who had wagered the supper, and all the rest, calling to mind the Baronci's ugliness, were so tickled, that they fell a laughing, and averred that Scalza was in the right, and that he had won the wager, and that without a doubt the Baronci were the best gentlemen, and of the longest descent, not merely in Florence, but in the world and the Maremma to boot).

Even on the level of the discourse, a metamorphosis takes place. Let us consider, as a key example, the tale of Friar Cipolla. Cipolla is aware of a reality which is not the same as that of the *certaldesi*: his speech is so clever, his rhetoric so refined, that he can make everybody believe that he has taken a trip to the Holy Land, while his fantastic account is merely about a tour in the streets of Florence. The speech that he pronounces is made

with signifiers with a double signified, words that are able to change reality<sup>99</sup> and create a metamorphic discourse which is not only able to increase the levels of reality but also to transform reality itself within the tale. Friar Cipolla eventually manages to escape from the risk of a possible lynching and retains his credibility in the eyes of the *certaldesi* by means of the fantastic reality he succeeded in creating with his oratory.<sup>100</sup>

As argued above, the enigma is also a short tale, as the Greek etymology indicates (from 'ainos' = tale/story),<sup>101</sup> and was considered as such in the pre-Socratic era.<sup>102</sup> The meaning of the *motto* is not always recognizable and valid in itself; rather, it depends on the function it performs within a defined narrative situation.<sup>103</sup> For instance, Nonna de' Pulci's *motto* is not witty in itself, but becomes witty in a particular context; specifically, the urban context of fourteenth century Florence. In addition, in order to clarify better the contextual nature of the *motto*, we find that the link between enigma and *motto* becomes apparent, both in antiquity and in the Florence of the *Decameron*, within a historical context which is not a pure theatrical backdrop.<sup>104</sup> Characters such as Giotto and Guido Cavalcanti are historical Florentine figures, but are represented as legendary by virtue of their instinctive cleverness. The anecdotes of the Sixth Day take the form of historical *memorabilia*. The city of Florence is represented in the background as the proper context of a primordial society whose characters are depicted with the same stylized actions of the philosophers of Ancient Greece. Boccaccio's characters are historical, but they are still represented as ideal figures. (Boccaccio collects his stories from the repertory of the collective memory, as Plato, Aristotle, and the authors of the age of philosophy collected the riddles and the Eleusinian oracles in their works.) The contextual nature of the *motto* is evident not only from the simple observation that some historical Florentine characters appear in short anecdotes, but also for the motivations presented and repeated several times by the author regarding the narrative poetics. Getto rightly points out these aspects of Boccaccio's poetics: the tales are given birth from a "happy memory impulse," which the author then makes explicit, through the words of Fiammetta, in the exhibition of his poetics which is that of a discourse attentive to historical truth, or at least to verisimilitude.<sup>105</sup> But above all, what does matter is Boccaccio's direct intervention in the

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Bosetti, "Analyse structurale," 157.

<sup>100</sup> The issue of a type of narration which leads to the transformation/metamorphosis of a character appears from the very beginning of Boccaccio's literary production: for example, see the transformation of Ameto and his cathartical bath in the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, which represents the evolution of humanity from a primordial condition characterized by the power of senses, to a moral and intellectual consciousness mediated by virtues and love. The topos of the brigata and the transformation of the character is also present in the *Filocolo*.

<sup>101</sup> Cook, "The Figure of Enigma," 355.

<sup>102</sup> Colli, *La sapienza greca*, 36.

<sup>103</sup> Van der Voort, "Convergenze e divaricazioni," 211.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. E. De' Negri, "The Legendary Style of the Decameron," *The Romanic Review* 43 (1952): 166-189.

<sup>105</sup> ". . . se io dalla verità del fatto mi fossi scostare voluta o volessi, avrei ben saputo e saprei sotto altri nomi comporla e raccontarla [scil. la novella]; ma per ciò che il partirsi dalla verità delle cose state nel novellare è gran diminuire di diletto negli 'ntendenti, in propria forma, dalla ragion di sopra detta aiutata, la vi dirò" (IX.5.5) (. . . which I might well, had I been minded to deviate from the truth, have disguised, and so recounted it to you, under other names; but as whoso in telling a story diverges from the truth does thereby in no small measure diminish the delight of his hearers, I purpose for the reason aforesaid to give you the narrative in proper form).

First Day, in which he says he is almost forced to narrate about the plague.<sup>106</sup> Thus, here, Florence appears as the mythical setting of witty people, historical characters represented in an evanescent historicity that loads the verisimilitude of the story with a universal and idealized atmosphere which emphasize wisdom. Overall, the exaltation of intelligence in the *motto* is the expression of the bourgeois society in which the value of wit prevails, and those who do not have it are doomed to exclusion.<sup>107</sup>

The *motto*, as the enigma, is a formal device for the search of wisdom and knowledge. Once again, we must recall Getto's observations on *Decameron's* Introduction, for his remarks are in perfect harmony, on the level of the discourse, with the search for knowledge. Getto found in the words of the Introduction a "layering" of "three expressive moments" that produce the narrative and the form of the work: from the pleasure of memory as the engine of narrative, to the pleasure of communication in the context of the refined conversation of the merry and idle brigade, and finally to the "lyrical emotion" of the "joyfully reached life wisdom by the young brigade."<sup>108</sup> This last moment links the reasons of the entire collection to the author's desire to provide, through his tales, an ideal model of life, a standard of perfect living. This model is constructed by getting through the "sin of Fortune"<sup>109</sup>—after a "passionate contemplation

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<sup>106</sup> "E nel vero, se io potuto avessi onestamente per altra parte menarvi a quello che io desidero che per così aspro sentiero come fia questo, io l'avrei volentier fatto: ma ciò che, qual fosse la cagione per che le cose che appresso si leggeranno avvenissero, non si poteva senza questa ramemorazion dimostrare, quasi da necessità costretto a scriverle mi conduco" (I.intr.7) (In truth, had it been honestly possible to guide you whither I would bring you by a road less rough than this will be, I would gladly have so done. But, because without this review of the past, it would not be in my power to shew how the matters, of which you will hereafter read, came to pass, I am almost bound of necessity to enter upon it, if I would write of them at all).

<sup>107</sup> Thus Getto concludes his introductory remarks: "E' sempre quel principio genetico dell'obbedienza ad un invito del fatto storico, ad un richiamo dell'accadimento reale, assai caro (e rivelatore) per il gusto del nostro artista, che qui agisce. Il Boccaccio si troverà costantemente a legare le sue novelle ad eventi e cose di una verità consacrata dalla storia ufficiale o dalla sua storia personale, a scoprire addentellati con nomi, luoghi, vicende concrete, storicamente determinabili." (Getto, *Vita di forme e forme di vita*, 10). The opening of Getto's first chapter is meaningful for the perspective he employs, insofar as it makes us understand his attention for Boccaccio's discourse and usage of connotation: "Al critico del Boccaccio che con occhio attento sappia scrutare in trasparenza la pagina, non mancherà certo di rendersi sensibile la presenza, fin dal Proemio del Decameron, di un tipico nucleo espressivo in cui la parola acquista un tale valore allusivo da costituire come una rivelazione emblematica, quasi una filigrana pallida e pur evidente, del ritmo fantastico che governa l'intera partitura dell'opera". It is worth noticing that Getto was writing in the 1950s, a period in which critics and semilogists put a lot of emphasis on the connotative aspects of literary production. See, for instance, R. Barthes, *Le degré zero de l'écriture suivi de éléments de sémiologie* (Paris: Gonthier, 1953), which is almost contemporary to Getto's *Vita di forme e forme di vita*. Before Getto, Vittore Branca writes on the importance of historical and contextual references for Boccaccio in order to create "un linguaggio storicamente allusivo" whose repetitive "motivi costituzionali" make them "costanti, o meglio condizioni del suo narrare" (V. Branca, "Le nuove dimensioni narrative e il linguaggio storicamente allusivo," in *Boccaccio medievale*, 226).

<sup>108</sup> Getto, *Vita di forme e forme di vita*, 12.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Proemio.13: "Adunque, acciò che in parte per me s'ammendi il peccato della fortuna, la quale dove meno era di forza, sì come noi nelle delicate donne veggiamo, quivi più avara fu di sostegno, in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano, per ciò che all'altre è assai l'ago e 'l fuso e l'arcolajo, intendo di raccontare cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo, raccontate in dieci giorni da una onesta brigata di sette donne e di tre giovani nel pistelenzioso, tempo della passata mortalità fatta, e alcune canzonette dalle predette donne cantate al lor diletto" (Wherefore, in some measure to compensate

of the limitations and obstacles that life (nature and fortune) places against men, and man that faces those limits and obstacles." Moreover, this model of life is achieved in accordance with a perfectly secular ideal of the world and within the scope of a very precise social reality.<sup>110</sup>

Alan Freedman does not emphasize at all these important ideal aspects; he believes that "Boccaccio instead feels the need to eliminate the enigmatic element prior to using his narrative materials in a book that, despite the wide variety of sources, character and tone of any single tale, reveals a consistently strong structural unit insofar as a coherent and consistent fiction." Moreover, Freedman states that Boccaccio wants "to reject any obviously didactic-problematic suggestion" and that in the *Decameron* in general, as well as for instance in the X.5, "the center of the work's interest is moved from the intellectual paradox to the narrative and its characters."<sup>111</sup> In essence, Freedman maintains that Boccaccio has transformed the enigma in VI.1 into a new metaphorical coinage. Guido Cavalcanti is eminently wise and so is described in the Florentine context ("un de' migliori loici che avesse il mondo e ottimo filosofo naturale" [VI.9.8] [one of the best logicians in the world, and an excellent natural philosopher]). What Getto calls "the art of living" is nothing but a search of wisdom expressed in the literary form of the challenge, of the enigma, of the *motto* plunged into the Florentine civilization. Although knowledge may result in a violent and competitive act, it also involves a productive moment: knowledge is the virtue of intelligent minds (but just a few have it) and can also be transmitted and taught, as long as we are willing to learn. Cisti gives to Messer Geri a lesson on courtesy and on how to live one's own life, and Messer Geri is so gracious and humble to accept the lesson: "Il che rapportando il familiare a messer Geri, subito gli occhi gli s'apersero dello 'ntelletto e disse al familiare: —Lasciami vedere che fiasco tu vi porti; —e vedutolo disse: —Cisti dice vero; —e dettagli villania gli fece torre un fiasco convenevole" (VI.2.26) (Which being reported by the servant to Messer Geri, the eyes of his mind were straightway opened, and:—"Let me see," quoth he to the servant, "what flask it is thou takest there." And when he had seen it:—"Cisti says sooth," he added; and having sharply chidden him, he caused him take with him a suitable flask"). Not surprisingly, the understanding of the *motto* is here associated with sight, as sight was linked to the ancient knowledge of Dionysus and Apollo; moreover, the *vision* of the future was the primitive feature of the knowledge of the truth.<sup>112</sup>

Another formal feature of the *motto* is that which links it to time and narrative speed. By "narrative speed," I mean the measurement of the relationship between the duration of the story and the length of the narrative as theorized by Gérard Genette.<sup>113</sup>

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the injustice of Fortune, which to those whose strength is least, as we see it to be in the delicate frames of ladies, has been most niggard of support, I, for the succour and diversion of such of them as love (for others may find sufficient solace in the needle and the spindle and the reel), do intend to recount one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them, which were recounted in ten days by an honourable company of seven ladies and three young men in the time of the late mortal pestilence, as also some canzonets sung by the said ladies for their delectation).

<sup>110</sup> Getto, *Vita di forme e forme di vita*, 11-12.

<sup>111</sup> Freedman, "Il cavallo di Boccaccio," 234.

<sup>112</sup> Colli, *La sapienza greca*, 20.

<sup>113</sup> On the concept of narrative speed, see in particular G. Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca NY: Cornell Un. Press, 1988), 33-37.

The motto has the ability to concentrate the action in a short space of narration, and it is different from the enigma in the very rapidity caused by the wit of the character. The *motto* provides the narrative of the Sixth Day with a new artistic and rhetorical form. Boccaccio is perfectly aware of his innovation, yet he invites us to ponder—in particular with his metanarrative reflections in the VI.1—and retrospectively emphasizes the brevity of the stories of the Day with respect to the chronological context of the general narrative structure: “Era ancora il sol molto alto, per ciò che il ragionamento era stato brieve . . .” (VI.concl.17) (The sun was still quite high in the heaven, for they had not enlarged in their discourse). Thus, the motto is the artistic form of the purest narrative speed, but also the form of fugacity and elusiveness perfectly represented by the athletic gesture of Cavalcanti, which epitomizes his spirit, acumen and rapidity: “. . . e posta la mano sopra una di quelle arche, che grandi erano, sì come colui che leggerissimo era, prese un salto e fussi gittato dall'altra parte, e sviluppatosi da loro se n'andò” (VI.9.12) (Thereupon he laid his hand on one of the great tombs, and being very nimble, vaulted over it, and so evaded them, and went his way). The value of such a narrative speed becomes more evident when compared with the narrative speed of the First Day: here the actions of the characters are slower than the narrative; they have been meditating for a long time in order to provide a moral teaching or a punishment, and are not quick and immediate as in the Sixth Day. In the First Day, moreover, the character has to deal with persistent human vices and not with sudden errors, as in the Sixth.<sup>114</sup>

In the Sixth Day, and probably in the entire *Decameron*, knowledge becomes a human achievement and not something provided by God. Knowledge is produced by the good usage of discourse and deals with the comprehension of human things. It stems directly from man, from his intelligence, and ultimately from his word. Boccaccio made a major leap from Dante's conception of intelligence. While in the *Commedia* the good use of intelligence can be problematic, as the figure of Ulysses and Guido da Montefeltro perfectly represent, and inevitably leads to tragedy when devoid of virtue and grace, in the *Decameron* the use of intelligence never constitutes a rupture. What is rewarded in the *Decameron* is always men's ability to escape from dangerous situations or to impose their will over other people independently from their ethical conditions.<sup>115</sup> Typically, moreover, as in the case of Cepparello, the application of intelligence in quotidian life not only is accepted but also finally rewarded independently from the orthodoxy of religion and faith. All this brings a significant humanistic progression in the vision of the world compared to the medieval *Weltanschauung*, in which wisdom consisted in the knowledge of the divine, intelligence came from Grace, and the only accepted and relief-worthy word was the sacred Word, that of the Bible.

Thus, the 'earthly' vision of the world is significantly embodied in the figure of the artist. As the master of his own destiny, Giotto can be considered an exemplary, but perfectly human, representation of the artist. He is not simply the imitator of reality; he is the one who is able to read in the book of Nature and shape real things in a new visual synthesis, a synthesis which is capable of creating the illusion of reality by satisfying the intellectual needs of the mind: “E per ciò, avendo egli quella arte ritornata in luce, che molti secoli sotto gli error d'alcuni, che più a diletta gli occhi degl'ignoranti che a

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<sup>114</sup> Cf. also Van der Voort, "Convergenze e divaricazioni," 231 ff..

<sup>115</sup> L. Pertile, "Dante, Boccaccio e l'intelligenza," *Italian Studies* 43 (1988): 60-74, 64-65.

compiacere allo 'ntelletto de' savi dipignendo intendeano, era stata sepulta, meritamente una delle luci della fiorentina gloria dir si puote” (VI.5.6) (Wherefore, having brought back to light that art which had for many ages lain buried beneath the blunders of those who painted rather to delight the eyes of the ignorant than to satisfy the intelligence of the wise, he may deservedly be called one of the lights that compose the glory of Florence). However, it is the idealized writer represented in the text by Boccaccio himself who observes society, succeeds in obtaining knowledge, and describes it in all its aspects; then, the writer can extract from it the superior significance reserved for literates and talented men (the wise man, as it were), for only these latter can understand the message and appreciate the form. In this very respect, the Sixth Day can be considered ultimately an exaltation of man with his intellectual capacities in opposition to the theocentric vision of the world of the Middle Ages.

### *Temporary Conclusions*

By analyzing the rhetorical strategies of both the Introduction of the collection and the Sixth Day, it has been noted how the framework elements of the *Decameron* are the functional elements of a discourse based on the interaction between rhetoric and dialectics whose final outcome is the moral teaching or the acquisition of knowledge. The central theme of the Sixth Day is not merely represented by the verbal challenge, and intelligently varied in its own parodic aspects, but is also manifested in a peculiar form of narrative; namely, the form of discourse that Boccaccio calls *motto*. The characteristics and formal features of the *motto* show how this metaphorical device can be considered not only a main structuring feature of Boccaccio's discourse, but also a 'veil,' a poetical strategy that is able both to conceal and to reveal philosophical knowledge. If we consider the first tale of the Sixth Day as a tale whose primary purpose is to guide the reader to understand the whole day by means of an enigma, it is then possible to read the entire Sixth Day of the *Decameron* as a series of literary enigmas in the form of the *motto*. Furthermore, it is possible to interpret the function of the *motto* as a peculiar literary form of recognition that leads the characters to a *shift* from ignorance to knowledge. The *motto*, indeed, has the same formal features and contextual characteristics of the ancient enigma with which pre-Socratic philosophers exercised their search for knowledge. At the time of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the oppositional elements characterizing the ancient *problémata* were still practiced in the dialectic controversies and preserved all their primordial vividness in providing Boccaccio with a completely renewed narrative form as opposed to that of the *Novellino*. Even the archetypal and tragic atmosphere that surrounded the accounts of ancient enigmas—particularly the mortal danger of defeat in the dialectical challenge between two wise men—stands in the historical background of the characters. Yet, this same potentially threatening atmosphere in the Sixth Day is either exorcised by the comedic and by granting the reader the pleasure of a witty remark, or it is subverted and transformed by parody.

## Chapter 4

### The Variants of The *Honestum*: Practical Philosophy and Theory of Action in the *Decameron*

*Nam illud verum bonum non moritur, certum est sempiternumque,  
sapientia et virtus: hoc unum contigit immortale mortalibus*  
(Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, XVI, iii)

The *Decameron* usually impresses us with its wit and grace, and with its humorous tricks, as well as with the depth of its portraits of human vices and virtues. However, the enthusiasm that a reader experiences in engaging the text sometimes threatens to overshadow issues that are more profound, thoughtful and even philosophical.<sup>1</sup> In fact, these aspects, and especially the morality of the text, if well observed and appreciated, contribute greatly to enriching the complexity of the discourse, and provide a more detailed and varied image of Boccaccio. The *Decameron* intends to tell "one hundred Novels or Fables or Parables or Stories, as we may please to call them;" the author's statement in the *Proemio*, and the word "parables" included in it, announces a kind of narrative that aims at illustrating a moral truth. In fact, The playful conversation enacted by the storytellers consists in introducing—before the narration of the story—a moral thought which intends, primarily, to work as an *accessus* to the understanding of the story, and secondly to emphasize the specific perspective of the storyteller about the story. Except for a few critics who interpreted the *Decameron* as a text devoid of a moral vision, or even of a system of hidden values,<sup>2</sup> the *Decameron* has always been read as a

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<sup>1</sup> For the critical reading of Boccaccio as rebel to the values of society and as a champion of the natural law, see De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, I, chp. 9; Hauvette, *Boccace*, 256; E. Auerbach, *Zur Technik der Frührenaissancenovelle in Italien und Frankreich: 2. durchgesehene Auflage. Mit einem Vorwort von Fritz Schalk* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1971), 20; id., *Mimesis; the Representation of Reality in Western Literature. Tr. from the German by Willard Trask. Anchor Books Ed.* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1953), 188-189; H. Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1950), 66-67; W. Pabst, *Novellentheorie und Novellendichtung, zur Geschichte ihrer Antinomie in den romanischen Literaturen, von Walter Pabst* (Hamburg: Cram, de Gruyter und Co, 1953), 27-40; Scaglione, *Nature and Love*, 44-45, 67-68, 68-82, 97-100. For a history of criticism on Boccaccio, see G. Petronio, "Giovanni Boccaccio," in W. Binni, *I classici italiani nella storia della critica* (Firenze: Nuova Italia, 1954), I, 169-228; A. Chiari, "La fortuna del Boccaccio," in U. Bosco et alii, *Questioni e correnti di storia letteraria*, with intr. by Attilio Momigliano (Milano: C. Marzorati, 1949), 275-341 (in part. pp. 275-290 dedicated to the *Decameron*); V. Branca, "Giovanni Boccaccio," in *Letteratura italiana. I maggiori*. Milano: Marzorati, 1956, 185-244 (in part. p. 233 ff.); A. E. Quaglio, "Studi sul Boccaccio," *GSLI* 137 (1960): 409-438; D. Rastelli, "Lecture boccacesche," *Studia Ghisleriana*, II, 2 (Pavia, 1957): 129-175; E. Sanguineti, "Rassegna boccacciana," *Lettere italiane* 12 (1960): 76-100; B. König, "Boccaccio vor dem *Decameron*. Ein Forschungsbericht," *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 11 (1960): 108-142.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. De Sanctis, *Storia*, I, 291 e 310; Auerbach *Mimesis*, 231; C. S. Singleton, "On 'Meaning' in the *Decameron*," *Italica* 21 (1944): 117-124, in part. 124; Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 2; G. Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982), 208-215. For the *Decameron* as a work that deals with aesthetic and *not* with moral issues, see Russo, *Lecture critiche del Decameron*, 40-41; A. Lipari, "The Structure and Real Significance of the *Decameron*," in H. Peyre, ed., *Essays in Honor of Albert Feuillerat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 43-83.



literary work with moralizing intent.<sup>3</sup> And such an interpretation may certainly be true, but with the due clarification that Boccaccio is a moral author, not a moral authority.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the *Decameron* departs from the *exemplum* tradition simply by virtue of its tendency to propose debatable subjects, and to free the stories from any absolute or homogenizing interpretation.<sup>5</sup> In other words, Boccaccio's tales do not seem to convey a predetermined and dogmatic vision of morality, but, conversely, allow readers to draw their own conclusions from the representation of experiences that are conjured up by the literary imagination.<sup>6</sup> The *Decameron* has even been read as a treatise on morality, or even a work that, for the teachings that we presume it intends to impart, draws its inspiration from the encyclopedic literature of *specula*. From this point of view, in fact, the linkage established with the didactic literature of the *exemplum* and with the sermons

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<sup>3</sup> On the ethical finality of the *Decameron*, see Bosco, *Il Decameron: saggio*; Getto, *Vita di forme*; B. Croce, *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte: studi sulla poesia italiana dal Tre al Cinquecento*, ed. P. Cudini (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 1991); A. Momigliano, *Giovanni Boccaccio. Decameron. 49 novelle commentate*, ed. E. Sanguineti (Milano: Vallardi, 1936); Bergin, *Boccaccio* 286-336. The frame tales of the *Decameron* have been understood as moral in key; recent proponents of this possibility are Ferrante, "The Frame Characters of the *Decameron*;" S. Galletti, *Patologia al "Decameron"* (Palermo: S. F. Flaccovio, 1969). For L. Marino, *The Decameron Cornice: Allusion Allegory, and Iconology* (Ravenna: Longo, 1979), the true purpose of the frame is to proclaim itself as art. J. H. Potter, *Five Frames for the Decameron: Communication and Social Systems in the Cornice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 28, 80 ff., finds in the *brigata*, which is simply "a varied cross-section of sound qualities for living," "semiotics of highly coded, self-conscious literature."

<sup>4</sup> For M. Bonfantini, "Boccaccio e il Decamerone," *Pegaso* 7 (1930): 13-28, 23, Boccaccio was a moralist and the frame operated a function of detachment from the tales and worked as an ethically purifying filter (hence the apparent apathy and detached reactions of the storytellers to the stories). This line of argument is also successful in S. Battaglia, "Schemi lirici dell'arte del Boccaccio," *Archivum Romanicum* 19 (1935): 61-78. According to Mario Apollonio (*Uomini e forme nella cultura italiana* [Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1943], 374), the frame would play the function of moralistic control over the tales. Benedetto Croce, searching for an esthetical unity in the *Decameron*, between poetry and non-poetry, emphasize a certain duplicity in Boccaccio's soul: "Il Boccaccio non era anima da moralista... ma neppure immorale cinico." (Croce, *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte*).

<sup>5</sup> Cf. F. Tateo, "Il 'realismo' della novella boccaccesca," in *Retorica e poetica fra medioevo e rinascimento*, 197-202; Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 11 ff. On the influence of the *exemplum* tradition on the *Decameron*, see De' Negri, "The Legendary Style of the *Decameron*;" Delcorno, *Exemplum e letteratura*; V. Branca and C. Degani, "Studi sugli *exempla* e il *Decameron*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983-84): 178-208. On the narrative of the *exemplum* tradition, see C. Brémond, J. Le Goff, and J. C. Schmitt, *L'Exemplum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1982). For the critical reading of Boccaccio as rebel to the values of society and as a champion of the natural law, see De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, I, chp. 9; Hauvette, *Boccaccio*, 256; Haydn, *The Counter-Renaissance*, 66-67; Pabst, *Novellentheorie und Novellendichtung*, 27-40; Auerbach, *Zur Technik der Frührenaissancenovelle in Italien und Frankreich*, 20; Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 188-189; Scaglione, *Nature and Love*, 44-45, 67-68, 68-82, 97-100; T. K. Seung, "The Sovereign Individual," in *Cultural Thematics: The Formation of the Faustian Ethos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976): 207-216; Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 13n., 30 and n., 38, 57, 245-247.

<sup>6</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 37-38; A. S. Bernardo, "The Plague as Key to Meaning in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," in D. Williman, ed., *The Black Death The Impact of the Fourteenth-Century Plague* (Binghamton, NY: State Univ. of New York, 1982), 40-42. V. Kirkham, "An Allegorically Tempered *Decameron*," *Italica* 62 (1985): 333-343 sees Boccaccio as a bearer of the traditional Christian moral vision which is essentially Augustinian. According to G. Di Pino, "Il proemio e l'introduzione alla quarta giornata," in *La Polemica del Boccaccio* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1953): 209-220, Getto, "La cornice e le componenti espressive del *Decameron*," in *Vita di forme e forme di vita nel Decameron*, 1-9, Scaglione, *Nature and Love*, 44-45, and Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron*, 35, Boccaccio represents a new moral vision in polemical relation to the old moral order. Specifically focused on the moral aspects of the *Decameron* is Hastings, *Nature and Reason in the "Decameron"*.

tradition of the mendicant orders is indicative of an educative attitude of his author.<sup>7</sup>

Beyond any possible exaggeration, however, this chapter will present an analysis of the moral discourse of the *Decameron*, with regard specifically to the moral philosophy that derives from the tales, and of the directions for reading provided by the frame texts.<sup>8</sup> As I will try to show, the *Decameron*, starting from its *cornice*, does not reflect a vague and indeterminate ethical vision of the world that alludes to the ideals in vogue in Boccaccio's day, in the well educated society and literary circles at that time,<sup>9</sup> but rather suggests a well-defined and verifiable model of life that can be traced back to the practical philosophy (i.e., ethics, in reference to the medieval context) upon which the author—as a reader of Cicero, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas—had long meditated. In this chapter, ultimately, I will take into consideration the ethical system of the *Decameron*. In order to find out what the author's thoughts are about morality, I will also attempt to read between the lines, particularly by paying attention to those clues that the author provides with the aim of bringing his ideas into the open and leading the reader to a guided interpretation. As these textual clues are likely to be found in some strategic points of the collection where the attention of the author and his stylistic-rhetorical concerns are more focused—namely, at the beginning of the *Decameron* and in the peripheral texts of the collection—in order to identify the ethical code which Boccaccio refers to, it is then necessary to examine the texts related to the *cornice* of the *Decameron*. The scholarship on the *Decameron's cornice* is so vast that could be the subject of an independent monograph. However, a quick overview and some comments on the moral aspects concerning the frame texts will be instructive to provide a general idea of how the *cornice* has been typically read and interpreted. Vittore Branca once insisted on the didactic significance of the *cornice*, and emphasized the legendary function of the characters, a function that can be up to strengthen, from the 'outside,' the moral significance already active 'inside' the ethically ascensional structure of the *Decameron*.<sup>10</sup> Cesare Segre saw an ideal progression in the *Decameron*, and thus, identified a fundamental ethical-pedagogical thread which, from the outset, consistently

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<sup>7</sup> Ferrante, *The Frame Characters*; Levarie Smarr, *Symmetry and Balance*; Marcus, *An allegory of form*; Potter, *Five Frames*. The *Decameron*, moreover, has been read as a text reflective of the history and society of Florence, that is, by emphasizing its social aspects, particularly those related to Florentine history and to the need of reconstructing the entire community after the cataclysm of the plague. On the social and esthetic dimensions of the *Decameron*, see M. Cottino-Jones, *Order from Chaos: Social and Aesthetic Harmonies in Boccaccio's Decameron* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982). More historically minded is Padoan, *Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale*. See also Cardini, *Le cento novelle contro la morte*.

<sup>8</sup> On the role of the cornice as a part of the text, as a metapoetic element that provides a key for the reading of the entire work, and as an exegetic and metanarrative moment, see Picone, "Preistoria della cornice del 'Decameron'," 91-104; M. Picone, "L'autore allo specchio dell'opera," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 19 (1991): 27-46. On the role of the frame texts and their moral meaning, see Kirkham, "An Allegorically Tempered *Decameron*." On the allegorical meaning of certain themes of the cornice, see E. G. Kern, "The Gardens in the 'Decameron' Cornice," *PMLA* 66 (1951): 505-23. For a survey of the various studies and interpretations of the cornice, see P. L. Cerisola, "La questione della 'cornice' del *Decameron*," *Aevum* 49 (1975): 137-156. A quick survey of the scholarship which emphasizes the moral aspects of the *Decameron* can be found in G. Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 241-242. On the developments of the *cornice* after Boccaccio, see M. Picone, "La cornice novellistica dal *Decameron* al *Pentamerone*," *Modern Philology* 101 (2003): 297-315.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Padoan, "Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale."

<sup>10</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 18, 34.

runs throughout the work.<sup>11</sup> And likewise, Ferdinando Neri insisted on the "progressive" character of the work.<sup>12</sup> More recently, Edith G. Kern has proposed to see in the *Decameron* a progressive glorification of the ideals of Love and Nature tempered by Reason; that is, a moral vision whose emphasis is slightly offset from the traditional concept of morality, and yet whose peculiar progressive dynamics seems to refer to the same, and common, critical tradition.<sup>13</sup> In essence, from this series of critical interpretations,<sup>14</sup> the didactic intent of the *Decameron* appears to have been built, from the outset, on a 'gradual' program of human cases neatly exposed by the author and set in the narrative in a sort of progression. According to this interpretation, the reader can move from the 'reading' of the vices to that of the virtues, from the observation of positive examples to that of negative examples. In fact, the presence of characters such as Cepparello and Griselda—the former a very bad character placed at the beginning of the First Day, the latter a clear example of supreme virtue at the end of the Tenth—confirms the intention of arranging the texts for edifying purposes and the author's determination of privileging the peripheral texts as bearers of fundamental meanings.

Instead of accepting too simple a reading of the *Decameron* as a progression of virtues, the narrative plot of the collection, so full of characters and fertile of an equally manifold variety of vices skillfully alternating and artfully blended with virtues, is woven into an ethical discourse whose systematic nature must be revealed gradually by a contrastive reading of the stories with the *cornice*, of the stories with other stories, of the Days with other Days, and so on. In this respect, another recurrent element in the narrative of the *Decameron*—an element which has all the credentials to be a major structural constituent—is the presence of the storytellers who, with fancy names tailored to their nature, take turns at telling the stories and establishing the thematic guidelines of the reading of the collection. Such a presence, certainly not unintentional, can have a significant role, even a moral one.<sup>15</sup> On this ground, which is strictly bound to the moral interpretation of the *Decameron*, scholarship has been dwelling on assigning an elusive allegorical meaning to the ten storytellers of the *Decameron*. Resting the feet on the very slippery ground of Boccaccio's poetics, which often makes vain any attempt of systematization (cf. chap. 1), the three young men and the four young women who flee from Florence to tell their stories in a countryside retreat are frequently said to be the personification of virtues and appetites within the Aristotelian-Thomistic ethical system; more precisely, the seven women can represent the four cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues, while the three men serve the oppositional function of the appetites of the soul.<sup>16</sup>

Without claiming to answer all the questions related to the ethical interpretation of the *Decameron*, I will analyze first some aspects related to the function of the *cornice*, aspects which could affect, eventually, the interpretation of the entire work. The term

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<sup>11</sup> C. Segre, Intr. a Boccaccio, *Opere* (Milano: Mursia, 1966), xvi.

<sup>12</sup> Neri, "Il disegno ideale del *Decameron*," in *Storia e poesia*, 73-82.

<sup>13</sup> Kern, "The Gardens in the *Decameron Cornice*."

<sup>14</sup> But even from others, actually. G. Barberi-Squarotti, "La 'cornice' del *Decameron*, o il mito di Robinson," in *Il potere della parola*, 128, 130, instead, through an introspective reading of the text, has tried to uncover a secret plot made of a socio-allegorical discourse modeled on the myth of Robinson.

<sup>15</sup> On the possible allegorical meaning of the ten characters' names, and on some possible interpretations, see first Branca's commentary to his edition of the *Decameron*, p. 992-993 and 997.

<sup>16</sup> Kirkham, "An Allegorically Tempered *Decameron*."

'function' can be used to provide an analysis that consider many aspects and many levels of the work, from the ethical to the intertextual, from the communicative to the metanarrative, etc.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly enough, multiple levels of understanding overlap upon the ethical vision of the *Decameron*, and a narrative discourse that involves the entire philosophical system of Boccaccio and his readings is built, as we shall see, around it. However, Pier Luigi Cerisola's observations on the *cornice* appear to be worthy of some detailed comments, although they turn out to be somewhat contradictory in their conclusions. On the one hand, Cerisola proposes a correct reading of the frame text as a "functional" element of the entire work: clearly, the frame text is not a decorative element of the *Decameron*, but its essential characteristic consists in its "function" in relation with the stories. On the other, however, he argues against the reading of the *Decameron* as a representation of a renewal, the renewal of the social order exemplary proposed by the storytellers, and also denies the possibility of a symbolic interpretation of the frame.<sup>18</sup> (Apparently, Cerisola's stance is against any 'symbolic' criticism, even if he admits the possibility of applying such an hermeneutics to the ballads of the *Decameron*.) Yet he even argues that, on the ethical ground, the frame text of the *Decameron* appears to be "devoid of effective functional values in its relations with the stories."<sup>19</sup> Unlike Cerisola's interpretation, however, an attentive reading of the text suggests that these functional relationships indeed exist in the *Decameron* and are active not only in structuring the collection, but also, as I argue, in developing Boccaccio's philosophical thought.

In Boccaccio's times, any vernacular literary work constantly struggles to reaffirm its existence, autonomy and literary dignity against the Latin models endowed with more authority. The literary excellence of the *Decameron*, however, stands out in the literary system of the time, and is appreciated by Petrarch (*Seniles*, XVII, 3) in virtue of that *imitatio* of literary models, Latin and Vulgar, that steadily shines through the lines of the frame texts of the *Decameron*. As we know, the literary practice of the *imitatio* was not unpopular in the Middle Ages. Indeed, one can also say that it was a key element of medieval culture, an element that demonstrated the literary quality of an author, or an indicator of the inherent artistic qualities of a work even before the advent of humanism and the rediscovery of the classics as models of imitation. As a consequence, in the analysis of the moral qualities of the *Decameron*, it is necessary to look at the Latin and vulgar sources. Specifically, it is fundamental to consider the philosophical works of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Cicero, works that, besides being authoritative texts of practical philosophy, will serve my purposes to define a criterion of interpretation. In particular, I will try to identify the textual watermarks of classical authors that are concealed between the lines of the *Decameron*. Peculiar watermarks, indeed, that disappear and often reappear in a fascinating mechanism of memory and assimilation of models. Apart from making the literary work worth aspiring to the heights of literary excellence, these peculiar signs also imperceptibly communicate to the reader (and, therefore, to the literary critic) a worldview, a *Weltanschauung*, a system of values, a theory of art or, in particular, the principles of a practical philosophy whereby the author

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. M. Picone, "Il *Decameron* come macrotesto: il problema della cornice," in M. Picone and M. Mesirca, eds., *Introduzione al Decameron: lectura Boccaccii Turicensis*, 9-33.

<sup>18</sup> Cerisola, "La questione della 'cornice' del *Decameron*," 147.

<sup>19</sup> ". . . priva di efficaci valori funzionali nei rapporti con le novelle" (Cerisola, "La questione della 'cornice' del *Decameron*," 154).

was inspired. I will also dwell on identifying, and attempting to explain, certain semantic recurrences that, in my opinion, inscribe the ethical system of the *Decameron* within a particular philosophical tradition, and present the text to the active and creative reflection of its putative readers (the *lettrici*<sup>20</sup>) as a methodological model for a new society, whether newly created or partially re-established on pre-existing bases.

*The 'Honestum' as a Category of Behavior in the First Day*

There is a peculiar and intriguing repetition of the word "honest" and its derivatives ("honesty," "honestly," "dishonest," "dishonesty," and so on), both in the *Introduction* and *Conclusion* of the author. If we look up the terms related to this semantic area in the concordances, we realize that they actually accumulate in the peripheral texts of the *Decameron*, especially in the *cornice*, in the First and Tenth Day.<sup>21</sup> We find an example of such recurrences right after the description of the harmful effects of the plague, when the ten young men meet by chance in the church of Santa Maria Novella:

... addivenne, sì come io poi da persona degna di fede sentii, che nella venerabile chiesa di Santa Maria Novella, un martedì mattina, non essendovi quasi alcuna altra persona, uditi li divini ufici in abito lugubre quale a sì fatta stagione si richiedea, si ritrovarono sette giovani donne tutte l'una all'altra o per amistà o per vicinanza o per parentado congiunte, delle quali niuna il venti e ottesimo anno passato avea né era minor di diciotto, savia ciascuna e di sangue nobile e bella di forma e ornata di costumi e di leggiadra onestà. ... io non voglio che per le raccontate cose da loro, che seguono, e per l'ascoltare nel tempo avvenire alcuna di loro possa prender vergogna, essendo oggi alquanto ristrette le leggi al piacere che allora, per le cagioni di sopra mostrate, erano non che alla loro età ma a troppo più matura larghissime; né ancora dar materia agl'invidiosi, presti a mordere" ogni laudevole vita, di diminuire in niuno atto l'onestà delle valorose donne con isconci parlari. (I.Intr.49-50)

In a note accompanying the text, Branca emphasizes the repetition of the word "honest," a word continuously varied as it becomes the cipher of the human temperament of the storytellers in the *Introduction* (I.52, 53, 54, 55, 61, 65, 72, 82, 84, 91) and *Conclusion* (X.4-5 and 6-8); yet Branca does not give adequate consideration to it and provides no further explanation.<sup>22</sup> But the semantic area represented by honesty also involves other

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<sup>20</sup> That the women are the privileged readers of the *Decameron* is made explicit in *Proemio*.13-14: "Adunque, acciò che in parte per me s'ammendi il peccato della fortuna, la quale dove meno era di forza, sì come noi nelle delicate donne veggiamo, quivi più avara fu di sostegno, in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano, per ciò che all'altre è assai l'ago e 'l fuso e l'arcolaio, intendo di raccontare cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo, raccontate in diece giorni da una onesta brigata di sette donne e di tre giovani nel pistelenzioso, tempo della passata mortalità fatta, e alcune canzonette dalle predette donne cantate al lor diletto. Nelle quali novelle piacevoli e aspri casi d'amore e altri fortunati avvenimenti si vederanno così né moderni tempi avvenuti come negli antichi; delle quali le già dette donne, che queste leggeranno, 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: le quali cose senza passamento di noia non credo che possano intervenire."

<sup>21</sup> Considering the *Decameron* as a structurally complex and artfully elaborated entity, I define 'peripheral' texts those ones that, in so far as set immediately after the frame, have a 'positional' value superior to the others.

<sup>22</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Branca, note to *Dec.* Intr. 49.

aspects of the discourse, and reappears at the beginning of Pampinea's speech, a speech which triggers the *Decameron's* action:

Donne mie care, voi potete, così come io, molte volte avere udito che a niuna persona fa ingiuria chi *onestamente* usa la sua ragione. Natural ragione è, di ciascuno che ci nasce, la sua vita quanto può aiutare e conservare e difendere: e concedesi questo tanto, che alcuna volta è già addivenuto che, per guardar quella, senza colpa alcuna si sono uccisi degli uomini. (I.*Intr.*53) (emphasis mine)

Carlo Muscetta maintains, erroneously in my opinion, that Pampinea is quoting here some *loci* from Cicero's *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* in order both to promote the *utilitas tuta* of the flight from the city and to theorize the coincidence of the *honestum* with *salus*.<sup>23</sup> Even Luigi Surdich observes that "onestà" is a key word of the *cornice*, but he only reports its many different meanings without accounting for their origins and motivations.<sup>24</sup> Honesty is self-discipline, modesty, sense of limitation, decent exterior habit and decorum, but also a social virtue, virtuous behavior, as Dante defines it in the *Convivio*.<sup>25</sup> Hence, a question may arise. Is the ethics that governs the "honest" brigade of a courtly kind? In the *Decameron*, as in the Trecento Florence alike, there is an integration in progress between bourgeois forms of life and courtly values, of which the tale of Federigo degli Alberighi (V.9), among others, can be symbolically representative. Within the middle-class, moreover, the use of a courtly language can be functional to the attainment of desires, and the courtly ideology can be hegemonic against mercantile ethical demands, even when—as in the story of Torello (X.9)—a social promotion is accorded.<sup>26</sup> Thus, in order to account for such recurrences, it is not enough to provide some references, confined in a note, to works of classical antiquity which comment on the relationship between 'useful' and 'honest,' or to recall the courtly ethics in order to contextualize the semantic use that Boccaccio made of the term 'honest.' Probably distracted by the effort of explaining the first pages of the *Introduction*, namely, the narrative of the plague and its implications on the stories, modern literary critics have never dwelled on commenting the beginning of Pampinea's speech in order to grasp its sense, in itself and in relation to the tales, to look for the sources of inspiration, and so much less to explain the repetition of the word "honest." Indeed, Pampinea's speech has its own significance both independently and in connection with the stories; moreover, it has a specific function within the framework and for the interpretation of the collection that is worth analyzing in detail. Pampinea's speech can be better considered the core of the *Decameron's* action; it has its own significance in so far as it establishes the ethical conditions of the flight of the storytellers from Florence and provides them with reasonable ideological motivations. This speech aims at demonstrating that escaping from the city is appropriate (honest) for everyone and is not at odds with moral values or civil laws. Specifically, Pampinea's arguments, as well as the repetition of the word "onesto,"

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<sup>23</sup> C. Muscetta, "Giovanni Boccaccio," in *Letteratura italiana Laterza* (Bari: Laterza, 1989), 308. Cf. Cicero, *Rhet. ad Her.* II, 58, 173; *De inv.* III, 2, 5 and 2, 9.

<sup>24</sup> L. Surdich, "Il *Decameron*: la cornice e altri luoghi dell'ideologia del Boccaccio," in *La cornice di amore: studi sul Boccaccio*, 249-250.

<sup>25</sup> "Cortesía e onestade è tutt'uno" (Dante, *Convivio*, in *Opere di Dante Alighieri*, a cura della Società Dantesca Italiana. *Testo*, ed. F. Brambilla Agno [Firenze: Casa Editrice Le Lettere, 1995], II, 10, 8).

<sup>26</sup> Surdich, *La cornice di amore*, 265-69.

recall the ethical system of classical antiquity. That Boccaccio alludes to a precise source is implied by Pampinea's own words: "voi potete, così come io, molte volte avere udito che . . .". Certainly, this is not about rumor, or just about popular voice, and the source cleverly alluded by the storyteller is not that indicated by Muscetta. The honest use of reason is part of a semantic landscape that considers honesty as the main quality of the storytellers, the "onesta brigata," and as a principal virtue from the beginning of the *Decameron*: the seven women are, in fact, adorned with "costumi" and "leggiadra onestà" (I, Intr., 49). In fact, the continuous use of this word as well as the concept of 'honesty' are not accidental, nor does it constitute just a literary affectation emptied of its original meaning or devoid of a precise connotation.

As Paolo Cherchi has shown—indeed, he has given remarkable attention to this subject—in order to understand the meaning of honesty, we need to refer first to Cicero's *De officiis*,<sup>27</sup> specifically to a passage which is fundamental for the definition of Stoic thought:

Principio generi animantium omni est a natura tributum, ut se, vitam corpusque tueatur, declinet ea, quae nocitura videantur, omniaque, quae sint ad vivendum necessaria anquirat et paret, ut pastum, ut latibula, ut alia generis eiusdem. Commune item animantium omnium est coniunctionis appetitus procreandi causa et cura quaedam eorum, quae procreata sint.<sup>28</sup>

[First of all, Nature has endowed every species of living creature with the instinct of self-preservation, of avoiding what seems likely to cause injury to life or limb, and of procuring and providing everything needful for life — food, shelter, and the like. A common property of all creatures is also the reproductive instinct (the purpose of which is the propagation of the species) and also a certain amount of concern for their offspring.]<sup>29</sup>

This is clearly the principle of self-preservation (*oikeiosis*) that underlies the ethical system of Stoicism and is here briefly recalled as the foundation of Cicero's work.<sup>30</sup> But what is the honest use of reason that Pampinea alludes to? This term too has an explanation. But first, let us briefly recall what the *De officiis* is about. In the first book, Cicero deals with the *honestum*, and defines it as the morally good, or the morally "beautiful" (the term "beautiful" translates the Greek *kalón*, but with the evident loss of an aesthetic component). In the second book, Cicero deals with the 'useful,' the *utile*. As he also criticizes the philosopher Panaetius for having neglected the conflict between *utile* and *honestum*, the third book is devoted to analyze this conflict. Taking advantage of the Stoic view of the universe as a rational whole ruled by divine reason (the *λόγος*), Cicero argues that human societies must be based on natural reason, and consequently Roman laws and institutions should closely reflect the characteristics of nature. In the *De officiis*, Cicero offers a practical-oriented ethical system based on the principles of Stoicism. According to these principles, the four cardinal virtues called the "four parts of the *honestum*"—justice, wisdom, fortitude and temperance—are developed, under the

<sup>27</sup> P. Cherchi, *L'onestade e l'onesto raccontare del Decameron* (Fiesole: Cadmo, 2004).

<sup>28</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, ed. Karl Atzert (Leipzig: Teubner, 1963), I, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Cicero, *De officiis*, trans. W. Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. J. Sellars, *Stoicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 107 ff.; Marco Tullio Cicerone, *I doveri*, intr. and notes by di E. Narducci, trans. A. Resta Barile (Milano: BUR, 1993). In addition to *De officiis* I.11, cf. also *De finibus* III.16-76. On the definition of *honestum* as the Ciceronian translation of the Greek *kalón*, see also M. Pohlenz, *L'ideale di vita attiva secondo Panezio nel "De officiis" di Cicerone*, trans. M. Bellincioni (Brescia: Paideia, 1970), in part. p. 35 ff.

guidance of reason, from four basic instincts—sociability, search for the truth, pre-eminence over men and things, harmony. In the third book, Cicero shows how the honest and the useful are not at odds, the truly useful consisting in a skilled capacity to manage the *honestum* by the leading classes of Rome. (Incidentally, Cicero had in mind a project to reform the Roman society whom he clearly meant to promote with his treatise.) Finally, the honest stems from the power of the mind, not from the body, and consists in the activity of the soul, and in reflection.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, to define what is the honest in the *Decameron* seems to be a more complex issue than we thought at the beginning. It is no coincidence, then, that in the text of the *Decameron*, the honest is not simply an abstract noun that may hint at a courtly ideological background, but also a 'modifier', an adjective or an adverb, namely something that expresses the mode of reflection or the activity of the soul in a well-defined linguistic system of reference.

Then, what is the meaning of the *honestum* in Boccaccio's linguistic system? Do these meanings of honesty pertain to all the aspects of Boccaccio's complex language, and what criteria can be used to define them? Moreover, what are the implications of the ethical theory of the honest in the *Decameron*? At a closer look, the repetition of the word honest, and the honesty/dishonesty of behavior, can be seen as the cipher of the ethical system of the *Decameron* and may serve well to explain much of the meaning of the stories. In other words, this peculiar repetition is not simply about a semantic recurrence that, leaping off the page, gives us the dimensions of the author's concerns in matters of ethics and moral conduct; specifically, the richness of its variants can easily make the *Decameron* an exemplary catalogue of human cases and a handbook of ideas on behavior whom the reader could look at through a particular lens. One could even analyze the entire collection taking the honest, in all its nuances and connotations, as a referential category, and measuring the behavior of the characters in the light of what should, or should not, be convenient to society, of whether it is in line (or convenient) both with the moral qualities of the characters and with the ethics of the community (i.e., what society agrees to be convenient). In fact, this is what Paolo Cherchi appears to have done when offering an interpretative key to the reading the *Decameron*, a reading, though, calibrated to a narratological analysis of the contents. According to Cherchi, Boccaccio developed peculiar strategies to create the "raccontare onesto," that is, the "raccontare per il raccontare, senza altro utile;" such inventive and rhetorical strategies aimed to purify the tales from any "utile" and managed only to delight in a way that is also useful ("solamente a dilettere in un modo che è poi anche utile").<sup>32</sup> In order to achieve the *honestum*, Boccaccio invented a comfortable environment in which the

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<sup>31</sup> "Omnino illud honestum, quod ex animo excelso magnificoque quaerimus, animi efficitur, non corporis viribus. exercendum tamen corpus et ita afficiendum est, ut oboedire consilio rationique possit in exsequendis negotiis et in labore tolerando. Honestum autem id, quod exquirimus, totum est positum in animi cura et cogitatione; in quo non minorem utilitatem afferunt, qui togati rei publicae praesunt, quam qui bellum gerunt." [That moral goodness which we look for in a lofty, high-minded spirit is secured, of course, by moral, not by physical, strength. And yet the body must be trained and so disciplined that it can obey the dictates of judgment and reason in attending to business and in enduring toil. But that moral goodness which is our theme depends wholly upon the thought and attention given to it by the mind. And, in this way, the men who in a civil capacity direct the affairs of the nation render no less important service than they who conduct its wars.] (*De officiis* I, 79)

<sup>32</sup> Cherchi, *L'onestade e l'onesto raccontare*, 89. M. Bevilacqua, *Leggere per diletto: saggi sul Decameron* (Roma: Salerno, 2008) is another supporter of the theory of narration as *diletto* in the *Decameron*.



storytellers could spend some time exercising their *otium* in a country retreat,<sup>33</sup> the *otium* could also involve the idea of the pleasure that comes from meditation and with amusing conversations on topics related to wisdom. According to Cherchi, the process of learning, and apprehension, is devoid of any material intent, that is, the love of knowledge is only for knowledge sake. "Their [i.e. of the Storytellers] action of telling the stories does not lead to any more wisdom and profit if not the very pleasure of narrating" ("il loro [*scil. dei novellatori*] raccontare non porta ad alcuna sapienza e ad altro profitto se non al piacere stesso di raccontare").<sup>34</sup>

As my analysis will inevitably follow several critical threads developed by Paolo Cherchi, I will also seek to distance myself from them on a few issues that I consider fundamental to emphasize the philosophical content of the *Decameron* and to bring the debate on the honest back on the tracks of practical philosophy. Before discussing the variants of the *honestum* that Boccaccio has systematically utilized in the ethical project of his collection, I would like to consider some implications of Cherchi's thesis. (1) With his book, Cherchi argued that the 'onestade' of the *Decameron* consists in the discovery of the "racconto per il racconto," while the 'useful', that Boccaccio aimed to provide in "celebrating such a purity," consisted in the *diletto*.<sup>35</sup> According to Cherchi, the *diletto* and *utile consiglio* that women can get in order to "cognoscere quello che sia da fuggire e che sia similmente da seguire" (*Proemio*.14) is only a purely formal literary homage devoid of confirmations and consequences.<sup>36</sup> Formally, therefore, the *Decameron* is considered the book of the "raccontare onesto," a work that celebrates literature in so far as beautiful for itself.<sup>37</sup> Had any doubt arisen from this very brief summary about the nature of Cherchi's theory, his concluding remarks will remove every ambiguities. Although the purpose of his final remarks was certainly to clarify his thinking and dispel any misunderstanding, Cherchi is also well aware that his theory evokes the well-known decadent avant-garde notion of 'art for art's sake'. As he tries to defend himself against any possible accusations,<sup>38</sup> he points out that Boccaccio had to fight, on the one hand, against the detractors of poetry and literary fictions by supporting the worth and dignity of imagination, and on the other, against the defenders of the poetics of the so-called *miscere utile dulci* because, according to this principle, the literary 'beautiful' was not enough to secure the dignity of literature. Yet, the nature of Cherchi's thesis of Boccaccio as the advocate of the conception of 'art for art's sake' is not disavowed by these clarifications. First, because Boccaccio's poetics does not reflect the classical *kalokagathia* that describes the ideal individual as 'beautiful' and virtuous. Secondly, because the image of Boccaccio totally involved in literary fictions and fully enthusiastic for the absolute importance of invention must also be coupled with his attitude to claim the historicity of the events narrated, a claim that the author puts forward in defense of his tales.

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<sup>33</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 91.

<sup>34</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 92.

<sup>35</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 21.

<sup>36</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Before the decadent avantguards, however, the concept of art for art's sake had fortune in the Sixteenth century: Torquato Tasso's *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* and Lodovico Castelvetro's *Poetica d'Aristotele vulgarizzata, et sposta* develop the concept that the purpose of literature is to delight the reader. See also T. Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990), 9.

(2) Cherchi's narratological theory of "narrating for the sake of narrating" is also motivated by too an easy awareness that the *Decameron* does not convey any philosophical content. As recalled by Cherchi's words ("il loro [*i.e.* the storytellers] raccontare *non porta ad alcuna sapienza e ad altro profitto se non al piacere stesso di raccontare*"<sup>39</sup>), the narration of the storytellers does not lead to any knowledge and does not produce any more profit besides the pleasure of the narration. Cherchi even concludes that "il catalogo delle materie dilette [del raccontare onesto] esclude immediatamente, quasi a priori, argomenti didattici, filosofici e tecnici in generale."<sup>40</sup> If it is easy to answer, as I intend to do, to the alleged lack of philosophical content by emphasizing the deep connection of the honest with practical philosophy as expounded through the language of the stories, I would also like to remind that the entire work undoubtedly contains allegorical references (the names of the characters, the structure of the collection in ten days, etc..) whose philosophical implications should be far from being ignored, and that the contrast of themes in the tales may have didactical implications that seems inappropriate to neglect. On the structural level, moreover, the combination/contrast of themes and subjects mimics the typical contrast of arguments in a philosophical dialogue—this combination becomes explicit according to a typical pattern of rewriting the same theme in the following story, or in another Day of the collection. Boccaccio, as a reader of ancient and medieval philosophy, was certainly familiar with medieval academic disputes made of arguments and counterarguments.

(3) Furthermore, a greater adherence to textual analysis as well as a greater attention both to the narrative content and the implications of the stories with respect to the content of practical philosophy are equally desirable. If, on the one hand, Cherchi has the merit of having tackled a problem, namely, that of the *honestum*, and of having analyzed it not only in the light of the narratological contents of the *Decameron* but also in the comparative perspective of Latin and romance literature, on the other hand, he has failed to develop a careful analysis of the texts. In my opinion, it is necessary to consider the analysis of the *honestum* as the moral subject matter of the stories themselves. (4) Such an analysis may further confirm the subversive and ironic character of the *Decameron* that some critics have emphasized,<sup>41</sup> and may also unveil a deeper meaning which stands beyond a generic interpretation of Boccaccio's literary art as 'art for art's sake.'

In order to observe what kind of ethical dynamics underlies the beginning of the *Decameron* and to extrapolate moral implications for the entire collection, let us consider the occurrences of the *honestum* in the peripheral texts of the *Decameron* (frame narratives, First and Tenth Day), where they mainly concentrate. That the first tale of the *Decameron* can also be considered a reflection on honesty and dishonesty is clear

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<sup>39</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 92 (emphasis mine).

<sup>40</sup> Cherchi, *ibid.*, 107.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. L. Rossi, "Ironia e parodia nel *Decameron*: da Ciappelletto a Griselda," in E. Malato, ed., *La Novella Italiana*, Atti del Convegno di Caprarola (19-24 settembre 1988), (Roma: Salerno, 1989), I, 365-405. On parody in the *Decameron*, see Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 397 ff.; Delcorno, "Ironia/parodia," in R. Brigantini and P. M. Forni, eds., *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 162-189; Hollander, "Boccaccio's Dante: Imitative Distance," 169-198; R. Hollander, "*Decameron*: The Sun Rises in Dante," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 14 (1983-84): 241-255; N. Giannetto, "Parody in the *Decameron*: A 'Contented Captive' and Dioneo," *The Italianist* 1 (1981): 7-23.

enough, even to a first face-value reading of the text.<sup>42</sup> The counterfeiter Cepparello's false confession produces a benefit for the community and makes him a holy man, but his behaviour is dishonest in so far as he deceives his confessor.<sup>43</sup> More specifically, Cepparello's dishonesty lies in the lack of coherence between his personality and his moral conduct; in other words, he acts in a way we would not expect from a wicked and impious person, even if this does not appear to the eyes of many. His behavior is not honest, as it were, not only according to the moral canons of the collectivity, which should be able to recognize the truth and value it, but also in so far as he is not consistent (or 'fitting') with its very bad reputation. His evil nature should probably make him perform as much wicked actions as visibly recognizable by the public opinion. A deep discrepancy between Cepparello's moral portrayal and his confession, after all, is what originates the comicity of the tale. In fact, Cepparello's portrait as the "piggioro uomo forse che mai nascesse" is possibly made according to Aristotle's *Poetics* definition of the comedic: as Cepparello's turpitude is coupled with the paradox of not causing any trouble, it brings a benefit for the community.<sup>44</sup>

Specifically, in Cepparello's tale—and perhaps throughout the *Decameron*—one can identify a privileged connection between what is 'honest' and what is 'fitting,' between what is good for society and what the members of the community agree to be most appropriate. In other words, according to the canons of Boccaccio's ethics, what is honest in the behavior is also what morality, as social convention, has established to be correct. Inevitably, on the semantic level, the use of the term "onesto" and its derivatives, often combined with the word "convenevole," "convenire" (what is proper/appropriate/fitting) and "sconvenevole," "sconveniente," etc., serves to increase the complexity of the language by which we are able to measure human actions and their acknowledgment by the community. In fact, Musciatto is looking for a person dishonest enough to cope with the Burgundians, and finds Cepparello, whose evil is perfectly suited to the task of recovering his loans: "Ser Ciappelletto, come tu sai, io sono per ritrarmi del tutto di qui, e avendo tra gli altri a fare co' borgognoni, uomini pieni d'inganni, non so cui io mi possa lasciare a riscuotere il mio da loro più *convenevole* di te; e perciò, con ciò sia cosa che tu niente facci al presente, ove a questo vogli intendere, io intendo di farti avere il favore della corte e di donarti quella parte di ciò che tu riscoterai che *convenevole* sia" (I.1.17).

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<sup>42</sup> For an analysis of the First Day, see M. Cottino-Jones, "Saggio di lettura della prima giornata del Decameron," *Teoria e critica* 1 (1972): 111-138; Stefanelli, "Dalle Genealogie al *Decameron*," in *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 187-258.

<sup>43</sup> The theme of the false confession has other famous intertexts. Consider the Archipoeta's false confession in the *Carmina Burana* (191, 220), and that of Renart in the *Roman de Renart* (cf. L. Rossi, "Ironia e parodia nel *Decameron*," 382-390). Also, consider the same theme as was refashioned by Pulci's *Morgante*, Folengo's *Baldus* and by Bandello (cf. Barberi Squarotti, *Il potere della parola*, 97-127).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. M. Scalabrini, "Il piggioro uomo forse che mai nascesse: la novella di ser Ciappelletto e la poetica del comico," *Italian Quarterly* 41 (2004): 55-60. Besides Scalabrini, even Rossi, "Ironia e parodia nel *Decameron*," 384 and n. 52, thinks of a link between Aristotle's *Poetics* and the first tale of the *Decameron*, and Cazalé Berard, "Riscrittura della poetica e poetica della riscrittura negli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio," in *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio*, 431-432, notices that Boccaccio may have known the *Poetics* through Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro. According to G. Agamben, *Categorie italiane: studi di poetica* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1996), 3, the *Decameron* belongs to the "sfera comica." Getto, *Vita di forme*, 34-77, reads the tale with the lens of the "capovolgimento." M. Petrini, *Nel giardino di Boccaccio* (Udine: Del Bianco, 1986), 32-36, reads it according to the topos of the "mondo alla rovescia." Barberi Squarotti, *Il potere della parola*, 97, sees Cepparello's confession as a reversal of the sacrament.

In the distorted view of Messer Musciatto's moral, the most suitable character to perform such a despicable task is only Cepparello. Understandably, the narrator is careful enough to avoid making value judgments about his characters, but the attentive reader will have to form his/her opinion on what to accept and what to reject. Even the reward assigned to Cepparello follows the distorted rules of the 'fitting,' and therefore will be appropriate to the nature of his action. Cepparello's mission of recovering Musciatto's loans will be the result of an agreement, a pact, that will have its dishonest benefits: "Per che, *convenutisi* insieme, ricevuta ser Ciappelletto la procura e le lettere favorevoli del re, partiti messer Musciatto, n'andò in Borgogna dove quasi niuno il conoscea; e quivi, fuor di sua natura, benignamente e mansuetamente cominciò a voler riscuotere e fare quello per che andato v'era, quasi si riserbasse l'adirarsi al da sezzo" (I.1.19).

An honest person who behaves badly is certainly dishonest. But, is an evil person not equally dishonest if he/she brings a benefit to the community through deception? Is any benefit that we derive from a dishonest action acceptable? Ser Cepparello pronounces a false confession, which, although technically a sin in so far as a mere lie, finally turns out to be beneficial for the entire community of believers. The value judgment on the tale's events can be certainly suspended, yet it is not by chance that the tale is introduced by a reflection on God's unfathomable will, on the inscrutable and infinite ways that His goodness adopts in order to save his flock of believers, and then on the power of saints' prayers to change the course of events and solicit the divine grace (I.1.3-6). Even if one cannot know God's intentions and read the mind of a person who is about to die in order to know if he/she actually repented, Cepparello's confession is ultimately a real dishonesty: a supposed deathbed confession that could redeem an entire life of sins is not credible in this case; indeed, if we correctly read his thoughts, even the narrator does not believe him:

. . . non potendo l'acume dell'occhio mortale nel segreto della divina mente trapassare in alcun modo, avvien *forse* tal volta che, *da opinione ingannati*, tale dinanzi alla sua maestà facciamo procuratore, che da quella con eterno essilio è scacciato (I.1.5)

Così adunque visse e morì ser Cepparello da Prato e santo divenne come avete udito. Il quale *negar non voglio essere possibile* lui essere beato nella presenza di Dio, per ciò che, come che la sua vita fosse scelerata e malvagia, egli poté in su l'estremo aver sì fatta contrizione, che per avventura Iddio ebbe misericordia di lui e nel suo regno il ricevette; ma, per ciò che questo n'è occulto, secondo quello che ne può apparire ragiono, e dico *costui più tosto dovere essere nelle mani del diavolo* in perdizione che in paradiso (I.1.89)

And finally, if we consider the subversive charge that the story brings against the possibility offered by the doctrine of the time that a soul can redeem even on the verge of death,<sup>45</sup> the general tone and the irony of the story can lead us to believe, without running the risk of being too wrong, that Cepparello ended up in hell: "Il quale *negar non voglio essere possibile* lui essere beato nella presenza di Dio, per ciò che, come che la sua vita fosse scelerata e malvagia, egli poté in su l'estremo aver sì fatta contrizione, che per avventura Iddio ebbe misericordia di lui e nel suo regno il ricevette: ma, per ciò che questo n'è occulto, secondo quello che ne può apparire ragiono, e dico *costui più tosto dovere essere nelle mani del diavolo* in perdizione che in paradiso" (I.1.89). Although the

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<sup>45</sup> The possibility of a deathbed repentance was even enhanced by Dante's theology: see, for instance, the episode of the repentance of Bonconte da Montefeltro in *Purg.* V.85-129.

human mind cannot penetrate the mysteries of the divine will, intelligence, or practical reason, can however approximate to grasp some of its contents.

As a corollary of the first big dishonesty of Cepparello, the dishonesty of behavior reappears in the second story, that of Jew Abraham. "Abraham, a Jew, at the instance of Jehannot de Chevigny, goes to the court of Rome, and having marked the evil life of the clergy, returns to Paris, and becomes a Christian" (I.2.1). As a matter of fact, those who should be the living proof of divine goodness behave in the opposite way ("... e io nel mio intendo di dimostrarvi quanto questa medesima benignità, sostenendo pazientemente i difetti di coloro li quali d'essa ne deono dare e colle opere e colle parole vera testimonianza, il contrario operando . . ." (I.2.3)).<sup>46</sup> The usual mechanism of the reversal is operative here as much as in the tale of Ser Cepparello: the dishonesty of the clergy's conduct, in no way appropriate to the official Christian morality, is finally revealed and demonstrated by Abraham's investigative journey ("... egli trovò dal maggiore infino al minore generalmente tutti *disonestissimamente* peccare in lussuria, e non solo nella naturale, ma ancora nella sodomitica, senza freno alcuno di rimordimento o di vergogna . . ." [I.2.19-20]), and yet the goodness of the Christian religion, whose judgment on its moral should remain detached from men's faults, paradoxically turns out to be reinforced to the point of causing Abraham to convert ("E per ciò che io veggio non quello avvenire che essi procacciano, ma continuamente la vostra religione aumentarsi e più lucida e più chiara divenire, meritamente mi par di scerner io Spirito Santo esser d'essa, sì come di vera e di santa più che alcun'altra, fondamento e sostegno. " [I.2.26]). As typically happens in the *Decameron*, the stories are arranged in a way that one story can be read as the counterargument of the following. Accordingly, the second tale in many ways recuperates and transforms the previous tale's theme. In fact, the dishonesty of the Burgundian merchants, that of Messer Musciatto, and that of Cepparello represented in I.1 ("E la cagion del dubbio era il sentire li borgognoni uomini riottosi e di mala condizione e misleali; e a lui [i.e. Musciatto] non andava per la memoria chi tanto malvagio uom fosse, in cui egli potesse alcuna fidanza avere che opporre alla loro malvagità si potesse. E sopra questa essaminazione pensando lungamente stato, gli venne a memoria un ser Cepperello da Prato . . ." [I.1.8-9]) is set in neat contrast with the honesty of the merchants in I.2 ("... in Parigi fu un gran mercatante e buono uomo, il quale fu chiamato Giannotto di Civignì, lealissimo e diritto e di gran traffico d'opera di drapperia; e avea singulare amistà con uno ricchissimo uomo giudeo, chiamato Abraam, il qual similmente mercatante era e diritto e leale uomo assai" [I.2.4]).

The honesty of conduct, be it challenged or enhanced for the praise of human intelligence, constitutes a fertile ground for meditation in reading the tales. The language of the *Decameron's rubriche* also emphasizes the fact that there is often an ongoing reflection on the best way to behave. The headings of the First Day mention the term "onesto" three times ("onestamente rimproverando" [I.4]; "onestamente morde" [I.7]; "onestamente fa vergognare" [I.10]), and link it to the main actions of the stories in which a witty remark resolves a difficult situation. The fourth tale thus begins: "Un monaco, caduto in peccato degno di gravissima punizione, *onestamente* rimproverando al suo abate quella medesima colpa, si libera dalla pena" (I.4.1). A monk brings a girl in his cell

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<sup>46</sup> And cf. also: "... avendo alla manifesta simonia " procureria " posto nome, e alla gulosità "sustentazioni", quasi Iddio, lasciamo stare il significato de' vocaboli, ma la 'ntenzione de' pessimi animi non conoscesse, e a guisa degli uomini a' nomi delle cose si debba lasciare ingannare." (I.2.21)

and amuses himself with her. The abbot discovers the affair, imprisons the monk but also enjoys the girl's beauties. Finally, the monk escapes from his punishment by covertly reproaching the abbot of the same crime. After a brief, apologetic, but full of irony and sexual allusions, reply played on the double meaning of the verb "premiere" ("Messere, io non sono ancora tanto all'Ordine di san Benedetto stato, che io possa avere ogni particolarità di quello apparta; e voi ancora non m'avavate monstrato che' monaci si debban far dalle femine *premiere* come da' digiuni e dalle vigilie), the prompt response of the novice proves to be also a perfect example of intelligent behavior: ". . . ma ora che mostrato me l'avete, vi prometto, se questa mi perdonate, di mai più in ciò non peccare, anzi farò sempre come io a voi ho veduto fare" (I.4.21). As stated in the *rubrica*, he "honestly" reproaches the abbot of his sin, that is, by covering up the affair and without anyone being aware of the abbot's guilt; in turn, the abbot "honestly" accompanies the girl home, that is, without provoking a big scandal: "E perdonatogli e impostogli di ciò che veduto aveva silenzio, *onestamente* misero la giovinetta di fuori" (I.4.22). Here, it is not difficult to infer what will happen next, both from the words of the storyteller (" . . . e poi più volte si dee credere ve la facesser tornare" [I.4.22]) and from the reaction of his fellows who listen to the story with moderate shame ("La novella da Dioneo raccontata, prima con un poco di vergogna punse i cuori delle donne ascoltanti e con *onesto* rossore né loro visi apparito ne diedon segno; e poi quella, l'una l'altra guardando, appena del ridere potendosi astenere, sogghignando ascoltarono" [I.5.2]). However, once again, the *Decameron's* language emphasizes that the semantic area of honesty operates in the dynamic of actions, and shows how, in the reading of the facts, multiple and numerous factors, behavior and intelligence are simultaneously at stake in solving the situation.

The fifth tale of the Day, which tells the story of the Marchioness of Monferrato and the king of France, gives evidence of a quite inappropriate behavior. During her husband's absence, the Marchioness receives the visit of the king of France, who intends to seduce her. The *Marchesa* with a witty answer and a banquet of hens eventually curbs the inappropriate cravings of the king. The story is introduced by some reflections on how wise is for men to seek the love of a woman from a family better than their own, and for women, by contrast, to shun the love of a man of a greater station (" . . . e si ancora perché quanto negli uomini è gran senno il cercar d'amar sempre donna di più alto legnaggio ch'egli non è, così nelle donne è grandissimo avvedimento il sapersi guardare dal prendersi dello amore di maggiore uomo ch'ella non è" [I.5.4]). The king of France falls in love with the Marchioness without ever having seen her, *de lonh*, as was customary, and mistakenly believes that his high rank could allow him to visit her safely in her husband's absence ("Le quali parole per sì fatta maniera nell'animo del re di Francia entrarono, che, senza mai averla veduta, di subito ferventemente la cominciò ad amare e propose di non volere, al passaggio al quale andava, in mare entrare altrove che a Genova; acciò che quivi, per terra andando, *onesta* cagione avesse di dovere andare la marchesana a vedere, avvisandosi che, non essendovi il marchese, gli potesse venir fatto di mettere ad effetto il suo disio" [I.5.7]). But the king will soon be disappointed by the Marchioness' wit, and will return home in order to prevent his untimely visit to cause him dishonor (" . . . e, finito il desinare, acciò che col presto partirsi ricoprisse la sua *disonesta* venuta, ringraziatala dell'onore ricevuto da lei, accomandandola ella a Dio, a Genova se n'andò" [I.5.17]). As in the previous tale, the mechanism of wit succeeds in solving an unpleasant situation; the unseemly situation created by a "dishonest" motivation (the

king's foolish love), and by an equally "dishonest" action, is resolved both by an intelligent expedient and by the invention of a symbolic animal (the hens) that triggers the understanding of the witticism in the mind of the king. The reflection on behavior, however, appears to be predominant, not only for the semantics of the terms used, but also for the scope of the introductory remarks ("è gran senno il cercar d'amar sempre donna di più alto legnaggio") as well as for the courtly tone of the narration.

The tale of Bergamino (I.7) has been read on the theme of avarice. Nevertheless, the story of Primasso and the Abbot of Cluny told by Bergamino is intended to correct the behavior of Can Grande della Scala, who does not have the grace of giving the appropriate monetary reward to his host (Bergamino). Here too, the tale's heading confirms the massive dose of 'honest' that Boccaccio constantly brushes here and there over the narrative weave for the eyes and minds of his readers: "Bergamino, con una novella di Primasso e dello abate di Cligni, *onestamente* morde una avarizia nuova venuta in messer Can della Scala" (I.7.1). Avarice is also the privileged theme of the following tale, in which Guglielmo Borsieri bites with a *motto* Erminio de' Grimaldi. Here too, however, the thematization of a vice (avarice) is mixed with a reflection on behavior: through the words of his characters, the author's disdain, in fact, is turned to express bitter disappointment over the degradation of the courts ("E colui è più caro avuto, e più da' miseri e scostumati signori onorato e con premi grandissimi essaltato, che più abominevoli parole dice o fa atti: gran vergogna e biasimevole del mondo presente, e argomento assai evidente che le virtù, di qua giù dipartitesi, hanno nella feccia de' vizi i miseri viventi abbandonati" [I.8.10]), and his words are intentionally reminiscent of Dante's laments on the same topic (cf. *Inf.* XVI.67; *Purg.* XIV.109 ff.; *Conv.* II.x.8). An inconvenient way to talk is properly corrected with a witty remark that provokes the shame of Erminio ("A cui Guiglielmo, udendo il suo *mal conveniente* parlare, rispose: - Messere, cosa che non fosse mai stata veduta non vi crederrei io sapere insegnare . . ." [I.8.14]; "A cui Guiglielmo allora prestamente disse: - Fateci dipignere la Cortesia. Come messere Ermino udì questa parola, così subitamente il prese una vergogna tale, che ella ebbe forza di fargli mutare animo quasi tutto in contrario a quello che infino a quella ora aveva avuto . . ." [I.8.17]) and leads to his redemption through a cognitive mechanism that is reminiscent of the Sixth Day's *motti* with their philosophical connotation: "E da questo dì innanzi (di tanta virtù fu la parola da Guiglielmo detta) fu il più liberale e il più grazioso gentile uomo e quello che più e cittadini e forestieri onorò che altro che in Genova fosse a' tempi suoi" (I.8.18). This story also reminds us about the relationship between courtlyness and honesty that Dante theorized in the *Convivio* ("Cortesia e onestade è tutt'uno: e però che ne le corti anticamente le vertudi e li belli costumi s'usavano, sì come oggi s'usa lo contrario, si tolse quello vocabulo da le corti, e fu tanto a dire 'cortesia' quanto uso di corte" [*Convivio* II.x.8]) and that Boccaccio will describe at length in his *Esposizioni* (XVI.53): "Cortesia par che consista negli atti civili, cioè nel vivere insieme liberamente e lietamente, e fare onore a tutti secondo la possibilità."

### *The 'Honestum' from Cicero to the Decameron*

In reading the First Day of the *Decameron*, we have examined various cases in which the behavior of the characters emerged according to different circumstances and personalities. The different ways in which the characters react are literarily emphasized in

the stories by means of the repetition of the word 'honest,' be it used in its connotation related to a supposedly appropriate behavior, or in reference to what the social conventions have established and what is best suited to them (the 'fitting'). The honesty of behavior, whereto the characters (not all of them, actually) try to adapt, and whom the narrator proposes to the reflection of the readers, does not stray far from the peculiar semantic group represented by the "costumi onesti" of the seven women in charge of telling the stories, namely, from the conventions that this small and privileged community establishes as the canon of moral conduct during the time of the plague. But is the honesty that shines through the actions of the characters of the tales really of the same kind as that of the storytellers? In reading the frame texts and observing the storytellers' behavior, something idealized transpires. Boccaccio himself tells us that the storytellers are flesh and blood individuals, real and historical people whose names have been disguised in order both to protect them from their detractors and at the same time to give them a symbolic meaning that alludes to their natural inclinations (I. Intr.50). Notwithstanding Boccaccio's concern with preserving the historicity of his ten young people, the storytellers, however, do not behave in the same realistic way the characters of the tales do. They appear as abstract, quasi allegorical figures moving in an idealized landscape. It is not simply the fact that Boccaccio has not yet completely abandoned the pleasure of representing allegories as in the *Ameto* and *Amorosa visione*. Giovanni Getto has made it very clear in pointing out that the ten storytellers constitute a representation of a life model to imitate, whose characteristics are the result not only of an ethical ideal but also of an aesthetic project. Thus, the "costumi onesti" of the seven women in charge of telling the stories also carries a peculiar esthetic connotation ideally represented by the harmony of the "onesta brigata. This connotation refers to a theoretical concern for beauty and should not pass unnoticed by a more careful and attentive reading: ". . . savia ciascuna e di sangue nobile e bella di forma e ornata di costumi e di leggiadra onestà" (I.Intr. 49).

However, to better understand this nuance of meaning, it is useful to return to Cicero and see how he further develops the implications of the *honestum*. The fourth virtue of the Stoic system is temperance; in order to define it, Cicero describes the concept of *decorum*. Following Panaetius of Rhodes, who already theorized the development of temperance from the instinct for order and harmony, Cicero translated the Greek *prépon* (πρεπον) with the Latin *decorum*:

Sequitur ut de una reliqua parte honestatis dicendum sit, in qua verecundia et quasi quidam ornatus vitae, temperantia et modestia omnisque sedatio perturbationum animi et rerum modus cernitur. Hoc loco continetur id, quod dici latine *decorum* potest; Graece enim πρεπον dicitur. Huius vis ea est, ut ab honesto non queat separari; nam et quod decet honestum est et quod honestum est decet. qualis autem differentia sit honesti et decori, facilius intellegi quam explanari potest. quicquid est enim, quod deceat, id tum apparet, cum antegressa est honestas. (Cicero, *De officiis* I.93)

The term *prépon* derived from the vocabulary of poetico-rhetorical theory, art criticism and aesthetics, where it signified various shades of meaning of the concept of 'convenient:' the appropriateness of behavior for a certain person, the adaptation of an actor to his role, the agreement of the tones with the contents of an oration, the personality of the speaker and the mood of the audience. By bringing the *prépon* to the ethical sphere, Panaetius made it broadly signify the exterior counterpart (in gestures,



attitudes and behavior) of the *kalón*, which is the inner harmony of personality resulting from the controlled use of reason over instincts. In this sense, then, in the *De officiis*, the meaning of *decorum* invests all human actions. Cicero distinguishes two types of *decorum* (*De officiis* I.96 ff.): a general one, which pertains to human nature and relates to *honestas* as a whole, and a specific one, which coincides with the virtue of temperance in its function of 'regulator' of the other virtues. In the *De officiis*, the aesthetics of *decorum* calls on 'ordered' moral behavior from which emotional and personal impulses are banned. Cicero also delves into the requirements of a proper etiquette, offering advice for conversation and entertainment.<sup>47</sup> Cicero claims this moral conduct to be valid for the whole society, and to be useful to dominate social classes other than those who promoted it; apparently, Cicero's cultural operation resembles, more than that of Castiglione and Della Casa, that of Erasmus in the *De civilitate*.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, the term 'honest' has its counterpart in the aesthetics of behavior: in other words, what is good for society and conforms to moral laws is also outwardly beautiful:

Quare pertinet quidem ad omnem honestatem hoc, quod dico, decorum, et ita pertinet, ut non recondita quadam ratione cernatur, sed sit in promptu. Est enim quiddam, idque intellegitur in omni virtute, quod deceat; quod cogitatione magis a virtute potest quam re separari. Vt venustas et pulchritudo corporis secerni non potest a validudine, sic hoc, de quo loquimur, decorum totum illud quidem est cum virtute confusum, sed mente et cogitatione distinguitur. (*De officiis* I, 95)

An honest person who behaves and acts fairly, with justice, in accordance with social rules, and refraining from performing reprehensible acts against others, is also able to control outwardly his/her gestures and to express dignity. Dignity may become superiority in virtue of its genuine correspondance with interiority. Thus, the *decorum* may be reflected in the use of the term 'honest' in the *Decameron*, and develop all the semantic variety related to the aesthetic side of social behavior. Like in Cicero's work, in the *Decameron* the word 'onesto' (and its derivatives) carries an aesthetical connotation that is ideally represented by the harmony of the "onesta brigata."<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Narducci, intr. to Cicerone, *I doveri*, 46.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. S. Bertelli and G. Calvi, in S. Bertelli, G. Crifò, and E. Acanfora, eds., *Rituale, cerimoniale, etichetta* (Milano: Bompiani, 1985), and N. Elias, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation*, 2 Vols. (Bern: Francke, 1969), quoted by Narducci, *ibid.*, 47.

<sup>49</sup> Interestingly enough, the theorization of the *decorum* as the aesthetic and behavioral variant of the *honestum* does not stop with Cicero; rather, it continues at least until the thirteenth century. In his *Livres dou Trésor* (1260-1267), Brunetto Latini speaks of *honesté*, which is concerned with proper behavior and the art of speaking fittingly: "Par ces et par maintes autres raisons apert il tout clerement que en trestoutes manieres de bien celui ki est honeste est très millour, si comme celi ki gouverne humaine compaignie et maintient vie honorable; car vertus et honestés sont une meisme chose, ki nous atret *par* sa force et nous alie *par* sa dignité. [...] Tuilles dist, celui est honestes ki n'a nule laide tache, car honestés n'est autre chose que honours estable et parmanans. [...] Seneques dit, es sages homes est honestetés, mais a la commune gent est la samblance d'onesteté; car si comme li fus porris samble k'il respandisse en leu oscur, tot autresi est la bone oeuvre ki est contre talent . . . HONESTÉS est garder honour es paroles et es meurs; c'est a dire que l'ome se garde de fere et de dire chose dont il li coviegne puis vergoignier. Car nature meisme, quant ele fist l'ome volt ele garder honesté, ele mist en apert nostre figure, en quoi il a honeste samblance, et repost les parties ki sont donees as besoignes de l'home, pour çou k'eles estoient laides a veoir. Et li honeste home ensivent diligament ceste forge de nature; car il nascondent çou que nature repost, et c'est honeste chose ke l'en ne monstre ses membres. Autresi doit on avoir vergoigne en paroles, car il ne doit pas noumer ces membres qu'il repost" (Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, ed. F. J.

Far beyond his intentions, however, Cicero, while teaching how to appear a *vir bonus* (II.44), also provides the dishonest with the weapons to deceive and simulate virtues that they do not have (*simulatio*). Under the counterfeited appearance of the good man can hide the unscrupulous demagogue, or the oportunist flatterer. Cicero was wary enough to evaluate the risk of his theory. Even if Cicero lashes out at deception in the third book, where he strives to demonstrate the necessary identity of *honestum* and *utile* assuming that the criterion of *utile* be the same of *honestum*, the problem of the *simulatio*, in fact, is a sort of obsessive nightmare that appears throughout the pages of his treatise.<sup>50</sup> The real conflict is not between honest and useful, but between honest and what 'appears' useful in virtue of a guiltily distorted perspective (*De officiis* III.34). With regard to the *Decameron*, among the champions of simulation is not difficult to include characters like Ser Cepparello. Among the unscrupulous demagogues, what immediately comes to mind is Friar Cipolla, who makes his followers to believe that he has a feather of the archangel Gabriel. As a result, one wonders if in all these cases Cicero's text could have helped inspire such characters. The dialectic between what is good and what appears to be good (i.e. the simulation) pervades the *Decameron* and, therefore, involves the dialectic between what is honest and what simply appears honest. Furthermore, if one considers the third book of *De officiis*, where Cicero debates at length on mercantile ethics with the intent to show how an insidious and dangerous malice emanates from the world of commerce—a malice ready for any simulation and any lie considered useful to increase the profit—once again it seems clear that in the *Decameron* a certain reflection on the values of the so-called 'mercantile epic' exemplary represented in a number of tales—see for example that of Tancredi and Ghismonda in the Fourth Day—is not a pure invention but has deeper roots that date back to antiquity.

From old to modern Italian, the term 'honest' has certainly gone a long way and some of its connotations and meanings have been transformed over time. We certainly should not underestimate the role that Cicero's prose has had in the creation of the Italian vocabulary and its influence both on Boccaccio and on the following ethical speculation. As mentioned above, Cicero drew the usage of the word *decorum* from Panaetius, who had imposed a particular usage in Latin, and, while the *prépon* had lost the aesthetic connotation that the term had in Greek, the term *decorum* kept the meaning of 'convenient.' If one considers the number of occurrences of the word "conveniente" and its derivatives in the frame texts of the *Decameron*, it seems clear that Boccaccio was influenced by the Ciceronian use of the term. Furthermore, one can assume that Cicero's work has influenced the ethical reflection that underlies the *Decameron*, as we have discussed for the First Day and as we shall see below by considering other philosophical aspects. In terms of the historical evidence that should support the intertextual relations we have traced so far, while there are no extant manuscripts of the *De officiis* with Boccaccio's handwritten notes, the catalogue of manuscripts of the so-called *parva libraria* bears witness that Boccaccio read and possessed three unknown copies of the *De officiis*.<sup>51</sup> This last consideration, even before leading us to consider Boccaccio as a stoic

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Carmody [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1948], II, 52 and II, 75). Cf. Cherchi, *L'onestade e l'onesto raccontare*, 71. As we shall see, Thomas Aquinas dwells on the same concept in the *Summa Theologiae* (1265-74).

<sup>50</sup> Narducci, intr. to Cicerone, *I doveri*, 55-56.

<sup>51</sup> Mazza, "L'inventario della *parva libraria*," 22; 34.

*tout court*, should at least be enough to confirm a certain acquaintance of the author with the Latin terminology of practical philosophy as well as with the Roman Stoic ethical speculations.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, we know that Boccaccio also read other authors of Roman stoicism such as Seneca (*Epistles to Lucilius*), and that these readings led him to copy some of these texts in the so-called *Zibaldone Magliabechiano*.<sup>53</sup> The *Decameron*, however, shows a remarkable shift of the meaning of key concepts like honor/honesty, discretion, wisdom, in comparison with how they were used in Dante's *Commedia*. The words for honor and honesty no longer have anything to do with Dante's transcendental notions, but are always put in relation with how they are perceived by the community and how they can be presented to the public opinion.<sup>54</sup>

The influence of Cicero's Stoic philosophy on the *Decameron* is not limited to the phenomenology of behavior that revolves around the central concept of honesty, but also extends to the dynamic development of virtues and their relationship with vices. Since *De Sanctis*, some critics have assigned the *Decameron* to the tradition of the so-called medieval Naturalism, namely, that form of philosophy that provides instinctual life and sexuality with a new moral status and emphasizes the predominant role of instincts in human life.<sup>55</sup> Yet another point of contact between the ethical vision of the *Decameron* and that of the *De officiis* shows that not only there is a dialectic between instincts and reason, but also that the role of reason is far more important, especially in the mechanism of development of human virtues. According to Cicero's *De officiis*, reason is the means by which instincts become virtues: "Duplex est enim vis animorum atque natura; una pars in appetitu posita est, quae est orme Graece, quae hominem huc et illuc rapit, altera in ratione, quae docet et explanat, quid faciendum fugiendumque sit. Ita fit, ut ratio praesit, appetitus obtemperet" (*De officiis* I.101). Thus, the goal of reason is to keep the individual away from his animal-like state. The author of the *Decameron* declares himself at the same time as both a champion and a victim of the dialectic between instincts and reason. In the opening section of the *Decameron*, the experience of personal lovesickness, which according to Boccaccio's (or the author's) words is caused by love experienced with extreme intensity, is the result of the inability to regulate one's own appetites (i.e., the instincts) and the result of an excess of passion:

. . . nondimeno mi fu egli di grandissima fatica a sofferire, certo non per crudeltà della donna amata, ma per *soverchio fuoco* nella mente concetto *da poco regolato appetito*: il

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<sup>52</sup> K. Flasch, "Boccace et la philosophie," in F. Mariani-Zini and J. Biard, eds., *Ut philosophia poesis: questions philosophiques dans l'œuvre de Dante, Pétrarque et Boccace* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2008), 213–222 in part. p. 217-220 emphasizes Boccaccio's attentions to stoic philosophy, in particular that of Seneca. Recalling the fact that Boccaccio copied quotations from Seneca's moral philosophy in the cols. 147-160 of the *Zibaldone Magliabechiano* (see *Mostra di manoscritti, documenti e edizioni*, 124-126, numero 102; A. M. Costantini, "Studi sullo Zibaldone Magliabechiano, II: il florilegio seneciano," *Studi su Boccaccio* 8 [1974]: 79-126), Flasch maintains that the ideal of wisdom and poverty, before coming from the franciscan tradition, comes to Boccaccio from stoic philosophy (Flasch, "Boccace et la philosophie," in *Ut philosophia poesis*, 217-218).

<sup>53</sup> G. Velli, "Seneca nel *Decameron*," *GSLI* 168 (1991): 321-334.

<sup>54</sup> Pertile, "Dante, Boccaccio e l'intelligenza," 68-69.

<sup>55</sup> De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, I, chap. 9. Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 15 ff. quickly summarizes the critical threads of Naturalism in the *Decameron*. See also Branca, *Boccaccio Medievale*, 29-70; Scaglione, *Nature and Love*, intr. and passim; Di Pino, *La polemica del Boccaccio*, 209-252; Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 198.

quale, per ciò che a niuno convenevole termine mi lasciava un tempo stare, più di noia che bisogno non m'era spesse volte sentir mi facea." (Proemio.3)

Alongside the well known Aristotelian theorization of the appetites, the human reason that regulates the instincts is also well defined in the *De officiis* (I.11-14). After all, the whole account of the plague in Florence and the representation of the human degradation resulting from the deterioration of the social order are the result of men's reaction to extreme, exceptional events. Individuals react differently, with unruliness, excess, and instinctual recklessness (I. Intr.21), or with self-discipline and the proper control of appetites (I.Intr.24). In order to impose a temporary solution to this exceptional condition through the idea of cohabiting in a micro-society, which is actually about to be reborn after the plague, here comes Pampinea who proposes to the brigade to withdraw from the city and adopt a regulatory policy of cohabitation. The regulation of the new life style is then embodied in the figure of a king, or a queen, whose functions are to regulate the day's activities, the flowing of time during the narration, as well as to provide a measure, a "modo", for everything that will happen during the country retreat:

Dioneo, ottimamente parli: festevolmente viver si vuole, né altra cagione dalle tristizie ci ha fatto fuggire. 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 continuare della nostra letizia, estimo che di necessità sia convenire esser tra noi alcuno principale, il quale noi e onoriamo e ubbidiamo come maggiore, nel quale ogni pensiero stea di doverci a lietamente viver disporre. E acciò che ciascun pruovi il peso della sollecitudine insieme col piacere della maggioranza, e per conseguente, d'una parte e d'altra tratto, non possa, chi nol pruova, invidia avere alcuna, dico che a ciascun per un giorno s'attribuisca e 'l peso e l'onore; e chi il primo di noi esser debba nella elezion di noi tutti sia (I.Intr.94-96)

The activities of the retreat will be performed in accordance with the parameters of order, pleasure and honesty, and with the creation of a courtly regulatory hierarchy of human relations: "Acciò che io prima essempro dea a tutte voi, per lo quale, di bene in meglio procedendo, la nostra compagnia con *ordine* e con *piacere* e *senza alcuna vergogna* viva e duri quanto a grado ne fia, io primieramente costituisco Parmeno, famigliar di Dioneo, mio siniscalco" (I.Intr.98).

The phenomenology of appetites is well described in the *Decameron* in the different solutions adopted by the Florentines as they react against the plague using their beliefs or knowledge. Before writing the one hundred tale collection, Boccaccio had exemplified such a phenomenology in the *Teseida* (VII.30.g1) in two allegorical glosses about the locations of Mars and Venus and clearly represented it in the *Filocolo* according to unambiguous Aristotelian-Thomistic parameters through the relational dynamics of the main characters.<sup>56</sup> Now, in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio bears witness to a radical line of moderate and temperate life style that abstains from excesses and takes advantage of solitary life (I.Intr.20). Additionally, men can react following the opposite, but equally radical, thread of the free eruption of "appetites," a thread that advocates for a

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. S. Grossvogel, *Ambiguity and Allusion in Boccaccio's 'Filocolo'* (Firenze: Olschki, 1992). According to Grossvogel (chap. 3), the protagonists, whose irascible and concupiscible appetites contend with their reason, behave by the strictures of Aristotelian-Thomistic psychology. Florio and Biancifiore graduate from Ovidian to Christian love; their sensitive appetites yield to the higher rational power of reason.

life of debauchery, amusements, immoderate drinking; a "proponimento bestiale" which refuses any human contact with the sick:

Altri, in contraria opinione tratti, affermavano il bere assai e il godere e l'andar cantando attorno e sollazzando e il sodisfare d'ogni cosa all'*appetito* che si potesse e di ciò che avveniva ridersi e beffarsi esser medicina certissima a tanto male; e così come il dicevano mettevano in opera a lor potere, il giorno e la notte ora a quella taverna ora a quella altra andando, bevendo *senza modo e senza misura*, e molto più ciò per l'altrui case facendo, solamente che cose vi sentissero che lor venissero a grado o in piacere. E ciò potevan far di leggieri, per ciò che ciascun, quasi non più viver dovesse, aveva, sì come sé, le sue cose messe in abbandono; di che le più delle case erano divenute comuni, e così l'usava lo straniero, pure che ad esse s'avvenisse, come l'avrebbe il proprio signore usate; e con tutto questo *proponimento bestiale* sempre gl'infermi fuggivano a lor potere (I.Intr.21-22)

As an alternative, there is the "mezzana via" of those who can moderate their appetites and not reject human society:

Molti altri servavano, tra questi due di sopra detti, una mezzana via, non strignendosi nelle vivande quanto i primi né nel bere e nell'altre dissoluzioni allargandosi quanto i secondi, ma a sufficienza *secondo gli appetiti* le cose usavano e senza rinchiudersi andavano a torno, portando nelle mani chi fiori, chi erbe odorifere e chi diverse maniere di spezierie, quelle al naso ponendosi spesso, estimando essere ottima cosa il cerebro con cotali odori confortare, con ciò fosse cosa che l'aere tutto paresse dal puzzo de' morti corpi e delle infermità e delle medicine compreso e puzzolente (I.Intr.24)

And finally, those who, being totally devoid of humanity and compassion, completely abandoned the city and care about nothing but themselves (I.Intr.25).<sup>57</sup>

In contrast to the many and varied common opinions, Pampinea, in his first speech, summarizes the parameters of his ethical philosophy and invites the storytellers to shy away from the twisted logic of unbridled instincts, and from the "bestial" logic of those who decided to remain in the city:

Noi erriamo, noi siamo ingannate; che *bestialità* è la nostra se così crediamo; quante volte noi ci vorrem ricordare chenti e quali sieno stati i giovani e le donne vinte da questa crudel pestilenza, noi ne vedremo apertissimo argomento. E perciò, acciò che noi per ischifaltà o per traccuttaggine non cadessimo in quello, di che noi per avventura per alcuna maniera, volendo, potremmo scampare (non so se a voi quello se ne parrà che a me ne parrebbe), io giudicherei ottimamente fatto che noi, sì come noi siamo, sì come molti innanzi a noi hanno fatto e fanno, di questa terra uscissimo; e, fuggendo come la morte i *disonesti* esempli degli altri, *onestamente* a' nostri luoghi in contado, de' quali a ciascuna di noi è gran copia, ce ne

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<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the logic of desires and appetites pervades the mechanism of falling in love, as we know from Lisa's words in the Tenth Day ("... niuno secondo debita elezione ci s'innamora, ma secondo l'appetito e il piacere; alla qual legge più volte s'opposero le forze mie, e più non potendo, v'amai e amo e amerò sempre." X.7), or even the definition of love as enjoyment in the *Filocolo* ("Il secondo è chiamato amore per diletto, e questo è quello al quale noi siamo soggetti. Questo è il nostro iddio: costui adoriamo, costui preghiamo, in costui speriamo che sia il nostro contentamento, e che egli interamente possa i nostri disii fornire" [*Filocolo*, IV, 44, 6-9]). The doctrine of the threefold Love—i.e. honest love, love for pleasure, and love for utility—seems to be traditional, or at least certainly aristotelian (*philia*; cf. *Ethics*, 1156a), so that one can find it in Dante, *De vulgari eloquentia*, II.ii.8, and in Boccaccio's *Amorosa visione*, XXXVIII.40-88) represented in three statues, and then in *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, V, esp. litt., 160-162. Love for the useful was condemned by Andreas Capellanus ("Amor semper consuevit ab avaritia domiciliis exsulare;" *De amore*, II, viii, 45).

andassimo a stare; e quivi quella festa, quella allegrezza, quello piacere che noi potessimo, senza trapassare in alcuno atto *il segno della ragione*, prendessimo. (I.Intr.64-65).

The twisted logic of instincts leads to perform reckless actions; it is contrary to the honesty with which collective morality identifies, but also allows us to liken man's action to that of a beast. What Pampinea wants to emphasize is precisely the logic that allows to calculate all the possibilities, a practical logic that derives from the observation of what happened in the past, and practically functions in the formulation of hypotheses for the future. Thus, bestiality forces to live in the present with no relations with past and future, and does not allow anyone to make projections, to formulate hypotheses and come up with solutions by the mere observation of events that have already happened. Reason, instead, allows the individual to expand the present towards two new dimensions (past and future) and to become a master of his own time through the ability of establishing causal connections and formulating projects. This establishes an interesting contrast between practical logic and bestial thinking, between a balanced, moderate use of reason and illogical brutality that follows only the appetites. The contrast between man and animal as exposed in these terms is also present in the introductory paragraph on the *honestum* in the *De officiis*:

Sed inter hominem et beluam hoc maxime interest, quod haec tantum, quantum sensu movetur, ad id solum, quod adest quodque praesens est se accommodat, paulum admodum sentiens praeteritum aut futurum. Homo autem, quod rationis est particeps, per quam consequentia cernit, causas rerum videt earumque praegressus et quasi antecessiones non ignorat, similitudines comparat rebusque praesentibus adiungit atque adnectit futuras, facile totius vitae cursum videt ad eamque gendam praeparat res necessarias. (*De off.* I, 11)<sup>58</sup>

But even Aristotle's *Ethics* (VII.1145a.15-17) talks about bestiality (*theriòtes*). Here, bestiality is seen as a bad 'usual status,' as an attitude of the character which, together with vices and the lack of self-control, must certainly be avoided.

#### *Practical Reason and Natural Law: Ethics as Practical Philosophy*

As I tried to show, the repetition of the word "honest" and its derivatives in the peripheral texts of the *Decameron* can be explained in reference to the domain of moral philosophy. With the aid of a reflection on Boccaccio's philosophical sources, we can also see that a peculiar usage of the language reveals a complex philosophical system that both defines the moral coordinates of the collection and offers a sort of *accessus* to the single stories, that is, a way to tackle the reading of the tales. The principle of self-preservation that underlies the motivations for fleeing from the city is also the necessary ideological premise of the moral reflection of the storytellers. The category of honest, associated with the semantic area of the "conveniente," of 'what is fitting' in daily and social relationships, is only the first element of a complex ideology that is present throughout the *Decameron*—particularly in its peripheral texts—and creates regular occasions to reflect, both for the characters and for the readers of the tales. A series of case studies on the nature of the human character and the meaning of actions to be undertaken starts with Cepparello's dishonesty and with the utility derived from his dishonest action. The honesty of the characters (Abraham's, for instance, as for others'

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. also *De officiis* I.105.

honesty) can be compared and analyzed in parallel with the storytellers' behavior, which within the action of the *cornice* acquires an ulterior aesthetic connotation built on the attention to honest conduct and the best fitting action. Finally, the phenomenology of the appetites—of a stoic matrix, indeed, but with inevitable Aristotelian-Thomistic reinterpretations, as we shall see shortly—is more clearly understandable within a dialectic of reason and instincts. The practical logic underlying the action of the characters—and indeed of the storytellers who decide to flee from the city—is set against the 'bestial' behavior of those who remain in Florence and decide to defeat the plague by using every inhumane and unscrupulous means.

So far, I have mostly reconstructed the exterior dynamics of moral reflection in the *Decameron* through the categories of 'honesty' and 'fitting,' and have tried to show how they operate in the texts. Next, in an effort to see things from the perspective of a common reader, I will analyze the tales in order to show how, and if, these categories can offer answers to the peculiar questions that, in the perspective of the practical philosophy, inevitably arise from the many different cases offered by the stories. In other words, can the categories of honest and fitting—and the practical philosophy related to them—offer practical solutions to the human cases that are gradually brought to the attentive scrutiny of the reader? Besides the theory of action that transpires from every single case, are these categories able to produce an ethical code, or a methodology, with which to direct human actions and provide a model for the reader? Furthermore, can these categories also indicate an end to human actions and a valid epistemological way to achieve it? The answer to these questions will help to determine, on the one hand, whether Boccaccio intended to propose a recognizable and adoptable ethical code, and, on the other, whether 'the honest' and 'the fitting' are adequate categories to guide human action and to offer practical solutions.

As illustrated above, the parallels with Stoic thought are evident, but it is certainly not advisable to approach the moral system of the *Decameron* without due regard for Aristotle's *Ethics*. Not only, and not simply, for the obvious relationship between Dante and Boccaccio, the latter being a well known reader of Aristotle, and for the wide dissemination of Aristotelian texts in the High Middle Ages, but also, and most importantly, because we know that Boccaccio was an equally attentive reader of Aristotle, owning himself a copy of the *Ethics* at some point in his life.<sup>59</sup> The *Ethics* has been known in the West since the first half of the thirteenth century, as evinced in the content of the oldest manuscripts, yet gained wide acceptance only in the second half of the century, when, in the schools and universities of Cologne and Paris, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas made a critical re-evaluation of the text. The *Ethics* spread throughout Europe by means of partial translations (the *Etica Vetus* and *Etica Nova*) of the original Greek text; later, a thirteenth century Latin translation of a Hellenistic-Arabic compendium of the Aristotelian *Ethics*, the *Liber Ethicorum*, spread widely after it was commented by Thomas Aquinas. There is no sure evidence of the identity of the translator of the Latin *Nicomachean Ethics* in the version possessed by Boccaccio.

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. V. Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993), in part. pp. 180-182, on the autograph held in the Ambrosiana, and pp. 156-159, 183-185. Kirkham, on magnanimity (p. 250), compares *Decameron* X.1.2 with Aristotle, *Ethics*, IV.7.1124a.1-3 and Thomas Aquinas, *Sent. libri eth.* IV.8.15. The aristotelian definition of magnanimity is also contained in *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, II, i, 70. Cf. also, Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg, and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, chap. II: *Aristotle in the Middle Ages*.

However, according to the most accredited scholarship, it is likely that the translators be Henry of Brabant, William of Moerbeke, and Robert Grosseteste. Ezio Franceschini argues that the *Liber Ethicorum* underwent a review in 1260 by William of Moerbeke, and that this edition constituted the basis for the commentary of Thomas Aquinas.<sup>60</sup> Although the lines of the diffusion of the text and the literary currency of the *Ethics* in the Middle Ages are more or less known, the relationship between Boccaccio's literary production and Aristotle's text has not been fully explained and still leaves open some important questions. Hence, it will be useful to recall briefly some of the issues at stake and outline the textual coordinates of Boccaccio's knowledge of Aristotle in order to observe the philosophical implications that the *Ethics* might have for the *Decameron*.

Boccaccio's knowledge of Aristotle incorporates a number of different influences, and certainly is not exclusive. Contaminated with other philosophical readings, it appears at different moments of his literary career. In turn, the influence of Aristotle acquires different meanings depending on Boccaccio's variable attitudes toward philosophy and literature. While Vittore Branca had drawn attention to the presence of Aristotelian-Thomistic motifs in the *Decameron*,<sup>61</sup> recently, Bausi has masterfully rediscovered a number of clear, evident Aristotelian watermarks in the Tenth Day of the *Decameron* and assigned to that Day a structure clearly recognizable through the Aristotelian framework of virtues, updated by the Thomistic reflection and systematization.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, Kurt Flasch has emphasized the presence of Aristotelian moral philosophy in the *Decameron* and in relation with Boccaccio's reading of Dante's *Commedia*.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Michael Sherberg has recognized in the structure of the *cornice* the influence of the Aristotelian theorization of friendship as it appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, by considering Boccaccio's minor production, Veglia reads the *Corbaccio* as a kind of intellectual autobiography in which the author is intent on a re-meditation of the courtly love while rethinking its Aristotelian background (Andreas Capellanus, Guido Cavalcanti) in the Christian-Augustinian perspective of Petrarch. According to this

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<sup>60</sup> On the knowledge of Aristotle's *Ethics*, see C. Marchesi, *L'Etica Nicomachea nella tradizione latina medievale. Documenti ed appunti* (Messina: A. Trimarchi, 1904); E. Franceschini, "La revisione Moerbekana;" id., "L'«Aristotele latino» nei codici dell'Ambrosiana." *Miscellanea Giovanni Galbiati 3 Archeologia, storia, filologia classica e bizantina, filologia orientale, glottologia* (Milano: Hoepli, 1951), 227-247; id., "Leonardo Bruni e il "vetus interpres" della etica a Nicomaco," in *Scritti di filologia latina medievale* (Padova: Antenore, 1976), pt. 2, p. 674-692. See also Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf.," 98, n. 80; A. L. M. M. B. Jourdain, *Recherches critiques sur l'âge et l'origine des traductions latines d'Aristote et sur des commentaires grecs ou arabes employés par les docteurs scolastiques* (New York: B. Franklin, 1960), 21 ff.

<sup>61</sup> For the presence in the *Decameron* of motifs derived from Aquinas, see Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 15-16, 22, 168, 193, 289, 290.

<sup>62</sup> F. Bausi, "Gli spiriti magni. Filigrane aristoteliche e tomistiche nella decima giornata del *Decameron*," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 27 (1999): 205-53.

<sup>63</sup> In the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, IV, 1, 82, when commenting the fourth canto of the *Inferno*, Boccaccio shows to be acquainted with Aristotle's moral philosophy, and explains the difference between the concepts of *sapienza, scienza, arte, prudenza e intelletto* by mentioning Aristotle's *Ethics* and Albert the Great's commentary. See Flasch, "Boccacce et la philosophie," in F. Mariani-Zini and J. Biard, eds., *Ut philosophia poesis*, 214-217.

<sup>64</sup> M. Sherberg, *The Governance of Friendship: Law and Gender in the Decameron* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2011).



interpretation, the raven (the *corvo*) would represent the icon of Boccaccio as a repenting churchman.<sup>65</sup>

But how do we know that Boccaccio was a meticulous and attentive reader of Aristotle? What are the reasons and modalities of his interest in this kind of philosophical culture? In this regards, the history of Boccaccio's manuscripts is indicative (see Introduction, § "The Manuscript Tradition"). Boccaccio read Aristotle and, during the years of the composition of the *Decameron*, even copied the commentary to the *Nicomachean Ethics* written by Thomas Aquinas. The manuscript of the *Nicomachean Ethics* studied by Boccaccio is now held in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan; this manuscript also contains Aquinas' commentary which Boccaccio copied with his own hand.<sup>66</sup> Boccaccio is likely the transcriber of both the text of the *Ethics* and Aquinas' commentary; and the copy possibly took place around 1338/40 for his personal usage.<sup>67</sup> It must be remembered that Boccaccio used to live in Naples in this period. In Naples, there was a royal library full of classical works, and a fervent philosophical and literary culture gravitated around it.<sup>68</sup> There resided Paolo da Perugia, librarian of the king, erudite, fond of classical studies, who Boccaccio cites in his *Genealogies* (Proemium, and LXV, 6, p. 761). Boccaccio could also have gone to the nearby library of the monastery of Monte Cassino, which notoriously possessed books of inestimable value. Furthermore, Dionigi da Borgo Sansepolcro, theologian, and astrologer of the king, famous for his studies on Aristotle, was active in Naples at that time.<sup>69</sup> Strangely enough, however, the *Ethics* owned by Boccaccio did not appear in the lists of books belonged to him and bequeathed to Friar Martino from Signa for the library of Santo Spirito in Florence.

Beyond the cultural aspects that emerge from the study of Boccaccio's books, a comparative reading of the *Nicomachean Ethics* in relation to the *Decameron*—a reading that takes a proper account of ethical aspects—shows primarily a persistent representation of man as an individual born into, and living in constant interaction with, his social and ethical context. The representation of man in the *Decameron* and the interchange of ethical values throughout the collection is dependent upon the metaphorization of "virtue and knowledge," as we have seen in chapter 3, which showed how the figure of the enigma brings the problematic matrix of social life to the fore and provides individuals with the means to express wittily their worldview. The *motto*, whose hidden and mysterious nature is illustrated by a variety of human cases, and in relation to the conventions of society, constitutes one of the formal manifestations of human behavior, or at least the witty externalization of hidden desires, as Freud maintained.<sup>70</sup> The *motto* is also one of the many ways available to the author to promote the lifestyle

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<sup>65</sup> M. Veglia, *Il corvo e la sirena. Cultura e poesia del 'Corbaccio'* (Pisa-Roma: Istituti Editoriali e Poligrafici Internazionali, 1998), 41.

<sup>66</sup> The text of the *Ethics* is on one column in Gothic writing; in the margin, surrounding the text, Aquinas' commentary in cursive Gothic writing with red and blue initials.

<sup>67</sup> Hecker, *Boccaccio-Funde*, 28; Kristeller, *Le Thomisme et la pensée italienne de la Renaissance*, 70; *Mostra di manoscritti, documenti e edizioni*, 139-140, number 112; Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf.," 85.

<sup>68</sup> Coulter, "Boccaccio and the Cassinese Manuscripts of the Laurentian Library;" ead., "The Library of the Angevin Kings at Naples."

<sup>69</sup> Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf," 93. See also Padoan, "Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale," 95.

<sup>70</sup> Freud, *Il motto di spirito*, 163 ff.

that Getto called "the art of living."<sup>71</sup> The social context, and the impact of human activity on it, is also observable on the level of rhetoric: not only the art of persuasion is represented explicitly in a *rhetorica docens* that makes the *Decameron* a place where one can theoretically reflect on the art of storytelling, but also manifests itself in a *rhetorica utens* which is made of concrete situations and sets practical goals aimed at solving a wide variety of predicaments.<sup>72</sup>

It is on this very ground that Boccaccio develops his conception of ethics as practical philosophy. Morality is clearly the first manifestation of practical reason; however, such awareness, although implicit in today's moral conscience, was probably not as obvious in Boccaccio's time, for it is the result of many centuries of philosophical elaboration, from Plato to Kant. The practical use of reason is concerned with the refinement of certain activities (other than theoretical) that lead the individual to the acquisition of truths about what he should do.<sup>73</sup> At the level of literary creation, *Fortuna* and *Ingegno* are the two major forces that govern the world of the *Decameron*, yet are also, as Neri puts it, "le linee maestre di quella morale semplice e pratica, che possiamo seguire fino al Machiavelli, il quale oppose, più reciso e più serio, Fortuna e Virtù; fino all'Ariosto, il quale sorride bonario: 'Vincasi o per fortuna o per ingegno . . .!'" In general, besides being part of the cultural landscape of the period, this conception of ethics as practical philosophy is also common to a number of authors that Boccaccio had certainly at hand; in fact, some of them are indicated on the list of his readings (the *parva libraria* catalogue).<sup>74</sup> The practical aspects of ethical speculations were already defined by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, which not only marked a line between theoretical and practical philosophy, but also properly defined the research field of ethics as philosophical speculation linked to *praxis*. The ethical world of the *Decameron* was affected by the Aristotelian practical speculation that came to the fourteenth century mainly through the adaptation of Thomas Aquinas.

The ethics of the *Decameron* also reflected the new common view that was shared by prominent thinkers beyond the Alps, for instance, William of Ockham.<sup>75</sup> On the

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<sup>71</sup> Getto, "Culto della forma e società fiorentina nella VI giornata," in *Vita di forme e forme di vita nel Decameron*, 140-164.

<sup>72</sup> A. Battistini, "Retorica," in Bragantini and Forni, eds., *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 322. On the concept of "social morality" in the *Decameron*, see Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 75 ff. and notes. Mazzotta then summarizes his thoughts at p. 104.

<sup>73</sup> R. M. McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Univ. of America Pr, 1997), 38-39.

<sup>74</sup> For instance, cf. Ockham's *Logic*, Aristotle's *Ethics*, and Thomas Aquinas' *Sententia in libros Ethicorum* and *Summa Theologiae* Ia-IIae. See Mazza, "L'inventario della *parva libraria*," for the texts of Boccaccio's library.

<sup>75</sup> According to Ockham, on the epistemological level, knowledge is mainly experience, while logic concerns the relations between words and the things they represent. Moreover, an object is knowable only through a direct experience of it. In order to apprehend an object or an abstract reality, it is not necessary to assume a medium between the object itself and the knowing intellect. Knowledge is therefore immediate, intuitive and evident in virtue of a direct linkage between the knower and the known object. Ockham's Empiricism, which maintains that possible and true knowledge is based only on experience, comes to its logical conclusions with the skepticism of Nicholas of Autrecourt. Cf. Gilson, *Storia della filosofia medievale*, 760 ff. While we know that Petrarch argued with the English and French terminists, Boccaccio instead praised Ockham and recommended educating the mind with the *modi significandi*, speculative grammar and dialectics. Cf. G. Boccaccio, *Opere latine minori*, ed. A. F. Massèra, Bari 1928: 112, 118; Garin, "La cultura fiorentina nella seconda metà del Trecento e i barbari Britanni," 187 and n. 16.

epistemological level, according to Ockham, knowledge is mainly experience, while logic concerns the relations between words and the things they represent. In other words, an object is knowable only through direct experience of it; in order to apprehend an object, or an abstract reality, it is not necessary to assume a *medium* between the object itself and the knowing intellect. Knowledge is therefore immediate, intuitive and evident through a *direct* link between the knower and the known object. Ockham's empiricism, which maintained that possible and true knowledge is based on experience, comes to its logical conclusion with the skepticism of Nicholas of Autrecourt.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the epistemological and metaphysical speculation of the second half of the Trecento—that revolves around Empiricism—also involved morality and certainly influenced Boccaccio's poetic. While we know that Petrarch argued with the English and French Terminists,<sup>77</sup> Boccaccio instead praised Ockham (1339) and recommended educating the mind with the *modi significandi*, speculative grammar and dialectics.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, taking a panoramic view of the literary context of the *Decameron*, we may notice that, from the Duecento onward, vernacular prose is mostly concerned with practical uses of transmitting knowledge to those who did not know Latin. In this respect, Dante's *Convivio* contributed to develop this trend and, possibly, became a model of prose for Boccaccio. Before that, however, both Brunetto Latini's *Tesoretto* and *Tresor* sum up the popular encyclopedic knowledge of the time.<sup>79</sup> Thus, it is no coincidence that the *Decameron* follows in the footsteps of its predecessors, and that Boccaccio intends to communicate philosophical concepts using a pragmatic attitude towards knowledge. Both the *Convivio* and the *Decameron* show an ethical and civil commitment (the "desiderio di dottrina dare") to provide those who are in a bestial condition ("bestiale pastura") with philosophical doctrine and to encourage them to cultivate science and virtue (Dante). These two works also display a project of overcoming the state of social dissolution through the restoration of civic values and the exaltation of human virtues (Boccaccio). Both the *Convivio* and the *Decameron* were written during a period of personal and social crisis and their composition expressed similar feelings (cf. *Convivio* I.i.8-11).<sup>80</sup> Particularly, the first sentence of the *Decameron*'s Proemio blends the pragmatic moral philosophy expressed by the sententiousness of a proverb with the autobiographical element of Boccaccio's experience: "Umana cosa . . . io sono uno di quegli." Boccaccio provides the reader with universal ethical contents, yet communicated through the benefit of a life-long experience. In this regard, as suggested by Susanna Barsella, "the ethical function of the *Decameron* is visible in the fictional author's motivation to write a collection of stories for an audience of lovesick women. The proemial narrator justifies his act of writing by invoking a principle of fairness. He argues that it is fair to

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Gilson, *Storia della filosofia medievale*, 760 ff.

<sup>77</sup> Francesco Petrarca, *Fam.* I, 12, 18; I, 7, 3; I, 7, 5-6; I, 7, 14; X, 5, 8-9; XVI, 14, 12; *Sen.* XII, 2; V, 2). Cf. Garin, "La cultura fiorentina", 186.

<sup>78</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Mavortis miles strenua*, in *Opere latine minori*, ed. Massera, 112, 118. Cf. Garin, "La cultura fiorentina," 187.

<sup>79</sup> The second book of the *Tresor* deals with ethics; in the first part, Brunetto offers a compendium of Aristotle's *Ethics*. In the second part, he summarizes both the *De officiis* and the *De inventione*; here, Brunetto also draws on Guillaume Perrault's *Summa aurea de virtutibus* and on the anonym *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, whose main sources are Cicero and Seneca (cf. Cherchi, *L'onestade e l'onesto raccontare del Decameron*, 70).

<sup>80</sup> On the possible influence of Dante's *Convivio* in the *Decameron*, see R. Ferreri, "Appunti sulla presenza del *Convivio* nel *Decameron*."

communicate to others, and particularly to those most in need, what one has learned from others' wisdom and from his own experience. The author of the Proemio confesses that he benefitted from a friend's advice while he was in pain for love. Now that he has overcome the disorder of the senses, he feels morally obliged to benefit those held by passion by communicating them what he learned. This motivation suggests that Boccaccio modeled the fictional narrator of the Proemio on the ideal of the sage, the emblematic figure of ancient moral philosophy. Both Boccaccio and Petrarch elaborated on the idea of the poet-philosopher, which remained a leitmotiv in their relationship and a constant in Boccaccio's works. The author's most extensive speculation on this theme is contained in his defense of poetry in book XIV of the *Genealogie*. The poet-philosopher, like the wise man, is a *figure of practical wisdom*, learned in natural and moral philosophy, who offers what he apprehends in contemplation and meditation for the benefit of the community. Analogously, the proemial narrator of the *Decameron* teaches what he learned *from doctrine and experience* for the benefit of the little community of lovesick women (emphasis mine).<sup>81</sup> As in chapter 3 we have shown how knowledge derives from the poetics of the *motto*; next, we shall see how the practical side of moral speculation conveys the production of knowledge through the observation of both the existing reality and the ability to apprehend it immediately, without any intervening mediums.<sup>82</sup>

A certain practical wisdom identified with the combination of doctrine and experience is also found in the analysis of human action as described by Thomistic ethics. According to Thomas Aquinas, the subject matter of moral philosophy is human action. Human action, which is understood as a cognitive aspect related to action in the world, is an important element in the thought of the *Summa Theologiae* and the commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*. The human act is one that is conscious, deliberate, and free; it is undertaken for a purpose, with an end in view.<sup>83</sup> It involves both the mind and the will,

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<sup>81</sup> S. Barsella, "The Myth of Prometheus in Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *Modern Language Notes* 119 (2004, Special issue: Studia Humanitatis; Essays in Honor of Salvatore Camporeale): 120-141, in part. p. 125-126.

<sup>82</sup> Cfr. Aristotele, *Etica Nicomachea*, trad., intr. and notes by C. Natali (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2007); Cicerone, *De officiis*; Guglielmo di Ockham, *Logica dei termini*, intr., trans., and notes by P. Müller (Milano: Rusconi, 1992). Barsella, "The Myth of Prometheus." S. Benedetti, "Boccaccio lettore di Orazio," in E. Russo, ed., *Testimoni del vero. Su alcuni libri e biblioteche d'autore* (Roma: Università degli studi di Roma La Sapienza, 2000); Garin, "La cultura fiorentina." *Genealogie XIV*. Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 243-244.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Ethics*, I, 1094a, 1-7 e 18-24. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, in Sancti Thomae Aquinatis *Opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita* (Rome: Ex Typographia Polyglotta S. C. de Propaganda Fide, 1888-1906), t. 4-12 (hereafter abbreviated as Aquinas, *ST*), I-II, q1, a3, c: "I answer that Each thing receives its species in respect of an act and not in respect of potentiality; wherefore things composed of matter and form are established in their respective species by their own forms. And this is also to be observed in proper movements. For since movements are, in a way, divided into action and passion, each of these receives its species from an act; action indeed from the act which is the principle of acting, and passion from the act which is the terminus of the movement. Wherefore heating, as an action, is nothing else than a certain movement proceeding from heat, while heating as a passion is nothing else than a movement towards heat: and it is the definition that shows the specific nature. And either way, human acts, whether they be considered as actions, or as passions, receive their species from the end. For human acts can be considered in both ways, since man moves himself, and is moved by himself. Now it has been stated above (Article 1) that acts are called human, inasmuch as they proceed from a deliberate will. Now the object of the will is the good and the end. And hence it is clear that the principle of human acts, in so far as they are human, is the end. In like manner it is their terminus: for the human act terminates at that which the will intends as the end; thus in natural agents the form of the thing generated is

two essential components for achieving a practical good.<sup>84</sup> But the most interesting aspect, which in my opinion is shared by both Boccaccio and Aquinas, is concerned with the very conception of ethics as practical philosophy. According to Wolfgang Kluxen, a well-systematized notion of practical philosophy like that of Aquinas does not appear in other authors contemporary with, or prior to, Boccaccio.<sup>85</sup> The theological attitude of Thomas' religious thought is notorious, and so is its importance for the systematization of the Christian view of his works. Yet, while, on the one hand, Etienne Gilson had once reassessed the philosophical dimension of Thomas' thought emphasizing the distinctive philosophical features independent from theology,<sup>86</sup> Kluxen, on the other, explored the philosophical discourse of Thomas in the context of ethical reflection, the most common treatment of which is contained in the middle section of his *Summa Theologiae* (Prima secundae, questiones 90-97). Kluxen also demonstrated how, in Thomas' thought, next to the superior theological order coexists also an autonomous dimension of philosophical understanding whose principles and structures are distinct from those of theology. In other words, Aquinas' theological synthesis also incorporates philosophical elements which are evident, therefore, particularly in the context of ethical reflection;<sup>87</sup> the *philosophical* ethics that Thomas already finds (in the form of a science) in Aristotle's text is incorporated into the new system of moral theology of the *Summa*, but it remains distinct and constitutes the first essential means for apprehending philosophical truths before any theology.<sup>88</sup> What is known by means of the practical philosophy (as a science), which refers to "present life," undergoes *only later* a theoretical interpretation; metaphysical contemplation presupposes practical knowledge, and follows it. Both the speculative and the practical mode, thus, remain distinct and operate in two moments, being assigned different purposes, objects and perspectives.<sup>89</sup> In fact, the practical use of the mind is concerned with the perfection of some activity other than thinking, that is, with the acquisition of a truth about what is to be done; and this is certainly opposed to the theoretical and speculative use of the mind which is concerned with the perfection of thinking in itself.<sup>90</sup>

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conformed to the form of the generator. And since, as Ambrose says (Prolog. super Luc.) "morality is said properly of man," moral acts properly speaking receive their species from the end, for moral acts are the same as human acts." Cf. McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 1.

<sup>84</sup> McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 60.

<sup>85</sup> W. Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, trans. C. Vigna and A. Campodonico (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 2005), 14.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Gilson, *Storia della filosofia medievale*, 600 ff.

<sup>87</sup> Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, 27.

<sup>88</sup> Kluxen, *ibid.*, 29.

<sup>89</sup> Kluxen, *ibid.*, 31.

<sup>90</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I, q14, a16: "Respondeo dicendum quod aliqua scientia est speculativa tantum, aliqua practica tantum, aliqua vero secundum aliquid speculativa et secundum aliquid practica. [...] Tertio, quantum ad finem, *nam intellectus practicus differt fine a speculativo*, sicut dicitur in III de anima. Intellectus enim practicus ordinatur ad finem operationis, finis autem intellectus speculativi est consideratio veritatis." ["I answer that, Some knowledge is speculative only; some is practical only; and some is partly speculative and partly practical. [...] Thirdly, as regards the end; "for the practical intellect differs in its end from the speculative," as the Philosopher says (*De Anima* iii). For the practical intellect is ordered to the end of the operation; whereas the end of the speculative intellect is the consideration of truth." Translation taken from Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica. Literally Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province* (New York: Benziger Bros, 1947)] Cf. McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 39.

If one compares the reflective moral attitude of the *Decameron* and its direct impact on the narrative experience, it becomes evident that practical philosophy and the art of storytelling are closely related to one another as theoretical reflection and its corresponding operational activity in every individual, or historically contextualized case. Moral knowledge is not innate but is acquired through experience. In order to acquire practical knowledge, an observation of moral actions performed by others is required. Likewise, the understanding of the mechanisms of Natural Law is realized through the narration of the stories that everyone is able to experience. This 'narrative' philosophy, therefore, serves to shed light on how Natural Law is discovered through experiencing, or *living*, the stories.<sup>91</sup> Moreover, the wisdom that derives from the understanding of the artwork is strictly contingent on the knowledge of the singular—in turn, resulting from the quotidian relation with things and being of a sensitive kind. This wisdom is, in virtue of its nature, a 'practical experience.'<sup>92</sup> According to Aquinas, science is perfection, and the knowledge produced by reason is separated from the sensitive knowledge: while sensitive knowledge is obtained immediately, from apprehending individual elements, reason manages to both contemplate and establish an order in the world; moreover, through practical action, reason is able to put knowable things in relation to one another, thus bringing knowledge from multiplicity to common principles.<sup>93</sup> As we have discussed in chapter 3, the oscillating movement of knowledge—from the particular to the universal—is rhetorically presented in the Proem of the *Decameron*, where the author's personal experience constitutes the cipher and the capstone of an epistemological duality of particular and universal. From the beginning of the *Decameron*, the morality promoted by Boccaccio is based on the experience of the particular, an experience in which the biographical element constitutes only the preliminary (or the ultimate?) step of a journey in search for knowledge. From the epistemological point of view, therefore, Boccaccio's knowledge of the literary artwork reflects Aquinas' theory as is well explained by Kluxen (cf. *In Eth.* I.8.n100). The practical reasoning elaborated in the *Decameron* is thus emphasized by Pampinea who mentions the "natural ragione" in her arguments in favor of fleeing from the city oppressed by the plague.

In the second book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle examines various aspects of moral virtue, explores its origin, describes its field, and seeks to provide a definition. Moral virtue is the 'golden mean,' the middle point between two extreme options, excess and deficiency. Moral virtue comes from habit (*ethos*); virtues are not generated by nature, but it is part of our nature to accept and develop them by means of habit (II, 1103a, 15-19 and 24-26). Moral virtue is about pleasures and pains; and because of these, people perform good or ignoble actions (1104b, 9-11). Virtues are neither passions nor capacities, they are just 'habitual dispositions' (*hexis*) producing choices; and these choices, rationally determined, consist in a middle point between two evils, one according to excess and the other according to deficiency (II, 1106b, 36-1107a, 7). Thus, the essence of virtue is to be a middle point, a mean between two extremes. On the other hand, moral excellence is just a quality of virtue, and not its essence. The sixth book of

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<sup>91</sup> R. A. Gahl, Jr., "Legge naturale e narrativa," in F. Di Blasi, ed., *Riscoprire le radici e i valori comuni della civiltà occidentale: il concetto di legge in Tommaso d'Aquino* (Soveria Mannelli [Catanzaro]: Rubbettino, 2007), 99-105, in part. p. 102, argues that the narrative moral epistemology embedded in Aquinas's thought shows the interdependency of law and virtues.

<sup>92</sup> Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, 82.

<sup>93</sup> Aquinas, *In Eth.* I, 1, n. 1-2. Cf. Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, 75.

Aristotle's *Ethics* is about the practical knowledge that is involved in the virtuous action. Here, Aristotle raises the question of what is the criterion of the golden mean and analyzes the concept of practical truth. The golden mean is a guiding method for the application of the virtues. In performing an action, one must choose the right mean, and it is the 'right reason' (*orthos logos*) that establishes it. In every habitual disposition, there is a usual goal towards which the rational individual looks at, and there is a criterion that determines the middle point that stands in an intermediate position between excess and deficiency and is determined by correct reasoning (VI, 1138b, 15-24). According to Aristotle, moreover, it is necessary to define the 'right reason' and its criterion. In order to take a good decision on what is good and what is useful, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is required for the virtuous action. Virtue is a form of wisdom, a habitual state in accordance with right reason (VI, 1144b, 22-26). Practical wisdom is a truthfully habitual state combined with practical reasoning, which concerns what is good and what is evil to human beings (VI, 1140a, 24-28, 1140b, 4-6). Wisdom (*sophia*), instead, is the precise and certain science of the highest, noblest things in nature. Practical wisdom is not just about universals, but must also consider particular cases; and in fact, it is practical, and *praxis* concerns particular cases (VI, 1141b, 15-17).<sup>94</sup>

Most likely, by keeping in mind the concept of virtue as the golden mean, we can interpret some of Boccaccio's invitations to reflect on behavior. It is worth noticing Pampinea's words in response to Dioneo, who willingly accepted to withdraw from the city in order to spend happy hours in amusing, laughing, and singing in the countryside:

- Dioneo, ottimamente parli: festevolmente viver si vuole, né altra cagione dalle tristizie ci ha fatto fuggire. 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 continuare della nostra letizia, estimo che di necessità sia convenire esser tra noi alcuno principale, il quale noi e onoriamo e ubbidiamo come maggiore, nel quale ogni pensiero stea di doverci a lietamente viver disporre (I.Intro.94-95)

or the indirect words of condemnation for the dissolute life of the Florentines oppressed by the plague in the city:

Altri, in contraria opinion tratti, affermavano il bere assai e il godere e l'andar cantando attorno e sollazzando e il sodisfare d'ogni cosa all'appetito che si potesse e di ciò che avveniva ridersi e beffarsi esser medicina certissima a tanto male; e così come il dicevano mettevano in opera a lor potere, il giorno e la notte ora a quella taverna ora a quella altra andando, bevendo *senza modo e senza misura*, e molto più ciò per l'altrui case facendo, solamente che cose vi sentissero che lor venissero a grado o in piacere. (I.Intro.21)

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<sup>94</sup> According to Scaglione (*Nature and love in the late middle ages*, 194, n. 11), the concept of virtue as a mean between two extremes is more pagan than christian. The delphic sentence Μηδεν αχαν, nihil nimis, 'nothing in excess,' was famous in antiquity; moralists used to talk about αχολασια, 'immoderateness,' as opposed to σοφροσυνη, 'wisdom.' This classical vision will reappear in the Renaissance; in his books *Della famiglia* IV, for instance, L. B. Alberti will propose a series of practical, bourgeois, and anti-heroic virtues ("seek just revenge, but with measure, win but without damaging yourself, fight for liberty but do not lose your life for it") (See Scaglione, *Nature and love in the late middle ages*, 193, n. 6). Alberti coined—in Aristotelian terms—a naturalistic definition of virtue: virtue is perfection of the being, fulfillment of the self, *entelécheia* (*I libri della famiglia*, in *Opere volgari*, ed. C. Grayson, I, 63).

Moreover, if we carefully re-read the first words of Pampinea, we realize that her invitation to use reason 'honestly' could be interpreted as her advice to make choices according to Aristotle's 'right reason' (*orthos logos*):

- Donne mie care, voi potete, così come io, molte volte avere udito che a niuna persona fa ingiuria chi *onestamente usa la sua ragione* (I.Intro.53)

In practical philosophy, the methodology of arranging the arguments is not the same as in metaphysics, or in other branches of philosophy. The metaphysical method consists in starting from basic theoretical principles in order to establish more complex, yet equally theoretical, ones. Practical philosophy's method, instead, proceeds as illustrated by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, that is, in various ways, according to the principles that are being analyzed. In general, one of those ways consists in gathering the opinions of all authors in order to establish a reason shared by the entire community of thinkers and develop a theory of what might be the right mean, namely, a mean agreed by society (*Ethics* VI, 1138b, 20-34; VI, 1145b, 3-6). At the level of micro-argumentation, the structure of the discourse proceeds as: *p, in fact q*. Instead of deducting a thesis by a number of assumptions, Aristotle's method tends to state immediately the thesis (p), and then to confirm it with other arguments, examples, or by pointing out a cause (q). In terms of macro-argumentations, instead, the *Nicomachean Ethics* shows a variety of approaches: book I is a sort of *methodos*, an inquiry. Books II-IV and VIII-IX are descriptive and explanatory; the second book is a *pragmateia*, as is defined by Aristotle, that is, a treatise wherein Aristotele describes the mechanisms of moral reasoning. In these books, the collected data of experience that appear in the foreground are the *phainomena*, namely, the practical behaviors of the most virtuous men; their opinions on good and evil are valid, precisely, in so far as they are expressed in practice. Book VII and the first part of book X are structured in a strictly dialectical way: here, the major opinions of the experts are listed, and then are confirmed or refuted.<sup>95</sup>

Through the repetition of the ritual of the storytelling, the exposition of life cases, and the alternation of different points of view (those of the author, of the storytellers, of the characters, etc.), the *Decameron's* framework certainly imitates the method of the practical philosophy and brings it to serve the purposes of fiction. In the *Decameron*, narration consists, first, in the complete exposition of the different views and variety of cases, and, later, in developing a practical thinking, often delegated to the intelligence of the reader. Practical thinking establishes the rules shared by everybody—or by the society, in so far as majority. It defines the best rules for the community, and eventually leads to a regeneration. The regeneration of society that takes place after the disaster of the plague, in other words, does not come from the theoretical speculation of an author. Boccaccio does not propose his own ideal model by automatically putting it down on paper as it comes out of his mind, nor does he want his readers to imitate it. Instead, the regeneration takes place *operatively*, through a common process of exposing ideas and facts wherefrom a 'practical' solution to life cases might arise, in the minds of the characters, or the readers, through a reflection. The practical solution that serves to face the concrete cases of life is clearly not offered by providing a role model to be imitated, as is common in the didactic and exemplary literature of the Middle Ages; instead, it is

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. C. Natali, p. ix-x.



offered by giving the reader the right means of philosophical reflection, which is the key for having access to the proper cognitive process. In this respect, Timothy Kircher's observations can further illustrate this point. Kircher perfectly measures the distance that, at the level of communication, separates the *Decameron* from the moral literary production of the Mendicant Orders. That distance sheds light, on the one hand, on how the *Decameron* sets, in front of the reader, a literary work that is alive and ready to be actively interpreted without any preconceived and superimposed moral vision. On the other hand, it shows how the devotional literature of the Mendicant Orders offers only an ethical model to imitate (a *speculum* on which to mirror) and does not allow the reader to trigger any active process of interpretation.<sup>96</sup>

Evidently, the framework simply enacts this communication process through the poetic fiction of the storytellers. The representation of characters that tell the stories and introduce themselves, as it were, as collectors, disseminators of popular tradition is also a *mise en abîme* of the process of elaboration and reflexion of practical philosophy, which begins with observation and ultimately results in interpretation for the creation of the rules of society. Besides stemming from Aristotelianism and then being revised by Thomistic doctrine, observation is a primary function of the practical philosophy of the Stoicism. (It is no coincidence that the ancient philosopher Epictetus used to encourage his students to observe themselves in everyday actions in order to find out what school of philosophy they belonged to.<sup>97</sup>) However, a basic misunderstanding can arise when it comes to grasp the significance of the relationship of the framework with the tales—a relationship related to the function of the framework and the relations aimed at understanding the stories, as well as at creating additional meaning. Such misunderstanding can be resolved precisely at the level of moral philosophy. Through moral philosophy, one can explain how the framework's argumentation is not inconsistent with the subject of the tales, but constitutes the fundamental methodological premise; or rather, how the framework is nothing more than a *practical* function in the sense of moral philosophy.

San Ciappelletto's tale, a story describing events that Boccaccio claims really to have occurred, starts the series of one hundred tales. Before providing the theoretical and moral principles on which to ponder, or wherefrom to set one's own behavior, Boccaccio decides to submit to the reader's attention a case that 'really' have occurred. From the beginning of the story, we are faced with a highly negative character, indeed, the worst that can ever exist ("il piggioro . . . che mai esistesse"); and he is a figure that comes from the Florentine history. The story of Saint Ciappelletto starts the *Decameron* in the most irreverent possible way by calling into question the inscrutable judgment of God and the power of the saints to intercede with the aid of the believers' prayers. The author's intentions transpire from the words of the first storyteller, Panfilo; these words introduce the story and emphasize, with a well-known rhetorical technique, two theoretical aspects relevant to the understanding of the story. The first rhetorical element is about the opportunity to begin any form of narration with a reference to God, even by just praising His greatness ("convenevole cosa è . . ."). In other words, Boccaccio maintains that calling God into question is a literary convention but also a good means to strengthen one's faith. The second rhetorical aspect, however, gives us an idea of what will be at

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<sup>96</sup> Kircher, *The Poet's Wisdom*.

<sup>97</sup> Sellars, *Stoicism*, 32.

stake in the narrative; Boccaccio gives us a key to the understanding of the tale and admonishes us to distinguish between what appears and what truly is ("manifesta cosa è [I.1.3] . . . manifestamente, dico . . ." [I.1.6]). While declaring, on the one hand, that the frailty of life and the transience of the things of the world are well known and widely accepted conceptions, Boccaccio does reinforce in the reader the belief that God's judgments and men's opinions are two very different things. After all, what is *agreed*, namely, the praise of God and the conviction of the ineffability of his judgment ("convenevole cosa"), should not be confused with what is *evident* ("manifesta cosa"), that is, with the theories of the mortality of temporal things or with the appearances that come from human actions.

What Boccaccio is doing here is to put into practice his conception of practical philosophy. This philosophy, on the one hand, is based on the methodology of studying facts from which to extrapolate principles, while, on the other, it turns out to be skeptical with respect to the existence of a transcendent level of knowledge by saying that what concerns God's will still remains inscrutable. (But the author will not thoroughly deal with this issue; he will instead concentrate on what happens among men, which is worthy of being told because it may conflict with what is humanly and morally correct.) As a sort of *accessus* to the reading of the story, the presence of the inscrutability of divine will cleverly set at the beginning of the narrative, and the veiled possibility that it can also be questioned, brings a powerful subversive charge to the tale. Boccaccio creates a character (Cepparello) that has all it takes to become an antichrist according to the objective reality of the story, but who becomes, due to his verbal ability and the subversive power of appearances, a role model to be imitated, and even a saint to be venerated. From the point of view of practical philosophy, San Ciappelletto is a perfect *case study* that raises endless discussions on moral conduct and social conventions, on the conception of saints, on the moral appropriateness of usury, and finally on whether or not it is possible to understand God's judgment.

The meaning of the allusion to the knowledge of the divine will, however, is an aspect of the story that has not been sufficiently explained by the critics. Such allusion, moreover, could have an explanation on the ethical level. Cepparello's tale calls into question divinity by connecting it to the motif (or narrative expedient) of the false confession. Considering the meaning of the tale in the context of ethical reflection: how are we to understand this allusion to the will of God? As an interpretative hypothesis, I would like to suggest that the author wanted to consider the divine as the basis of moral reflection and a measure for judging human actions. In other words, if one sees things from the point of view of God, who knows the truth about human actions and therefore the truth about a false confession, one inevitably formulates a bad opinion on Cepparello's behavior. As a consequence, we may consider the divine as the true foundation of ethics, that is, the only true, irrefutable criterion to judge human actions. Not surprisingly, Thomas Aquinas maintains that God's Law (and God himself) constitutes the foundation of Natural Law, and therefore that human behavior is guided by divine will.<sup>98</sup> Considering the actions of Cepparello's tale, instead, it seems that the

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<sup>98</sup> Cfr. Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, 325 ff.; R. M. Pizzorni, *Diritto naturale e diritto positivo in S. Tommaso d'Aquino* (Bologna: ESD, 1999), 15. S. L. Brock, *Azione e condotta: Tommaso d'Aquino e la teoria dell'azione* (Roma: Università della Santa Croce, 2002) provides a detailed articulation of Aquinas's action theory and in relation to human action.

first, and only, foundation of ethics is human action, namely, what men thinks of others regardless of the truth of their statements or the honesty of their behavior. God's judgment matters, and is valid to regulate the historical evolution of the world, yet has no bearing on human actions and on the consequences of those actions that must be performed individually. When considering the outcome of Cepparello's story, it is evident that God and religion do not underlie practical Christian ethics; instead, it is precisely man who determines, by his actions, although deceiving, what is good and what is bad, who goes to heaven and who to hell, who becomes a saint and who does not. That religion and God are not the foundation of Christian ethics, and by extension, of any kind of ethics, is also shown (*reductio ad absurdum*) by the final outcome of the tale in which an evil person manages to do some good for the community by using this very community's beliefs.<sup>99</sup> In essence, The first story seems to constitute a challenge from a distance to the foundation of ethics and its implications to the practical philosophy. Rather than identifying in Cepparello the champion of a totally relativist (and atheist) ethics, it seems more appropriate to think of him as the personification of an emblematic case, a promoter of reflection, albeit extreme, on human behavior and its real motivations.<sup>100</sup> For Boccaccio, discussing theological categories, or making judgments or accusations about religion and how it is administered, probably does not raise much interest; rather, what matters most is to stimulate a reflection. This is further confirmed by the fact that Melchisedec's story (I.3), which deals not only with Christianity but also with all the major religions of the time, asserts the triumph of compromise. A compromise symbolized by the social triumph of Melchisedec through his ability to invent, and then to narrate, the fable of the three rings. As previously noted, this story does not metaphorize the magnificence of tolerance, even as far as religious matters are concerned; instead, it tells about superficiality and indifference towards faith, to the point that, at the very end, the absolute value of faith is defeated.<sup>101</sup> Ultimately, The *Decameron* portrays a kind of society that is consciously organized according to the canons of the double-standard morality: on the one hand, the vertical, interior relationship of the individual with his inner conscience and with God, on the other, the horizontal, outwardly relationship of the individual with the community.<sup>102</sup>

Furthermore, that Cepparello is a privileged promoter of reflection is more understandable on the level of human action. Here, too, we have to rely on other Thomistic categories in order to respond to some questions that, I think, the story raises. When the narrator ponders Cepparello's action, or when he suspects that Cepparello has really gone to hell, the tale appears to be a reflection on good and evil, on positive or negative actions, on good or bad intentions. If we think in terms of the philosophy of action, as I assume Boccaccio did, we must also consider the *end* of the action. In Aristotelian-Thomistic thought, as seen above, a human act is defined as conscious, deliberate and free, but is also undertaken for a purpose and with a specific end in mind. The end is also considered the good which perfects such an action. But, whereas for Aristotle the ultimate end consists in the attainment of human happiness (*eudaimonia*),

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<sup>99</sup> Cf. Blackburn, "The Eighth Story of the Tenth Day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*."

<sup>100</sup> For a subtle interpretation of the first novella in moral terms, see also Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, 11-26.

<sup>101</sup> Pertile, "Dante, Boccaccio e l'intelligenza," 65.

<sup>102</sup> Pertile, "Dante, Boccaccio e l'intelligenza," 68.

according to Thomas Aquinas, the ultimate end is understood as the love communion with God. Precisely, Aquinas' approach to the notion of end derives from the meaning of 'good', what he calls the "ratio boni," the character of goodness. Indeed, there is a distinction between the particular thing, or kind of thing, that is sought, and the reason for seeking it.<sup>103</sup> Only God, as the absolute good, can satisfy the formal reason whereby we desire and act. Therefore, perfect happiness for the individual consists in the love union with the good, that is, with God.<sup>104</sup> That being said, it is worth going further and considering some distinctive ideas of Aquinas on particular actions that take us back directly to the tale of Cepparello. According to Aquinas, there are good and bad actions. He maintains that there are certain actions that are in themselves bad and that cannot be justified only because they are aimed toward a good end. Likewise, an action that is good in kind is vitiated if it is done with a bad end in view. Therefore, in order for an action to be good, it must be good in all respects—in kind and in end.<sup>105</sup> In other words, the consequences of the actions we perform affect their moral goodness. The result does not make bad an act that was good nor good one that was evil.<sup>106</sup>

On the contrary, The consequences do not make an action that was evil, to be good; nor one that was good, to be evil. For instance, if a man gives an alms to a poor man who makes bad use of the alms by committing a sin, this does not undo the good done by the giver; and, in like manner, if a man bears patiently a wrong done to him, the wrongdoer is not thereby excused. Therefore the consequences of an action do not increase its goodness or malice.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q1, a6, c. Cf. McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 26.

<sup>104</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q2, a8, c: "I answer that, It is impossible for any created good to constitute man's happiness. For happiness is the perfect good, which lulls the appetite altogether; else it would not be the last end, if something yet remained to be desired. Now the object of the will, i.e. of man's appetite, is the universal good; just as the object of the intellect is the universal true. Hence it is evident that naught can lull man's will, save the universal good. This is to be found, not in any creature, but in God alone; because every creature has goodness by participation. Wherefore God alone can satisfy the will of man, according to the words of Psalm 102:5: "Who satisfieth thy desire with good things." Therefore God alone constitutes man's happiness." Cf. McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 30.

<sup>105</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q18, a4, ad3m. Cf. McInerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 77-78.

<sup>106</sup> Sicut autem esse rei dependet ab agente et forma, ita bonitas rei dependet a fine. [...] Sic igitur in actione humana bonitas quadruplex considerari potest. Una quidem secundum genus, prout scilicet est actio, quia quantum habet de actione et entitate, tantum habet de bonitate, ut dictum est. Alia vero secundum speciem, quae accipitur secundum obiectum conveniens. Tertia secundum circumstantias, quasi secundum accidentia quaedam. Quarta autem secundum finem, quasi secundum habitudinem ad causam bonitatis. [...] Et secundum hoc, contingit actionem quae est bona secundum speciem suam vel secundum circumstantias, ordinari ad finem malum, et e converso. Non tamen est actio bona simpliciter, nisi omnes bonitates concurrant, quia *quilibet singularis defectus causat malum, bonum autem causatur ex integra causa*, ut Dionysius dicit, IV cap. de Div. Nom. (Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q18, a4) [Now just as the being of a thing depends on the agent, and the form, so the goodness of a thing depends on its end. (...) Accordingly a fourfold goodness may be considered in a human action. First, that which, as an action, it derives from its genus; because as much as it has of action and being so much has it of goodness, as stated above (Article 1). Secondly, it has goodness according to its species; which is derived from its suitable object. Thirdly, it has goodness from its circumstances, in respect, as it were, of its accidents. Fourthly, it has goodness from its end, to which it is compared as to the cause of its goodness. (...) And thus it may happen that an action which is good in its species or in its circumstances is ordained to an evil end, or vice versa. However, an action is not good simply, unless it is good in all those ways: since "evil results from any single defect, but good from the complete cause," as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv).]

<sup>107</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q20, a5, sed contra. The passage thus continues: "I answer that, The consequences of an action are either foreseen or not. If they are foreseen, it is evident that they increase the

Actions that are good in kind ought not to be performed haphazardly in any way or place, but in the appropriate circumstances only, since these affect the goodness of the action. A good act must be performed when, where, and as it should be.<sup>108</sup>

On another level of reflection, the object of practical philosophy that Boccaccio enacts in the *Decameron* is also—and particularly in the First Day—of an historical and social character. The problem of the practice of usury in I.1 and the clergy's corruption in I.2 are both realities well-known to everybody and flexible topics to be used for the ethical reflection, albeit unquestionably wide-spread in the entire community. If anyone wanted to cast doubts on the practical implications of this moral philosophy, he/she could certainly read what, in the *Decameron*, the characters say about the debauched and decadent ways of the Roman clergy in the story of the Jew Abraham, or what people thinks about the Lombards in Burgundy in saint Ciappelletto's tale. I dare say that the character of Abraham, for his desire to ascertain how things truly go in Rome in terms of honesty and morality, could certainly represent a *mise en abîme* of the cognitive process in the practical philosophy: in fact, before converting to Christianity, Abraham decides to go to Rome in order to experience first-hand and investigate the habits of the leaders of the Church by making a sort of *enquête de terrain* which is typical of modern anthropology or sociology (I.2.10, 19-21).

From the very beginning of the *Decameron*, various levels of reading and comprehension of reality that concern the categories of honesty and fitting are activated. The "manifesto" and the "convenevole," the deception of appearances (or rather, what appears to be honest), which are fundamental elements of discussion on the honest in Cicero's *De officiis*, or the fitting in Thomas Aquinas' *Summa*, are coupled with knowledge and belief in the First Day. In reading the first tale, it is also worth considering the category of simulation as discussed in details in book III of the *De officiis*, and which appears to be only a special case of the apparent conflict between the useful and the honest.<sup>109</sup> In order to maintain the counterintuitive position that morality

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goodness or malice. For when a man foresees that many evils may follow from his action, and yet does not therefore desist therefrom, this shows his will to be all the more inordinate. But if the consequences are not foreseen, we must make a distinction. Because if they follow from the nature of the action and in the majority of cases, in this respect, the consequences increase the goodness or malice of that action: for it is evident that an action is specifically better, if better results can follow from it; and specifically worse, if it is of a nature to produce worse results. On the other hand, if the consequences follow by accident and seldom, then they do not increase the goodness or malice of the action: because we do not judge of a thing according to that which belongs to it by accident, but only according to that which belongs to it of itself." Cf. McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 87.

<sup>108</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q23, a3, c. Cf. McNerny, *Ethica Thomistica*, 88.

<sup>109</sup> "Neque enim id est celare, quicquid reticeas, sed cum, quod tu scias, id ignorare emolumentum tui causa velis eos, quorum intersit id scire. Hoc autem celandi genus quale sit et cuius hominis, quis non videt? Certe non aperti, non simplicis, non ingenui, non iusti, non viri boni, versuti potius obscuro, astuti, fallacis, malitiosi, callidi, veteratoris, vafri. Haec tot et alia plura nonne inutile est vitiorum subire nomina?" (The fact is that merely holding one's peace about a thing does not constitute concealment, but concealment consists in trying for your own profit to keep others from finding out something that you know, when it is for their interest to know it. And who fails to discern what manner of concealment that is and what sort of person would be guilty of it? At all events he would be no candid or sincere or straightforward or upright or honest man, but rather one who is shifty, sly, artful, shrewd, underhand, cunning, one grown old in fraud and subtlety. Is it not inexpedient to subject oneself to all these terms of reproach and many more besides?) (Cicero, *De officiis* III.57).

does not conflict with self-interested behavior, Cicero resorts to the “reality” versus “appearance” distinction. Is it not true that Ciappelletto is a supreme case study of that kind of simulation that is defined "omission" (*quicquid reticeas*), as Cicero puts it?<sup>110</sup> Technically, those of Ciappelletto are not lies. Indeed, he only confesses his misdemeanors, by avoiding disclosing his deadly sins. That here, too, Boccaccio is drawing on Cicero's reflection on the ‘honest’—and in particular on the apparent conflict of ‘useful’ and ‘honest’—seems to be further confirmed by the legal language that transpires from certain expressions, and that can be traced back to the influence of the language of judicial cases that supports the theoretical discussion on the ‘honest’ in the *De officiis*. Let us consider, for instance, how saints are qualified in Ciappelletto's tale: the saints who intercede with the Lord through the prayers of the believers are called "procuratori" as if the relationship between God and His believers could be compared to that among the people who sign a contract. However, if we keep the categories of the *De officiis* in mind, we realize that these are not satisfactorily adequate. In fact, Ciappelletto's dishonest behavior, in the eyes of the intelligent reader, also comes into conflict with the evident utility that the community draws from the miracles derived from the veneration of a supposed saint.

Another important aspect of the practical philosophy that has been defined by Aristotle (*Ethics* X.4) is that real pleasure derives from human activity. Even Aquinas argued that the subject matter of moral philosophy is the study of human action.<sup>111</sup> According to Cicero, since the truly useful consists in a skilful capacity of managing the *honestum*, the value of *virtus* is mostly evident in the action.<sup>112</sup> After all, Stoic morality established a distinction between absolute good and the precepts that can virtually regulate life (*De officiis* I.7), between perfect duty and 'middle' duty or convenient action (*De officiis* I.8), and also established a fundamental distinction on the level of action. There are two kinds of actions in Stoic ethics: on the one hand, a 'perfect action,' which can only be undertaken by a wise man, a purely ideal figure, and, on the other, an "action for which one would conceivably make a legitimate justification." For the latter case, Panaetius used the term *kathekon*, 'what is fitting;' and Cicero translated *kathekon* with *officium*. In the *Decameron*, activity is not just what triggers the narration and makes men truly 'human,' but is also the supreme principle of human life and an indispensable subject of observation in the practical philosophy.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> "quicquid reticeas" (Cicero, *De officiis* III.57).

<sup>111</sup> "Nam idem sunt actus morales et actus humani" (Aquinas, *ST* Ia, IIae, q1, a3, C).

<sup>112</sup> "Pompeium ipsi cognovimus, multos in dialecticis, plures in iure civili, quae omnes artes in veri investigatione versantur, cuius studio a rebus gerendis abduci contra officium est. *Virtutis enim laus omnis in actione consistit*, a qua tamen fit intermissio saepe multique dantur ad studia reditus; tum agitatio mentis, quae numquam adquiescit, potest nos in studiis cognitionis etiam sine opera nostra continere." (Cicero, *De officiis* I.19).

<sup>113</sup> That morality—and therefore practical philosophy—revolves around the fundamental concept of action is also evident from the connotation that the medieval allegory takes in its moral variant. According to the first theorizations of the Latin exegetes who have helped shape the concept of allegory in the Middle Ages, the moral meaning of a text is always open to action. Augustine of Dacia, for example, thus sums up the significance of the four senses of the Scripture: "Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, / moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia" (cf. C. Spicq, *Esquisse d'une Histoire de l'exégèse latine au Moyen Âge* [Paris: J. Vrin, 1944], 340; H. De Lubac, *Exégèse médiévale: les quatre sens de l'Écriture* [Paris: Cerf, 1993], I, i, 23; J. Pépin, s.v. "allegoria", *Enciclopedia dantesca*, I: 151-165). See also Augustine on the four senses of Scripture: "In libris autem omnibus sanctis intueri oportet, quae ibi aeterna

Given these premises on human action, let us return to gloss the speech that prompted our ethical reflection. We have observed that the philosophical coordinates of Pampinea's speech are to be established within Stoic thought on the honest. But what is left to be explained is why Pampinea mentions the "natural ragione" as motivation for the flight from the city, and why she exhorts her listeners to use reason honestly (*onestamente*). As Mazzotta correctly noted, the "natural ragione" mentioned by Pampinea evokes the so-called Natural Law (the *ius naturalis* or *lex naturalis*) that—according to the jurists, and since the Classical and Patristic epochs (see, for instance, Saint Paul's *Letter to the Romans* 2.14)—is inherent in man, and imposed by nature upon all people.<sup>114</sup> Besides the obvious repercussions in jurisprudence and canon law that Boccaccio certainly had in mind, given his early career as a lawyer, the theory of natural law is also part of a larger pattern of medieval thought,<sup>115</sup> whose major proponent is precisely Thomas Aquinas. According to Aquinas, there are true directives of human action that arise from the very structure of human agency and that anyone may easily formulate for himself. Natural law is also the peculiarly human way of participating in eternal law (*lex aeterna*) whereby God governs the universe.<sup>116</sup> Since everything we are inclined to do according to our own nature belongs to natural law, the inclination of the human being is to act according to reason.<sup>117</sup> That is why Boccaccio uses the term 'reason' instead of 'law.' (Furthermore, human beings' inclinations may belie a certain character of the law in themselves, since any inclination toward something governed by law can be considered law by participation.)<sup>118</sup>

If Pampinea's 'natural reason' is the natural law theorized by Aquinas, the meaning of the 'honest' use of reason is not so much due to the Ciceronian *honestum*, which has certainly had an authoritative conceptual basis, but must be more appropriately attributed to Thomistic ethics. In fact, Aquinas maintains that the first inclination of man

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intimentur, quae facta narrentur, quae futura praenuntientur, quae *agenda* praecipiantur vel admoneantur" (*Gen. ad litt.* I, i).

<sup>114</sup> Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 221-222. Moreover, according to Mazzotta (*The World at Play*, 243-244), the nature of pleasure, the "diletto," does not derive from the reckless enjoyment of earthly pleasures but from the harmonious and balanced enjoyment of knowing how to live, and is due to the ethical conception of the *Decameron*.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Cicero, *De republica* III, xxii, 33, for a definition of the law. Cf. *Glosa Ordinaria* (PL 114, col. 475-761), and Ugucione da Ferrara on Gratian's *Decretum* (1188) mentioned by J. Porter, *Nature As Reason: A Thomistic Theory of the Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2005), 2-3 and 14-15; O. Lottin, *Le droit naturel chez saint Thomas d'Aquin et ses predecesseurs* (Bruges: Beyart, 1931), 109-10.

<sup>116</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q91, a2. Cf. anche Pizzorni, *Diritto naturale e diritto positivo in S. Tommaso d'Aquino*. There is a fundamental distinction in the use of the term 'nature:' on the one hand, the term *natura* is interpreted both genetically and biologically as everything that comes from nature; on the other hand, the word *secundum natura* implies a teleological sense linked to human inclinations and to what is its ultimate or immediate end. Natural law is the participation of eternal law in rational creatures (cf. Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q91, a2). Aquinas uses interchangeably the words *lex naturalis* and *ius naturale* (cf. Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, D33, q1, a1, and *ST*, I-II, q95, a4). However, between natural law (*lex*) and natural right (*ius*), there is a difference as from the gender to the species. Natural law studies and embraces all human action, while the natural right only concerns issues that deal with the relationships between men and, consequently, justice and social values (Pizzorni, *Diritto naturale*, 27). Pizzorni examines the concepts of 'naturalness,' 'historicity,' and the dynamism of natural law in the classical Thomistic definition of "participation of the eternal law in the rational creature," namely the need for its ultimate foundation in God, the main human rights, and therefore, the Thomistic notion of positive law (Pizzorni, *Diritto naturale*, 27-28).

<sup>117</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q94, a3 (cf. also Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q91, a6, see above).

<sup>118</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q91, a6.

is the preservation of his existence, and whatever is useful to preserve human life belongs to natural law. It is worth considering here the passage in which Thomas defines the principle of self-preservation as one of the self-evident principles of practical reason:

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, praecepta legis naturae hoc modo se habent ad rationem practicam, sicut principia prima demonstrationum se habent ad rationem speculativam, utraque enim sunt quaedam principia per se nota. . . . Sicut autem ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter, ita bonum est primum quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinatur ad opus, omne enim agens agit propter finem, qui habet rationem boni. . . . Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum. Et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae, ut scilicet omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana. Quia vero bonum habet rationem finis, malum autem rationem contrarii, inde est quod omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem, ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona, et per consequens ut opere prosequenda, et contraria eorum ut mala et vitanda. Secundum igitur ordinem inclinationum naturalium, est ordo praeceptorum legis naturae. Inest enim primo inclinatio homini ad bonum secundum naturam in qua communicat cum omnibus substantiis, prout scilicet quaelibet substantia appetit conservationem sui esse secundum suam naturam. Et secundum hanc inclinationem, pertinent ad legem naturalem ea per quae vita hominis conservatur, et contrarium impeditur. (Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q94, a2)

[I answer that, As stated above (Question 91, Article 3), the precepts of the natural law are to the practical reason, what the first principles of demonstrations are to the speculative reason; because both are self-evident principles. . . . Now as "being" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so "good" is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. . . . Hence this is the first precept of law, that "good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided." All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided. Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law. Because in man there is first of all an inclination to good in accordance with the nature which he has in common with all substances: inasmuch as every substance seeks the preservation of its own being, according to its nature: and by reason of this inclination, whatever is a means of preserving human life, and of warding off its obstacles, belongs to the natural law.]

The fact that natural law is called 'reason,' and that it is mentioned by Pampinea along with the principle of self-preservation, leaves no doubt about the dependence of this passage in the *Decameron* from Aquinas' *Summa*. The Thomistic intertext at the basis of the *Decameron's* ethics is crucial for understanding the way in which Boccaccio's moral reflection operates and suggests a number of implications not only for the reading and interpretation of the stories but also for the *Decameron's* very narrative structure.

If Pampinea is indeed to be allegorically identified with one virtue, it should be the one most necessary for human life. The virtue that underlies the human capacity to make choices and reflect on a course of action is Prudence. Aquinas adapted the Aristotelian and Stoic system to the Christian theological framework, dividing the virtues into intellectual and moral types. In the justification of prudence as an intellectual virtue, Aquinas speaks of *electio recta*, right choice, which, to be right, must first be made in



accordance with the due end (*debitum finem*) and then with what is ordered toward that end, inasmuch as virtue in the will is perfected by the habit of reason (*habitus rationis*), which is the 'habitual' way in which reason makes right choices, and not according to the impulse of passions.<sup>119</sup>

Respondeo dicendum quod prudentia est virtus maxime necessaria ad vitam humanam. Bene enim vivere consistit in bene operari. Ad hoc autem quod aliquis bene operetur, non solum requiritur quid faciat, sed etiam quomodo faciat; ut scilicet secundum electionem rectam operetur, non solum ex impetu aut passione. Cum autem electio sit eorum quae sunt ad finem, rectitudo electionis duo requirit, scilicet debitum finem; et id quod convenienter ordinatur ad debitum finem. Ad debitum autem finem homo convenienter disponitur per virtutem quae perficit partem animae appetitivam, cuius obiectum est bonum et finis. Ad id autem quod convenienter in finem debitum ordinatur, oportet quod homo directe disponatur per habitum rationis, quia consiliari et eligere, quae sunt eorum quae sunt ad finem, sunt actus rationis. Et ideo necesse est in ratione esse aliquam virtutem intellectualem, per quam perficiatur ratio ad hoc quod convenienter se habeat ad ea quae sunt ad finem. Et haec virtus est prudentia. Unde prudentia est virtus necessaria ad bene vivendum. (Aquinas, *ST I-II*, q57, a5)

[I answer that, Prudence is a virtue most necessary for human life. For a good life consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds, it matters not only what a man does, but also how he does it; to wit, that he do it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion. And, since choice is about things in reference to the end, rectitude of choice requires two things: namely, the due end, and something suitably ordained to that due end. Now man is suitably directed to his due end by a virtue which perfects the soul in the appetitive part, the object of which is the good and the end. And to that which is suitably ordained to the due end man needs to be rightly disposed by a habit in his reason, because counsel and choice, which are about things ordained to the end, are acts of the reason. Consequently an intellectual virtue is needed in the reason, to perfect the reason, and make it suitably affected towards things ordained to the end; and this virtue is prudence. Consequently prudence is a virtue necessary to lead a good life.]

Prudence, intended as right reason (*recta ratio agibilium*), echoes the honest reason of Pampinea; it is the virtue of a practical but also the intellectual use of reason that, for its discretionary power, is called upon to make choices in the practical life. Because of its dual nature (both practical and intellectual), prudence operates according to both universal and particular principles in order to suit any particular case. Specifically, Prudence defends reason from the passions that hinder the attainment of the good end and obscure the right vision:

Cuius ratio est, quia prudentia est recta ratio agibilium; non autem solum in universali, sed etiam in particulari, in quibus sunt actiones. . . . Oportet autem rationem circa particularia procedere non solum ex principiis universalibus, sed etiam ex principiis particularibus. . . . Contingit enim quandoque quod huiusmodi universale principium cognitum per intellectum vel scientiam, corrumpitur in particulari per aliquam passionem, sicut concupiscenti, quando concupiscentia vincit, videtur hoc esse bonum quod concupiscit, licet sit contra universale iudicium rationis. . . . ita ad hoc quod recte se habeat circa principia particularia agibilium, quae sunt fines, oportet quod perficiatur per aliquos habitus secundum quos fiat quodammodo homini connaturale recte iudicare de fine. Et hoc fit per virtutem moralem, virtuosus enim recte iudicat de fine virtutis, quia qualis unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei, ut dicitur in III Ethic. Et ideo ad rectam

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<sup>119</sup> Cf. S. Theron, "The *Bonum Honestum* and the Lack of Moral Motive in Aquinas's Ethical Theory," *The Downside Review* 118 (2000): 85, in part. p. 99.

rationem agibilium, quae est prudentia, requiritur quod homo habeat virtutem moralem. (Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q58, a5)

[The reason for this is that prudence is the right reason about things to be done (and this, not merely in general, but also in particular); about which things actions are. . . . And when reason argues about particular cases, it needs not only universal but also particular principles. . . . For it happens sometimes that the aforesaid universal principle, known by means of understanding or science, is destroyed in a particular case by a passion: thus to one who is swayed by concupiscence, when he is overcome thereby, the object of his desire seems good, although it is opposed to the universal judgment of his reason. . . . in order that he be rightly disposed with regard to the particular principles of action, viz. the ends, he needs to be perfected by certain habits, whereby it becomes connatural, as it were, to man to judge aright to the end. This is done by moral virtue: for the virtuous man judges aright of the end of virtue, because "such a man is, such does the end seem to him" (*Ethic.* iii, 5). Consequently the right reason about things to be done, viz. prudence, requires man to have moral virtue.]

As previously mentioned, the guiding function of human action is our natural inclination to goodness, which Aquinas calls happiness. Goodness is divided into the honest, the useful and the pleasant. In particular, the honest is that virtuous good which is considered the most fitting in so far it is desired *per se*:

Sic ergo in motu appetitus, id quod est appetibile terminans motum appetitus secundum quid, ut medium per quod tenditur in aliud, vocatur utile. Id autem quod appetitur ut ultimum, terminans totaliter motum appetitus, sicut quaedam res in quam per se appetitus tendit, vocatur honestum, quia honestum dicitur quod per se desideratur. Id autem quod terminat motum appetitus ut quies in re desiderata, est delectatio. (Aquinas, *ST*, I, q5, a6)

[Thus, in the movement of the appetite, the thing desired that terminates the movement of the appetite relatively, as a means by which something tends towards another, is called the useful; but that sought after as the last thing absolutely terminating the movement of the appetite, as a thing towards which for its own sake the appetite tends, is called the virtuous; for the virtuous is that which is desired for its own sake; but that which terminates the movement of the appetite in the form of rest in the thing desired, is called the pleasant.]

Happiness is precisely the good that must be honored by everybody, that is, the *bonum honestum* or honorable good. Virtue is only a *bonum honestum* when it leads to happiness:

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut Isidorus dicit, honestas dicitur quasi honoris status. Unde ex hoc videtur aliquid dici honestum, quod est honore dignum. Honor autem, ut supra dictum est, excellentiae debetur. Excellentia autem hominis maxime consideratur secundum virtutem, quia est dispositio perfecti ad optimum, ut dicitur in VII *Physic.* Et ideo honestum, proprie loquendo, in idem refertur cum virtute. (Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, 145, a1)

[I answer that, As Isidore says (*Etym.* x) "honesty means an honorable state," wherefore a thing may be said to be honest through being worthy of honor. Now honor, as stated above (144, 2, ad 2), is due to excellence: and the excellence of a man is gauged chiefly according to his virtue, as stated in *Phys.* vii, 17. Therefore, properly speaking, honesty refers to the same thing as virtue.]

As the most honorable of all the virtues, Honesty is characterized by being the good desired only for itself, the good that leads man to happiness:

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, sicut philosophus dicit, in I Ethic., eorum quae propter se appetuntur, quaedam appetuntur solum propter se, et nunquam propter aliud, sicut felicitas, quae est ultimus finis. Quaedam vero appetuntur et propter se, inquantum habent in seipsis aliquam rationem bonitatis, etiam si nihil aliud boni per ea nobis accederet, et tamen sunt appetibilia propter aliud, inquantum scilicet perducunt nos in aliquod bonum perfectius. Et hoc modo virtutes sunt propter se appetendae. Unde Tullius dicit, in II Rhet., quod *quiddam est quod sua vi nos allicit, et sua dignitate trahit*, ut virtus, veritas, scientia. Et hoc sufficit ad rationem honesti. (Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q145, a1, ad 1)

(Reply to Objection 1. According to the Philosopher (Ethic. i, 7), of those things that are desired for their own sake, some are desired for their own sake alone, and never for the sake of something else, such as happiness which is the last end; while some are desired, not only for their own sake, inasmuch as they have an aspect of goodness in themselves, even if no further good accrued to us through them, but also for the sake of something else, inasmuch as they are conducive to some more perfect good. It is thus that the virtues are desirable for their own sake: wherefore Tully says (De Invent. Rhet. ii, 52) that "some things allure us by their own force, and attract us by their own worth, such as virtue, truth, knowledge." And this suffices to give a thing the character of honesty.)

Ad secundum dicendum quod eorum quae honorantur praeter virtutem, aliquid est virtute excellentius, scilicet Deus et beatitudo. Et huiusmodi non sunt ita nobis per experientiam nota sicut virtutes, secundum quas quotidie operamur. Et ideo virtus magis sibi vindicat nomen honesti. Alia vero, quae sunt infra virtutem, honorantur inquantum coadiuvant ad operationem virtutis, sicut nobilitas, potentia et divitiae. Ut enim philosophus dicit, in IV Ethic., huiusmodi *honorantur a quibusdam, sed secundum veritatem, solus bonus est honorandus*. Bonus autem est aliquis secundum virtutem. Et ideo virtuti quidem debetur laus, secundum quod est appetibilis propter aliud, honor autem, prout est appetibilis propter seipsam. Et secundum hoc habet rationem honesti. (Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q145, a1, ad 2)

(Reply to Objection 2. Some of the things which are honored besides virtue are more excellent than virtue, namely God and happiness, and such like things are not so well known to us by experience as virtue which we practice day by day. Hence virtue has a greater claim to the name of honesty. Other things which are beneath virtue are honored, in so far as they are a help to the practice of virtue, such as rank, power, and riches [Ethic. i, 8. For as the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3) that these things "are honored by some people, but in truth it is only the good man who is worthy of honor." Now a man is good in respect of virtue. Wherefore praise is due to virtue in so far as the latter is desirable for the sake of something else, while honor is due to virtue for its own sake: and it is thus that virtue has the character of honesty.)

If honesty is identified with virtue, honesty is also identified with spiritual beauty:

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut accipi potest ex verbis dionysii, IV cap. De div. Nom., ad rationem pulchri, sive decori, concurrunt et claritas et debita proportio, dicit enim quod Deus dicitur pulcher sicut universorum consonantiae et claritatis causa. Unde pulchritudo corporis in hoc consistit quod homo habeat membra corporis bene proportionata, cum quadam debiti coloris claritate. Et similiter pulchritudo spiritualis in hoc consistit quod conversatio hominis, sive actio eius, sit bene proportionata secundum spiritualem rationis claritatem. Hoc autem pertinet ad rationem honesti, quod diximus idem esse virtuti, quae secundum rationem moderatur omnes res humanas. Et ideo honestum est idem spirituali decori. Unde Augustinus dicit, in libro octogintatium quaest., honestatem voco

intelligibilem pulchritudinem, quam spiritualem nos proprie dicimus. Et postea subdit quod sunt multa pulchra visibilia, quae minus proprie honesta appellantur. (Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q145, a2)

(I answer that, As may be gathered from the words of Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv), beauty or comeliness results from the concurrence of clarity and due proportion. For he states that God is said to be beautiful, as being "the cause of the harmony and clarity of the universe." Hence the beauty of the body consists in a man having his bodily limbs well proportioned, together with a certain clarity of color. On like manner spiritual beauty consists in a man's conduct or actions being well proportioned in respect of the spiritual clarity of reason. Now this is what is meant by honesty, which we have stated (1) to be the same as virtue; and it is virtue that moderates according to reason all that is connected with man. Wherefore "honesty is the same as spiritual beauty." Hence Augustine says (Q83, qu. 30): "By honesty I mean intelligible beauty, which we properly designate as spiritual," and further on he adds that "many things are beautiful to the eye, which it would be hardly proper to call honest.")

The spiritual beauty of honesty is due to the ruling activity of reason, and for this reason it justly deserves the highest honor:

Respondeo dicendum quod honestum concurrit in idem subiectum cum utili et delectabili, a quibus tamen differt ratione. Dicitur enim aliquid honestum, sicut dictum est, in quantum habet quendam decorem ex ordinatione rationis. Hoc autem quod est secundum rationem ordinatum, est naturaliter conveniens homini. Unumquodque autem naturaliter delectatur in suo convenienti. Et ideo honestum est naturaliter homini delectabile, sicut de operatione virtutis Philosophus probat, in I ethic.. Non tamen omne delectabile est honestum, quia potest etiam aliquid esse conveniens secundum sensum, non secundum rationem; sed hoc delectabile est praeter hominis rationem, quae perficit naturam ipsius. Ipsa etiam virtus, quae secundum se honesta est, refertur ad aliud sicut ad finem, scilicet ad felicitatem. Et secundum hoc, idem subiecto est et honestum et utile et delectabile, sed ratione differunt. Nam honestum dicitur secundum quod aliquid habet quendam excellentiam dignam honore propter spiritualem pulchritudinem; delectabile autem, in quantum quietat appetitum; utile autem, in quantum refertur ad aliud. In pluribus tamen est delectabile quam utile et honestum, quia omne utile et honestum est aliquid delectabile, sed non convertitur, ut dicitur in II ethic. (Aquinas, *ST*, II-II, q145, a3)

(I answer that, The honest concurs in the same subject with the useful and the pleasant, but it differs from them in aspect. For, as stated above (Article 2), a thing is said to be honest, in so far as it has a certain beauty through being regulated by reason. Now whatever is regulated in accordance with reason is naturally becoming to man. Again, it is natural for a thing to take pleasure in that which is becoming to it. Wherefore an honest thing is naturally pleasing to man: and the Philosopher proves this with regard to acts of virtue (Ethic. i, 8). Yet not all that is pleasing is honest, since a thing may be becoming according to the senses, but not according to reason. A pleasing thing of this kind is beside man's reason which perfects his nature. Even virtue itself, which is essentially honest, is referred to something else as its end namely happiness. Accordingly the honest the useful, and the pleasant concur in the one subject. Nevertheless they differ in aspect. For a thing is said to be honest as having a certain excellence deserving of honor on account of its spiritual beauty: while it is said to be pleasing, as bringing rest to desire, and useful, as referred to something else. The pleasant, however, extends to more things than the useful and the honest: since whatever is useful and honest is pleasing in some respect, whereas the converse does not hold. (Ethic. ii, 3))<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> It is not difficult to compare this reflection on the honorability of honesty with a similar one by Brunetto Latini (see above, n. 50).

Although limited to the peripheral texts of the *Decameron*, this analysis may lend itself to draw many conclusions. However, to look at Boccaccio in the broader picture, it is worth emphasizing the elements of modernity in the *Decameron's* thought. As appears in the representation of everyday life in Boccaccio's collection of tales, natural law refers to the use of reason to analyze human nature, both social and personal, and deduce binding rules of moral behavior. Consequently, natural rights are entirely based on reason and do not need God to be established.<sup>121</sup> Although natural law theory featured greatly in the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas, Boccaccio contributed to this endeavor by taking advantage of a vast philosophical knowledge and by creating a unique literary form to express the process of ethical reflection. Another aspect of Boccaccio's modernity can be seen in the complete dismissal of teleology in nature. If Aristotle had theorized the knowledge of the end as essential to the understanding of nature, modern science, instead, is independent from the notion of finality and does not purport to attain the knowledge of God and the meaning of things through the understanding of nature that, instead, reason alone can provide.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Hugo Grotius is the father of modern natural law. Cf. Di Blasi, *Riscoprire le radici e i valori comuni della civiltà occidentale*, 110-115. See also D. Lorenzo, "Tommaso d'Aquino e MacIntyre sulla legge naturale: Metafisica e pratica," In Di Blasi, ed., *Riscoprire le radici e i valori comuni della civiltà occidentale*, 205-222.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Di Blasi, *Riscoprire le radici e i valori comuni della civiltà occidentale*, 117-118.

## EPILOGUE

### Epistemological Considerations on the Tenth Day

The last considerations of the previous chapter allow me to tackle a specific philosophical question that I hope could serve as a starting point for general reflection: Do the philosophical categories suggested by the peripheral texts of the *Decameron* provide a recognizable ethical code and a practical methodology for the reader? In the previous chapter, I introduced the concept of honesty as a means to interpret the ethical system of the *Decameron*. Now, in the perspective of the practical philosophy promoted by Boccaccio, I would like to consider honesty in the last Day of the *Decameron* in order to see if this philosophical category can *adequately* provide the reader with a reliable ethical model, or a method to undertake actions in the world, so that he/she will eventually be able to formulate a judgment.

Thomas Aquinas' epistemological theory could help us to better define what I mean by 'adequacy' of the cognitive category of honest. The cognitive process that Aquinas describes consists in three basic steps. The knowledge of the world (like in Aristotle's epistemology) is possible, scientific, and capable of producing true knowledge. (a) The process begins with sensation. Sensitive impressions are imprinted in the mind and provide a true representation of sensible objects. (b) These images, or *phantasmata*, are then transformed into intelligible images by that faculty of the mind called the 'agent intellect' (or active intellect). (c) The agent intellect abstracts the content of the *phantasmata* transforming it into intelligible species, that is, that aspect of the image that can be conceptualized. The intelligible species is then imprinted into the possible intellect, which is that part of the mind that knows all things eventually turning them into *verba mentis*, namely, conceptual signs of the original sensible object.<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, to ensure the truthfulness of knowledge, the whole cognitive process described so far must be based on the ability of the human mind to ensure that the images of sensible objects that are formed in the intellect be faithful reproductions of the same sensible objects; in other words, that their sign function be 'adequate' to represent real objects. In order to ensure the adequacy of the represented to the real object, another step in the cognitive process is needed: forming an opinion on the object in connection with its sign representation. According to Aquinas—who, in this case, probably draws on Stoic theories about the role of judgment to convert simple propositions into *cataleptic* propositions, namely, those that ensure certainty—the formation of a judgment is necessary to ensure adequacy; and the will is the faculty suitable to form this judgment, which basically consists in an act of intellectual assent. This last act of the cognitive process provides us with the certainty of the truthfulness of the objects known. Therefore, if we want to measure on the ethical plan the cognitive ability of the category of honest in the *Decameron*, we must also refer to its adequacy, namely, the capacity of the honest to

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<sup>1</sup> Colish, *The Mirror of Language*, 118-120, sums up the cognitive process as described by Aquinas and puts it in relation with the sign theory (semiotics). Additionally, on Aquinas' epistemology see Kretzmann, "Philosophy of mind," and MacDonald, "Theory of knowledge," in Kretzmann et alii, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 128-159, and 160-195.

let us know true things and, finally, to lead us safely to right actions through the formation of a judgment and an intellectual assent.

Before moving to the analysis of the text, we might want to know why Boccaccio felt the need to emphasize the concept of honesty, which so deeply permeates his language, and why the persistence of the term is so evident at certain key points of the *Decameron* (Day I and X). If we consider that, in some important texts, such as the *Decameron* and the *Genealogies*, Boccaccio explicitly declares his inadequacy in dealing with the matter he was commissioned to write,<sup>2</sup> then I suspect that this constant bringing himself into question with respect to the categories agreed by the community—namely, with respect to that honest that should precisely guide human behavior by providing a model—is nothing but a more or less unconscious attempt to express a feeling of inadequacy towards society. Probably, Boccaccio perceived that his own narrative, and himself, was inadequate to represent reality and to offer solutions, or even inappropriate to compare favorably with authors who, according to him, were more prestigious than he was.<sup>3</sup> It would not be difficult, then, to imagine that he also wanted to represent the reality of the world through the mediation of fiction and, in so doing, to propose a model of ideal life—and perhaps even utopian and unattainable—through the representation of virtue and moderation as idealized in the figures of the ten storytellers. However, it can be argued that the theoretical reflection on the practical aspects of life that we can extrapolate from the *Decameron* is not entirely distinguishable from the interior language that Boccaccio at times employs. The theoretical reflection that we reconstruct with the help of philosophical sources blends with a narrative mechanism that cannot fail to convey other hidden meanings. These meanings are not just allegorical, or molded by the *velamen* of poetry, but are instead associated with inner feelings and with the vision that the author had of himself.

### *Honesty as a Category of Inadequacy*

When it comes to provide definitive categories for the interpretation of human action in the world, a relevant number of textual clues lead us to doubt the author's confidence. To illustrate the point, we must recall how Boccaccio theorized the necessity of an almost insurmountable obstacle, such as the plague, in order to eventually attain a final good, and how Boccaccio alluded to Dante's journey of ascent of a mountain in the *Decameron's* Proemio (cf. chap. 2). We must also recall that, in the *Genealogies*, Boccaccio accepted from the King of Cyprus the commission to write the history of classical mythology despite the fact that he had realized that the immensity of the literary and historical materials on the pagan gods (and the fear to treat them properly) does not allow him to provide definitive explanations on the subject. And this insecurity of Boccaccio is coupled with his personal belief that other writers, Petrarch *in primis*, would know how to do a better job (cf. chap. 1). What may cast doubts on the author's confidence is also the need of various 'defenses' that arises in Boccaccio's texts, that is,

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<sup>2</sup> Especially in the prologue of the *Genealogies*, where he calls into question important and already established literary figures like Dante, or Petrarch, who better than any other author could take the burden of writing such a vast literary work.

<sup>3</sup> As he struggles to affirm himself among humanists, Boccaccio expresses dissatisfaction with his work and concern of not being accepted among scholars in some of his letters to Petrarch (*Seniles* II, 1; VI, 2; XVII, 2 and 3).

the *Decameron's* defenses (Day Fourth's introduction, and Day Tenth's conclusions), or the defense of poetry in the *Genealogies* (book XIV). Is there a real and historical necessity to defend the dignity of the poet face to the rising attacks of theology and natural science? Or rather, are these defenses considered indirect tokens of a specific concern, that of inadequacy? In other words, a certain feeling of inadequacy seems to transpire from Boccaccio's text in his most inspired moments also indicative of the full power of his imagination.

Such inadequacy is also associated with both the need for legitimation and the difficulties of integration that, here and there, one can perceive both in the characters of the *Decameron* and in Boccaccio's minor production. The literary veil that hides the character of Idalogo as Boccaccio's *alter ego* in the *Filocolo* (V, 8), along with the character of Fiammetta under which someone recognizes the illegitimate daughter of King Robert of Anjou, Maria d'Aquino, may conceal some strongly felt issues beneath the literary play involved. These may suggest a special attitude on the part of the author to deal with a genealogical inadequacy through the means of a fictitious legend.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Boccaccio's difficulty of integration in the aristocratic society of Naples is portrayed in an awkward episode of the *Filocolo* in which the hero, the son of King Felice, heir to the throne of Marmorina, and his fellow travelers come in contact, for the first time, with the young local nobles and does not feel well accepted (*Filocolo* IV, 14, 3-4). Furthermore, in a letter to Francesco Nelli (1363), Boccaccio shows resentment against his old friends who had received him with an unworthy welcome in Naples, and makes explicit reference to his social inferiority.<sup>5</sup> If we consider the portraying of some of the characters of the *Decameron* like the woman from Gascony (I.9), Cisti the baker, and Messer Torello, we realize how fiction may reflect the author's issues of legitimation. How to gain access to a higher social class, and how to prove one's worth with respect to that class, are themes of the *Decameron* that should not be overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

A certain category of inadequacy, repeatedly emphasized by Boccaccio in his works, and formally expressed through the literary variants of 'honest' and 'fitting,' may suggest a parallel with the concept of 'imperfect happiness' as theorized by Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologiae* I-II.1-5.<sup>7</sup> As it is realized during a life time, imperfect happiness appears to be achieved through practical and natural experience. By studying the metaphysics of action and its relation to practical knowledge, Aquinas shows that metaphysical contemplation requires practical knowledge and ensues from it. Aquinas' alleged 'deduction' of the principles of morality from metaphysical knowledge—i.e. the principles of ethics from theology—is only apparent, since ethics, albeit being of a *reflexive* kind, has full legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> In other words, although ethics partakes 'reflexively'

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<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Boccaccio, *De casibus*, ed. Branca, I, p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, in *Opere latine minori*, ed. Massera, XII, p. 153-154. Cf. Forni, *Parole come fatti*, 118-120.

<sup>6</sup> P. M. Forni, *Parole come fatti: la metafora realizzata e altre glosse al Decameron* (Napoli: Liguori, 2008), 120.

<sup>7</sup> See Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, 2nd part: "La determinazione dell'estremo poter-essere."

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, I-II, q91, a2: "I answer that, As stated above (90, 1, ad 1), law, being a rule and measure, can be in a person in two ways: in one way, as in him that rules and measures; in another way, as in that which is ruled and measured, since a thing is ruled and measured, in so far as it partakes of the rule or measure. Wherefore, since all things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law, as was stated above (Article 1); it is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, in so



of the absolute truths discovered and defined by theology, ethics and theology operate independently. With this in mind, one can understand how it is possible that the *Decameron* privileges human action in the world while the metaphysical, or transcendent, dimension is almost totally excluded from literary representation and action. What matters most is life and its representation, yet real life, in so far as has a purpose, is only the first, necessary step toward a path of ascension. Therefore, practical knowledge is crucial, as the representation of the world in all its concreteness of action and reaction constitutes the inevitable element of a journey for the acquisition of knowledge. If practical philosophy, then, is independent from metaphysical or theological knowledge as far as the mechanisms of action and the capacity to act freely determining the course of the events are concerned; yet practical philosophy is still linked to metaphysics by a tenuous thread of reflexivity that makes the metaphysical-theological dimension not disappear completely and always remain in the background. Kluxen's vision of Aquinas' *Ethics* is evidently based on the concept of reflexivity of the synthesis' structure (the synthesis being the re-elaboration of the Aristotelian thought in the *Summa Theologiae*): philosophical ethics depends on metaphysics only reflexively; only this condition guarantees a full autonomy by assigning to the former the characteristics of a practical science.

As we have seen, from a theoretical definition of ethics within the context of philosophical disciplines, it is possible to see how ethics manifests itself in the *Decameron* as the 'knowledge of action' (*synderesis*, self-awareness, conscience, and wisdom). What remains to define is, at the literary level, the form it takes, how it appears, how it operates, and to which peculiar ethical field it pertains. Moreover, if there is an ongoing reflection on happiness in the *Decameron*, this certainly entails a reflection on the highest good (*summum bonum*) as the end whereto human action inclines. The concept of highest good, too, deals particularly with ethical reflection, and its definition can authoritatively be drawn from Aristotle (*Ethics*, 1097a-1097b). It is no coincidence that, from the *Commedia delle ninfe* to the *Decameron*, Boccaccio strives for a definition of the *summum bonum*—and consequently, happiness, for which man struggles in the world. After a long narrative journey through nine stages, the Tenth Day is the last chance to reflect on the value of virtue and how it contributes to give happiness to men. The Tenth Day is also an opportunity to measure the distance between the Aristotelian concept of virtue and that of the Stoics. Considering the ethical reflection, in other words, what would Boccaccio mean to communicate with the *Decameron*? A Peripatetic interpretation of virtue as the key to the attainment of happiness in the presence of favorable external circumstances? A Stoic interpretation of virtue that, in so far as an

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far as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to Divine providence in the most excellent way, in so far as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law. Hence the Psalmist after saying (Psalm 4:6): "Offer up the sacrifice of justice," as though someone asked what the works of justice are, adds: "Many say, Who showeth us good things?" in answer to which question he says: "The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us": thus implying that the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light. It is therefore evident that the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law." Cf. Kluxen, *L'etica filosofica di Tommaso d'Aquino*, 3rd part, chap. 10 and 11.

absolute principle, contributes to the pursuit of happiness regardless of external circumstances? Or rather, a representation of virtue in the Thomistic sense, namely, as the activity of reason that controls inclinations but can only lead to an imperfect happiness on this earth, imperfect with respect to the perfect happiness of the afterlife? The role of Fortune, however, undoubtedly remains essential in the ethical system of the *Decameron*, and here, again, it would be more than appropriate to give a closer look at the relation Fortune/Virtue, especially in the Tenth Day. Furthermore, is it possible that Boccaccio wanted us to understand that, in order to be happy, being virtuous is not enough? And conversely, in order to become happy, must one *be* happy regardless of the circumstances, as in the Stoic thought?<sup>9</sup>

Countless questions could be raised, as endless indeed is the nature of ethical speculation. However, yet another issue that could be taken into account, and that Boccaccio could have been able to convey in the Tenth Day, is the possibility of the existence of a wise man, whether or not a wise man might be seen concealed in some of the characters of the *Decameron*, a wise man that could symbolize perfection and the complete invulnerability to external circumstances. In fact, the ideal of the wise, imperturbable, serene, happy, and innerly free man is a peculiar theme of Stoicism. As an alternative, we could also consider the interpretation that reads the Tenth Day as a mockery of this supposed ideal figure. Griselda's story, in fact, seems to postulate the existence, real or imaginary, of a figure comparable to that of the Stoic sage. As she passes through an endless series of misfortunes, humiliations and cruelties, her imperturbability is strikingly similar to that of the Stoic wise man, who even comes to commit suicide just to prove that his ideals are truthful.<sup>10</sup> However, as such distinct features sometimes result in absurdity, it is definitely worth considering whether this representation is intentional aiming to prove a point, or rather it intends to mock a certain philosophical-moral ideal. In fact, the well-known ironic interpretations of Griselda's story<sup>11</sup> clash with the ones that, in a serious key, consider Griselda as a *figura Christi*. But even in this case, however, can the wise man represented in the *Decameron* prefigure the perfect action of man in the world—an inadequate action that leads only to imperfect happiness, as in Aquinas' ethics? The story of the two friend philosophers (X.8), Titus and Gisippus, seems to confirm this latter hypothesis. The historical background of the tale, the Greek names of the characters, and other aspects of philosophy seem to be a mockery of the absurdity of philosophy, of the different situations to which philosophy can lead when it takes extreme positions as a point of reference—on friendship, in this case.<sup>12</sup> In other words, could the two friends represent two Stoic philosophers, and could the tale be a Stoic *ekphrasis*?

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Seneca, *Prov.* 4, 5; *Ep.* 16, 3.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Cato the Younger as portrayed by Seneca, *Const.* 7.1; Cicero, *Pro Murena*, 62; *Parad.* 2; Lucan, *Pharsalia* 9.601-4.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rossi, "Ironia e parodia nel *Decameron*."

<sup>12</sup> On some philosophical implications of Titus and Gisippus' tale and on Boccaccio's peculiar knowledge of the Stoicism and Cicero's *De fato*, cf. F. Ademollo, "*Decameron* X 8.56 ss. e un'antica controversia filosofica," *Rinascimento* 35 (1995), 173-178.

### *The Knowing Process of the 'Honestum' and the Tenth Day*

Besides the fact that Panfilo declares liberality as the theme of the Tenth Day, the interpretations of the last day of the *Decameron* are various and conflicting. From Branca on, an ethical and religious interpretation related to the *exemplum* tradition makes its way through an ironic-parodic one<sup>13</sup> further supported by a negative aesthetic judgment.<sup>14</sup> Recently, however, in order to limit the scope of negative criticism that has concentrated on this Day, Francesco Bausi emphasized the undeniable ethic-philosophical substratum that stems from an Aristotelian and Thomistic thought. According to Aristotle, magnificence must conform to convenience. Wealth, without virtue, makes no one magnanimous.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, if we want to continue the analysis of the use of 'honest' and 'fitting' in the Tenth Day of the *Decameron* in relation with the theme of liberality/magnanimity, the questions to be asked at this point are basically three. First: (a) is the category of convenience adequate to provide answers to the innate indecision of human action? Second: (b) is there an intellectual assent on the part of the reader that makes adequacy possible? Third: (c) how do the cognitive process of what is 'honest' and 'fitting' (and its related act of judgment) occur?

The first story of the Tenth Day starts with a rather ironic and irreverent tone.<sup>16</sup> Messer Ruggieri is in the service of the king of Spain and thinks he has been poorly rewarded by the king. The theme of the day, magnificence, is immediately ridiculed in the first tale by comparing king Alfonso's act of magnificence to the defecation of the mule that he had given to Messer Ruggieri as a gift. The mule does not defecate in the stable, as would be appropriate, but in the river. With a witty answer, Messer Ruggieri compares the mule's act with the inconvenient behavior of the king, who remunerates the unworthy and gives no money to those who deserve it. In addition to the double theme of donation/defecation (*donare/defecare*; and possibly *deficiere* = to lack), which could also have interesting anthropological interpretative implications<sup>17</sup> that do not seem to have been analyzed by the critics, here appears again the language of the 'fitting' that we noted

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<sup>13</sup> G. Cavallini, *La decima giornata del Decameron* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1980); G. Barthouil, "Boccaccio et Catherine de Sienne (La dixieme journée du 'Decameron: noblesse ou subversion?)." *Italianistica* 11 (1982): 249-276; Rossi, "Ironia e parodia nel *Decameron*," Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 122-130, 241-269; Hollander, "Utilità' in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," 215-233; R. Hollander and C. Cahill, "Day Ten of the *Decameron*: the Myth of Order," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995): 113-70; S. Giovannuzzi, "La novella di Gualtieri ('Decameron', X 10)," *Filologia e Critica* 21 (1996): 44-76; G. Güntert, *Tre premesse e una dichiarazione d'amore: vademecum per il lettore del "Decameron"* (Modena: Mucchi, 1997), 40-41.

<sup>14</sup> Battaglia *La Coscienza letteraria del Medioevo*, 504-525; Padoan, "Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale," 167-168; Fido, *Il regime delle simmetrie imperfette*, 26-28; E. Grimaldi, *Il privilegio di Dioneo: l'eccezione e la regola nel sistema Decameron* (Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1987), 380, 394, 406.

<sup>15</sup> Bausi, "Gli spiriti magni," 222 e 223.

<sup>16</sup> For the ideological reinterpretation of the Tuscan novella tradition according to the social and cultural environment, see C. Perrus, *Libéralité et munificence dans la littérature italienne du Moyen Âge* (Pisa: Pacini, 1984).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. L. Lazzarini, *Audigier: il cavaliere sul letamaio* (Roma: Carocci, 2003). In this parodic *chanson de geste*, Audigier's deeds are ridiculed through grotesque mythological motives and ancient folklore. In particular, the motif of defecation conveys anthropological implications related to an ancient popular cosmology. On the corporeal 'low' in medieval popular culture see also Bakhtin, *L'opera di Rabelais e la cultura popolare*.

in the peripheral text of the *Decameron*. In this case, however, what does the act of defecating exactly mean? Is it just a figurative language that takes advantage of Dante's typical *Inferno* vocabulary to characterize, from the bottom upwards, the ascensional journey of the Tenth Day of the *Decameron*?

The king's ingratitude is metaphorized by the very nature of the gift that he offered to Messer Ruggieri at the moment of his departure: the king does not bestow upon him a noble gift; he gives him only a mule—even if it is the best he had—and not a horse, as a king's munificence could have afforded. Then Ruggieri immediately understands the inconvenient act of the mule defecating in the river, and clearly connects this act to the inconveniency of the king and to his gesture: "Per che cavalcando avanti, stando sempre il famiglio attento alle parole del cavaliere, vennero ad un fiume, e quivi abbeverando le lor bestie, la mula stallò nel fiume. Il che veggendo messer Ruggieri, disse: - Deh! dolente ti faccia Dio, bestia, ché tu se' fatta come il signore che a me ti donò" (X.1.11). When Ruggieri and the messenger come back to the king, Ruggieri reveals the misunderstanding ("con aperto viso") explaining that he compared the king to the mule because he thought that the king had been ungrateful and insufficiently munificent: "Messer Ruggieri *con aperto viso* gli disse: - Signor mio, per ciò ve l'assomigliai, perché, come voi donate dove *non si conviene*, e dove *si converrebbe* non date, così ella dove *si conveniva* non stallò, e dove non *si convenia* sì" (X.1.14).<sup>18</sup> But the King apologizes, stating that the blame rests not with him, but with the knight's own evil fortune that did not make the king find the right opportunity to reward him in the most appropriate way. Moreover, the king cares to point out that Ruggieri's worth was, in fact, fully recognized, and that he wants to prove it to him: "Allora disse il re: - Messer Ruggieri, il non avervi donato, come fatto ho a molti, li quali a comparazion di voi da niente sono, non è avvenuto perché io non abbia voi valorosissimo cavalier *conosciuto* e degno d'ogni gran dono, ma la vostra fortuna, che lasciato non m'ha, in ciò ha peccato e non io; e che io dica vero, io il vi mosterrò *manifestamente*" (X.15). Ruggieri responds to the challenge by reaffirming that he does not want anything but the mere acknowledgment of his virtue; he is also keen to point out that the King's excuse, though being honest, is not supported by evidence (X.1.16). Then, the king devises a sort of ordeal with the intent to resolve the question that now arises: is ingratitude or Fortune's cruelty responsible for Ruggieri's disappointment? Thus the king issues yet another challenge to his rival, inviting Ruggieri to choose between two chests, one containing dirt, the other containing the king's crown, the scepter, and other jewels.<sup>19</sup> Ruggieri makes his choice, but unfortunately picks the chest with the dirt. In so doing, the thesis of the 'mistake' of Fortune supported by the king is formally validated; but the king, recognizing Ruggieri's worth, decides to give him anyway the chest containing the royal insignia and the jewels, thus theoretically correcting Fortune's mistake.

Despite Fortune's capriciousness, which has been appropriately corrected, is Ruggieri's virtue really acknowledged? Or rather, does the ungrateful king, whose mule

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<sup>18</sup> The expression "con aperto viso," although obviously meaning 'frankly' and 'without fear,' as Branca's notes well emphasize, also takes an epistemological meaning in the context of the novella in so far as Ruggieri's action is that to 'clarify,' to unveil 'overtly,' the hidden content of his words.

<sup>19</sup> This is also a motif of classical and folk literature: cf. S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955), L 211, J 1675.3, and *Aggiunte*, p. 475.

defecates where it should not, luckily make up for his fault with a trick? Boccaccio's ability to propose alternative solutions is now well-known to us, and this tale looks like yet another opportunity to experiment his ability. Perhaps, in order to try to answer these questions, we should probably suspend our judgment and conclude the reading of the Day. That the first tale of the Tenth Day has a strategic function in the general harmony of the collection is indicated not only by the intrinsic numerology (the first tale of the Day) but also by some structural connections with other peripheral texts of the *Decameron*, connections that are here confirmed by the details of certain poetic comparisons: in the introductory words of Neifile, the author compares magnificence to the sun that decorates the sky and enlightens the other virtues. As well as being inspired by the Aristotelian conception of magnificence as ornament of the other virtues,<sup>20</sup> this simile is also reminiscent of that on graceful jests pronounced by the words of Pampinea (I.10.3) and Filomena (VI.1.2).<sup>21</sup>

The second tale of the Day begins with the theme of a cleric's munificence. The Abbot of Cligny is captured by Ghino di Tacco, cured for a disorder of the stomach, and then released. Upon his return to Rome, the Abbot reconciles Ghino with the pope and makes him a member of the Knights Hospitaller. The possibility that a cleric could be generous may seem impossible to the eyes of an ordinary reader of the *Decameron*, especially after having gone through the reading of nine Days of the collection in which any possible criticism against the clergy has been fully developed. In fact, the Abbot's attitude sounds miraculous in the words of Elissa (X.2.4) and in those of the narrator at the beginning of the following tale (X.3.2). On the other hand, the motif of the stomach ache seems a camouflage of the defecation in the previous tale: not accidentally, both images deal with the lower parts of the body. As is usual in Boccaccio, the same motif (just like important issues at stake) is symmetrically developed within a couple of stories, the first story's motif being subject every time to a sort of rewriting or variation. Let us consider, for instance, the novels I.1 and I.2, where Cepparello's false confession is turned into the *mala confessio* (as religion) of the Church's wickedness in Abraham's tale. Ghino di Tacco turns himself into a doctor and cures the abbot with a treatment based on bread and Vernaccia wine. Apparently, the polemic against doctors continues, but the motif of the 'mistake' of Fortune is here subversed. Ghino is an honourable man who is forced to be a bandit because of his bad luck, but he is eventually pardoned by the pope, and, in this case too, the 'mistake' of Fortune is amended.

The story X.3 presents again the theme of generosity. Mitridanes, who wants to be more liberal than Nathan, falls into the opposite vice, that of envy; his weakness, however, is more greed than generosity, or rather, a peculiar form of pathological narcissism that is so excessive to the point that he plans to kill his rival in liberality, Nathan.<sup>22</sup> Nathan's story develops the motifs of the challenge between two wise men combined with the risk of death. (For a close comparison, see also the challenges of the Sixth Day in chapter 3.) Here, however, the challenge is about liberality. Several critics emphasized the abstract character of the tale, a character typical of apologues,<sup>23</sup> which

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<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1119b. Cf. Bausi, "Gli spiriti magni," 211.

<sup>21</sup> On magnificence, cf. also Dante, *Convivio*, IV.xvii.

<sup>22</sup> According to Mazzotta (*The World at Play*, 252), the meaning of the novella is established in the context of an insidious and "subtle narcissism at the heart of the most altruistic virtue imaginable, liberality," and the practice of total liberality edges toward the egoistic desire of fame (p. 253).

<sup>23</sup> Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron*, 172-180.

should suggest on the part of the author a desire to convey moral or philosophical meanings behind the plot. As Sergio Zatti pointed out that, the figure of Nathan lends itself to elaborate a close comparisons with the Stoic wise man.<sup>24</sup> Nathan is a man trained to maintain self-control and to master his inner nature. His self-discipline also makes him capable of exercising control over the others. According to Zatti, in fact, a Stoic background, which could have an authoritative source in Seneca's *De beneficiis*, characterizes the figure of Nathan.<sup>25</sup> In Seneca's ideology, the wise man who keeps control over himself also legitimizes his control over others. In other words, the power over other individuals is ethically legitimized by the power over oneself.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, according to Zatti, Nathan's power over Mitridanes is exercised through the 'evil' power of his gift, that is, the gift of life. According to anthropological theory, in fact, the gift establishes a kind of inequality between those who give and those who receive. The superiority of the donor, and his generosity, places the receiver in a position of inferiority; generosity, in fact, enslaves the one who receives the gift.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, according to several anthropological studies, the 'ritual' gift of primitive societies, otherwise known as *potlatch*, constitutes an important feature of competitions. In other words, to give a gift is like putting out a challenge.<sup>28</sup> Hence, the competition between Nathan and Mitridanes can be read in terms of power and control. Liberality can be nothing but a means to assert oneself and, consequently, to keep others under control. In this kind of challenge, therefore, Nathan's victory is sanctioned by Mitridanes' failed attempt to emulate his competitor, and such attempt is doomed to fail precisely because of Mitridanes' inadequacy.<sup>29</sup>

Yet the competition between the two wise men is specifically played on the epistemological level. When Mitridanes is about to kill his rival in generosity, he recognizes Nathan's voice and, overwhelmedly ashamed, stops carrying out his intentions and becomes his friend. The recognition scene is characterized by the language of knowledge and features a gnoseological transformation:

- Vegliardo, tu se' morto. Al quale niuna altra cosa rispose Natan, se non: - Dunque, l'ho io meritato. Mitridanes, udita la voce e *nel viso guardatolo, subitamente riconobbe* lui esser colui che benignamente l'avea ricevuto e familiarmente accompagnato e fedelmente consigliato; per che di presente gli cadde il furore e la sua ira *si convertì* in vergogna (X.3.26-28)

Now, Mitridanes knows (or re-cognizes) "manifestly" the value of Nathan's munificence. In fact, Nathan goes so far as to offer his life (the "spirito") for another's life. Eventually, Mitridanes' inferiority is unexpectedly declared and vanquished by Nathan's superiority. Nathan's sublime generosity managed to risk the highest stake for him: his life; while, in

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<sup>24</sup> S. Zatti, "Il dono perverso di Natan (*Decameron* X, 3)," *Intersezioni: rivista di storia delle idee* (1999): 25-38, 29 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Before Zatti, Giuseppe Velli, "Seneca nel *Decameron*," had recognized the influence of Seneca in Boccaccio's works. Velli had also recognized a quotation from Seneca's *De brevitate vitae* in Nathan's conclusive speech (G. Velli, "Memoria," in *Lessico critico decameroniano*, 222-248).

<sup>26</sup> Zatti, "Il dono perverso di Natan," 30-31.

<sup>27</sup> As noted by Zatti, *ibid.* 31, n., even Aristotle (*Eth. Nich.* 1158b; *Eth. Eud.* 1238b) compares the relation between donor and recipient (*euerhetes/euerghetetheis*) to that between dominator and dominated (*archon/archomenos*).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Zatti, *ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>29</sup> Zatti, *ibid.*, 35.

this case, it is God himself who opened the eyes of Mitridanes' intellect by making him abandon the envy that kept them clouded.

A reflection on the practical side of knowledge follows the epiphanic and instantaneous moment of recognition: Mitridanes says that he is willing to repent and undergo the penance that Nathan would consider appropriate. The penance should be "convenevole" to the nature of the sin committed (X.3.29):

*Manifestamente conosco, carissimo padre, la vostra liberalità, riguardando con quanta cautela venuto siate per darmi il vostro spirito, del quale io, niuna ragione avendo, a voi medesimo disideroso mostra'mi; ma Iddio, più al mio dover sollicito che io stesso, a quel punto che maggior bisogno è stato gli occhi m'ha aperto dello 'ntelletto, li quali misera invidia m'avea serrati. E per ciò quanto voi più pronto stato siete a compiacermi, tanto più mi cognosco debito alla penitenza del mio errore; prendete adunque di me quella vendetta che convenevole estimate al mio peccato (X.3.28-29)*

But, will Mitridanes prove himself really wise? Will he prove that he actually understood the virtue of munificence and the right ways to exercise it? At this point of the story, we only know that Nathan is willing to forgive Mitridanes, to the point of arguing that, in reality, he does not need to be forgiven because his actions were not the result of a bad intent, but instead of a desire for perfection (X.3.30); and after all, the desire to kill just one man is nothing compared to murders and assassinations perpetrated by powerful rulers (X.3.32). Moreover, is Nathan's liberality really strong and all-encompassing to the point of even donating his life? Is that of Nathan a verisimilar human case? Or does he represent only a possible, hypothetical, character? In fact, as Nathan puts it (X.3.35-38), the donation of his life is not a big deal, since he has lived a long life and already reached the age of one hundred years. On the other hand, he thinks that it is better to voluntarily donate a young life than have it taken accidentally by nature. Here, as elsewhere, interpretations remain open. However, it clearly appears that Nathan and Mitridanes' story metaphorizes a challenge for wisdom and knowledge on the subject of munificence. That there is a continuing agonism for wisdom all over the tale is also evident from the conclusion of the story: the author decides to fade the narrative after the ambush episode. Nathan and Mitridanes, in fact, keep exchanging acts of generosity in a competition for wisdom that lasts several days in Nathan's palace: "Questi e molti altri piacevoli ragionamenti stati tra Natan e Mitridanes, come a Natan piacque, insieme verso il palagio se ne tornarono, dove Natan più giorni sommamente onorò Mitridanes, e lui con ogni *ingegno e saper* confortò nel suo alto e grande proponimento. E volendosi Mitridanes con la sua compagnia ritornare a casa, avendogli Natan assai ben fatto *conoscere* che mai di liberalità nol potrebbe avanzare, il licenziò" (X.3.44).

The following story (X.4), the tale of Gentile de' Garisendi, is about magnificence and how the latter can involve the love for a woman. After saving Niccoluccio's wife, who has been presumed dead and buried, Messer Gentile is ready to restore her safely to her lawful husband along with his recently born son. Since Messer Gentile is in love with Niccoluccio's wife, he legitimates the motivations of his generosity on the capacity to deprive himself of the woman he loved. The language of honesty appears intermittently in this story. Although the tone is mostly serious and well conforms to Gentile's attitude toward generosity, the story conceals something spicy to a closer look. When Gentile comes to the tomb of Niccoluccio's wife to catch from her a kiss that he would never dare to steal had he known she was living, his sexual appetite becomes so intense that he

reaches out to touch her breast. Once the lady is saved and restored in Gentile's house, Messer Gentile tells her the facts as they occurred and asks a reward for what he has done for her. Safely remaining in Gentile's house, the woman doubts the honesty of Gentile's intentions; she wants to make sure that she be treated kindly and honestly and that the reward he asked be not anything offensive to her honesty (X.4.19 and 21). Yet Gentile's reassurances and promises of good intentions—or, maybe, 'kind' intentions, as the protagonist's name 'Gentile' suggests—are not enough. Upon restoring the woman and her child to the lawful husband, Gentile, once again, feels the need to reassure Niccoluccio that his wife's stay in his house in no way compromised her integrity (X.4.43). Finally, the storyteller's words commenting the story synthesize the significance of Gentile's virtuous action toward the woman: for him, it is not simply a matter of restoring the woman he loves to her legitimate husband, but above all is a matter of restraining 'honestly' his passions, even if the guilty negligence of the woman's husband and her relatives could easily have caused the woman to remain with Gentile: "Il quale giovane e ardente, e giusto titolo parendogli avere in ciò che la traccutaggine altrui aveva gittato via ed egli per la sua buona fortuna aveva ricolto, non solo temperò *onestamente* il suo fuoco, ma liberalmente quello che egli soleva con tutto il pensier disiderare e cercar di rubare, avendolo, restituì. Per certo niuna delle già dette a questa mi par simigliante" (X.4.48). Even with difficulty, honesty and honest behavior are finally achieved with virtuous actions, yet good intentions and virtuous actions are very often not enough to counterbalance the power of appearances, and virtue is not always immediately acknowledged. Most importantly, why exactly should Gentile give up trying to have his beloved lady? His noble and courtly gesture to restore the lady to her legitimate husband, in fact, is not motivated or justified as such by the author with any explicit, or implicit, moral explanation. In essence, why is Gentile's act to be appreciated? Is it only because it is necessary, anyway and anyhow, to temper the fire of sexual appetites, as the storyteller's conclusions epitomize?

Beyond the inexplicable mystery that comes out of every possible question raised by the tale, the category of honesty, here too, appears inadequate to provide all the answers or to guide the action of the characters. However, one aspect of the Tenth Day that, in my opinion, deserves to be once again considered is that the patterns of human behavior that are gradually being presented are, in the storytellers' own words, one more extraordinary than the other (cf. X.5.3). It is not merely a strategy of progression, an escalation of munificence, to be more densely applied by Boccaccio in the Tenth Day through the *topos* of the marvelous and extraordinary, it is specifically an attitude to emphasize the characteristics of a model of behavior, based on honesty but reflecting a constant instability; a model that gradually improves, yet always leaves behind questions and doubts. (It is no coincidence that both the X.3 and X.4 are rewritings of love affairs already present in the *Filocolo*.)

The tale of Madonna Dianora, the X.5, is a rewriting of the love triangle that appears also in the X.4. Dianora asks Ansaldo the impossible gift of giving her a garden with flowers and fruits in January; in exchange, she would give him her love. By hiring a necromancer, Ansaldo manages to grant her desire. When her husband decides that she must fulfill Ansaldo's requests, Ansaldo releases Dianora from her promise. According to the words of Dianora's husband, who blames his wife's imprudence for having compromised her chastity and knows of Ansaldo's wonder of the magic garden (X.5.14),



Madonna Dianora is neither wise nor honest. In order to make up for her imprudence, the husband asks Dianora to go ask Ansaldo to release her from the pact, so that she can keep her integrity; if he refuses to release her from her promise, she would grant him only her body, not her soul (X.5.16). When Ansaldo sees Dianora, he welcomes her "onestamente" and reverently, "senza alcun disordinato appetito seguire" (X.5.18). Then Ansaldo asks explanations about her coming and mentions a "reward" (X.5.19). Clearly enough, the love triangle of the previous tale is reproduced here, even in the language: there is a married couple in both tales; the woman, probably neglected by her husband, is the object of desire of another man. For the quirks of Fate, the intervention of magic, or more likely for the intelligent and virtuous conduct of the lover, the woman falls *de facto* in his hands; and eventually the lover expects a reward (the "guiderdone"). The virtuous behavior of the lover, in this case too, exceeds that of the husband—whose generosity consists, actually, in granting his wife's graces to Ansaldo—and keeps safe both the honorability of the couple and the honesty of the woman. Eventually, the amount of courtliness and generosity is improved when the necromancer refuses to accept Ansaldo's remuneration for his magical performance (another "guiderdone"), and Ansaldo "spento del cuore il concupiscibile amore, verso la donna acceso d'onesta carità si rimase" (X.5.25). As a rewriting of the previous tale, Dianora's story (X.5) constitutes a challenge more properly directed to the reader, who, by now, toward the end of the *Decameron*, should have developed strong critical thinking skills. Like in the *Filocolo*, a short story becomes a *questione d'amore*. With the necessary modifications and adaptations, Boccaccio stimulates the reader's wit to form his/her personal opinion not only on munificence (the theme of the Day) but also on what might be honesty for a woman.

Featuring King Charles of Anjou, the sixth tale of the Day seems to privilege the theme of restraining sexual appetites but with peculiar epistemological implications. The old king, hosted in the house of Messer Neri, falls in love with his two young daughters after having admired their graces during a covertly voyeuristic fishing scene by the garden's pool. King Charles' liberality consists not so much in arranging honorable marriages for Neri's two daughters with two noble lords of the reign as a way to thank him for his hospitality, but rather in his capacity to resist the temptation of possessing two beautiful young ladies who are exposed to his sight wearing provocative clothes. Paradoxically, the king proves to know how to 'win' both himself and the power of sexual desire manifested in his fierce appetite; he finally renounces both the two girls and love passion (X.6.32 and 35). Thus, more than a challenge against a competitor in liberality, this tale is a challenge against one's appetite. In terms of competition, a parallel between the Sixth and the Tenth Day can be significantly established if one looks at the fishing scene of the two honest girls in X.6.13-14 (see also VI, conclusion., 31, and *Caccia di Diana* VIII.43 ff.).<sup>30</sup> As well as having a certain Arthurian flavor (the names of the two girls, Ginevra and Isotta, are indicative of a certain literary context), the scene has also obvious erotic connotations; the beauty and innocence of the two young girls did not leave the king indifferent, but led him to an attentive observation:

Il re e 'l conte e gli altri che servivano, avevano molto queste giovinette *considerate*, e molto in sé medesimo l'avea lodate ciascuno per belle e per ben fatte, e oltre a ciò per piacevoli e per costumate, ma sopra ad ogn'altro erano al re piaciute. Il quale *si*

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<sup>30</sup> In a note to the *Decameron*, Branca notes that Boccaccio could have read in *De officiis* III.14 a similar fishing scene. As a matter of fact, that scene is not that similar, and has other ideological purposes.

*attentamente* ogni parte del corpo loro *aveva considerata*, uscendo esse dell'acqua, che chi allora l'avesse punto non si sarebbe sentito. E più a loro ripensando, senza sapere chi si fossero né come, si sentì nel cuor destare un ferventissimo desiderio di piacer loro, per lo quale assai ben conobbe sé divenire innamorato, se guardia non se ne prendesse, né sapeva egli stesso qual di lor due si fosse quella che più gli piacesse, sì era di tutte cose l'una simiglievole all'altra (X.6.18)

Besides being very beautiful, the two diaphanous figures are also described as "oneste e vergognose" (X.6.13), as if the author wanted to demonstrate that genuine youth and feminine beauty cannot be hidden, and that the final unveiling of their graces is in no contradiction with honesty. It is worth noting, also, that the use of the verb *considerare*—whose technical meaning related to 'speculation' is well known to both the Provençal and Latin tradition<sup>31</sup>—together with the semantic context of the story related to the activity of observation, takes a certain philosophical connotation that becomes especially evident if compared with the same usage in the Latin Thomistic language. In fact, Thomas Aquinas uses the verb *considerare* as a synonym of 'to think abstractly.'<sup>32</sup> Moreover, Aquinas defines sensitive species as the immediate objects of abstraction, which he calls *consideratio*.<sup>33</sup>

What befits a king is recalled, here, by the words of Count Guido, on whose advice King Charles relies in confiding his wishes: "Questo non è atto di re magnanimo, anzi d'un pusillanimo giovinetto. E oltre a questo, che è molto peggio, dite che deliberato avete di dovere le due figliuole torre al povero cavaliere, il quale, in casa sua, oltre al poter suo v'ha onorato, e, per più onorarvi, quelle quasi ignude v'ha dimostrate, testimoniando per quello quanta sia la fede che egli ha in voi, e che esso fermamente creda voi essere re e non lupo rapace" (X.6.29). Thus, Messer Neri shows his trust and honors the king by introducing his daughters without using any precaution or by covering their beauty with any protective screen. As the most precious things, however, the two young women should have been kept safe from prying eyes, but Messer Neri demonstrates his supreme confidence by presenting them almost 'naked' to the king's sight, openly showing what is most precious for him. As a consequence of the direct observation of the two girls, the king should have *recognized* the worth of Messer Neri's donation, and not simply let a trivial erotic desire result from it. In this case, evidently, the knowledge of the essence of generous gestures is not perfect and immediate, but has to be guided by the intervention of a more detached observer (the "consigliere"). Here, as in other

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. M. Mocan, *La trasparenza e il riflesso*, and *I pensieri del cuore: per la semantica del provenzale cossirar* (Roma: Bagatto libri, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> Aquinas, *ST II-II*, q53, a4: "Sed considerare praecedit omnes istos actus, quia pertinet etiam ad intellectum speculativum;" and q180, a4: "Videtur quod vita contemplativa non solum consistat in contemplatione Dei, sed etiam in consideratione cuiuscumque veritatis." Cf. Kretzmann, "Philosophy of mind," in Kretzmann and Stump, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Such a connotation of the verb 'considerare', beside the more familiar usage that Dante makes of it in the *Commedia* (cf. M. Mocan, *I pensieri del cuore*, passim), can be supported, in my opinion, by the *Decameron* alike. See, for instance, how the verb 'considerare' is used in Zima's novella ("... niun termine è sì lungo che mi bastasse a pienamente potervi ringraziare come io vorrei e come a me di far si conviene; e per ciò nella vostra discreta *considerazion* si rimanga a conoscer quello che io disiderando fornir con parole non posso" [III.5.23]). From the way Forese observes Giotto, who gets completely wet in the rain, we can infer that he is already plotting something ("E messer Forese, cavalcando e ascoltando Giotto, il quale bellissimo favellatore era, cominciò a *considerarlo* e da lato e da capo e per tutto, e veggendo ogni cosa così disorrevole e così disparuto, senza avere a sé niuna considerazione, cominciò a ridere..." [VI.5.13]).

Boccaccio's works (*Amorosa visione*, *Commedia delle ninfe*), the nakedness of the two girls acquires a symbolic meaning that can refer both to the knowledge hidden under the *velamen* of an artistic product and to the ability to see beyond the appearances of reality. Furthermore, the two girls, like two fairies appearing in proximity to an aquatic element, manifest themselves as liminal figures who are responsible to guiding the observation of hidden meanings. In this case, however, this observation fails: probably distracted (or blinded) by their beauty, the king is carried away by a sexual desire that probably does not befit the essence and meaning of this appearance in the economy of the tale. A complete observation, however, will be achieved later, in the last story of the collection, when the Marquis of Saluzzo is able to identify Griselda's virtues by the simple observation of her naked body.<sup>34</sup>

Pampinea tells a story about Love and the differences of social classes in the *novella* X.7, the tale of Lisa and King Peter. Upon learning that the young Lisa loves him secretly and has fallen seriously ill because of her inability to show her love, King Peter decides to comfort her by giving her in marriage to a young nobleman. Honesty, once again, influences the behaviour of the characters in the story. Why is Lisa's love for King Peter not honest? Is it just because the king is already married to Queen Costanza? Or, rather, because the king is from another social class, higher than that of Lisa? According to Lisa's words (X.7.40-41), it is clear that hers is not a proper love in so far as it is not directed to a person of the same rank. In this respect, however, Lisa cares to point out that love between a man and a woman does not begin according to a rational choice; just as in the *Stilnovo* poetics, love here follows the impulse of the passions, is attracted to beauty, and aims to achieve the fulfilment of pleasure.<sup>35</sup> Given these preliminary remarks, Lisa's love for the king aims to be eternal. Precisely in virtue of her love, Lisa will fulfill all the king's desires and will allow him to marry her after he professes himself her knight: "cavaliere . . . quanto . . . si conviene;" moreover, she will grant him the kiss he asked for if only the queen were to agree (X.7.42-44). The tale ends with Lisa's marriage with Perdicone, a young, but poor, nobleman, and with the king conferring vast feuds to the new couple. Moreover, the story ends in a courtly, elegant, and proper manner ("il re molto bene servò alla giovane il conveniente") with the king kissing Lisa on the brow, henceforth wearing on his armature an object that Lisa gives him as a symbol of him being her knight (X.7.48). This is certainly a story of virtue acknowledged, of faith kept, and a story about the preoccupation for what is fitting. But the final say on the story is pronounced by the words of the narrator who, in this case, probably reflects Boccaccio's thoughts (X.7.49). The tale offers an exemplary model of conduct for the ruling class that should hypothetically follow the example of King Peter and Queen Costanza. A nostalgic aura surrounding the representation of the old aristocratic society is coupled with the implicit criticism of the contemporary ruling class. By Boccaccio's time, in fact, not only does the aristocracy cease to constitute an example of moral conduct—and for that reason

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<sup>34</sup> Even Griselda is a liminal figure: she, too, appears in proximity to an aquatic element, that is, while she is bringing water from the river to her father's house. The themes of honesty and liberality get mixed with politics in the tale of King Charles (X, 6). Furthermore, the Guelph-Ghibelline dynamic transpires from the reactions of the Ghibelline storytellers who do not appreciate the tale (vedi X.7.2).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Guinizzelli, *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*; Cavalcanti, *Donna me prega*; Dante, *Purg.* XVIII, 19 ff.; Boccaccio, *Filostrato* II, 19 ("Amor non ha qual uomo ami per legge / Fuor che colei cui l'appetito elegge"); and *Amorosa visione* XVI. All references quoted by da Branca, note on *Decameron* X.7.41.

it does not have any good reputation—but it has also lost the willingness to become a model, and has turned into tyranny. Its lack of motivation is expressed through the metaphor of the taut bow, reminiscent of similar images in Dante (*Purgatorio* XVI.47 ff.): "Così adunque operando si pigliano gli animi dei soggetti; dassi altrui materia di bene operare, e le fame eterne s'acquistano. Alla qual cosa oggi pochi o niuno ha *l'arco teso dello 'ntelletto*, essendo li più de' signori divenuti crudeli tiranni" (X.7.49). To the metaphor of the taut bow, Boccaccio adds a detail that probably points us toward the Aristotelian vocabulary on the teleological nature of ethics: the will (as a bow) aims to an end, and is precisely aimed to achieve this end like the arrow of a bow is meant to reach its target; but the taut bow symbolizes the intellect, that is, human action originating in the rational soul (the intellect).

The eighth story of the Day, the tale of Titus, Gisippus, and Sophronia, develops the theme of friendship involving human action and its consequences. As another case study treated from different perspectives, the power of friendship is so strong that, eventually, can even come to sacrifice love and life. The theme was popular in the *novella* tradition,<sup>36</sup> but even classical authors insistently re-elaborated it (among other examples, see the myth of Damon and Pythia).<sup>37</sup> More likely, Boccaccio drew the theme of his tale from the second story of Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina clericalis*, this story sharing the same plot.<sup>38</sup> Besides its unique distant setting in the ancient world, the less than honorable moral conduct of the male protagonists, and the prominent role that rhetoric exercises in their speeches, the tale constitutes yet another opportunity to reaffirm the strength and power of love.<sup>39</sup> Titus makes this clear in the midst of his all-consuming passion for Sophronia: "Le leggi d'amore sono di maggior potenza che alcune altre: elle rompono, non che quelle della amistà, ma le divine." According to the words of Filomena, the story begins with a reflection on the appropriateness of human actions in

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<sup>36</sup> Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, and D. Rotunda, *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella in Prose* (New York: Haskell House Publ., 1973), H 1558.2, P 315; Rotunda, *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella in Prose*, P 315.2\*.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. Valerio Massimo, *Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri IX*, IV.7; Cicero, *De officiis*, III.10; and *Tuscolanae* V.22, quoted by Branca's commentary on *Decameron*, X.8.1.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Pietro Alfonsi, *Disciplina clericalis: sapienza orientale e scuola delle novelle*, ed. C. Leone, intr. L. Minervini, Testi e documenti di letteratura e di lingua, XXXI (Roma: Salerno, 2010). The second story, here, takes place in Baghdad.

<sup>39</sup> Salvatore Battaglia, *La coscienza letteraria del Medioevo*, 521, underlines the uniqueness of setting in the ancient world, and maintains that, in doing so, Boccaccio intended to indicate that in his own time, and among his contemporaries, the story would not be possible. H. I. Needler, "Song of a Ravished Nightingale: Attitudes toward Antiquity in *Decameron* X.8," *Literary Review* 23 (1980): 502-518 emphasizes that there is no easy continuity between the classical past as represented in this tale and the culture of Boccaccio's own time. The classical past would be also parodied and made useless as an accessible model of behavior (503). Needler, moreover, goes as far as to say that the unavailability of classical ideals is something that concerns temperament and character of individuals in any age and social order (510). In her highly rhetorical article, exclusively made of rhetorical question, Barbara L. Blackburn, "The Eighth Story of the Tenth Day of Boccaccio's *Decameron*," emphasizes the humanistic aspects of the tale as represented by the treatment and usage of classical rhetoric as well as by didactical purpose reflected in the persuasive arguments used by the ancients and defined by Aristotle. R. Hyatte, "Reconfiguring Ancient *Amicitia Perfecta* in the *Decameron* 10,8," *Italian Quarterly* 32:125-6 (1995): 27-37 suggests that the exemplary virtue that the protagonists demonstrate, and which qualifies them as perfect friends, is the orator's virtue which Cicero's *De oratore* identifies and praises. Boccaccio, thus, would revise the ancient concept of *amicitia perfecta* in the light of the orator's virtue and identify ethical friendship with the ideal orator's ethos.

relation to social rank. Magnificence befits the rank of kings; those who have sufficient means must be liberal; and those who behave according to their nature act well. In light of these syllogistic premises, the munificent action of a person with meager resources (belonging to a lower rank) becomes even more worthy of praise, and his action certainly rises to the dignity of a king (X.8.3-4). The necessary correspondence between social rank and action fitting that rank falls, again, within the Stoic view, and Boccaccio inserts the discussion of the 'convenient action' into the mechanism of progression of virtues, which is particularly expanded in the Tenth Day. This story, however, adds a touch of wonder and awe to the previous one, as the actions performed by these characters are even more virtuous. The protagonists of the story are the two friends Titus and Gisippus. As was customary for Roman nobles of that time, Titus is sent to study in Athens.<sup>40</sup> Gisippus, instead, gets engaged and is about to get married. The woman designated to marry Gisippus is Sophronia (= the wise / the judicious?). So far, then, we only see the typical love triangle which is very common in the *Decameron*. But soon afterwards Titus falls in love at first sight with Sophronia. His first monologue sums up all the concepts of practical philosophy: convenient action, honesty, knowledge deriving from the rational faculties of the intellect, and reason, which is supposed to curb carnal appetites by opening the eye of the mind:

Ahi! misera la vita tua, Tito! Dove e in che pon tu l'animo e l'amore e la speranza tua? Or non conosci tu, sì per li ricevuti onori da Cremete e dalla sua famiglia, e sì per la intera amicizia la quale è tra te e Gisippo, di cui costei è sposa, questa giovane *convenirsi* avere in quella reverenza che sorella? Che dunque ami? Dove ti lasci trasportare allo 'ngannevole amore? Dove alla lusinghevole speranza? Apri *gli occhi dello 'ntelletto*, e te medesimo, o misero, riconosci; dà luogo alla *ragione*, raffrena il *concupiscibile appetito*, tempera i disideri non sani, e ad altro *dirizza i tuoi pensieri*; contrasta in questo cominciamento alla tua libidine, e *vinci te medesimo*, mentre che tu hai tempo. Questo *non si conviene* che tu vuogli, questo *non è onesto*; questo a che tu seguir ti disponi, eziandio essendo certo di giugnerlo (che non se'), tu il dovresti fuggire, se quello riguardassi che la vera amistà richiede e che tu dei. Che dunque farai, Tito? Lascera il *non convenevole* amore, se quello vorrai fare che si *conviene*. (X.8.13-15)

As in the tale of King Charles, to fight and win the power of appetites is equal to win oneself. Similarly, the appeal to win oneself ("vinci te medesimo") echoes the love sufferings that Boccaccio mentioned in the Proemio. Then, Titus' monologue goes on discussing the conflict between the laws of love and those of friendship; such a conflict has always resulted into much more aberrant romances ("Quante volte ha già il padre la figliuola amata, il fratello la sorella, la matrigna il figliastro? Cose più monstruose che l'uno amico amar la moglie dell'altro, già fattosi mille volte" [X.8.16]).<sup>41</sup> Finally, Titus concludes that, as he is still a young person, honest things do not belong to him; instead, he should follow what love demands: "Oltre a questo io son giovane, e la giovinezza è tutta sottoposta all'amorose forze. Quello adunque che ad Amor piace a me convien che piaccia. L'oneste cose s'appartengono a' più maturi; io non posso volere se non quello che Amor vuole" (X.8.17). Here, the power of love is thwarted by the action

<sup>40</sup> The *custum* is also mentioned in the introduction of Cicero's *De officiis*, and Cicero devoted his treaty to his son Marcus, a long time student of Cratippus of Athens.

<sup>41</sup> In this respect, Cavallini, *La decima giornata del Decameron*, 131, maintains that Titus' interior debate, which contrasts the duties of friendship with love's force, is a mere conventional rhetorical exercise.

of Fortune, but not because Titus' passion is wrong (X.8.19). Vexed by these inner thoughts, however, Titus torments himself for a long time, often changing opinion.

As Titus confesses everything to his friend, Gisippus in turn reproaches him for having hidden his love pains. Gisippus believes that Titus' actions are truly 'honest'. Had they been dishonest, Titus should not have kept them under silence, since part of friendship consists in sharing both honest and dishonest things (X.8.25). Finally, Gisippus decides to do an honest thing: namely, renouncing to Sophronia in the name of their old friendship and for the fact that Titus loves her more intensely than him. In other words, Gisippus considers both himself and Titus worthy of Sophronia's love, but, by making both a qualitative and a quantitative assessment, he finally judges Titus much more in love and worthy of it (X.8.31). Furthermore, Fortune, whose bad attitude is here lamented by Titus, was anything but indulgent as she entrusted Sophronia to Gisippus, his friend, rather than to another one who would have probably liked to keep her only for himself (X.8.27-28). Then, the friendship contest continues. After Gisippus' response, Titus is torn between the desire of having the woman and the morally just decision of not taking advantage of his friend's generosity. Finally, he decides to reject the offer based on another motivation, a transcendental one: had God thought that Sophronia was a 'fitting' divine gift for Titus, she would have never been granted to Gisippus. Hence, Titus can consider himself unworthy of that gift (X.8.33-34). In reply to him, Gisippus says that the friendship that binds them is such that gives him the privilege of forcing him to follow his will, especially since his will befits the particular interests of Titus. The long diatribe ends with Titus finally complying to Gisippus' wish and arguing that his generosity has overcome Titus' shame ("Ecco, Gisippo, io non so quale io mi dica che io faccia più, o il mio piacere o il tuo, facendo quello che tu pregando mi di'che tanto ti piace; e poi che la tua liberalità è tanta che vince la mia debita vergogna, e io il farò" [X.8.40]). After a harsh rhetorical struggle where both men compete in altruism, and after seeing both characters pondering their conflicting feelings as well as evaluating their reasons, the final balance of the forces involved in this dispute between friendship and love, fitting and honest, is reestablished on the basis of ethical reflection. The 'golden mean' is identified precisely by balancing the forces and feelings involved. Besides being a contest of practical knowledge, a school diatribe on the theme of friendship, or even an academic discussion on a difficult case study, that between Titus and Gisippus is also a demonstration of how the practical philosophy of the 'golden mean' can be applied on possible cases and how these cases may be resolved by weighing the reasons of the individuals involved, their social conventions, and the specific strengths of their feelings.

But what at first glance seems a final resolution—a happy ending produced with the 'weapons' of philosophy and rhetoric—is just the first act of this long tale. The diatribe of Titus and Gisippus is nothing but the parodic anticipation of the embarrassing predicament that takes place immediately after the marriage. All the verbal skirmishes, the careful choice of argumentations, the contest of liberality and generosity, and the contrasting feelings of this second part of the tale sound exaggerated enough to make us suspicious of their real appropriateness. And what about Sophronia? So far, she has not even appeared on the scene; we do not even know if she truly loves Gisippus, or if she has ever been in contact with Titus. What are her feelings? After Titus has agreed to receive Sophronia from Gisippus' hands, the two friends face the problem of communicating their decision to their families and thus, fearing possible resentment, set a

trap for Sophronia: they plan to celebrate the marriage between Gisippus and Sophronia as if nothing had happened, but they also decide that, at the moment of their first night together, instead of Gisippus, Titus would secretly enter the nuptial bed and consummate his marriage with Sophronia. Things go as planned and, although it is not clear how long Sophronia would remain in her deception of being the wife of Gisippus, the trick, however, seems to be over soon. Upon Titus' return to Rome following the death of his father, the two friends are forced to reveal their trick to Sophronia. A pandemonium inevitably breaks out; Sophronia's family gets mad and calls for a punishment for Gisippus's actions. Gisippus defends himself saying that he was just doing an honest thing ("Ma egli sé *onesto cosa* aver fatta affermava e da dovernegli essere rendute grazie da' parenti di Sofronia, avendola a miglior di sé maritata" [X.8.53]). Ridiculous excuse, indeed, at this point of the story! The honest reasons, so well argued by the two philosopher friends, prove to be so inadequate that it is not even necessary to provide further explanations.

That Gisippo's reasons are not convincing is demonstrated by the fact that Sophronia's relatives seem to never stop arguing. Soon, the rhetorical intervention of Titus takes over the development of the story. Titus discusses, argues his defense, and draws conclusions with a perfect oratory style. His very long harangue essentially consists in considering both advantages and disadvantages of the two rivals in order to demonstrate that one's merits have more weight than the other's. The reasons given in defense of their actions, however, are various, and not all of them fully convincing. It will be helpful, then, to dwell on just a few of them. One of Titus' argumentations refers to the concept that the goodness of the end (or the goodness of effects) invalidates the deceitfulness of the means (or person) that made those actions possible (X.8.74-75)—this actually recalls Machiavelli's saying that "the end justifies the means." Moreover, Titus' reasons are not convincing, since, in his defense, he does not consider Sophronia's desires. (Besides, her feelings and desires are totally insignificant and secondary in the representation of the whole affair.) Sophronia's honesty, which should be the subject of the dispute, and that Titus says to have actually safeguarded (X.8.78), in fact would certainly be offended had she not possessed the intention to grant her favors to Titus. Moreover, while Titus remarks that Sophronia consented to the marriage by saying "yes" in front of the priest and by giving Gisippus the wedding band on Titus' behalf (X.8.80), the fact that Sophronia, being deceived, believed to eventually agree to the consummation of the marriage with Gisippus is completely ignored. Therefore, Titus' conclusions (X.8.84) do not appear convincing, at least to a reader expert of rhetorical artifices and attentive to the nature of the arguments. (Did Boccaccio want to test his female readers' ability to recognize the righteousness of the arguments?). That there is something strange in Titus' speech, however, can be inferred from the fact that it ends with a veiled threat of retaliation against the family and with Titus disdainfully escaping from the temple where the relatives of the two families were assembled and where he delivered his speech. The stunning story of Sophronia's deception ends with a practical decision dictated by a pure, worldly interest. The relatives, partly convinced by Titus' reasons, partly frightened by his threats, come to the agreement that Titus is better than Gisippus, and that it is better to have Titus as their relative rather than losing Gisippus and having Titus as enemy. Sophronia, as a 'wise' person who thinks that what cannot be cured must be endured,

immediately offers Titus the same love that she had for Gisippus, and eventually goes to Rome with Titus.

From here on, the story takes a different direction. Impoverished and fallen into disgrace, Gisippus is forced to flee from Athens. Remembering his friend Titus, he goes to Rome to beg for help. When, at first, he fails to approach him, he believes himself scorned by Titus, and soon afterwards, in order to be put to death, claims that he has murdered a man. In front of the magistrate Varrus, however, Gisippus is recognized by his friend, and Titus, thanks to his great generosity, manages to save him by declaring that he himself committed the murder. The story comes to an end like in Madonna Dianora's tale (X.5): after the confession of the actual murderer, the worth of generosity is finally acknowledged by Octavian and the three (Titus, Gisippus and the murderer) are set free. Gisippus is welcomed and restored into Titus' house; Titus shares with his friend all his possessions and gives him his sister in marriage. The exemplarity of the tale is therefore emphasized by the author's conclusions about the sanctity of friendship. Friendship matters more than family, for, according to the authority of Valerius Maximus and Aristotle's *Ethics*, friendship is sought voluntarily, while family is assigned by destiny. The thematic structure of the tale is clearly stated in the final words of Boccaccio—words beautifully interwoven with the usual rhetoric. However, what should strike the reader's attention most—and what actually impresses the storytellers (cf. X.9.2)—is the magnificent gratitude of Titus, who manages to save the situation and to restore everybody's harmony and happiness despite the questionable actions of the two friends and the unwise decisions of Sophronia's relatives. Gisippus' generosity, instead, appears negligible, since he does not care that much of Sophronia; he even admits that his generous act of granting her to his friend would not have been as such if finding a woman had not been as difficult as finding a true friend: "Alla qual cosa forse così liberal non sarei, se così rade o con quella difficoltà le mogli si trovasser, che si truovan gli amici; e per ciò, potend'io leggerissimamente altra moglie trovare, ma non altro amico, io voglio innanzi (non vo'dir perder lei, ché non la perderò dandola a te, ma ad un altro me la trasmuterò di bene in meglio) trasmutarla, che perder te" (X.8.38).

The characteristics that describe friendship in this story refer to the concept of friendship as exposed in Cicero's *Laelius* and *De officiis*.<sup>42</sup> Like Cicero's son to whom the *De officiis* is dedicated, it is no coincidence that Titus is sent to Athens to study with a Greek philosopher. The intertextuality with the *De officiis*, therefore, appears to be well-founded. However, one may wonder whether Titus and Gisippus' story does not really represent a parodic reversal of the *De officiis*' ethics. In this perspective, Boccaccio would draw on the philosophical categories set out in the Latin treatise, but, in the end, he would change them as much as to declare the victory of both Titus' appetite<sup>43</sup> and the practical advantage of Sophronia's family. As a matter of fact, the two friends are truly dishonest since they privilege fraud over the good when they encourage Titus' lust against both Sophronia's dignity and Gisippus' honor.<sup>44</sup> According to Victoria Kirkham and Giuseppe Mazzotta, however, it is reason that prevails in the story, and the story plays on the search

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<sup>42</sup> V. Kirkham, "The Classic Bond of Friendship in Boccaccio's Tito and Gisippo (*Decameron* 10.8)," in A. S. Bernardo and S. Levin, eds., *The Classics in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Twentieth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies* (Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies, 1990), 229.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 254-60.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Battaglia, *La coscienza letteraria del Medioevo*, 424.



for wisdom (the Greek etymology of Sophronia may allude to wisdom).<sup>45</sup> In my opinion, this can be true only in the sense that, in this case as in similar ones in the *Decameron*, the reason that in the end prevails is the practical reason, namely, the faculty of the mind that analyzes events with an end in view, the faculty that ponders all the possibilities in order to offer a final solution based on the honest or the useful. Thus, Titus and Gisippus can be viewed as two characters in search of practical wisdom in the city of Athens, which, according to other works of Boccaccio, symbolizes precisely wisdom.<sup>46</sup> Just as in the Sixth Day, knowledge is obtained through a swift action of the mind (an act of recognition) and made explicit in a final sentence that, for its intrinsic characteristics, is comparable to the wisdom produced by the *motto* ("di necessità virtù"). The *persuasio* inherent in Titus' oratory is just the initial rhetorical stage of the cognitive process that is eventually disclosed in the outcome of the tale. The final stage of this process, instead, is achieved with the recognition of the actions to be done in the peculiar, practical situation and with the decisions to be made on future actions: not only are Sophronia and her family fully convinced by Titus and Gisippus, but they also acquire a complete and clear view of the situation, which in turn allows them to make a right choice based on the *most* convenient result.

In sum, we must emphasize that Titus' unconvincing reasons definitively collapse with a strict obedience to the theory of honesty. As often repeated in his words, the basic principles elaborated in Titus' speech do not guarantee the secure realization of an honest conduct. What remains solid and uncontroverted in the story is the peculiar power of friendship and gratitude, which can finally prevail despite the hampering influence of external circumstances. The reasons of honesty, or even reason itself that should reflect and prevail over the appetites, are not enough to ensure the fulfillment of the good end that every individual seeks during his life. The category of honesty, in particular, takes on even more shadowy and indistinct features. In the intricacy of argumentations, one no longer comprehends what honesty is, and one cannot even rely on reason to identify it as it appears in the infinite, reiterated rhetorical dialogues between Titus and Gisippus as well as by Titus' complex speech. The 'honest' is even more inadequate to guide our choices; all the attention of the story focuses, as it were, on action and on a few sententious considerations about the resolution of the story: "Per la qual cosa andati, ritrovar Tito e dissero che piaceva lor che Sofronia fosse sua, e d'aver lui per caro parente e Gisippo per buono amico; e fattasi parentevole e amichevole festa insieme, si dipartirono e Sofronia gli rimandarono. La quale, sì come savia, *fatta della necessità virtù*, l'amore il quale aveva a Gisippo prestamente rivolse a Tito; e con lui se n'andò a Roma, dove con grande onore fu ricevuta" (X.8.89). Boccaccio is not interested in explaining the reasons for Sophronia changing her feelings. When she easily adapts herself to love Titus without even considering the possibility of staying with the man she truly loves, Boccaccio quickly motivates the resolution of the whole love story with that "*fatta della necessità virtù*." Beyond the legendary aspects that appear in the final scene, the whole story is accurately based on various failed attempts to match the reasons of the heart with those of honesty, and on the awareness that, at the end of the day, what matters most is not sentiment, but the reasons of necessity. These reasons are also established through the characters' ingenuity, which manages to turn necessity into virtue, even

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<sup>45</sup> Kirkham, "The Classic Bond of friendship," 229; Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 257.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Teseida*, II, 2, 4; *Decameron*, Concl. 21; *De casibus* 1.10; *De mulieribus* 6.7.

though, in the end, the dictates of necessity inevitably prevail over reason and affection. The 'useful', in this case, prevails upon the 'honest', which (according to Christian morality) should have satisfied, instead, the lovers' desires and not just considered the worldly side of the story. What matters also is the swift power of intelligence that can resolve any type of situation by adapting a personal, original vision of the world to different circumstances—the intelligence of both Sophronia's relatives and Titus and Gisippus who orchestrated their plans so well to succeed in convincing the opposing parties.

Even the story of Messer Torello (X.9) shows aspects related to the search of what is convenient. After the first episode of the story in which Saladin is honorably hosted and entertained in Pavia, Torello decides to set off on a crusade and authorizes his wife to marry again in case he were not able to return after one year. His wife declares her complete devotion to her husband, and yet promises to fulfil Torello's desire to have her remarried, although it would be more honorable to do otherwise ("Io farò ciò che io potrò di quello che detto v'ho; e quando pure altro far mi convenisse, io v'ubidirò, di questo che m'imponete, certamente" [X.9.46]). The natural inclination of the *Decameron's* characters to acquire knowledge is evident, here, in their willingness to conceal their social status, or the nature of their courtliness, in order to disclose it only at the end, after a final recognition. When Torello hosts Saladin in his house, Torello suspects, and 'believes,' that he is not really just a merchant but a noble man ("Messere, egli potrà ancora avvenire che noi *vi farem vedere* di nostra mercatantia, per la quale noi la vostra *credenza* raffermeremo; e andatevi con Dio" [X.9.38]). This suspect is confirmed by Saladin himself when Torello, who has been taken prisoner by Saladin and becomes a hunting birds trainer, is finally recognized: "Voi siete messer Torel di Strà, e io sono l'uno de' tre mercatanti a' quali la donna vostra donò queste robe; e ora è venuto il tempo di *far certa* la vostra *credenza* qual sia la mia mercatantia, come nel partirmi da voi dissi che potrebbe avvenire" (X.9.57). Of course, the commodity in question ("la mia mercatantia") is the courtliness that befits a real gentleman, but the understanding of the mechanism of this special language that pertains only to virtuous men is developed through the usual process of recognition. Knowledge, in this case, is acquired during the transition from belief to certainty, from *believing* something to *being sure* of something; the virtue of courtesy, then, is exercised even under the state of mere belief, and just for this reason, it has to be considered a noble virtue. In the final scene of the tale, Torello truly understands the nature of Saladin's magnificence when, thanks to magic arts, he is transported to Pavia in a single night:

Messer Torello, *aperti gli occhi* e dattorno guatatosi, *conobbe manifestamente* sé essere là dove al Saladino domandato avea, di che forte fu seco contento; per che, a seder levatosi e partitamente guardando ciò che dattorno avea, quantunque prima avesse la *magnificenzia del Saladin conosciuta*, ora gli parve maggiore e *più la conobbe* (X.9.92)

Like in the tale of Titus and Gisippus, there is a courtesy contest between the two men; Torello's regret for having failed to provide Saladin with proper hospitality is mirrored by Saladin's regret for not having been able to pay the due honors when he had send Torello to Pavia on a magical bed. But, above all, even here, the tale portrays the feelings that come into play at the moment of reflection before making a decision. When Saladin recognizes Torello, Torello is torn between two conflicting feelings: happiness, for

having hosted such a high-rank nobleman, and shame, for having housed him, as he admitted, so poorly and in a way that certainly would not be suited to his rank (X.9.58).

Finally, in order to further see how the knowing process of the *honestum* works, we have to read the last tale of the Day. Not surprisingly, there are different and alternative readings of the character of Griselda. As they all seek to resolve the multiple perspectives that created the charm of the story, they also confirm the author's attitude to write a story that could raise different ethical views.<sup>47</sup> (a) An interpretation of the character of Griselda as a Marian figure (Branca<sup>48</sup>) clashes with another (b) developed on the theme of biblical patience, for which Griselda is compared to Job (Petrarch;<sup>49</sup> Mazzotta<sup>50</sup>). (c) According to another interpretation, Griselda is considered an allegorical *figura Christi* (Cottino-Jones;<sup>51</sup> actually, the interpretation of Griselda as *figura Christi* in some sense was already identified by Petrarch's Latin rewriting). If we consider the second interpretation, where the Marquis of Saluzzo, Gualtieri, is seen as a kind of God figure who tests the exceptional virtue of Griselda (her patience), the final evaluation of the tale leaves the reader in a state of interpretative *impasse*. In fact, Gualtieri makes his wife Griselda believe that he put to death their children; then, he publicly renounces Griselda claiming he has been granted papal dispensation to divorce her and marry a better woman, and Griselda endures this situation with patience. Gualtieri seems to operate as Providence who has the power to put individuals to a test. However, in Cepparello's tale, a general consideration on Providence's power to operate in the world puzzled us as to the rightness of her actions, that is, whether it is fair, and lawful, to achieve good ends with wrong and evil means. Now, in the story of Griselda, similar issues arise again to the reader's attention. Is it right (and lawful) that Griselda's virtues be tested by such cruel means? This question is not explicitly formulated by the text, but seems to be legitimate after reading of all the crimes inflicted on Griselda, and after some allusions of the text reporting the narrative voice of Gualtieri's advisers allowed us to be skeptical on his excess of cruelty: "*savissimo* reputaron Gualtieri, come che troppo reputassero agre e intollerabili l'esperienze prese della sua donna; e sopra tutti *savissima* tenner Griselda" (X.10.66). The medieval reader was certainly capable of grasping the legendary significance of Griselda's story and comparing it with the mainstream tradition

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<sup>47</sup> K. Malone, "Patient Griselda," *Romanic Review* 20 (1929): 340-345 sets the novella in the fable tradition and hypothesizes an oriental archetype. W. A. Cate, "The Problem of the Origin of the Griselda Tale," *Studies in Philology* 29 (1932): 389-405 recalls the analogies with the myth of Cupid and Psyche. G. Barberi Squarotti, "L'ambigua sociologia di Griselda," *Annali Facolta di Magistero Universita di Palermo* 1970: 32-75, shows how Boccaccio manages to create "un parlare doppio" which mixes the language and logic of the fable with the Christian language of the relation between God and His creatures. Moreover, Boccaccio shuts the magic and the hagiographical modes with sociological reality, thus promoting the ascent of the lower classes with the means of the marriage.

<sup>48</sup> Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 17-18.

<sup>49</sup> *De insigni obedientia et fide uxoria, sive historia Griseldis*, in Petrarca, *Seniles* XVII, 3. Cf. also R. Morbito, "La diffusione della storia di Griselda dal XIV al XX secolo," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 17 (1988): 237-285.

<sup>50</sup> Mazzotta, *The World at Play*, 123-124 mentions biblical examples and compares Griselda's language with the figure of Job.

<sup>51</sup> M. Cottino-Jones, "Fabula vs. Figura: Another Interpretation of the Griselda Story," *Italica* 50 (1973): 38-52. On Griselda's tale see also R. Bessi, "La Griselda del Petrarca," in E. Malato, ed., *La novella italiana. Atti del Convegno di Caprarola 1988*, 2: 711-26; C. Haines, "Patient Griselda and *matta bestialitate*," *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 6 (1985): 233-240; V. Kirkham, "The Last Tale in the Decameron," *Mediaevalia* 12 (1989): 205-223.

of saints' lives. Yet, is it possible that the reader have privileged the legendary meaning of Griselda, instead of failing to express a judgment on the legitimacy of Gualtieri's cruelty? In other words, in the context of practical philosophy, are Gualtieri's cruelties appropriate, 'fitting,' to glorify the virtues of a woman? Does Gualtieri truly have such a long-range perspective of things to sense the moral power of Griselda and bring the story to a happy end by operating for "antiveduto fine"? Is his alleged far-sighted action equally and truly justified? This does not seem verisimilar to me, so much so that the final resolution of the story certainly leaves us with a bitter taste. Judging from her sufferings and the many tears dropped, the character of Griselda does not look like a saint; she is not completely immune from feelings that are proper to a flesh and blood human being. This last impression, besides being supported by modern critics,<sup>52</sup> is also confirmed by ancient readers, who, by constantly putting into question the standards of human values expressed by Gualtieri and Griselda, felt compelled to write another finale for the tale.<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, to a closer look, in the tale, multiple perspectives overlap: that of Dioneo, Gualtieri, Griselda, and the marquis' advisors. Generally, Dioneo's perspective always stands at a conventional human level, or even at a low level of understanding.<sup>54</sup> Dioneo's function seems to be that to act as the black crow of Boccaccio's *Corbaccio*: by proposing his partial view of the story, he actually facilitates the understanding of a higher level reading that transcends the literal interpretation.<sup>55</sup> If we examine the various ways in which Boccaccio manipulates Dioneo in order to create various levels of meaning in the tale, we realize that, in the *Decameron*, Dioneo has an ambivalent function comparable to that of the *alazon*, the impostor that sees himself as greater than he actually is, like the opponent of the *eiron* in Greek tragedy. After all, that in this story two different perspectives are supposed to coexist is explicitly stated by the words of Dioneo himself who aims to tell about a case of "matta bestialitate," and not about magnificence.

In terms of an ethical reading of the *Decameron*, this last consideration (on the possibility to accommodate different perspectives in the interpretation of the text) offers us the opportunity to measure the distance that separates the popular interpretation of De Sanctis from what nowadays we are able to understand of the *Decameron*. As we are supported by much more detailed studies in all areas of the literary scope, the separation that De Sanctis imposed between Dante's literary production and that of Boccaccio in so far as moral issues are concerned appears to us today much less clear and with different characteristics. At this point of our ethical reflection, if we read the *Decameron* through the lens of realism and compare it with Dante's work, as was the case in De Sanctis, we

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<sup>52</sup> Momigliano, *Decameron. 49 novelle commentate*, 35, thought that Griselda was a poor idiot. Bergin, *Boccaccio*, 323, considered her "pathologically submissive." A. Bonadeo, "Marriage and Adultery in the *Decameron*," *Philological Quarterly* 60 (1981): 287-303 maintains that Griselda's personality was violated by "sadistic abuse and rejection." Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason*, 263, instead, does not accept an ironic reading of the novella.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. V. Branca, "La diffusione della Griselda," *Studi petrarcheschi* 6 (1956): 221-224; I. T. Rutter, "The Function of Dioneo's Perspective in the Griselda Story," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 5 (1974): 33-42, in part. 33-34.

<sup>54</sup> A. Duranti, "Le novelle di Dioneo," in A. Duranti and M. Pieri, eds., *Studi di filologia e critica offerti dagli allievi a Lanfranco Caretti* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1985), I: 1-38.

<sup>55</sup> Rutter, "The Function of Dioneo's Perspective," 39-40.

realize that the reality illustrated by the *Decameron* is much more 'real' and tangible than that of the *Commedia*, but also as much artificial and endowed with literariness.<sup>56</sup> In particular, Boccaccio's ethical reflection not only takes advantage of a considerably more varied and complex series of cases on which to formulate theories than that of Dante—and, moreover, it is increased with the possibility of different perspectives—but it is also built on such a philosophical depth that, if not superior, it is at least as much developed and justified.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, that of Boccaccio is an ethical reflection of a different nature, more philosophical, as it were, more erudite, and whose preferred means of communication is not the personal invective expressed in the first person, but the peculiar power of language to allow the voice of the characters to speak, rather than the voice of the author to teach a lesson. Thus, in Boccaccio's work, no neat passage is traceable from the "spirituality" of the *Commedia* to the sensuality of the early modern era,<sup>58</sup> but only a non-antithetical genre of dramatized ethical reflection that, if not complementary to that of Dante, is certainly different and complex.

### *Conclusions and possible developments*

The study of literature produces *knowledge* in the same way science, philosophy, or history do without using the powerful means of language and rhetoric. As epistemologists concern themselves with determining the nature and the extent of human knowledge, writers and poets experience the world by representing it with images and metaphors that are distant from daily discourse, yet are able to unveil the imaginative and verbal power that lies concealed both in everyday things and in the historical past. Modern epistemology constitutes a helpful critical grid to study the language of literature and identify the subjects and key concepts of literary analysis, yet it alone cannot be enough to explain the manifold implications, terminologies, and historical developments that a literary work can convey. The reciprocal influence of epistemology and literary theory ideally aims to explore both the nature of literary works as signs, bearers of hidden meanings, and their philosophical implications, in order to better comprehend the world

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<sup>56</sup> On the presence of both reality and imagination (as style) in the *Decameron*, see Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron*, 23-48 and 323-325.

<sup>57</sup> Boccaccio's capacity to analyze reality without abstract moralization was already noted by Auerbach (cf. *Mimesis*, trans. Trask, 193).

<sup>58</sup> "Lo spirito del Boccaccio è meno nell'intelletto che nell'immaginazione, meno nel cercar rapporti lontani che nel produrre forme comiche. Lo studio che i suoi antecessori pongono a spiritualizzare, lui lo pone a incorporare. E cerca l'effetto non in questo o quel tratto, ma nell'insieme, nella massa degli accessori tutti stretti come una falange. Gli antecessori fanno schizzi: egli fa descrizioni. Quelli cercano l'impressione più che l'oggetto; egli si chiude e si trincerava nell' oggetto e lo percorre e rivolta tutto. Perciò spesso hai più il corpo e meno l'impressione; più sensazione che sentimento; più immaginazione che fantasia; più sensualità che voluttà. . . . Appunto perchè questi fiori non mandano profumi, e queste luci non gittano raggi, tu hai sensazioni e non sentimenti, immaginazione e non fantasia, sensualità e non voluttà. . . . È il mondo cinico e malizioso della carne, rimasto nelle basse sfere della sensualità e della caricatura spesso buffonesca, inviluppato leggiadramente nelle grazie e nei vezzi di una forma piena di civetteria, un mondo plebeo che fa le fiche allo spirito, grossolano ne' sentimenti, ragentilito e imbellettato dall'immaginazione, entro del quale si move elegantemente il mondo borghese dello spirito e della coltura con reminiscenze cavalleresche. È la nuova *Commedia*, non la divina, ma la terrestre *Commedia*. Dante si avvolge nel suo lusso, e sparisce dalla vista. Il medio evo con le sue visioni, le sue leggende, i suoi misteri, i suoi terrori e le sue ombre e le sue estasi è cacciato dal Tempio dell' arte. E vi entra rumorosamente il Boccaccio e si tira appresso per lungo tempo tutta l'Italia" (De Sanctis, *St. lett. it.*, 347, 349, 356-357).

outside us. Therefore, the study of literature is paramount to understand the interactions, dynamics, and nature of the world. Even when scholars do not agree on what knowledge is, understanding the cognitive and epistemic character of literature is key to increasing our ability to identify the necessary conditions which determine knowledge acquisition. This dissertation aimed to contribute to this endeavor by centering on the epistemological implications of the *Decameron* and by exploring the unclear relationship between literary production and epistemological foundation.

Overall, this dissertation has explored a wide range of Boccaccio's readings and the extent to which he transformed what he read, whether in the philosophical, classical, and romance traditions. Boccaccio's exceptional independence vis-à-vis other authors is informed by a deep knowledge of the epistemological tradition, which he amply display in both the *Decameron* and his minor works. I have explored the philosophical implications of the *Decameron* in connection with Boccaccio's minor works and attempted to ascertain his attitudes towards philosophy, in order to evaluate how a theoretical reflection on the nature of rhetoric and poetic imagination can ultimately elicit a theory of knowledge.

Besides re-establishing poetry among the intellectual and moral values of his times and raising it to the level of philosophy, Boccaccio theorized the myth used by poets as having a meaning which goes beyond the literal understanding and which the reader must discover. Ancient literature provides us with delight through fables, but this delight is a means of conveying a truth hidden beneath the allegorical fiction. If this is the right interpretation of the *Genealogies*, then, one can supposedly find a similar attitude in the *Decameron* on the part of its author. In other words, Boccaccio's collection of tales could be also understood beyond its literal sense and, consequently, each tale could hide a truth beneath the literary fiction. To describe what kind of truth may be concealed by the *Decameron* and, specifically, what kind of philosophical truth, underlies the *cortex* of the literal sense of the tales has been the purpose of this work. This also explains the decision to start with the *Genealogies* in order to give a different interpretative perspective on the *Decameron*. Accordingly, as the interpretation of mythology in its own terms becomes a pivotal point in Boccaccio's defense of poetry, an interpretation that goes beyond the literal meaning (and that takes advantage of an epistemological perspective) has been the overall purpose of this dissertation.

In connection to the study of Boccaccio's philosophical background, I have analyzed the rhetorical devices of the *Decameron* and the many ways in which Boccaccio establishes a meaningful connection between rhetoric and knowledge. As the characteristics and formal features of the *motto* in the Sixth Day of the *Decameron* have shown, rhetoric can be epistemic, and the language of the *motto* demonstrates how this metaphorical tool can be considered not only a structuring device of Boccaccio's discourse, but also a 'veil,' a poetical strategy which is able to simultaneously *conceal* and *reveal* philosophical knowledge. Boccaccio meditated at length on the relationship between philosophical and literary discourse. His *oeuvre* engages with several aspects of this relationship as they come to him from contemporary debates about literature. In particular, the possibilities offered by epistemology in medieval thought and the role of allegory and mythology as poetical devices of a latent philosophical discourse are critical means to understanding Boccaccio's theory of the nexus between rhetoric and knowledge.

The *Decameron* can be seen as a journey toward the acquisition of knowledge—be it moral, philosophical, or practical. In the Introduction to the *Decameron*, the famous simile comparing the interpretation of the text to the climbing of a mountain alludes to Dante's *Commedia* and justifies the necessity of the Black Death in eschatological terms, thereby defining the reader's experience as a sort of intellectual and spiritual progression and ascent. A reflection on the ethical aspect of the frame texts of the *Decameron* along with a proper understanding of the concept of honesty suggests a well-defined model of life that can be traced back to the practical philosophy that Boccaccio—as a reader of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas—had long meditated. The guiding principle of Natural Law evoked in the *Introduction* to the *Decameron* is most properly understood in relation to the Thomistic ethical system in which Nature and its earthly manifestations in human instincts are counterbalanced by the action of reason and free will, with the aim of achieving a practical knowledge that eventually leads to a new vision of the world.

In the transition from scholastic philosophy to humanism, Boccaccio proves to be a precursor of the early modern speculations on knowledge and the power of the mind. Through its language of knowledge and the aid of imagination, the *Decameron* portrays an author, a philosopher, attentive to the problems of how men understand the world, and gives the reader the opportunity to experiment his/her own cognitive skills. The kind of knowledge (whether moral, philosophical or practical) that comes out of the *Decameron's* discourse is certainly not traditional. In place of the medieval concept of moral teaching in which the author's thought appears to be the only possible and is exposed as a model to be imitated, Boccaccio promotes an ideal of philosophical learning and understanding that privileges a multi-facet perspective as well as the active role of the reader.<sup>59</sup>

Some of the issues related to the *Decameron's* epistemology, however, will require further investigation. For instance, it could be interesting to describe Boccaccio's stance within the poetical dialogue between Cavalcanti and Dante on the concepts of mystical vision, knowledge, brightness, wisdom—a dialogue that emerged from the lyrics of the *Stilnovo* as well as from Dante's *Commedia* (*Paradiso* X).<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, it would be necessary to evaluate the theory of knowledge in early modern Epicureanism, Averroism and Thomism, and Ockhamism, in order to provide a broader picture of the *Decameron's* philosophy and show how such philosophical movements are involved in the elaboration of Boccaccio's attitudes toward life. Finally, it would be worth exploring the epistemological implications of the *canzoni* which appear at the end of each Day of the *Decameron* and see how they are related to the overall understanding of the collection.

Moreover, another aspect of Boccaccio's discourse that has not yet been closely explored is its relationship with the tradition of the rhetorical-sophistic thought. The argumentative style was something deeply inherent to the medieval spirit, and was typically used in the teaching practices of the Middle Ages. According to the so-called *esprit de controverse*, whereby dialectic becomes the logic of the possible, the world is described and narrated by a binary discourse whose characteristics are the form of the

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<sup>59</sup> On medieval and Renaissance epistemology cf. Cummings, *Medieval Epistemology and the Rise of Science*, 2003, and Hendrix and Carman, *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, 2010.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Mocan, *La trasparenza e il riflesso*; D. Ottaviani, *La philosophie de la lumière chez Dante: Du "Convivio" à la "Divine comédie"* (Paris: Champion, 2004).

main rhetorical, philosophical, and juridical culture.<sup>61</sup> Boccaccio took on some features of the sophistic thought through Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, Seneca, and Macrobius, elaborating them in the *questioni d'amore* of the *Filocolo*, and eventually linked them to the epistemic power of language in the variety of possibilities offered by the tales of the *Decameron*.

Lastly, the study of the manuscript tradition, especially Boccaccio's autographs in Italy, would certainly turn out to be illuminating in order to characterize the author's dynamics of composition.<sup>62</sup> A systematic examination of Boccaccio's manuscripts could better define the author's philosophical background both by explaining how it influenced the making of the collection and by showing how Boccaccio structured the rhetorical bases of his vernacular prose. A fundamental source for the making of the *Decameron* is the manuscript labelled Paris, BNF, Ms. Ital. 482, which Vittore Branca identified as an early authorial redaction (years 1349-1351) of the collection before the definitive version transmitted by the codex Hamilton 90 of the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz of Berlin.<sup>63</sup> This manuscript, now held in Paris, written by Giovanni d'Agnolo Capponi by the years 1365-1369, may bring to light new philosophical aspects that hitherto have been overlooked by scholars.

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<sup>61</sup> Cf. Corti, *Il viaggio testuale*, 259; Chiappelli, "Discorso o progetto per uno studio sul 'Decameron'," in Cherchi and Picone, eds., *Studi di italianistica in onore di Giovanni Cecchetti*, 104-111.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Ianni, "Elenco dei manoscritti autografi di Giovanni Boccaccio;" Mazza, "L'inventario della 'parva libraria';" Kristeller, *Le Thomisme et la Pensée Italienne de la Renaissance*, 70; Cesari, "L'Etica di Aristotele del Codice Ambrosiano A 204 inf."

<sup>63</sup> Branca, "Studi sul testo del 'Decameron';" Branca and Vitale, *Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni*.





Fig. 1 Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*. Paris: Antoine Vérard, 1498. Beginning of Book XI.







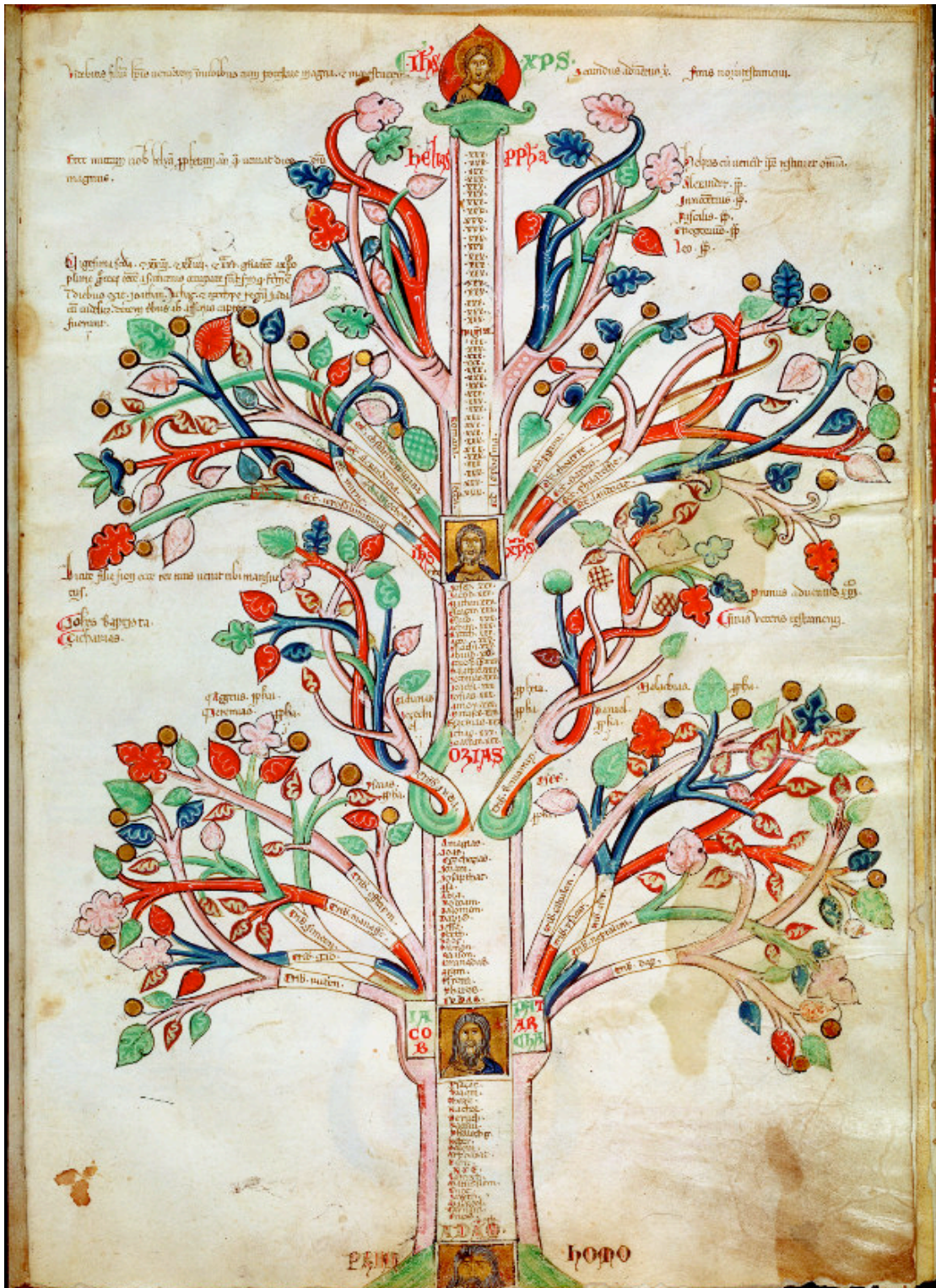
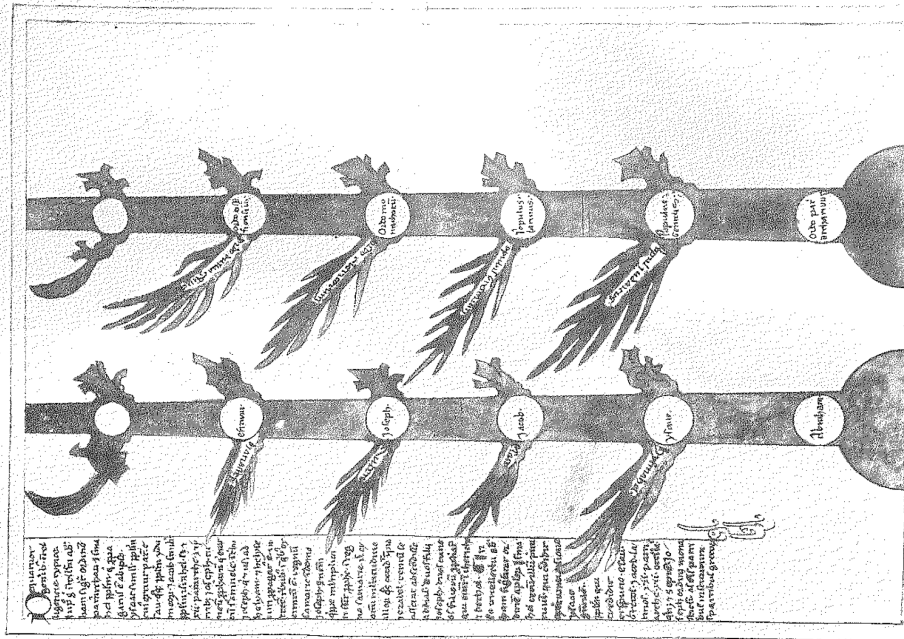
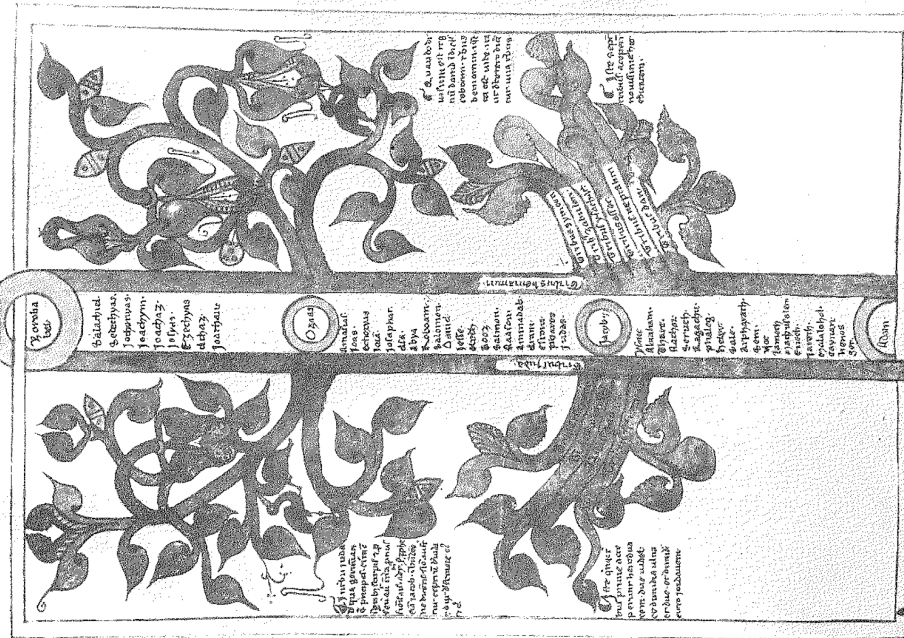


Fig. 3 The tree of humanity culminating in the Second Advent of Christ. Joachim of Fiore, *Liber figurarum*. Reggio Emilia, Seminario Vescovile Urbano (second half of the 13th century), f. unspecified.



MS Dresden A 121 fol. 89v.



MS Dresden A 121 fol. 87v.

Fig. 4 The tree of humanity. Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, A 121 (second half of the 13th century), f. 87v.





Fig. 5 Salvatore Postiglione. Motiv aus der Erzählung des Dekameron (Il *Decamerone*) von Giovanni Boccaccio (1906), oil on canvas, Öl auf Leinwand, 100 x 151 cm. (Source: Artnet).





Fig. 6 *The Stuttgart Psalter* [Saint Germain, ca. 820-830]. Stuttgart, Württembergische Landesbibliothek, Bibl., f. 55r. Psalm 42:4-5. In the first picture, the psalmist is shown playing on a lute while the soul, labeled *anima*, is seated on the hill. In the second picture, a deer is drinking from a spring (Psalms 41:2). [from E. T. De Wald, ed., *The Stuttgart Psalter: Biblia Folio 23, Wuerttembergische Landesbibliothek, Stuttgart* (Princeton: Department of Art and Archaeology of Princeton University, 1930).]



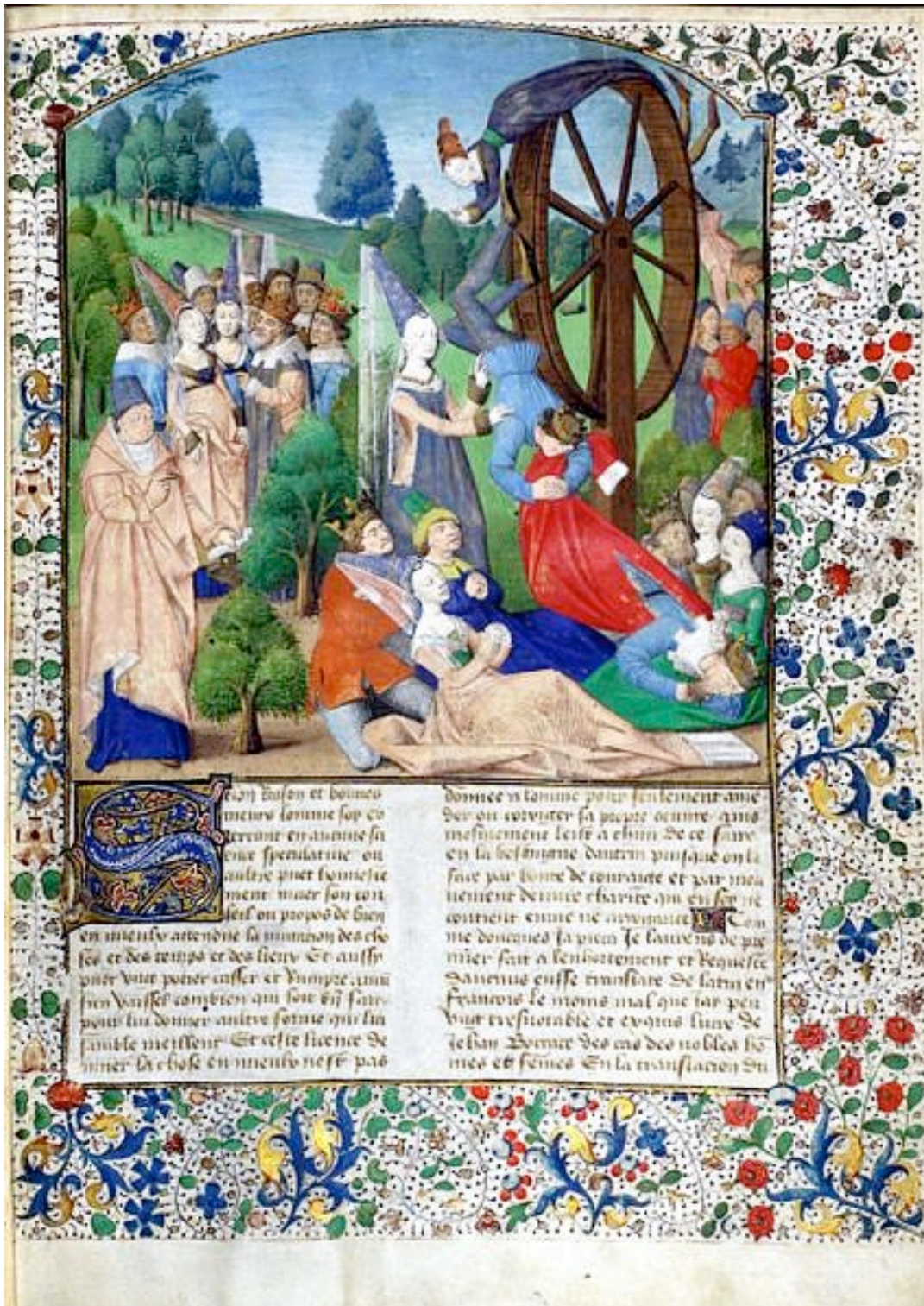


Fig. 7 The Wheel of Fortune. Boccaccio *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*. Paris: 1467, Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 371-372, vol. 1: folio 1r. French Miniaturist (15th century).





Fig. 8 Giovanni Toscani, *cassone*, tale of Ambrogiuolo and Zinevra. Edimburgh, National Gallery of Scotland.



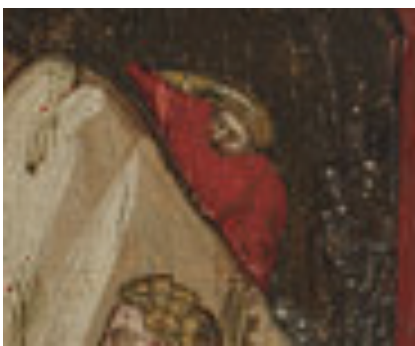


Fig. 9 Childbirth tray (desco da parto) with scenes from Boccaccio's *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*: Ameto's Discovery of the Nymphs. ca. 1410, Master of 1416 (Italian, Florentine, active early 15th century), Tempera on panel. Rogers Fund, 1926. On the right, the hunter Ameto, dressed in red, peers over a hill and discovers a group of nymphs (cf. detail).



Fig. 10 Childbirth tray (desco da parto) with scenes from Boccaccio's *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*: Contest between the Shepherds Alcesto and Acaten. ca. 1410, Master of 1416 (Italian, Florentine, active early 15th century), Tempera on panel. Rogers Fund, 1926.





Fig. 11 Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *The Countryside under the Rule of Good Government*, 1338–40, fresco, Sala dei Nove, Palazzo Pubblico, Siena.

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- Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*. A cura di Vittore Branca. Milano: A. Mondadori, 1967-98. I classici Mondadori.
- Contains:
- i : *Caccia di Diana, Filocolo*
  - ii : *Filostrato, Teseida delle nozze di Emilia, Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*
  - iii : *Amorosa visione, Ninfale fiesolano, Trattatello in laude di Dante*
  - iv : *Decameron*
  - v, 1: *Rime, Carmina, Epistole e lettere, Vite, De Canaria*
  - v, 2: *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta, Corbaccio, Consolatoria a Pino de' Rossi, Buccolicum carmen, Allegoria mitologica*
  - vi: *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*
  - vii-viii, 1-2: *Genealogie deorum gentilium*
  - vii-viii, 2 : *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, locubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludis, et de diversis nominibus maris*
  - ix : *De casibus virorum illustrium*
  - x : *De mulieribus claris*
- Elegia di madonna Fiammetta-Corbaccio*

*Trattatello in laude di Dante*  
*Vita di Petrarca (De vita et moribus Domini Francisci Petrarchi).*

### **Cronology of Boccaccio's works**

*Caccia di Diana* (1334)  
*Filostrato* (1335)  
*Filocolo* (1336)  
*Teseida* (1340-41)  
*Commedia delle Ninfe* (1341 – 42; entitled *Ninfale d'Ameto* by Quattrocento scribes and editors)  
*Amorosa Visione* (1342–43)  
*Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* (1343–1344)  
*Ninfale Fiesolano* (1349–1351)  
*De vita et moribus domini Francisci Petracchi* (1349-1353)  
*Genealogie Deorum gentilium* (1305 ca.–1375)  
*Buccolicum carmen* (1351–1366)  
*De casibus virorum illustrium* (1355–1374)  
*De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludis, et de nominibus maris liber* (1355–1374)  
*De mulieribus claris* (1361–1375)  
*Epistola consolatoria a Pino de' Rossi* (1361–1362)  
*Corbaccio* (1366)  
*Trattatello in laude di Dante* (composed in different periods: 1351, 1360, 1373)  
*Esposizioni della Commedia* (1373–1374)  
(Taken from: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca. Milano, Mondadori, 1998. Vol. I, pp. IL – LIX.)

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