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Rinaldo D'Asti:
Drama of the *Signifié*

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The issues of narration and, by extension, language stand at the very heart of Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The author's own preoccupation with the uses of narrative and manipulation of language are everywhere manifest; within the narrative frame, the art of storytelling is of constant concern to the *brigata* and countless are the novellas in which characters wrangle with problems of speech and are victims of linguistic ineptness. One need only think of the first tale of day six—as close to a structural center of this *Umana Commedia* as we are likely to define—in which madonna Oretta rejects the stammering cavaliere and requests to be let down off his horse. The curious metaphor created in this tale, by which horsebackriding, or travel, is equated to storytelling, is structurally and spiritually central to the world of the *Decameron* and pervades Boccaccio's entire work. Furthermore the act of travelling ("camminando") is often presented in the *Decameron* as a metaphorical reduction of the act of living—this will be evident in my analysis of the tale of Rinaldo d'Asti (II, ii); in this way, Boccaccio's tales are informed by the fundamental parallels, quasi identification, between movement and speech, history and narrative, life and language.

That language is the chief distinguishing trait of humanity and the direct expression of human *ratio* is a concept as valid for Boccaccio as for Dante. Boccaccio's use of the verb "ragionare" for "to narrate"

or "to speak" comes instantly to mind. As Mario Baratto suggests, Boccaccio views man's use of language as an intrinsic and natural reaction to the chaos of human existence. Man's attempts to dominate the vicissitudes of history are akin to the writer's efforts to gain control over her or his formless material by means of language:

È agevole infatti riconoscere... non solo una rispondenza tra la mutevolezza del reale e quella dello stile, ma anche l'indicazione di una struttura bipolare del *Decameron*, di una tensione fondamentale tra due elementi opposti, elementari ma determinanti: tensione, aggiungiamo, che costituisce pure la prova della nobiltà dell'assunto dello scrittore... una capacità di affrontare e in una certa misura di dominare il reale da parte dell'uomo, di resistere al mondo per non essere sopraffatto; e, correlativa e rispondente ad essa, la capacità, da parte dello scrittore, di dominare il suo materiale con uno stile consapevole di sé, adeguato al proprio contenuto. Se l'uomo ha gli strumenti per capire, e dunque per agire *sulla* realtà, lo scrittore sa esprimere a sua volta questo vario rapporto tra l'uomo e la realtà mondana.¹

The basic movement described by the *Decameron's* frame can be understood in this light: the *brigata* flees the horrific disorder of the plague in an attempt to reimpose order through narration, that is through language. As Baratto points out, this attempt «è proposta fatta in nome della 'natural ragione': quella per cui l'uomo tende ad aiutarsi, a conservare sè stesso, a salvarsi dai pericoli.»² Man's most natural and distinguishing act, then, is speech; his or her role in history, in the temporal realm, is as language-producer.

The primary importance of the linguistic nature of man is perhaps nowhere more overtly defined than in the second tale of day two, that of Rinaldo d'Asti. This tale places linguistic issues center stage. The historical events of the narrative are so consistently paralleled by concerns of language that the tale begs to be read from a linguistic viewpoint. What may seem to be a simple trial of Rinaldo's faith in the spiritual personages of San Giuliano and family is ultimately a trial of the referential capacity of language, or, to borrow from Saussure, a drama of the *signifié*.

My close narrative analysis of the Rinaldo d'Asti tale will necessitate a limited segmentation of the novella into various temporal sections

in order to facilitate discussion. As Segre illustrates, any text can be interpreted as “progressively larger groupings of signs,” each novel sign complex serving in turn as constituent sign of a larger whole.³ The first step of discourse analysis should thus be a linear, chronological division of the whole into manageable temporal segments. Since my present concerns are not purely narratological (that is, I am not primarily interested in schematizing the temporal and functional relationships within the narrative), a detailed segmentation of the entire novella will not serve my purposes. Nonetheless I shall identify segment I as the ordering of the tale (from the opening to, « il quale senza indugio alcuno incominciò. »), segment II as the preamble (from « Belle donne, ... » to « ... ancora che abbia buon letto, alberga male »), and the lengthier segment III as the introduction (from « Era adunque, ... » to « ... secondo che una mia avola me solea dire, di grandissima vertù »). My reading of the novella in a linguistic key will focus primarily on segments II and III, in which the drama of the *signifié* is established.

In these opening two segments, Boccaccio clearly and repeatedly draws the basic analogies between travel and existence (« camminare » and « essere »), and travel-existence and language (« camminare » and « ragionare »). Filostrato addresses his tale to those who are travellers in the lands of love:

Belle donne, a raccontarsi mi tira una novella di cose cattoliche e di sciagure d'amore in parte mescolata, la quale per avventura non fia altro che utile avere udita, e specialmente a coloro li quali per li dubbiosi paesi d'amore sono camminanti, ne' quali chi non ha detto il paternostro di san Giuliano, spesse volte, ancora che abbia buon letto, alberga male.⁴

This segment introduces the element of the paternoster of San Giuliano, upon which the comic mechanism of the novella is largely based. More telling, however, is the purposeful confusion between a geographical term (« camminanti... per paesi ») and an existential term (« d'amore »). Boccaccio exposes the underlying structural conceit of the entire novella in one succinct and emblematic phrase: lands of love. The tale will have special meaning for those who move through these doubt-ridden territories. Boccaccio continues the Augustinian metaphor of life as pilgrimage, but expresses it in more everyday, human terms.

Filostrato firmly establishes this parallel even before beginning to recount the story proper.

The first part of Filostrato's narration—segment III of my schematization—strictly defines the relationship between «camminare» and «ragionare» and sets up the fundamental tension between belief in and scorn of the transcendent capacity of language. Segment III contains no use of «camminare» (or its various substitutes, «andare» or «accompagnare») that is not coupled with a use of «ragionare» (or its various substitutes, «favellare» or «dire»). Moreover Boccaccio's phrase almost always places the two verbs in balanced symmetrical opposition, often connected by an adverb or adverbial phrase of ambiguous reference, thus confirming and reinforcing the thematic analogy through carefully considered syntactic structures. Having left Ferrara en route to Verona, Rinaldo soon comes upon the *masnadieri*, «con li quali ragionando incautamente s'accompagnò.» These last three words provide an overt illustration of verbal symmetry. The adverb, «incautamente,» serves as a center pivot of sorts, pointing backwards and forwards with equal strength. Movement is effectively and elegantly equated to speech.

The very next sentence offers a variation on the theme by identifying false appearance with false language. The *masnadieri* feign friendliness by playing along with Rinaldo, and «... come uomini modesti e di buona condizione, pure d'oneste cose e di lealtà andavano con lui favellando.» Here again one must note the symmetrical emphasis linking movement with speech: «andavano/ con lui/ favellando.» «Andare» and «favellare» can be read as two autonomous verbs, each with distinct reference («andavano... come uomini modesti e di buona condizione, favellando... d'oneste cose e di lealtà») or as a single verbal phrase, «andare favellando,» with multiple reference: the ambiguous referential potential again serves to blur the distinction between, in this case, false reality and false language. As I shall shortly demonstrate, false language is to be understood as language of uncertain or confused reference; that is, language in which the *signifiant* dominates, cut off from any concretely verifiable *signifié*. The *masnadieri* have thus already begun to represent the world of unmeaningful language and the death of the *signifié*.

The following sentence continues to insist on the simple analogy be-

tween movement and speech, once again through utterly harmonious syntax: «E così camminando, d'una cosa in altra, come ne' ragionamenti addivien, trapassando, (caddero in sul ragionare dell'orazioni che gli uomini fanno a Dio...)». We again note that two modifying phrases of near equal length and not entirely clear reference connect the terms of our analogy. Thus the travellers move from one point to the next along their journey as well as in their discourse. The parallels I have explicated thus far can be schematized as follows:

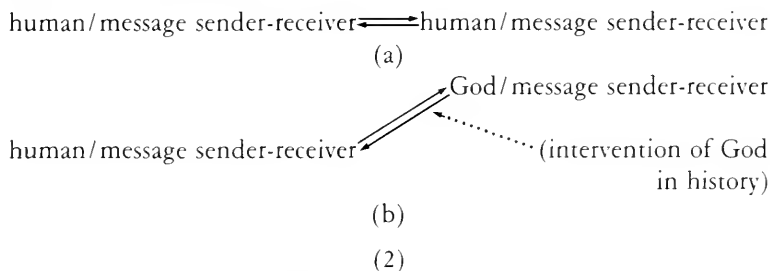
<i>narration</i>	<i>movement (existence)</i>
« ragionando »	« s'accompagnò »
« favellando »	« andavano »
« trapassando (ne' ragionamenti) . .	« camminando »

(1)

A brief glance at the *camminare* entry of a *Decameron* Concordance will reveal a great many such pairs,⁵ for this is a concept that, as stated in the introduction, pervades the entire work. My point is that Boccaccio gives extraordinary emphasis to this language-life analogy in the Rinaldo d'Asti tale, for which he must have had linguistic issues foremost in mind.

Up to this point in the novella, the conception of language has been entirely contained within human, earthbound parameters; with the second half of the previously cited phrase («caddero in sul ragionare dell'orazioni che gli uomini fanno a Dio»), Boccaccio introduces the central element of prayer, that is human language projected outside of the temporal realm towards the eternal. Just as the miscreant *masnadieri* are emblematic of a lack of faith in the *signifi * of the word, so is Rinaldo representative of firm and simplistic belief in the one-to-one bond between word and thing, or word and concept. For if the fundamental act of the human being is, as we have seen, as language-user or message-sender (are we not, incidentally, further reminded of this fact by the frequent appearance of the word «fante» in this novella, harkening back to *Purgatorio*, XXV, 61?),⁶ Rinaldo is naively secure of the unambiguous nature of his code and destination of his message, be this human or divine. In accordance with Rinaldo's unsophisticated conception of language, he will expect to find proof of his faith, when necessary, in the events of human history. He will expect, that is, a

response to his message affirming the real value of dialogue, no matter if it is human-human or human-divine. Rinaldo's mindset can be diagrammed as follows:



Needless to say, the *masnadieri* scoff at model (a) and scornfully dismiss model (b). The tale of Rinaldo d'Asti constitutes a most clever and amusing playing out of this drama of the referent; we know who will emerge victorious.

The *masnadieri* poke fun at Rinaldo's ingenuousness and set about challenging his faith with sarcastic inquiry: «E voi, gentil uomo, che orazione usate di dir camminando?» Rinaldo's response to this reveals at once his personal character and crystallizes the central conflict of the novella:

Nel vero io sono uomo di queste cose materiale e rozzo, e poche orazioni ho per le mani, sì come colui che mi vivo all'antica e lascio correr due soldi per ventiquattro denari; ma nondimeno ho sempre avuto in costume, camminando, di dir la mattina, quando esco dell'albergo, un paternostro ed un'avemaria per l'anima del padre e della madre di san Giuliano, dopo il quale io priego Iddio e lui, che la seguente notte mi deano buono albergo.

I should like to analyze Rinaldo's response by segments. «Nel vero io sono uomo di queste cose materiale e rozzo, e poche orazioni ho per le mani,»: Rinaldo defines himself as an unrefined, earthbound being, who is not comfortable when confronted with the transcendent implications of prayer. His inferior social status is quickly accompanied by an inferior linguistic status. Rinaldo views language as a simple tool for direct communication between human beings, where concrete reference is more easily detectable, and is uneasy at the prospect of directing language toward an unseen destination. «Sì come colui che mi vivo

all'antica e lascio correr due soldi per ventiquattro denari;»: here Rinaldo affirms his personal affinity to an older and simpler age of faith with an illuminating modern metaphor. The socio-economic universe of Boccaccio's Florence was just getting accustomed to the widespread use of currency; some were no doubt adjusting better than others. The symbolic reduction of an economic or historical reality, through money or through language, can be an unsettling concept. What more effective way to call attention to the problems of linguistic reference than through the ingenious use of a popular saying on the more readily grasped, but perfectly analogous, problems of economic currency? It is Rinaldo's nature «to let two *soldi* stand for twenty-four *denari*,» a precise image of one-to-one equivalence directly correspondent to his attitude toward language; for Rinaldo, *signifiant* and *signifié* are integral and inseparable parts of a single whole. Language is based upon a precise, unambiguous bond between word and concept, and by extension, between sender and receiver.⁷

The second half of Rinaldo's response begins with a connective of opposition: «ma nondimeno...». He then relates his habit of saying the paternoster of San Giuliano before setting out for a day's travel. We have already established that Rinaldo is a simplistic man who prefers not to doubt the referential capacity of language and generally avoids the uncertain implications of prayer; nevertheless, Rinaldo goes on to reveal his sole adventure into the risky world of transcendent reference, the paternoster of San Giuliano:

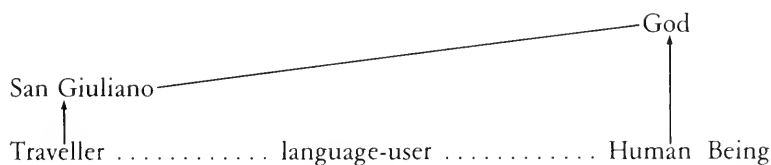
ho sempre avuto in costume, camminando, di dir la mattina, quando esco dell'albergo, un paternostro ed un'avemaria per l'anima del padre e della madre di san Giuliano, dopo il quale io priego Iddio e lui, che la seguente notte mi deano buono albergo.

Rinaldo then feels a need to support and defend his belief in the referential value of his prayers and proclaim his unwavering faith in their efficacy:

Ed assai volte già de' miei dì sono stato, camminando, in gran pericoli, de' quali tutto scampato, pur sono la notte poi stato in buon luogo e bene albergato; per che io porto ferma credenza che san Giuliano, a cui onore io il dico, m'abbia questa grazia impetrata da Dio, nè mi parebbe

il dî bene potere andare nò dovere la notte vegnente bene arrivare, che io non l'avessi la mattina detto.

Rinaldo's conception of language, then, remains consistent: humans can communicate with God as effectively as with fellow humans. Rinaldo's view of the transcendent is appropriately anthropomorphic. He prays not directly to the abstruse entity God, but rather reaches Him/Her through the more human San Giuliano and family. The popular appeal of the saints as mediators between mortals and God during the Middle Ages is well-known. San Giuliano is of course the patron saint of travellers and thus fits perfectly into the God-role of Boccaccio's conceptual scheme in this tale. He is ultimately to be identified with God (« m'abbia questa grazia impetrata da Dio »). The following diagram will clarify the underlying conceptualization of the tale:



(3)

The terms of Boccaccio's metaphor are well-defined: just as the human being looks to God as the eternal being, so does the traveller—within the localized framework of our tale—look to San Giuliano; San Giuliano's identification with God is mentioned above; Traveller corresponds to Human Being through the use of language, as I have illustrated.

The previous two citations not only reinforce the existential associations of the act of travel by their awkward and emphatic insertion of the gerund « camminando » (« ho sempre avuto in costume, camminando, di dir... », « assai volte già de' miei dî sono stato, camminando, in gran pericoli... »), but they furthermore serve to link travel with existence by drawing a patent analogy between the day travelled from morning to night and the life lived from birth to death. Boccaccio chiefly effects this association by introduction of the noun « albergo »

and its corresponding verb «albergare.» «Bene/male albergare» correspond, respectively, to dying a happy or sad death; «buono albergo,» more specifically, refers to the return of the Christian soul, after a brief pilgrimage, to its place of origin. This boomerang conception of existence, in accordance with Augustinian-Thomistic tradition, is apparent in the structure of Rinaldo's response: «ho sempre avuto in costume, camminando, di dir la mattina, quando esco dell'albergo, un paternostro... dopo il quale io priego Iddio e lui, che la seguente notte mi deano buono albergo.» Rinaldo's sentence suggests a ternary succession of events: 1) venture forth from the «albergo,» 2) travel and prayer, and 3) return to the «albergo.» The parallels are obvious.

The existential resonance of the binary oppositions that make up Rinaldo's discourse with the *masnadieri* («mattina/notte,» «bene albergare/mal albergare») cogently delineates the drama of the *signifié* that will be executed in the remainder of the tale. Rinaldo is confident that his prayer is comprehended and acted upon by San Giuliano and God, tangible proof of which he offers from his everyday life (we recall diagram 2b): he has often escaped great dangers on the highway on account of their intervention to find himself «la notte... in buon luogo e bene albergato.» We are at once struck by Boccaccio's choice of the possibly more ethereal «buon luogo,» which serves as more than mere repetition of «bene albergato.»

The *masnadieri* of course take a position diametrically opposed to Rinaldo's, impudently defying his faith in the word. One of the bandits taunts Rinaldo, who is an unwitting participant in the drama:

Ed istamane dicestelo voi? ». A cui Rinaldo rispose: «Sì bene». Allora quegli, che già sapeva come andar doveva il fatto, disse seco medesimo: «Al bisogno ti fia venuto, ché, se fallito non ci viene, per mio avviso, tu albergherai pur male.

The manifold web of dramatic irony generated by «già sapeva come andar doveva il fatto» is astounding, for not even the reader at this point knows who is «fallito» and who is destined for «buono albergo.» The bandit then offers contrary evidence and explicitly articulates the novella's informant tension:

Io similmente ho già molto camminato e mai nol dissi, quantunque io l'abbia a molti molto udito già commendare, nè già mai non m'avenne

che io per ciò altro che bene albergassi; e questa sera per avventura ve ne potrete avvedere chi meglio albergherà, o voi che detto l'avete o io che non l'ho detto.

With the ideological poles of the tale firmly in place, the linguistic drama can now proceed to play itself out. The bandit first takes one last jab at Rinaldo's stance using explicitly language-conscious sarcasm:

Bene è il vero che io uso in luogo di quello il *Dirupisti* o la *'ntemerata* o il *De profundis* che sono, secondo che una mia avola solea dire, di grandissima virtù.

The bandit's profane corruption of time-honored prayers—classic formulaic language with which one speaks to God—through clever *double entendre* is wholly consistent with his character. His is an irreverent view of language as a tool to be manipulated to one's own base ends with no real transcendent value. As Mario Marti's gloss on this sentence suggests, the bandit identifies himself with the convoluted and deceptive use of language characterized by long-winded verbosity and unclear reference.⁸ Furthermore, he indirectly alludes, and simultaneously opposes himself, to a former age of faith that respected the solemn import of these prayers (« secondo che una mia avola mi solea dire »); as we have seen, Rinaldo is most at ease with the values of this former age (« ... mi vivo all'antica »).

Segment IV recounts the robbery itself and runs from, « E così di varie cose parlando ed al lor cammin procedendo, ... » (by now the analogy leaps off the page) to « ... essendo già sera, entrato, senza darsi altro impaccio albergò. » The relative insignificance of what might superficially be considered the climactic moment of the novella, that is the robbery, is evident in the ever so brief narration time Boccaccio allots this event (« ... assalitolo, il rubarono, ... »). No, the intended climax of this tale is the victory of the *signifié*, to which Boccaccio devotes the remainder of the narrative. Here a more detailed consideration of what narratologists label anisochronics, which Segre defines as the "phase displacements between time narrated and the time of narration,"⁹ could be illuminating; such a study would, however, fall outside the scope of the present essay. The verbal jeering of the departing *masnadiéri* lies squarely within our schematic conceptualization of the

novella's conflict: « Va' e sappi se il tuo san Giuliano questa notte ti darà buono albergo, ché il nostro il darà bene a noi. »

Segment V of the novella, which begins with « Rinaldo, rimasto in camicia e scalzo, ... » and ends with « ... gli apparecchiò buono albergo, » portrays the victimized Rinaldo beset by doubts of the referential capacity of the word and thus, by analogy, on the threshold of death. Boccaccio presents Rinaldo's drama by constructing a series of easily discernible binary oppositions, a structural device that seems to dominate the tale as a whole. As Baratto indicates,

il racconto si imposta sull'efficacia di tale antitesi inaspettata: da una parte il terribile, desolato paesaggio notturno e invernale, dall'altra questo interno insperato, pieno di calore.¹⁰

The antitheses of which Baratto writes are numerous and each corresponds to the more universal antithesis between life and death of the soul-*signifié*:

<i>x</i>	<i>y</i>
life	death
warmth	cold
inside	outside
above	below
light	dark
day	night
womb-like security of bath	exposure to snow
food	hunger
clothing	nakedness

(4)

As Segre has shown, schematized uses of opposition and symmetries are not uncommon to the *Decameron* as a whole.¹¹ In segment V, Rinaldo sinks to a liminal and tenuous position on the precipice of despair and is virtually subsumed by the elements of column *y*. He is awaiting divine succor—an acknowledgement of the value of the word through a returned message—but soon begins to lose faith, « spesse volte dolendosi a san Giuliano, dicendo questo non essere della fede che aveva in lui. » At this the nadir of the narrative, the narrator intervenes (Filostrato? Boccaccio?) as a sort of *deus ex machina* to dispel

any doubts in the minds of the *brigata* and reader: « Ma san Giuliano, avendo a lui riguardo, senza troppo indugio gli apparecchiò buono albergo. »

All that follows segment V makes up a sort of second act of the novella and consists of Rinaldo's resurrection from near death as well as the analogous salvation of the *signifié*. Boccaccio naturally depicts Rinaldo's triumph through the deliberate affirmation of all of the life-associated terms of our various binary oppositions (diagram 4, column x). Moreover, Boccaccio generally overgoes a mere affirmation of the life-sustaining element to embrace an emphatic extreme: thus Rinaldo not only escapes the cold, he enjoys the intense, intimate warmth of a fire and eventually the maternal comforts of a hot bath; he not only finds something to eat, but is served a feast quite literally fit for nobility. He finally indulges in uninhibited sexual pleasure—perhaps the ultimate life-affirming act at the opposite extreme from death. The great comic satisfaction of the novella derives in large part from this overwhelming completeness of Rinaldo's victory.

Nor is the linguistic framework dismissed or set aside in any way during Act II. Rinaldo's near loss of humanity on the threshold of doom is characterized by his near inability to speak: « E Rinaldo, sì forte tremando, che appena poteva le parole formare, chi el fosse e come e perché quivi, quanto più breve poté le disse, ... ». Moreover, he brings about his extraordinary salvation by means of direct and effective speech: « La donna... dell'accidente che quivi condotto l'aveva il domandò; alla quale Rinaldo per ordine ogni cosa narrò. »

Finally, the very last sentence brings together all of the conceptual threads of the drama, confirms Rinaldo's faith as valid and just, and condemns the *masnadiéri* to what will surely be eternal death: « Per la qual cosa Rinaldo, Iddio e san Giulian ringraziando, montò a cavallo, e sano e salvo ritornò a casa sua; ed i tre *masnadiéri* il dì seguente andarono a dare de' calci a rovaio. » Rinaldo is thus, once again, human being, traveller-pilgrim (« montò a cavallo... ritornò a casa sua »), and language-producer (« Iddio e san Giuliano ringraziando »): this time, however, he speaks to San Giuliano and God with utmost confidence in the communicative power of his words—the life of the *signifié* has been dramatically affirmed. Language points beyond itself; it possesses

meaning and is not, as goes the popular English dictum, just a lot of hot air—a point driven home by the precious description of the *masnadieri*'s death by hanging: they kick the cold wind of the *tramontana*. Is this not, then, a poetic *contrappasso* of Dantesque ingenuity?

The tale of Rinaldo d'Asti celebrates the signifying power of the word. The question remains on what level the reader is to accept the narrative's lesson: without a doubt, Rinaldo and the thieves have renewed their faith in the word. What of the *brigata*? Filostrato addressed the tale to those who travel love's dubious lands with the sober admonition «... ne' quali chi non ha detto il paternostro di san Giuliano, spesse volte, ancora che abbia buon letto, alberga male.» We now understand how one might have a good bed, but bad lodging. The reaction of the *brigata*, Boccaccio's ideal audience, to Filostrato's tale is enthusiastically in line with the novella's moral: «Furono con ammirazione ascoltati i casi di Rinaldo d'Asti dalle donne e da' giovani, e la sua divozion commendata, ed Iddio e san Giuliano ringraziati che al suo bisogno maggiore gli avevano prestato soccorso.» They thus support Rinaldo's lesson with actions and events from their own lives. Boccaccio has thus effected one leap from narrative frame to real life—are we to follow his apparent suggestion and accept Rinaldo's moral as our own? And what of Boccaccio himself? Is he a firm believer in the referential capacity of the word? Responses to these latter inquiries can only fall into the realm of speculation. In accordance with the general comic spirit of the *Decameron*, Rinaldo's tale allows the reader to participate, at least temporarily, in an enthusiastic affirmation of human language. The ultimate convictions of Boccaccio and his readers must remain a mystery. All but mysterious, however, are the structural subtlety and soulful verve with which our author has executed this most unique drama of the *signifié*.

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Notes

1. Mario Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 1970), p. 15.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

3. Cesare Segre, *Structures and Time: Narration, Poetry, Models* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1979), trans. by John Meddemmen, p. 3.

4. All quotations from: Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Mario Marti (Milano: Rizzoli Editore, 1950).

5. See, for example, *Concordanze del Decameron* a cura di Alfredo Barbina, sotto la direzione di Umberto Bosco, vol. I (Firenze: C/E Giunti, 1969), p. 243:

camminando insieme e di varie cose ragionando, (II, 9, 36)

come costume è de' camminanti, con lui cominciò ad entrare in ragionamento (IX, 9, 11).

6. Canto XXV contains Statius' discourse on the generation of human beings. Dante chooses the word "fante" to denote man infused with reason, distinct from the reason-lacking beast:

Ma come d'animal divenga fante,
non vedi tu ancor: quest'è tal punto,
che più savio di te fe' già errante (*Purg.*, XXV, 61-63).

Sapegno explicates the linguistic import of "fante" in his commentary:

fante: parlante (dal latino *fan*). Dell'uomo solo, in quanto pensa, è proprio il bisogno di comunicare agli altri i suoi pensieri: 'eorum que sunt omnium soli homini datum est loqui' (*De. Vulg. Eloq.*, I, ii, i); e quindi la parola è segno distintivo dell'uomo, animale ragionevole.

see: Dante, *La Divina Commedia* a cura di Natalino Sapegno (Firenze: 'La Nuova Italia' Editrice, 14th printing 1981).

7. The convenient analogy between economic currency and the "currency of the word" is not, it seems, without its ancient and medieval precedents. See: R.A. Shoaf, *Dante, Chaucer, and the Currency of the Word* (Norman, Oklahoma: Pilgrim Books, Inc., 1983).

8. See Marti, p. 84, footnote 6:

Sono le parole iniziali, la prima e la terza, di due salmi, la seconda di un preghiera alla Vergine, che per sua lunghezza era già diventata sinonimo di 'lungo discorso, rimbrotto.' Qui, nel gergo dei malandrini, significano rispettivamente 'percosse, minacce verbali, uccisioni.'

9. Segre, p. 20.

10. Baratto, p. 114.

11. See Segre, chapter 4 (pp. 93-120), Functions, Oppositions, and Symmetries in Day VII of the *Decameron*."