The Economy and Parody of Matrimony in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*

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ABSTRACT

BRANDON K. ESSARY: The Economy and Parody of Matrimony in Boccaccio’s
Decameron
(Under the direction of Prof. Dino Cervigni)

Boccaccio focuses significant attention on the institution of marriage throughout his masterpiece, the Decameron. The purpose of the present dissertation is to take a close look at the bond between husband and wife, that of matrimony, which appears in all the frames of the Decameron — description of the plague, the lives of the brigata, and in the ten days devoted to storytelling — and occupies the central fifth day of storytelling in the course of the ten young people’s journey outside of Florence. More often than not, the sacred bond of marriage is broken, questioned and even parodied by the brigata. Often, this parody takes on an economic aspect, in which Boccaccio reduces the sacred matrimonial bond — and relationships between men and women in general — to an economic metaphor of exchange. As a result, one may wonder to what extent Boccaccio, who was born out of wedlock and never married, may be willing to question the institution—and even more so, the sacrament—of matrimony. One may also wonder whether Boccaccio intends to probe and question marriage, which, in its manifestations in well over half of the novelle of the work, may be seen as a phenomenon that undermines social order.
To my loving wife, Julie.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Religious Parody and Marriage in the Macrotext</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Historical Context, Parody, and Matrimony</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dissertation Chapter Outline</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>PARODY AND ITS PRACTICE IN THE DECAMERON</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Brief History of Parody</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defining Parody and the Decameronian Context</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Microtext, Macrotext, and Religious Parody</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>MARRIAGE IN MEDIEVAL ITALY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>MARRIAGE BEFORE DECAMERON DAY FIVE: FROM THE FILOCOLO AND THE “CORTE D’AMORE” TO DEC. 2.3</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage and the Sacred in the Filocolo</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nuptials in the Decameron before Day Five: What Happens to the Sacred, and What Happens to Narrative?</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>FROM ALATIEL’S “COSÌ SPESSE NOZZE” TO RICCIARDO DI CHINZICA’S “STUDIO DELLE LEGGI” INSTEAD OF HIS WIFE: MATRIMONY’S PARODY BEGINS</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>From Brides of Christ and a Promiscuous Priesthood to Laypeople: Continuous Corruption of Sacred Bonds</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marriage and the Dark Side of Love in Decameron 4</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VI. MARRIAGE IN DECMAERON DAY FIVE: FROM TRIAL TO MARRIAGE ................................................................. 118

The Tales, Trials, and Nuptials of Day Five ..................................................... 119

“La casa caduta”: God, Church and Society in Decameron 5 .......................... 134

VII. THE “ECONOMICS” OF PARODY AND MARITAL EXCHANGES .... 142

The Geographical Outreach of Decameron 5 .................................................. 144

Women as Objects of Exchange ........................................................................ 149

Social Class and the Economic Context ........................................................... 153

Appropriateness of Consumption for Nobles and Non-Nobles ....................... 156

Religious Parody and Conjugal Debt ................................................................. 162

VIII. QUESTIONING THE HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER: MARRIAGE IN THE DECAMERON AFTER DAY FIVE ......................... 168

Ready Replies, Husbands and Wives in Decameron 6 .................................... 170

Decameron 7: The Married World Turned Upside Down .................................. 175

From “peccato celato” to “moderata operazione”: The Beffa as Key to Conjugal Corruption ................................................................. 183

The Universalized Beffa and the Brigata’s Defect: Destructively Paving the Way to Liberality and Magnificence ......................... 193

Liberality, Magnificence and the Married World Made Whole ....................... 199

CONCLUSION ..................................................................................................... 218

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY .................................................................................. 229
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti...”: here is the immemorial proemial announcement of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* that segues into the author’s description of what events brought him to write the masterpiece and then for whom in particularly he is writing. In the *Proemio*, Boccaccio presents himself as the Narrator who, having recently been liberated from the chains of love, bids farewell to autobiography in order to turn his attention to the ladies in love. A propos of this liberation, Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin observes: “His new-found, liberated objectivity, which will allow him to fulfill his initial maxim of human charity (‘umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti’), derives from a benign instance of divine destruction: God has ordained that all earthly things, including Boccaccio’s unrequited love, must come to an end” (63). Boccaccio then turns his attention to the problems of the ladies in love, the “vaghe donne” who suffer the ill fortune of having to conceal and contend their amorous desires.

Certainly, as we are told, they cannot live as they would like and cannot distract themselves as easily as men do in order to alleviate their suffering: “E chi negherà questo, quantunque egli si sia, non molto più alle vaghe donne che agli uomini convenirsi donare? Esse dentro a’ dilicati petti, temendo e vergognando, tengono l’amorose fiamme nascose, le quali quanto più di forza abbian che le palesi color il sanno che l’hanno provate” (*Proemio* 10). In order to enter into the purpose of this study, I would like to
pose the following initial questions regarding the afflicted recipients of Boccaccio’s charity: What forces, other than that of Fortune, which Boccaccio hopes to be able to correct, cause them most to suffer and to have to conceal their desires? What keeps them locked in their homes and in their rooms with only the needle and thread to help them pass the time? Boccaccio the Narrator soon reveals that it is the family that restricts their movement and impedes the possibility of assuaging the flames of love: “... e oltre a ciò, ristrette da’ voleri, da’ piaceri, da’ comandamenti de’ padri, delle madri, de’ fratelli e de’ mariti, il più del tempo nel piccolo circuito delle loro camere racchiuse dimorano e quasi oziose sedendosi ...” (Proemio.10). It is the commands, desires, and will of mostly male family members—fathers, brothers, and husbands—that impede the amorous hopes of Boccaccio’s feminine readership. It is simply being a daughter, being a sister, and finally, after being passed from the familial patriarch to her husband, being a wife that cause women to need the sort of charity that Boccaccio plans to provide.

The purpose of the present dissertation is to take a closer look at the last of these bonds, between husband and wife, that of matrimony, which appears in all the frames of the Decameron — description of the plague, the lives of the brigata, and in the ten days devoted to storytelling — and occupies a central day of storytelling in the course of the ten young people’s journey outside of Florence. In order to overcome the noia (boredom, nuisance, suffering) caused by these restricting familial bonds, Boccaccio offers a remedy to the ladies’ bad fortune: countless examples of delightful and useful tales that might help them surpass the constraints imposed by their families and society: “Nelle quali novelle piacevoli e aspri casi d’amore e altri fortunati avvenimenti si vederanno così ne’

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1 Barolini succinctly states: “women who are in love have no such resources, and so Boccaccio offers them his novella, his parole; men have deeds, women have words” (175).
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” (Proemio 14). But let us also ask ourselves: why is it that this useful advice and delight of enjoyable things is being presented at this very point of Boccaccio’s life and in the history surrounding him? Conveniently enough, he is nel mezzo del cammin di sua: thirty five years of age, for the year of the spread of the plague, 1348, coincides with the beginning of the story; he has been in literary dialogue with Dante and even in correspondence contact with Petrarch. But, for Boccaccio to devise and propose, and as he himself states, even to begin to tell the “cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie” the necessary prerequisite is to experience, either through living or reading, the Black Death. The reader must first enter into Boccaccio’s historical moment. The reader will pass through the “orrido cominciamento” of the Introduzione, and recognize the plague that stripped away life, possessions and souls in Trecento Florence and Italy. Once the reader understands how much has been lost, how many lives, homes, and families have been destroyed, the charitable Boccaccio is ready to give his gift.

The Plague brought death, destruction, and, perhaps most importantly for consideration of matrimony, the collapse of civil and religious laws. As Boccaccio recounts in the introduction to Day One: “E in tanta afflizione e miseria della nostra città era la reverenda autorità delle leggi, così divine come umane, quasi caduta e dissoluta tutta per li ministri e esecutori di quelle, li quali, sì come gli altri uomini, erano tutto o morti o infermi o sì di famiglie rimasi stremi, che ufficio alcuno non potean fare; per la qual cosa era a ciascun licito quanto a grado gli era d’adoperare” (Dec. 1.Intro.23). The
last phrase of the quotation naturally brings to mind, as Branca reminds us, *Inferno* 5.56, “che libito fè licito in sua legge,” and Semiramis’s alteration of marriage laws in order to legitimize her boundless form of lust. With the collapse of the rule of law, both civil and divine, Boccaccio informs the reader that no offices could be fulfilled, and that there was a subsequent ruination of the family itself. Along with this ruination, one could argue, the ties that held marriages together and the “vaghe donne” to their traditional places in society and in the home: “… era si fatto spavento questa tribulazione entrata ne’ petti degli uomini e delle donne, che l’un fratello l’altro abbandonava e il zio il nepote e la sorella il fratello e spesse volte la donna il suo marito; e, che maggior cosa è e quasi non credibile, li padri e le madri i figliuoli” (*Dec.* 1.Intro. 27). In the end, he found that “cose contrarie a’ primi costumi de’ cittadini nacquero tra coloro li quali rimanean vivi”; in short, it appears that Boccaccio took this time of turmoil and moral uncertainty to propose a new view on society, on the civil laws that compose its foundations, and on the sacred bonds that hold its members together—husbands and wives, parents and children, and all citizens.

Branca aptly mentions the Dantean echo from *Inferno* 5; however, he stops at this textual reference. As critics unanimously underscore, *Inferno* 5 constitutes the fundamental allusion also for the subtitle of Boccaccio’s masterpiece. He opens the work with two obvious instances of intertextuality to the *Comedy* and also to Saint Ambrose’s *Hexameron*. With reference to the *Inferno*, the reading of vernacular love stories was the spur that pushed Francesca and Paolo to adultery and led to their sin of lust. The reader will recall that Dante links the reading for pleasure (“per diletto”) with the sin of lust punished in the second circle of Hell. As has been argued by numerous scholars,
Boccaccio warns readers to be careful about the way they read his work, to what lessons and delight they take from it, and the way they react to its narrations.

Yet, it is interesting that Boccaccio reminds his readers yet again of this punishment in Hell’s second circle so close to the Prencipe Galeotto reference. This time, Boccaccio draws the reader’s attention to the specific line of Inferno 5—“che libito fè licito in sua legge”—precisely at the moment when he discusses the collapse of sacred and revered authority of divine and human laws. It is a time when civic and church officials are not capable, because of the plague’s universal destruction, of ministering or executing the laws and their offices—“ufficio alcuno non potean fare” (Dec. 1.Intro. 23). “La reverenda autorità delle leggi” (1.Intro. 23) has collapsed, civil laws and Holy Offices cannot be performed, and just as the line from Inferno 5 would remind us; however, what are the laws, traditions and offices (“uffici,” in the Decameron) that have been obstructed, shaken, or destroyed by the plague?

Shortly thereafter, Boccaccio the Narrator describes several specific instances. Men and women alike discarded property laws and left behind the city, their homes, and their possessions. They also abandoned their families and sought refuge with other relations in the countryside. What seems most striking to Boccaccio, however, is the disregard for the family nucleus and the bonds, familial, fraternal, and even matrimonial that the plague unraveled: “… era con si fatto spavento questa tribulazione entrata ne’ petti degli uomini e delle donne, che l’un fratello l’altro abbandonava e il zio il nepote e la sorella il fratello e spesse volte la donna il suo marito; e, che maggior cosa è e quasi non credibile, li padri e le madri i figliuoli” (Dec. 1.Intro.27). Nothing could stop the
pestilential force from desecrating these institutions: neither the Church, nor religion, nor government. Instead, their authority lay bare the city “quasi caduta e dissoluta tutta.”

Giorgio Padoan, like Joy Potter and other scholars, affirm that the plague’s effects on religion in the *Decameron* are offered via social reflections as opposed to its transcendental content or concentration on God and the afterlife. Padoan asserts that the idea of the afterlife is almost completely ignored (and at this point, he refers to the jocular, voluntary damnation of Ser Cepparello). In fact, Boccaccio’s interest is focused almost exclusively on the life as lived on earth. For this critic, an exception to this rule would seem to be a point that Potter, too, treats thoroughly, in regard to the grand initial description of the plague:

… e tuttavia, a guarder bene, ciò che colpisce l’autore in quel grande dramma non sono le cause (anche se egli, come i cronisti, l’attribuisce alla giusta ira di Dio), quanto i suoi effetti proprio sulla società umana, nel progressivo disfacimento di vincoli sociali e persino familiari ed affettivi ... come la Natura è violentata dalla pestilenza, così il morbo è visto in quanto corrotture dei legami più sacri....

(Padoan 46)

That the perspicacious Boccaccio understood that he was living and writing in a time of transition and that he was aware of the crisis besieging him and Florentine society is well documented by these two prominent scholars and others. However, critics fail to tie 2

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2 I would argue here that Boccaccio’s wording is intentional and fecund with meaning. In this case, religious and civil laws are impotent, fallen and dissolve. A very similar wording can be found at the heart of the work, in the seventh *novella* of Day Five. In the latter case, the two enamored protagonists, Pietro and Violante, escape from nature’s wrath in the form of a violent thunderstorm. They rush into a little old church that is, according to the narrator, “quasi tutta caduta nella quale persona non dimorava” (*Dec.* 5.7.13). The only church mentioned in Day Five, the day of exclusively happy, matrimonial endings, hosts Pietro and Violante’s parodic consummation of their love outside of wedlock, for it goes against all laws, except those of nature. Boccaccio might very well be utilizing an abandoned “chiesetta antica” to refer to the fallen order of the “Chiesa” in the chronotope of the Plague.
Boccaccio’s observations of these most sacred, broken bonds in terms of marriage and of the broken link between husband and wife. The brigata’s frame-story will eventually work as an ideal place to observe the discussion of Boccaccio’s presentation of the marital bonds. But even before the reader enters into the brigata’s world and the one hundred tales, one finds that the group’s legitimization and their ability to maintain honor and decorum, rested on ties of consanguinity, marriage, or at least vicinity in regard to the first group, that of the ladies, as well as to the second group, that of the three men vis-à-vis the seven young ladies: “e andavan cercando per loro somma consolazione, in tanta turbazione di cose, di vedere le lor donne, le quali per ventura tutte e tre erano tralle predette sette, come che dell’alte alcuine ne fossero congiunte parenti d’alcuni di loro” (Dec. 1.Intro.79). These are the knots and threads which hold together Boccaccio’s storytelling group: they are bonds – religious (the ten young people are Christians), naturally sacred (family kinship), and civic (all Florentines), social (vicinity) – that had been utterly loosened and destroyed by the plague. With the help of the ten young characters, Boccaccio the parodist pulls at whatever remains of these familial, social and legal bonds. Ultimately, of course, he leaves the reader, as well as the ladies in love to decide what, if any, value remains in the institutions of family, marriage, and the Church.

These initial paragraphs show the presence of matrimony in the opening pages of the Decameron. In the rest of this study I will seek to identify and interpret the representation of marriage. Here then are some of the issues to be considered: Where does one encounter marriage in the course of the one-hundred tales? What is its function

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3 Consanguinity also facilitated Pampinea’s willingness and initiative to go and speak with the young men in order to propose a trip of the kind she had in mind: “Per che senza più parole, Pampinea, levatasi in piè, la quale a alcun di loro per consanguinità era congiunta, verso loro che fermi stavano a riguardarle si fece e, con lieto viso salutatigli, loro la lor disposizione fé manifesta e pregoli per parte di tutte che con puro e fratellevole animo a tener lor compagnia si dovessero disporre” (I.Intro.87).
and how is it represented? How do the young people react to it and what are their opinions, if any, on the matter? None of these questions appear to have been raised or responded to in a cohesive and thorough manner that addresses matrimony as one of the main elements of Boccaccio’s masterpiece and, as Dino Cervigni expounds, of the traditional Christian medieval world view. Hambuechen Potter mentions marriage as a fundamental subject in the Decameron but she does not deal with it thoroughly. As recently as Luigi Totaro’s 2005 work Ragioni d’amore: le donne nel Decameron, the usefulness and need of a more profound consideration has been underscored, even if only marginally in a footnote of his analysis of the first novella with a marriage ceremony in the entire work, Dec. 2.3. In chapter three, I will utilize some of Totaro’s reflections on the third tale of Day Two, where matrimony is celebrated according to certain civic and religious norms, as a point of departure for analyzing the numerous marriages that take place prior to Day Five. Totaro notes especially how the theme of matrimony and its

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4 In his review of Potter’s work, Alfredo Bonadeo writes: “Griselda calls attention to an important social feature of the Decameron, marriage. The author defines it as a “subject … basic … in the Decameron” (p. 26), but does not deal with it. Nothing better than this subject reveals Boccaccio’s “class position”: plebeians invariably marry plebeians, and noblemen noblewomen, the only exception being the Gualtieri-Griselda marriage” (168-69). Bonadeo might rightly expect at least a cursory analysis of marriage if Potter defines it as “basic” to the Decameron. However, his assertion that marriage in the Decameron does nothing more than reveal Boccaccio’s class position is less convincing. Marriage as referred to in the Introduzione has nothing to do with class. In several of the marriage celebrations of Day Five class certainly comes into play (5.2, 5.3, 5.8), and impedes male members of a lower class—at least relative to the lady with whom they fall in love—from initially courting them. Then, there is the example of Alessandro the merchant who marries the daughter of a king in Dec. 2.3. In addition, we have “parodic” marriages from Alatiel, who has many marriages with all kinds of people in Dec. 2.7 (dukes, merchants, two kings, and so on), to Masetto in Dec. 3.1 who “cuckolds” Christ by fornicating with his brides. In many of these cases, and contrary to Bonadeo’s observation, the man of lower class or wealth overcomes the obstacles and weds the higher-status bride, precisely as Fiammetta suggests that men should do in her preamble to Decameron 1.5.

5 Totaro writes: “Sarebbe assai interessante analizzare—al fine di cogliere l’aspetto della capacità di introspezione psicologica dell’Autore—le motivazioni che determinano i comportamenti della giovane donna in rapporto al padre, evocato dalle stesse sue parole. È questo un tema ricorrente nel Decameron, e raggiunge in alcune novelle un’intensità assai notevole, risultando capace di offrire spunti di riflessione particolare all’interno del più vasto tema dei rapporti fra individuo e nucleo familiare e, entro questo, del tema specifico del matrimonio e delle sue forme, che appare continuamente evocato” (Totaro 32n39).
various forms are continuously evoked in the work. Indeed, I have determined that marriages take place in no fewer than twenty-three novelle and in at least five out of the ten days of affabulation (Days Two, Three, Four, Five, and Ten). Although nuptials are not celebrated in Days One, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, there are wedded couples that comprise the protagonists of numerous tales; in addition, the central protagonists of all tales of Day Seven, under Dioneo’s reign, must be married, so that wives, according to the proposed topic, will mock (beffare) their husbands. Furthermore, these novelle in which matrimonies take place must be understood in the broader context of the attitude displayed by characters in the novelle in which there are no weddings at all. In the remaining tales where no marriage takes place, the institution of marriage itself is questioned, parodied, and at times even ridiculed, primarily because of the illicit affairs by wives and husbands. The result is shocking and obvious: the largest number of the Decameron tales deal with characters who desire to marry, or are married, or pursue sexual relationships allowed, according to the moral prescriptions of the time, only to married people. By recognizing the overwhelming presence of marriage, the context of attitudes towards marriage even when matrimony is not present, and the ubiquitous narrative developments of wedded protagonists, a careful examination of how the Decameron, especially through the parodic proclivity of Boccaccio the Author, represents, mediates and perhaps even transforms one of the central civil and religious institutions devastated by the Plague.

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6 After Day Five, in which all tales ended happily with the celebration of marriage—with the exception, as always, of Dioneo’s ultimate tale and deviation—Dioneo commands that in the seventh “si ragiona delle beffe, le quali o per amore o per salvamento di loro le donne hanno già fatte a’ suoi mariti, senza essersene avveduti o si” (Dec. 6. Concl. 6).
1. Religious Parody and Marriage in the Macrotext

As a result of Boccaccio’s subversive treatment of the institution, the present study will seek to understand marriage as one of the principal forces that restrict the ladies in love among Boccaccio’s readership. Fathers, husbands, and brothers, confine and control women in the Narrator’s historical chronotope. Amid the chaos of the plague, Boccaccio’s brigata and the tales they recount depict the matrimonial bond, by and large, in an unflattering light. More often than not, it is strained and transgressed, and the reader might rightly wonder why Boccaccio focuses so much narrative attention on it and why he depicts it in this way. On so many occasions, the author directly addresses the people and social system which valued highly honorable kinship, marriage connections, and a stable society. This arrangement prevents the ladies in love, Boccaccio’s ideal female readership, from expressing their love and experiencing it. Then, as we are informed in the introduction to Day One, the society that restricts the ladies permits enamored men to distract and enjoy themselves in countless ways and whenever they like. Boccaccio gives the gift of storytelling as a remedy to this bad fortune of the donne innamorate, and through the many diletti and utili consigli therein, he offers them an escape route: Boccaccio will allay the pain of others who suffer from the flames of hidden love. Above all, he concerns himself with the “vaghe donne” (Proemio.9) whom their fathers, brothers, husbands and even mothers oppress and restrain. Of course, this gift is given to all readers, not just to the ideal readership of the Proemio, and the frame-story structure effectively offers to the ten young people, and to the rest of us, as Ó Cuilleanáin writes, “withdrawal from the moral demands of
contemporary society, partly epitomized by the Church, into a perfectly regulated world of creativity with its own quasi-liturgical rules of organization” (9).

On purpose I have just quoted from Ó Cuilleanáin’s *Religion and the Clergy in Boccaccio’s Decameron*. The author, in fact, offers a broadly valid framework in which one can interpret the offices and practices of the church, religion in general, and the clergy in particular. The author offers a careful examination of how Boccaccio mediates and transforms these fundamental threads to arrive at a more complete understanding of the *Decameron*. From the beginning of the work, the critic brings into focus the notion of ideology in the *Decameron* and in particular asks what ideology, if any, could be behind Boccaccio’s portrayal of religion and the clergy: is the work a radical critique of medieval religion and church institutions? Does it offer a new earthly standard of action, leaving behind transcendental values? In his line of reasoning, the answer to these questions must avoid ascribing historical significance to the work. Nonetheless, and even if Boccaccio maintains no consistent ideology, the critic correctly posits that religion occupies a substantial role in the *Decameron*: “… the narrative resources of medieval religion play a distinctive and dynamic part in the composition of the book, a part moreover which illuminates the author’s cast of mind in a special way, illustrating his relationship to the cultural milieu which shaped him, and which he in turned shaped to his own ends” (Ó Cuilleanáin 16).7

In my attempt to interpret and define Boccaccio’s representation of the religious institution of matrimony, too, I will seek to avoid simplistic labels as well. The presentation of religious and sacred symbols and practices is much too varied to state that

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7 In accordance with the refusal to pin Boccaccio down to a particular set of beliefs or ideology, the author refutes subsequent interpretations of Boccaccio as being either “Protestant” or “Catholic” because he finds labels of this sort to be unconvincing, anachronistic and unliterary.
Boccaccio had a univocal opinion on the subject of religion. In rejecting a facile approach to tying down Boccaccio’s ideology, Ó Cuilleanáin concurs with Luigi Russo’s comment that “la religione nel mondo boccaccesco non è né assente né presente… si tratta di un’arte assolutamente mondana, dove i simboli sacri, i simboli che ci richiamano a un mondo trascendente, non sono esaltati né abbassati, ma interpretati come materia, come strumento, come mezzo, atmosfera in cui si muove la sagacia degli uomini che riescono a giovarsene” (Russo, Letture critiche del Decameron; qtd in Ó Cuilleanáin 32). Although he accepts Russo’s commentary a propos of the nature of the role of the sacred, the author finds that Russo underestimates the real role of the transcendent; however, Ó Cuilleanáin agrees completely with the opportunistic approach to sacred things, according to which the sacred and religion are utilized for personal gain, as well as the presence of sacred symbols in a mundane range of actions.

The most intriguing affirmation in this line of reasoning is the overarching contextual description that Ó Cuilleanáin utilizes to describe the sacred and religious in the Decameron. The critic finds that a line of enquiry is opened between the sacred and profane and finds that Boccaccio is the creator of a constant correspondence and interpretation of these two forces. Ó Cuilleanáin interprets the role of the religious and sacred mainly through representations of the clergy, the Church, confession, Cipolla’s sermon, and the supernatural, and it is through this interpretation that the author himself proffers Boccaccio’s nature as a parodist. In the second chapter of the work, “Religious Elements in the Frame,” Ó Cuilleanáin admits that Boccaccio is most original when he copies or adapts existing material, and underscores that Boccaccio was a great collector
and user of Dante’s works for his own radically different purposes. Boccaccio the reutilizer and collector places his ten novellatori and the one hundred tales in a sort of narrative laboratory. According to this interpretation, the cornice is not only a mechanism to provide literal unity to the tales, but, in a more modern sense, it acts as an estranging device. According to Ó Cuilleanáin, this frame device converts over-familiar stories into narrative myth, marks the tales off from life, and screens the reader from any non-literary confrontation with their content. When considered with most critics’ “escapist” interpretation, this screening theory means that the “cumulative effect of the frame is to lure the reader into a free zone of the imagination, between fantasy and reality, just as the writer is forced to cast off the inhibitions of everyday personality and judgment, in order to create” (Ó Cuilleanáin 61). And consequently even Ó Cuilleanáin does not escape the escapist reading of the Decameron altogether.

That Boccaccio has the ten young people depart from Florence for the purpose of escaping from the plague, from society, and from the woes of their family lives, is undeniable. Dioneo’s disclaimer is one of his most memorable, non-vulgar affirmations: he will turn around and take his belongings—or at least make his servant take his belongings—and return to Florence if everyone will not agree to leave behind all negativity and agree to bring about solace, sollazzandosi to the greatest extent possible within their habitual frame of onestà. That the several locus amoenus environments in which they find themselves recounting the novelle provide a sort of screen and free zone

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8 A propos of this statement, the critic continues: “In short, the precise running order of Boccaccio’s novelle, coupled with their arrangement as a collection, shows the author’s passion for collecting and elaborating existing source-material, and directs the reader’s attention to the kind of structural complexity which excited his entrepreneurial imagination” (Ó Cuilleanáin 60). Interestingly, Ó Cuilleanáin argues in favor of the relevance of Boccaccio’s historic biography, but discounts the validity of interpreting the Decameron in its historical context. Later in this introduction, and also in chapter two, I will posit the necessity of considering the latter as well as the former.
of imagination between fantasy and reality also seems plausible. But, at the same time,
Boccaccio makes it clear to the ladies in love, as well as the rest of his readership, that
there is both fun to be had and lessons to be extracted from his one hundred *novelle.*

There is to be *utilità* together with *diletto.* Thus, Boccaccio seeks to do more in the
frame-story than, as Ó Cuilleanáin suggests, as to alter “the reader’s consciousness by
casting off the intolerable demands of everyday life (or, in this case, death) and insulating
him in an ideal paradise of order suspended between two confusions of social and moral
anarchy” (61). Boccaccio reminds us time and time again with references to numerous
textual traditions and to the *Commedia,* Dante’s work and poetic achievement are a major
point of reference for his work. He wants to provide a new poetic model through which
his readers can find delight in his tales, and contemplate the poetic craft in the “free zone
of imagination”; however, Boccaccio does not stop there.

He invokes the two works alluded to in the title itself of the *Decameron,* both the
*Commedia* and the *Hexameron,* as the reader first enters his Decameronian literary world.
On the one hand, Boccaccio seems compelled by a twofold impulse: first, a poetic
mission, and, second, a deliberate decision to open a dialogue with Saint Ambrose’s and
all patristic writers’ take on creation. Precisely when civilization was crumbling and
anarchy affects all aspects of society, as we see in the description of the plague, he sets
out to propose a new world view. In his treatment of religion in the work, Ó Cuilleanáin
effectively leads us to several elements key to the understanding of Boccaccio’s aims.
He makes abundantly clear that the reader should steer far away from simplisitic labels of
the *Decameron*’s architect and that one should not try to tie him down like Gulliver on
one of his travels. He further establishes the complexity of Boccaccio’s mission: “His
systematic avoidance of conclusions means that critical efforts to extract a consistent message from his characters are doomed to inquisitorial failure” (75). He warns the reader to sidestep the pitfall of spending too much time in examining the identities and qualities of the ten frame characters.⁹ In the central chapters of his work, he convincingly argues that the author draws on Christian doctrines, practices and personae that are an established part of reality which interacts with the secular world around them. In this key of reading, the author agrees with critics such as Potter in that religion is very much a part of the distinctive and dynamic makeup of the book. Indeed, it is an element which helps elucidate the author’s mindset, his relationship to the culture which shaped him and his writing, and which he in turn seeks to reshape in his masterpiece. As mentioned above, the critic finds Boccaccio to be an interpreter of the sacred and the profane, a correspondent and interpreter of the two opposite poles. One of the most interesting statements made by the author with regard to the utilization of religious practices in this way is that Boccaccio both respects and perpetuates religious practices (confessions, marriages, extrema unctio, prayers, and so on), even if he does not agree with them, and in fact parodies them. To be sure, as Ó Cuilleanáin affirms, “Boccaccio’s passionate concern with the rules, observances and civilizing artifices of society necessarily gives religion a central role in his imaginative practice” (34).

These points are very well made and Ó Cuilleanáin’s textual support backs up the argumentation soundly such that one can wholly agree that rules and observances, the laws and metaphors of society, are fundamental to Boccaccio’s narration. The ufici,

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⁹ At this point, Ó Cuilleanáin accurately recognizes a study by Billanovich which offers the fullest and most subtle assessment of the identities and qualities of the ten frame characters. Billanovich essentially found that there are no set rules, no certain conclusions, and he, that is, Billanovich, ultimately posits an invitation to read more carefully. Ó Cuilleanáin concludes: “What is most important about the brigata is their collective role as a prism between art and society” (81).
leggi, and usanze of the introduction to Day One, the frame, as well as Boccaccio’s passionate concern with these civilizing artifices are under constant scrutiny in the 

*Decameron.* But Ó Cuilleanáin does not go far enough in underscoring the relationship Boccaccio has with these foundational elements of medieval society. He admits that “the *Decameron* must then be judged against the literary traditions which it emulates or parodies, and against such countervailing contemporary works as Passavanti’s *Specchio di vera penitenzia.*” (51). Furthermore, he lauds Boccaccio as a collector of countless texts from innumerable genres and arrangement of cultural data who is most original when he copies or adapts existing material. He underlines his proclivity to exploit existing plots, which can be compared to his skill in exploiting the rules and conventions of medieval religion. Ultimately, Ó Cuilleanáin pegs Boccaccio’s unique genius and literary brilliance on the definitive characteristics of parody.

In its most basic understanding, parody is an evaluation of what one reads, hears, or says, but there are much more sophisticated, and even less conscious ways, by which parody takes place. It can be as simple as imitation or exaggeration of another’s words. But for a collector, assembler and great writer such as Boccaccio, parody is perhaps best understood, as Dentith writes, as an intertextual “chain of utterances” such that all texts to some extent, but especially the *Decameron,* can be seen in the following terms: “…the interrelatedness of writing, the fact that all written utterances – texts – situate themselves in relation to texts that precede them, and are in turn alluded to or repudiated by texts that follow” (Dentith 5). What results is a dense web of allusions, in which one finds ready-made formulations, catch phrases, slang, jargon, and so forth. Ultimately, then, Dentith asserts more broadly that “parody includes any cultural practice which provides a
relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice,” in which “polemical” captures the evaluative aspect of parody (9).

Ó Cuilleanáin repeatedly describes Boccaccio’s techniques in terms of parody: in the case of the role reversals of the monk, the abbot, and the young lover in 1.4; the reference to the dense web of Christian doctrines, practices, personae and writings the help to create Boccaccio’s narrative repertoire; and the various permutations that Boccaccio makes of religious and sacred practices; and even in drawing attention to the act of narration and the creation of new fictions out of parodic procedures. When one considers narrative form instead of novella content, there are affinities between Ó Cuilleanáin’s interpretation of the Decameron narrative structure and the transformative powers of parody. Ó Cuilleanáin observes, “The Hundred Tales can be read almost as a treatise of the storyteller’s art, manipulations of narrative formulae,” which coincides Dentith’s comment that in essence “parody draws attention to the conventions that constitute narrative and novel-writing” (15). At this juncture, it is also helpful to consider the definition of parody given by The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics

10 Ó Cuilleanáin comments: “There is a splendidly symmetrical reversal of roles when the monk (outside) spies on the abbot (inside), and the normal hierarchy is completely capsized by the abbot’s considerate decision to let the girl go on top, lest she be oppressed by the ‘grave peso della sua dignità’ (1.4.18)” (101). Parody is often described in terms of “reversal of roles,” “turning upside down,” and in this case, also “completely capsizing.”

11 As evinced in one of Dentith’s initial definitions, parodic procedures result from utilization and evaluation of a dense allusive web of culture practices, doctrines, and texts. A propos of this element in parody’s definition, Ó Cuilleanáin independently observes: “These central chapters show how the author draws on the doctrines, practices and personae of Christianity as an established order of reality, interacting with secular reality, offering a repertoire of narrative resolutions and a vocabulary of ready-made narrative sequences to be incorporated in his formalized fictions” (10).

12 In the work’s introduction, Ó Cuilleanáin suggests that Boccaccio, “in making complicated stories out of the resources of religion in his day, is opportunistically exploiting the formal possibilities inherent in religious institutions: possibilities which also undergo permutations in the course of religious history” (35). Boccaccio continues this process of (per)mutation with exaggerations and topsy-turvy treatments of many religious and sacred traditions.
which defines it etymologically as “a song sung beside a previous one – [that] may be a critique, with serious or comic purposes, of a prevailing way of thinking and/or lifestyle.” Along these lines, Ó Cuilleanáin successfully indicates to the reader that there are indeed two songs being sung and at least two stories being told one beside another. In this way, the Decameron, with Boccaccio the parodist at the controls, “opens a line of enquiry into the fidelity of Boccaccio’s translations between the sacred and the profane, the correspondence and interpretation of the two worlds” (Ó Cuilleanáin 32).

2. Historical Context, Parody and Matrimony

Thus, the critic successfully, at times directly and at times indirectly, leads the reader to the interpretative approach through which the reader can come to a more complete understanding of religion’s place in the Decameron and Boccaccio’s role as a parodist. In this effort, he attempts to divorce Boccaccio’s parody and his masterpiece from its historical context, however, and leaves the argumentation less convincing than it otherwise might be. A propos of this separation, Ó Cuilleanáin conjectures, “Apart from contemporary history, the Decameron must then be judged against the literary traditions which it emulates or parodies, and against such countervailing contemporary works as Passavanti’s Specchio di vera penitenzia” (51). Undoubtedly, the textual targets of Boccaccio’s parody—Lo Specchio, La commedia, the Hexameron, church doctrine, canon law, among countless others—must be taken into consideration in order to understand the nature of the intertextual relationship and, often, subversion that takes place in the one hundred tales. However, it is not clear why the analysis and emulation

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13 Ó Cuilleanáin aptly underscores the difficulty of extracting a consistent message or ideology from Boccaccio’s tales: “His systematic avoidance of conclusions means that critical efforts to extract a
of literary traditions is inherently separate from *The Decameron*’s historical context.

Boccaccio the Narrator, at the very onset of the *Decameron*, declares the necessity of anchoring his work, the narrative frame, and all the stories therein to the *orrido cominciamento* that acted as the catalyst for the work.

The necessity of confronting Boccaccio’s literary predecessors comes at the very beginning of the work though the title, as Delcorno aptly underlines in his article “Ironicità-Parodia” in the *Lessico critico decameroniano*: “Già il titolo (‘Comincia il libro chiamato Decameron cognominato prencipe Galeotto, nel quale si contengono cento novelle in diece di dì dette da sette donne e da tre giovani uomini’) definisce l’opera come un rifacimento parodico di due sommi modelli della letteratura religiosa, latina e volgare: l’*Hexameron* di sant’Ambrogio e la *Commedia*” (172). Neither Delcorno nor most other critics of literary history or of the *Decameron* call so forcefully for the detachment of the history from the interpretation of the work. One can agree with Ó Cuilleanáin that to ideological questions one cannot always ascribe historical significance to literary statements; however, the text of the *Decameron* itself, and its inaugural parodic subtexts do not seem to support that Boccaccio had in mind only the project of creating a new literary aesthetic or the ideal literary place in which storytelling could be perfected.

Rather, his opening reference to the *Commedia* warns readers (who inhabit the historical frame of the work, just as present-day readers inhabit a period nearly seven hundred years consistent message from his characters are doomed to inquisitorial failure” (75). When one considers this difficulty in terms of the parodic context, this elusiveness seems to have much to do with the evaluative aspect of the parody in play. Does the narrator or Boccaccio agree or disagree with the outcome? Does the cultural practice in question work or not? In what critical direction is the reference directed: toward the world of the reader or toward the target text? Dentith offers a thorough and useful list of the effects of parodic references one must take into consideration when analyzing a text. According to Dentith, it is essential to address the direction of the polemic—i.e., towards the reader’s world or towards the original text—and, considering the evaluative stance, whether or not a work draws on the authority of the parodied text in order to distance itself toward a new idea or simply to call for a reevaluation of the original idea.
from Boccaccio’s birth) about just how much fun they should have and what “useful advice” they can take from the work. As hypotext, the Ambrosian commentary on Genesis suggests that Boccaccio, through the narrative recreation of his ten young people, seeks to recreate the world and make it different—perhaps even better—than it was before the plague and better than it is during the plague. To be sure, and we will treat this notion much more thoroughly in chapter one with the help of Cervigni’s study, it is an almost totally secular rewriting of the medieval worldview. Indeed, Boccaccio is clearly concerned with humanity and its afflictions, with rivaling the Commedia’s poetics, and with updating the traditional medieval outlook.

3. Dissertation Chapter Outline

Literary theorists and historians, too, emphasize the fluidity of parody’s definition and the difficulty of pinning down the term to have one meaning throughout the ages. Thus, in the introduction to Simon Dentith’s work on the subject, the subtitle for tracking down parody’s roots is presented as a question: “A History of Parody?” It is quite difficulty to render a condensed account of parody based on the general account of language because the historical context in which it is used changes its meaning from epoch to epoch: from the Greek Old Comedy of Aristophanes and medieval parodia sacra to Don Quixote or a publication as contemporary as Vanity Fair. The complex evolution and “range of material certainly seems too wide to be accommodated by a single definition, and any attempt to do so would seem to strip all these various cultural practices of their specific purchase on the differing historical worlds that they emerge from and speak to” (Dentith 21). The present study will accept Dentith’s advice in
Chapter One as we seek to trace parody’s evolution from period to period and culture to culture, and again in Chapter Two, when the historical context of medieval matrimony is presented as the backdrop for the many subversive elements that surround marriages throughout the Decameron’s first nine days. In both chapters, we will necessarily consider Boccaccio the parodist’s literary production by always keeping in mind the way it works at his particular historic moment and by considering the functions it performs in differing social situations.

Having defined the subject of religion and religious parody within the general context of the Proemio, the Introduzione and the interpretation of several prominent critics in the present introduction, in Chapter One I will delve into the complex history of parody and take a close look at Boccaccio’s use of the literary technique in his masterpiece, as well as the critical coverage it has received. I will posit that, although significant attention has been given to the presence of parody in the Decameron, critics generally tend to offer explanations at the microtextual level. Several excellent studies point out the forms of Boccaccio’s parody and list numerous novelle in which they take place. However, I would like to encourage a more complete view of parody, a macrotextual approach, in which we recognize that Boccaccio was not only capable of making ironic statements and providing localized examples of parody, but, rather, an overarching system of parody in the architecture of his work.

Dino Cervigni has recently proposed a broad schema of this sort, and we will use his reflections on the parodic, secular pilgrimage and establishment of a monastic community among the young people as a foundation and point of departure for understanding parody’s big picture in the work. After laying the foundation of parody’s
history and its place in the macrotext of the *Decameron*, we will heed Dentith’s warning and those of other critics that history must always be kept at the forefront of the analysis of parodic cultural practices. If there must be two songs, one being subversively sung alongside the other, Boccaccio’s genius lies not only in creating an unblemished literary world – the chronotope of the *brigata*, which, however, has frictions between the two sexes, and many pervasive personal problems, as most of the ballads reveal. Boccaccio’s genius also reveals itself in being capable of writing a response to the historical, legal, religious, and literary world that surrounded him. In the view of the present study, Boccaccio’s parody targets especially religious institutions and satires the sacred and the profane of his own day and society. Along this line of interpretation, the historical realities of medieval Florentine matrimony will be considered alongside Boccaccio’s treatment, representation and possible criticism of the institution.

Accordingly, it will behoove the reader to understand to some extent Boccaccio’s Florentine and Italian settings and to furnish a history of marriage in Medieval Italy that will be interwoven with a general schema and treatment of where matrimony appears in the frame-story and in the course of the one hundred *novelle*. At that point, we will take into consideration these questions among others: What was the history preceding matrimonial practices in *Trecento* Florence? How was marriage defined in Boccaccio’s time period and what changes, if any, came about during and after the plague? How does Boccaccio portray matrimony in the *Decameron* and why? After the reader has been given the historical and parodic interpretive lens through which to read the first two chapters, the remaining chapters will analyze the various *novelle* that contain nuptial celebrations and/or marriages *in medias res*, all the while keeping in mind
what, as Ó Cuilleanáin aptly reminds: “Rules and observances, the laws and metaphors of society, are Boccaccio’s narrative life blood” (34). But it is not simply the questioning of these contemporary phenomena that concerns Boccaccio: instead, he reworks these fundamental strands of medieval society in such a way that we the readers are forced to consider and question their validity, and, in a very Boccaccian way, laugh at them simultaneously. In the third and fourth chapters, the twenty-two nuptial-related novelle that precede Day Five will be treated. In brief, we will take a look at how the inaugural marriage ceremony of the work, in Decameron 2.3, closely imitates a prominent wedding from one of Boccaccio’s earlier works. It is an orthodox, ceremonious event, and, quite interestingly, the only wedding over which a member of the clergy presides, albeit belatedly. Immediately after this ceremony in Decameron 2.3 that refers to the Filocolo, Boccaccio presents several matrimony in the second day that correspond more closely to his typical representation of marriages in Day Five and in the rest of the work. What does Boccaccio’s reference to the Filocolo mean in the context of Day Two? Why does he decide to depart from the model of the Filocolo and how is matrimony presented in the novelle that immediately follow Decameron 2.3, and in those that precede Day Five, the day for marriage par excellence? In Chapter Five, the day of the lieto fine and of exclusively matrimonial endings will be considered in light of chapter

14 In this line of reasoning, it seems plausible to read Boccaccio’s parody as a critical function as Dentith argues about parodic authors in general: “For some writers, parody serves a normative critical function, indeed, it acts to do so when the more modern forms of criticism such as the literary essay are absent, and its function is to make explicit the absurdities of current poetic fashions” (33).

15 The presence of marriage ranges from formerly married widows (1.10; 2.2) and tales that begin with the protagonists already married (1.5; 2.6; 2.8; 2.9; 2.10; 3.2; 3.3; 3.4; 3.5; 3.6; 3.7; 3.8; 4.2; 4.9; 4.10) to tales in which the protagonists celebrate a new marriage (2.3, 2.6, 2.7, 2.8, 2.10, 3.10, 4.1, 4.6, 4.8). If one were to count the tale of Masetto, who breaks a sort of nuptial bond with the nuns, “brides of Christ,” and the presence of a marriage contract that never came to fruition in 4.4, then the number could also be extended to twenty-five amid the tales that precede Day Five.
three and four’s interpretative findings and in light of the central placement of so many marriages in the architecture of the work. The sixth chapter will complete the examination of novelle that contain couples who are wedded in Decameron Day Five and will look at Boccaccio’s treatment of matrimony and relationships as economic exchanges. The seventh and final chapter of the study will focus on the thirty-six novelle following Day Five that have matrimonial elements. If the conclusions of the first nine tales of Day Five present the reader with dubious happily-ever-after endings, the seventh chapter will take a look at how Boccaccio views married life after the wedding to verify whether or not the happy endings of the fifth day offer a solid foundation.

In so far as parody is a mode or range of writing embracing a wide spectrum of possible intertextual relationships, Boccaccio provides endless amounts of references to literary, juridical, liturgical, patrological, and just plain everyday conversation in the complex and allusive web of intertextual references from his subversive point of view. Keeping this context in mind, I will seek to analyze the local instances of parodic representation, which are housed in numerous individual novelle. At the same time, it is important to go beyond the confines of the microtext so that one can see Boccaccio who, without a doubt, sings his countervailing song in order to help us acquire a new way of looking at the world.
CHAPTER 2

PARODY AND ITS PRACTICE IN THE DECAMERON

Beginning in the last twenty five years of the twentieth century, critics have begun to view parody as a serious mode of literary expression. Before the twentieth century, in general, this manner of writing and reading a work was regarded as second-class, lighthearted, and incompatible with “serious” works of literature. As a result, one sometimes finds hesitation and temerity when referencing the presence of parody in a major literary work such as the Decameron. At several points throughout his critical edition of the medieval masterpiece, Vittore Branca indicates that Boccaccio is parodying, contaminating, or subverting a preceding text or religious practice. His first comment regarding the possibility of a subversive reference to a prominent hypotext comes at the very beginning of the work, when Boccaccio draws our attention to the Commedia and to Saint Ambrose’s Hexameron. Branca carefully notes the possibility parenthetically and in a footnote: “Il titolo, di derivazione greca …, fu ricalcato (forse parodisticamente?) su Hexameron, nome della nota opera di sant’Ambrogio.” Since that timid indication of a parodic possibility, a variety of scholars have contributed to this field of Boccaccio studies and posited that parody’s practice in the work is much more prominent and its existence merits much more attention than a parenthetical “forse.”

Delcorno, Rossi, and, as we have seen in the introduction to the present study, Ó Cuilleanáin, peg Boccaccio as a parodist who is at his best when referring to other
sources and reutilizing them to fit the needs of his new worldview. Delcorno’s article offers up an encyclopedic list of different categories of parody and many specific references to the *novelle* in which one can find them. Several critics have been successful in this sort of microtextual operation, identifying stimulating and valid examples of parody in the individual tales. Often, these subverted elements are religious, and their parodic (as well as comic) value often comes from the undermining of their inherently sacred nature. Thus, for instance, at the beginning of the masterpiece we watch aghast as Cepparello, the “buon uomo” he is, makes a mockery of confession. In Day Six, which many critics view as a watershed in the development of the tales, the power and efficacy of preaching and sharing the gospel and Word of our Lord, is turned upside-down in the infamous tale of Frate Cipolla. Almost at the end of Day Nine, a priest puts a personal and sexually gratifying spin on the last Christian sacrament, then called *extrema unctio* in the tale of Donno Gianni, *compar* Pietro and *comar* Gemmata. Identifying and analyzing parody at the level of the *novella* as well as in the unfolding of the *Decameron* constitute indispensable steps toward the proper reading of the masterpiece.

I would submit, however, that several weaknesses may emerge in this common approach to analyzing parody, especially in reference to the religious and sacred, in the *Decameron*. First, as helpful as it is to provide lists of isolated instances, for a masterpiece such as the *Decameron*, it is also necessary to recognize the place of parody in the macrotext, in the frame of the ten young people, and with reference to the historical

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16 If Cepparello acts as the inaugural instance of subverting the sacred and sacraments, Cervigni underscores the culmination of such a parody in the tale of Donno Gianni, *compar* Pietro, and *comar* Gemmata: “In fact, one could certainly read each tale of Day Three as a series of parodic profanations, which had already begun unfolding with Cepparello’s tale and will continue to unfold, in my view, until the end of Day Nine, culminating, according to the very insightful reading proposed by Tobias Gittes, with the profanation and parody of the last Christian sacrament, then called *extrema unctio* (St. Thomas, *Summa theologica*, *Sppl.* Q. 29, 1), in the tale of Donno Gianni, *compar* Pietro and *comar* Gemmata.”
frame of Boccaccio the narrator. Dino Cervigni has recently proposed a broad schema that contextualizes parody in terms of the work as a whole, and in the present chapter we will analyze his approach. My second point of criticism, a question raised also in the introduction of this dissertation, is that the localized, microtextual considerations of Boccaccio as parodist also tend to disregard the indispensable element of the contemporary history that molded Boccaccio as a writer and provided him with the material needed to formulate his subversions of the sacred and religious. Parody is etymologically a song sung beside another, for critical or comic purposes, and his destabilizing representations of contemporary cultural, religious, and social practices should keep the historical context in mind. Finally, critics have most often demonstrated that the targets of Boccaccio’s parodic proclivity are related to religion, the Church, or the sacred. Prayers, sacraments—such as confession, baptism, the last rites—key narratives in the Bible, such as the Annunciation, and other sacred and religious practices are turned upside down in Boccaccio’s observation, and perhaps also criticism, of the world around him.

Within the overall parodic context of the Decameron, I intend to focus on an institution highly emblematic of the entire Middle Ages, the institution of matrimony, which by the mid-fourteenth century had already been accepted as a sacrament, played an extremely important civic function, and, as the union between a man and a woman, was at the center of all aspects of medieval life. Thus, precisely at the time when matrimony’s sacramental value had reached its highest dogmatic in the previous century in the theology of Saint Thomas (1225-1274), and when matrimony played a fundamental role in civic matters, in everyday life marriages were also at the center of many evils in
society. Boccaccio’s masterpiece showcases the best and worst in the medieval practice of matrimony.

Relatively little critical attention has been given to the presence of the sacrament of marriage in the Decameron. Indeed, one finds that marriages take place, or married protagonists are found, in no fewer than 65 tales and in all ten days of storytelling. Although nuptials are not celebrated in Days One, Six, Seven, Eight and Nine, wedded couples comprise the protagonists of numerous novelle and are required to be the central protagonists of all tales of Day Seven under Dioneo’s reign. I believe that this sacramental institution, too, is portrayed in a parodic fashion, and deserves our attention as a central social and religious practice from beginning to end in Boccaccio’s masterpiece. In order to contextualize parody in the medieval period and Boccaccio’s particular approach, I will begin the present chapter with a brief historical excursus on parody, from its Greek origins through Roman times and finally into the Middle Ages. Through close consideration of literary history, one will find that, according to many critics, parody in a literary work must always be defined and considered alongside the historical context in which it developed. It is a quite complex term and form of expression whose meaning and uses can change significantly from epoch to epoch. Finally, keeping parody’s history and Boccaccio’s historical context in mind, we will sample the criticism available on parody in the Decameron. I will posit that much progress has been made in recognizing this literary and critical mode in the work, but that the localized efforts of finding parodic examples in the one hundred tales must be

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17 After Day Five, in which all tales ended happily with the celebration of marriage—with the exception, as always of Dioneo’s ultimate tale and deviation—Dioneo commands that in the sixth, “si ragiona delle beffe, le quali o per amore o per salvamento di loro le donne hanno già fatte a’ suoi mariti, senza essersene avveduti o sì” (Dec. 6.1.1).
complemented by recognizing the broader scope and presence of parody in the work as a whole.

1. A Brief History of Parody

Let us now follow a brief history of parody to help understand where it originated, what it came to mean in the medieval period, and finally, where Boccaccio fits into the evolution of this literary mode. Most critical accounts of parody’s evolution begin with identifying one of the term’s first known usages. In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, the term is utilized in reference to an earlier writer, Hegemon (Dentith 10). In general, one gathers from this context that parody was usually a narrative poem in the meter and vocabulary of epic poems that treated, instead, a light satirical or mock-heroic subject.\(^{18}\) Even if in the Roman world the term would come to be a reference to widespread practice of quotation or mere allusions to earlier texts, one finds that in the Greek world parody was a specific literary form for which prizes were awarded at poetic contests. After noting the competitive aspect of parody, Simon Dentith, in his work *Parody*, provides a useful disclaimer that is necessary and appreciated in consideration of historically distant themes, especially with the transmission of Greek texts and terms. Dentith underscores that it is useful and necessary to search out parody’s origins, but that with the greater historical distance, it becomes more difficult to reconstruct discursive dispositions, specific targets of derision, and even the evaluative stance of the parody.\(^{19}\)

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\(^{18}\) Bonafin concisely summarizes that “la parodia sta all’epica un po’ come la commedia sta alla tragedia; dalla collazione di altri passi di autori antichi, si arriva alla conclusione che il termine denoterebbe un testo narrativo non lungo, in versi e stile epico, ma applicati a un soggetto frivolo, satirico o eroicomico” (10-11).

\(^{19}\) It is possible to conclude, however, “that ancient Greek culture was shot through with parodic forms, even if their relationship to the heroic, tragic or sacred texts is difficult to determine” (Dentith 40).
As a literary historian, Dentith proffers evidence of parody’s presence and its etymological function as a “song sung beside”; often, he reminds us, the great tragic trilogies, such as Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, were performed as tetralogies, which ended on a satiric note. Just as other scholars, Dentith reiterates that Homer provided a fecund stylistic model and narrative opportunity for parodies of all kinds—from the mock-heroic to travesty. Even if it is difficult to ascertain the effect that parody had on the sacred stories themselves and how the audiences reacted, one found a profoundly welcoming attitude towards the form in ancient Greece. At almost all events, they seemed to maintain an open attitude and frame of mind in which serious forms and parodic counterparts could exist one alongside the other, even if the textual targets of parody were often the most sacred stories of their culture (Dentith 41). In this key of reading, epic heroic poetry was often presented in a reductively comic way and adapted for comic purposes and trivial matters. Nonetheless, parody was also present in higher forms of artistic and literary creation, including the plays of Aristophanes.  

Even if the extraordinary tolerance and enjoyment of parody was not as strongly present in the Roman and Christian eras as it was in the Hellenistic period, the practice still continued in a tradition known as “Menippean satire” after the Greek writer Menippus. By this time, one finds that “the genre provided a learned parody of learning, or indeed a philosophical parody of philosophy, by means of a comic self-parodying manner,” and the tradition served as the background for several prominent examples such as Petronius’s *Satyricon*, Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* (both first-century AD), and

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20 “Old Comedy, then – or at least the plays of Aristophanes – is a form which is marked by parodic forms on at least two levels. First, the very texture of plays is made up of myriad allusions to the contemporary language of Athens; second, the plays abound with specific parodies of tragic (and other) writers, the cultural politics of which is now hard to determine” (Dentith 45).
Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* of the sixth century (Dentith 47). The *Satyricon* mixes poetry and prose, fun and obscenity, real wisdom and satirized knowledge, and ultimately demonstrates the “parodic self-defeating nature of the genre with particular clarity, for its hero Encolpius is both the reader’s guide through a series of comic, obscene and satirical adventures, and himself the greediest and most salacious of characters” (Dentith 47). The *Satyricon* contains incidental parody, at times serious and sometimes not, jumps from poetry to prose, and, as Dentith aptly notes, a range of imitative skills which alert the reader to the varying tones which parodic forms can include. In the case of Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis*, the parody practice of parody moves closer to the medieval Christian period, which was most often centered on sacred and religious themes. In this work, which was written shortly after the death of the Emperor Claudius, Seneca recounts the failed attempt at apotheosis, which resulted in its opposite, with the emperor going to Hell. A more general assault on Claudius follows such as with subversions of the council of the Gods and the judgment in Hell.

Although scholars maintain that medieval Christendom was not as thoroughly permeated by parody as in preceding periods, they recognize that there was a wide variety of widely circulating written parodic forms. Indeed, Bonafin succinctly describes that the medieval period was an active laboratory and fertile ground for the use and growth of the mode of expression.21 To be sure, the ancient tradition of parody transforming and undermining sacred texts remained alive and well in the medieval period, to such an extent that its commonness in the medieval Christian world might

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21 “Il punto di partenza è rappresentato dall’età medievale, fecondo terreno per molteplici varietà di fenomeni comici, satirici e parodici, che in parte proseguivano e dilatavano, trasformandola, la tradizione festiva antica, pagana e folklorica” (17).
Parody was practiced in four distinct forms: allegorical parody, mock saints’ lives, liturgical parodies, and humorous centos (in which biblical passages or other classical sources are taken and reworked to make a new, comic text).

Mock saints’ lives, or parodic hagiographies, were often written about “St Nemo” or “St Invicem.” Such religious contaminations may serve as interesting descriptions and even as possible sources of inspiration for several scenes in the Decameron, in which Boccaccio could be subversively rewriting saints’ lives or, in one specific reference, playing with the scriptural wording of the word made flesh. In the case of parodying

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22 A propos of the liturgy, the Bible, common prayers, and so on, being the targets of most parodic expressions, Dentith writes: “What perhaps seems most surprising about medieval parodic forms is that they are focused on the most sacred texts of the culture, namely the Bible and the liturgy” (50). Citing a study of Francesco Novati, “La parodia sacra nelle letterature moderne,” Bonafin notes parody’s constant tendency to “spargere il dileggio sopra le cose più sacre,’ presente tanto negli spiriti colti’ quanto nel volgo vittima ‘delle superstizioni pagane,’ alla decadenza dell’impero romano e, parallelamente, al raggiungimento di uno status dominante da parte della religione cristiana” (96). Considering, however, that the clergy were the most common sort of educated and literate writers in the period, it does not come as such a great surprise to Bonafin. He conceives of parody originating from among the clergy as a form of entertainment with a ready-made supply of vocabulary in the sacred formulations of the Bible and other religious materials around them: “l’uso massiccio di frasi e locuzioni estratte dai testi della Chiesa nelle parodie medievali sarebbe spiegabile con la naturale familiarità, dovuta alla assidua frequentazione che i letterati avevano con essi, piuttosto che come un’intenzionale irriverenza: il logoramento delle formule sacre, la loro riduzione a cliché, la loro ripetizione decontestualizzata, doveva però col tempo suscitare il riso, e tanto più questo poteva accadere se i testi erano composti in vista della recitazione, forse ad opera di qualche chierico piu’ versato nell’intrattenimento” (Bonafin 97).

23 Considering the increasing attention that Boccaccio receives as a parodist, it is unfortunate and somewhat surprising that no monographs exist on medieval parody, excepting, of course, the studies quoted in both Dentith’s work and that of Bonafin. They both refer to Martha Bayless’s Parody in the Middle Ages: the Latin Tradition and Paul Lehmann’s Die Parodie in Mittelalter, but these two books only treat literature in Latin.

24 A propos of this parodic form, Bonafin, too, quotes Bayless and summarizes in the following way: “per definizioni, se nessuno può compiere una certa azione, Nemo può compierla! I sermoni parodici su questo santo improbabile, conservati in una pluralità di redazioni dal XIII al XV secolo, rappresentano una sorta di trasposizione irriverente dell’inizio del vangelo di Giovanni (‘In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum’, Gv 1,1): ‘The world of Nemo takes such statements at face value: while in the Bible a person appears as a Word, in Nemo a word appears as a person. St. Nemo, then, is the literal result of a Word made flesh’” (Bonafin 108).

25 The most obvious reference with regard to a parodic hagiography would be the inaugural novella of Ser Cepparello. The tale could also be seen as a mockery of the practices surrounding the veneration of saints, their bodies, and holy relics. Perhaps less obvious, but with equally rich potential might be found in some of the tragic conclusions of Day Five; for instance, when Gianni and Restituta (Dec. 5.6) are sentenced to
the “word made flesh,” one could argue that Boccaccio takes the biblical passage’s undermining a step further with Frate Cipolla who contaminates the “Word-Made-Flesh” with “Adam’s rib” and numerous other sacrilegious jokes.

Parodic writings and practices had scholarly, and even more so, clerical, provenance of the mock saints’ form, and underline the general propensity and eagerness of clerics to devise sophisticated wordplay for the purpose of mock-religious amusements (Dentith 50). Liturgical ceremonies were often the intended goal of many parodic practices. This category yielded texts such as the “drinkers’ mass,” in which the words of the liturgy were changed to convert them into masses to the cask (dolio, “cask” used in place of Domino, “Lord”; potemus, “let us drink,” in place of “oremus”; and so on). More elaborate and theatrical parodic forms existed in vernacular religious culture, such as the “Feast of Fools,” which featured an acted out parody of the liturgy that proffered a sort of carnival-like event in a religious context. A typical example of allegorical

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26 Dentith states: “Nearer to a potentially desacralising form of writing are the numerous liturgical parodies that are to be found in the medieval period” (51).

27 There were numerous other contaminations of this sort in both Latin and the vernacular such that Bonafin comments: “Questi bilingui sono perlopiù parodie di preghiere e inni molto noti (Pater noster, Ave Maria, Laetabundus) in cui l’originale è associato a campi semantici inattesi e stranianti, quail il vino, l’amore fisico, l’onnipotenza del denaro; in alcuni casi i sintagmi latini sono perfettamente inseriti nel discorso narrativo svolto dalla parodia, cosicché l’effetto comico scaturisce dalla contraddizione fra il significato religioso primitivo […] e il nuovo senso profano…” (Bonafin 97).

28 A propos of the “Feast of Fools,” Dentith draws attention to the bigger picture in that many of these rituals represented the “world turned upside down” with very precise inversions of religious meanings of medieval Catholicism: “In a manner directly reminiscent of carnival celebrations, junior clergy performed an elaborate parody of the liturgy, electing a bishop or abbot of fools, wearing their vestments back to front or women’s clothes, and performing various other rituals of inversion, such as using old shoes instead of incense in the censor, and braying hissing, shouting, cackling or jeering the responses” (Dentith 51). The wearing of vestments from back to front and the notion of cross-dressing might bring to mind the abbess of Dec. 9.2 who rises in haste from being in bed with her own lover with the intent of surprising an accused nun in bed with another. In her rush, she puts pants of the priest that has been with her instead of her coif.
parody that scholars often cite is the *Cena Cypriani*, with at least one example of parodic representation that in some ways even manages to subvert a sacred matrimonial example from the Bible. This text is the most important preceding text to the expansion of parodic literature.\(^\text{29}\) Typically, one finds that Eve sits on a fig leaf, Noah sits on the arch, Jesus drinks the wine, a rooster disturbs Peter’s sleep, Pilate washes his hands, Judas distributes kisses, and so on. The parodic element in this case is real but relatively weak. In the end, the *Cena* is little more than a didactic text made to instruct readers in the Bible by semi-humorous means. But it still manages to surround the sacred stories with a comic atmosphere (Dentith 50). Even if no strong subversive current pervades in the *Cena*, it is still worth underlining in the present study for an early precedent of religious parody that focused its parodic energies not only on the sacred stories of the Bible, but also on the celebration of a wedding.

It is especially noteworthy for an early and long-lasting tradition that embraces the act of surrounding sacred stories and institutions with a comic and secular, if at this point not also profane, atmosphere (Dentith 50). The communicative efficacy—both in the didactical-allegorical sense and comic—of the reworking can be attested to by the countless rewritings it underwent from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries (Bonafin 105). When considered alongside the long-lasting and widely copied examples in other major parody categories—mock saints’ lives, liturgy, allegorical and humorous centos—one finds that a long tradition of parody precedes Boccaccio. Often, Boccaccio is not recognized in the literary-historical timeline of medieval parody. Likewise, the history of a strong parodic tradition preceding Boccaccio is generally left out in the *Decamerone*

\(^{29}\) According to Bonafin, it “esemplifica il gioco erudito con i personaggi della Bibbia, convocati a un singolare banchetto nuziale, ad un tempo contraffazione delle nozze di Cana, imagine del Regno di Dio (sposo della Chiesa) e del Paradiso come convivio” (102).
criticism. With this history and practice of parody in mind, let us now proceed to provide briefly a working definition of parody that keeps in mind the historical context and development of this literary mode and helps to explain its function of the critical device in the *Decameron*.

2. Defining Parody and the Decameronian Context

The most obvious bridge between the historical tradition of parody and Boccaccio’s specific variety seems to be the focus on religious institutions, practices and figures, as well as the sacred in general. In ancient Greece, one of the most common targets of subversive rewritings was the *corpus* of Homer. In ancient Rome, too, the willingness to transform satirically sacred themes was still present (Dentith 47). Seneca’s *Apocolocyntosis* serves as a solid example, in which nothing less than apotheosis, *i.e.*, the deification of an emperor, is upended in order to call into question Claudius’s qualifications for being praised so highly in the afterlife. Then, in the medieval period, parodic and subversive practices and subversion of the most holy texts, rituals and institutions spread very widely. For Latin texts, Bayless provides four broad categories for the writing of the period: mock saints’ lives, liturgical parodies, and humorous centos. Beyond Latin examples, Dentith draws attention to the “Feast of Fools,” a reenactment that reminds the reader of carnival celebrations, in which junior clergy performed an elaborate parody of the liturgy. In this vein, Bonafin describes in detail the so-called “fool-ass rites,” or “le feste dei folli e dell’asino.”

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30 This phenomenon consisted of: “L’asino che partecipava alle cerimonie era una gaia allusione agli asini fedeli della storia sacra, appartenente ai motivi dei *ludi natalizi* (dall’asino di Balaam all’asino della mangiatoia, a quello della fuga in Egitto)” (Bonafin 99).
certainly focuses on religious, sacred, and civic rituals, norms and practices. A propos of this focus, Delcorno cogently posits that “[l]e armi della parodia sono rivolte in modo sistematico contro la letteratura religiosa (visioni d’oltretomba, leggende di anacoreti, vite di santi), utilizzata e propagandata dai pulpiti in funzione di un integralismo ideologico che alcuni hanno definito ‘cultura di penitenza’” (179).  

Although some critics successfully cite these general targets of parody and individual instances within the one hundred tales, they rarely present the historical context in which Boccaccio finds himself and, in so doing, leave unclear the long tradition that the author taps into to formulate his unique world view. In the same article as quoted above, Delcorno endorses a statement by Branca, which leads the reader to believe that there was no significant preceding tradition to underpin Boccaccio the parodist’s approach: “L’atteggiamento adottato dal Boccaccio nei confronti della Commedia è forse la prova più evidente di una vena parodistica che, osserva Vittore Branca, non risparmia quasi nessuna ‘tradizione viva nel nostro autunno del Medioevo’” (Delcorno 174). Before proceeding to take a closer look at Boccaccio’s system of parody, let us first seek to define this pervasive literary mode with the help of literary historians of parody, as well as the practice’s long history in mind.

Our understanding of parody cannot ignore the importance of the historical context. Dentith cogently affirms the difficulty of tracing the term’s history and evolution, while at the same time emphasizing the necessity of such an undertaking.  

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31 Though Boccaccio the parodist focuses much of his efforts on these target texts, one finds much “economic” parody as well, in which the author rewrites the mercantile vocabulary to describe human relationships, to undermine the biblical notion of conjugal debt, and so on.

32 “Finally, because of the antiquity of the word parody (it is one of the small but important group of literary-critical terms to have descended from the ancient Greeks), because of the range of different
Thus, the critic proposes a broad-based definition in which parody can be as simple as an evaluation of what one is say or hearing—a child mocking someone in feeble and whining tones—or as sophisticated as a complex “chain of utterances” that forms a dense web of intertextual references and allusions. Along these lines, one also sees that parody is one of numerous forms of intertextual allusion out of which literary works are produced (Dentith 5). Dentith rightfully dismisses studies which seek to tie the term down to a narrow and debilitating definition that reduces the form to formal operations. As a result, he concludes that “‘Parody’ should be thought of, not as a single and tightly definable genre or practice, but as a range of cultural practices which are all more or less parodic” (19). Thus in his work, he refers not only to parody in the singular form but also to “parodic cultural forms.”

A definition of this sort permits the reader to understand that parody comes in many shapes and forms and that it can and must differ significantly from writer to writer and from epoch to epoch. This approach encourages and demands the recognition of parody not simply as a lighthearted attempt to make a reader laugh, but, at its highest form of expression, and with a writer as great as Boccaccio, as a serious critical tool. Dentith advocates this redefinition with examples form mostly English literature since the seventeenth century; however, it holds true for the medieval period as well, which represents an excellent laboratory to experiment with and test the form, a laboratory that practices to which it alludes, and because of differing national usages, no classification can ever hope to be securely held in place” (Dentith 6).

The author’s understanding helps to add gravity and literary seriousness to the form, which has been lacking among criticism until the latter part of the twentieth century. In this vein, the author rightly underlines the complexity of parodic operations that are valid when considering Boccaccio’s Decameron: “In fact, the social and cultural meanings of parody, like all utterances, can only be understood in the density of the interpersonal and intertextual relations in which it intervenes” (Dentith 37).
was surrounded by and connected to a specific cultural and historic context.\textsuperscript{34} One needs to underline parody’s “temporality,” interpreting the parodic practices of a given period and of a given writer, that is, their unique correspondence with a determined historical phase.\textsuperscript{35} Bonafin takes this line of reasoning even further by underlining the helpfulness of interdisciplinarity to comprehend fully the meanings and references of well-executed parodic practices: “Né la parodia medievale fu al ripare dalle discussioni dei mutamenti intervenuti nella struttura economica, sociale e culturale nell’XI e XII secolo. Come si vede, la tematica è complessa e vasta e richiede una pluralità di competenze disciplinari” (95).

In this critical context, one finds that parody in certain periods, and according to Bonafin surely in the medieval period, served a critical function when other forms of modern criticism, such as the literary essay, were not available. This situation was characteristic of Boccaccio’s turbulent time period, Bonafin argues by quoting Lehmann, because of the intensification of parodic production beginning in the 1100s, which grew in concomitance with a rise in social, political and cultural conflicts. Indeed, he finds a marked expansion of parody in vulgar literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, which he connects to the rise of cities and the birth of a new kind of intellectual: “Ma soprattutto con le città nasce una nuova figura di intellettuale, più consapevole delle sue armi critiche, più insofferente delle costrizioni delle norme, dei precetti, dei vincoli, estetici come filosofici, che non derivino da decisioni razionali, ma solo dall’autorità”

\textsuperscript{34} In particular, Bonafin states: “Il medioevo rappresenta un eccellente laboratorio per verificare le concettualità messe in opera nella discussione sulla parodia che, come ogni manifestazione semiotica, non può essere sottratta alla dimensione storica e culturale” (93).

\textsuperscript{35} For Dentith, “the social and cultural meanings of parody, like all utterances, can only be understood in the density of the interpersonal and intertextual relations in which it intervenes” (37).
Bonafin connects the rise of this “new intellectual” and the use of parody as a critical weapon when laws, norms, and traditions, philosophical and aesthetic, and authority were being criticized. It is helpful to note that there are two types of parody, a conservative type that seeks to “police the boundaries of the sayable in the interests of those who wish to continue to say what has always been said,” as well as the tradition that exalts “the subversive possibilities of parody as its essential characteristic; parody in this view typically attacks the official word, mocks the pretensions of authoritative discourse, and undermines the seriousness with which subordinates should approach the justification of their betters” (Dentith 19). Boccaccio undoubtedly found himself in the latter category. If we can accept Bonafin’s general formula that the rise in political, social, and cultural conflict helped to cause the increase in the rise of the use of parody, and that, in particular, it was a critical trait of medieval intellectuals whose formative experiences took place in cities, then Boccaccio and the pestilential time period surrounding the writing of the Decameron offer interesting implications for his particular choice of using parody as his main critical tool. Bonafin’s definition of the subversive type of parody resonates especially well with what I believe Boccaccio was up to: “quella seria (e progressiva) mira a rovesciare ogni posizione autoritaria, che costituisca un’inibizione e un freno al libero esercizio delle facoltà intellettuali; in tal modo, va da sé, contribuisce, ad aprire la mente del lettore a nuovi orizzonti estetici e culturali, a nuove possibilità di vita” (Bonafin 15).

Furthermore, Bonafin, who presents a much more thorough and comprehensive treatment of parody in the Middle Ages than does Dentith, describes this “serious” form as an emancipatory act on the part of the reader. The parodist writes, no matter what the
object, and invites the readers to free themselves from the confines and limits of the
society and literary culture that preceded: “Quale che ne sia l’oggetto, comunque, tutta la
sua efficacia resiede nella capacità del ricevente di mettere in correlazione i contenuti
critici della parodia con quelli del suo modello: si tratta dunque di una struttura letteraria
che per realizzarsi ha bisogno dell’impegno cooperativo del lettore e del suo interesse ad
una lettura emancipata” (Bonafin 15).

In the context of parodic operations, and indeed the scope of the entire
Decameron as elaborated in the Proemio, Boccaccio describes himself and his work in
these “emancipative” terms. Boccaccio the Author has recently been liberated from love
and vows to return the favor to his readers, thus honoring the most high virtue that is
gratitude: “Ma quantunque cessata sia la pena, non per ciò è la memoria fuggita de’
benefici già ricevuti, datimi da coloro a’ quali per benivolenza da loro a me portata erano
gravi le mie fatiche” (Dec. Proemio.6). By placing the references to both the Divine
Comedy and the Hexameron so prominently, the reader must certainly be ready, as
Bonafin indicated in his definition, to “mettere in correlazione i contenuti critici della
parodia con quelli del suo modello”; however, readers must also be ready to free
themselves from the traditional reading by means of Boccaccio’s gift, the unforgettable
“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”

Boccaccio necessarily wedges the Black Death in between the two most important
creative components of his medieval masterpiece. The plague narrative acts as the
historical and literary hinge between “le cento novelle” and “alcune canzonette” that set this storytelling journey in motion, and the historical crisis that casts its shadow on the brigata throughout their secular pilgrimage. The description of the plague immediately follows Boccaccio’s declaration of having been liberated, and the exhortation of his desire to liberate others. The plague provided the ideal moment for Boccaccio to expound a new world view, and one of the main vehicles of his criticism and tool of his rewriting was parody. In the Decameron, the Black Death is the flashpoint, the “pietosa distruzione,” whether furnished by God or celestial alignments, which punishes humanity and shouts to them that everything is not alright on Earth. Boccaccio seizes the historical moment to free himself and society from traditional medieval worldview and to open his readers’ minds to a new future. He does so primarily through parody as a critical device, which looks at the Christian Middle Ages with a “sorridente addio.” With these definitions and the history of parody in mind, let us now proceed to consider where this literary, cultural, and reading mode stands among critics of the Decameron, as well as where it is to be found and how it is utilized in the work itself.

3. Microtext, Macrotext, and Religious Parody

Recently, Boccaccio critics have become more and more aware of the seriousness and underscore the centrality of parody to the Decameron’s structure. Delcorno’s article “Ironia-Parodia” does an excellent job at providing numerous individual instances of religious parody and of subversive treatments of the sacred. Delcorno also does the

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36 In another explanation of parody, the Bonafin notes a twentieth-century example of parody in which the historical importance of this literary mode is recognized “nel romanzo Lotte in Weimar (1939) essa è definite come ‘pietosa distruzione, sorridente addio’ del passato; nel momento in cui contribuisce ad abbattere un’opera fino ad allora venerata, per far spazio a nuove espressioni letterarie, la parodia partecipa al movimento dialettico con cui il presente si libera del passato e si apre al futuro” (13).
reader a great service by identifying the work’s parodic mission with the frame of the Author himself. The critic cites the introduction to the fourth day and proposes that “l’autore respinge le accuse di aver falsato la realtà dei fatti e invita i suoi critici a esibire gli ‘originali,’ che egli avrebbe tradito: ‘Quegli che queste cose così non state dicono, avrei molto caro che essi recassero gli originali: li quali se a quel che io scrivo discordanti fossero, giusta dire la lor riprensione’” (171). Most importantly, Delcorno also notifies the reader that this statement is also a challenge issued to the modern reader, to discover Boccaccio’s intertextual game, and the system of literary parody in the Decameron’s narrative system. Finally, Delcorno reiterates the necessity of seriously considering parody at the level of both the microtext and the macrotext.37

Delcorno effectively provides examples from the single novelle and from the various levels of the work’s narrative world; however, he does not offer a global interpretation or direct the reader to a study of this sort. He indicates to us the fundamental parodic references to the Commedia and the Hexameron and the possibility that the latter allusion intimates Boccaccio’s desire to recreate the world through the words of the ten young narrators. But he does not offer comprehensive commentary on how these references play out during the course of the narrative journey, what particular aspects of their world the young people want to subvert and change, or how the experiment ends for the young people and Boccaccio the Narrator by the conclusion of the work. Critics recognize the importance of parody in the single narrations and overarching architecture of the book, and generally only pay lip service to these aspects. They also are capable of indicating to readers that religion and the sacred elements of

37 Delcorno affirms: “In questa direzione si è mossa la critica più avveduta, sia nelle opere che affrontano una lettura globale del Decameron, sia nei saggi dedicate a singole novelle” (171).
medieval culture are prime targets. In some studies, such as Delcorno’s, they offer up considerable lists of religious and sacred practices and institutions that are parodied. However, there are two fundamental weaknesses in most of the available criticism on parody in the *Decameron*.

First, we must go beyond simply stating that parody is an essential critical tool of Boccaccio the Author. Studies must delve deeper and provide commentary on how parody of certain aspects of medieval life and culture play out from beginning to end, ideally connecting their argumentation to as many frames as possible, not simply within the *novelle* themselves. Then, numerous categories of the sacred, religious practices, and religious literature are highlighted by critics as being systematically attacked by Boccaccio the parodist (visions from the afterlife, legends of solitary monks, mock saints’ lives, prayers, confessions, and other sacraments). However, the omnipresence and parody of the sacrament of matrimony has not been thoroughly studied. Dino Cervigni’s “Rewriting Christian Middle Ages: The *Decameron*’s Parody of Genesis 1, the *Hexameron*, and St. Benedict’s *Regula*” provides an excellent example of how to read and interpret parody from a global point of view in Boccaccio’s masterpiece. After providing a solid foundation for this sort of reading of Boccaccio’s work as parodist in the bigger picture, I would also like to propose to the reader that matrimony, too, is methodically parodied and should be interpreted through a global reading of its representations.

In the aforementioned articles, one finds that many different components and all the chronotopes of the *Decameron* ultimately seeks to propose a new way of living that is

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38 In the next four paragraphs, I will synthesize some of the concepts that Cervigni develops in three articles forthcoming in *Annali d’italianistica* 31 (2013).
humane, compassionate and generous toward others. In this light, the principle vehicle of Boccaccio’s attempt at proposing a new way of living is parody, and in brief his essay “intends to analyze several key elements of the masterpiece where Boccaccio the parodist is at his best: thebrigata’s life, modeled after the six days of creation, the founding of a monastery, and monastic life” (3). In this effort, the critic goes beyond the usual cursory and superficial glance at Boccaccio’s reference to St. Ambrose’sHexameron. Indeed, he argues that the life of the ten young people is patterned after and parodies that of monks and nuns, and, for that matter, all devout Christian people of the Middle Ages. The ease with which the young people pass from the hellish environs of the plague-infected Florence to the paradisiacal settings of the variouslocus amoenus tales is emphasized, just as in Delcorno’s article. Both critics also allude to the parallels with the harsh ascent necessary to arrive in paradise in theDivina Commedia: “per Dante inizia, dietro la guida diVirgilio, la faticosa salita alla montagna del Purgatorio; i novellatori fanno un’agevole passeggiata seguendo la reina che va ‘con lento passo,’ ‘cianciando e motteggiando e ridendo’” (Delcorno 174). However, Cervigni justly underscores that in the broader project of Boccaccio’s work, even if at the level of thebrigata the passage is straightforward, the affabulatory trajectory of the first nine days is anything but peaceful or aspiring to paradise.

A propos of the narrative and parodic progression in terms of Boccaccio’s project to rewrite the Christian Middle Ages, one finds that “the Decameron’s parodic aspect – itspars destruens of medieval life – unfolds throughout the first nine days, and it thus

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39 I am thus in disagreement with a point of view such as Bonadeo’s that pegs Boccaccio as being on the “conservative side of society.” “Such a writer in such a society,” Bonadeo continues, “could hardly conceive a literary work that would, as some critics have claimed, turn the traditional social and moral values upside down” (Some Aspects of Love, 514-515).
paves the way for the ten tales of liberality and magnificence, narrated in Day Ten, the masterpiece’s *pars construens*” (3). In this way, even if in the *brigata’s* frame there is a peaceful and painless relocation to various earthly paradises, at the level of their stories and the themes of each day, a steep climb is necessary through the nine failed attempts to redefine the world positively in the section of the *pars destruens*. This argument is made while keeping in mind the overall purpose of Boccaccio’s initial reference to the *Hexameron* and encourages the reader to read the *Decameron* in terms of the overall purpose of St. Ambrose’s work. In this way one is better able to determine the extent to which Boccaccio’s work can be compared or contrasted with that particular hypotext. As far as the *brigata’s* travels are concerned, the critic persuasively argues that the ten young people undertake a secular pilgrimage to reestablish mankind’s primordial condition in three Eden-like locations, and in this key of reading, he affirms that their return to plague-stricken Florence may not be unlike the first city founded by Cain. In their secular pilgrimage, there exists a subversive rewriting of the canonical hours observed by the clergy and devout Christians, and in their daily activities throughout the work, he posits that the *brigata* sings, dances, and enjoys itself in a programmatic way. Yes, they escape from the tribulations and unhappiness of the city, but they are also attempting to recreate a form of life that contravenes the Christian medieval approach to life. In short, the *Decameron* transforms and subverts the sacred and religious (liturgical hours, monastic life, and the founding monastery in this particular study) which Boccaccio “does not situate completely outside the sphere of the sacred, but rather beyond or, at best, adjacent to the sacred, certainly with equal value and dignity as the sacred; in brief, as a song sung along the sacred, and thus parodic of the medieval primary perspective,
both sacred and ecclesiastical” (11). In this way, the critic recognizes the sacred and religious targets of Boccaccio the parodist, just as some other scholars have done. However, a service is also done to critical consideration of parody in the global context of the work by analyzing from the beginning (e.g., interpretation of *Hexameron* reference), throughout the *brigata’s* frame (through close consideration of the *brigata’s* various relocations), and at the end (by offering up the intriguing notion that the young people return not only to the hell from which they originally departed, but indeed to place that parallels the Genesitic first city founded by Cain).

The reader’s attention is effectively drawn also to the historical context surrounding the *brigata*, especially in terms of what would and would not be considered acceptable behavior according to the Christian medieval outlook. His perceptive commentary on the role of the ballads brings home this point and also offers us a bridge to the discussion of the global consideration of marriage in the *Decameron*:

> “In singing the ballad at the end of the day, the members of the *brigata* either recognize some form of weakness – despair, anguish, desire, etc. – thereby alluding to monastic practices mentioned above, albeit parodically, for they show no regret; or they boast their satisfaction in their love and its pursuit – a love, obviously, that medieval Christianity would disapprove because it has not been blessed by the sacrament of matrimony” (19).

The reference to the sacrament of matrimony is a valid and necessary one. It helps connect to the frame of Boccaccio the Author who openly challenges the traditional Christian approach to life. It is a reflection that also takes us into the realm of the negative feedback Boccaccio received from various unnamed *morditori*, at which point
he defends himself and hints at his parodic craft as Delcorno identified above. The institution in the present citation refers to the tradition in which matrimony was a blessing the singled out and legitimized a certain bond between man and woman in the medieval period. Does Boccaccio treat it as such – religious, sacred, blessed, etc. – at any point in the work? With marriages taking place in five out of ten days and with married protagonists in every day of the work, how is this bond between husband and wife understood by the Author, and how is it represented? Before turning our full attention to marriage as it existed in Boccaccio’s time period, let us first turn our attention to how we might interpret his parody of the institution in a global, macrotextual fashion.

4. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter of our investigation, it will be worthwhile to recall the aforementioned treatment of the Cena Cypriani. Dentith ultimately underlines that the parodic element in the work is palpable even if it is weak, and concludes, as noted above by emphasizing the instructional potential of the work: it “is little more than a didactic text which instructs readers in the Bible by semi-humorous means. Nevertheless, it does surround the sacred stories with a comic atmosphere” (Dentith 50). At this point, the critic draws our attention to the potential of parody to instruct and the role of the comic that helps stimulate the thinking and memory of the reader. In the critical history of literary parody, laughter and the comic have often been reasons that hindered critics’ acceptance of the seriousness of this form of discourse. Bonafin cites Benedetto Croce’s unwillingness to recognize the critical potential of parody, which Croce expounded in “Intorno alle parodie” in Poeti e scrittori del pieno e del tardo Rinascimento: “Benedetto
Croce, ad esempio, contestava il presunto fondamento critico della parodia proprio in ragione del ridicolo che essa suscita, infatti ‘la critica non può mai essere sostituita dal ridere o far ridere, perché critica è solo a patto di fornire determinazione logica al discernimento del bello e del brutto, che è del gusto’” (Bonafin 25n53). Fortunately, a group of Russian formalists (Bachtin, Sklovskij, Tynjanov) placed parody at the center of critical attention and debunked this notion that parody, which at its most effective brings about laughter and then reflection, could not be a serious critical operation. Bonafin summarizes beautifully the critical potential of parody, and his wording seems to resonate quite well with Boccaccio’s post-plague rewriting of the Christian Middle Ages: “È impressione diffusa, però che nella maggior parte dei casi la parodia sia segno di una saturazione, di un esaurimento di una tendenza, di una Weltanschauung, di una maniera letteraria, che si vuole seppellire con una risata liberatoria, per far spazio a idée o stili differenti: insomma, il nuovo nasce dalla crisi del vecchio” (34).

The “crisi del vecchio” that set in motion Boccaccio’s proposal of “il nuovo” was undoubtedly the Black Death of 1348. I believe, along with Cervigni, that Boccaccio’s new plan was a major rewriting of the traditional medieval world view. Boccaccio the parodist challenges religious traditions, the Church, divine and human laws because these institutions had been violently shaken and, as Boccaccio himself tells us in the Introduzione, “uficio alcuno non potean fare” (Dec. 1.Intro.23). One finds, following yet again Bonafin’s understanding of parody’s function and meaning, an explosion of traditional meanings and the opportunity to redefine the sacred and indeed, the entire surrounding world: “La struttura paradossale che si crea conduce, alla fine, a un’esplosione del significato, a una messa in crisi dei significanti tradizionalmente
associate alle frasi bibliche, a una disautomatizzazione della percezione – come avrebbero detto i formalisti russi – che costringe a considerare da un nuovo punto di vista i testi, più laico, meno deferente, fino a suscitare quel riso, comunque modulato, che è la marca dell’efficacia parodica (106). By the time of the Decameron Boccaccio had become an avid collector of countless textual genres and experiences (literary, legal, judicial, mercantile, diplomatic, ecclesiastical, etc.) and he had become a master of parody. He knew how to bring about laughter and the smile that, to reiterate Bonafin’s wording, is the true mark of parodic efficacy. Boccaccio knew full well the importance of this operation and he utilizes parody as a form of criticism that he knows will make his readers not only laugh, but also think. In the preamble to the tenth tale of Day Five, Dioneo describes the laughing aesthetic that girds the comical aspect of Boccaccio’s parody. Dioneo states: “[Io non so se io mi dica che sia accidental vizio e per malvagità di costume ne’ mortali sopravenuto, o se pure è nella natura peccato, il rider più tosto delle cattive cose che delle buone opera, e spezialmente quando quelle talij a noi non pertengono]” (Dec. 5.10.3). Dioneo speaks on Boccaccio’s behalf and emphasizes that others’ misfortunes, “le cattive cose,” are what will entertain his readership. So often in the Decameron matrimony and married protagonists are the target of the brigata’s laughter and entertainment. However, through his critical use of parody, Boccaccio not only entertains the brigata and his readership. He also demands that we contemplate the good and the bad of his time period, and how it might be changed ultimately to make the world a better place. Before delving into his complex and multifaceted viewpoint on marriage, let us first turn to the historical context of matrimony in medieval Italy.
CHAPTER 3
MARRIAGE IN MEDIEVAL ITALY

In his medieval masterpiece, the Decameron, Giovanni Boccaccio expounds a new world view against a backdrop of social chaos. One knows from the beginning of his work that the plague ravages Florence when the author describes the effects of that pestilence on Florentine society in the book’s introduction. Boccaccio underlines the substantial degradation of social, religious and behavioral norms as well as the different ways people choose to cope with and survive the turbulent times. There are those who mold their actions and attitudes on moderation, constantly seeking a via media. Some isolate themselves and limit contact with the outside world, while others refute self-restraint and decide to live in excess: drinking and eating immoderately, taking advantage of abandoned properties, and enjoying themselves through whatever means they can find. Yet, we are told, the plague struck down any number of philosophies indiscriminately and no one prevailed over the others. 40

Whether the author believes the plague to be the castigation of an angry God or the result of celestial alignments, the tales that follow the proem and introduction represent a critique of medieval society at large on the part of Boccaccio that questions

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40 In the Introduction to Day One, Boccaccio the narrator observes several of the people’s reactions to the plague including the extremes and a mezzana via. Yet, in the end, followers of each lifestyle die and no single lifestyle prevails as an effective means of avoiding death: “E come che questi così variamente oppinanti non morissero tutti, non per ciò che tutti campavano: anzi, infermandone di ciascuna molti e in ogni luogo, avendo essi stessi, quando sani erano, esempio dato a coloro che sani rimanevano, quasi abbandonati per tutto languiero” (Dec. 1. Intro. 26).
some of its fundamental institutions.\textsuperscript{41} He elaborates what it takes to survive and thrive in the pestilential mid-fourteenth century, and often he underlines and critiques what is wrong with the social and religious systems of his day. Although God’s presence in the introduction is significant, Boccaccio makes it clear that human society and not divine influence will be his focal point.\textsuperscript{42} The ten young narrators, who through their one hundred novelle demonstrate Boccaccio’s complex and multifaceted viewpoint, flee from Florence and the ravages of the plague in an attempt to find some order and to enjoy themselves in their own storytelling community. If some organization and enjoyment is achieved through the first three days of affabulation, the fourth day of novelle that end unhappily disturbs the system and requires the re-establishment of order in Day Five with novelle that are united by felicitous finales.\textsuperscript{43}

Queen Fiammetta reigns over this day of restoration and attempts to rectify the wrongs done by the fourth day’s king by requiring her subjects to tell stories “di ciò che a alguno amante, dopo alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti, felicemente avvenisse” (Dec.

\textsuperscript{41} Again, in the first day’s introduction, Boccaccio offers two possible reasons for which Florence has received its pestiferous punishment: “Dico adunque che già erano gli anni della fruttifera incarnazione del Figliuolo di Dio al numero pervenuti di milletrecentoquarantotto, quando nella egregia città di Fiorenza, oltre aogn'altra italica bellissima, pervenne la mortifera pestilenza: la quale, per operazion de' corpi superiori o per le nostre inique opere da giusta ira di Dio a nostra correzione mandata sopra i mortali ...” (Dec. 1. Intro.8).

\textsuperscript{42} After establishing Boccaccio’s plan of criticizing and making fun of the Church while treating God with reverence, Potter describes God’s presence in the Decameron’s Introduction. According to the critic, His presence is substantial, seriously and strongly marked where he is mentioned twice as an angry and awe-inspiring Old Testament Lord. Nonetheless, “the bulk of the description (an impressive bulk) underlines not God’s visitation but the ensuing breakdown of society. Boccaccio’s interest is social and oriented toward humanity-in-the-world” (42).

\textsuperscript{43} Biagini notes that there is a strong undercurrent throughout Day Five, which tries to pull the brigata back together and re-establish the order so abruptly disturbed by Filostrato’s depressing Day Four theme: “Questa esigenza di ordine, oltre che a collegarsi a quanto si è già notato per il Proemio e per tutta l’opera, si attua in pratica in questa giornata nella costante identificazione della felice conclusione con le nozze” (161). Upon closer scrutiny, however, these endings are only superficially cheerful; Biagini’s study fails to note the contradiction and incongruity of the happy endings with nearly all events preceding them in the novelle.
5.1.1). Ironically, however, even though Day Five’s stories are supposed to end happily with the celebration of marriage and the triumph of love, and they indeed do end happily, nearly all the events leading up to the irenic conclusions are shaped by tragedy, fear, violence, coercion and, in some cases, death. Rather than acting as a peaceful and socially unifying force fundamental to order and stability in society, the institution of marriage in Day Five is built upon a foundation of strained and unpropitious circumstances. As a result, one may wonder to what extent Boccaccio, who was born out of wedlock and never married, may be willing to question the institution—and even more so, the sacrament—of matrimony. Thus, one may also wonder whether Boccaccio intends to probe and question marriage, which in Day Five may be seen as undermining social order.44

One can argue in fact that the narrator’s questioning of marriage culminates with Dioneo’s parodical tenth and final novella, whose two protagonists are already married when the story begins. This last tale of Day Five – whether or not it fits within the context of Day Five’s topic – has a significant desacralizing function that reduces marriage and the exclusive and fundamental bond between man and woman to its opposite, thereby parodying it. Although the final novella demonstrates a parody of matrimonial life, it also offers a strong example of economic metaphor, in the social interactions of Day Five, of the Pauline notion of conjugal debt. In this subversion of married life, this notion of debt is completely lost and thus a distortion of Paul’s ideas

44 Historically, one finds that marriage in Medieval Christian Europe was recognized as an indissoluble bond between a man and woman that was sacred in that it was to convey the bond between God and humanity. However, historians also recognize the social importance of the institution of marriage and recognize it as a fundamental building block to society and in human relationships in general. In Storia del matrimonio, Klapisch-Zuber writes that in Christian Europe matrimony was understood as the base of the social edifice and a fundamental part of the fabric of human relationships.
results; whereas marital sex to the apostle was a safeguard to human weakness, Pietro di Vinciolo, unwilling to render that which his wife exacts, welcomes a circumstance set up by his adulterous wife not only to allow her own satisfaction but also to procure his own as well.

This possible interpretation of the *pactum conjugale* in terms of an equal exchange helps open the door to a more general, economic reading of the themes and situations of Day Five. Boccaccio’s understanding of commerce and his years of direct experience with the mechanisms and tools used in port cities for deposits, guarantees, advances and even debts, is evident throughout the text of the *Decameron*, especially in regard to social interaction and marriage as forms of exchange. In the particular case of the fifth day, one finds an attempt to reaffirm order in the world of the *Decameron*’s narrators through stories with happy endings that inevitably are identified with the celebration of marriage. Throughout the narration of these tales of lovers who overcome misfortunate circumstances, there is a strong presence of parody and often this parody is described in a language that emphasizes economic characteristics of social interaction.

The goal of the present chapter will be to underline the historical context of medieval matrimony. After establishing the way things were supposed to have been according to society and the church, it will be possible to proceed to an analysis of the marriages witnessed before, during and after Day Five and to analyze how the various *novelle* utilize love and marriage to undermine social order and to underline the non-essentiality or desacralization of the Church as an institution.45 Ultimately, these

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45 Along with the shift in emphasis from God and Fortune to humanity-in-the-world, man’s intelligence and the need of the resolution of social problems, the *Decameron* is also groundbreaking in this desacralization of the Church’s institutions. Although Potter does not treat the absence and desacralization of the institution of marriage in Day Five, she aptly describes Boccaccio’s broader undertaking: “The *Decameron*
economic and parodic elements will be analyzed in order to better understand what social
critique Boccaccio had in mind with regard to Florentine society before, during and after
the time of the plague and the language he used to describe it. Before turning to that
analysis, however, let us turn our attention to the historical significance and practices of
medieval marriage.

In order to offer an analysis and interpretation of Boccaccio’s take on marriage in
his Decameron, it will I will provide the historical background of that institution.
Although George Duby does not particularly treat matrimony in Italy, his analysis of
medieval marriage, which mainly concentrates on northern France in the twelfth century,
still offers a broadly valid schema for understanding common assumptions in Medieval
Europe in general. In his book, Medieval Marriage, Duby proposes a schema of
marriage in which it was had official recognition and was unique among all unions
because society recognized it as a fundamental means of perpetuating itself without
jeopardizing its structural stability. This emphasis on matrimony as the most important
social practice for maintaining peace and stability and perpetuating society itself is a
common theme in the literature on medieval marriage. Yet it is also essential, especially
when one considers Boccaccio’s treatment and possible parody of the institution, to
remember that there were two conflicting ideas of this vital union: the lay conception,

 deprives both the clergy and the institution they represent of sanctity precisely because the regulatory
structures they administer have proved no longer to be in working order, and have in fact broken down
completely in the case of the social crisis produced by the plague” (58). Read in this light, the absence of
the Church, of clergymen and, furthermore, physical churches, amid the numerous marriages of the fifth
day, is striking and significant.
which safeguarded the social order, and the ecclesiastical model, which sought to protect
the divine order.\footnote{Whether considering the social or ecclesiastical aspects, Duby, like other marriage scholars, underlines
the important distinction between marriage and the order and peace that marriage should bring with the
clandestine and violent earlier phenomenon of “abduction.” Accordingly he writes: “This is why marriage
was not supposed to be clandestine, but rather an ostensible, ceremonial act. It called for celebration, a
very public celebration, which, for a time, assembled large numbers of people attending a central rite” (4).
The marriage pact (pactum conjugale) was founded on an agreement and these agreements implied order
and peace. Interestingly, throughout Day Five Boccaccio, in order to have the characters attain such
agreements, order or peace, they must undergo a series of trials of all kinds.}

This conflict between social traditions and ecclesiastical interventions took place
in Italy as well, yet it must be understood that the practices were not by any means
universal or predictable from one region or city to the next.\footnote{In her introduction to Storia del matrimonio, Klapisch-Zuber concisely describes this difficulty of a
single and peninsular understanding of Italy, its language, its politics, or in this particular case, matrimony,
believing that “non si possa scrivere una storia del matrimonio – rinchiudendosi in uno splendido
isolamento peninsulare; e ancor meno sia possibile percepire la specificità di tale storia adottando una
simile posizione. La frammentazione politica del paese, durata fino al XIX secolo, ha accentuato la
differenziazione delle situazioni regionali e quindi la difficoltà di definire i contorni del processo evolutivo,
che non appare lineare, univoco, e nemmeno omogeneo da una regione ad un’altra” (xiii).}

Despite the myriad of
matrimonial traditions and the patchwork of actual practices, one finds in the history of
marriage from antiquity to the Renaissance that marriage was understood as a
fundamental element to the process of civilization. In Storia del matrimonio, Diane
Owen Hughes traces this representation all the way back to Livy’s account of the myth of
Rome’s foundation. The bellicose founders of Rome sought to transform the
indiscriminate act of abduction and establish demographic continuity by marrying the
Sabine women; at the same time, they established a model for bringing about peaceful
familial ties and founding a state. Hughes underlines the connection between marital
alliance and social harmony:

L’alleanza matrimoniale offerta da Romolo fu presa a cuore dalle Sabine, che si
presentarono ai loro congiunti venuti con propositi di vendetta come delle vedove,
“sciolti i capelli e lacerate le vesti,” a implorare la pace: era la prima di una lunga serie di alleanze tra popoli, sulle quali i Romani avrebbero edificato un impero. (5)

This conception of marriage as an institution directly affects political and social stability was maintained especially by Cicero, who considered the bond of matrimony as the first nucleus of the city and the semenzaio of the State itself. 48

According to Hughes, the conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity can be seen as a threat to this historical identification between matrimony and the State. Many Christians of the time maintained a dubious attitude with regard to both institutions; however, Saint Augustine eventually emerged as a considerable proponent of this historic link between stability, marriage, and things political. His defense of this connection was especially evident as Augustine defended Christianity against advocates of Manichaeism. Manichaeist believers abstained from marriage. Augustine opposed that abstinence, and, as a Christian, upheld the validity of matrimony. His beliefs were in close harmony with the Roman tradition and understanding of the institution. Hughes, however, continues, stating that “per Agostino, poi, il matrimonio era un sacramentum, un legame sacro non solo per la fedeltà che richiedeva da parte dei coniugi e per la legittimità dei figli che in esso si generavano, ma anche per la carità che diffondeva nella comunità” (7). Using a particularly Ciceronian image, Augustine saw this sacred bond as a means of spreading

48 This particularly Roman understanding of nuptial bonds as the adhesive for the State and justice was at odds with the Greek treatment of familial connections with regard to the polis. Hughes underscores the conflict of upholding matrimony as the prime nucleus of the State and democratic ideology: “…l’ideologia democratica del mondo Greco considerava le affinità familiari qualcosa di non compiuto o addirittura di inconciliabile con la comunità politica” (6). The Romans, on the other hand, tended to see consistently a direct relationship between the matrimonial bond and the history of the Republic.
charity in the city and as a fundamental institution for the establishment and diffusion of peace.

Augustine’s interpretation of the institution assumed the position of the Roman past: matrimony was a creator of alliances and with the resultant harmony and stability of those familial alliances, the way of Christian peace was being paved. Even through the centuries of Germanic invasions in Italy, this broad schema persisted and marriages continued between existing Roman families on the peninsula and their foreign conquerors. In many cases, and along the lines of Augustine’s reasoning, cultural and racial differences were seen as secondary to the common traits people shared through Christianity. Hughes writes: “Il cristianesimo, che estese l’universalismo imperiale fino a farlo divenire un codice morale, deve aver contribuito all’incremento di queste unioni con l’idea che le differenze culturali e razziali erano soltanto elementi estrinseci, che non dovevano precludere l’ingresso nella Città di Dio” (9). Hughes goes on to describe a general good disposition of the Romans to offer their daughters to the Germanic conquerors in an effort to confer a certain extent of social stability through the centuries of invasions by Goths, Vandals, Franks, and others. Matrimony offered the possibility, or at least the increased likelihood, of a more tranquil and productive future.49

In addition to broad political and social harmony and safeguarding a tranquil future, by the medieval period, especially among the aristocracy, marriage was also an essential system for protecting inheritances. It was a system designed to protect those who were not securely lodged within a conjugal situation, argues Duby, and it sought to protect the patrimony and economic position of children born of wedded couples.

49 Hughes makes reference specifically to the ruling classes here: “Il matrimonio aiutò i ceti dominanti, dell’uno e dell’altro versante dello spartiacque culturale, a non perdere di vista, pur dinanzi al caos della guerra e alla drammaticità dei mutamenti sociali, la prospettiva di un futuro pacifico e produttivo” (9).
Essentially, as D’Avray summarizes in his work, Duby posits the view of marriage as an aristocratic institution that favored legitimate marriage but allowed easy divorce. This system also tolerated the marriage of close relatives, which was opposed to the religious model that emphasized indissoluble monogamous marriage. Eventually, this goal of looking after social peace and earthly society came into direct conflict with the model propounded by the Church, which was most concerned with eternal salvation rather than the earthly human experiences. The ecclesiastical model described by Duby echoes Augustine’s understanding of matrimony as the creator of alliances that would ultimately pave the way to Christian peace, not merely social harmony. In this system, marriage fulfilled two particular exigencies: a reproductory function, often to be purged of all pleasure, set forth at the Creation and the need to restrain the carnal impulses of human nature.

If the rules decreed by the Church came into conflict with those founded on the social code of morality, conflict eventually developed between the latter rules and the form of government, the Comune, that developed in Italy. Given the Roman tradition and the beliefs of such theologians as Augustine, it was no surprise that society considered the centrality of the family necessary to the orderly functioning of the state; however, in the course of the medieval period, this assumption was contested by the rise of the political expectations of the diverse Comune governments within the Italian peninsula. Hughes aptly distinguishes between the social tradition of marriage that united and strengthened individual families and marriage as a civil institution of the government. A civil society at the base of which one found marital alliances meant to strengthen individual families at the cost of city government was contrary to the fundamental
principles of the political organization and attitudes of many Italian cities. As a result
Hughes maintains:

Nella lotta per definire e difendere la loro autorità giuridica contro signori feudali
e famiglie che rivendicavano la propria fisionomia giuridica e i propri spazi nella
vita pubblica, i comuni sorti nell’Italia centro-settentrionale nell’XI e XII secolo
sentirono il dovere di indebolire quei legami di parentela che potevano costituire
una minaccia per un nuovo sistema di vincoli civili e giuridici. (10)

Despite this effort, from Genoa to Florence and beyond, the traditional understanding and
function of marriage and its importance to politics and society triumphed and remained
essential to political reconciliation and social harmony.50

Even though the Comune was unable to expunge the existing social significance
and force of matrimony, it must be kept in mind that the Church did have some success in
infiltrating and manipulating these lay precedents. Duby argues that marriage’s entire
history in Western Christendom can be best understood as a process of acculturation. In
this line of interpretation, the historian finds that the ecclesiastical model eventually
overtook the lay model.51 Gradually, the lay model was infiltrated and absorbed by the
Church and its clergy, who were becoming more and more involved in the marriage

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50 Hughes cites several particular examples at this point in which strategic marriages helped to bring calm
and order among political factions: in 1253 seven public marriages were used to guarantee peace within the
city; in Duecento Florence, the story of the Buondelmonti and a failed strategic marriage led to the
prolonged struggle between Guelphs and Ghibellines that consumed the Tuscan capital for the duration of
the thirteenth century. Hughes then offers a peninsular and geographically broad example by citing the
Peace of Lodi in 1454 and the use of marriages to establish a balance – albeit fragile – of political power on
the Italian peninsula: “La disinvoltura quasi istintiva con la quale, con la pace di Lodi del 1454, gli italiani
costruirono un delicato equilibrio dei poteri nella penisola, assicurato da una serie continua di matrimoni
tra le varie dinastie, è un segno di quanto, nel corso dei secoli, la lezione di Livio fosse stata assorbita” (11-12).

51 A propos of this idea of acculturation, Duby specifically writes that “the entire history of marriage in
Western Christendom amounts to a gradual process of acculturation, in which the ecclesiastical model
slowly gained the upper hand [not over disorder but over a different order], one that was solidly entrenched
and not easily dislodged” (17).
ceremony, its rules, and its jurisdiction. Despite this tug of war between lay and ecclesiastical models and ideologies, social order remained one of the core functions of marriage in the medieval period. Whether used to settle political disputes and tamp down civil unrest or to promote and insure salvation and a beatific afterlife, the matrimonial bond represented a bulwark against disorder and a foundation on which society itself was to be built. According to the Church, furthermore, the sacramental union of man and woman represented and symbolized the union of Christ and the Church. D’Avray cogently and effectively sums up the power of this connection between terrestrial and celestial: “Marriage is a powerful symbol of the union of the human and the divine. Most relationships are superficial compared with marriage. Marriage is one of the strongest experiences in many people’s lives” (17). Indeed, marriage was nothing less than a way of conveying the strength of the bond between God and humanity.

Conclusion

Given these historical, social and religious aspects of matrimony in the medieval period, it behooves the reader of the Decameron to reconsider the representations of marriage throughout that work. One’s attention might immediately be drawn to the fifth day of storytelling, which is effectively a day dedicated to questionable irenic conclusions achieved at the very end of the novelle through nuptial celebrations and the triumph of love. However, even prior to the matrimonial marathon of Day Five, one finds that marriage plays a role in at least twenty-two novelle. Whether the fortune, industry, or unhappy endings govern the tales told in the days prior to Day Five, Boccaccio tends to surround matrimony with events that negatively affect his
protagonists. By the time of Day Five, marriages become a standard part of the formula for stories that must be told with happy endings. Ironically, however, even though Day Five’s stories are supposed to end happily with the celebration of love’s triumph, nearly all the events leading up to the felicitous finale are shaped by tragedy, fear, violence, coercion and, in some cases, death. Thus the stories intended to amend the unhappy endings of Day Four in the end are wrought with trials, struggles, and contradictions to the point that one can question the brief narrative of the happy ending. These contradictions and the brief happy ending narrative immediately raise several questions: does Boccaccio expect the reader to uncritically accept the narrated happy endings? Can these hastily conceived, at times even coerced marriages form the bedrock on which society can be built? What can be said about the symbol of strength between the human and divine? In order to satisfy these questions and to attempt to understand Boccaccio’s position on the institution of marriage, one must go to the text itself. Accordingly, let us now pass to an investigation of the marriages preceding Day Five in chapter four to analyze the meaning, effects, and representations of matrimony in Boccaccio’s literary world.
The *Filocolo* proffers perhaps the most prominent and important references to matrimony in Boccaccio’s literary output prior to the *Decameron*. In the *Filocolo*, monogamy is respected by Florio and Biancifiore. Through countless perils and after being separated by great distances over many years, they remain faithful to one another and to their love vows. Once Florio hears that Biancifiore has been sold to merchants by his mother the queen, he decides to embark on a love pursuit, but also a spiritual quest, to pursue and marry the love of his life. Before this union can take place, the reader witnesses the exaltation of matrimony and the meaning of marriage through the discussion of the young people who comprise the *Corte d’Amore* in Naples. Throughout the various discussions on love in this storytelling circle, marriage is defended as a sacred bond between man and woman. There are considerations among the group and their tales in which it is acceptable to love widows and young maidens. However, at no point does the group recount any situation in which the conjugal bond is broken, a wife or husband is unfaithful to one another, or in which the institution is treated in a light-hearted way. Indeed, the leader of the embryonic *brigata*, a young noblewoman by the name of
Fiammetta, fiercely defends marriage and delineates its sacredness by not permitting its inclusion among the various *ragioni d’amore*.\(^{52}\)

Soon after departing from Naples, Florio finds Biancifiore, and they are reunited in an intimate bedroom setting in the Babylonian sultan’s tower of women. Readers who are familiar with the *Decameron* and its portrayal of young lovers who arrive at a similar juncture would expect that the two would immediately pursue “love’s ultimate delights” and make love to express their delight in one another. To be sure, the two young people are enthralled to be together, look forward to embracing each other as lovers, and greatly anticipate their first amorous night together. But before any of that can take place, they stop. They find a statue of Cupid. They kneel together. They pray to the gods to bless them, unite them, and to watch over their sacred union.

By the time of the *Decameron*, matrimony is still a central consideration of Boccaccio. There are numerous married protagonists, and there are a striking number of marriage celebrations. However, when Boccaccio moves from his youthful production to his masterpiece, he must face several issues. First, he shifts from the long narrative to the short narrative. Along with this shift, the author decides to treat differently the love quest present in the *Filocolo*, but also in the *Teseida* and other stories. He realizes that the *Filocolo*’s plot must become essential and brief because of the new narrative scope of the *novelle*. He also realizes that he cannot continue the story after the male and female protagonists attain their goal and get married. In this vein, book five of the *Filocolo*, where the narrator goes on telling the reader in detail what happens after marriage, is

\(^{52}\) Ferramonte, Duke of Montoro, one of the young narrators of the *questioni d’amore* inquires to Queen Fiammetta and the group whether a young man should fall in love with a young girl, a married woman or a widow. They categorically discards the possibility of the married woman: “‘Delle tre l’una, cioè la maritata, in niun modo è da disiderare, però ch’ella non è sua, né sta in sua libertà il potersi donare ad alcuno...’” (Book 4, 52). She emphasizes that this sort of love would contradict divine and natural laws.
excised from the plotline of most *Decameron* tales. At the same time, Boccaccio realizes that he must shrink to a manageable size all the trials of the protagonists that take him almost four books in the *Filocolo* to describe. Finally, Boccaccio also transforms the way he treats not only the protagonists’ love quests, but also the spiritual quests of his characters. The *Filocolo*, in essence, is a quest of mutual and faithful love of the two protagonists who remain faithful to each other throughout many trials. In this case, one finds a quest toward religious love, too, since at the end they convert to Christianity.

In the *Decameron*, the treatment of the love and spiritual quests oscillates. At times, the *brigata* treats the love quest seriously, as in *Dec. 5.1*-9, with the exception of *Dec. 5.4*, but only to a certain extent. In other instances, the pursuit of love is recounted parodically and humorously as in the cases of Alatiel (*Dec. 2.6*), Alibech (*Dec. 3.10*), and Masetto (*Dec. 3.1*). The spiritual quest, that is, in the way of religious conversion, is almost always treated subversively and comically, and the tales of Alibech and Masetto here too are exemplary. Boccaccio the author of the *Filocolo* treats the “questioni di amore” and marriage with religious and moral presuppositions in mind. The storytelling group of that same work respects the sacred role of love and marriage. At the same time, they pay attention to the dynamic economy of the passions and emotions of the characters in their tales. To what extent is Boccaccio the author of the *Filocolo* present in the marriages represented in the *Decameron* and how central is matrimony throughout the work?

One finds evidence of the earlier Boccaccio’s presence in the very first marriage ceremony that takes place in the one hundred tales of his masterpiece. The reader observes in the *Decameron*’s introduction that the matrimonial bond was weakened and
many conjugal bonds were destroyed by the plague. There, one also reads of husbands
and other family members who limit the movement of their wives and restrict the ways in
which they are able to express their love and emotions. After the proem and introduction,
the wait is not long to arrive at the ceremony that reverberates profoundly with the
Filocolo. It arrives under the reign of Filomena, in which the brigata “ragiona di chi, da
diverse cose infestato, sia oltre alla sua speranza riuscito a lieto fine” (Dec. 2.1), and in
the third tale told by Pampinea about Alessandro and the daughter of the king of England.

Even though this ceremony will echo in some ways that of Florio and Biancifiore,
one finds the strong presence also of Boccaccio the parodist who inserts elements that
reflect a new way of representing marriage that will persist throughout the one hundred
novelle recounted by the brigata. What are these new elements that in Decameron 2.3
converge with the account in the Filocolo? Does the treatment of matrimony in the
novelle following 2.3 follow the traditional earlier manner, or does Boccaccio
demonstrate a new opinion or range of opinions on the subject? In the Decameron itself,
one does not have to wait long for more examples to analyze in order to begin to answer
these questions. Even before Alessandro’s tale, female chastity and conjugal fidelity are
upheld in Dec. 1.5 and 1.10 by the Marchioness of Monferrato and madonna Malgherida,
respectively. Following Alessandro’s novella, in Day Two there are four more tales—
six, seven, eight, and ten—that all together recount more than ten sets of nuptials,
including the parodic couplings of Alatiel. I will begin with an analysis of the Filocolo
and its parallels with the treatments of marriage Dec. 1.5, 1.10, and 2.3. Then I will
consider Dec. 2.3 together with the rest of the novelle that include marriages mentioned
in Day Two (in total, seven tales), the series of matrimones broken up by human
ingenuity witnessed in every tale of Day Three, and the several described in Day Four (in a total of six novelle).

1. Marriage and the Sacred in the Filocolo

The Filocolo abounds with religion, religious rites, rituals, visits to temples, and pilgrimage. Boccaccio combines pagan names and Christian meanings such that the story is situated in a highly religious atmosphere. For example, at the beginning of the work, Juno, the wife of Jove, is synonymous with the Church, the bride of Christ. Boccaccio begins his work with this particular metaphor in the process of telling the mythology-based background of the story he is about to narrate.53

Throughout the work and love story of the two young people, Boccaccio argues for the absolute power of love. However, he also implies that the natural result of that powerful bond is an equally binding force, that is, matrimony.54 Because of presumed social class differences between the two protagonists, Florio’s parents, the king and

53 Interestingly, the narrator also utilizes the trope of falling in love in church. He is in church on Easter Day, when he catches sight of the woman with whom he falls in love. After some time of sighing over his love for her, he finds her again at church (in a different temple) and begins telling his version of the young Spanish prince, Florio, and his love for Biancifiore. The theme of falling in love in a church is fairly common in Boccaccio’s literary corpus, for instance: Dec. 8.2, Dec. 8.4; Filocolo, 1.17; Filostrato, 1.18, etc.

54 Furthermore, there are numerous references to the binding power of certain enchanted rings that pass from mother to daughter, Biancifiore to Florio, and finally back from Florio to Biancifiore when they are wedded. The first such ring mentioned belonged to Giulia, Biancifiore’s mother, and has an interesting story as well as a certain magical power. The ring effectively acts as a promise or engagement vow between the two young people, who will soon be separated for a significant period of time. Biancifiore says to Florio: ”... io mi fido nella tua lealtà. E però che io sono certa che come tu in molti e varii diletti starai, così io in molte avversità, le quali forse io non ti potrò far note così com’io vorrei, ti voglio pregare, poi che gl’iddii adoperano verso noi tanta crudeltà, e la fortuna ne mostra le sue forze in dipartirci, che ti piaccia questo anello, il quale, mentre che io sanza pericolo dimorerò, sempre nella sua bella chiarezza il vedrai, ma come io avessi alcuna cosa contraria, tu il vedrai turbare...” (Book 1 21). Several paragraphs later, Florio vows to be monogamous and dedicates himself solely to Biancifiore; the ring is a reminder of that vow: “E promettotì per la leal fede che io ti porto, come a donna della mia mente, che il presente anello, il quale ora donato m’hai, sempre guarderà, tenendolo sopra tutte cose caro, e spesso riguardandolo, sempre imaginative di veder te’” (Book 1, 21).
queen, separate the two after they fall in love. The young couple remains separated for a substantial period of time, and, in the meantime, the king and queen take on a sinister aspect as they plan different ways of either killing Biancifiore or sending her away permanently. The last of their plans is initially successful and reminds the reader somewhat of several plots of the novelle of the Decameron. Florio’s parents sell Biancifiore to a group of merchants for a substantial sum of money on the condition that they will immediately take her far away. The merchants agree, and the king deceives Biancifiore by promising her hand in marriage to Florio and by telling her that she would be escorted to him immediately by the group awaiting her outside the castle.

Unbeknownst to her, the merchants are the ones accompanying her and she becomes their “cargo” or “good,” as the text states at various points. She passes from buyer to buyer until she finally ends up being sold in Alexandria to the “Admiral” of the mighty king of Babylonia. Florio finds out about the plan of his parents and is, of course, afflicted by her fate and declares that he will find her. He sets out on a pilgrimage to find his lost love and changes his name to “Filocolo” or, as Boccaccio intended at least, “struggle of love.”

55 The fate of Alatiel (Dec. 2.7) and Efigenia (Dec. 5.1) come to mind in particular. The young bride Alatiel is sent by her father to be wed to the king of Garbo. En route, her ship wrecks and she begins to be passed from man to man – among whom are at least two merchants – as if she herself were merely merchandise. Accordingly the two merchants “acquisition” of the girl is described with a commercial simile: “E essendosi l’un dell’altro di questo amore avveduto, di ciò ebbero insieme segreto ragionamento e convenirsi di fare l’acquisto di questo amor commune, quasi amore così questo dovesse patire come la mercantantia o I guadagni fanno” (Dec. 2.7.39). Efigenia, too, is abducted as if she were nothing more than cargo by Cimone. Cimone boards the ship that is taking Efigenia to her rightful husband, take her: “Quel che mi mosse è a me grandissima cosa a avere acquistata … ciò è Efigenia, da me sopra ogni altra cosa amata, la quale non potendo io avere dal padre di lei come amico e con pace, da voi come nemico e con l’armi m’ha costretto amore a acquistarla” (Dec. 5.1.31).

56 Before he sets sail, his mother the Queen gives him yet another ring and states: “Figliuolo, poi che né pregio né pietà ti può ritenere, prendi questo anello, e teco il porta, e ognora che ‘l vedi della tua misera madre ti ricordi’” (Book 1, 73). The reader finds that the ring has the power of making whoever wears it pleasing to everyone else. A story not only of love, but also of marriage, accompanies the ring: “Il mio
Filocolo’s journey is anything but direct, as he seeks further information on the whereabouts of Bianciflore. One of the most noteworthy and lengthy pauses in his journey takes place in Naples. This sojourn is particularly striking for the parallels to the Decameron, since here, as many critics underscore, the basic storytelling setup of the brigata was already conceived in Boccaccio’s mind. Eventually, Filocolo meets a most beautiful young woman whose name is Fiammetta in a locus amoenus along with other noble young people. As the day progresses, it becomes too hot to stay out in the open, and Fiammetta proposes that the young people gather around a nearby fountain to cool off and to discuss various stories and questions related to love. The young people agree, they elect Fiammetta to be their queen, and the storytelling begins.

This part of the work seems to offer a view of the Decameron in embryonic form, not only for the narrative paradigm visible via the selection of a queen, a certain topic for the whole group to discuss, the changing of storytellers at regular intervals, and so on, but also for the topics under discussion and the nature of the stories themselves. An in-depth look of the salient Decameron-like elements will help us to understand better Boccaccio’s masterpiece; however, for the purposes of the present chapter, I will concentrate on questions proposed that in some way deal with the matrimonial bond. In one novella-like tale, the question is posed as to whether a man, who has performed an impossible task to padre, pacificato col tuo, quando a lui per isposa mi congiunse, il mi donò acciò che graziosa fossi nel suo cospetto” (Book 1, 73). The giving of the ring from one family to another described at this point provides the background to the ring, and, perhaps more importantly, proffers another description on the part of Boccaccio of marriage as stabilizing force. The ring made Florio’s mother especially pleasing to her husband; however, it also represents the peaceful unification of two families and a stable foundation for the political reign that their union would bring about.

Filocolo and his band of barons and friends are stuck in Naples for quite some time on account of the weather and unpropitious sailing conditions. One day, while wandering in the woods, they happen upon a most perfect garden filled with beautiful, noble young women and young men. This locus amoenus comes complete with sweet music, various instruments and angelic voices, and it lures Filocolo and his company right in.
earn the love of a married woman, should accept her love, should she decide to approach him. Matrimony is defended as a binding contract by one of the interlocutors of the group:

“… ma la donna, con ciò sia cosa ch’ella sia membro del marito, o più tosto un corpo con lui, non potea fare quel saramento sanza volontà del marito, e se ‘l fece, fu nullo, però che al primo saramento licitamente fatto niuno subsequente puote derogare, e massimamente quelli che per non dovuta cagione non debitamente si fanno; e ne’ matrimoniali congiungimenti è usanza di giurare d’essere sempre contento l’uomo della donna, e la donna dell’uomo, né di mai l’uno l’altro per altra cambiare.” (Book 4, 34)

A discussion focused on the rules of marriage follows, and the young narrator explains the importance of virtue and chastity in the eyes of God as well as the importance of marriage to uphold these values.

Another young person of the group proposes the following topic: “‘… desidero di sapere da voi, di cui più tosto un giovane, per più felicemente il suo disio ad effetto conducere, si dee innamorare di queste tre, o di pulcella o di maritata o di vedova’” (Book 4, 51). Queen Fiammetta’s reply upholds medieval orthodoxy and the sanctity of the matrimonial bond, thus eliminating the possibility of the married woman: “‘Delle tre l’una, cioè la maritata, in niun modo è da desiderare, però ch’ella non è sua, né sta in sua libertà il potersi donare o concedersi ad alcuno: e il volerla o prenderla è commettere contra le divine leggi, e eziandio contra le naturali e positive. Alle quali offendere è un commuovere sopra di sé la divina ira, e per consequente grave giudicio’’” (Book 4, 52).
Interestingly, this pre-Decameronian group of young people accepts the queen’s ruling, abandons the possibility of illicit extramarital love, and proceeds to discuss the merits and faults of loving either a maiden or a widow.58

Finally, I would like to turn our attention to the marriage that is not merely talked about but that actually takes place in the Filocolo. At this point, Florio has arrived in Alexandria, and he has found that Biancifiore is being held in a sort of harem, which is filled with the most beautiful women imaginable who are destined to be sent to the king of Babylon by the admiral in charge of the tower. This veritable torre delle donne (as opposed to the valle delle donne in the Decameron) is undoubtedly another locus amoenus and quite possibly a parodic representation of the holy mountain of Purgatory. The narrator, in fact, goes to great lengths to describe it and places atop the tower an enchanted garden, whose flora is capable of discerning whether a resident maiden has maintained her virginity or not.59

58 Seemingly pertinent to the current study and understanding of Boccaccio’s opinions on matrimony is the Queen’s following declaration: “E non è dubbio che tra l’altre cose che la femina ha sopra tutte cara è la sua verginità: e ciò è ragione, però che in quella tutto l’onore della seguente sua vita vi consiste, e senza dubbio ella non sarà mai tanto da amore stimolata che ella volentieri ne sia cortese, se non a cui ella per matrimonial legge si crederà per isposo congiungere” (Book 4, 54). In several tales of the Decameron, by contrast, male characters fall in love with married women (Dec. 1.5, 2.10, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.7, 3.8, 4.9, 4.10, 6.7, and so on) or women promised to others (e.g. Dec. 5.1, 2.7, 4.8). In at least one instance—perhaps the only instance—a member of the brigata, Neifile—that is, outside the tales—asserts the praiseworthiness for women to remain virgins until matrimony, even though she admits that this lofty goal cannot easily be achieved because of “la fragilità nostra” (Dec. 8.1.3)—some kind of human frailty, however, that Florio and Biancifiore never experienced in the Filocolo. But other considerations should also be made concerning the brigata: in their ballads, several members of the brigata let everyone know that they have achieved some sexual satisfaction, even love’s highest delight, as the narrator puts it; at the same time, however, in more than one instance some of them point out that their life in the countryside has been onestissima (Dec. 6.Concl.11, Dec. 7.Concl.17, Dec.10.Concl.4). All these arguments will be pursued further in the following chapters.

59 This point of reference to Purgatorio offers some interesting parodic connections. The tower “è altissima tanto che quasi pare che i nuvoli tocchi, e sì è molto ampia per ogni parte, e credo che il sole, che tutto vede, mai si bella torre non vide, però ch’ella è di fuori di bianchi marmi e rossi e neri e d’altri diversi colori tutta infino alla sua sommità, maestrevolmente lavorati, murata” (Book 4, 85). Furthermore, just before Florio leaves from Naples to continue his search, he has a vision that seems to connect to the
Florio manages to sneak into the highest reaches of the tower and into Biancifiore’s room. Facing the possibility of finally embracing her and achieving love’s ultimate delights, he declares that he is not interested in having a mistress; he wants an inseparable bride. As a result, the two don elegant clothing and kneel before an image of Cupid:

E Filocolo primamente cominciò così a dire: “O santo iddio, signore delle nostre menti, a cui noi dalla nostra puerizia avemo con intera fede servitor, riguarda con pietoso occhio alla presente opera. Io con fatica inestimabile qui pervenuto, cerco quello che tu ne’ cuori de’ tuoi suggetti fai disiderare, e questa giovane con indissolubile matrimonio credo di congiungermi, al quale congiungimento ti prego niuna cosa possa nuocere, niuno vivente dividerlo né romperlo, niuno accidente contaminarlo, ma per la tua pieta in unità il conserva….” (Book 4, 121)

This sort of soliloquy is novel in Boccaccio’s narrative repertoire, and it is fascinating that it concludes with an act of faith in an almost Christian language, high atop the parodically represented mountain of Purgatory. Eventually, the two try to escape and are caught. The admiral sentences them to death by fire, but they are protected from flames by the gods, while Filocolo’s band of friends slays the enemy forces with celerity. 60

iconography of Dante’s Purgatorio: “Ma ritornato in Partenope, e con malinconia aspettando tempo, avvenne che con grandissima malinconia un giorno in un suo giardino si racchiuse solo, e quivi con varii pensieri s’incominciò in se medesimo a dolere, e dolendosi, in nuove cose di pensiero il portò la fantasia, portandogli davanti agli occhi, che il loro potere aveano nella mente raccolto, nuove e inusitate cose” (Book 4, 74). As Carlo Muscetta observes, this reference could also foreshadow the conversion of the protagonist to Christianity (46).

60 The scene of two unmarried lovers being caught and sentenced to die being burned at the stake reminds the reader of a similar tale that ultimately recounts a marriage in the Decameron. In the sixth tale of Day Five, Gian di Procida sneaks into a palace of the king of Sicily in order to be reunited with the girl he loves, Restituta. Upon arriving in the room, Gian embraces Restituta, and they discuss the possibility of escaping and returning home. Gian promises that they will, but before they do, passion overwhelms them and they
Before they make it home to Marmorina and finally Spain, they pass a significant period of time in Rome. The young couple meets a persuasive priest, who recounts the Bible to Florio and one of his dukes in a matter of days and convinces them to convert to Christianity. Florio agrees willingly and then takes the gospel to Biancifiore. They both are baptized and become Christians, thus removing their only negative attribute, their pagan faith, and completing Filocolo’s formative, spiritual journey. Upon returning to Spain, Florio urges his father and mother to convert and then the rest of the dukes and subjects of the kingdom do the same.

In the tales told and questions debated in the Parthenopean locus amoenus, the sanctity of the matrimonial bond is defended and the institution seems to be respected and even revered by the young people. Vows are defended in the tales told in the garden, and they are also upheld and respected dutifully by Florio and Biancifiore’s monogamous relationship. These aspects seem to reflect tradition and what one might expect of a couple destined or at least desiring to be wed in Christian medieval Europe. The two characters are involved in a serious quest to realize their faithful, exclusive love for one

make love multiple times, ultimately, and almost fatally, falling asleep in each other’s arms. Unlike the case of Florio and Biancifiore, no sacred ceremony or thought of matrimonial union enters into the equation: “E appresso questo, con grandissimo piacere abbracciatisi, quello diletto presero oltre al quale niuno maggior ne puote amor prestare: e poi che quello ebbero piú volte reiterato, senza accorgersene nelle braccia l'un dell'altro s'addormentarono” (Dec. 5.6.19). The king discovers them the next morning and decides they should be burnt at the stake, but they are ultimately saved by an admiral of the king who recognizes Gian and garners pardon on the young couples’ behalf: “Partissi adunque il re turbato della camera e comandò che i due amanti, cosí ignudi come erano, fosser presi e legati e, come giorno chiaro fosse, fosser menati a Palermo e in su la piazza legati ad un palo con le reni l'uno all'altra volte e infino ad ora di terza tenuti, acciò che da tutti potessero esser veduti: in appresso fossero arsi sì come avea meritato. E cosí detto se ne tornò in Palermo nella sua camera assai cruccioso” (Dec. 5.6.25).

Muscetta opines that “A Roma Filocolo compirà il suo iter educativo, ascoltando il ‘reverendo Ilario’ nella chiesa di San Giovanni. L’ammirazione per i mosaici e la ‘soave voce’ di questo ateniese emigrato affascinano Filocolo, che da lui ascolta con gran maraviglia ‘un elegante sommario storico delle ‘cinque età passate’ riferito in discorso indiretto e una sinoossi evangelica in compendio” (53). Florio’s conversion represents an authentic conclusion to the protagonist’s spiritual quest. This sort of spiritual quest and conversion will be mostly absent in the Decameron. When it is present, the brigata presents conversion – religious and otherwise – in a parodic manner, such as in the case of Abraam in Dec. 1.2.
another. Then, by the end of the work, they also complete a spiritual quest in which they become Christians and, as king and queen, convert their subjects and kingdom. Furthermore, one witnesses the grand narrative scope of the younger Boccaccio who describes in detail the lives of the protagonists even after they are married. By the time of the *Decameron*, the post-marriage life will often be announced as “And they happily live ever after,” rather than narrated in detail by the members of the *brigata*. These aspects will be fundamental to the next segment of my discussion on the treatment of marriage and its narrative portrayal in *Dec.* 1.5, 1.10, and 2.3. Will the spiritual and amorous quests remain serious and fit into the strictures of medieval tradition? How will Boccaccio adapt his use of descriptive narrative space to conform to his newly selected *novella* form?

2. *Nuptials in the Decameron before Day Five: What Happens to the Sacred, and What Happens to Narrative?*

As we begin to transition into the representation of marriage in the *Decameron*, I would like to draw attention to a part of the prayer Florio lifted up to the gods during his marriage to Biancifiore. As noted before, he declared his desire to be united as one in an indissoluble bond with his lady: “… al quale congiungimento ti priego niuna cosa nuocere, niuno vivente dividerlo né romperlo, niuno accidente contaminarlo, ma per la tua pietà in unità il conserva....” (Book 4, 121). This language resonates even with a modern reader for its similarity to a preacher’s words during a marriage ceremony of today. Florio utilizes a Christian register that seems to echo Christ’s words to the Pharisees regarding marriage in the tenth Chapter of Mark. Christ reminds them that God
originated the union of man and woman, that it first took place in Eden, and that no force should seek to separate it: “‘Ab initio autem creaturae masculum et feminam fecit eos Deus. Propter hoc relinquet homo patrem suum et matrem et adherebit ad uxorinem suam. Et erunt duo in carne una itaque iam non sunt duo sed una caro. Quod ergo Deus iunxit homo non separet.’”

The narrator of the *Filocolo* agrees with this description of the power of the matrimonial bond. Nothing harms the married couple, no being is capable of dividing them or breaking their union, and it cannot be contaminated, not even in the storytelling circle in Naples. Furthermore, an entire book is dedicated to narrating the happy life of the couple after their marriage. What is the situation like, though, in the *Decameron*? To be sure, the first two representations dealing with marriage in the *Decameron* offer continuity with the ideology found in the *Filocolo*. In the fifth and tenth tales of Day One, Boccaccio describes women protagonists who are already married, or had been married, when the story begins. On the one hand, a marchioness defends her honor and marriage by rejecting a king’s sexual advances. On the other, a widow recognizes an elderly doctor’s love, but refuses to compromise her honor. Furthermore, the first wedding ceremony in the *Decameron* (2.3) parallels the Christian representation and sacred aura surrounding the ceremony witnessed in the *Filocolo*. Two young people exchange vows and a ring, kneel before an image Christ and are wedded before they make love to one another.

However, it is also in that first ceremony that new elements in the representation can be found. The two young people, Alessandro and the king of England’s daughter decide to get married before an image of Christ. However, they do so undressed or even
nude, and in the bed at a random inn as they travel to Italy. This tale also offers continuity with Florio and Biancifiore’s story because the novella, too, describes in detail the fortuitous events following their marriage. In the days preceding Day Five, married (or formerly married) protagonists are present in at least twenty-two novelle. At times, the couples are married when the story begins, and in other cases, the marriage takes place in the tale itself. After the third tale of Day Two and throughout the novelle in Decameron Day Five and beyond, the prominent features surrounding the ceremony in the Filocolo – sacrality, religious ceremony, auspicious circumstances – are for the most part no longer present (except, as I argue in the final chapter of this work, in the case of Day Ten). Florio’s ideal and expectation of the matrimonial union being indissoluble, unbreakable and protected from contamination is forgotten. Instead, marriage is often corrupted, and seems to be questioned and perhaps even critiqued rather than presented as a viable, lasting and sacred bond.

Before I proceed to a detailed analysis of the matrimonial bond as presented in the fifth day of the Decameron, it will be useful to establish how matrimony is portrayed in the aforementioned twenty-two novelle preceding Day Five. Boccaccio’s first representation of a ceremony in Dec. 2.3 reminds the reader of his traditional treatment as seen in the Filocolo. The marital fidelity and probity of the married and widowed women in Dec. 1.5 and 1.10, respectively, reflect that of the Filocolo’s protagonists. How do the other twenty-two novelle prior to Day Five present unions between husband and wife? Does Boccaccio continue to present a sacred, ceremonial or central rite or does subversion accompany and undermine its reputation? I would now like to turn the reader’s attention to the text of the Decameron itself to investigate these phenomena and
provide answers to these questions.

In the case of the fifth tale of Day One, Fiammetta narrates the story of the Marchioness of Monferrato who extinguishes the foolish love of the king of France. The king of France falls in love with her on account of her famed beauty and valor, and decides to act on his impulse while the marquis is out of town. Baffled at the lack of variety in the meal served to him by her, the king inquires as to whether only hens and no cocks are available in the area. The marchioness concisely responds: “Monsignor no, ma le femine, quantunque in vestimenti e in onori alquanto dall’altre variino, tutte per ciò son fatte qui come altrove” (Dec. 1.5.15). The king understands quite well that he is being reproached for his immoral intentions, renounces the possibility of using violence against her, and is forced to squelch his dishonest love (“il male concetto fuoco”). Thus, in the first appearance of a married protagonist, Fiammetta strikes down immorality and dishonest love, and has the marchioness defend her marital fidelity and honor. Just as the Fiammetta of the Filocolo, the present narrator presents the bond between husband and wife as being sacred and worthy of protection from dishonesty.

In the tenth novella of the first day, Pampinea safeguards the honor of a madonna Malgherida, who was once married but is now a widow. An aged doctor, Maestro Alberto da Bologna, falls in love with the much younger Malgherida after seeing her at a party. As a result, he begins to walk and ride his horse past her home in hope of catching a glimpse of her beauty. Malgherida and her friends realize what he is up to, and decide

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62 In the preamble, the narrator connects the marchioness’s story with the De amore of Andrea Cappellano, the “questioni d’amore” from the Filocolo and a canonical belief regarding medieval love and social status. Fiammetta reconnects to the discourse of Filocolo Book 4, paragraph 50 when she opines that “quanto negli uomini è gran senno il cercar d’amar sempre donna di più alto legnaggio che egli non è, così nelle donne è grandissimo avvedimento il sapersi guardare dal prendersi dell’amore di maggiore uomo che ella non è...” (Dec. 1.5.4). In short, the rule states that a man inevitably tries to marry someone of higher class and that a woman should not become involved with a man of a higher class. The marchioness abides by this rule since “tra tutte l’altre donne del mondo era bellissima e valorosa” (Dec. 1.5.6).
to invite him to make fun of his love for the much younger widow. After sharing with him fine wines and exquisite desserts, they begin to goad the doctor. Unbeknownst to the antagonizing women, Maestro Alberto is quite clever and precise with his words, just as was the Marchioness of Monferrato. He utilizes the analogy of a leek, of which most “foolish” women eat the leaves. The tasty and worthwhile part is actually the root, and Alberto assures Malgherida that she will have a much better experience with the root, that is Alberto, than with the common leaves that are usually consumed by young women in love. As in the case of Dec. 1.5, the antagonist recognizes fault and accepts the point of view of the protagonist. For the Marchioness, the king gave up his foolish, immoral love pursuit. In the case of Alberto, Malgherida accepts his affection and admits it is dear to her. However, she draws the line of this acceptance such that her honor remains safeguarded.

After the free-themed first day of the Decameron ends, the ten young people pass to the second day which witnesses for the first time the imposition of a set topic: Fortune. The series of misfortunes after which protagonists attain unexpected happiness proffer some of the most common narrative situations and settings of the work: travel is central to the second and fifth tales; unfamiliar and hostile environments negatively affect characters in the second, seventh and ninth tales; extraordinary political events, such as political rebellions and wars, set the sixth and eighth tales into motion; and merchants

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63 The text reads as follows: “… e al fine con assai belle e leggiadre parole come questo potesse essere, che egli di questa bella donna fosse inamorato, il domandarono, sentendo esso le da molti belli, gentili e leggiadri giovani essere amata” (Dec. 1.10.14).

64 Malgherida is ashamed of her behavior and mockery after Alberto’s castigation. She replies to him: “Maestro, assai bene e cortesemente gastigate n’avete della nostra presuntuosa impresa; tuttavia il vostro amor m’è caro, si come di savio e valente uomo essere dee, e per ciò, salva la mia onestà, come a vostra cosa ogni vostro piacere imponete sicuramente” (Dec. 1.10.19; emphasis my own).
involved in risky business drive forward tales three and four. Among the narrations of Day Two, one finds numerous references to these common topoi and also allusions to the aleatory governing theme to the genesis of the *Decameron* itself. Given these common themes, one finds a significant affinity to the narrative elements present in the *Filocolo*.

Among the substantial evidence that connects Day Two’s theme to the work’s introduction, one finds also the commonality of the undoing of family bonds that come about in several tales of the day. In this vein, Boccaccio explores internal relationships in the family nucleus (one thinks especially of the tales of the Conte d’Anguersa, 2.8, and that of Madama Beritola, 2.6) that brings to light a broader theme of social relationships. Zatti recognizes even that the conjugal relationship is visible in the last two tales of the day, but, along with most other critics, neglects the centrality and importance of the matrimonial relationships. The tales in which these happenings take part (and there is reference to at least fifteen nuptials taking place, including the eight ascertainable, albeit subversive, examples in the novella of Alatiel) are more than half of those told in the day. These phenomena unfortunately do not find themselves among the list of important settings, situations and themes among critics of Day Two.

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65 Zatti cites offers up a similar summary in citing Cazalé Bérard: “... la peripezia narrativamente espansa di queste novelle attinge ad una inusitata eterogeneità di situazioni e ambienti: viaggio (2 e 5); eventi politici eccezionali come guerre, insurrezioni ecc. (6 e 8); impresse commerciali rischiose (3 e 4); ambienti in abituali e ostili (2, 7, e 9); e ancora, e più specificamente, come si avvicendino una serie di cronotopi: la notte buia e tempestosa della provincia italiana; la città malavita; il remoto e inospitale Settentrione d’Europa; i mari corsi dai venti di Fortuna, dai traffici mercantili e dalle incursioni dei pirati” (Zatti 81).

66 In the essay “Il mercante sulla ruota: la seconda giornata,” Sergio Zatti does a thorough job not only of indicating these common topoi, but also in connecting the aleatory governing theme to the genesis of the *Decameron* itself. He utilizes the preceding argumentation of Asor Rosa in noting that “lo stesso presupposto del *Decameron* è determinato ‘da un colossale ‘caso di Fortuna’ come la pestilenza, che, sconvolgendo in profondità ogni ordine costituito,’ ha reso necessario il viaggio, l’esodo di salvezza, così da promuovere la fondazione di un ordine ‘altro’ in cui la narrazione sia resa possibile ‘grazie all’imprevisto spazio di libertà aperto dalla catastrofe’” (Zatti 81).
There is no place for matrimony in Monica Bardi’s analysis of the day; however, she effectively brings to the fore the importance of social identity in Day Two and the prominence of protagonists who lose and gain it: “Quella della perdita dell’identità e della funzione sociale è la prova a cui la fortuna sottopone gli uomini, ponendo un freno all’arbitrio con cui, in origine, ha posto alcuni in alto e altri in basso nella scala gerarchica e sociale; solo chi supera con pazienza e spirito di adattamento la prova dell’umiliazione e della perdita può aspirare a una vera e non labile identità umana e sociale” (Bardi 27). Closely connected to, and just as prominent as social and human identity among the day’s protagonists, is their conjugal status and strength of marital faith. The elements of fortune lend themselves in this day to breaking apart and testing marriage and faith: from the false accusation of the King of France’s son’s wife and the long years of faithful service of the Count of Anguersa and the incredible faithfulness that Zinevra holds toward her undeserving husband, to the numerous abductions of wives witnessed through Alatiel above all, but also in the case of Bartolomea in Dioneo’s tale.

Inevitably the spouses involved in these marriages are caught in the midst of the many negative situations brought about by Fortune; however, in the women’s case, one finds positive results that allow them to break free of the isolation and restrictions affecting them and the ladies in love in the Proemio. A propos of this element, one finds that women’s metaphorical “mobilità” renders Madonna Zinevra literally mobile as she

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67 The first tale of Martellino pretending to be paralyzed, does take part in this list. The second novella involves a relationship between a formerly married female protagonist and Rinaldo d’Asti. One witnesses the marriage of Alessandro and the daughter of the king of England in the third tale of the day. Landolfo Rufolo remains single throughout his adventure to become rich in Decamerone 2.4, and Andreuccio comes into contact only with his “sister” in the fifth story. The protagonist in the rubric for 2.6 is married, and her son and daughter get married by the end of the tale. The aforementioned eight parodic couplings of Alatiel come about in the seventh story, while in the eighth tale the Conte d’Anguersa is widowed, and his two children get married by the end of the tale. Fortune separates Zinevra from her husband Bernabò, only to reunite the married couple at the end. And finally, the young female protagonist of tale 2.10 is initially married to Ricciardo di Chinzica, leaves him, and marries the pirate Paganino.
travels the Mediterranean disguised as a man, breaking the confines of the domestic seclusion mentioned at the beginning of the Decameron. Even when these confines are broken, Zinevra and most of the other women of Day Two return to marriage whether happily or not. Beginning with the third novella, let us now proceed to investigate how Boccaccio’s representation of matrimony in the Decameron begins with the suggestion of the traditional representation found in the Filocolo and how, from there, he turns the voices of ten young people to a new approach that complicates, deepens, and further centralizes the theme.

In the introduction to the third tale, Pampinea brings attention to the foolishness of humans who believe that they are in control Fortune, which governs much of what happens around them: “... tutte le cose quali noi scioccamante nostre chiamiamo, sieno nelle sue mani, e per conseguente da lei, secondo il suo occulto giudicio, senza alcuna posa d’uno in altro e d’altro in uno successivamente, senza alcuno conosciuto ordine da noi, esser da lei permutate” (Dec. 2.3.4). Much like Florio and Biancifiore, the protagonists of this tale will be affected by similar forces. First of all, Pampinea’s emphasis on Fortune foreshadows the financial rise and fall of the three Florentine merchants. In the Filocolo, there are similar rise and falls in the love and spiritual quests of the protagonists. These aleatory elements create a rather complex plot, reversals in fortune and also marriage in both Decameron Day Two and in the Filocolo. As far as

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68 Zatti observes: “La metaforica mobilità delle donne – riprovata dalla mentalità maschile come tratto caratteriale di una psicologia volubile – fa diventare Zinevra letteralmente ‘mobile,’ cioè capace per sua iniziativa di rompere i confini della reclusione domestica in cui le donne sono ‘racchiuse’ e agire nel mondo ‘in forma di maschio’” (83). Barolini perceptively notes that Bartolomea “is in many respects a woman who anticipates the women of Day VII, insisting on the right to sex as a fundamental right to life,” and that “Zinevra is a woman who crosses the bridge from words to deeds, literally becoming a man in order to preserve her life and honor…” (179).

69 In one case, that of the second tale, a widow remains unmarried, but has a physical relationship with another man.
marriage is concerned, in *Dec. 2.3*, like the in *Filocolo*, the ceremony takes place before the end of the story and allows for some narration of the post-marital life. This placement opposes that of the marriage celebrations that occupy the last lines of the tales in Day Five.

The aforementioned merchants are the uncles of the main narrative’s protagonist, Alessandro, who was in charge of the family’s affairs in England. Alessandro decides to leave England for Florence, and meets a group of travelers that consists of an abbot dressed in white, numerous monks, and knights among others.⁷⁰ Soon, the travelers arrive at a town in which, because of lacking availability of rooms, it happens that Alessandro must spend the night in the Abbot’s room. It is at this point that the abbot, whom the tale’s rubric has already revealed to be the king of England’s young daughter, reveals her love for Alessandro and ultimately uplifts the social, erotic, and economic fortune of his family and him. Once the abbot realizes that Alessandro is in the room, the abbot calls him to the bed, reveals who she really is, and takes control of the situation, immediately assuring Alessandro that all is well: “‘Alessandro, caccia via il tuo sciocco pensiero, e, cercando qui, consoci quello che io nascondo.’ Alessandro, posta la mano sopra il petto dell’abate, trovò due poppellite tone e sode e delicate” (*Dec. 2.3.31-32*).

Despite his new-found enthusiasm, Alessandro cannot benefit from her generosity and this possible change in fortune unless he listens to her story and does what the king’s daughter says. She is being sent to Rome to avoid being married to the elderly king of

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⁷⁰ The white abbot remains somewhat mysterious to Alessandro, especially on account of the abbot’s apparent young age. The knights imply that Alessandro should not ask about the abbot, but it turns out that the abbot eventually takes a liking to Alessandro: “… gli venne nel cammino presso di sé veduto Alessandro, il quale era giovane assai, di persona e di viso bellissimo, e, quanto alcuno altro esser potesse, costumato e piacevole e di bella maniera” (*Dec. 2.3.20*). After talking for a while, the abbot judges Alessandro to be a gentleman in spite of being a mere merchant, begins to feel compassion toward him and his unfortunate circumstance, and ultimately assures Alessandro that “se valente uomo fosse, ancora Iddio il riporterebbe là onde la fortuna l’aveva gittato e più in alto” (*Dec. 2.3.22*).
Scotland by asking the pope himself to marry her to someone else. In the meantime, Love has caused her to fall for Alessandro, who can act as her way out, if he will be her husband: “… o tua ventura o mia sciagura che sia, come l’altro di ti vidi, si di te m’accese Amore, che donna non fu mai che tanto amasse uomo. E per questo io ho deliberato di volere te avanti che alcuno altro per marito: dove tu me per moglie non vogli, tanto sto di qui ti diparti e nel tuo luogo ritorna” (Dec. 2.3.33). It is clear that the young woman has given much thought to the proposition and also that her heart as well as her mind has decided upon Alessandro. She is choosing a new version of married life and not just pursuing a one-time erotic adventure.71 It is at this point that one also finds the resoundingly clear reference to the traditional wedding scene of Florio and Biancifiore in the Filocolo.

In a manner and wording quite similar to the Filocolo scene, they kneel before an image of the deity (in this case Christ), exchange a ring, and thus are married: “Essa allora levatasi a sedere in su il letto, davanti a una tavoletta dove Nostro Signore era effigiato postogli in mano uno anello, gli si fece sposare; e appresso insieme abbracciatisi, con gran piacer di ciascuna delle parti quanto di quella notte restava si sollazzarono” (Dec. 2.3.35).72 The atmosphere surrounding the ceremony is of great

71 Luigi Totaro, too, emphasizes that the king’s daughter is looking for more than a one-night affair. Rather, in the critic’s opinion she has deliberated and enacted a “progetto di vita”: “è manifesta che non di avventura intende parlare, bensì di un progetto di vita concepito rapidamente ma lucidamente, anche se ora manifestato con forte emozione: il ricorrere frequente di endecasillabi—‘avanti che tu più mi t’avvicini/attendi quello che io ti voglio dire’; ‘e pulcella partitami da casa’; ‘al papa andava che mi maritasse,’ che donna non fu mai che tanto amasse’—nella parole della donna innamorata” (30).

72 The last act, as it were, of the wedding ceremony—namely, “si sollazzarono”—characterizes many Decameronian sexual encounters, by and large outside marriage. The terms “sollazzarsi” or “sollazzo” are not utilized in sexual encounters in the Filocolo. At the beginning of the work, it is used in a statement that reverberates with the Decameron’s proem as a form of help or aid that comes from a friend when one is suffering: “Di che prendere potrete consolazione, se quello è vero, che a’ miseri sia sollazzo d’aver compagni nelle pene...” (Book 1, 2). In other cases the verb means “to enjoy oneself” (Book 2, 5; Book 4, 2; Book 5, 18); or the noun as “enjoyment” as opposed to “study” (Book 2, 10; 41). After Filocolo and
intensity, even if the scene itself contrasts such intensity with the two young people likely nude in bed together. But this contrast does not seem to create a comic effect. In this vein, seriousness in the atmosphere surrounds the two young people. There, too, seems to be a certain sacredness present not only of the ceremony, but also of the words of the king’s daughter, who has an almost sacerdotal aspect as she proposes to the man, “presides” over the ceremony and even produces the ring. ⁷³

Thus, the marriage is true and holy to her and, since Alessandro agrees, also to him. Indeed, as the two young people underwent the rite, it would have been considered a sacrament. Historically, the sacramental definition of marriage emphasized the betrothal and exchange of vows between the man and woman. ⁷⁴ Given the social stature of the young woman in this case, the marriage must also be recognized by the Church, and the two decide, after repeatedly enjoying each other’s company throughout the night, to push on to Rome in order for the pope to celebrate publicly and sanctify their marriage.

The king’s daughter proclaims the nobility and goodness of Alessandro’s character, if not of his blood line, and declares, much to the initial dismay and embarrassment of her two accompanying knights, that the pope must marry them and their union must be recognized by the Church. She came all this way with the motive of

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⁷³ In his work entitled *Ragioni d’amore: le donne nel Decameron*, Luigi Totaro observes: “Ma non sfugge che è proprio la donna ad attribuirlo con la scelta operata. Ella appare così rivestita di una autorità che diviene dignità alta e ieratica nella scena” (Totaro 31).

⁷⁴ In *Storia del matrimonio*, Diane Owen Hughes thus explains: “... quello che la Chiesa ideò nel corso del Medioevo dava tutto il potere ai due contraenti, lo sposo e la sposa. Giacché erano loro a porre in essere il sacramento, non c’era bisogno di un sacerdote celebrante; e anche se la Chiesa richiedeva la presenza di testimone e raccomandava di fare le pubblicazioni, riconosceva poi come legittime unioni clandestine” (49).
marrying someone other than her father’s choice. In some way, it seems, the text suggests to us that by celebrating the marriage far away, amid the holy sites of Rome, and before the highest prelate in the Christian world, this task could be completed and carry the sacred force necessary to keep it together: “…ma piacquemi di fornire il mio cammino sì per visitare li santi luoghi e reverendi, de’ quali questa città è piena, e la vostra Santità, e sì acciò che per voi il contratto matrimonio tra Alessandro e me solamente nella presenza di Dio io facessi aperto nella vostra e per conseguente degli altri uomini” (Dec. 2.3.40).

There are still significant elements of the sacred nature and religious context of the wedding ceremony and of matrimony, but it is also essential to note that there is a turn towards subversion in this case, especially given that the daughter of a king was married secretly, in bed, with a non-noble. Weddings celebrated in secret like this will play a part in several of those celebrated in the Decameron.75 In this particular case, the young woman’s words do in fact elevate the scene during which the ceremony takes place; however, of course, they would not be sufficient to satisfy any sovereign in Christian Europe. So, they go to the pope who affirms that the two had already celebrated the sacrament, blesses their union, and proceeds to celebrate publicly, not another wedding ceremony, but rather the public ceremony of what had already taken place. This time the ceremony is in the presence of the cardinals, the nobility of Rome, and the two young spouses. It is well worth quoting the scene in detail at this point:

75 Totaro contextualizes this instance with regard to Church doctrine: “Il matrimonio celebrato segretamente appartiene all’extrema ratio della Chiesa per salvaguardare la libertà del consenso matrimoniale; ma il contesto in cui tutto si svolge – la sequenza della profferta delle “poppelline tonde e sode,” dei due giovani nudi al momento della consegna dell’anello di fronte a quella tavoletta con l’effigie di Cristo, della consumazione che segue – si prestava bene alla parodia o al sacrilegio, se non fosse innalzato dalle nobili parole della giovane…” (Totaro 32-33).
E il giorno posto da lui essendo venuto, davanti a tutti i cardinali e di molti altri gran valenti uomini, li quali invitati a una grandissima festa da lui apparecchiata eran venuti, fece venire la donna realmente vestita, la quale tanto bella e si piacevole parea che meritamente da tutti era commendata, e simigliantemente Alessandro splendidamente vestito, in apparenza e in costumi non miga giovane che a usura avesse prestato ma più tosto reale, e da’ due cavalieri molto onorato; e quivi da capo fece solennemente le sponsalizie celebrare, e appresso, le nozze belle e magnifiche fatte, con la sua benedizione gli licenziò. (Dec. 2.3.44)

These unique rituals are rare indeed in their descriptive detail, and a ceremony so elaborately described will not be witnessed again in the Decameron until that of Griselda.

In this inaugural representation of matrimony in the Decameron, one finds a sacred union initially brought about by the consent of the two young people involved. In order to be sure that their vows are sealed by more than their own consent, the king’s daughter demands that a member of the Church—and not just any member, but the pope himself—recognize and publicize their marriage contract—a fundamental aspect for people of high rank, and even more so for kings and queens.76 As is common in most other marriages in the Decameron, the reader is informed that a magnificent celebration proceeds. Unlike most other instances of marriage, though, this time the narrator actually gives some details about the protagonists’ lives after the ceremony. This difference embodies the fundamental narrative shift from the Filocolo to the Decameron. In the earlier work, Boccaccio dedicated an entire book to the description of life after the

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76 As mentioned in chapter two, it would certainly not be unheard of for the marriages witnessed throughout the Decameron not to take place in a church or even before a priest, given that the sacramental definition of marriage emphasized the betrothal and exchange of vows between the man and woman. However, given the weighty social and political significance of some marriages, such as in the present case of Dec. 2.3, the act also functioned as a means of establishing and perpetuating social as well as political stability.
wedding ceremony and conversion to Christianity. In *Dec. 2.3*, that narrative portion is truncated and consists only of a few paragraphs. In almost all other tales with a wedding ceremony, the post-wedding will be replaced with the announcement (and not description) of great celebration and a happy life ever after.

In this case, noblemen, cardinals, and significantly, the knights who were originally accompanying the king’s daughter, accept the union and help to comprise the chorus of voices who accompany the pope’s official proclamation of their matrimony: “e quivi da capo fece solennemente le sponsalizie celebrare, e appresso, le nozze belle e magnifiche fatte, con la sua benedizione gli licenziò.” (*Dec. 2.3.44*). After the wedding celebration in Rome, the fête continues in Florence, where the two are received honorably and Alessandro’s uncles are set free, get back their wealth, and “reacquire” their wives and other possessions. Finally, the two knights are sent ahead to England to explain to the king the incredible events that have taken place without his knowledge, to ensure that he will accept his mercantile Florentine son-in-law.

One must assume that the knights possess a substantial proclivity for rhetoric, for they manage to convince the king to accept Alessandro as his daughter’s husband. But the king even goes as far as to throw them yet another magnificent party, to render grace unto them, and to knight Alessandro “con grandissimo onore,” bestowing upon him the County of Cornwall. I draw attention to the “great honor” with which the king knights Alessandro because it takes part in this unique celebratory, sacralizing, and elevating vocabulary that surrounds matrimony in the first novella in which a marriage ceremony

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77 As is often the case in the *Decameron*, wives and women are considered possessions and the description of the uncles’ women is no different: “Piacque a Alessandro e similmente alla donna, di Roma partendosi, di venire a Firenze, dove già la fama aveva la novella recata; e quivi da’ cittadini con sommo onore rivescuti, fece la donna li tre fratelli liberare, avendo prima fatto ogn’uom pagare, e loro le lor donne rimise nelle loro possessioni” (*Dec. 2.3.45*).
takes place in the *Decameron*. It is an irenic vocabulary and peaceful terminology: just before the wedding in Rome, Alessandro feels a “mirabile allegrezza” (*Dec*. 2.3.42); the two knights were put at ease and “in buona pace” by the Pope who “diede ordine a quello che da far fosse” (*Dec*. 2.3.43); during the ceremony, the two young people are “realmente e splendidamente vestiti,” and “da’ due cavalieri molto onorato,” and the Pope celebrates this sacred occasion “solenemente,” finally giving the young couple “la sua benedizione” (*Dec*. 2.3.44). After the wedding, Boccaccio maintains the sacred, solemn, and honorable aura created by his word choices: in Florence the couple is welcomed “con sommo onore,” they receive “buona grazia” from everyone, and during a brief stop in Paris, “onorevolmente dal re ricevuti furono” (*Dec*. 2.3.45). 78

Finally, one might rightly expect the king to express anger, at least initially, in the way of Tancredi (4.1) or even Caterina’s father who catches her grasping the *lusignolo* (5.4), but no such reaction is found here. This marriage brings happiness to the king and peace in England: the king, as mentioned before “le rendé grazia sua e con grandissima festa lei e ’l suo genero ricevette” and “con grandissimo onore fè cavaliere” (*Dec*. 2.3.46). Alessandro, being the *promesso sposo* he has turned out to be, even manages to bring peace between the king and his son and eventually to the whole kingdom: “di che

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78 After they are married, Florio and Biancifiore go to the church of San Giovanni to convert to Christianity in Rome. There are similar patterns in the way their conversion and the wedding celebration of Alessandro and the King of England’s daughter are celebrated. The day Filocolo and Biancifiore depart to be converted, family, friends, and the noblemen of Rome celebrate and accompany them: “Mennilio, che in sollecitudine d’obviare Filocolo dimorava, come vide il giorno, così con Quintilio e con molti altri parenti e amici e compagni e con Ilario onoratamente molto salirono a cavallo, e con istrumenti molti e con gran festa ad obviare Filocolo uscirono, e appresso di loro Clelia e Tiberina in guisa di grandissime principesse ornate: e da’ nobili uomini di Roma e da molte donne accompagnate, cavalcando di Roma uscirono” (Book 5, 71). Then, when the newlyweds arrive home in Spain, they are received in way not dissimilar to Alessandro and his new bride on their way home to England: “Con la quale così grande allegrezza Florio entrò in Marmorina sotto onorevole palio, e Biancifiore similemente dopo lui. E pervenuti al real palagio, ricevuti furono con mirabile allegrezza dal vecchio padre e dalla pietosa madre, e con loro insieme tra gli altri fu molto onorato Mennilio: e’ compagni di Florio prima dal re e dalla reina lietamente veduti, poi da’ suoi stretti amici e parenti con maggiore letizia furono ricevuti” (Book 5, 81).
This analysis of the language surrounding matrimony in the present novella brings me to find much in common, again, with the representation of the institution of matrimony in the Filocolo. Luigi Totaro does not mention this parallel; however, he does well in noting the sacred aura surrounding the events and ending in this tale such that it seems God himself blesses the union and brings about such a lovely marriage and happy ending: “Il lieto fine, in questo caso, pare avere il carattere di una sanzione divina. La donna esce di scena, e sparisce lasciando il luogo alla novella della fortuna ritrovata, della ricchezza recuperata, dell’alto stato raggiunto da Alessandro” (Totaro 33). I would add three words to the ending of this telling and accurate observation—“tramite il matrimonio”—in order to focus on the importance of their nuptials to this fortuitous ending, especially since it is the first of sixteen nuptials to take place in Day Two and the first of numerous novelle throughout the Decamerone in which they will be found. Will the portrayal of matrimony stay the same in the remaining tales of Day Two? Will the sacralizing and uplifting vocabulary of 2.3 continue to describe the elements before, during, and after of protagonists’ nuptials? In order to answer these questions and to begin to unveil Boccaccio’s increasingly multifaceted representation of matrimony, let us proceed to analyze the remaining relevant novelle of Days Two, Three and Four.

79 After marrying in Alexandria in the sultan’s tower, Florio and Biancifiore stop in Rome to be baptized as Christians, and then they return home, where they convert the populace to Christianity, become king and queen, and live happily ever after.
CHAPTER 5

FROM ALATIEL’S “COSÌ SPESSE NOZZE TO RICCIARDO DI CHINZICA’S “STUDIO DELLE LEGGI” INSTEAD OF HIS WIFE: THE PARODY OF MATRIMONY BEGINS

The next marriages in Day Two take place in the sixth novella of Madama Beritola, which is recounted by Emilia. In the broader scheme of the day’s fortune theme, the events that lead to Madama Beritola’s misfortune and the loss of her two sons stem from the aforementioned war and political upheaval context. The change of political power in Sicily signals also the fall in fortune of Madama Beritola’s husband, messer Arrighetto Capece. As a result, the noble Arrighetto is no longer in political favor, and Beritola flees from Sicily with her son and other refugees, ending up on the island of Ponza. While fleeing from Sicily, she gives birth to another son, and one day, while she is away from the others in the group and her sons lamenting her misfortune, pirates abduct all of her companions, her two sons, and their nurse. Eventually, she is found by Corrado Malaspina and convinced by him and his wife to leave the island and to live with them in Lunigiana. After a series of events over several years, it happens that Beritola’s older son, Giuffredi (who in hiding his identity has taken the name of Giannotto) also ends up, unbeknownst to Beritola, working at the Malaspina home as a servant.

While working in the home, the young man falls in love with one of Corrado’s daughters, Spina, who had previously been married, “la quale, essendo assai bella e
piacevole e giovane di poco più di sedici anni, per ventura pose gli occhi addosso a Giannotto, e egli a lei, e ferventissimamente l’uno dell’altro s’innamorò” (Dec. 2.6.35).

The narrator informs that their love “non fu lungamente senza effetto” and that the two carried on their carnal relationship without anyone knowing for many months. Eventually, the father, Currado, finds out and refuses to accept such a love between a servant and his noble, widowed daughter, incarcerating both young people. Once Currado finds out the young man is actually of noble birth, he recognizes first the utility of giving his daughter to such a noble young man in order to restore his and her honor, and then seems to feel a bit of remorse and shame for what he has done: “Questo udendo Currado avvisò lui dovere esser desso, e caddegli nell’animo, se così fosse, che egli a una ora poteva una gran misericordia fare e la sua vergogna e quella della figliuola tor via dandola per moglie a costui” (Dec. 2.6.48).

Currado then goes to speak with Giannotto, justifying his decision to imprison and reiterating that it was in his legal right to have the improvident young man killed. But, that is not what he did, and now that he has learned the truth, he would like to restore their honor, offer to Giannotto his daughter (and a hefty dowry), and marry her, not as a licentious “amica” but as an honorable wife: “Per che, quando tu voli, io sono disposto, dove ella disonestamente amica ti fu, che ella onestamente tua moglie divenga e che in guisa di mio figliuolo qui con esso meco e con lei quanto ti piacerà dimori’ (Dec. 2.6.51).

I would like to emphasize at this point the importance of an honorable marriage and the

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80 Currado wants to have them both put to death; however, his wife, who is one of the first women in the *Decameron* along with Beritola to be precisely identified and emblematized as a mother, convinces him to lessen their punishment. Currado binds them in separate prison cells and forgets about them for a year. When Giuffredi/Giannotto happens to hear of the return of King Charles and the Ghibellines in Sicily, he reveals to the prison guard that he is actually the son of a Sicilian nobleman. The guard reports the story to Currado, he recognizes the father’s name as the husband of Madama Beritola, and finds out from her that she did in fact have two male children.
necessity of a reasonably dowry to the tale’s protagonists, and especially to the father. He is only willing to reconsider and give his blessing to the two young people once it is clear that he can repair his reputation with honorable, socially acceptable marriage.\footnote{Totaro effectively summarizes the situation and emphasizes the importance of an honorable marriage to the tale’s protagonists: “Con la benedizione di Currado […] che pur voleva uccidere il giovane quando era povero servitor e aveva mancato al dovere verso di lui e delle sue cose, cioè la sua propria figliola: non dunque ‘l’amorosa avvegna che sconvenevole … amistà’ muove il severo padre; ma soltanto la possibilità di riparare il disonore con un onorevole matrimonio altolocato: solo per felice caso anche matrimonio d’amore” (39).}

In this case, as in that of Alessandro and the king of England’s daughter, one finds the importance of an honorable marriage. That is, according to Currado’s understanding and the medieval view, one in which intercourse does not precede the marital union. This custom was observed by Alessandro and the king’s daughter, and then Fortune had it that the marriage could be confirmed and announced by the pope. In this case, before Giannotto and Spina had intercourse, they celebrated no exchange of vows. Only when the father realizes that family honor can be restored does he opt for an “onorevole” marriage without regard to what happened between the two lovers beforehand. The wedding celebration is very much festive as in the case of Alessandro; however, the matrimony itself is not confirmed or proclaimed by a member of the clergy or surrounded by quite the same sacred aura and elevating vocabulary.

Indeed, the text states that they are wedded by Currado, \textit{secondo la loro usanza}, in one of their prison cells.\footnote{“Ella era nella prigione magra e pallida divenuta debole, e quasi un’altra femina che essere non soleva parea, e così Giannotto un altro uomo: i quali nella presenza di Currado di pari consentimento contrassero le sponsalizie secondo la nostra usanza” (Dec. 2.6.57). In a footnote, Branca describes what he believes is meant by “la nostra usanza”: “Ciò scambiando le promesse e consegnando l’anello alla sposa: cerimonia che si svolgeva dinanzi ai genitori o anche al padre solo” (216n5). Branca draws attention to a parallel scene of Ricciardo and Caterina in the fourth \textit{novella} of Day Five in which Caterina’s father weds the two nude young people to prevent gain a noble son-in-law through a hasty marriage rather than allowing a scandal to develop around their clandestine coupling.} Only after this ceremony does Currado bring the two mothers together to make a “maravigliosa festa alla nuova sposa” (Dec. 2.6.65). After
yet another more public, “bella e magnifica festa,” Giannotto reveals the whereabouts of his own brother to Currado, and asks that his brother be freed from servitude in the home of a certain Messer Guasparrino and that he too be reunited with their mother, Madama Beritola. Currado sends a messenger to Messer Guasparrino, who verifies the tale with the nurse who originally accompanied Giannotto and his brother. Amazed at the story, Messer Guasparrino, “vergognandosi del vil trattamento fatto del garzone, in ammenda di ciò, avendo una sua bella figliuioletta d’età d’undici anni, conoscendo egli chi Arrighetto era stato e fosse, con una gran dote gli diè per moglie” (Dec. 2.6.74). He immediately organizes “una gran festa” at his own home and then travels to one of Currado’s castles where yet another “festa grande era apparecchiata” (Dec. 2.6.75).

Interestingly, Boccaccio does not permit Emilia the narrator to provide any details of the presumed happy ending of the family or the married couples. In the tale of Alessandro, the reader is made fully aware by Pampinea in 2.3, by recounting how their union as husband and wife facilitated Alessandro’s rise to power consequent ability to make peace in England. In the tale of Madama Beritola, one finds, on the one hand, a turn in the representation of marriage by Boccaccio. First, the language surrounding the

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83 After these instances, the partying continues, and there are other terms found among the celebratory atmosphere in this case that were also present in that of Alessandro. However, once word arrives of Beritola’s husband return to power and prominence in Sicily, the celebration includes him and the good fortune that has befallen him and his family, rather than exclusively on the married couples themselves. Currado’s envoy from Sicily recounts the celebration that took place there in honor of Arrighetto and his service to King Pietro: “aggiunegno che egli aveva lui con sommo onore ricevuto e inestimabile festa eva fatta della sua donna e del figliuolo, de’ quali mai dopo la presura sua neente aveva saputo” (Dec. 2.6.78). All the quests seem to focus on the envoy who was “con grande allegrezza e festa ricevuto e ascoltato,” and Currado “lietamente ricevette” the nobleman sent by Arrighetto to their festivities, which, the narrator informs us, are not even half over. After the nobleman vow any and all support on the behalf of Arrighetto to Currado and Guasparrino for watching over his wife and children, finally “Appresso questo, lietissimamente nella festa delle due nuove spose e con li novelli sposi mangiarono” (Dec. 2.6.81). In the end, Beritola, her sons and their wives depart for Sicily where they are received with “tanta festa,” and Emilia uncertainly informs the reader that they probably all lived happily ever after, with a final, brief reference to God and their gratitude to him: “Dove poi molto tempo si crede che essi tutti felicemente vivessero e, come cognoscenti del ricevuto beneficio, amici di messer Domenedio” (Dec. 2.6.83).
ceremonies has shifted. There is much “festa” as was the case with Alessandro’s wedding; however, the elements of solemnity, benediction, and grace are no longer present. In close connection to this change, one does not find the aspect of the sacred or religious in the celebrations.

Finally, in the case of 2.3, the narrator states that the king’s daughter and Alessandro were happily married, and provides a series of evidence that proves that statement. At the end of Emilia’s tale, the protagonists are consigned to an only presumable happy ever after (“si crede che essi tutti felicemente vivessero”), and with a fairy tale-like epilogue, how their lives and marriages actually turn out cannot be ascertained. In its description of after-the-wedding festivities, Dec. 2.3 is similar to what occurs in Filocolo after the wedding, obviously on a smaller scale. In Dec. 2.6 we start moving to what is going to become quite standard in the Decameron: Boccaccio is not always interested in describing what happens after the happy celebration of matrimony. Rather, he also focuses his writing energy and the narrative space of the brigata on the travails that precede it and how the two people arrive at it.84

Panfilo’s tale of Alatiel comes next, in which one finds numerous, parodic nuptial celebrations and the earliest examples of subverting and questioning matrimony. To contextualize my interpretation of Alatiel’s multitude of “marital” mishaps, let us note first the reactions of the women of the brigata to her nuptial happenings after the story ends. By the end of Panfilo’s novella, they are sighing quite heavily, not only for their concern with regard to Alatiel’s misadventures, but specifically at how many times Fortune and the excessive passions of men forced her into “nuptials”: “Sospirato fu molto

84 Or, in some cases (e.g. that of Zinevra, 2.9; Pietro da Vinciolo, 5.10; the stories of the seventh and eighth days; some tales of Dec. 9), the tale will start after the matrimony is celebrated, *in medias res*, and Boccaccio proceeds to narrate what happens afterwards.
dalle donne per li varii casi della bella donna: ma chi sa che cagione moveva que’ sospiri? Forse v’eran di quelle che non meno per vaghezza di così spesse nozze che per pietà di colei sospiravano” (Dec. 2.8.2).

The narrator ironically subverts the supposed moral of Alatiel’s epic erotic journey: “Ma per ciò che, come che gli uomini in varie cose pecchino disiderando, voi, graziose donne, sommamente peccate in una, cioè nel disiderare d’esser belle, in tanto che, non bastandovi le bellezze che dalla natura concedute vi sono, ancora con maravigliosa arte quelle cercate d’acrescere, mi piace di raccontarvi quanto sventuratamente fosse bella una saracina, alla quale in forse quattro anni avvenne per la sua bellezza di fare nuove nozze da nove volte” (Dec. 2.7.7). Panfilo announces a moral that should teach women not to desire excessively the vanity of physical beauty, but he also undermines the traditional role of “nozze,” marriage, the indissoluble bond between one man and one woman, anticipating that the female protagonist will celebrate ‘new nuptials’ no fewer than nine times.85

It is appropriate and accurate for critics to find that Alatiel is caught up in a sort of “erotic odyssey” which is ultimately transformed into and parodies simultaneously a religious pilgrimage.86 Rather than there being a sacred or holy site during each stop of

85 Totaro observes this subversion as it regards the moral announced originally by Panfilo. However, it seems appropriate also—especially considering the tale’s collocation in the series of four novelle that devote considerable attention to marriages and marital faithfulness—to consider this parodic undermining in terms of the representation of marriage to which the ladies of the brigata react. Could they really be sighing as if they, too, would like to be forced in and out of so many “nuptial” bonds? Or is the reader to read these “spesse nozze” as just sexual encounters? To the present reader, the second possibility seems much more likely. The matrimonial bond is one of the prime burdens of the ladies in love, that keep them locked away in isolation with the needle and thread. Hence, the ladies of the brigata envy Alatiel for the unique freedom and sort of “nozze” that Fortune grants her.

86 Zatti aptly cites Picone to support this interpretation: ‘Il racconto […] è la trasformazione di una odissea erotica in una peregrinatio religiosa, […] la metamorfosi di una storia immorale (le ripetute infedeltà della protagonista) in una storia edificante (la castità difesa contro ogni ostacolo). Il senso del racconto sta […]
her journey at which one might worship God, venerate a saint, or meditate in prayer, each
leg of the journey is marked by what Panfilo and Boccaccio the narrator recognize as
parodic nozze, or a sexual encounter (or rather sexual encounters) that parody the
consummation of a marriage union, that in Alatiel’s case will occur only at the end—a
final parody of a sacred union, and an anticipation of what Licisca will proclaim all
Florentine “virgins” do before matrimony.\(^87\) Extending the metaphor of her parodic
pilgrimage in this way fits in well with the sort of “devoutness” we will witness in
Alibeck’s similar quest to serve God while undertaking a supposedly sacred journey.\(^88\)

There remains one tale of Day Two that seriously questions matrimony. In the
last tale of the day, one finds that an elderly lawyer marries a young woman, whom he is
not able to please physically or emotionally. In the novella’s third paragraph, the narrator
underscores the lawyer’s intelligence in legal study and weakness in satisfying his wife:
“… forse credendosi con quelle medesime opere sodisfare alla moglie che egli faceva
agli studii, essendo molto ricco, con non piccolo sollecitudine cercò d’avere e bella e
giovane donna per moglie, dove e l’uno e l’altro, se così avesse saputo consigliar sé come

\(^87\) Licisca states precisely: “‘E è ben si bestia costui, che egli si crede troppo bene che le giovani sieno si
sciocche, che elle stieno a perdere il tempo loro stando all abade del padre e de’ fratelli, che delle sette
volte le sei sopratanno tre o quattro anni più che non debbono a maritarle’” (Dec. 6.Intro.9).

\(^88\) By the end of the novella, Alatiel finds an old friend of her father’s who is willing to help her rework
what actually happened to her over the past years such that her father will take her back in and re-initiate
her original marriage with the king of Garbo. According to this cleaned-up version of her travels, her
shipwreck would eventually lead her to a group of men who took her to a monastery: Essi, dopo lungo
consiglio postami sopra uno de’ lor cavalli, mi menarono a uno monastero di donne secondo la lor legge
religiosa; e quivi, che che essi dicessero, io fui da tutte benignissimamente ricevuta e onorata sempre, e con
gran divozione con loro insieme ho poi servito a san Cresci in Valcava, a cui le femine di quel paese
voglion molto bene” (Dec. 2.7.109). From there she would travel to Cipri, where, according to her God
brought Antigono, her father’s old friend before her who then led her back home. The gullible king accepts
her story at the behest of Antigono, and proceeds to reorganize Alatiel’s marriage with the king of Garbo.
They celebrate with “gran festa” and the novella concludes with a terse happily ever after for Queen
Alatiel: “e reina con lui lietamente poi più tempo visse” (Dec. 2.7.121).
altrui faceva, doveva fuggire” (Dec. 2.10.5). The lawyer can barely consummate the marriage, and in light of his lacking “corporal forza,” he devises an abstinence calendar. The calendar recognizes a myriad of civil and religious holidays, astral alignments, lunar phases, and the like—real and made-up, one imagines—during which, it is not permissible to have sex.

The amorous young wife, naturally, reacts negatively to the calendar and experiences melancholy on account of the severely restricted “coniugnimenti” between husband and wife. However, Fortune soon releases her from Riccardo’s strictures and laws when a virile corsair, Paganino da Monaco, abducts the young wife while she and her husband are out sailing with some friends and family. The wife is momentarily upset, but afterward, Paganino consoles her with words by day on the boat and with action by night in the bedroom such that she “e il giudice e le sue leggi le furono uscite di mente, e cominciò a viver più lietamente del mondo con Paganino” (Dec. 2.10.23). Eventually, Riccardo comes to Monaco and attempts to win back his wife. The lawyer invokes her family’s honor, the sin of her relationship outside of marriage, and that according to the law, he is her true husband.

As a student of law in his youth, Boccaccio had likely in mind here to subvert a particular aspect of the marriage contract, that of the remedium concupiscentiae, which is a part of the so-called “conjugal debt.” The concept derives from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians: “Propter fornicationes autem unusquisque suam uxorem habeat et unaquaeque suum virum habeat. Uxori vir debitum reddat similiter et uxor.” The wife of Dec. 2.10 utilizes the Pauline statement in her self-defense, underlining that the

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89 1 Corinthians 7: 1,2: “But for fear of fornication, let every man have his own wife: and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render the debt to his wife: and the wife also in like manner to the husband.”
lawyer recognizes only the laws that correspond to his own physical needs and ignore hers. Thus, ironically, he fails to remedy her sexual passions when they were together, while he comes to Paganino’s home to pay up, all too little and all too late: “Non vedi tu che io sono il tuo messer Riccardo, venuto qui per pagare ciò che volesse questo gentile uomo in casa cui noi siamo, per riaverti e per menartene? e egli, la sua mercé, per ciò che io voglio ti rende’” (Dec. 2.10.24).\(^{90}\) Saint Paul reiterates in 1 Corinthians 7,9 that marriage is an answer for those who cannot control their carnal desires: “Quod si non se continent, nubant, melius est enim nubere quam uri.” A jurist such as Riccardo di Chinzica, who apparently knows the law so well, should have been quite aware of this legal aspect. However, as his wife points out, he knows the law, as well as secular and religious holidays, all too well and knows nothing of human nature or the “study of his wife.” In the end, she opts for a man who knows how to treat a woman and, after the lawyer’s death, her needs as a spouse, and Paganino “per sua legittima moglie la sposò” (Dec. 2.10.43)

In between Alatiel’s parodic pilgrimage and questionable “nozze” and the subversion of the *remedium concupiscentiae* aspect of medieval marriage are two novelle that defend marital fidelity and do not undermine matrimony. Although I am originally

\(^{90}\) The young wife laughs and assures Ricciardo that she remembers all too well who he is and how life was with him. She explicitly refers to the debt, what is owed to a wife, that she did not receive as a reason for not returning to Pisa with him: “Per ciò che se voi eravate savio o sete, come volete esser tenuto, dovavate bene avere tanto conoscimento, che voi dovavate vedere che io era giovane e fresco e gagliarda, e per conseguente cognoscere quello che alle giovani donne, oltre al vestire e al mangiare, benchè elle per vergogna nol dicano, si richiede: il che come voi il faciavate, voi il vi sapete” (Dec. 2.10.31). Several paragraphs later, she again emphasizes the “economy” of a marital relationship: “E ancor vi dico di più: che quando costui mi lascerà, che non mi pare a ciò disposto dove io voglia stare, io non intedo per ciò di mai tornare a voi, di cui tutto premendovi, non si farebbe uno scodellino di salsa, per ciò che con mio grandissimo danno e interesse vi stetti una volta: per che in altra parte cercherei mia civanza” (Dec. 2.10.40) Barolini notes that as a wife Bartolomea demands “a full woman’s lot,” but does not attempt to define what a wife was entitled to in the context of a medieval marriage. The broader importance of this language of conjugal debt and mercantile vocabulary to explain human relationships, as well as a woman or wife’s “lot,” will be treated in detail in the third chapter of the present work.
arguing that Boccaccio often questions marriage and sometimes parodically portrays it, his representation is not univocal. One finds a paradigm of conjugal fidelity in the tale of Bernabò da Genova and Zinevra (2.9). In the memorable opening scene of Zinevra’s tale, a group of merchants share stories around a table in a tavern in Paris. Finally, they arrive at questions of love. At this time, one of the merchants elaborates a negative viewpoint of conjugal fidelity. However, the tale’s protagonists disprove this negative portrayal. In this tale one finds a happy married life at the beginning. Then there is a test, which neither wife nor husband fails, although the marriage seems to collapse because of the merchant’s deceptions. Husband and wife are finally reunited because of the magnanimity of the wife. Thus, the story anticipates that of Griselda, which it resembles in many features. In the eighth tale of the day, Elissa narrates the story of the Count of Anguersa, which begins with the count rejecting the sexual advances of a married noblewoman. In the same tale, the count temporarily gives up custody of his children and hides them while he is in exile. Both children are eventually rewarded by Fortune with honorable marriages, even though they are initially thought to be of a lower class by the families into which they marry.

As we have seen, in *Dec.* 1.5 and 1.10, chastity and conjugal fidelity are upheld by the Marchioness of Monferrato and madonna Malgherida, respectively. In the second day of Boccaccio’s masterpiece, Fortune governs the stories told, and marriage appears in numerous novelle. In the inaugural wedding ceremony of the work, one finds a strong

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91 He states: “Io non so come la mia sia fa: ma questo so io bene, che quando qui mi viene alle mani alcuna giovinetta, che mi piaccia, io lascio stare dall’un de’ lati l’amore il qualeporto a mia mogliere e prendo di questa qua quello piacere che io posso” (*Dec.* 2.9.5).

92 Here, too, it is necessary to point out Boccaccio’s consideration of the *remedium concupiscentiae* in the context of a royal marriage. The royal woman argues that her husband is not present, and thus he has failed to uphold this part of the marriage contract. As a result, she seeks satisfaction elsewhere.
affinity between Alessandro’s wedding and that of Filocolo. The union is treated in a ceremonious and sacred way, and finally is recognized by the pope himself. After the regal wedding celebration in Rome, peace and harmony ensue. In other tales, however, a new narrative approach can be found. This new approach is unique to the Decameron and embodies, in many cases, a shift away from recounting the life after marriage.

Instead, Boccaccio now often focuses the storytelling space of the brigata on the travails that protagonists face prior to arriving at a presumable happy ending. In all of these cases, in the context of Day Two (e.g. 2.6, 2.7, 2.8), the brigata marginalizes the sacred, questions matrimony, and even parodies the traditional medieval viewpoint of marriage as a sacrament and indissoluble contract between one man and one woman. The ladies sigh over Alatiel’s “così spesse nozze” and envy her, not for real nuptial celebrations, but rather, for her numerous sexual encounters that in the end do not even hinder her ability to have an honorable, regal marriage. The entire brigata laughs until their jaws hurt after the story of Paganino da Monaco. In this concluding tale, the Pauline notion of what the Church considered remedium concupiscentiae is turned upside down. Marriage becomes laughable and utterly fails when Fortune pairs a passionate young woman with an impotent old man. How then will matrimony fair when we pass from the whims of Fortune in Day Two to the wits of man and woman in Day Three? The ground for such consideration is fertile in the Decameron’s third day. Marriage and sacred bonds are an integral part of every novella told.
Before proceeding to the third day of affabulation, the newly elected queen Neifile decides that the brigata must abstain from storytelling. First, she argues, they must respect and revere Friday because it is the day that Christ died on the cross: “… il venerdì, avendo riguardo che in esso Colui che per la nostra vita morì sostenne passione, è degno di reverenza” (Dec. 2.Concl.5). Then, she proclaims that Saturday is not fit for storytelling either, since it is a day for bathing and personal hygiene on the one hand, and, on the other hand, they must fast in reverence of the Virgin Mary and refrain from all activity in honor of the coming Sunday. These religious observances firmly place the brigata in the traditional medieval world view. They are Christians, they are faithful, and in their frame world, they live honestly. Nonetheless, acceptance of the corruptness of human nature and the breaking of marital vows, too, act as a bridge between the second and third day of storytelling along with these observances. Indeed, the breaking and corruption of sacred, and often marital, unions will take place in every tale of this day, except for, perhaps, 3.9, in which a husband sleeps with his own wife while thinking that he commits adultery.

In the preamble to Dec. 2.10, Dioneo chides the character of Bernabò, who in the ninth tale of the same day presumed that his wife, Zinevra, was free from carnal desire. Dioneo exalts the inexorable truth that humanity cannot escape its sinful nature, and he underlines the foolishness of those who ignore that nature or believe that it can be suppressed by marriage. In his tale about the lawyer and the young wife, he aims to demonstrate “la sciocchezza di questi cotali, e quanto ancora sia maggior quella di coloro
i quali, sé più che la natura possenti estimando, si credon quello con dimostrazioni favolose potere che essi non possono, e sforzansi d’altrui recare a quello che essi sono, non patendolo la natura di chi è tirato” (Dec. 2.10.4). Filostrato connects with this same line of reasoning in the opening tale of Day Three. Dioneo does not believe in the power of marriage to suppress a passionate young woman’s sexual desires. Filostrato rejects the notion that becoming a bride of Christ changes sinful inclinations. Accordingly, from the outset he underscores the foolishness of those who “credono troppo bene che, come a una giovane è sopra il capo posta la benda bianca e indosso messole la nera cocolla, che ella più non sia femina né più senta de’ feminili appetiti se non come se di pietra l’avesse fatta divenire monaca…” (Dec. 3.1.2).93

While keeping this connection in mind, we find the first example of “industria,” or ingenuity, used to gain something desired or to reacquire something that is lost. In the famous tale of Masetto da Lamporecchio, ingenuity is reduced to the ability to feign deafness and to deceive religious figures. By doing so, Masetto finds work in a monastery alongside eight libidinous nuns and an abbess, who generously give him work, but also make fun of him for being “dumb.”94 Soon, the nuns want to take their

93 In this mode of imbrication between the two days, Boccaccio cleverly pairs two forms of “vestizione” that of a traditional bride and that of a bride of Christ, or a nun. The “vestizione” of a bride was a rite in which the husband claimed her by dressing her in ornate clothing and jewelry. This action literally clothed the bride and declared her passing from the care of her father to her husband. The “vestizione” of the bride of Christ is the process described Filostrato in the present quotation. Neither of these rituals (the vestizione of religious people, including nuns), the sacrament of matrimony or the sacrament of holy orders of male clergy (and accompanying clerical celibacy), renders the person perfect. As Augustine comments in the City of God, all mankind suffers from possession by “libidines,” and the strongest of these, sexual libido, cannot be eliminated, according to biblical and patristic writings, with which certainly in this regard Dioneo and Filostrato (as well as all other members of the brigata) fully agree.

94 This meanness towards what is, for all the nuns know, a meek, afflicted individual also supports Filostrato’s opening paradigm regarding the innate sinfulness of all people, lay and religious alike, with much misogyny as well. Soon after Masetto begins working the monastery’s garden, the nuns “incominciarono a dargli noia e a metterlo in nove della, come spesse volte avviene che altri fa de’ mutoli, e dicevagli le più scellerate parole del mondo, non credendo da lui essere intese” (Dec. 3.1.30). The taking
exploitation of the robust young man from verbal harassment to carnal involvement. Interestingly, after one nun proposes the idea to another nun, the second incredulously responds that they cannot do such a thing, for they are brides of Christ, and have promised their virginity to God: “‘Oimè!’ disse l’altra ‘che è quell che tu di’? non sai tu che noi abbiamo promessa la verginità nostra a Dio?” (Dec. 3.1.25). But, all of the nuns eventually are on board with the idea such that Masetto’s speech miraculously returns, and they devise a schedule so that the nuns can take pleasure with him, and Masetto does not tire out. Filostrato informs the reader that Masetto becomes the administrator of the monastery, lives happily ever after, producing numerous “monachini,” and leaves the monastery quite wealthy as an old man. That Boccaccio intended to parody in this tale and to display a corrupted bond between the nuns and the Church is unmistakable given the last statement made by Masetto as relayed by Filostrato. Masetto returned home bragging about his wealth and the sacrilegious way by which he attained it: “… con una scure in collo partito s’era se ne tornò, affermando che così trattava Cristo che gli poneva le corna sopra ‘l capello” (Dec. 3.1.43). In five other tales of the day, one finds a common element to the first novella. That is, a lay person, married or unmarried, utilizes his or her “industria” to corrupt not only a sacred, but also a marital union. Masetto corrupts nuns, the brides of Christ. In the other five tales, secular characters use their “ingenuity” to commit adultery with other married lay people. In the case of the second tale, the reader witnesses one of two cases in which a character of low birth outsmarts someone of higher status. The horse groom of King Agilulf’s wife falls in love with her,
and, by impersonating the king, sneaks into her room and makes love to her. The king finds the culprit in the dark, and cuts his hair in order to be able to identify him the next morning without making a scene. The groom cuts all the other servants’ hair the same way, and avoids punishment for sleeping with the wife of a king.

In the third tale of the day, a married woman “di alto legnaggio” disdains her rich husband who is not of noble origin, and uses a friar as a go-between to speak with her lover. The ingenuity found in this case goes beyond the initial lie and feigned deafness of Masetto. The clever and unhappy wife abuses the sacrament of confession to arrange for adulterous sexual encounters. In the end, the element of parody is bolstered by Filomena, who – either humorously or seriously, but certainly irreverently – prays that God have such “pity” for her, and anyone else in need of such amorous arrangements: “… io priego Idio per la sua santa misericordia che tosto conduca me e tutte l’anime cristiane che voglia n’hanno” (Dec. 3.3.55). In Elissa’s fifth novella, the wealthy, single and non-noble Zima falls in love with the wife of Messer Francesco Vergellesi. On the condition that Zima give Francesco a magnificent horse, Francesco promises that Zima can speak with his wife in person, although he does not permit his wife to respond verbally. Zima’s rhetorical ability and affectionate words win her over, though, where his spending money to impress her had failed.95 Once her husband goes to Milan on his fine new horse, his wife and Zima begin an extramarital affair that continues to their mutual delight for some time.

95 This setup is quite similar to that of Nastagio degli Onesti and the Traversari girl of Dec. 5.8. Zima and Nastagio are both extremely wealthy, but not of noble birth. They both spend money to impress the women with which they are in love to no avail. Zima overcomes his social inferiority and wins the woman’s heart with his affectionate words: “La donna, la quale il lungo vagheggiare, l’armeggiare, le mattinate e l’altre cose simili a queste, per amor di lei fatte al Zima, muovere non aveano potuto, mossero l’affettuose parole dette dal ferventissimo amante: e cominciò a sentire ciò che prima mai non aveva sentito, cioè che amò si fosse” (Dec. 3.5.17). Nastagio frightened his beloved into “loving” him and ultimately into marrying him.
The noble and wedded Ricciardo Minutolo is the protagonist of Fiammetta’s sixth novella, in which his “industria” helps him to trick the “onestissima” wife of noble Filippello Sighinolfi, Catella, into sleeping with him. First, he creates a screen lady in order to allow for Catella to feel comfortable around him. Then, his ingenuity takes the form of an elaborate false story regarding Catella’s husband, who supposedly wants to sleep with Ricciardo’s wife to offend Ricciardo. In so doing, Ricciardo feeds Catella false information about where to find her husband in waiting for an amorous encounter. She comes to that particular bath and makes love to Ricciardo, whom she mistakenly thinks to be her own husband. Upon discovering the deception, an incensed and deeply distraught Catella decries the improvident Ricciardo, demands that she will seek a vendetta, but ultimately yields to the influence of Ricciardo’s “industria” and dishonest way with words.\footnote{In this tale, too, as in that of Masetto, ingenuity is reduced to the ability to lie and fabricate stories to get one’s way. Ricciardo himself defines his ingenuity as “inganno,” a tool that Love gave him when loving was not sufficient. “‘Anima mia dolce,’” he explains to Catella, “‘non vi turbate: quello che io semplicemente amando aver non potei, Amor con inganno m’ha insegnato avere, e sono il vostro Ricciardo’” \textit{(Dec. 3.6.42)}.} In the end—\textit{mirabile dictu}—he calms her down, and somehow convinces her to continue to be his longtime paramour, despite the fact that she was initially described in the text as “onestissima” and loving nothing more than her dear husband.\footnote{This transformation is almost as hard to believe as that of the Traversari girl of \textit{Dec. 5.8}, who suddenly loves Nastagio after witnessing the infernal hunt scene (“… ella, avendo l’odio in amor tramutato…” \textit{Dec. 5.8.41}). This time, the honest and faithful wife is convinced to take on a lover and to continue betraying her husband while sitting in a bath house with Ricciardo and his “industria”: “E conoscendo allora la donna quanto più saporiti fossero i baci dell’amante che quegli del marito, voltata la sua durezza in dolce amore verso Riccardo…” \textit{(Dec. 3.6.50)}.}

Before turning our attention to the three stories in which religious figures corrupt secular women characters—two of which are married—one last portrayal of ingenuity as a tool to interfere with marriage between two lay people must be treated. Emilia recounts
the story of Tedaldo, who is rejected by his lover, the wife of Aldobrandino Palermini, and disappears from Florence to become a merchant. He becomes extremely wealthy and decides to return home to Florence in the guise of a pilgrim returning from a visit to the Holy Land. He immediately finds that Aldobrandino has been convicted of killing none other than Tedaldo himself, and will be put to death for it. Good fortune reveals the true culprits to Teldaldo, who in turn uses his ingenuity and his disguise to chastise his former lover, reconcile their affair, set free her husband and to make peace between his family and that of Aldobrandino.98

In the process, Tedaldo discovers that it was a sanctimonious friar who defended matrimony and led his lover to end their extramarital relationship. He responds by attacking the vices and hypocrisy of the clergy and defends the breaking up of the marriage bond as the least important wrong that has come to pass in the disconcerting story: “Ma posto pur che in questo sia da concedere ciò che il frate che vi sgridò disse, cioè che gravissima colpa sia rompere la matrimonial fede, non è molto maggiore il rubare uno uomo? Non è molto maggiore l’ucciderlo o il mandarlo in essilio tapinando per lo mondo? Questo concederà ciascuno” (Dec. 3.7.45). In other words, it is common sense, Boccaccio would have us believe through Emilia’s tale, that the breaking of the matrimonial bond is preferable to other more serious sins. And surely, Emilia agrees with this notion, as she concludes underscoring the continued adulterous relation between

98 Marriage was reckoned to be a fundamental element to the stability of society and relationships between men and women. According to this traditional point of view, the marriage of Decameron 2.3, between Alessandro and the king of England’s daughter, brought about peace between the two young people and to all of England. With great irony, the narrator of the present tale, 3.7, argues the exact opposite: only renewing an extramarital affair will lead to peace between these incensed families.
the two protagonists and the wish that God would help the members of the brigata to find a similar arrangement.99

In Dec. 3.4, 3.8, and 3.10, religious protagonists break their vows of celibacy and willingly corrupt the matrimonial bond between the wives with whom they cheat and their husbands. In 3.4, Dom Felice takes advantage of Fra Puccio’s simplemindedness and convinces Puccio to complete an elaborate, prayer-based shortcut to sainthood so that the monk can lie with his “fresca e bella e ritondetta” spouse. Dom Felice invokes the Church fathers to facilitate his adulterous acts. By the end of the tale, the narrator even goes as far as to parody the key step of validating a marriage between husband and wife, that of consummation.100 Dom Felice fabricates a shortcut to sainthood for Fra Puccio, and enjoys a carnal, earthly “paradise” with his wife. In Lauretta’s eighth novella, a seemingly pious and saintly abbot promises to Ferondo’s wife to send her jealous husband temporarily to Purgatory to cure him of his envy. The wife confesses to the abbot that married life is like a prison: “La donna disse: ‘Pur che egli di questa mala ventura guerisca, ché egli non mi convenea sempre stare in prigione, io son contenta; fate come vi piace’” (Dec. 3.8.18). The abbot feels for her, and in exchange for sending Ferondo to “purgatory,” he wants her love and her body. This request stuns the wife,

99 She specifically states, “Tedaldo adunque, tornato ricchissimo, perseverò nel suo amare, e senza più turbarsi la donna, discretamente operando, lungamente goderon del loro amore. Dio faccia noi goder del nostro” (Dec. 3.7.101). This formulaic sort of hortatory request that God help the brigata achieve some immoral, extramarital love life appears also at the end of 3.3, 3.6, and in a way also 3.10.

100 Without consummation, a marriage contract is not complete. Of course, there is no matrimony between the monk and monna Isabetta. It is a parodic coupling in which the tale’s narrator, Panfilo, explains their continuous consummation as an act of eating. While Frate Puccio is fasting outside staring up at the stars, believing that he has found a shortcut to heavenly Paradise, his wife and the monk find a questionable earthly paradise in which they eat, drink, and repeatedly consummate the extramarital affair: “E parendo molto bene stare alla donna, si s’avezzò a’ civi del monaco, che, essendo dal marito lungamente stata tenuta in dieta, ancora che la penitenza di frate Puccio si consumasse, modo trovò di cibarsi in altra parte con lui e con discrezione lungamente ne prese il suo piacere” (Dec. 3.4.32).
who asks the abbot how a holy man such as he could make such a request. The abbot responds much like Tedaldo did in 3.7, sidestepping the gravity of breaking up a marriage, and underlining that physical wrongdoing will not affect his spiritual wellbeing.\footnote{Tedaldo demands that his lover look at all the other awful things that could have been avoided had she simply continued their extramarital affair: a kidnapping could have been avoided, a murder would not have taken place, he himself would not have been “forced” into exile. In the present tale and quote, Branca notes the turning upside down of a passage in the \textit{De amore}, as the abbot defends his request of the married woman: “A cui l’abate disse: ‘Anima mia bella, non vi maravigliate, ché per questo la santità non diventa minore, per ciò che ella dimora nell’anima e quello che io vi domando è peccato del corpo’” (Dec. 3.8.25).}

Lascivious carnal acts and spiritual wellbeing provide a fitting segue into the discussion of the final tale in which a religious character manipulates a lay character. In this final example, Rustico, unlike his pious predecessors, deceives an unmarried girl of fourteen years, Alibech. From the outset, Dioneo announces that his tale will have to do with saving one’s soul and also with the omnipresence of love and the inclination for man and woman alike to act upon libidinous desires. At a later point, Rustico explicitly states that Alibech was sent to him by God for the health of his soul: “Hai il ninferno; e dicoti che io mi credo che Idio t’abbia qui mandata per la salute dell’anima mia…” (Dec. 3.10.18). Soon after, Rustico demonstrates how one puts the devil back into hell, and explains how great a service this exertion is to God. Both take delight in the service, but Rustico quickly finds that the lifestyle is not sustainable for him, who has an inadequate diet of herbs, dates, and other insubstantial desert fare.

Interestingly, her premarital sexual encounters do not diminish Alibech’s chances of getting married. Boccaccio puts some cultural distance between his readers and this female character by making her non-Christian and setting the tale in North Africa. However, he also arranges for Fortune to remove an omnipresent force in the \textit{Decameron}...
and the medieval world, the male figures who dominate and control the lives of women. Rustico clearly utilizes “industria” to corrupt the young woman and realize his sexual desires. However, Neerbale, too, demonstrates a strong sense of ingenuity in the marriage market. À la Federigo degli Alberighi, Neerbale lives an extravagant, non-sustainable life and wastes away his family’s fortune. He hears that Alibech’s family—father, mother, brothers, everyone—dies in a fire, and ventures out into the desert to find her and take her as his wife.102 By the end of the tale and just before marrying Neerbale, Alibech’s unique service to God is known by all the townspeople, but it does not apparently change Neerbale’s opinion of her or his desire to wed her. At this level, one could argue that the husband acts as an entrepreneur-suitor, and chooses Alibech to make money, not so much to take a wife—an association, that of money (or value, and merchandise) and wife not at all inconsistent with the economy of marriage at work in the *Decameron*.

2. *Marriage and the Dark Side of Love in Decameron 4*

When crowned king of Day Four, Filostrato reveals that he is unhappily in love with one of the ladies of the *brigata*, so much so that he believes he will die as a result of her rejection. His unhappy love ignites the storytelling flame for the fourth day, in which the young narrators will speak of “coloro li cui amori ebbero infelice fine” (*Dec.* 3.Concl.6). Furthermore, Filostrato underlines that his unhappiness in love is the theme from which his own moniker comes; according to Boccaccio, he is literally “defeated by

102 In this way, the narrator eliminates the necessity of negotiations and questions of honor and appropriateness regarding the wedding. The job of finding a husband was that of the father and other male members of the family. Evidence of this historical fact can be found in the tale of Federigo degli Alberighi (*Dec.* 5.8) and also in Ferondo’s tale of the present day (3.8).
love.” Immediately following Filostrato’s thematic announcement, the narrator reiterates the perfection of the place in which the unhappy Filostrato and the brigata find themselves. From the description, it is clear that none other than an earthly paradise, a veritable Eden, surrounds them. There are endless pleasures: they sing, they play chess, they dance. Perhaps the most striking edenic quality is the absolute peace in nature. In the wild, animals fear for their lives, flee from humanity, and seek only to survive. In this locus amoenus, they gather around the young people, and run from them only as if it were a game of chase.

The brigata knows well what it means to run away and to survive. They run away from the plague and, in a way, tell stories to survive. Their stories are a gift to each other—much like the storytelling present offered up by Boccaccio the Author to the ladies in love—intended to help them have fun, to learn lessons, and to divert themselves from the pestilential horrors surrounding them. The text at this point reminds the reader of the paradisiacal place in which they create their storytelling world. This particular reminder of an irenic environment is starkly juxtaposed to Filostrato’s turbulent state of mind and the unfulfilled love between him and a woman of the group. It is if they have one foot in Eden, but they, much like the characters of their tales, cannot step in with both feet. According to Church doctrine, the first marriage and only perfect human love came about in the Garden of Eden. One might expect a similar love at least to be possible in the various ideal narrative loci of the Decameron’s brigata. However, Boccaccio is ever the realist, and subtly indicates to the reader at this point in the brigata’s attempt to escape, that unhappiness is an inexorable part of the human experience. Neither earthly

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103 The text states: “...i cavriuoli e i conigli e gli altri animali che erano per quello e che a lor sedenti forse cento volte, per mezzo loro saltando, eran venuti a dar noia, si dierono alcune a seguitare” (Dec. 3.Concl.7).
love nor relationships can be perfect, and the stories of Day Four will showcase this reality.

Many of these *novelle* contain examples not only of love gone awry, but also of marriages that cannot exist for several unfortunate lovers. In Fiammetta’s opening tale, Ghismonda’s complicated love life seems to begin with her father not marrying her at an appropriate age: “… avendo ella di molti anni avanzata l’età del dovere avere avuto marito, non sappiendola da sé partire, non la maritava” (*Dec.* 4.1.4). Eventually, her father, Tancredi, “gives” her in marriage to the Duke of Capua’s son, who dies shortly after they are wedded. Since her father does not give any thought to remarrying her, and it would not be, according to Ghismonda, an honest request to make of him (“… né a lei onesta cosa pareva il richiedermelo”), she decides to take a lover. Tancredi discovers that she in fact takes a lowly, non-nobleman by the name of Guiscardo. Because of the dishonor inherent in a socially disparate relationship such as theirs, the father has the lover killed, and ultimately sends his heart to Ghismonda. Tancredi confronts her about the affair, and underlines specifically among her dishonorable activities that he cannot believe she would lie with any man who was not her wedded husband. ¹⁰⁴ Ghismonda cleverly fires back at her father, using his failure to marry her as a root cause of her “disonestà”: “… ma a questo non m’indusse tanto la mia feminile fragilità, quanto la tua poca sollecitudine del maritarmi…” (*Dec.* 4.1.32).

In the next tale, Pampinea returns to the common narrative setup of the third day in which a religious figure corrupts a marriage. In this tale, Frate Alberto pretendsto be

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¹⁰⁴ Tancredi underlines his incredulity when he begins to speak to Ghismonda about her virtue and her honesty: “Ghismonda, parendomi conoscere la tua vertù e la tua onestà, mai non mi sarebbe potuto cader nell’animo, quantunque mi fosse stato ditto, se io co’ miei occhi non l’avessi veduto, che tu di sottoporli a alcuno uomo, se tuo marito stato non fosse, avessi, non che fatto, ma pur pensato” (*Dec.* 4.1.26).
the angel Gabriel in order to lie with a rich merchant’s wife. The notion of an earthly, sexual paradise appears again, too, when Frate Alberto convinces the woman that his own soul will be in heaven while Gabriel occupies his body and enjoys himself with her. Even though in the third tale three young couples run away from France to Crete in order to be together, married life is not present and no marriages take place. In the fourth tale of the noble Gerbino’s love for the King of Tunis’s daughter, a marriage is contracted and broken up, but never actually takes place. In the fifth tale, even though no marriage is present, the failure to marry the young Elisabetta in a timely manner is cited by the narrator in part as the cause for her “disonestà” and love with an employee in the brothers’ business. The narrator emphasizes her beauty and good nature and also that she still had not been married by her brothers for some reason: “… e avevano una loro sorella chiamata Elisabetta, giovane assai bella e costumata, la quale, che se ne fosse cagione, ancora maritata non aveano” (Dec. 4.5.4). The brothers’ failure to marry off Elisabetta, just as in the case of Ghismonda, is thus a root cause of her dishonorable affair, the beheading of her lover, and ultimately both of their deaths.

In Panfilo’s sixth novella, two young people of different social classes marry each other clandestinely in a garden of the noble young woman’s father. Their union and the motivations behind it are described briefly by the narrator: “E acciò che niuna cagione mai, se non morte, potesse questo lor dilettevole amor separare, marito e moglie segretamente divennero” (Dec. 4.6.9). They choose marriage as a means to protect their love from harm, except that of death. Later on, they again take pleasure with one another in the garden, and the young Andreuola reveals to her lover, Gabriotto, that she had an inauspicious dream regarding him and their relationship. He momentarily convinces her
to ignore the premonition as a meaningless figment of her imagination, and after they take delight in one another one last time, he dies suddenly right before her eyes.

Andreuola suffers, and is inconsolable, but immediately thinks to preserve her honor by not revealing the secret marriage or the way in which her husband died. She opines that this preservation of honor can be attained if her maidservant will help her take his body to his own family’s home in secret.

During the body’s delivery, the two women are discovered by none other than the podestà. He takes Andreuola in, questions her, and attempts to take advantage of her in exchange for his silence regarding the secret marriage and her lowly husband’s death. Her father arrives the next day, and after she apologizes for not having told him who she married, he forgives her. What is more, for the first and only time in the Decameron an upper-class parent verbally approves of a marriage arrangement with someone of a non-noble birth. Finally, he demands that the young man be buried honorably, and it is interesting and noteworthy that all the city and all classes come together to honor

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105 Andreuola “virilmente si difese,” and would not give herself to the podestà. When her father arrives, the podestà takes on a Gualtieri-like aspect, and claims that he threatened and attempted to rape the girl just to test her “costanza” and her “fermezza.” According to the podestà, she passes the test, and even though he knows of her previous marriage to someone of a lower class, offers to marry the girl.

106 At this point, her father demonstrates a form of generosity and magnanimity that is not at all unlike that presented by characters in the tenth day of storytelling. He is tolerant and assures his daughter that if she had just been honest with him from the beginning, he would have gone along with her choice, if it made her happy: “… e disse: ‘Figliuola mia, io avrei avuto molto caro che tu avessi avuto tal marito quale a te second oil parer mio si convenia, e se tu l’avevi tal preso quale egli ti piacea, questo doveva anche a me piacere; ma l’averlo occultato della tua poca fidanza mi fa dolere, e più ancora vedendotel prima aver perduto che io l’abbia saputo” (Dec. 4.6.40). In a similar situation elsewhere in the work, one finds a violent initial reaction on the part of the father. In Decameron 2.6, Currado imprisons his daughter and her lover, and releases only when he finds out that the young man is actually of noble origins. In the seventh novella of the fifth day, Amerigo Abbate orders that the improvident seducer of his daughter, Pietro, is put to death, and that the child of his daughter and Pietro be killed. Here again, the father changes his mind only after he finds out the Pietro is of noble birth. Finally, Andreuola’s father’s reaction is diametrically opposed to that of Guiscardo regarding Ghismonda’s lover at the beginning of the fourth day. In a final act of generosity and respect toward the young man, Andreuola’s father demands that he be buried in a great an honorable way: “… e volto a’ figliuoli e a’ suoi parenti commandò loro che l’esequie s’apparecchiassero a Gabriotto grandi e onorevoli” (Dec. 4.6.41).
Andreuola’s dead husband, and by extension, the marriage they once had together: “…
quivi non solamente a lei e dalle parenti di lui fu pianto ma publicamente quasi da tutte le
donne della città e da assai uomini; e non a guisa di plebeio ma di signore, tratto della
corte publica, sopra gli omeri de’ più nobili cittadini con grandissimo onore fu portato
alla sepoltura” (Dec. 4.6.42). The podestà continues to ask her father for her hand in
marriage, but Andreuola refuses. Finally, in order to maintain the family’s honor, she
agrees to enter into a convent with her maidservant, where they become nuns “e
onestamente poi in quello per molto tempo vissero” (Dec. 4.6.43).

At the beginning of the subsequent tale, Filostrato shows no compassion for
Andreuola, and brusquely orders Emilia to begin the next narration. The essential part of
the tale again takes place in a garden like that of the previous novella. This time, no
marriage results from the two young, non-noble lovers. Pasquino dies from putting a leaf
in his mouth that had been tainted by a poisonous toad. His friends and the authorities
suspect foul play on the part of Simona, and ask her to indicate the plant that supposedly
caused his death. She points it out, and to vindicate herself in a most dramatic way, rubs
a leaf from the same plant on her teeth and dies on the spot. Marriage returns as a central
consideration of unhappy love in Dec. 4.8 when Neifile tells the story of Girolamo, a rich
merchant’s son, who falls in love with Salvestra, a lowly seamstress’s daughter.
Girolamo is forced to move away to Paris by his mother, who will not allow her son to
choose a wife of such humble origins. Girolamo remains faithful throughout his Parisian
sojourn, returns to Florence, and finds Salvestra happily married. He sneaks into her
bedroom to try and rekindle their love, but he fails, and dies, lying beside her in bed. At
his funeral, Salvestra weeps uncontrollably and dies in mourning, falling on top of her true love’s dead body.

In Filostrato’s penultimate tale of the day, the wife of Guiglielmo Rossiglione falls to her death upon learning that her husband murdered her lover, Guiglielmo Guardastagno. At no point in the story does the narrator indicate that Rossiglione’s wife is “malmaritata” as is the case with many unfaithful wives throughout the Decameron. Rather, she simply falls in love with Guardastagno and prefers him over her husband: “…conoscendolo per valorosissimo cavaliere le piacque e cominciò a porre amore a lui, in tanto che niuna cosa piu che lui desiderava o amava” (Dec. 4.9.7). Indeed, after she discovers that she has eaten her lover’s heart, she responds matter-of-factly to her husband as if she were simply following the rules of courtly love and that he was guilty of breaking those rules by punishing Guardastagno instead of her. For his irascible and murderous reaction, she calls him a disloyal and wicked knight, though she does not at all call into question his place as her husband. She then proclaims that no other meal could surpass that of her lover’s heart in nobility or goodness, and to ensure that it not be contaminated by any other dish, she kills herself by means of defenestration. Her husband recognizes that not only she, but also the rest of the townspeople and the Count of Provence, would punish him for wrongdoing once they heard of his deeds. So, he has his horses prepared and disappears from the area.

Neither of the day’s two loves set in serene gardens last long—the first in Dec. 4.6, perhaps, a matter of weeks; the second in the seventh tale, a matter of days—before death takes its toll and ends the amorous relationships. The garden settings of these imperfect and unhappy affairs remind the reader of Filostrato’s imperfect love amid the
storytelling *locus amoenus*. He and the rest of the young people are surrounded by paradise. But, no matter how cleverly they manage to affabulate and construct their narrative worlds, they cannot totally excise death or unhappiness from the human experience. Most of the tales end by informing the reader that one or all of the protagonists’ loves end badly and stop there. However, several comment upon the possibility of love after death. Furthermore, they seem to imply that the only relationships that can possibly be happy and enduring, are those that might or might not exist in the afterlife.\(^{107}\)

For Ghismonda and Guiscardo, familial intervention and social class differences ended their love and took their lives, and they only found true peace when they were honorably buried together in the same grave. In the seventh tale, Boccaccio the narrator interrupts the tale and offers up one of the most moving and agitated interventions of the work. He draws the reader’s attention to the close pairing of death and love, and wishes hortatorily that lovers end up in the same place after death, for in that case, they just might be happy together as they could not be during their lives on earth: “O felici anime, alle quali in un medesimo dì adivenne il fervente amore e la mortal vita terminare! e più felici, se insieme a un medesimo luogo n’andaste! E felicissime, se nell’altra vita s’ama e voi v’amate come di qua faceste!” (*Dec.* 4.7.10). In this vein, the narrators’ two tales following this affirmation, consign their lover-protagonists to a happiness that could not be achieved if not in the afterlife. In both cases, they are buried together and put to rest.

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\(^{107}\) Several of the tales imply that death has the power to unite lovers in an inseparable union. Although Boccaccio, does not specifically refer to this “inseparabile compagnia” as marriage, such an affirmation seems to contradict what Christ says regarding unions of men and women in the afterlife in Mark 12, verse 25: “*Cum enim a mortuis resurrexerint neque unbent neque nubentur sed sunt sicut angeli in caelis.*”
in “inseparabile compagnia.” By the tenth tale, Dioneo is more than ready to lift the brigata’s spirit and tell a tale that will also, he hopes, signal for a more enjoyable subject matter in the following day. He does so by recounting the tale of yet another unhappily married woman who breaks her wedding vows and has an affair with a rapscallion of the Salernitan nobility. The less sad air about the tale points toward the happy endings of the fifth day. The presence of yet another married couple and the insistence on the frailty of the matrimonial bond also acts as a bridge into yet another day in which marriage is a part of every novella told. In the next chapter, I will take a look at just how happy these endings actually are and take a close look at what role Boccaccio assigns to marriage amid the day’s theme.

Conclusion

Following Decameron 2.3, one begins to find a more complex, multifaceted representation of marriage. In Day Two, honorable matrimony at times take place to compensate steadfast characters for the woes they suffer at the hands of Fortune (2.6, 2.8). Bernabò and Zinevra’s marriage temporarily falls apart; however, in the end, her magnanimity and perseverance preserves their relationship and the narrator proffers marital fidelity. At the same time, Boccaccio juxtaposes these honorable instances with subversive occasions that marginalize and even parody the sacred aspect of marriage.

In the case of Girolamo and Salvestra, the text proffers a sort of post vitam union that parallels an earthly nuptial bond: “… in una medesima sepoltura furono sepelliti amoundi: e loro, li quali amor vivi non aveva potuti congiugnere, la morte congiunse con inseparabile compagnia” (Dec. 4.8.35). The wife of Guiglielmo Rossiglione, too, is buried honorably with her lover, Guiglielmo Guardastagno, such that “… da quegli del castello di messer Guiglielmo Guardastagno e da quegli ancora del castello della donna, con grandissimo dolore e pianto, furono i due corpi ricolti e nella chiesa del castello medesimo della donna in una medesima sepoltura fur posti…” (Dec. 4.9.25). Amazingly, the two adulterers receive a Christian burial in a nearby Church. And not only are they buried there, but the story of their extramarital affair is recounted in that same church just above the place where they are buried: “… e sopra essa scritti versi significati chi fosser quelli che dentro sepolti v’erano, e il modo e la cagione della lor morte” (Dec. 4.9.25).
Alatiel undermines the concept of nuptial unions in sleeping countless times with eight different men prior to marriage and parodies the sacrament of marriage by marrying a king at the end as if she were a virgin. In the tenth tale of Day Two, Boccaccio draws attention to the fact that joining a couple in marriage does not change human nature or eliminate sexual desire.

In the opening tale of Day Three, Boccaccio transitions by reiterating the same idea, but this time, one finds that “vestizione,” or becoming a bride of Christ does not alter human nature. In the nine tales following 3.1, deceptive “industria” is used across social classes, by men and women alike, and by clergy and laymen alike, to corrupt the matrimonial bond and sacred vows. The corruption of sacred unions, from the brides of Christ to married laywomen, reaches all new heights in this day. Human ingenuity is utilized in every tale of the day to break a sacred bond. In the tales of this day, the *brigata* underscores the frailty of matrimony and the ease and desire with which it is broken apart at all levels of society.
CHAPTER 6
MARIAEGE IN DECAMERON DAY FIVE: FROM TRIAL TO MARRIAGE

Marriage in the medieval period bestowed official recognition on a union between man and woman and, among all possible unions, it was recognized by people as the most legitimate means of perpetuating society without jeopardizing structural stability. One finds that marriage in Medieval Christian Europe was recognized as an indissoluble bond between a man and woman that was sacred in that it represented on earth the bond between God and humanity. However, historians also recognize the social importance of the institution of marriage and recognize it as a fundamental building-block to society and to human relations in general. In the medieval historical context, Christian Europe understood matrimony as the foundation of social interactions and as one of the most fundamental threads in the fabric of human relationships.\(^{109}\)

Often, and especially among the upper classes who could most afford to be ostentatious, the celebration of marriage and the construction of this social foundation was to be an ostensible and ceremonial act. Along these lines, marriage often called for a very public celebration, which brought together families as well as the community and assembled large numbers of people who attended a central rite. Although celebrations are mentioned in Day Five’s novelle, rather than acting as a peaceful and socially unifying force fundamental to order and stability in society, the institution of marriage in

\(^{109}\) In *Storia del matrimonio*, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber accordingly writes that “la vecchia Europa cristiana l’ha inteso [il matrimonio] anche come la base dell’edificio sociale, come la cellula fondamentale nel tessuto delle relazioni umane” (vii).
the fifth day is built upon a foundation of strained and inauspicious circumstances. Furthermore, there is a striking absence of religious celebration in this day of matrimonial unions. In the first tale, Cimone and his band of followers murder and kidnap their way to the denouement of marriage. In other tales, a protagonist must become a corsair to earn enough money to be with his love (Dec. 5.2); a young couple stands nude at the stake to be burnt before they can be finally united (Dec. 5.6). In the eighth and ninth tales, of Nastagio and Federigo, respectively, the protagonists must nearly bankrupt themselves and flee into the country to arrive eventually at their felicitous matrimonial finales. Through all of the trials and perils that the lovers of Day Five must pass to end with Fiammetta’s command for the “lieto fine,” one might ask oneself: do the ends justify the means? Ultimately, these conditions call into question the credibility of the “happily-ever-after” endings that conclude each of the day’s novelle and force the reader to reflect upon the representation of marriage at the heart of the Decameron.

1. The Tales, Trials, and Nuptials of Day Five

Throughout the development of Day Five, the ten novellatori recount stories, according to Queen Fiammetta’s order, about lovers who make it through a series of misfortunes and unhappy events to finally attain happiness. The happy ending at which the young lovers of the tales arrive is invariably the celebration of marriage such that the narrative arch of the day fuses positive outcomes with matrimony itself. The queen’s requirement of misfortunes or difficulties is a reasonable one, especially given Boccaccio’s introductory paradigm of the steep and bitter slopes that one must ascend to
arrive at a happy and peaceful conclusion. However, the presence of reasonable difficulties must be differentiated from the minefield of misfortunes Day Five’s protagonists encounter. These perils include, but are not limited to, violence brought on by plots to abduct brides (Dec. 5.1, 5.5), coerced marriages that result from parental intervention (Dec. 5.4) and a ritualistic infernal spectacle (Dec. 5.8). Often, these factors deprive lovers of sentimental freedom and undermine the stability of the marriages that, in the last several lines of the novelle, suddenly appear. To be sure, within each story and within Queen Fiammetta’s formula imposed on the affabulatori, one discovers the constant element – “di ciò che a alcuno amante […] felicemente avvenisse” – and the variable, albeit extremely important: “alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti” (Dec. 5.1.1).

Upon closer inspection, however, different groupings surface in the structure and development of Day Five, thus rendering the day’s theme to be much less straightforward than it might initially seem.

One of the most striking characteristics of Day Five’s ten tales, on which critics fail to comment significantly, lies in whether or not a given tale takes place within or outside Christendom. Panfilo’s inaugural novella of Cimone and Efigenia sets the stage for the lieto fine through marriage, and is set in a time before Christianity: “Adunque (sì come noi nell’antiche istorie de’ cipriani abbiam già letto) nell’isola di Cipri …” (Dec. 5.1.3). Panfilo recounts the story of Cimone, a handsome and robust young man of noble

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110 Boccaccio the narrator explains that he had to describe the dismal situation and frame of the plague so that the reader can pass, in essence, from the bad to the good: “... 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 piú viene lor piacevole quanto maggiore è stata del salire e dello smontare la gravezza” (Dec. 1.Intro.4).

111 Bonadeo mentions the forces that negatively affect the young lover of the day, underlining “forced conformity to conventional social standards, submission to parental will and authority, and the impersonal effects of adventures and ordeals” (295). However, he does not provide significant commentary on the effects of these forces on the representation of matrimony in Day Five and in the Decameron as a whole.
birth who is at the same time primitive in his simplemindedness and rejection of civilized customs and education. Since Cimone rejected the learning of civilization, his father, out of shame, exiles him to the countryside, where Cimone eventually happens upon a young woman sleeping in the forest. In all her beauty, Efígenia acts as a catalyst that ignites the flame of Cimone’s intellect and desire to learn and be “civilized.”

After four years of ardent work in education and etiquette, Cimone “riuscì il più leggiadro e il meglio costumato e con più particolari virtù che altro giovane alcuno che nell’isola fosse di Cipri” (Dec. 5.1.20), and he decides it is time to take Efígenia, who he believes is rightfully his, as his bride. Much to his chagrin, Efígenia’s father denies Cimone’s request because her hand has already been promised to Pasimunda, and she will soon depart to Rhodes for their wedding. Cimone’s impulsive and violent reaction invites the reader to question the nature of his transformation to become civilized and the enduring presence of his original savageness. One might expect such a transformed and renewed man to win his love by peaceful or, at the very least, humane means, perhaps even utilizing what is described as his vast and newly acquired knowledge of philosophy and propriety. Instead, Cimone’s actions spiral downward into destruction, violence, and ultimately death for anyone who gets in his way. Cimone immediately prepares a ship to abduct Efígenia, and after “alcuni avvenimenti fieri o sventurati” he appears on her wedding day, slaughters her husband-to-be, among countless others, and takes Efígenia, weeping in opposition, to be his bride.

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112 Cimone’s move to the country is not only significant in that it shows that he rejects rational thinking and cannot live according to “civil” society’s rules, in contrast, therefore, to the very purpose of the brigata. By leaving the city as moving into the country, as well as, at the end, returning to the city, the brigata acts according to reason, onesta, and civil norms. Cimone, by contrast, was a brute when he was in the country, desired nothing, and harmed nobody. Only when desire arises and Cimone is subdued by it, does he accept civilization’s norms but also the violence that supposedly lies at its basis. The life of the brigata demonstrates that one can be civilized, nurture desires (many in the brigata seem unhappy in their loves, as borne out by the ballads), and also non-violent and even harmonious in one’s relationships with others.
Boccaccio thus portrays love through Panfilo’s narration in a harmful, destructive framework. At the surface, one might mistakenly admire the “ennobling effects” of love on Cimone. On the contrary, I would like to draw attention to the downward spiral of Cimone’s transformation, at the bottom of which one finds none other than marriage itself. One critic underlines the irony of Cimone’s “evolution” in that, before he became “civilized,” he was harmless and that, after his moment of inspiration, he acts a raging beast ready to kill anyone who gets in his way of acquiring Efigenia (Cozzarelli 344). In attempting to explain Cimone’s failure to be truly ennobled by love, Cozzarelli even mentions that “the most simple [reason] might be the fact that he is, fundamentally, a beast; or that living in antiquity he lacks Christian guidance” (344, emphasis mine).

This lack of Christian guidance may be a legitimate and intriguing possibility. But in order to validate whether or not the absence of Christian morality and guidance is a serious factor in the destructive nature of love and the very questionable nature of the resulting marriage, one must go further and provide some commentary on how Boccaccio portrays love and marriage within Christendom. Within the text of the Decameron itself one need not look further than the nine novelle that follow Cimone’s to ascertain whether things improve and become more “civilized” or not, since all of them are situated within Christian time and in a very civilized country: Italy. What, if anything, changes in the...
other nine stories of Day Five that purposefully take place when Christianity had long been the religion in Italy? Will these protagonists, given the chance at Christian morality and guidance which Cimone was denied, progress to their marriages in a constructive and peaceful way, or will external forces, violence, and coercion similar to those at work in Cimone’s story still pave the way to an only presumably happily-ever-after? Will the Church as an institution offer any guidance to help maintain matrimony as a unifying and peaceful union?

The extent of violence and the forms of coercion oscillate and persist throughout the Christian marriages following that of Cimone in Day Five. In the second tale of the day, one does not witness the aggression and bloodshed found in the day’s first story; however, Gostanza, who quite significantly is identified as being a Christian from Italy (“fattala risentire e all’abito conosciutola che cristiana era, parlando latino” Dec. 5.2.16), and Martuccio are pushed to the limits and suffer greatly in order to arrive at an unverifiable, peaceable existence. Martuccio is handsome, well mannered and seems truly to love Gostanza, but he is not wealthy enough to marry her. Consequently, Martuccio becomes a corsair, vows not to return until he is affluent enough to marry Gostanza, and, in his absence, she is pushed to the brink of suicide.

cambiò il dato di fatto che vedeva le spose come oggetti di un piano maschile, pedine da muovere in un processo controllato quasi esclusivamente da uomini” (15).

115 Insofar as tales two through ten take place in Christian time and unite two baptized people, a man and a woman, those matrimones constitute a sacrament. However, Potter and Padoan note in general terms that can be applied to the tales under scrutiny, the sacred, the afterlife, and the supernatural are de-emphasized in the world of the Decameron and Boccaccio’s lens focuses, rather, on man and his actions.

116 Gostanza, after failing to kill herself on the open seas in a boat without oars, washes ashore somewhere in Tunisia. A local woman finds her and identifies her by her clothing: “[…] la quale essalei che forte dormiva chiamò molte volte e, alla fine fattala risentire e all’abito conosciutola che cristiana era, parlando latino la dimandò come fosse che ella quivi in quella barca così soletta fosse arrivata” (Dec. 5.2.16).
Ultimately, after their misfortunes are resolved, and they return home to Lipari, they celebrate their marriage and “insieme in pace e in riposo lungamente goderono del loro amore” (Dec. 5.2.48). Admittedly, the irenic conclusion is more credible than that of Panfilo’s first novella of Day Five; however, the travails undergone to attain the matrimonial denouement are remarkably similar. One witnesses yet again the extraneous demands of family and society that drive Martuccio to become a pirate and drive Gostanza almost to suicide. Taking these demands into consideration and critically weighing their possible effects on the couples’ happiness, one might reasonably conclude that their love will be lastingly affected by the harsh experiences of suffering and survival.\(^{117}\) One can argue, therefore, that the echoes of Filostrato’s unhappy endings in the previous day’s tales reverberate profoundly through the development of this and the other first nine stories of Day Five (excluding, of course, Dioneo’s exception in recounting the tenth story). Thus the events leading up to marriage’s lieto fine are inseparable from trials, turmoil, and in some cases even from tragedy, albeit in varying degrees and circumstances, as I will seek to point out.

Similarly, although in the third and fourth novelle of the day, extreme violence is lacking, the strained and unpropitious circumstances preceding the tales’ marriages are ever-present.\(^{118}\) In tale three, the noble Pietro Boccamazza and the plebeian Agnolella fall in love, and he asks for her hand in marriage. As in several other tales of the day

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\(^{117}\) Alfredo Bonadeo concludes: “Their love affair must be indelibly marked by the scorching experience of suffering, death and survival” (292).

\(^{118}\) In this first part of this analysis, novelle one, two, four and seven will be treated especially as they relate to marriage within the context of Day Five. In the second part of the study, the first, second, fifth, sixth, eighth and ninth tales will be analyzed in regard to marriage as well as economic significance. Although at this point the third novella is not treated in the body of this study, it too fits into both the parodic-matrimonial interpretation offered thus far as well as the economic interpretation that will be developed in the next part.
(Dec. 5.2, 5.6, 5.7, 5.8, and 5.9), also here the more prestigious family rejects the marriage proposal because of class and wealth differences. Soon after this rejection, Pietro and Agnolella depart from Rome in order to be wedded in secret as soon as they are at a safe place and distance away from home. Eventually they get lost and the series of tragic and difficult moments begin for them. By good fate, the two finally end up finding one another at a nearby castle, where a friend of Pietro’s family agrees to wed the two young people because of all the pain and suffering they have been through: “il lor desiderio è onesto e credo che egli piaccia a Dio, poiché l’uno dalle forche ha campato e l’altro dalla lancia e amenduni dalle fiere salvatiche” (Dec. 5.3.51). Only after such trials can a marriage and happy ending in Day Five take place, and the pattern continues in tale four as well.

119 “Pietro, da fervente amor costretto e non parendogli più dover sofferir l’aspra pena che il disiderio che avea di costei gli dava, la domandò per moglie; la qual cosa come i suoi parenti seppero, tutti furono a lui e biasimarogli forte ciò che egli voleva fare” (Dec. 5.3.6).

120 The narrator states: “... e così cavalcando, non avendo spazio di far nozze per ciò che temevano d’esser seguitati, del loro amore andando insieme ragionando, alcuna volta l’un l’altro basciava” (Dec. 5.3.9).

121 They are caught in the middle of a fight between two groups of armed horsemen. The first group of knights force Pietro to strip, and are about to tie him to a tree when the second gang of horsemen attack. This conflict separates Agnolella and Pietro as they ride into the unknown. Pietro ends up spending the night atop an oak tree, trembling from the cold and fear of wolves. As he worries about what fate has befallen his love, wolves eventually arrive and devour his horse. Agnolella finds shelter at an old married couple’s house, but is nearly killed when brigands arrive and she hides from them in a hay stack. With nothing better to do, one of the brigands tosses his lance and almost strikes the young girl in the heart: “la lancia le venne allato alla sinistra poppa, tanto che col ferro le stracciò de’ vestimenti” (Dec. 5.3.35).

122 The peace between the two families and nuptial celebrations are taken care of by the family friend, the wife of the nobleman who owns the castle in which they find themselves: “E a loro rivolta disse: ‘Se pure questo v’è all’animo di voler essere moglie e marito insieme, e a me: facciasi, e qui le nozze s’ordinino alle spese di Liello; la pace poi tra voi e’ vostrsi parenti farò io ben fare’” (Dec. 5.3.52). Interestingly, the protagonists of all of the first nine tales have to leave their home cities, and the social strictures associated with them, in order for their marriages to be able to take place. This is a phenomenon which I will treat to some extent in the analysis of Dec. 5.8 and 5.9. Along these lines, it is interesting to note that the narrator of the present tale in question distinguishes the quality of a city wedding celebration from that of a rural celebration (“in montagna,” Elissa specifically states) celebration: “Pietro liettissimo, e l’Agnolella più, quivi si sposarono; e come in montagna si poté, la gentil donna fé loro onorevoli nozze, e quivi i primi frutti del loro amore dolcissimamente sentirono” (Dec. 5.3.53).
In the fourth tale, two young people of noble origins, Ricciardo and Caterina, arrange to sleep together on the veranda overlooking Caterina’s father’s garden. After falling asleep in each other’s arms, the following morning, Caterina’s father, Lizio, happens upon them finding them in a most compromising position. Instead of flying off the handle and harming or even killing the young man—which was in the realm of justifiable reactions on the part of a father dishonored in this way—Caterina’s cool and shrewd father sees marriage as an advantageous compensation to be exacted from the imprudent seducer. Lizio keeps in mind how well off Ricciardo’s family is and quickly explains the benefits of the situation to his on-looking and bewildered wife: “Ricciardo è gentile uomo e ricco giovane; noi non possiamo aver di lui altro che buon parentado” (Dec. 5.4.38). Of course, the young man’s choices are few, and he meekly agrees to a hastily celebrated wedding. If wolves and bandits are no longer present, the difficulties of this tale manifest themselves in the parent who forces conformity to social standards, obedience to parental authority, and the possibility of being killed.¹²³

Neifile’s fifth novella reminds the reader of Cimone’s tale because again in this case, the young woman has at least one of the two suitors who plans to abduct her in

¹²³ Squillacioti underlines that this situation often calls for death: “Si ha una sorta di infrazione al codice cortese, che in casi analoghi prevede la morte, e talora, come s’è visto, il pasto del cuore; ne è consapevole il giovane colto in flagrante: ‘Quando Ricciardo il vide, parve che gli fosse il cuore del corpo strappato; e levatosi a sedere in su il letto disse: ‘Signor mio, io vi cheggio mercé per Dio. Io conosco, sì come disleale e malvagio uomo, aver meritata morte, e per ciò fate di me quello che più vi piace: ben vi priego io, se esser può, che voi abbiate della mia vita mercé e che io non muoia’ (V 4,42; miei i corsivi)” (75). Migiel perceptively underlines that, although Filostrato now brings about laughter among the brigata instead of sadness as in Day Five, the deeper structure of his novelle have not changed: “It seems that Filostrato has changed his tune since Day Four, so after he finishes his story on Day 5, the women of the group laugh. But even if they accept the humor, they might wish to be more discerning. The fact that his story of Guiglielmo Rossiglione and Guiglielmo Guardastagno (Decameron 4.9) and his story of the nightingale (Decameron 5.4) have different outcomes—tragic on one hand, ‘comic’ on the other—is of little relevance to the deep structure of the tales. Filostrato has continued to narrate the same story about alliances among men, male power, male mastery” (Encrypted Messages 9). I would argue that alongside this unchanging structure about alliances and male power, Filostrato’s willingness to narrate an uncomplicated and happy marital union between two people also continues.
order to marry her. The young men are Giannole di Severino and Minghino di Mingole, and, in order to get close enough to her to express their love, each of the young men befriends a servant who works in the young woman’s home. Inadvertently, each servant arranges for each young man to visit the girl at the same moment, when her father is out of the house one evening. Each suitor fears that the other will in some way interfere, so, “ciascun sospettando dell’altro, con certi compagni armati a dovere entrare in tenuta andò” (Dec. 5.5.15). Giannole arrives first with a couple of armed companions, and, rather than explaining to the young girl his love for her, in a move that reminds the reader of Cimone, he kidnaps her.124

Immediately following the young girls’ cries, Minghino and his armed gang arrive, and the “fieri o sventurati accidenti” multiply as swords are drawn and the young men begin to attack one another. Soon, the entire neighborhood appears to watch the spectacle and help the girl, and ultimately the police arrive—“i sergenti del capitan della terra vi sopragiunsero e molti di costor presero” (Dec. 5.5.21). The girl’s father finally arrives on the scene, and after interrogating her to find that she had nothing prior to do with the boys, he meets with the boys’ families. In fear that the same ordeal might happen again, he arranges for the girl to marry Minghino.125 Thus, violent conflict

124 Once the servant allied with Giannole gives the signal, the servant “andò a aprir l’uscio, e Giannole prestamente venuto con due de’ compagni andò dentro, e trovata la giovane nella sala la presono per menarla via” (Dec. 5.5.19). Not surprisingly, the young girl’s reaction is not unlike that of Efigenia: “La giovane cominciò a resistere e a gridar forte, e la fante similmente” (Dec. 5.5.20).

125 Minghino is chosen also because the girl’s “father,” Giacomino da Pavia, reveals to the two boys’ families that she is only his adopted daughter. Giannole’s father eventually recognizes the girl as his daughter, who was accidentally left behind in their home in Faenza when the city was under attack. Despite these incredible twists in the plot, it is intriguing that the narrator affirms Giacomino’s fear that another kidnapping of this sort might be attempted because of the girl’s beauty and ideal age for being wedded: “… essaminando come stato fosse e trovato che in niuna cosa la giovane aveva colpa, alquanto si diè più pace, proponendo seco, acciò che più simil caso non avvenisse, di doverla come più tosto potesse maritare” (Dec. 5.5.22). I have already pointed out that the theme of kidnapping in this tale recalls Cimone and Efigenia’s marital misadventure. However, the proximity yet again of marriage versus abduction
between rivaling suitors, a riot-like atmosphere, commotion in the neighborhood, and the necessity of dealing with the suitors’ families—inside and outside of court—preface the marriage of these two young people, who, we are told, celebrate great and wonderful nuptials and live well and in peace for many years.

Pampinea narrates the sixth novella of Gianni and Restituta which offers continuity with the trials and perils found thus far in Day Five’s narrations, as well as a rewriting of a central episode of the Filocolo. In the preamble to her tale, Neifile highlights the great forces of love and the unimaginable difficulties lovers go through: “Grandissime forze, piacevoli donne, son quelle d’amore, e a gran fatiche e a istrabocchevoli e non pensati pericoli gli amanti dispongono, come per assai cose raccontate e oggi e altre volte comprender si può” (Dec. 5.6.3). She does not, however, offer any commentary on whether or not the end of a happily-ever-after marriage justifies the means through which a lover must pass. So far, these “gran fatiche” and “istrabocchevoli e non pensati pericoli” have ranged from the coercion of an angry father (Dec. 5.4) to kidnappings (Dec. 5.1, 5.5), becoming an outlaw (Dec. 5.2), committing violent acts and even murder itself (Dec. 5.1). Furthermore, Boccaccio showcases these woes such that they occupy far more of the storytelling than love’s “grandissime forze” or the marriage that ostensibly signals a happy ending for the protagonists.

The sixth novella continues this trend of focusing the bulk of narrative space on the troubles of the protagonists and the numerous ways in which Fortune and society seek to impede the young lovers’ affection. Again in this case, we have a young woman who is abducted, but this time it is at the beginning of the tale and by a group of young sailors, makes the reader wonder to what extent this practice still took place in the medieval period, and what Boccaccio might be implying with the close pairing of abduction and matrimony in these tales.
rather than the lover himself. Each of the young men desires to possess the beautiful young woman, but they cannot reach an agreement on to whom she should belong. They conclude that the girl will only hurt their business affairs, and thus decide to give her to King Frederick of Sicily. Gianni, who is in love with her, acquires a ship, searches the Italian coast from Naples to Sicily, and finally finds Restituta, who awaits the king in one of his palaces. Restituta reasons that, through all of these events, her honor was as good as lost, and recognizes that Gianni is a worthy fellow, willing and able to get her out of imprisonment.¹²⁶

Once he promises to break her out of confinement, she gives herself to him, and “con grandissimo piacere abbracciatisi, quello diletto presero oltre al quale niun maggior ne puote amore prestare” (Dec. 5.6.19). Unfortunately, amid all of the evening’s delight, Gianni neglects to wake up, and, as a result, King Frederick finds them in bed and orders that they be burned nude at the stake. By chance, one of the king’s admirals knows Gianni, speaks with him as he stands waiting to be burned, and ultimately pleads on Gianni’s behalf to the king and has him freed. By the end of the novella, Neifile informs

¹²⁶ Their love is stated to be mutual at the beginning of the tale (“… fu Restituta … la quale un giovanetto … amava sopra la vita sua e ella lui” (Dec. 5.6.4) and again at the end (“… io sono con questa giovane, la quale io ho più che la mia vita amata e ella me” (Dec. 5.6.34). Thus, the protagonists have a mutual love from the very beginning of the story along with those of four other tales of Day Five (5.2: Gostanza and Martuccio; 5.3: Pietro and Agnolella; 5.4: Ricciardo and Caterina; and 5.7: Pietro and Violante). Whether or not, in all the other tales, the couples loved one another prior to getting married, by the end of each tale, we are told in a generic fashion that they all live happily ever after. Does Boccaccio expect the reader to believe that no matter what feelings two people share, that their wedding will somehow change who they are and how they feel for one another? The answer to these questions is not discernible from the first nine stories because the narrator tersely closes them with a line that states they had a wonderful wedding celebration and lived in happiness for their rest of their lives. However, in the tenth tale of the day, Dioneo’s privilege will provide the reader with a glimpse at what married life might be like, and whether or not Boccaccio would like for us to accept the superficial happy endings. Dioneo will recount not a series of travails that end with matrimony, but, rather, a matrimony followed by a series of difficulties, especially regarding love between husband and wife. (Indeed, the admiral in Dec. 5.6 hints at the possibility of the young couple being together for so long, presumably in wedlock, that they will grow tired of seeing each others’ faces: “Ruggieri ridendo disse volentieri: ‘Io farò sì che tu la vedrai ancora tanto, che ti rincrescerà’” (Dec. 5.6.35). I will continue with this line of thought in the analysis of Dec. 5.10 below.
the reader that the king “a Gianni fece la giovinetta sposare. E fatti loro magnifichi doni, contenti gli rimandò a casa loro, dove con festa grandissima ricevuti lungamente in piacere e in gioia poi vissero insieme” (Dec. 5.6.42). Thus, the vast majority of the narrative continues to be occupied by an abduction, frightening separation of the lovers, and desperate searches, stopping just short of death by being burnt at the stake.

In the seventh novella, paternal intervention moves beyond the coercion of Dec. 5.4 and in the direction of exercising actual violence over the two young lovers involved in an affair that initially seems to violate social norms. In this tale, a very skilled and able former slave, Pietro, is adopted and taken in as the son of his master, Amerigo Abbate. Pietro falls in love with Amerigo’s daughter, Violante, and eventually she becomes pregnant by him. Amerigo does not discover the pregnancy until he walks in on his daughter giving birth, and in a rage he rushes toward her with sword in hand demanding to know who fathered the child. In fear of death, Violante tells her father everything, Pietro is tortured mercilessly, and Amerigo decides to have him executed.\(^{127}\) The strands of misfortune propelling Lauretta’s tale begin to unravel when Amerigo finds that Pietro is actually of noble birth. At this point, marriage is eagerly and perhaps brutally imposed upon the young man. Amerigo’s harshness towards his daughter and Pietro continues the pattern of inauspicious and abnormal circumstances preceding marriage. In the end, as one comes to expect of Day Five, Boccaccio, through the narration of Lauretta unites the

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\(^{127}\) Further demonstrating this streak of cruelty that Amerigo experiences during his rage, he eventually orders one of his most malicious servants to murder his newly born grandchild and demands that Violante kill herself either with his sword or by poison. If she would not do it herself, he asks that his servant assure her that she would instead be burnt in public.
two young lovers in matrimony and dispatches them to a questionable happy-ever-after.\textsuperscript{128}

Tales eight and nine, of Nastagio degli Onesti and Federigo degli Alberighi, respectively, are without a doubt two of the most famous novelle of Day Five. And yet, the role and representation of marriage showcased within them has not received ample attention. They maintain continuity with the preceding tales since the protagonists’ difficulties occupy most of the narrative space. Then, in the last line of the story the narrator consigns the couples to a blissful, yet unverifiable matrimonial existence. In brief, the marital happiness of Nastagio and the young Traversari girl is especially questionable. The narrator, Filomena, makes abundantly clear that the girl disdains Nastagio. Even if he claims to love her and spends an extraordinary amount of wealth to impress her, the girl rejects him totally because she is not much nobler lineage than he.\textsuperscript{129}

As is well known, he exploits the infernal scene to such an extent that the girl, “avendo l’odio in amor tramutato,” lets him know that she is willing to do “tutto ciò che fosse piacer di lui” (Dec. 5.8.41). Nastagio honorably responds that he does not simply want pleasure, but, rather, a wife: “dove le piacesse, con onor di lei voleva il suo piacere, e questo era sposandola per moglie.” (Dec. 5.8.42).

Ultimately, Nastagio had to bankrupt himself and witness the frightening spectacle before the matrimonial denouement can be reached. Federigo degli Alberighi’s situation in Dec. 5.9 is similar to Nastagio’s in that he spends his immense wealth

\textsuperscript{128} Bonadeo, too, affirms that the narrator “consigns them to an unverifiable blissful existence through a fable-like epilogue” (295).

\textsuperscript{129} Accordingly, the text states that Nastagio, “essendo senza moglie s’innamorò d’una figliuola di messer Paolo Traversaro, giovane troppo più nobile che esso non era, prendendo speranza con le sue opere di doverla trarre a lui” (Dec. 5.8.5).
profligately to impress monna Giovanna, actually arriving at the point of becoming almost destitute. However, through the sacrifice of his last remaining valuable possession, the falcon, he earns Giovanna’s love, respect, and ultimately, her hand in marriage.  

Before turning to the main conclusions of the analysis of Decameron Day Five and the representation of matrimony therein, I would like to make some final remarks regarding Dec. 5.7, the novella of Pietro and Violante. This tale of Lauretta certainly provides another instance of continuity in the series of unfortunate events that each novella must provide; however, the story of Pietro and Violante also presents a subtle yet profound scene that further seems to undermine the sacredness of Christian morality, the Church, and marriage itself. One question that does not ever seem to be raised among critics of the fifth day is as simple as where the day’s marriages take place. Thus the question is: How can there be so many wedding celebrations and not one of them is held in a church or even fêté as a religious ceremony? While on the way to a villa at which the women of Amerigo Abbate’s family often spend time, fortune presents the two young people of Lauretta’s seventh novella with an opportunity to fulfill their amorous desires.  

In route to the villa, a series of dark, ominous clouds obfuscate the sky: Violante’s mother, her servants, and other accompanying women decide to turn back towards home and find temporary shelter in a peasant’s home. Inspired as much by desire as the

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130 I will delve much deeper into these Dec. 5.8 and 5.9 in the next chapter entitled “The ‘Economics of Parody’ and marital exchanges.” The relationships and marriages of these protagonists will be considered in terms of economic exchange, social class, and consumption appropriateness among nobles and non-nobles.

131 “Ma mentre che essi così parimente nell’amorose fiamme accesi ardevano, la fortuna, come se deliberato avesse questo voler che fosse, loro trovò via da cacciare la temerosa paura che gl’impediva” (Dec. 5.7.9).
worsening weather, Violante and Pietro are well ahead of the others and find shelter in an abandoned and dilapidated church. Indeed, “Pietro e la giovane, non avendo più presto rifugio, se n’entrarono in una chiesetta antica e quasi tutta caduta nella quale persona non dimorava” (Dec. 5.7.13). Forced by scarce covering overhead, the two huddle together, touch one another and thus press on until they experience what Fiammetta calls the ultimate delights of love.

Historically, it would certainly not be unheard of for the marriages witnessed throughout Day Five not to take place in a church or even before a priest. The sacramental definition of marriage emphasized the betrothal and exchange of vows between the man and woman. In this vein, the Church put much power in the hands of the two spouses, just as one witnesses in the tale of Alessandro (Dec. 2.3), and there was not absolute necessity for the presence of a priest. Even if the Church recognized secret unions, it did also require the presence of a witness and encouraged publicizing the union. However, given the weighty social and political significance of some marriages, the public and official ceremony of marriage often acted as a means of establishing and perpetuating social as well as political stability.

Because of these ecclesiastical and social practices, and the elevated social milieu of many of the parties involved in the marriages of Day Five, it is somewhat surprising that the weddings under Queen Fiammetta’s rule are not treated as central and ceremonial, much less sacred. The absence of religious ceremony is particularly striking

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132 In Storia del matrimonio, Diane Owen Hughes thus explains: “… quello che la Chiesa ideò nel corso del Medioevo dava tutto il potere ai due contraenti, lo sposo e la sposa. Giacché erano loro a porre in essere il sacramento, non c’era bisogno di un sacerdote celebrante; e anche se la Chiesa richiedeva la presenza di testimone e raccomandava di fare le pubblicazioni, riconosceva poi come legittime unioni clandestine” (49).
given that in a day inundated with what was at the time, and still is among many strata of society, the spiritual union of man and woman that represents the union of Christ and the Church. Boccaccio presents his readers but one, old, decaying church in which one of Day Five’s many couples clandestinely consummates their love for one another in the house of the Lord, “quasi tutta caduta, nella quale persona non dimorava” (Dec. 5.7.13). Let us further pursue this lack of the sacred elements of matrimony typical of most, if not all, medieval marriages.

2. *La casa caduta: God, Church and Society in Decameron 5*

The appearances of things religious in Day Five seems to be concerned not so much with the breakdown of society, but rather with the many toils people must undergo to achieve what lies at the basis of society, marriage. Furthermore, the institution of marriage, sacred since its primordial beginnings (Gen. 2-3), is always portrayed as the end result of a human struggle and always outside its primordial sacred context. In her book *Five Frames for the Decameron: Communication and Social Systems*, Joy Potter does well in establishing the relationship between God, the Church and Society in the *Decameron*. According to Potter, “The end result of Boccaccio’s handling of the themes of God and Church is to maintain the religious attitude toward God while at the same time desacralizing the official institution” (45). Potter interprets this treatment as Boccaccio’s indictment of the organized religious system’s failure to preserve the sacred and, consequently, to performs its social function. Although Potter’s interpretation is valid and seems to accurately convey Boccaccio’s consistent reverence of God and scorn for unholy clergy (and one finds almost exclusively unholy clergy in the *Decameron*), the
lack of commentary in her work on an institution as sacred and important to society as matrimony must be addressed.

Potter mainly relies on two solid and convincing novella examples to forward her argument regarding the social failure of the religious system: the Decameron’s opening tale of Ser Cepparello and the story of Frate Cipolla from the sixth day. In the case of Cepparello, Potter underlines the anti-social facet of the misuse of sanctity and Cepparello’s perversion of civic justice by lying so flagrantly in order to fool the priest on his deathbed and to protect the two Florentine usurers. Potter continues, “Like the description of the plague in the cornice, whatever its functions within the extremely complex whole may be, the opening story of the Decameron points out the failure of the religious system to perform its proper functions from a civic point of view” (53). In the case of Frate Cipolla, Potter recognizes the Friar’s endowing the Holy Ghost with a flesh-and-blood finger, his contamination of the Word-Made-Flesh with “Adam’s rib” and his numerous other sacrilegious jokes as the evidence of the fallen nature of the Church and its ministers. Ultimately, Potter concludes: “The content of the stories thus shows itself to be perfectly in keeping with the comments of the story tellers on this subject, and with the demonstrated failure of the Church to deal with the social crisis engendered by the plague” (67).

Padoan, like Potter and other scholars, affirms the unique presentation of religion in the Decameron in that it is offered via social reflections as opposed to its transcendental content or concentration on God and the afterlife. Padoan asserts that the idea of the afterlife is almost completely ignored (and at this point, he refers to the jocular, voluntary damnation of Ser Cepparello himself), whereas Boccaccio’s interest is
focused almost exclusively on the life as lived on earth. For this critic, an exception to this rule would seem to be a point that Potter, too, treats thoroughly, the grand initial description of the plague:

… e tuttavia, a guarder bene, ciò che colpisce l’autore in quel grande dramma non sono le cause (anche se egli, come i cronisti, l’attribuisce alla giusta ira di Dio), quanto i suoi effetti proprio sulla società umana, nel progressivo disfacimento di vincoli sociali e persino familiari ed affettivi ... come la Natura è violentata dalla pestilenza, così il morbo è visto in quanto corrotture dei legami più sacri....

(Padoan 46)

That the perspicacious Boccaccio understood that he was living and writing in a time of transition and that he was aware of the crisis besieging him and Florentine society is well documented by these two prominent scholars and others. However, critics neglect to tie Boccaccio’s astuteness to observe and interpret what he saw going on in society with his specific interpretation of matrimony and its role as a peaceful and unifying force.

From the evidence found in Day Five, Boccaccio undermines whatever peace, social stability, or even happiness among spouses could likely exist in marriage. In the first nine tales, some of the most negative experiences possible in life (murder, near-death experiences, forced marriages, infernal visions, bankruptcy, being forced to earn money by illegal means, being lost in the woods among wild animals, and so on), occupy the vast majority of the narrative space. Only after these travails does Boccaccio permit the brigata to take their characters to a presumably happily married life. At the same time, the brigata does not show the reader what happens after the lieto fine until, of course, one arrives at Dioneo’s tenth tale of an already married couple, Pietro da Vinciolo and his
amorous young wife. After all of the “happily-ever-afters” witnessed throughout the day, one might expect a happy, peaceful, marital situation in this case, too.\textsuperscript{133} However, Dioneo makes it clear from the beginning that they are not happy. Their marriage was arranged by the husband as a screen to make others think that he was not a homosexual.\textsuperscript{134} His wife underscores that Pietro has failed to hold up his end of the marriage contract because he neglects her emotional, and more important for Dioneo’s subversive nature, sexual needs. Dioneo without a doubt questions the purpose and efficacy of marriage through his tale. The marriage he presents is founded on a lie and is utilized by the husband to hide and continue a way of life and sexual activity that was considered sinful and unacceptable in the medieval period. The only way they can both be satisfied and live happily together is by breaking the matrimonial bond, and inviting a man who is willing to please both of their carnal desires.

Thus, through Dioneo’s privilege, Boccaccio reveals a different perspective than that witnessed in the first nine tales. He shows us the post-wedding life of two spouses, and it totally contradicts the happiness that was announced at the end of each preceding tale. The dysfunction of the conjugal life in Dec. 5.10 goes beyond questioning the

\textsuperscript{133} I would proffer at this point the vocabulary which the brigata uses to describe again and again the happy endings after marriage. Even after the wedding-day massacre and abduction, Cimone “lietamente con la sua visse lungamente contento nella sua terra” (Dec. 5.1.70). Gostanza and Martuccio “insieme in pace e in riposo lungamente goderono del loro amore” (Dec. 5.2.48). Pietro Boccamazza “con molto riposo e piacere con la sua Agnoletta infino alla lor vecchiezza si visse” (Dec. 5.3.54). Ricciardo with Caterina “lungamente in pace e in consolazione uccellò agli usignuoli e di di e di notte quanto gli piacque” (Dec. 5.4.49). Minghino, we are told, lives with Agnese “in pace e in bene poscia piu anni” (Dec. 5.5.40). Gianni and Restituta “lungamente in piacere e in gioia poi vissero insieme” (Dec. 5.6.42). Pietro and Violante live all of their life “con riposo e con pace” (Dec. 5.7.53). Nastagio weds the Traversari girl on a Sunday and “con lei piu tempo lietamente visse” (Dec. 5.8.44). Federigo degli Alberighi reacquires his wealth by marrying his love and he lives “in letizia con lei” (Dec. 5.9.43).

\textsuperscript{134} Boccaccio sets up this “donna-schermo” to be used by Pietro da Vinciolo in a way not unlike that which Dante utilizes in the Vita nuova. Of course, this instance is a parodic rewriting since a man takes advantage of matrimony to hide his sexuality, rather than to hide a true love that would be considered acceptable by medieval moral standards.
potential for happiness between a married couple. Indeed, through Dioneo’s dissident voice, Boccaccio parodies and desacralizes the matrimonial sacrament. This tale also acts as an introduction to the way not only married people, but people in general, will treat each other in Days Six, Seven, Eight and Nine through the beffa.

Pietro and his wife only manage to find satisfaction in their marriage by cheating on one another, anticipating the beffa that will take place time and again in the coming days’ novelle. Thus Boccaccio chooses to showcase the difficulties and violence and destruction that protagonists must go through to arrive at a happy ending through marriage. In the first nine tales, the reader cannot verify the married protagonists’ contentment, because it is tersely stated by each narrator at the very end of their stories. In the tenth tale, Boccaccio offers a response for the attentive reader who might wonder how the protagonists’ lives actually might turn out. As a result of this final representation in 5.10, and its continuity with the upcoming days of the beffa, Boccaccio questions and even parodies the institution of matrimony. The reader cannot help but ask him or herself along with the author, does the end justify the means? In this line of questioning and interpretation, Boccaccio seems to be interrogating marriage’s role in society, especially in light of the destruction caused by the plague. I believe we must consider his unique treatment in the broader context of the plague as the destructive agent of the most sacred bonds among humans.

Conclusion

The reader knows from the introduction of the first day and forward that one of the main goals of the brigata is to escape from the tribulations of their plague-ridden city

135 Most interesting about this parody is the subversive treatment of what was then and is now called “conjugal debt.” I will discuss in detail this specific form of parody in the next chapter, taking into consideration the Pauline notions of conjugal debt.
in order to enjoy themselves. Indeed, it is Dioneo, the narrator of the fifth day’s final tale, who makes certain that he will be able to enjoy himself before setting out on a journey outside Florence. As soon as they leave Santa Maria Novella and arrive at the first villa, the seven young ladies and the three young men talk of their sojourn outside the city, and Dioneo speaks out: “… io non so quello che de’ vostri pensieri voi v’intendete di fare: li miei lasciai io dentro dalla porta della città allora che io con voi poco fa me ne usci’ fuori: e per ciò o voi a sollazzare e a ridere e a cantare con meco insieme vi disponete … o voi mi licenziate che io per li miei pensier mi ritorni e steami nella città tribolata” (Dec. 1.Intro.93). Clearly, as in the case of the story of Pietro di Vinciolo, the ten novellatori are entertained and the reader of the Decameron is invited and almost compelled to laugh along with them.

This outward and jocular level is present in many of the Decameron’s one hundred tales and Dioneo’s tale of Day Five is no exception. However, Boccaccio tells the reader that he is not only in the business of entertaining his supposed and exclusive audience of donne innamorate. One can be certain of the higher expectations that Boccaccio had for his work by presenting his self-defense in the introduction to Day Four. Boccaccio’s detractors criticized him for seeking to console and entertain women in love and for the base language he used to do so. Messer Giovanni held his ground by citing the examples of Dante, Cavalcanti, and Cino da Pistoia who were concerned with love and pleasing women too. As a result of these and other examples from history, he states: “E se non fosse che uscir sarebbe del modo usato del ragionare, io producerei le istorie in mezzo, e quelle tutte piene mostrerei d’antichi uomini e valorosi, ne’ loro più
maturi anni sommamente avere studiato di compiacere alle donne: il che se essi non fanno, vadano e si l’apparino” (Dec. 4.Intro.34).

Boccaccio proceeds by announcing that “né dal monte Parnaso né dalle Muse non mi allontano quanto molti per avventura s’avisano,” and Padoan makes a crucial observation of these words (Dec. 4.Intro.36). To Padoan, this latest quote demonstrates “pur sotto l’apparente umiltà, una considerevole consapevolezza della propria arte di narratore e il desiderio di rivendicarne una certa nobiltà letteraria, desiderio che ci spiega appunto l’estrema ricercatezza dello stile e il grandioso disegno architettonico” (84). It is in this key of reading the Decameron as a text of great architectural complexity and extreme stylistic preciseness that one should consider the non-jocular and often parodic sides of tales recounted in its fifth day. As Padoan aptly points out, in defending himself, Boccaccio accentuates a considerable awareness not only of the importance of his role as a narrator but also in establishing and preserving a certain literary seriousness and nobility for his masterpiece. In this context, the parody Boccaccio creates is a critique, at times with comic results, but in the end a serious one of the prevailing medieval mindset and lifestyle.

As a result, it is plausible and advisable to delve beyond the ostensible felicitous finales of Day Five and to ask what is really going on in the representation of marriage that results from its novelle. Historically and socially, one finds that the matrimonial bond represented as a bulwark against disorder and as a fundamental unit of society’s foundation. Ecclesiastically, the sacramental union of man and woman represented the bond between earth and heaven, of Christ and the Church, and between God and humanity. For many centuries prior to Boccaccio’s age, marriage was the union that
people recognized as the most efficacious way of perpetuating society and bringing about social harmony. On the contrary, matrimony in the fifth day is built upon a foundation of strained and inauspicious circumstances. This representation, coupled with the striking absence of religious celebration, calls into question the happy endings and ultimately yields a parodic representation of matrimony. Rather than acting as a peaceful and socially unifying force fundamental to order and stability in society, the marriages in Day Five and the trials leading up to them undermine social harmony and deemphasize the traditional link between God and humanity.

Within this interpretative framework of Day Five, Boccaccio seems to offer the critique that matrimony, as the Church and society had understood it for so long a time, did not provide society with the stability and benefits that it once did. He surrounds this exclusive and fundamental religious and social bond with a myriad of perils and obstacles and, at times, reduces marriage to an economic metaphor of exchange.
CHAPTER 7
THE “ECONOMICS” OF PARODY AND MARITAL EXCHANGES

If Giorgio Padoan stops just short of the threshold of interpreting the parodic representation of matrimony, he does not fail to deliver on establishing the influence of mercantile life and an economic occupation which Messer Giovanni partook of during his years in Naples and beyond. In *Il Boccaccio, le muse, il parnaso e l’Arno*, Padoan brings about a meticulous study of the two sides of Boccaccio the writer, which he hinges on the time spent in Naples versus the years spent in Florence. He attempts to strike a balance between Boccaccio’s adhesion to the world and society of the *bourgeois* and mercantile Florence and what Padoan calls his considerable sympathies for the aristocratic and courtly world of Naples. Yet, for the purpose of the current chapter, let us concentrate our efforts on a trait common to both of those experiences: the influence of the world of trade and merchants on Boccaccio’s masterpiece. When one considers these constants, it seems plausible to understand the *novelle* of the *Decameron’s* fifth day in an economic sense. Boccaccio’s mercantile background will be treated in order to understand better how it influences, directly or indirectly, the themes and settings of his greatest work. One of the relevant themes appears as a result of the universal happy ending of Day Five’s stories: each *novella* concludes with a celebration of matrimony. In

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136 Padoan’s study of this intermixing between the Florentine and the Neopolitan aspects within Boccaccio seems especially plausible and convincing because he works diligently not to oversimplify and separate the elements: “Mondi sociali ed artistici tanto opposti possono convivere nel Boccaccio anche perché l’uomo Boccaccio vive in una ambiguità ideologica di fondo; e l’artista, formatosi in esperienze tanto diverse, riflette il loro contrasto, ed insieme le contraddizioni della stessa società comunale…” (41).
the situations leading up to these felicitous finales, the women protagonists become objects of exchange. In a pair of the stories, conspicuous consumption among certain social classes are juxtaposed and compared in a manner that raises questions about appropriateness. Finally, in the tenth and final story, Boccaccio closes the day of happy endings with a plot that parodies the Pauline notion of conjugal debt.

Although Day Five does not seem to fit into or support Vittore Branca’s thesis aptly expressed through the phrase “L’epopea dei mercatanti,” its stories do manage to convey economic, and at times mercantile, motifs in much of its social interactions and settings. Branca supports his argument in favor of the Decameron as the merchant’s epic by underlining Boccaccio’s own training in and knowledge of mercantile activities; since he was an apprentice in the largest and most influential company in Florence of his day, Boccaccio created a literary work that reflected the interests and concerns of that profession and class of people. Ultimately, he argues that preference is given throughout the medieval masterpiece to mercantile protagonists, environments, and themes; he believes that the text must be read through a mercantile key.

On the one hand, there are many merchant protagonists enliven the ten days of storytelling and the one hundred stories recounted; on the other hand, it does not seem plausible to read the Decameron as a whole as the merchants’ epic. This notion is particularly impractical when one reads the fifth day’s novelle in which stories are told about lovers who, after a series of unfortunate events, attain happiness. None of the day’s protagonists are identified as merchants, and none of them directly take part in mercantile

137 Branca posits that the Decameron is literally the merchant’s epic that demonstrates how the Florentine pioneers of commerce led Italy out of the darkness of the medieval period. Accordingly, he writes that “la rievocazione della civiltà italiana nell’autunno del Medioevo, che si è rivelata nel Decameron grandiosa e suggestiva, trova uno dei suoi centri più vivi e affascinanti nella serie di avventurosi e mossi affreschi in cui si riflette la ricchissima vita mercantile fra il Duecento e il Trecento” (9).
activities. Despite the lack of merchants and explicit mercantile activities, however, the environments and themes of the day’s ten tales do lend credence to at least a part of Branca’s thesis. Boccaccio’s understanding of commerce and his years of direct experience with the mechanisms and tools used in ports for deposits, guarantees, and advances are evident when one reads the stories through a more general economic lens rather than in the narrow and less convincing mercantile key.¹³⁸

1. The Geographical Outreach of Decameron 5

The majority of Day Five’s novelle take place in various regions and cities of Italy and in the not too distant past, with the obvious exception of the first tale. As David Wallace suggests in his book Boccaccio, Decameron, Boccaccio offers a wide range of locations and, at the same time, proffers a wide spectrum of social situations as well as a variety of narrative outcomes to the same sort of conclusion. Simultaneously one could also conclude that Boccaccio offers readers such a broad geographic sampling to emphasize that the day’s theme could unfold in any number of places. Beginning with Emilia’s second novella, “vicin di Cicilia è una isoletta chiamata Lipari, nella quale non è ancor gran tempo...” (Dec. 5.2.4); then, Elissa’s third novella is “in Roma, la quale come è oggi coda così già fu capo del mondo, fu un giovane, poco tempo fa...” (Dec. 5.3.4).

¹³⁸ At several points, Padoan notes the importance of Boccaccio’s economic formation and exposure to the international scene via trade in Naples: “In questo ambiente internazionalmente aperto, ove confluivano disordinatamente e convulsamente interessi tanto diversi, e dove il determinante influsso culturale dell’Occidente europeo non poteva rimanere ignaro ed estraneo a quell’Oriente tanto vicino e tanto ricercato, si forma lo scrittore e l’erudito Boccaccio” (6). He goes on to specify the access that Boccaccio had to different segments of Neapolitan society: through his work at the Naples branch of the Bardi bank, he maintained daily relationships with merchants; through his studies of law he came into contact with the academic environment; his father’s high position permitted him to mingle among higher social circles.
With Filostrato’s fourth story comes the first of three tales set in Romagna: he begins, “… non è adunque, valorose donne, gran tempo passato che in Romagna ...” (Dec. 5.4.4); then, Neifile recounts the fifth tale set in Faenza: “… avvenne in questi tempi che la città di Faenza lungamente in guerra e in mala ventura stata, alquanto miglior disposizion ritornò...” (Dec. 5.5.6); and finally, Filomena’s didactic tale of Nastagio degli Onesti, “In Ravenna, antichissima città di Romagna ...” (Dec. 5.8.4).139

Pampinea’s fifth novella, as well as Lauretta’s seventh, take place on islands – Ischia and Sicily, respectively. The ninth and tenth novelle return to central Italy with the story of Federigo degli Alberighi set just outside of Florence and that of Pietro di Vinciolo taking place in Perugia.

While Boccaccio offers his readers a variety of narrative paths through a range of geographical locations, all of them in Day Five situated in Italy (except for, quite significantly, Panfilo’s opening tale, which is set in ancient times and in Cyprus), he certainly presents a more homogenous spectrum of social and personal characterizations. Without exception, the protagonists of Day Five are all described as young, good-looking and well-mannered people, even if only ostensibly so. Admittedly, Cimone, the male protagonist of the day’s opening tale, initially is characterized as being a crude and beast-like simpleton despite the fact the he “di grandezza e di bellezza di corpo tutti gli altri giovani trapassava” (Dec. 5.1.4). However, after his reawakening – that is, after stumbling upon Efigenia in the forest and deciding to become “civilized” – his transformation is thus described: he “riuscì il più leggiadro e il meglio costumato e con

139 According to Wallace in his Introduction to the Decameron, this grouping of novelle set in Romagna best demonstrates the view of romance and marriage as a social negotiation: “This view of romance as social negotiation is developed most powerfully by the three novella set in Romagna” (64).
più particolari virtù che altro giovane alcuno che nell’isola fosse di Cipri” (*Dec. 5.1.20*).

Accordingly, Efigenia is described as “una bellissima giovane” (*Dec. 5.1.7*). In the second *novella*, Gostanza is introduced similarly as “una bellissima giovane chiamata Gostanza, d'assai orrevoli genti” while Martuccio is a “giovane […] assai leggiadro e costumato e nel suo mestier valoroso”, and this descriptive pattern continues throughout the remaining *novelle* (*Dec. 5.2.4*).\(^{140}\)

Although geographic variety supports the universality of the day’s marriage theme, this sort of regional expansiveness and diversity also seems to stem from Boccaccio’s own unique worldview, which he acquired during his years working as a merchant for the Bardi company. As a young man beginning in 1325, the writer worked for the largest Florentine “super-company,” and learned the merchant’s craft and trade routes. More than likely he also heard countless stories from the many outposts along the vast Mediterranean trade network of the Bardi company. At this point, it is important to note Edwin Hunt’s definition of “super-company” as stated in his recent work *The Medieval Super-companies*, because it helps contextualize the kind of geographic knowledge with which Boccaccio would have come in contact and perhaps would have mastered. Hunt’s definition includes not only the elements of profit and large volume, but also a grandiose geographic scale with numerous permanent branches and points of trade throughout the Mediterranean.\(^ {141}\)

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\(^{140}\) Admittedly, Dioneo offers no description regarding the physical attributes of Pietro di Vinciolo. He is described simply as a rich man: “Fu in Perugia, non è ancora molto tempo passato, un ricco uomo chiamato Pietro di Vinciolo” (*Dec. 5.10.6*).

\(^{141}\) Hunt affirms: “The medieval super-company is defined here as a private profit-seeking organization operating several lines of business in very large volume in multiple, widespread locations through a network of permanent branches” (38).
Born of a Florentine merchant with connections to the influential Bardi family, Boccaccio was especially well placed to take advantage of and flourish in the mercantile world even if he ultimately rejected the profession to pursue poetry. Florentine merchants were the main human element in the growth and development of super-companies, within Italy in general as well as beyond, in the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The peninsula’s location at the center of the Mediterranean gave Italian merchants a natural position as the go-between of goods from the Levant en route to the rest of Europe. Richard Goldthwaite underlines the result of this geographic centrality coupled with the ingenuity of Italian businessmen. This critic emphasizes that Italians held a monopoly over the trade of luxury goods, which often originated in the East and were sold in northern European markets. In this view, Italian businessmen were “merchant-colonizers” who dominated maritime commerce.\(^{142}\) In order to achieve this influence at home and abroad, the super-companies’ agents had to be skilled at dealing not only with business but also with deficient ways of communications, temperamental rulers, and hardly any international law.

Boccaccio’s unique experience in this line of business afforded him the ability to create a narrative world in which the characters were aware of these economic difficulties and realities. Naturally, Florence and Tuscany are at the heart of Boccaccio’s world and the ideal geography of the Decameron, just as they were in finance and commerce;

\(^{142}\) A propos of this point, Goldthwaite states: “In the commercial sector Italians monopolized the trade of luxury items imported from the Near East and distributed throughout northern Europe; going abroad into both areas as merchant-colonizers, they dominated the maritime transport of these goods, created the network for their distribution, and promoted trade in other goods to balance payments” (13). The writer concludes shortly thereafter with an affirmation that echoes Branca’s praise of Italian mercantile know-how and determination: “In short, Italians aggressively took the initiative in exploiting the relation between the developed economy of the eastern Mediterranean and the underdeveloped economy of Western Europe” (13). Branca refers to merchants as “heroes of enterprise,” “lively and aggressive champions” of commerce and ultimately praises Boccaccio for having elevated the commercial world to “literary dignity.”
however, many other places, either well known or barely known, appear as well throughout the text. Branca aptly underlines the demarcation of the *Decameron*’s world and connects its geographical vastness to the frontiers frequented by Florentine companies. Boccaccio’s literary gaze fell upon even the most obscure regions, and he brought them to the literary forefront, just as merchants brought them into the commercial light of day.143

Thus, even if these companies and their agents do not appear quite as often or as prominently through the work as Branca suggests, the fruits of their exploration and, perhaps, exploitation, push the boundaries of the *Decameron* far beyond a narrow medieval conception of a literary setting.144 Branca cogently observes the unique worldview that Boccaccio’s mercantile and business background offered him:

“L’esperienza mercantile offriva anche al Boccaccio un punto di osservazione della vita contemporanea, donde il suo sguardo poteva spaziare al di là del comune, al di là della regione, al di là dell’Italia stessa per l’Europa civile e per il Mediterraneo fortunoso ...” (14). Branca skillfully describes this zooming out and enlarging of Italian and Mediterranean geography which had not been utilized or possible before Boccaccio. For his day and age, Boccaccio’s tales do not know physical limits: from England to Egypt, from Tunisia to Armenia, the settings of the *Decameron* offer a relatively globalized view of the world as it was then known. If Florentine companies and their agents understood and crossed economic and geographic boundaries, Boccaccio also crossed literary

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143 Branca writes: “Anche le regioni più in ombra nella storia e nella vita di quegli anni non si sottraggono all’attenta osservazione dello scrittore del *Decameron* come non sfuggivano alla tenace penetrazione delle compagnie fiorentine” (14).

144 In particular, the critic declares that “quel vasto sfondo europeo e mediterraneo su cui si tesse l’avventura, anzi la quête eroica dei ‘mercantanti,’ allarga anche singolarmente, come mai fino allora nella nostra letteratura, l’orizzonte dei paesaggi e degli ambienti ritratti” (18).
borders bringing with him several themes of the trade: notions of exchange, ideas of consumption and expenditures, and a particular understanding of debt.\textsuperscript{145}

2. Women as Objects of Exchange

In the inaugural tale of Day Five one finds the farthest reaching example of geographic distance from the Italian peninsula in that the story takes place on the islands of Rhodes and Cyprus and on the seas around them. Panfilo recounts the tale, which is the only one to take place on that day in the distant past, outside of Italy and before Christianity. Accordingly, Panfilo’s narration begins: “Adunque (sì come noi nell’antiche istorie de’ cipriani abbiam già letto) nell’isola di Cipri fu un nobilissimo uomo il quale per nome fu chiamato Aristippo, oltre a ogni altro paesano di tutte le temporali cose ricchissimo” \textit{(Dec. 5.1.3)}. Eventually, Aristippo exiles his uncouth son, Cimone, to the countryside where he is transformed into a “civil” man by coming across the beautiful Efigenia. Interestingly, one of the first results of Cimone’s sudden transformation is the newly found taste he has in selecting a woman. Panfilo, the narrator of the tale, informs the reader as follows: “E quinci cominciò a distinguere le parti di lei, lodando i capelli, li quali d’oro estimava, la fronte, il naso e la bocca, la gola e le braccia e sommamente il petto, poco ancora rilevato: e, di lavoratore, di bellezza subitamente giudice divenuto ...” \textit{(Dec. 5.1.9)}. In what the brutish Cimone sees as his market of women, we are told that he instantly metamorphoses from a peasant into a “connoisseur

\textsuperscript{145} After discussing the reasons for Italian predominance in the commercial world of Medieval Europe, Hunt comments that by the end of the twelfth century, primarily Italians were needed to finance foreign rulers and that more often than not native businessmen could not satisfy their needs (e.g., the first “emigration” of Italian merchants to England occurred after the third crusade in which Richard I incurred huge expenses). With the increasing involvement in foreign business, these Italians “crossed enterprise as well as geographic boundaries, becoming buyers and sellers of wool, lenders to princes, and transfer agents of the papacy, in addition to being general merchants” \textit{(Hunt 43)}. 
of beauty” and makes his wife’s selection. After four years of ardent work in education and manners, Cimone succeeds in becoming the most charming, well-mannered, and accomplished gentleman in Cyprus, and he decides it is time to take Efigenia as his bride. Much to his chagrin, Efigenia’s father denies Cimone’s request because her hand has been promised to another noble, but this news does not stop Cimone from pursuing the young woman.

Indeed, he commits nothing less than an act of piracy by “stealing” someone who belongs to somebody else and whom he wants to become his own property, against all current laws and also Efigenia’s will. He immediately prepares a ship to abduct Efigenia and successfully boards her ship, subdues the crew and informs them that he does not want spoils in the traditional, commercial sense; rather, “‘Quel che mi mosse è a me grandissima cosa a avere acquistata e a voi è assai leggiera a concederlami con pace: e ciò è Efigenia, da me sopra ogni altra cosa amata …’” (Dec. 5.1.31). Despite his initial success, Fortune overturns his gains, and a violent and tempestuous storm forces Cimone, Efigenia and his crew onto the shore of Rhodes, right beside the vessel from which his precious cargo had just been taken. After battling the storm, Cimone faces yet another variable that also plagued commercial ventures of the time—unexpected government intervention.146 Pasimunda, the noble and rightful groom to Efigenia, has connections in the Rhodian senate and exerts his influence to insure that Cimone is imprisoned for life and that his own marriage to Efigenia proceeds as planned. Despite this turn of events

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146 In his narration on the super-companies’ international grain trade, Hunt notes several factors that could negatively affect the companies’ economic interests while at sea. Interestingly, the same elements exert themselves on Cimone’s abduction just as if it were a transport of goods: “Overall, therefore, the international grain trade – vast, fluctuating, subject to risks of tempest, piracy, war, and arbitrary government action – was lucrative in the hands of these astute managers. It had to be very rewarding to justify these risks and the enormous cash investment needed to participate in this business” (53).
and in line with the exigencies of Day Five’s storytelling, Cimone is freed from prison and after “several unhappy or misfortunate events” he appears on her wedding day, slaughters her husband to be (among many others), and takes Efígenia, weeping in opposition, to be his bride.

In the second story of the day, Martuccio becomes a corsair, vows not to return until he is affluent enough to marry Gostanza, and plunders ships along the coast of North Africa. Martuccio, however, is too ambitious and eventually falls victim to Saracen pirates himself and is thought to be dead. Once Gostanza gets word of Martuccio’s supposed death, she decides to kill herself in a very particular way. Rather than taking her life in a quick and violent way, she decides to go to the port of the island, steal a boat, and cast herself to sea: “Sopra la quale prestamente montata e co’ remi alquanto in mar tiratasi … fece vela e gittò via i remi e il timone e al vento tutta si commise, avvisando dover di necessità avvenire o che il vento barca senza carico e senza governator rivolgesse, o a alguno scoglio la percotesse e rompesse…” (Dec. 5.2.12). Ultimately, she wanted to drown at the hands of the same elements which plagued merchants, their merchandise and Cimone in the preceding novella.

Thus, Gostanza, who like many other women of Lipari would likely be at least somewhat familiar with the rudiments of navigation, puts herself on the vessel in the place of its cargo and chooses to allow the elements of Fortune on the high seas (whether storms, the reef, or even pirates) to decide her fate. The motif of women acting as objects of exchange continues in the language of several other tales. Accordingly, in the fifth story, the female protagonist is of marrying age, has two potential suitors and is described in terms of an object to be passed from her parents to a husband: “… per che,
In the sixth story, the male and female protagonists offend the king of Sicily, who eventually condemns them to be burnt together at the stake in the center of Palermo. As the two lovers await their demise, they are on display to the townspeople and the resultant scene is market-like. One thinks back to Cimone when he transforms into a giudice di bellezza as the citizens of Palermo size up Gianni and his lady:

Quivi subitamente tutti i palermitani, e uomini e donne, concorsero a vedere i due amanti: gli uomini tutti a riguardar la giovane si traevano e così come lei bella esser per tutto ben fatta lodavano, così le donne, che a riguardare il giovane tutte correvaro, lui d’altra parte esser bello e ben fatto sommamente commendavano.

(Dec. 5.6.28)

These citizens head to the center of town not merely to witness the execution of the two young people; indeed, their rapidly approaching deaths do not merit the attention of the onlookers or the story’s narrator. Rather, the townspeople interact with the condemned as consumers might peruse goods at the market in an age when the earliest traces of “consumerism” became evident.147

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147 Goldthwaite offers an interesting discussion of economics in Italy even before the Renaissance period. He underscores the development of consumption, as early as the fourteenth century, as “an interactive process between consumer and goods by which culture itself was generated; and in this sense it will not be an anachronistic exaggeration to talk about something we can rightfully call consumerism” (5). Indeed, Goldthwaite continues in this vein in order to proffer the idea that Italians of this time period might very well have inaugurated modern times with their attitudes toward consumption and the marketplace: “Moreover, the venture of Italians into the world of goods may be said to have inaugurated modern times, for the new attitude about goods that arose in Italy marked the first stirring of what today is called consumerism” (5).
3. Social Class and the Economic Context

Throughout the stories of Day Five and alongside these representations of women, goods and the marketplace itself, several conflicts between the nobility and non-nobles emerged caused not only by issues of social rank but also of wealth. It is noteworthy that Boccaccio generically attributes to many of the lover-protagonists a similar noble social identification which sets up a conventional world of traditional love literature in order to bring about repeatedly a certain type of love. Yet these social disparities also set the stage for many relationships and marriages that are considered socially unacceptable, at times for class and at times economic reasons. The social atmosphere of Day Five applies more broadly to the Decameron as a whole in that the stories of the day reflect a social rigidity found throughout Boccaccio’s masterpiece. As a result, a character such as Martuccio Gomito is rejected by Gostanza’s father because he is not sufficiently wealthy or noble to marry the young woman. Such an example of social inferiority hinders Martuccio and Gostanza’s love and accentuates the social world of the Decameron, which, as some critics point out, is a world that does not present the possibility for the intermingling of classes.148

Critics tend to agree on this sort of social rigidity and stability especially when treating the situations and relationships that occur in Day Five between the protagonists who fall in love and who by the end of each story celebrate matrimony. Several critics support the thesis that mixing of classes is not possible and the social hierarchy is rigid

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148 Biagini argues in favor of this sort of rigidity. The world of the Decameron, in his opinion, is “un mondo in cui non è possibile nessun tipo di osmosi tra classi sociali, e la gerarchizzazione ha raggiunto un alto grado di stabilità” (163).
and stable throughout the work. If one considers the social status of the protagonists in the first, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth tales of Day Five, this line of reasoning triumphs: in each of these stories the characters who fall in love and get married are noble, of gentle breeding and of substantial wealth. These marriages uphold the static social and ideological idea that only nobles can marry nobles, and no mixing of classes emerges. However, the second, third, and eighth tales present formidable challenges to this traditional interpretation because, whether through personal ingenuity, aristocratic intervention or violence and coercion, non-noble characters contravene social conventions and marry outside of and above their class.

In the frame of the plague raging in and around Florence, this loosening of communal standards and matrimonial conduct could reflect broader changes in Italian society during the turbulent years of the Black Death and beyond. If we consider Branca’s commentary while keeping the economic context in mind, these contraventions

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149 Specifically, Zaccarrello notes that in the eighth tale the young Traversari’s refusal of Nastagio demonstrates “la filigrana ideologica che domina la rappresentazione della società nel Decameron” (146).

150 Admittedly, in Queen Fiammetta’s ninth tale, the noble Federigo degli Alberighi becomes destitute in his efforts to impress his lady through profligate consumption; however, by the end of the tale he marries Madonna Giovanna and becomes wealthy again.

151 In the Decameron’s introduction, Boccaccio notes the loosening of moral values especially through the people who believed that licentiousness and excess, as opposed to moderation, were necessary to survive the plague: “Altri, in contraria opinion tratti, affermavano il bere assai e il godere e l’andar cantando a torno e sollazzando e il sodisfare d’ogni cosa all’appetito che si potesse e di ciò che avveniva rideresi e beffarsi esser medicina certissima a tanto male: e così come il dicevano il 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’altro case facendo, solamente che cose vi sentissero che lor venissero a grado o in piacere” (Dec. 1.Intro.21).
of social norms, such as those evident in tales two, three, and eight, seem to stem not just from a utilization of individual ingenuity as opposed to simply surrendering one’s actions to Fortune. But perhaps also they stem from a very slowly growing awareness that a true union of two individuals goes beyond many current practices that Boccaccio criticizes or even parodies, such as: capturing a woman as if she were merchandise (Dec. 5.1, 5.5, 5.6); viewing marriage as the coming together of two bodies, appropriate perhaps for two very young people (5.4 and 5.7), or two wicked people (5.10). Ultimately, a true union entails the free offering of one to the other, thereby transposing the dolce stil novo theory of loving freely a woman-angel to the more alluring view of love as a union not just of bodies but of bodies and souls at once.

Branca convincingly presents us with a suture point between the mercantile world and that of the Decameron, arguing that Boccaccio wants to elucidate the contrast between human ingenuity and Fortune, as well as the conflict between inherited nobility and personal achievements, which an individual has to earn and for which one has to struggle.152 The world of Boccaccio’s Decameron and the historical context surrounding it witnessed the need for personal ingenuity, and not just of a profound faith in God and Fortune. Boccaccio is an astute observer of this change, among many others, and his characters increasingly depend on their individual industria and ingenuity to achieve their goals and desires.153 In Day Five, this reality is taken to the extreme by some

152 In the context of the “Epopea dei ‘mercatanti,’” Branca has merchants in mind first and foremost, suggesting that Boccaccio here intends to “illuminare il contrasto fra l’ingegno umano e la Fortuna di una luce allusiva alla contrapposizione – a lui cara - fra la nobiltà fortuita e quella conquistata nelle continue lotte di un’esistenza sempre aperta ai rischi più subiti e gravi...” (21). However, the observation applies also the nobles and non-nobles who seek love and marriage in Day Five.

153 In his narration of the Peruzzi family’s commercial ascent to the status of a super-company, Hunt substantiates this notion. The Peruzzi did not possess a noble lineage and, indeed, had fairly humble origins as a family. Accordingly, Hunt accentuates the necessity and predominance of individual skill,
protagonists who objectify the women they desire and seek to marry.

4. Appropriateness of Consumption for Nobles and Non-nobles

Wealth and affluence in this fourteenth-century society were fleeting and often aleatory for merchants and those who earned money in commercial ventures. After treating the relatively wide distribution of wealth in Florence between the patriciate and the middle class, Goldthwaite soundly describes the volatile nature of financial stability in the time period because business fortunes came and went, new entrepreneurial plans and businessmen appeared and disappeared, and establishment figures were regularly refreshed. Those who kept their riches in business could not guarantee long-term stability for their families, and enduring wealth was hard to come by in Boccaccio’s time. This sense of uncertainty underpins much of the tension between classes during the time period and in the situations leading up to marriage in several of the tales in the *Decameron*’s fifth day.

Perhaps the most significant examples rest in the eighth and ninth stories of the day. These two tales are strikingly similar in plot but have several key differences. In both cases the male protagonists test their financial fortunes in continual acts of discipline and talent needed to dominate European and Mediterranean commerce: “In short, the company, with its exceptional size and widespread activities, was not a lineage undertaking, but the product of the imagination and effort of a few individuals in the family, especially Filippo and Tommaso, who perceived opportunity and found the means to act upon it” (37). Padoan, among others, treats at length this tendency to focus on human intelligence, “il tema fondamentale nel Decameron, della ‘saviezza’: la saviezza del sapere cogliere l’occasione fortunata, del sapere superare il timore pudico di fanciulla; dove anzi si anticipano certe figure di adolescenti del Decameron che sono davvero di una modernità straordinaria” (12).

Goldthwaite cogently summarizes the overall situation: “So long as men kept their wealth in business, they could not assure the financial stability of their families, many of whose histories reveal how elusive permanent wealth could be in the early Renaissance; in any case, business dynasties operating the same business over generations during the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, like those found in the south German towns, are not easy to find” (51).
conspicuous consumption in order to win the love of a noble lady, thereby mimicking, perhaps even parodying, mercantile exchange in that the two suitors sought to win over a woman rather than to make money in a business transaction. In the case of Filomena’s eighth tale, the story unfolds in the ancient city of Ravenna, which was known for its celebrated aristocracy. Interestingly, the source of Nastagio’s wealth is not stated explicitly; we only know that it came to him suddenly by the death of his father and one of his uncles. The reader soon learns that Nastagio falls in love with a daughter of a nobleman from Ravenna, and attempts to win her love by means of his many accomplishments. Despite his efforts, no matter how magnificent, praiseworthy and expensive they are, Nastagio fails to attract the lady he desires; indeed, his efforts do him harm, “forse per la sua singular bellezza o per la sua nobiltà sì altiera e disdegnosa divenuta, che né egli né cosa che gli piacesse le piaceva” (Dec. 5.8.6).

As a result of his profligate spending and failure to attract the young girl, Nastagio’s family and friends implore him to leave Ravenna. After transferring himself into the forest outside the city, Nastagio goes to his friends and family and says to them: “Voi m’avete lungo tempo stimolato che io d’amare questa mia nemica mi rimanga e ponga fine al mio spendere” (Dec. 5.8.33). He swears that he will do so if only they will

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155 Kamber explains that Boccaccio, having passed at least four significant sojourns in Ravenna, was well aware of its celebrated aristocracy and its substantial chivalric traditions but did little more than allude to a vague aristocratic atmosphere. The critic also believes that since the reference to the patriciate’s presence is brief, it is to be disregarded as a vague reference to the aristocratic atmosphere. This assertion seems implausible given the emphasis placed on Nastagio’s lack of nobility compared to the young Traversari. Thus, Kamber’s statement that “quel che interessa al Boccaccio non è evidentemente lo sfondo, ma gli uomini che si muovono su quello sfondo e le loro azioni,” is true to a certain extent; however, the background cannot be discarded (63).

156 Although Filomena does not specifically state by what means or what these accomplishments are, it seems logical, given the parallel structure of the ninth novella and Nastagio’s on actions later in the story, that Nastagio’s efforts and accomplishments consisted of participating in jousts and tournaments, organizing banquets, and spending his money in other ways that would attract the attention of the young Traversari.
arrange for the young Traversari girl, her parents, and any other desired guests to be invited to dine in the very spot of the infernal hunt. The dinner takes places shortly thereafter and, unbeknownst to the guests, a show will begin just after the last course is served. The ensuing scene frightens and astonishes the guests, but, we are told, the young Traversari was most terrified and realized that the infernal scene concerned her above all. Greatly fearing the possibility of suffering a similar fate, that very evening the young Traversari girl transformed her hate into love and offered to do anything Nastagio pleased. Interestingly, to this offer “Nastagio fece rispondere che questo gli era a grado molto, ma che, dove le piacesse, con onor di lei voleva il suo piacere, e questo era sposandola per moglie” (Dec. 5.8.42).

At least one critic interprets this refusal as of mere sexual gratification as a way for Nastagio to assert his own power in their newly possible relationship. In this way, Nastagio acquires a wife in the open and can celebrate his acquisition through a public marriage ceremony. 157 Yet it also seems probable that Nastagio, ever-conscious of his social inferiority, does not want the Traversari to act in a way unfitting to her status; he wants his wealth, his accomplishments, his saviezza and conspicuous, non-noble consumption to be recognized by a noble family and a noble wife. It is quite noteworthy that the only way his desires can be fulfilled in the social world of the Decameron is

157 In the article “Happy Endings? Resisting Women and the Economy of Love in Day Five of Boccaccio’s Decameron,” Fleming interprets this refusal as follows: “… his subsequent refusal to accept the woman’s offer of mere sexual gratification allows him to assert his power in their relationship by instead insisting upon marriage as a public acknowledgement of the legitimacy and success of his sexual conquest and claim to her body” (31). On the whole, Fleming views the theme of Day Five as “an ideological category that largely seeks to define ‘happy’ or ‘successful’ according to the perceived interests and perspectives of the male characters in the stories” (30). In this context, his interpretation of marriage as “a public acknowledgement of the legitimacy and success of his sexual conquest and claim to her body” is somewhat convincing. However, it must be noted that Fleming fails to note the absence of the church as a place to celebrate the many protagonists’ nuptials. At the end of each story the reader is told that there is a large feast and people get together to celebrate; however, not once does this “public acknowledgement” take place in or become legitimized by the church.
through the *deus ex machina* that is the infernal hunt he witnesses. Boccaccio must mix the realistic and the supernatural to create in this tale a world that is unlike the normal world of the *Decameron*. He must resort to the fantastic in order to tear the medieval social fabric just enough to allow Nastagio’s new money to have value among a noble milieu.

The tale of Federigo degli Alberighi follows Nastagio’s *novella* and is grounded in the real world, a world of identifiable cause and effect and of social and economic limits.\(^{158}\) Federigo is of noble birth, falls in love with a noble (and at the beginning) married woman, Madonna Giovanna, and “acciò che egli l’amor di lei acquistar potesse, giostrava, armeggiava, faceva feste e donava, e il suo senza alcun ritegno spendeva; ma ella, non meno onesta che bella, niente di queste cose per lei fatte né di colui si curava che le faceva” (*Dec.* 5.9.6). If Nastagio, with his “immeasurable wealth,” was able to retreat from the city and continue his lavish way of living, Federigo loses everything except a little farm and a falcon that is one of the finest of its kind in the world.

 Eventually, Giovanna becomes a widow and finds herself alone in the world except for her young son. During a sojourn in the countryside not too far from Federigo’s farm, Giovanna’s son becomes extremely ill and claims he cannot get well unless he takes possession of Federigo’s falcon. As a result, Giovanna goes to Federigo and offers to dine with him as a token of appreciation for how much he has suffered in loving her

\(^{158}\) Fleming goes on to explain that this distinction is especially communicated by the economic context: “We do not know whether Federigo is as rich as Nastagio who inherits two fortunes, or if he spends more to impress his lady, but we do know that his wealth has definite, as opposed to more vague limits in Nastagio’s case, because the former becomes destitute in accordance with a fundamental economic law: to spend without measure and, simultaneously, to earn or acquire nothing signifies eventual ruin and poverty” (41).
excessively. Federigo praises her “worth” and admits that he loves her so much that he would spend just as he had spent in the past if he could.

In discussing the “economy of love” in the tale, Federigo’s extreme generosity, display and consumption are a concrete sign of his valor and courtesy, and they must be interpreted alongside the understanding of temperance as a cardinal virtue affecting even the new commercial society of Boccaccio’s time. Along these lines, I find a useful insight to reconnect to Branca’s discourse and the economic context of the *Decameron*’s fifth day: Federigo represents a fundamentally unsettled tension within this newly emerging capitalist society. One finds specifically a tension between the nobility and its ideals of generosity and magnanimity and the newly emerging bourgeois values of careful calculations and restraint. ¹⁵⁹ Thus one could read Madonna Giovanna as a counter-point to Federigo’s lack of moderation and bourgeois values in a commercial world; yet this comparison seems lacking. It is admissible that Giovanna possesses more temperance and perhaps more maturity; however, she is of the nobility and has no clear connections to commerce or that newly emerging capitalist society. Furthermore, Federigo does what is expected of him as an aristocrat in spending and in love, and exhausts his wealth; but, in the end, because of his noble nature and his generous, chivalrous spirit, he is rewarded with Giovanna’s hand in marriage. And here resides a parodic twist in Boccaccio’s mercantile background: contrary to mercantile ideology, which rewards astute merchants and mercantile practices, Boccaccio rewards those who first lose everything. At the same time, one sees here at work even a parodic rewriting of

¹⁵⁹ In particular, Fleming opines that “Federigo, then, represents a basic and unresolved tension at the very core of this newly emerging capitalist society, a tension between the chivalrous ideals of high mindedness and generosity on the one hand, and the bourgeois consecration of the values of shrewd calculation and moderation on the other” (39).
a fundamental Christian principle, according to which one must lose oneself to conquer eternal life (Matt. 10.34; 16.25; etc.). In these two tales, the male protagonists first lose all or almost all their wealth and, in the end, they receive it back, even more so than they first offered up—another rewriting of Christ’s words (Mark 29-30).

This tension seems more likely to be found on the hinge between the eighth and ninth stories rather than in either one of them. In Nastagio’s case, one finds a character in possession of a great, unspecified amount of new wealth (which comes from unidentifiable sources); yet he and his sudden inheritance, no matter how plentiful it is, cannot attract the attention of the nobility, much less the Traversari girl’s hand in marriage, without the story temporarily receding from reality and the exertion of exertion of otherworldly influences via an infernal supernatural vision.\(^\text{160}\) Nastagio prevails because he chances upon an opportunity – the otherworldly enters the human sphere, in a parodic twist of the sacred – and Nastagio finds a way to exploit it for his own purposes. In the case of Federigo, a nobleman aspires to court a noblewoman, exhausts his finite fortune in the process and ultimately prevails (after the lady loses her husband and son) because of his inherent greatness of spirit and noble lineage. We find that Nastagio is a prime example of what has become a virtual law of social behavior in medieval and early modern Europe: he imitates the nobility and seeks to enter its ranks, but this is not an

\(^{160}\) As some critics note, it could be the case that she simply does not like Nastagio. Yet, given the historical context and the nature of marriages among the upper classes, it does not seem likely that she would have much say in the matter. To this end, Hughes notes the role of women who did not initiate marriage but, rather, were always married through arrangements made by the men of the family: “La trasformazione del rapimento in matrimonio incrementò la forza civilizzatrice del percorso verso l’unione coniugale, ma non cambiò il dato di fatto che vedeva le spose come oggetti di un piano maschile, pedine da muovere in un processo controllato quasi esclusivamente da uomini” (145).
easy task in the real world of the *Decameron*.\textsuperscript{161}

5. Religious Parody and Conjugal Debt

Despite Nastagio’s tale offering such fertile ground for discussion of social themes in Boccaccio’s work, it also presents itself as one of the many examples of religious parody in Day Five’s *novelle*. It is noteworthy that the narrator of Nastagio’s tale presents it to the other ladies of the group as an *exemplum*, a short story designed to demonstrate a didactic and parodically religious moral lesson. In the end, the moral of the story is that women should not be “cruel” and negate potential lovers their sexual desires—a parodic theory of love forcefully proposed by Madonna Filippa in *Dec. 6.7*.\textsuperscript{162}

Thus, the story’s parodic probity can be interpreted as a series of elements that are perniciously mixed up with courtly ideology through the use of Christian tradition in a secularized way.\textsuperscript{163} Hence, Boccaccio’s subversive intent comes through most obviously. Indeed, the institution of marriage itself is treated in such a way throughout the day that the closing story can easily be read as a parodic crown to a series of nine preceding stories, all of which, in one way or another, include a critique and even a parody of matrimony and its social and religious function. One possible exception among the first nine tales would be that of Federigo degli Alberighi, who always gives freely while

\textsuperscript{161} In his discussion of increased availability of disposable wealth in the Early Renaissance and the greater access of the society’s lower ranks to markets with cheaper goods, Goldthwaite mentions this tendency to imitate: “Historians have taken it as virtually a law of social behavior throughout the history of medieval and early modern Europe that wealthy non-nobles imitate the ways of the nobility and seek to enter into its ranks” (3).

\textsuperscript{162} Kamber concludes that under these suppositions, “Now, a god that encourages sexual freedom and castigates chastity, no matter how powerful he is, is not the Christian God” (62).

\textsuperscript{163} Baldi observes that Christian morality is “maliziosamente contaminata con l’ideologia cortese, attraverso l’assimilazione dei testi ‘liturgici’ secondo uno spirito laico” (24).
receiving nothing in return, and who, at the end, being left with nothing, receives freely what at first he wanted to obtain through material expenses, according to a mercantile theory of exchange that becomes therefore debunked.

Dioneo, the narrator of the final tale, has the privilege to recount any story he so pleases, and in the final novella of the fifth day, he changes course somewhat. Although the two protagonists are married and there is a happy ending, the ending is not a marriage celebration as in the preceding stories. From the beginning of the tale, one finds that Pietro di Vinciolo took a wife,

forse piú per ingannare altrui e diminuire la generale opinione di lui avuta da tutti i perugini, che per vaghezza che egli n’avesse, prese moglie; e fu la fortuna conforme al suo appetito in questo modo, che la moglie la quale egli prese era una giovane compressa, di pel rosso e accesa, la quale due mariti piú tosto che uno avrebbe voluti, là dove ella s’avvenne a uno che molto piú a altro che a lei l’animo aveva disposto. (Dec. 5.10.6-7)

When she comes to understand Pietro’s true nature, the young woman seeks out the advice of an elderly woman who is considered a saint by most people in the community. The woman advises the young girl not to waste the sexual opportunities of her youth. One night, while Pietro is away, his wife invites over a young man to dine and to give her what her husband will not. As she prepares the table, Pietro returns home, she hides her

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164 In the introduction to the fourth tale of the first day, Dioneo states: “Amorose donne, se io ho bene la ‘ntenzione di tutte compresa, noi siamo qui per dovere a noi medesimi novellando piacere; e per ciò, solamente che contro a questo non si faccia, estimo a ciascuno dovere esser licio (e così ne disse la nostra reina, poco avanti, che fosse) quella novella dire che piú crede che possa dilettare” (Dec. 1.4.3). Consequently, he is granted the privilege to deviate from the theme of the day and tell whatever story he would like.
lover and Pietro relates that the friend whom he was visiting caught his wife hiding her own lover.

In order to conceal her own infidelity and guilty feelings, Pietro’s wife condemns the unfaithful woman, and unleashes a fervid if hypocritical diatribe emphasizing several important qualities of matrimony:

Che maladetta sia l’ora che ella nel mondo venne ed ella altressí che viver si lascia, perfidissima e rea femina che ella dee essere, universal vergogna e vituperio di tutte le donne di questa terra: la quale, gittata via la sua onestà e la fede promessa al suo marito e l'onor di questo mondo, lui, che è cosí fatto uomo e cosí onorevole cittadino e che cosí bene la trattava, per un altro uomo non s’è vergognata di vituperare e se medesima insieme con lui. (Dec. 5.10.44)

Shortly thereafter, her own infidelity is found out when her lover makes a noise and gives away his place of hiding. Pietro criticizes his wife’s hypocrisy, yet is pleased to have the handsome fellow in his grasp. As a result, he tolerates his wife’s opprobrium in which she ultimately concludes that he looks after her in material things, but he does not give her the attention that a husband rightfully owes his wife, namely, sexual intercourse.

It is at this point that I will propose, in the schema of the economic interpretation of this chapter, that the idea of “conjugal” debt becomes quite important to understanding what unfolds among Pietro, his wife, and the young man. Conjugal debt originally derived from Paul’s epistles to the Corinthians, and it was also a fundamental tenet in medieval canon law. In essence, the debt had to do with the notion that both husband and
wife have a duty to meet each others’ sexual needs. Often, the concept was a major part of canonical discussions regarding marital sex.\textsuperscript{165}

Given the persistent presence of religious parody throughout the matrimonial happenings of Day Five and Boccaccio’s experiences studying law, it seems plausible that he might be creating a parodic theological metaphor here.\textsuperscript{166} Even if most laymen might have been unaware of the arguments and distinctions made in canon law, it is possible that Boccaccio was familiar not only with Paul’s opinion on the matter of conjugal debt but perhaps even the finer distinctions and subtle arguments of theologians and canonists. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes: “Uxori vir debitum reddat: similiter autem et uxor viro. Mulier sui corporis potestatem non habet sed vir. Similiter autem et vir sui corporis potestatem non habet sed mulier” (1 Cor. 7.3-4).\textsuperscript{167}

If at the beginning of the tale one sees that Pietro fails to render this debt unto his wife, she ultimately looks elsewhere to find satisfaction. When caught, the wife berates Pietro for ignoring her and demands what, according to Paul, is her due. Pietro finally grows tired of his wife’s criticism, and decides to give her due, but not by means of his

\textsuperscript{165} In the article “The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law,” Makowski traces various legal interpretations of the Pauline notion of sexual relations in marriage. Her essay’s specific focus is the concept of conjugal debt, that is, the notion that both husband and wife had a duty to perform sexually at the request of their mate. Originally derived from Paul, I Corinthians 7.3-6, this equal opportunity concept formed a cornerstone for canonical discussions of marital sex (129).

\textsuperscript{166} In the study “The Concept of Debt in The Shipman’s Tale,” Adams describes the theological metaphor of debt found in that tale. Although he refers to a metaphor “whereby sin and the penance with which one compensates for sin are considered ‘debts’ to be discharged to God,” and not in the sense of conjugal debt, Adams believes that the story’s roots come directly from the Decameron. In establishing the significance of the language of debt in the “The Shipman’s Tale,” the critic points to Boccaccio’s understanding and use of the concept: “If, as now seems likely, Chaucer was freely adapting three folktales he found in Sercambi and Boccaccio (and not merely translating, as Spargo believed, a lost Old French original), this elaborate system of wordplay based on ‘debt’ would assume considerable significance, since Chaucer himself probably added it in its entirety to what he found in the Italian stories” (89).

\textsuperscript{167} “Let the husband render to his wife what is her due, and likewise the wife to her husband. A wife has no authority over her body, but her husband; likewise the husband has no authority over his body, but his wife. You must not refuse each other, except perhaps by consent…” (1 Cor. 7.3-4).
own body but rather through an intermediary, the young man’s body, which he also exploits for his own pleasure. Thus this last tale is highly parodic of matrimony and the debt that husbands owe their wives and that wives owe their husbands. In spite of its obscene and jovial nature, the tale subverts the institution of matrimony viewed as a contract between two families—or even a business contract, considering the importance of the dowry and gifts in wedding calculations—and also viewed as a debt that each spouse has to pay to the other.\textsuperscript{168} The narrator enters at the very last to inform the reader: “Dopo la cena quello che Pietro si divisasse a sodisfacimento di tutti e tre m'è uscito di mente; so io ben cotanto, che la mattina vegnente infino in su la Piazza fu il giovane, non assai certo qual piú stato si fosse la notte o moglie o marito, accompagnato” (Dec. 5.10.63). In the end, the notion of the conjugal debt is completely lost and a parody of Paul’s ideas results. Whereas marital sex to the apostle was a safeguard to human weakness, Pietro, unwilling to render that which his wife exacted, exploits a situation arranged by his wife to satisfy himself and his wife as well, thereby rendering the idea of conjugal debt ludicrous. For the ambiguous ending by the storyteller only emphasizes, via irony, who rendered what to whom, and who exacted “payment” from whom; whether or not the husband and his wife even engaged in marital intercourse seems to be out of the question.

In conclusion, we can return once again to Branca’s enthusiasm and insight in viewing the masterpiece as “l’epopea dei mercatanti”; in fact, he goes far in painting a vivid and realistic historical background against which early modern and medieval merchants did business and expanded the horizons of their world. He successfully

\textsuperscript{168} Days Six (perhaps notably in the person and acts of Madonna Filippa) and especially Seven, Eight, and Nine further demonstrate this theory—that is, they debunk matrimony as an exchange and contract—thus paving the way to Day Ten in which matrimony can be seen for the first time in the work as a free gift.
sutures that mercantile and commercial background with the world of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, but he does not go beyond the idea of mercantile interests to understand the interactions of that world and their economic basis in the lives of so many protagonists, who, while outside the mercantile world, displayed but also parodied mercantile exchanges, losses, and gains. To be sure, merchants and mercantile interests are present in some *novelle* of Boccaccio’s medieval masterpiece, but these men and their interests are not the center of the writer’s attention. Rather, Boccaccio interprets his world with economic explanations and ties his commercial knowledge to the social, cultural and religious happenings of his day. Thus, one is left with a world in which geography is set by the extent to which commercial vessels have enlarged the frontier, in which social comparisons are made by emphasizing consumption styles appropriate to certain classes and in which sexual transgressions can be read as an economic and theological metaphor of debt. If the *Decameron* is an epic, it is not exclusively a mercantile epic of merchants and mercantile goods, but rather an economic epic based on exchange that affects all aspects of human interrelationships, including the exchange of promises and vows between a man and a woman. As an economic and mercantile transaction of a special kind, therefore, matrimony may no longer be viewed as a sacred bond, and it’s open to all the possibilities of human interrelationships: desire, jealousy, deception, and exploitation, as the tales of the next four days illustrate.
CHAPTER 8

QUESTIONING THE HAPPILY-EVER-AFTER:
MARRIAGE IN THE *DECAMERON* AFTER DAY FIVE

After reading the first nine stories of Day Five, Boccaccio’s readers could reasonably wonder: “Does the end justify the means?” The day’s protagonists must face a minefield of misfortunes in order to arrive at a dubious, matrimonial happy ending. The forces that negatively affect the protagonists before they can get married range in form and severity. On the more frightening end of the spectrum, Cimone murders Efigenia’s husband-to-be and turns her massive wedding celebration into a mass homicide (*Dec.* 5.1.67-9). Although it does not apparently arrive at the point of bloodshed, Giannole and Minghino start an armed riot in the neighborhood as they fight over Agnesa (5.5). On the other, less violent end of the spectrum, Ricciardo and Caterina are caught having pre-marital sex in her father’s home. Caterina’s father simply forces the young man to marry the girl. The improvident seducer of *Dec.* 5.3, Pietro, is tortured by his paramour’s father. Many other of the day’s protagonist face life-changing ordeals and must undergo perilous journeys and agonizing punishments in order to arrive at the matrimonial denouement.

Seen in this negative and destructive framework, the answer to that valid question—“Does the matrimonial end, justify the violent, coercive means?”—could ultimately depend on whether life after the marriage celebration is happy or not. Boccaccio as author of the *Filocolo* spent the entire fifth book of the work describing
how elated the married couple was and how their union generated peace and felicity for them and everyone around them. Boccaccio the narrator of the first nine tales of the Decameron’s fifth day only informs the reader that there is a celebration and that they live happily ever after. However, Dioneo’s final tale does provide a look at life after the celebration, and it is not a happy life. One finds that Pietro da Vinciolo marries an amorous young woman in order to use her as a screen to make others believe that he in fact is not homosexual. Their married life is in crisis. The husband ignores the physical and emotional needs of his wife, and continues his former life through extramarital affairs. The wife disdains her husband for not loving her as he should, and not paying what Saint Paul understood as a necessary “conjugal debt” that spouses owe to one another. In the course of the story, the only way their marriage becomes bearable and “happy” is when a third male party is invited into the exclusive, sacramental relationship, to please both of them sexually at the same time.

Boccaccio cannot leave the topic of matrimony and marital fidelity alone for long. At the beginning of Day Six, two servants, Licisca and Tindaro, explode onto the scene and disrupt the order of Queen Elissa’s reign. The topic of their heated disagreement is whether or not young women enter into marriage as virgins or whether pre-marital sex is more common. Licisca chides Tindaro for his ignorance and for naively believing that young women do not act on their sexual desires before, during and after marriage, whether with their husbands or not. She concludes: “Alla fè di Cristo, ché debbo sapere quello che io mi dico quando io giuro: io non ho vicina che pulcella ne sia andata a marito, e anche delle maritate so io ben quante e quali beffe elle fanno a’ mariti […]” (Dec. 6.Intro.10). Of course, Dioneo will take up this subject during his seventh day rule,
but even before the day dedicated to the numerous ways wives plot and commit adultery, Day Six offers up a couple of interesting examples of marriages gone awry (Dec. 6.3, 6.7). In Days Eight and Nine, too, one continues to see matrimony displayed and described in a frail, breakable, and often broken state, and in a negative and destructive framework (8.3, 8.6, 8.8, 8.9, 9.3, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, 9.9, 9.10). The goal of the present chapter is to analyze Boccaccio’s numerous portrayals of marriage in the days following Day Five. If tales one through nine of Day Five leave the reader wondering how happy married life really can be after the celebration, Dioneo’s tale at 5.10 and many tales following it up to the tenth day, indicate that wives and husbands do not enjoy the happily-ever-after announced at the end of the first nine tales of Decameron 5, their marriages are often troubled, and that both sexes will do just about anything in their power to cheat on their spouses and violate the conjugal bond.169

1. Ready Replies, Husbands and Wives in Decameron 6

The first married woman of Day Six utilizes quick wit and a prompt response to put an end to ineffectual storytelling. While Madonna Oretta and a group of other nobles are traveling outside of Florence, a knight offers to tell her a story to help pass the time. Filomena makes clear that Oretta is the wife of Geri Spina and that she is “una gentile e costumata donna e ben parlante” (Dec. 6.1.5). Ultimately, she uses this last trait to gently inform the knight that he should stop his story, by commenting that his metaphorical

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169 I am in agreement with Dino Cervigni, which will be expounded in volume 21 of Annali d’italianistica, regarding the separation of the first nine days of storytelling and the tenth day. The first nine days act as the pars destruens. In this framework, marriage is almost always treated, at best, in a questionable, and, at worst, a negative and destructive framework. Day Ten, and its acts of generosity and magnificence, represent the pars costruens. In this context, the institution and sacrament of marriage are view predominantly in a positive light, and constructive framework.
horse (that is, his storytelling ability) are too rough to make for a pleasant ride. In this case, a married woman uses her skill with words in an everyday situation that does not call her honor or fidelity into question.\textsuperscript{170} No question about marital happiness is at stake here, and yet the tale points out how easily the bonds bringing together men and women—whether married or not—can be broken, and the extent to which \textit{i leggiadri motti}, or just \textit{motti}—human speech—can make these fundamental human relationships smooth, pleasant, unbearable, or deceitful.

The next relevant example in the day comes when Lauretta narrates the tale of Monna Nonna de’ Pulci and the bishop of Florence. In this tale, one finds yet another example of a lascivious clergyman who willingly seek to challenge, and perhaps even corrupt a marriage. In the first part of the tale, we hear that a Catalan gentleman, called Messer Dego della Ratta, marshal for King Robert, takes advantage of the miserliness of a nephew of the Bishop of Fiesole and succeeds in sleeping with the nephew’s wife, paying the husband with almost worthless coins that he had gilded. The Bishop hears about the whole matter but does nothing about it. Shortly afterward, as the Bishop and Dego della Ratta ride a horse and encounter, amidst other ladies, Nonna de’ Pulci, a beautiful lady, the Bishop challenges the lady, asking her, in public, whether she could conquer Dego. The lady promptly rebuts the indecent suggestion, while shaming also the Bishop for not having done justice to the affront of the wife of his brother. She thus rejects the Bishop’s insinuation, and sees such a proposition made in public as an affront

\textsuperscript{170} Seeing a sexual imagery in the metaphorical expression—“portare a cavallo” (6.1.6)—employed by the knight, some critics, including Picone, read into the verbal exchange as rejection of a potential suitor and/or sexual encounter: “Grazie a questo elegante motto il cavaliere viene esautorato dal ruolo che si era attribuito di novellatore; ma, come abbiamo visto, il suo ridimensionamento è più radicale, implicando sia l’aspetto sociale (è oramai un cavaliere senza cavallo...) sia quello sentimentale (il suo ‘trottare’ è indizio di una pratica erotica impetuosa e tutt’altro che piacevole)” (Leggiadri motti 167).
to her honor. As a result, she defends her “onestà” as a married woman, and quips that she is not interested, since one cannot trust a man who paid in false coin to sleep with the Bishop’s own family member. Nonna de’ Pulci rejects this instance of a sexual advance, although her answer – “Messere, e’ forse non vincerebbe me; ma vorrei buona moneta (Dec. 6.3.10) – may be open to more than one reading. Does Nonna de’ Pulci intimate that she would be amenable, but only with genuine florins? Or, as it seems much more probable, is her mention of genuine florins a way to reproach both men of their deceptive and despicable ways? Finally, the tale points out how easily marital union can be broken—even by five-hundred worthless coins—and well prepared women must be ready to defend their matrimony.

By far the most compelling tale related to matrimony in Day Six is that of Madonna Filippa. This novella solidly reconnects with both the final tale of Day Five and with Licisca’s commentary on the natural tendency of women to cheat on their husbands. Filippa’s story offers up yet another view of what married life is like, not leading up to the wedding, as in Day Five, but in the post-wedding relationship. Filippa is caught in flagrante delicto by her husband, Rinaldo de’ Pugliesi, in the arms of her lover, Lazzarino de’ Guazzagiotri. Rinaldo’s first reaction was to kill them both, but for fear of what might happen to him, he decides to let the law handle her. According to the tale, the Pratese punishment for an adulterous wife or a wife (but also for any woman who sold her body as a prostitute) was to be put to death. Because of her beauty and laudable manners, the judge feels compassion for her and urges her to ponder her answer carefully because he can condemn her only if she admits to her sin (Dec. 6.7.12). Filippa

\[^{171}\text{Branca suggests an additional explanation for Nonna’s quip: Boccaccio’s critique of the well-known ‘avara povertà di Catalogna’ (Par. 8.77), which Boccaccio criticizes in other works as well (Dec. 6.3.10n3).}\]
boldly confesses her actions but refuses to accept that she is a criminal.\textsuperscript{172} She frames her self-defense in a mercantile vocabulary of the tale’s sexual economy. Her husband admits that she always gave herself to him fully and willingly, and if we think in terms of the conjugal debt parody of \textit{Dec.} 5.10, she always rendered the debt when it was exacted by her spouse.

But Filippa, like so many other female characters of Boccaccio’s work, has more than a little love to go around. In her own words, she has nothing less than a love surplus that she is not willing to waste or throw away to the dogs.\textsuperscript{173} The townspeople, no doubt populated with numerous merchants who would eagerly welcome a surplus of this sort, first laugh, then shout in chorus that Filippa is right. The \textit{podestà}, too, is in agreement and changes the law such that only wives who cheat on their husbands for money can be punished with death. Thus, the reader is left to believe that in a way, adultery has been legalized, and that if a married woman can prove that she has a surplus of love that her husband cannot handle, she is free to make use of it through extramarital relationships rather than losing or wasting it.

At a glance, and in the euphoric moment of Filippa’s life being spared and the triumph of the swift and convincing defense, critics tend to accept this conclusion.

\textsuperscript{172} She thus echoes many other circumstances, such as: the words of Masetto (\textit{Dec.} 3.1) when she posits that women naturally have a tremendous sexual appetite and can easily please multiple men in satisfying their own desire; or the experience of Rustico, unable to satisfy Alibech’s desire to put the devil back into Hell.

\textsuperscript{173} A propos of the love surplus, Filippa states before the court and people of Prato: “Adunque’ segui 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 quell che gli avanza? Debbolo io gittare a’ cani? Non è egli molto meglio servire un gentile uomo che più che sé m’ama, che lasciarlo perdere o guastare?” (\textit{Dec.} 6.7.17). Boccaccio, ever of the merchant mentality, and well knowing his majority of his mercantile Florentine audience, masterfully brings to his writing metaphors and vocabulary that easily relate to them. We are reminded by Branca that this passage and the relationships described among countless other couples in the \textit{Decameron} were conceived by a writer with surplus, supply and demand, as well as “esperienza diretta del meccanismo usato nei porti per i depositi, le garanzie, gli anticipi” (\textit{Epopea} 14).
However, the reader might just as readily feel a bit like Filippa’s husband at the end of the story. He is confused by the bizarre outcome of the case (“… rimaso di così matta impresa confuso”), and perhaps even more so by the implications for the society around him. On this sixth day of Boccaccio’s recreation of the medieval Christian world, the most prominent example of marriage undermines social order, and the exclusive sacramental bond between husband and wife is seriously questioned. From an exclusive, sacramental contract between two people, Boccaccio the parodist breaks apart the nuptial bond and establishes an entire adulterous economy in Dec. 6.7. This tale, along with 5.10, sets the stage for the most serious undermining of the marriage’s value within medieval society. In 5.10, what seems to be a one-time fix is reached through the ménage à trois orchestrated by Pietro da Vinciolo. In 6.7, Filippa wins the battle in court, but a substantial and intriguing question mark remains: what will Filippa’s husband do and what are the implications for society as a whole now that all wives are free to use their “surplus” as they wish? Thus, at the beginning of Day Six, unmarried young ladies are acknowledged to have pre-marital affairs; now, the seventh tale, told by Filostrato, legally allows married women to have extra-marital affairs with no consequences if they do so for no remuneration. After the many trials and sufferings of the male and female characters of the first nine tales of Day Five to achieve matrimonial unity, the reader now finds out that unity may be set asunder with no consequences whatsoever. The stage is thus set for the deceptions of the next three days of storytelling.

It seems especially important to remember the creation of male and female protagonists and the way they get along in the context of Decameron Day Six. The reader must always keep in mind that Boccaccio names his masterpiece after Saint
Ambrose’s *Hexameron*, and he seeks to rewrite the creation of the world through the<br>brigata’s affabulation. According to Genesis chapter one, God created land animals, and<br>his greatest creature of all, the only one that was made in his image. God saw all the<br>things that he had made on the sixth day and they were very good. Peace, albeit a very<br>short peace, ensued for the first man and woman, and the first husband and wife. At<br>precisely the moment of Boccaccio’s sixth day, Boccaccio, too, decides to draw our<br>attention to husbands and wives and they way they treat each other.<br><br>The first nine tales of Day Five repetitiously introduce the idea that peace<br>between man and woman can be achieved and maintained simply by holding a wedding<br>celebration. The final tale of that day undermines the peace-giving potential of<br>matrimony. This tale, 5.10, precedes the outburst of the servants who introduce the reality<br>found in many of the married protagonists in the stories prior to the fifth day. It is a<br>reality according to which spouses recognize from the outset that marriage will be<br>unhappy and that they must utilize whatever means necessary to find satisfaction, sexual<br>and otherwise, even if it means finding partners outside of marriage. Madonna Filippa<br>confirms this need, and by legitimizing, and indeed, legalizing a certain kind of adultery,<br>her tale sets the reader up for an entire day of storytelling in which wives commit<br>adultery for a number of reasons.<br><br>2. Decameron 7: The Married World Turned Upside Down<br><br>In the context of Boccaccio’s creation versus that of Genesis, one must recall that<br>the seventh day was a peaceful day of rest for God the Creator. Heaven and Earth were<br>perfect, furnished and populated by animals and man. Despite this perfection, one reads
in the sixth day of creation, in the second narrative of the creation of man and woman, about God’s decision to provide man with a helper. After naming all of the animals, Adam still finds himself alone. Thus, God puts the man to sleep, removes one of his ribs, and creates from it the first woman and Adam’s wife, Eve. God puts Adam into a perfect, deep sleep in order to create a more perfect world for him through the perfect companion: a woman, Eve, who was to be his wife. In the seventh day of a rewriting of creation, Boccaccio, too, brings man and woman, husband and wife, to the center of attention. However, it is anything but a day of peace. In every novella men are found to be insufficient for their spouses—whether emotionally, sexually, or physically—and wives break a primordial, sacramental bond to find sexual satisfaction through extramarital affairs.

On the whole, critics neglect to note the parallel of the days of Genesitic creation and those of Boccaccio’s recreation. One of the most striking parallels can be found in the presence and parody of the sleep in the context of the creation of woman from Adam’s rib. In Genesis, God puts Adam to sleep in order to generate the perfect companion for him. Throughout Day Seven, sleep and the place for rest par excellence, the bedroom, is a common setting. However, slumber for the men and husbands of the day creates a venue, not for the creation and perfection of a spouse, but rather, the recreation and sexual delight of the wife. This wife’s deception is almost discovered at night, while she lies at rest with her husband. Her lover mistakenly arrivers the wrong

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174 Battistini does draw our attention to the presence and potential meaning of the dark in the day’s narrations: “L’oscurità è una determinazione sottolineata nella sede più rilevata dei sommari delle novelle che ‘tutte nella fronte portan segnato quello che esse dentro dal loro seno nascose tengono (Concl. Aut. 19). Qui in quattro caso (novelle 1, 4, 5, 8) si avverte esplicitamente che l’azione avviene di ‘notte,’ e quand’anche non sia precisato in capite, come nelle novelle settima e decima, il lettore lo apprende nel corso del racconto…” (190).
evening and knocks at the door, hoping to arrange for yet another amorous encounter. The husband’s simplicity and excessive faith in numerous prayers are the root cause of his wife’s dissatisfaction with him. He spends too much time at church and at work to realize his wife’s needs and ultimately trickery. However, he fails even to catch her lover red-handed also because of his groggy state resulting from sleep. He is surprised initially, but the clever wife convinces him it is simply a spirit that has “awoken” her a number of times before. The simple-minded husband chants several orations to make the “ghost” go away and to allow for the lover and his wife to continue their relationship.

In the case of the fourth *novella*, the wife herself induces the sleep through which her deceptions are made possible. The husband of this tale, Tofano, jealously guards his wife, even though initially she has given him no particular reason to be suspicious of her. The wife disdains him for the baseless jealousy and retaliates by having an extramarital affair. She knows all too well that her husband has a drinking problem, and she uses it against him to induce sleep and to buy herself time to spend with her lover. The husband’s sleep is now brought upon by an unhappy wife rather than God, and has been reduced to coerced, planned inebriation. Instead of the Creator putting a man to sleep to create a loving companion, an unhappy spouse takes advantage of her husband’s alcoholic weakness to be with her lover during his stupor. Eventually, the husband finds out her deception, feigns drunkenness, and locks her out of the house when she pays a visit to her paramour. The clever wife wins in the end, and tricks the husband into letting her in. She then locks him out, and convinces the neighbors and her family that he is a worthless, jealous drunk, who in his inebriated state and sleep dreams up false, dishonorable scenarios about her. The centrality of man’s slumber to the extramarital
activity can also be found in the fifth and eighth tales. In the former case, the husband is baffled when his wife reveals to him that while he sleeps a priest comes and pleasures her in the night. In the latter case, the wife communicates with her lover while lying in bed with her sleeping husband by means of a thread tied to her toe that dangles out the window.

At the beginning of the fifth tale, Fiammetta announces in a legalistic language that wives of jealous husbands are entitled to “self-defense” by means of cheating on their spouses. If Madonna Filippa justifies adultery on the basis of “surplus love,” Fiammetta here defends the wives of the seventh day and their extramarital affairs because of excessive jealousy from husbands: “Per che conchiudendo, ciò che una donna fa a un marito geloso a torto, per certo non condennare ma commendare si dovrebbe” (Dec. 7.5.6). This sort of logic entertains the brigata throughout the ten days of storytelling such that they fulfill their inaugural desire and mission to enjoy themselves. However, in the context of Boccaccio’s recreation of society amid the turmoil and divine punishment of the plague, can the ten young people or the reader really accept this sort of proposal as the foundation on which a new society can be built? How could the deceptive, dishonest treatment of husbands and wives found throughout Day Six sustain a new civilization? Emilia assures us that the wife of the first tale meets with her paramour on other occasion (7.1.30). In 7.2, Filostrato defines the marital foundation of their society, and by extension, I believe, the entire society itself, as one of continuous deception that permeates all levels of it:

175 In particular, she states: “E se ogni cosa avessero i componitori delle leggi guardata, giudicio che in questo essi dovessero alle donne non altra pena aver costituita che essi costituirono a colui che alcuno offende sé difendendo: per ciò che i gelosi sono insidiatori della vita delle giovani donne e diligentissimi cercatori della lor morte” (Dec. 7.5.3).
“Carissime donne mie, elle son tante le beffe che gli uomini vi fanno, e spezialmente i mariti, che, quando alcuna volta avviene che donna niuna alcuna al marito ne faccia, voi non dovreste solamente esser contente che ciò fosse avvenuto o di risaperlo o d’udirlo dire a alcuno, ma il dovreste voi medesime andar dicendo per tutto, acciò che per gli uomini si conosca che, se essi sanno, e le donne d’altra parte anche sanno....” (Dec. 7.2.3)

At the level of the storytelling, this attitude entertains the young people, but among the storytellers themselves, it does not seem to lead them to happiness. Despite telling of and praising illicit, extramarital relationships, the young people of the frame, we are told, maintain their onestà. Furthermore, even if they seem to accept an affirmation such as Filostrato’s as a feasible basis for a new social edifice, this sort of philosophy does not seem to lead to any real happiness for them or hope for the future. In the venue par excellence for gleaning the feelings of the frame narrators, that of the ballate, the reader almost inevitably finds mention of unhappy love pursuits and even marriages. The brigata seems unsure of how to find felicity and peace in the first nine days of the work.

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176 The questioning of sacred institutions and the undermining of social order characterize is, in my opinion, the “defect” criticized by Emilia at the end of the ninth day. At the end of Day Nine, the brigata recognizes that laughing about others’ misfortunes is defective in the scope of their voyage as a recreation of the world. As a result, Panfilo requires them to emend the storytelling tenor of the first nine days and to recount tales of true liberality and magnificence in Day Ten.

177 In Emilia’s inaugural ballata, there is no love pursuit at all (and perhaps she has given up on it?). Instead, she sings about her desire for her own beauty. In the second ballata, Pampinea sings of contentment for having found a new love after sighs and bitter pain (about which she does not want to speak). Even though she has found the object of desire and is content to laud him, the love is not apparently reciprocated: “E quel che ’n questo m’è sommo piacere / è ch’io gli piaccio quanto egli a me piace” (Dec. 2.Concl.15). From the beginning of the third ballata, Lauretta underlines her disconsolate lamentations that result from her unhappiness in love. She feels despised and unrecognized in her present relationship, and sadly reflects on her former love and husband who has passed away. Now she is unhappily married, and wishes that she could have died rather than live in her present matrimonial state. Filostrato is sorrowful, and weeps from the outset of his Day Four song because he was betrayed under the
Boccaccio seems to be tugging at this imperfection among the unmarried men and women of the brigata throughout the seventh day of his work. They live honestly and tell stories amid various earthly paradises, however, no state of ataraxy – utter carelessness about their historical and personal condition – is ever achieved by them. The tremendous burden of the historical moment, that of the plague, weighs down on them, and tests their ability to recreate an improved, superior society. Critics do well in noting the important macrotextual role of Day Seven and especially how strongly it reconnects with the Proemio of the work and the plight of enamored women in Boccaccio’s society. At the beginning of the third tale, Elissa interrupts her story, becoming the spokesperson for Boccaccio the Narrator, and vents his anger and disappointment toward the misbehavior of the clergy while draws the reader’s attention to the guasto mondo’s present punishment.\(^{178}\) Frate Rinaldo’s subsequent eagerness to disrobe and seduce his comare with her baby in hand is a symptom of the broken,

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178 "‘Ahi vitupero del guasto mondo! Essi non si vergognano d’apparir grassi, d’apparir coloriti nel viso, d’apparir morbidi ne’ vestimenti e in tutte le cose loro, e non come colombi ma come galli tronfi colla crestà levata pettoruti procedono: e che è peggio (lasciamo stare d’aver le lor celle piene d’alberelli di lattovari e d’ungenti colmi, di scatole di varii confetti piene, d’ampolle e di guastadette con acque lavorate e preziosissimi traboccati, in tanto che non celle di frati ma botteghe di speziali o d’unguentarii appaiono più tosto a’ riguardanti)..." (Dec. 7.3.8-10).
diseased world in which the brigata narrates. In the fifth tale, Fiammetta’s
aforementioned defense of wives with jealous husbands continues with her emphatic
description of women’s isolated state that was described by Boccaccio the Narrator in the
book’s introduction. They are always locked inside the home and burdened by the
demands of their husband’s and families. Everyone else, in her opinion, deserves and
gets a break from their daily toil—from field hands and builders to politicians and
clergymen—but women get no such satisfaction.

Fiammetta brings up Genesis and invokes God himself as the last example of a
being who deserved and received a break from his labor: “… come fé Idio che il di
settimo da tutte le sue fatiche si riposò” (Dec. 7.5.4). In this seventh day of their
storytelling, matrimony is more often than not referred to as a prison rather than a happy
and peaceful relationship as the tales of Day Five might have us believe. Soon after,
Fiammetta describes it as a confinement after her defense of wives who cheat on jealous
husbands: “E così ingelosito tanta guardia ne prendeva e si stretta la tenea, che forse assai
son di quegli che a capital pena son dannati, che non sono da’ pregionieri con tanta
guardia servati” (Dec. 7.5.8). In the case of the jealous husbands, by the end of each tale
(7.4, 7.5, 7.8) they are bested and made cuckolds by their wives. The endings of these
three novelle embody a critical point turning point in Boccaccio’s treatment of marriage
among the Centonovelle.179

Ironically, whereas here Fiammetta criticizes husbands for their jealousy, in her ballad at the end of the
Decameron she will admit her unhappiness in love results from her own jealousy, warning all ladies against
any attempts at taking her beloved away from her: “Per Dio, dunque, ciascuna / donna pregata sia che non
s’attenti / di farmi in ciò oltraggio; / ché, se ne fia nessuna / che con parole o cenni o blandimenti / in
questo in mio dannaggio / cerchi o procuri, s’io il risapraggio, / se io non sia svisata, / pianger farolle amara
tal follia” (Dec. 10.Concl.14). Even though this turning point takes place specifically with regard to the
representation of marriage within the tales themselves, Fiammetta’s despair underlines that no such order or
state of ataraxy has been achieved in the world of the brigata. Campbell makes note of this contrast and a
resulting sense of ambiguity, especially as evinced by the tenth tale of Day Ten: “The tenth day sees a

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To be sure, up until this point, the reader has witnessed numerous adulterous relationships. In 2.10, a corsair abducts the unhappy wife of Ricciardo di Chinzica, satisfies her sexual desires through an adulterous relationship, and marries her. In Day Three, several wives and husbands use “industria” to initiate and maintain extramarital affairs. In Day Four, Guigielmo Rossiglione’s wife is happily involved in an affair until her husband finds out and murders him, feeding his heart to her. In Day Five, as mentioned above, all is happy in married life until the reader witnesses a married couple in medias res in 5.10, where adultery again becomes a central element to the tale. In the sixth day, Filippa wins her case in court amid the laughter of the townspeople, but one cannot help but wonder about the future of her husband, confused about “così matta impresa” (6.7.19), and, even more so, about the future of their life as a couple.

One way or another, extramarital affairs up until Day Seven, have depended upon the ignorance or naivety of the cuckolded spouse. On the whole, this is still the case in Day Seven, and the range of forms of unawareness is comical to say the least. Whether an inept husband is scraping clean the interior of a large jar (7.2), or an elderly spouse impotently watches his wife pursue love’s delights from a tree top (7.9), stupidity and/or gullibility help facilitate wives’ cheating in this day. However, Boccaccio makes a bold move when he goes beyond this typical formula and has three sets of married couples make long-term agreements to cheat on each other with impunity to allow for stability in their marriages. In Dec. 7.4, Boccaccio daringly presents husbands who allow for their wives to do, in their extramarital conduct, whatever they please, with whomever they like. These husbands recognize their inability not only to satisfy their wives, but to
maintain happily and harmoniously the seemingly impossible demands of the sacramental bond of matrimony.

By the end of 7.4, Tofano recapitulates and agrees never to be jealous again. However, he does so only on the condition that she maneuver her affairs in such a way that he does not realize it and she be discreet about it, allowing her to pursue whatever delight she wants: “… e tanto procacciò, che egli con buona pace riebbe la donna a casa sua, alla quale promise di mai più non esser geloso: e oltre a ciò le diè licenzia che ogni suo piacer facesse, ma si saviamente, che egli non se ne avvedesse” (Dec. 7.4.30). In 7.6, Boccaccio cautiously renders the wording somewhat more vague, but the effect remains the same such that the wife is “quasi licenziata a’ suoi piaceri” (Dec. 7.5.59). Finally, in the eighth novella, the wife uses her wisdom to avoid danger and “s’aperse la via a poter fare nel tempo avvenire ogni suo piacere, senza paura alcuna più aver del marito” (Dec. 7.8.50). Whether in verbal agreement as in the first of the three, or tacitly, as in the latter two tales, at the end of each story, an agreement is reached such that the husband accepts or at least indirectly allows for his wife to continue cheating on him in order to find peace in an otherwise unhappy marital setup.

3. From “peccato celato” to “moderata operazione”: The Beffa as Key to Conjugal Corruption

Critics of Day Eight inevitably focus on its comicalness, the “toscanità” or “fiorentinità” of the beffa, and the theatrical and literary traditions that derive from this day of storytelling.\(^\text{180}\) Muscetta mentions in passing the “quartetto interconiugale” that

\(^{180}\) Muscetta refers to the day as “[u]nna giornata così toscana,” and spends much time discussing the theatricality and comicalness of the day’s various novelle. Picone begins by noting that critics should pay
results from the eighth tale, and even claims that the tale, which witnesses the agreement of two husbands to share freely and perpetually their wives, is “un piccolo gioiello, tra i più audaci che mai siano usciti dalla penna meno che mai medievale del Boccaccio. Ed è così sfaccettato nel dialogo, che la trama narrativa sembra quasi fungere da didascalia a un pezzo di teatro” (266). He does well to point out the audacity of Boccaccio to organize a wife-sharing system between the two friends. However, Muscetta and other critics fail to go beyond superficial comments regarding audacious, comical presence of such married protagonists among Day Eight’s tales. Picone disregards the civil status of all the day’s married couples and claims that only the eighth tale of the day exhibits a “beffa coniugale” (L’arte della beffa 207). Forno refers to that same tale, alongside the second tale of the day as merely erotic, and argues that these “erotic” stories are only for pure entertainment and are inherently less serious than other tales told (134).

I disagree with the way in which critics marginalize and even ignore the presence and centrality of matrimony in Day Eight and, indeed, throughout the Centonovelle. The elements of comicalness, the particularly Tuscan and Florentine nature of the beffa, and the role of the day as a generator of genres to come are important. However, it is careless to ignore Boccaccio’s continued and uninterrupted attention towards husbands, wives, and broken nuptial bonds. At the beginning of the work, improper sexual conduct and the breaking of a sacred clerical bond was referred to by the abbot of 1.4 as sinful, but, in his case, if it was hidden, at least it would be partly forgiven. By and large, in the tales in closer attention to Day Eight as a whole simply because of its seminal role in bringing about important works of literature during the Renaissance: “Dalle novelle 3 e 6, aventi come protagonista Calandrino, scaturisce una vena teatrale fiorentissima, che produrrà capolavori come la Calandria del Bibbiena e la Mandragola di Machiavelli” (203). Carla Forno concentrates on the “comicità” and “fiorentinità” of the day’s theme and also dedicates substantial energy to identifying the historical personalities on which many of the day’s characters are based.
which adultery takes place before Day Seven, the element of secrecy protected the unfaithful spouse and allowed for the continuation of extramarital affairs.

In the seventh day, Boccaccio boldly steps up the brigata’s rhetoric against marriage and allows for husbands and wives to make long-term agreements by which unsatisfied wives could please themselves with whomever they like. By the eighth tale of Day Eight, he goes even further, for an improper, adulterous, and systematic arrangement for adultery is viewed as a moderate response to the problem of a wife cheating with another married man. Alongside this climax of the undermining of the matrimonial bond, I would also like to analyze other classic tales of the beffa (those of Calandrino and Maestro Simone) for their representation of the rapport between husband and wife, not simply as the venue of the practical joke.

In the first tale of Day Eight, Neifile condemns the wife of Guasparruolo not for committing adultery, but, rather, for cheating on her husband for the purpose of making money. She offers up the inaugural tale of a day dedicated to beffe not only of men by women, but of both sexes to one another, as a balance to the previous day. She seeks to demonstrate that men, too, are capable of tricking women, and, in this particular case, the beffa is not just a trick, but also a merited punishment. In condemning madonna Ambruogia, Neifile reconnects and reaffirms the validity of madonna Filippa’s precedence. A woman who compromises her chastity, honor, and onestà for love, should be forgiven, but a woman who does so “per prezzo” should rightly be burnt at the stake. The first tale acts as a connective tissue to uphold the brigata’s acceptance and belief in
the acceptability of some forms of adultery as exemplified in Day Six through the novella of Filippa.\footnote{Various mentions of women’s fragilità throughout the Decameron might be read as a sort of justification for their lack of chastity. This admission somewhat contextualizes and somewhat restrains Madonna Filippa’s assertion of her rights to an almost boundless sexual freedom corresponding to her boundless sexual desire. At the work’s outset, for instance, Filomena states: “Ricordivi che noi siamo tutte femine, e non ce n’ha niuna si fianciulla, che non possa ben conoscere come le femine sien ragionate insieme e senza la provedenza d’alcuno uomo si sappiano regolare. Noi siamo mobili, riottose, sospettose, pusillanime e paurose ...” (Dec. 1.Intro.74-5). Then in the introduction to the ninth tale of Day Nine, Queen Emilia makes a similar affirmation: “E quando a questo le leggi, le quali il ben comune ruigardano in tutte le cose, non ci ammaestrassono, e l’usanza, o costume che vogliamo dire, le cui forze son grandissime e reverende, la natura assai apertamente cel mostra, la quale ci ha fatte ne’ corpi delicate e morbide, negli animi timide e paurose, nelle menti benigne e piteose, e hacci date le corporali forze leggieri, le voci piacevoli e i movimenti de’ membri soavi...” (Dec. 9.9.4).}

The second tale of the day continues the theme of lascivious clergymen who are willing and able to violate both their sacred vows to the Lord and their parishioners. In 8.2 the priest from Varlungo parodies the traditional role of the good shepherd and “entertains” his congregation. He is, the reader finds, “un valente prete e gagliardo della persona ne’ servigi delle donne, il quale, come che leggere non sapesse troppo, pur con molte buone e sante parolozze la domenica a piè dell’olmo ricroava i suoi popolani; e meglio le lor donne ...” (Dec. 8.2.6; emphasis mine). The priest also seeks “recreation” with a woman of the town by violating the nuptial bond of her marriage and his status as a servant of Christ. Boccaccio subversively underlines this latter violation by describing their sexual encounter as an act that makes the woman a new member of God’s family: “E quivi il prete, dandole i più dolci basciozzi del mondo e facendola parente di messer Domendeio, con lei una gran pezza si sollazzò: poscia partitosi in gonnella, che pareva venisse da servire a nozze, se ne tornò al santo” (Dec. 8.2.38). If the common equivocal expression, “faccendola parente di messer Domendio,” was not enough, Panfilo clearly subverts the role of a marriage – and a priest’s role in a wedding ceremony – by dressing
the priest from Varlungo in traditional wedding garb as he returns from his inaugural sexual encounter with monna Belcolore.

The following novella, the first of the famous Calandrino series, offers a unique glimpse of “normal” married life. For the first time in the *Decameron* the reader witnesses the rapport between an already married husband and wife that does not have to do directly with an extramarital affair. Even though adultery does not (yet) take part in the Calandrino series, the reader witnesses an unhappy, wedded couple through the violent abuse of monna Tessa at the end of the tale. Tessa has the sad fate of being the one who reveals to Calandrino that the *elitropia* is not real and ultimately that his “friends” have duped him. Importantly, though, Calandrino does ever realize that he has been deceived. Rather, one sees how lowly he thinks of his wife when he foolishly assumes that she had the power to ruin the magic and destroy his glorious discovery. The scene that follows showcases nothing less than a frightening example of domestic violence. In his ignorance and disdain toward his wife, the husband beats her mercilessly: “… le diè per tutta la persona: pugna e calci, senza lasciarle in capo capello o osso adosso che macero non fosse, le diede, nuina cosa valendole il chiedere mercé con le mani in croce” (*Dec* 8.3.53).

Calandrino recounts to Bruno and Buffalmacco what he believes Tessa has done with a deep-seeded, misogynistic, and proverbial belief that “le femine fanno perder la vertù a ogni cosa” (*Dec* 8.3.61). This is his belief and a common assumption of women of the time, but it also seems to reflect also the beliefs of husbands towards their wives throughout this day. Panfilo describes Tessa as “bella e valente” in the tale, and she represents to Calandrino not just a woman who takes the “vertù” out of everything, but a
wife who sucks the fun out of his life. She is reason and good sense, and thus an enemy to a most unreasonable man, her husband.

Tessa also represents these qualities in the sixth tale of the day. In this tale, Bruno and Buffalmacco successfully steal and dine on Calandrino’s hog. The success of the narration and their acquiring the pig depends on the absence of monna Tessa. Calandrino’s wife, if she were present, could not be fooled by the deceptions and shenanigans of his “friends.” One imagines that she would have known of Calandrino’s inability to stand much alcohol, and thus would not have even let him go out drinking with his friends. A strong, inherent distrust pervades the relationship of this married couple. The text makes clear that Tessa is a reasonable lady, who cannot be duped as easily as Calandrino, to whom she is clearly superior in intellect. However, the reader comes to find that she also simply does not trust her husband, no matter whether he is at fault or not: “Per certo’ disse Calandrino ‘egli è così, di che io sono diserto e non so come io torni a casa: mogliema nol mi crederà, e se ella il mi pur crede, io non avrò uguanno pace con lei’” (Dec. 8.6.27).

This representation of the wife as a constant of reason and sobriety, but also of conjugal distrust, comes up too in the eighth novella of maestro Simone. Deep down, Maestro Simone might know that Bruno and Buffalmacco’s elite party group does not really exist. With certainty, he knows that his wife would not believe in such a group or

\footnote{Filomena underlines the importance of Tessa not being with Calandrino. Her absence, and the absence also of the good sense, reason, and intelligence she embodies, is the *sine qua non* for the successful execution of their plan. Thus, “non essendo la moglie ben sana, Calandrino andò egli solo a uccidere il porco; la qual cosa sentendo Bruno e Buffalmacco e sappiendo che la moglie di lui non v’andava, se n’andarono a un prete loro grandissimo amico, vicino di Calandrino, a starsi con lui alcun di” (Dec. 8.6.5).}

\footnote{Regarding this superiority, Martinez even parallels Tessa to Beatrice for her intelligence and superior traits to her husband: “The tenth day sees a movement towards moral tales and the promise of order and resolution, yet the moral substance of the tales told on the final day is often ambiguous, and the story of Griselda, rather than resolving these ambiguities, instead serves to complicate them further” (11).}
allow for him to take part in it. So, when his wife inquires as to why he is leaving the house so late at night, the doctor must lie to her and come up with excuses that will get him past her and out the door. Bruno and Buffalmacco look forward to her opprobrium and wait outside his home as the doctor returns after falling into the sewer drain. She automatically assumes that he was with another woman, and she berates him ceaselessly into the late hours of the night (Dec. 8.9.101).

Before closing the analysis of Day Eight with a look at tale eight’s conjugal quartet, let us look also at two novelle, 8.4 and 8.7, which present two widowed protagonists who treat their honor as widows in different ways. The rector of Fiesole proffers yet another example of a clergyman who cannot control his sexual desires and would compromise the honor of a widow parishioner. The widow refuses his numerous, unrelenting advances, and justifies her refusal with the necessity of maintaining her honor: “… e son vedova, che sapete quanta onestà nelle vedove si richiede” (Dec. 8.4.8). Dishonorable conduct could cause her to lose the patrimony left behind by her husband, and could lead to her being ostracized by her brothers. Thus, this widow acts in the way of madonna Malgherida, also a widow (Dec. 1.10), and defends her onestà and the memory of her husband. The widow of Day Eight’s seventh tale, too, decides never to remarry. Unlike the protagonist of tale four, however, this character, Elena, falls in love and chooses to have a lover, while leading on another suitor, the scolaro. This brief comparison reiterates that civil status and the way protagonists react to it are an element

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184 Pampinea describes the genesis of their amorous arrangement as follows: “La quale rimasa del suo marito vedova mai più maritar non si volle, essendosi ella d’un giovinetto bello e leggiadro a sua scelta innamorato; e da ogni altra sollecitudine sviluppata, con l’opera d’una sua fante, di cui ella si fidava molto, spesse volte con lui con maraviglioso diletto si dava buon tempo” (Dec. 8.7.4).
in the composition also in the eighth day. The comparison also further demonstrates that Boccaccio’s representation of married and formerly married protagonists is not univocal.

Queen Lauretta of the eighth day selects Fiammetta to compensate for the tragic details and fate of Elena at the hands of the *scolaro*. Fiammetta declares that “convenevole sia con alcuna cosa più dilettevole ramorbidare gl’innacerbiti spiriti” (Dec. 8.8.3). To do so, she will tell a story whose moral – “assai dee bastare a ciascuno se quale asino dà in parete tal riceve…” – reconnects with that of the tenth tale of Day Five. In that tale, as I have argued in the sixth chapter of this work, the married protagonists arrange for an obscene and jovial *ménage à trois* with a young Perugian fellow. Even before, the husband, Pietro, cheats on his wife with other men. By the end of the tale, the couple agrees to entertain themselves with the young man simultaneously. Only by cheating in turn on her husband – and alongside him – can the young wife find sexual gratification in marriage. In 5.10, it is not clear whether the arrangement will continue. It appears to be a one-time agreement, between husband and wife and the male lover of the two. Nonetheless, the tale subverts the institution of matrimony viewed as a contract between two families and also viewed as a debt that each spouse exclusively must pay to the other.

In *Dec*. 8.8, Fiammetta ups the ante in this dangerous, subversive love game.\(^{185}\) This time, two married couples are involved: Spinelloccio, Zeppa, and their wives. Spinelloccio and Zeppa are the best of friends and often frequent each other’s homes.

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\(^{185}\) The mortal danger inherent in adultery of the time can most readily be seen and recalled in the case of *Dec*. 4.9. Guigielmo Rossiglione is the best of friends with Guigielmo Guardastagno until he discovers Guardastagno is having an adulterous relationship with his wife. Two of the most graphic and cruent scenes of the Decameron result from their illicit love. Rossiglione leads his friend deep into the woods and murders him cold blood. He then has Guardastagno’s heart cooked and fed to his wife. The wife throws herself out the window and dies, smashing her body against the rocks below their castle.
Eventually, Spinelloccio begins sleeping with his friend’s wife. Zeppa discovers them in flagrante dilecto, but, instead of enraging himself or even recognizing this violation of his marriage contract as offensive, he sets out to seduce Spinelloccio’s wife and simply to “return the favor.” So often in the Decameron, adulterous encounters are shrouded in secrecy, and the cuckolded spouse is kept in the dark—whether literally or metaphorically. Yet in this case, Zeppa arranges for a spectacle, and even a game, out of his traitorous response. He sets the stage for his sexual encounter with Spinelloccio’s wife on a box in which Spinelloccio himself is hiding. He explains to the wife while sitting on the box what has transpired, that he still loves her husband as a dear friend, and that he simply wants to even things out by making love to her (while, unbeknownst to her, on the box in which her husband is hiding).

Zeppa starts making love to his friend’s wife in such a way that his friend can hear, feel, perhaps even smell the perspiration of their infidelity. He feels dismay, and fear of Zeppa, but he does not make a sound or object in the slightest way. The climax of the theatrical scene is reached once the two have finished the first act on top of the box. Zeppa calls his wife into the room, opens the box, and the four of them feel some shame, but quickly decide that they are fine with being even. And not only, but they all four also agree to relive the scene indefinitely by sharing spouses. By the tale’s conclusion, everyone is in on the arrangement, and sidesteps their sacred, exclusive marital vows. The parody of marriage reaches all new heights here. Four spouses

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186 Indeed, while listening and feeling, quite literally, their every movement that “sopra il capo fatta gli era,” Zeppa recognizes that he initiated this iniquitous series of events, declares the rightfulness of Spinelloccio’s reaction, and reaffirms to himself his friendship with him. Quite interestingly, Zeppa even finds this retribution to be an “umana cosa,” one could say: “Poi, pur ripensandosi che da lui era la villania incominciata e che il Zeppa aveva ragione di far ciò che egli faceva e che verso di lui umanamente e come compagno s’era portato, seco stesso disse di volere esser più che mai amico del Zeppa quando volesse” (Dec. 8.8.29).
consent to violate openly and repeatedly their exclusive vows, and the arrangement results in the greatest peace imaginable: “Il Zeppa fu contento, e nella miglior pace del mondo tutti e quattro desinarono insieme; e da indi innanzi ciascuna di quelle donne ebbe due mariti e ciascun di loro ebbe due mogli, senza alcuna quistione o zuffa mai per quello insieme averne” (Dec. 8.8.35).

Distrust defines the foundation of married life for these husbands and wives. In the eighth and ninth days, Boccaccio takes the beffa a step further than Day Seven’s specific target of violated marriages. He universalizes the beffa to characterize the fallen state of society; however, corrupted nuptials and troubled marriages are still a central, if not the exclusive consideration. In Day Eight, the first, second and eighth tales proffer adulterous relationships and the questioning of matrimony gradually crescendos with the wife-sharing system devised by the two husbands of the eighth novella. In the third, fifth and ninth tales the narrators evince troubled marriages founded on distrust between husbands and wives. In the way of formerly married protagonists, there are two instances of widows whose honor is put to the test. In the first case, a widow safeguards her honor and exposes the libidinous ways of a clergyman. In the seventh tale, a widow compromises her honor by having a lover. Even in the last tale in which no marriage takes place, the sexual and commercial exchanges between the Florentine merchant and the “Ciciliana” leave the reader with yet another instance of man-woman relationships that fail because of deception and mistrust.
4. The Universalized Beffa and the Brigata’s Defect: Destructively Paving the Way to Liberality and Magnificence

Emilia reigns over the ninth day of affabulation, and the first novella proffers yet another widow who rebuffs two suitors and defends her honor. Yet the tale also acts as an inaugural indicator for the depths to which the beffa has sunk. Narrating tricks and practical jokes began in earnest as a means to increase the enjoyment of the group. And one finds traces of this original comical design in the ninth day. However, the reader might also notice that narrators cannot deviate from the formula in which the beffa requires desacralization, physically harming others, and breaking the most sacred bonds known to humankind. In the first tale, the widow tricks her suitors into desacralizing the grave of a Ceparello-esque character named Scannadio. In the fifth story, the tables turn on Calandrino and his wife beats him as thoroughly as he did to her in 8.3. Then, in 9.2, 9.6, and 9.10 characters break some of the most important and meaningful human relationships to entertain the brigata. In the first case, caught in sin, an abbess approves of sexual encounters for nuns. In the latter two, wives are victims of adulterous relationships that unfold in the presence of inept husbands. By the end of the day, the queen declares that her reign and those of all predecessors are defective and that they must be corrected. One might logically ask: What is their defect and how does the breaking of sacred and nuptial bonds factor into it? Let us take a quick look at the tales of day nine to understand the answers to these questions.

In the second tale of the day, the sanctity and goodness of an abbess comes into question. The abbess finds out from several nuns that another nun has a lover in the convent. The abbess rises from bed leaving behind her own lover and puts on his pants in
place of her coif. Before the other nuns notice her fashion mishap, the abbess verbally chastises the young nun for threatening the sanctity, honesty, and fame of the convent. The nun eventually observes the pants, and cleverly criticizes the abbess for her hypocrisy in front of all the nuns. Boccaccio continues to question the sanctity of religious figures and the sort of life lived behind the walls of convents and monasteries.

In the sixth tale, the young man Pinuccio conjures up a plan to sleep in the same room as the family of the girl he loves. He takes a friend of his along as an accomplice. The dark of the night and the slumber of the father facilitate Pinuccio’s success in sleeping with his girl and Adriano’s unexpected fortune of sleeping with the wife of the family. In this context, the wife’s dishonest reaction is recognized as a positive example to hide her own dishonor and that of the daughter. Finally, in Dioneo’s final tale of the day, a priest convinces a poor, naïve couple that he can turn the wife into a mare. All she has to do is disrobe, get on her hands and knees, and allow him to “give her a tail” by performing an enchantment on her—an all too obvious instance of sexual intercourse which her husband interrupts only after its consummation.

The willingness of Donno Gianni to take advantage of the naïve couple and their desire to be able to make more money with a wife-turned-mare has been highlighted by critics. Yet the disingenuousness of the husband is striking too. He impotently and ignorantly watches Donno Gianni pin the tail on—and inside of—his wife. Even though he realizes what is happening, he does so only when the priest attains the climax of the

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187 The nighttime is an essential element in this tale, and recalls its presence and centrality in the sexual goings-on of several unfaithful wives in the seventh day: “La notte ritorna cioè a essere, per l’oste, dominio dell’irrealità, rassicurante momento di riposo; per la moglie che ha provato il piacere di inconsueti abbracciamenti, per la figlia che ha portato a frutto il suo innamoramento e per i due giovani che hanno vissuto le loro esperienze erotiche, la notte resta invece il segno della realtà amorosa, del tutto occasionale (come non può essere la trasgressione) e destinata perciò al ricordo (negato strumentalmente dalla figlia, conservato per sé dalla madre) di tenebre popolate di ambigue e straordinarie ‘sorprese’” (Peirone 159).
tail-pinning enchantment. Compar Pietro fits into a series of unflattering portrayals of men who do not fulfill their roles as leaders of women or as able husbands. The series begins with Calandrino, whose wife subverts an acceptable sexual position and supposedly causes him to become pregnant. Then, Calandrino takes on yet another position of inferiority with respect to his wife when he is beaten by her for trying to cheat on her in the fifth tale of Day Nine. As mentioned in the analysis of Day Eight, this husband fears, and perhaps even hates, his wife perhaps because he recognizes her superior reason and perspicuity. In the sixth tale of Day Nine, the deceived, perhaps also simple-minded husband is tricked into believing that neither of his young male guests slept with his wife or his daughter, when in fact it all transpired right under his nose. In the seventh tale of Day Nine, Pampinea describes Talano as an incompetent husband who cannot make his wife obey. As a result, all these couples are unhappy at varying degrees, and distrust defines their relationships together.\footnote{Talano apparently reveals the dream of his wife being torn to pieces by a wolf to his wife in earnest to protect her. Like so many wives of the Decameron, however, she reacts immediately with distrust toward her husband even as he warns her. She automatically assumes that he is trying to conceal an amorous encounter from her: “Hai veduto come costui maliziosamente si crede avermi messa paura d’andare oggi al bosco nostro? là dove elgi per certo dee aver data posta a qualche cattiva e non vuole che io il vi truovi. Oh! egli avrebbe buon manicar co’ ciechi, e io sarei bene sciocca se io nol conoscessi e se io il credessi!” (Dec. 9.7.10). The wife equates trust among spouses with foolishness, and only the realization of Talano’s dream can change the way they treat each other.}

In the ninth tale, too, Queen Emilia underscores the incompetence of Giosefo as a husband. His wife acts much like Talano’s wife: she is mean and stubborn and he seeks King Solomon’s advice to change her ways. He ends up taking the king’s advice and after witnessing a mule being beaten thoroughly on a bridge, he decides to beat his wife mercilessly to change her attitude. As Muscetta and other critics maintain, without a doubt in this novella one finds limits to Boccaccio’s “feminism” or at least positive
treatment of women and their intellectual emancipation. Emilia delivers a prolix proem on the fickle, inferior nature of women and the necessity of their being obedient and patient with their husbands prior to the telling of this tale. In her opinion, nature made women “ne’ corpi delicate e morbide, negli animi timide e paurose, nelle menti benigne e pietose,” and as a result, they need men as “governatori” and “aiutatori.” Critics tend to read this passage only as an ethical statement that defines how a woman should act and even as the underlying assumption for the novella of Griselda. However, especially given the series of inept husbands presented throughout Day Nine, it seems equally likely that Emilia underscores the incompetence of husbands as well as the shortcomings of the two disobedient wives found in this day. No matter how one reads Emilia’s preamble to the tale, though, one fact remains: the wives and husbands of this day do not represent at all the happily-ever-after goal achieved after such turmoil in the tales of Day Five.

Whether the wife is stubborn and ornery, or, as a preponderance of tales would lead us to believe, the husband is inept and impotent, married people are not happy. The brigata constantly questions fidelity and trust, whether among married, secular people, widows, or spouses of Christ.

Muscetta describes the resultant image of matrimony in tales eight and nine as “un documento giocoso dell’etica matrimoniale” (278). The problem with this interpretation is that not everyone is laughing after the tales are told. After the wolf tears apart and “humbles” Talano’s wife, the young people only clarify that what Talano saw was a vision and not a dream. After the pusillanimous Giosefo beats his wife to a pulp, the young men of the brigata laugh, but the women are rightly concerned: “Questa novella dalla reina detta diede un poco da mormorare alle donne e da ridere a’ giovani” (Dec. 9.10.2). I believe that crisis, and not jocularity defines the documentation of “l’etica matrimoniale” in throughout this day and in most novelle of the Decameron.

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apart and “humbles” Talano’s wife, the young people only clarify that what Talano saw was a vision and not a dream. After the pusillanimous Giosefo beats his wife to a pulp, the young men of the brigata laugh, but the women are rightly concerned: “Questa novella dalla reina detta diede un poco da mormorare alle donne e da ridere a’ giovani” (Dec. 9.10.2). I believe that crisis, and not jocularity, describes the documentation of “l’etica matrimoniale” throughout this day and in most novelle of the Decameron. The condition of society and social interaction in Day Nine demonstrates a further calamity in the narrative fabric of the ten young people. The beffa has gone beyond having a bit of fun and has effectively become the vehicle of describing the fraudulent ways in which almost all people interact with one another.\footnote{Surdich fittingly notes this degeneration of the beffa: “Dalla strategia divertita della beffa si scende verso l’esecuzione di malizie crudeli, come accade nella prima novella, con la giostra di cadaveri veri e finti” (257). The descent into pure malice strikes the reader especially because of the physical violence and aggression that transpire among the various protagonists.} Surdich points out that the beffa has almost gone too far, for, by the ninth day, it has become less of a jocular strategy to increase laughter. Indeed, it has descended into being nothing more than cruel malice. Surdich does well to note this downward spiral in the nature of the beffa, and he underscores that the ninth day stands in stark contrast to the tenth day in which the young people will truly aspire to values that could found a new society: “… paiono dunque essere gratificati dal possesso della forza e della saggezza (sacerdoti della liturgia mondana ed edonistica del novellare), avere riconoscimento del loro ruolo di ‘salvatori’ e rifondatori di civiltà, essere promossi al livello di una umanità superiore” (262).

By the end of this day, the queen recognizes a defect in the brigata as she passes the crown to Panfilo: “Signor mio, gran carico ti resta, sì come è l’avere il mio difetto e degli altri che il luogo hanno tenuto che tu tieni, essendo tu l’ultimo, a emendare …”
The question that does not apparently come up among critics is: “What exactly is this defect that must be corrected?” Branca simply repeats in a footnote that Panfilo must “emendare il difetto di me e degli altri” and refers to Purgatorio 6.41 (Dec. 9.Concl.2). But what is defective and how will Panfilo’s day emend? Surdich draws attention to the evidence of the defect in noting the social dysfunction surrounding the universalized beffa of Day Nine. I believe, furthermore, that the defect has been explicitly brought into the fore by the brigata and particularly by Dioneo himself in the preamble to Dec. 5.10.

At that point, Dioneo describes the immemorial truth of human laughter and, more importantly, the laughing aesthetic that characterizes the brigata’s storytelling through the end of Day Nine: “Io non so se io mi dica che sia accidental vizio e per malvagità di costume ne’ mortali sopravenuto, o se pure è nella natura peccato, il rider più tosto delle cattive cose che delle buone opere, e spezialmente quando quelle cotali a noi non pertengono” (Dec. 5.10.3). Emilia commands that Panfilo revise this philosophy, this defective “peccato,” in hopes that the brigata can elevate positive values that could actually serve them in the task of recreating their world to be a better place. Panfilo orders that this emendation be made through tales of liberality and magnificence. The presence of matrimony will persist in the tenth day. But, after all of the negativity, failed fidelity, and the destructive framework surrounding marriage in the first nine days, can it truly be portrayed in a positive light? Let us turn to the last segment of this chapter to consider these questions in the context of Day Ten.
6. Liberality, Magnificence, and the Married World Made Whole

By order of King Panfilo, on the tenth day the brigata tells stories of liberality, generosity and magnificence. This requirement demands that the ten young narrators correct their storytelling “defect” of the previous nine days.\(^{191}\) In my reading, they mainly want to eliminate their practice of telling stories in which they laugh, or at least enjoy themselves, by hearing of others’ troubles. Critics write of rehabilitated merchants, finally seen in a positive light (10.9); of clerics who can – *mirabile dictu* – possess the positive attributes of generosity and gratitude (10.2); and of the singular self-sacrifice of perhaps the most financially generous character of the *Decameron*, Natan (10.3). The metamorphosis of matrimony in the tenth day should equally strike readers and critics. The inauspicious circumstances preceding marriage and the questionable happy endings that were the hallmark of Day Five are no more. To prove the changes found in the characters and situations of Day Ten, inevitably references to similar previous tales are utilized in analyzing this day’s *novelle*. The significant shift in the treatment of marriage, too, can be illuminated by comparing like situations found in the defective days prior to Day Ten. Marriage plays a central role in seven of the day’s ten tales, and, indeed, the last seven tales of the entire work, culminating with Griselda’s tale. In the effort to emend the defective storytelling of the first nine days, I will argue that the brigata also seeks to portray marriage, for the most part, in a different, more constructive manner.

The first three tales build the foundation for what essentially becomes a competition in recounting stories about liberality and magnificence. In these first three tales, marriage does not play a role; however, several noteworthy passages help to

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\(^{191}\) Particularly, Emilia says to Panfilo: “Signor mio, gran carico ti resta, sì come è l’avere il mio difetto e degli altri che il luogo hanno tenuto che tu tieni, essendo tu l’ultimo, a emendare: di che Idio ti presti grazia, come a me l’ha prestato di farti re” (*Dec.* 9.Concl.2).
understand that the values of the tenth day have changed. In the inaugural tale, the
description of Florence as a virtuous and noble place juxtaposes starkly with the Florence
of the beffa witnessed in the previous three days and the decimated, desecrated locus of
the work’s introduction. Neifile describes the Tuscan capital as so thoroughly populated
with valiant knights, that messer Ruggieri de’ Giovanni must move to Spain to
distinguish himself: “… il quale, essendo e ricco e di grande animo e veggendo che,
considerate la qualità del vivere e de’ costumi di Toscana, egli in quella dimorando poco
o niente potrebbe del suo valor dimostrare” (*Dec.* 10.1.4). In the renewed narrative
environment of Day Ten, Elissa underlines in the second tale that even miracles can
happen. That is, even clerics can be found generous though most often, as witnessed time
and again in the first nine days, “essi tutti avarissimi troppo più che le femine sieno, e
d’ogni liberalità nimici a spade tratta” (*Dec.* 10.2.4). Finally, the example of Mitridanes
demonstrates the propensity of the day’s protagonist to sacrifice the self for the sake of
others.

Lauretta follows up with the fourth tale of the day, which introduces the first
matrimonial example. In this *novella*, Messer Gentil de’ Carisendi visits the tomb of the
woman he loved – but whose love he never obtained – to give her a first and last kiss.
When he finds her actually to be alive, he decides to take her home, nurse her back to
health and treat her honestly and as he would his own sister, he states. Amazingly for a
lover in the *Decameron*, he demonstrates considerable restraint and even respect for the
married status of the woman he loves. He saved her life by discovering her pulse in the
tomb, but only asks in return that she allow him to bring her back to health and hold a
banquet at which he could give her back to her husband and be recognized for his honesty
and valor: “E la cagione per che io questo vi cheggio è per ciò che io intendo di voi, in presenza de’ migliori cittadini di questa terra, fare un caro e solenne dono al vostro marito” (Dec. 10.4.20). The climax of the tale takes place at the magnificent banquet at which messer Gentile reveals and returns the wife to her husband. The scene starkly contrasts with two other examples of banquets at which marital revelations took place prior to Day Ten. In 5.1, Cimone and his band of followers slaughtered husbands-to-be and wedding party members at a wedding banquet (5.1.68-9). In 5.8, Nastagio orchestrated the infernal spectacle of a woman being violently and eternally punished for rejecting her lover’s advances.

In Emilia’s fifth tale, the happily married Madonna Dianora rejects the advances of messer Ansaldo, who is madly in love with her. In an effort to put an end to his foolish hopes, she asks the impossible of him, namely, that he make flourish for her a beautiful springtime garden in the middle of the winter. Messer Ansaldo enlists a magician who realizes the lady’s request for a substantial amount of money. Upon seeing the miraculous garden, Dianora stands by her word, “acciò che per quel potesse lui amarla conoscere e ricordarsi della promission fattagli e con saramento fermata, e come leal donna poi procurar d’attenerglie” (Dec. 10.5.11). The wife’s reaction is quite unique considering the frail, distrustful relationships between husbands and wives prior to this day. She tells her husband everything, and he, magnanimous spouse that he is, recognizes the goodness of her soul and the honesty of her original intention: “… per ciò che io conosco la purità dello animo tuo, per solverti da’ legame della promessa, quello ti

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192 Failed fidelity characterizes the vast majority of marital relationships and trust between men and women in general prior to Day Ten. Here, messer Ruggieri’s lady recognizes his honesty and invokes a real and meaningful faith to seal their agreement: “La donna, conoscendosi al cavalire oblizata e che la domanda era onesta, quantunque molto disiderasse di rallegrare della sua vita i suoi parenti, si dispuse a far quello che messer Gentile domandava; e così sopra la sua fede gli promise” (Dec. 10.4.21).
concederò che forse alcuno altro non farebbe”’ (Dec. 10.5.15). The lady goes to Ansaldo and tells her that her husband’s command, rather than her own love or promised faith compels her. Ansaldo is greatly struck and moved by her words and her husband’s liberality. He states – just as did Messer Gentile in the preceding novella – that his love for her is like that of the love for a sister, and that he will not allow himself to become a “guastatore dello onore” (Dec. 10.5.22). Interestingly, Boccaccio the Narrator underlines that one of the most lengthy discussions result among the ladies from this tale. Such generosity among husbands and wives and lovers is unheard of in the preceding days, and perhaps also in the society to which they soon must return.

In the sixth and seventh tales, kings restrain their sexual desires and reward beautiful young maidens with honorable marriages. In Fiammetta’s sixth tale, King Charles falls in love with two young noble girls. His enamorment and stare at the young

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193 In the representation of so many married couples throughout the Decameron, an overwhelming emphasis has been placed on the necessity of carnal pleasure and satisfying sexual desire. Here, Dianora’s spouse goes against the common depiction of husbands as either impotent, jealous, or bigots. This couple uniquely demonstrates – and perhaps for the first and last time – a wedded pair that communicates with one another and has considerable trust in each other. The husband recognizes that even if his wife must violate her “onestà” in satisfying the demands of Messer Ansaldo, he knows that only her body and not her spirit betrays him: “Voglio che tu a lui vada e, se per modo alcun puoi, ’ingegni di far che, servata la tua onestà, tu sii da questa promessa discolta: dove altramenti non si potesse, per questa volta il corpo ma non l’animo gli concedi” (Dec. 10.5.16). A statement of this sort also belies the simplification of women as being only lascivious and sexually motivated in matters of love as argued time and again especially by Dioneo (2.10, 3.10, 4.10, 5.10, and so on).

194 The tale echoes the plot of Dec. 3.5 in which Zima is in love with the wife of Francesco Vergellesi. In the preceding tale, the husband promises to let Zima speak with his wife if only Zima will give his finest horse. The husband does not necessarily allow Zima to speak with her because he trusts his wife. Rather, in order to ensure that they do not effectively communicate and possibly work out an amorous arrangement, Francesco deceitfully forbids his wife to speak. Zima’s rhetoric overcomes her, wins her love, and they manage to begin an adulterous relationship once Francesco goes out of town. Deceit and avarice defines the transactions in 3.5, and ultimately lead to adultery. In 10.5, there is instead a chain of generous gestures and absolutions from promises made. The husband forgives the wife, Ansaldo releases Dianora from her promise, and the magician – so moved from hearing about all the previous acts of generosity – decides not to make Ansaldo pay for his services for the magic garden.

195 The following tale records the reaction of the young women: “Chi potrebbe pienamente raccontare i vari ragionamenti tralle donne stati, qual maggior liberalità usasse, o Giliberto o messer Ansaldo o il nigromante, intorno a’ fatti di madonna Dionora? Troppo sarebbe lungo” (Dec. 10.6.2).
women recalls the scene of Cimone’s initial gaze upon Efigenia in Dec. 5.1. Just as Cimone “cominciò a distinguere le parti di lei” (Dec. 5.1.9), here King Charles watches the two young women rise up from a pool of water and “sopra a ogn’altro erano al re piaciute, il quale si attentamente ogni parte del corpo loro aveva considerata ...” (Dec. 10.6.18). As is well known, Efigenia acts as a catalyst that inspires Cimone to become “educated and civilized,” even though, in the end, his transformation is superficial and he obtains Efigenia’s hand in marriage through violence and kidnapping. The present king, on the other hand, listens to reason and is convinced by one of his nobleman that his love for such young girls was foolish and could cause political upheaval if brought to fruition. The nobleman reminds King Charles that his predecessor, Manfred, was ousted for having dishonorable sexual relations with women other than his wife: “Ora èvvi così tosto della memoria caduto le violenze fatte alle donne da Manfredi avervi l’entrata aperta in questo regno” (Dec. 10.6.30). Just as King Charles defeated Manfred, he must also defeat his own lustful desires. He restrains himself, denies the impulsive precedent of Cimone and subdues his passionate feelings for the beautiful young women. Finally, the king gives to each of the young women magnificent dowries and marries them to great and noble barons of his kingdom. For the first time since Alessandro’s betrothal to the king of England’s daughter, marriage pacifies and brings about tranquility.\footnote{In her conclusion of the tale, Fiammetta points out that some might argue that a king giving two maidens in marriage is not a very big deal. However, she emphasizes the importance of an all-powerful sovereign not just subduing his lustful desires, but then treating the objects of his desire in an honorable, most generous way: “Saranno forse di quei che diranno piccolo cosa essere a un re l’aver maritate due giovonette, e io il consentirò; ma molto grande e grandissima la dirò, se diremo un re inamorato questo abbia fatto, colei maritando cui egli amava senza aver preso o pigliare del suo amore fronda o fiore o frutto” (Dec. 10.6.36). The king’s restraint is particularly remarkable when juxtaposed to the reaction of another king in the sixth tale of Day Five. In 5.6, when King Frederick discovers that he cannot solely possess Restituta – because he found her in the arms of her lover, Gianni – he becomes enraged and “si ritenne e pensò di volergli in pubblico e di fuoco far morire” (Dec. 5.6.23). The situations are by no means identical; however, the story from the fifth day at least illustrates how violently King Frederick of Day Ten...}
seventh tale, King Peter of Aragon recognizes but does not reciprocate the love of a merchant’s young daughter. The king invites the girl before himself and the queen, assures her his honorable, non-carnal love, and decides to reward her noble love for him by marrying her to one of his knights: “... e l’onore è questo, che, con ciò sia cosa che voi da marito siate, vogliamo che colui prendiate per marito che noi vi daremo” (Dec. 10.7.38). Ultimately, the king unites the young woman and the knight in matrimony, gives them a hefty dowry of precious stones and land, and they, “contenti grandissima festa fecero e liete nozze” (Dec. 10.7.48).

In Filomena’s eighth novella, Tito falls in love with the fiancé of his best friend, Gisippo. In a long monologue, Tito, a student of philosophy, grapples with the dilemma of serving his love for the girl, Sofronia, or his friendship with Gisippo. In the discussion with his self, Tito concludes that love has the power to destroy the most sacred bonds, from friendship itself to the divine: “Le leggi d’amore sono di maggior potenza che alcune altre: elle rompono non che quelle della amistà ma le divine. 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” (Dec. 10.8.16). In the Decameron itself, a friend loving the wife of another friend has already taken place not a thousand times, but at least four. In all preceding occasions, the enamored friend ends up also making love to the wife with varying consequences and

could have reacted if the tenth day were still a part of the “defective” storytelling system of the first nine days. For the reactions of other kings to married women or in giving women in marriage to others, see Dec. 1.5, 2.3, 2.8, 3.2, 3.9, 4.1 and 5.6.

197 This king, too, rejects passionate impulse and the allure of physical beauty. He recognizes the necessity of restraining these forces and uplifts a non-sexual, honorable love that can also unite two people: “Ma sì come voi molto meglio di me conoscete, niuno second debita elezione ci s’innamora ma second l’appetito e il piacere: alla qual legge più volte s’oposero le forze mie, e, più non potendo, v’amai e amo e amerò sempre” (Dec. 10.7.41).
outcomes. In 4.9, Guiglielmo Rossiglione murders his friend for sleeping with his wife and causes her to commit suicide. In 8.1, Gulfardo borrows money from Guasparruolo in order to pay to sleep with his Guasparruolo’s wife. In 8.8, Spinelloccio first sleeps with Zeppa’s wife, then, to get even, Zeppa sleeps with Spinelloccio’s wife. In the end, they decide to maintain their perfect friendship by working out a wife-sharing system.

Finally, in 9.10, Donno Gianni attempts to reward Compare Pietro’s friendship by performing a sexual enchantment on his wife.

The adulterous, sexual outcome of the examples in the first nine days cannot and does not come about in the tenth day. The brigata sticks to their decision to refrain from laughing at the misfortunes of others. Filomena’s tale of Tito and Gisippo is no exception. Tito does not immediately act on his desire for Sofronia and thus resists engaging in a carnal relationship with her and corrupting the engagement between Gisippo and her. Instead, he reveals his love for Sofronia to Gisippo, and Gisippo munificently offers her hand in marriage to Tito: “Egli è il vero che Sofronia è mia sposa e che io l’amava molto e con gran festa le sue nozze aspettava; ma per ciò che tu, si come molto più intende de me, con più fervor disideri così cara cosa come ella è, vivi sicuro che non mia ma tua moglie verrà nella mia camera” (Dec. 10.8.30). A series of misfortunes befall Gisippo after Tito marries the girl and moves back to Rome. In the end, however, they are reunited in Tito’s home where Sofronia welcomes him as if he were her brother. Furthermore, Tito shares all of his wealth and possessions with his long-time friend, except, quite significantly, his wife. To compensate for his lost love, rather, Tito gives to Gisippo his sister in marriage: “E ricreatolo alquanto e rivestitolo e ritornatolo nell’abito debito alla sua vertù e gentilezza, primieramente con lui ogni suo
tesoro e possession fece comune e appresso una sua sorella giovinetta, chimata Fulvia, gli diè per moglie …” (Dec. 10.8.109). We are told, much like in the endings of Day Five’s tales, that Gisippo “con la sua Fulvia, e Tito con la sua Sofronia, sempre in una casa gran tempo e lietamente vissero, più ciascun giorno, se più potevano essere, divenendo amici” (Dec. 10.8.110). However, now friendship reigns at the heart of the novella and acts as the foundation on which the marriages in it are built. As a result, the brigata seems to make straight, sacred, and peaceful the married world of the Decameron that was so often, twisted, desacralized and destructively represented in the novelle prior to Day Ten.

Panfilo recounts Day Ten’s penultimate tale, continuing the positive representation not only of matrimony, but also of happily married couples. The marriage of Messer Torello and Adalieta is striking among the numerous examples of the Decameron for three main reasons: first of all, they are genuinely happy, as even the wife’s name implies; second, they are faithful to one another; and, finally, the climactic confrontation between Torello and the suitor about to marry his wife ends peacefully. Evidence of these elements begin to appear when Torello prepares for his departure to fight in a crusade. Despite the prayers and tears of his wife, he decides to take part in the adventure for his honor and the wellbeing of his soul. Torello entrusts all his possessions and the couple’s honor to his wife. After doing so, he leaves instructions with her that place their marriage at the center of attention: “… voglio che to mi facci una grazia: che di me s’avegna, ove tu non abbi certa novella della mia vita, che tu m’aspetti uno anno e un mese e un di senza rimaritarti, incominciando da questo di che io mi parto”” (Dec. 10.9.42). At first, his wife refuses the possibility of remarrying and vows that she will live and die as the wife of Messer Torello. He believes her, but knows that if he
were to die, that her hand would be sought by other great noblemen, and that her family would most likely force her into a new arrangement.

Mistaken identity eventually causes the untrue news of Torello’s death to reach Adalieta. Panfilo raises the pressure surrounding her marital status by underscoring that the greatest men of Lombardia have asked for her hand in marriage and that her family has coerced her into accepting one of them. Torello is in the far-off land of the sultan, who, because he is deeply indebted to Torello, arranges for a sorcerer magically to transport him back to Pavia on his wife’s wedding day. He reveals himself to his wife and the guests at the nuptial banquet, and her husband-to-be amazingly, in his own home, and among his friends and family, accepts defeat, and cedes Adalieta to Torello: “Il nuovo sposo, quantunque alquanto scornato fosse, liberamente e come amico rispose che delle sue cose era nel suo volere quel farne che più le piacesse” (*Dec*. 10.9.110). In the context of Day Five, the fifth tale comes to mind as a stark contrast to this turn of events. In 5.5, two suitors pursued the same young woman to the point of deciding to abduct her. When the two young men happened to meet, it was at the girl’s home with armed bands of supporters. A riot ensued, and after all the parties went through mediation and dealt with the authorities, the story was able to end, seemingly happily, with a wedding celebration.

Since the conclusion of Day One, Dioneo has possessed the “spezial grazia” that allows him to recount a story that does not perfectly fit into the proposed theme of the day.\(^{198}\) From that point forward, Dioneo affabulates tales that do indeed diverge

\(^{198}\) Dioneo makes this request to the second day’s queen, Filomena: “Madonna, come tutti questi altri hanno detto, così dico io sommamente esser piacevole e commendabile l’ordine dato da voi. Ma di spezial grazia vi cheggio un dono, il quale voglio che mi sia confermato per infino a tanto che la nostra compagnia
somewhat from each day’s theme; however, one often finds that there can still be a part of his tales that fit in with the tales recounted by the others within the topic of the day. For instance, in 4.10, the tragic theme of unhappiness and death does not govern the tale, even though one character is presumed to be dead. In the last tale of the fifth day, the day of so many presumable happily-ever-afters, Dioneo’s tale offers a happy, albeit transgressive, ending. Another example lies in Frate Cipolla’s last novella of Day Six, in which clearly the theme of quick wit and rhetorical cleverness persists, even if the story is much longer than those recounted by the rest of the brigata.

The tenth tale of the tenth day is no exception to this trend. Dioneo proffers perhaps the most striking example of patience and magnificence in the whole of Day Ten, and the entirety of Boccaccio’s masterpiece. However, he deviates somewhat from the day’s theme by introducing one of the most malevolent, ungenerous, and tyrannical characters through Gualtieri. Gualtieri’s “matta bestialità” and the way he treats Griselda and his children makes their marital happiness, which is announced at the end of the tale, much less credible than the marital happiness mentioned in the previous marriages of Day Ten, tales 1-9.\textsuperscript{199} Thus, Dioneo has no qualms with continuing the crescendo and competition of munificence and generosity through Griselda’s otherworldly patience, but he seems to have a problem with offering a totally credible happily-ever-after to his characters. This hesitation and refusal should come as no surprise if the reader takes into account the nature of the stories and the characters involved.

\textsuperscript{199} The terse conclusion of their happiness echoes the questionable happy-ever-afters of Day Five: “E egli appresso, maritata altamente la sua figliuola, con Griselda, onorandola sempre quanto più si potea, lungamente e consolato visse” (Dec. 10.10.67).
consideration the narrative output and Dioneo’s amorous feelings as evinced by his song at the end of Day Five.

He is consistently the most “anti-matrimonial” storyteller of the brigata. He begins in 1.4 merely with the breaking of sacred vows by the monk and the abbot, who sexually share time with the same girl. Then, he gives an account of unhappy, broken marriages in Days Two, Four, Five, Seven and Nine. In Day Three, his tale of Rustico and Alibech demonstrates the deceptive ways of another monk who breaks his vow of celibacy; however, it also demonstrates the tendency of a young woman to have sex before marriage (albeit unknowingly, according to the story, no matter how unbelievable her sexual innocence might appear)—well before Licisca mentions this trend in the early afternoon of Day Six. Also, Dioneo’s propensity to deny felicity and fidelity to his protagonists, who are for the most part married, might also stem from his own unhappiness in matters of love. The reader learns from his ballad that the most common form of love ensnares Dioneo, the most free-spirited and irreverent storyteller, and that happiness in his personal love life eludes him.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, I presented a question to the reader: after reading the first nine stories of Day Five, can we say that the matrimonial end justifies the means, namely, can so many trials and tribulations be worthy going through to arrive at merely a

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200 Dioneo clearly demonstrates his lack of faith in fidelity as early as Decameron 2.10 in which, as Barolini maintains, “he is incensed at the obtuseness, the ‘sciocchezza,’ of those who believe that while they go about the world disporting themselves with one woman after another their wives remain at home inactive” (182). Dioneo recounts 2.10 in order to counter the faithfulness of Zinevra in 2.9. Zinevra’s husband believed in his wife and the wholeness of their marriage, and Dioneo calls the husband’s faith the “bestialità di Bernabò,” or the stupidity of a naïve husband. Ultimately, though, Barolini does not make a connection between Dioneo’s consistently “anti-matrimonial” thematic; rather, she underlines that Dioneo believes in women’s right to sexuality as a way of bringing about some parity between the sexes.
presumably happily-ever-after through marriage? In the first nine tales, enamored young protagonists went through all sorts of horrible tribulations: murders (5.1); kidnappings (5.1, 5.5); running away from home (5.2, 5.3); being sentenced to death (5.6, 5.7); and facing bankruptcy (5.8, 5.9). After these trials leave indelible impressions on the young protagonists, each narrator consigns them to a questionable happily-ever-after in the tales’ last lines. If they do indeed live happily for the rest of their lives, then it might all have been worth it. However, Dioneo’s transgressive tenth tale of the fifth day and nearly ever tale after it prior to Day ten lead us to believe that married life – put bluntly and colloquially – is not all it’s cracked up to be.

In 5.10, the couple must share a young man in their bed in order to achieve mutual sexual gratification, and, even then, the text does not indicate they ever managed to be happy together after that experience. The third tale of the sixth day underscores how easily a marital union can be broken—even by five-hundred counterfeit coins—and warn the reader that women like Monna Nonna de’ Pulci must be ready to defend her matrimony. In the sixth tale of that same day, Filostrato supports the serious questioning and undermining of the sacred nuptial bond. In his novella, Madonna Filippa proves her case in court and the law ends up supporting married women who have extra-marital affairs as long as they do not do so for remuneration and they satisfy their husbands. After the many trials and sufferings of the male and female characters of Day Five’s first nine novelle, the reader now discovers that matrimonial unity can be torn apart with no painful consequences whatsoever.

Filippa’s legalization of adultery sets the stage for the deceptions of the next three days of affabulation. Day Seven acts as the subversive anti-matrimonial foundation of
the three days in which the *beffa* governs the storytelling. The rule of the Dioneo’s reign is that “*si ragiona delle beffe, le quali o per amore o per salvamento di loro le donne hanno già fatte a’ suoi mariti,*” and every *novella* proffers adulterous relationships and violated nuptials. These elements – adultery and dishonored nuptials – have been a part of every day prior to Day Seven except for the first day. However, in Day Seven, for the first time, the *brigata* also presents husbands who willingly permit their wives to cheat, even after discovering their infidelity. Whether in verbal agreement as in the case of 7.4, or tacitly, as in 7.5 and 7.8, at the end of the story, an agreement is reached such that the husband accepts or at least implicitly allows for his wife to continue cheating on him in order to find some kind of peace, or rather a questionable and disturbing *modus Vivendi*, in an otherwise unhappy marital arrangement.

Thus, in the seventh day Boccaccio daringly steps up the *brigata*’s rhetoric against marriage and permits sexual freedom to several unsatisfied wives. The eighth day showcases *beffe* that either men do to women or *vice versa*. Under this narrative rubric, the *brigata* offers examples of one unfaithful widow (8.7), three distrustful married couples (8.3, 8.6, 8.9) and three adulterous spouses (8.1, 8.2, and 8.8). This day further proves that the representation of widows in the *Decameron* is not univocal. In Day Eight, one discovers that some widows, such as the lady of 8.4 who rejects the sexual advances of the rector of Fiesole, protects their *onestà* and honors her husband’s memory. Yet there are also examples of widows who actively pursue lovers as well, such as Elena who rejects the *scolaro* in 8.7 to have an affair with another young man. The preponderance

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201 Yet even in Day One, there is the example of the violated sacred bond of the abbot and the monk, who have sexual encounters with a young lady (1.4). Then, there is the attempt of the king of France to seduce the married marchioness of Monferrato. Finally, one finds the example of the widow, Madonna Malgherida, who agrees to accept his love, while safeguarding her honor (1.10).
of Day Eight’s matrimonial evidence continues to suggest that marriage brings about an unhappy existence. The wife of the first tale cheats on her husband for money, and Monna Belcolore of the second tale sleeps with the Prete of Varlungo for gifts and favors. Then the inaugural tales of the Calandrino and Maestro Alberto series also show a non-flattering view of an allegedly normal married life. In Calandrino’s case, he and Monna Tessa completely distrust one another. In 8.3, he beats her mercilessly for “ruining” the elitropia, while in 8.6 one begins to see that Calandrino fears his wife because she embodies reason, sobriety, and good sense. When Maestro Simone returns home from an evening with Bruno and Buffalmacco, his wife immediately assumes infidelity is the cause of his late night adventures. Finally, by the eighth tale of the day, two married couples arrange for an improper, adulterous, and systematic “wife-sharing” arrangement, a setup which totally parodies the exclusive, sacred nature of the marriage contract and sacrament of the time.

Day Nine universalizes the beffa and describes more than just practical jokes. The day also serves as a final demonstration of the fraudulent ways in which people treat each other. For the purposes of the present chapter, the representation of marriages in Day Nine continues to question the happily-ever-after of the fifth day’s first nine tales. In the final two installments of the Calandrino series, yet again the reader finds complete distrust between husband and wife. Violence escalates during this day between husbands and wives, too. In 9.3, Calandrino repeats that beating Tessa is the only

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202 In 9.3, Calandrino blames Monna Tessa for causing him to become pregnant. Her tendency to be atop Calandrino during intercourse is the cause, he believes. He is not at all surprised about her power to make him sick in such a way, and indeed he posits a universalization that God makes a wife trista such that husbands cannot be happy: “Oimè, tristo me, come faro io? Come partorirò io questo figliuolo? Onde uscirà egli? Ben veggo che io son morto per la rabbia di questa mia moglie, che tanto la faccia Idio trista quanto io voglio esser lieto; ma cosi fossi io sano come io non sono, ché io mi leverei e dare’le tante busse, che io la romperei tutta, avvegna che egli mi stia molto bene, ché io non la doveva mai lasciar salir di sopra” (Dec. 9.3.23-24). In 9.5, Monna Tessa catches Calandrino cheating on her with a prostitute.
remedy for "communicating" with her; in 9.7, Talano’s wife must suffer a vicious attack from a wolf to become less presumptuous and more agreeable to her husband; and in 9.9, Giosefo takes the advice of King Solomon to beat his wife as the only way to change her recalcitrance and their rapport together. Deception and violence characterize the narrative world – and indeed, the married world – of Day Nine. By the end of the day, Queen Emilia passes on the duty of emending her defect and that of all the members of the brigata to Panfilo. It is my belief that the defect she refers to is that they for far too long enjoyed themselves by telling stories of others’ misfortunes, and now they would like to change this practice.

Panfilo institutes such an emendation by requiring the group to tell stories about “chi liberalmente o vero magnificamente alcuna cosa operasse intorno a’ fatti d’amore o d’altra cosa” (Dec. 10.1.1). In large measure, I believe his affabulatory requirement is a success, and the brigata finally manages to proffer values and acts that not only entertain, but also furnish utile consiglio in the work’s broad mission – of which we are reminded by the parallel of its title to that of Saint Ambrose’s Hexameron – of recreating the world around them to be a better place. As a result, I must disagree with critics who emphasize continuity between the first nine days and the tenth and who find the parody of liberality and magnificence in Day Ten. Affirmations of this sort altogether ignore the matter of the brigata’s defect, the king’s command that they emend their ways, and the fact that they genuinely do so in the last ten tales of the Centonovelle.

The brief investigation of the change in attitude and representation toward matrimony is perhaps one of the most effective means of ascertaining the genuineness of the transition from the pars destruens of the work to the pars construens. Some critics,
for instance, Novajra, underscore continuity, rather than a break between the first nine
days and the tenth. Novajra also simplifies the representation of matrimony in the work
in such a way that causes a distortion of its changed depiction in the Decameron’s last
day: “L’espressione di un amore che si pone al di fuori del matrimonio … viene nel
Decameron demistificato nella parodia semplice del tradimento coniugale, infrazione
palese alla norma, per riconquistare nuovamente dignità nell’esaltazione del vincolo
coniugale” (173). First of all, there are far too many instances and different
circumstances to refer to one monolithic “love outside of marriage” for the entirety of the
work. Second, the concept of parody, and especially the parody of the sacrament of
marriage, is anything but simple. And finally, to what sort of norm could the critic refer
here? If anything, one could argue, just as I have, that the norm of the Decameron’s
married couples consists of betrayal, distrust, and unhappiness. Only by recognizing and
closely studying the complexity and myriad examples of matrimones – both happy and
unhappy – prior to the tenth day can one argue the one true element of Novajra’s
statement. That is, we do in fact witness for the first time a consistent representation of
dignity and exaltation regarding the matrimonial bond.

For this reason, it is hard to accept statements such as those made by Luciano
Rossi, who claims that Day Ten be read in an ironic, and even comical key. According to
Rossi, Boccaccio evokes liberality and magnificence in this day with a malicious smile,
almost as a jocular myth. It is, he affirms,
niente più di un miraggio, nel quale i protagonisti della giornata mostrano tutta la
loro miopia, nei confronti delle donne-amanti, senza essere capaci, non dico di
intenderne la vera natura, ma nemmeno di percepirne la profonda umanità,
relegando queste ultime a meri oggetti di desiderio, non più importanti d’un bel cavallo o d’una bella armatura. (273)

Rossi’s reference to jocularity and Boccaccio’s supposed “malicious smile” brings to mind Muscetta’s afore-mentioned quote regarding marriage amid the violence and fraudulence of Day Nine. Where Muscetta states that one finds there a “documento giocoso dell’etica matrimoniale,” I would argue that Day Nine and almost all other instances prior to Day Ten point to a matrimonial crisis. Before the last day, more often than not, marriages strike the reader because the brigata portrays them in a negative and destructive framework. There are exceptions, to be sure, the most prominent of which are perhaps are that of Alessandro and the king of England’s daughter (2.3) and also that of Federigo degli Alberighi (5.8).\footnote{\textit{Dec}. 2.3 is without a doubt the most positive example prior to Day Ten that could very well belong to the series of representations in the last day. Fortune brings together Alessandro and the king of England’s daughter. They perform two sacred ceremonies: the first before a statue of Christ in a room at inn; the second before the pope in Rome. The narrator goes beyond the terse, formulaic happily-ever-after ending that one finds in Day Five and dedicates a significant portion of the novella’s ending to describing their joyous trip back to England, where their union brought peace and happiness.} However, for the most part, married protagonists in the \textit{Decameron}’s first nine days strike the reader much more so for the toils and trials they must undergo than for the happiness they display in a continued and sustained narrative (such as in the last chapter of the \textit{Filocolo}).

By contrast, in the last seven tales of Day Ten, one finds that much less violence, trials, and tribulations surround marriage and indeed that those toils are, relatively speaking, constructive and peaceful occasions. In 10.4, Messer Gentil de’ Carisendi shatters the tradition of violent banquets that precede the marriages in 5.1 and 5.8. Madonna Dianora and her husband Gilberto communicate openly with one another and – a most rare occurrence in the marital relationships of the \textit{Centonovelle} – they trust each
other. To rebut Rossi’s comment that all the women in the tenth day are treated as objects, the reader need look no further than the husband’s words to the wife when she tells him she has lost a bet and must acquiesce to another man’s sexual desires: “Voglio che tu a lui vada e, se per modo alcun puoi, t’ingegni di far che, servata la tua onestà, tu sii da questa promessa disciolta: dove altamente non si potesse, per questa volta il corpo ma non l’animo gli concessi” (Dec. 10.5.16). Throughout the Decameron, as I have argued in the central chapters of this study, women are regularly treated as inanimate objects of exchange. However, here, for the first time, a man, and a husband at that, assigns a very complex matter to his mate to resolve. He trusts his wife’s onestà and believes that she is capable of making a wise decision (even after making a foolish promise to her pursuer), and distinguishes her soul (her being’s rational, spiritual aspect) from her body (which has been thus far, in most tales, the narrators’ only concern). In speaking in this fashion, Gilberto clearly dispels any doubts about his respect for his wife, thereby dismissing also any lingering concerns in the critics’ minds about Boccaccio’s intent in no longer depicting women and wives as mere things and inanimate objects.

Liberality, magnificence, and fidelity of this sort have become the hallmark of almost all protagonists in Day Ten. I believe that one of the clearest ways of assessing the transition from the first nine days to the tenth is to take a look at the way husbands and wives act toward one another. The magnanimity and trust that the husband of 10.5 places in his wife is remarkable, and foreshadows the happy relationship between messer Torello and Adalieta in 10.9. In the latter case, too, one discovers yet another couple that is happy, faithful to one another, and a novella that concludes peacefully, even though the wife was coerced and about to contract to marry another man.
In the tenth and final tale, Dioneo seems to return to the less-than-credible happily-ever-after formula of Day Five. The patient Griselda must undergo the harshest of tribulations and tests before she can arrive at a questionably felicitous finale. Dioneo diverges only slightly, though, from the storytelling order of the day. He breaks the rules by inserting one of the most malevolent, deceitful characters possible in Gualtieri. He follows the rules by describing to the brigata the most patient, magnificent character of the entire work. In so doing, I believe Dioneo continues to reject the idea of a completely credible happily-ever-after for married people, just as he has done consistently throughout the Decameron. However, Dioneo – Boccaccio’s most subversive, irreverent narrator – conforms to Panfilo’s command and tries to give the brigata a lasting, constructive value that might – if they learn anything at all from their experience – make Florence a better place upon their return.
CONCLUSION

After the final tale of the work, Fiammetta sings the Decameron’s last ballata. The ballata strikes the reader because of its stark contrast to the tales of liberality and magnificence that the brigata has just told. The tales of the tenth day proffer munificent merchants, repentant clergy, and happy marriages, all rarities indeed in the first nine days of storytelling. Even though the brigata finally manages to uplift positive values in their stories, Fiammetta’s performance – like those of most of the rest of the young narrators – highlights that the characters of the frame have not attained happiness or peace in their love pursuits as a result of their journey away from plague-ridden Florence. All matters of love in the tenth day are also matters of matrimony. In 10.4, we witness an honest wife “at the mercy,” one could suggest, of a long-time, rejected, suitor who, renounces, nevertheless, to take advantage of her, even while she is a helpless guest in his home. In 10.5, Emilia offers yet another example of an honest wife in Dianora and of a trusting, forgiving husband in Gilberto. In the sixth and seventh tales, kings demonstrate their generosity by selflessly arranging honorable marriages for young maidens. In 10.8, a most generous friend, Gisippo, gives his fiancée over to his friend Tito, who apparently loves the woman even more. In the end, Tito reciprocates Gisippo’s generosity by arranging an honorable marriage for him. In the ninth and tenth tales, yet again we witness two wives who maintain their onestà through numerous trials and tribulations.
Yet, Fiammetta would have us believe through her ballad that she knows women all too well, and that they, given the chance, would take away her love: “Ma per ciò ch’io m’avveggio / altre donne savie son com’io, / io triemo di paura, / e pur credo il peggio: / di quello avviso en l’altre esser disio / ch’a me l’anima fura” (*Dec.* 10.Concl.12).

Fiammetta distrusts women because she knows their treacherous nature, but she also demonstrates a lack of faith in men who are all guilty of lacking fidelity. One could easily connect Fiammetta’s closing comments on fidelity to her inaugural tale in the first day, and, in so doing, highlight one of the many ways by which marriage and fidelity is reflected on the *brigata*’s life from the beginning to the end of the work. In her opening tale, 1.5, the narrator actually defended a woman’s honor and faithfulness to her husband. Yet, by the end of the work, one finds that the she might not be altogether convinced of the woman’s example she touted at the work’s beginning.

Beyond this character-centered connection, I hope to have demonstrated that the *brigata* and Boccaccio constantly consider matrimony, fidelity, and its meaning amid the backdrop of the historical moment of the plague. In the first chapter of the present work, I argued that Boccaccio’s consideration not only of marriage, but also of sacred matters in general, is more often than not presented as a parody. Parody is etymologically a song sung beside another, for critical or comic purposes; and Boccaccio’s destabilizing representations of contemporary cultural, religious, and social practices begs the reader to keep the historical context in mind. Among these practices, little critical attention has been given to the presence and subversive representation of marriage in the *Decameron*.  

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204 Fiammetta states that she would not be jealous if the man she loves – or any men in love for that matter – possessed as much fidelity as valor – a term which here carries a spiritual meaning: “Se io sentissi fede / nel mio signor quant’io sento valore, / gelosa non sarei: / ma tanto se ne vede, / pur che sia chi inviti l’amatore, / ch’io gli ho tutti per rei” (*Dec.* 10.Concl.13).
After defining parody in the first chapter, we proceeded to a brief look at what, in theory, marriage of the time period was supposed to be according to historians. From that analysis, we concluded essentially that whether it was used to settle political disputes and tamp down civil unrest or to promote and insure salvation and a beatific afterlife, the matrimonial bond represented a bulwark against disorder and a foundation on which society itself was to be built. According to the Church, furthermore, the sacramental union of man and woman represented and symbolized the union of Christ and the Church. Ultimately, marriage was nothing less than a way of conveying the strength of the bond between God and humanity.

So often in the Decameron failed matrimony and unhappily married protagonists are the target of the brigata’s laughter and entertainment. However, especially given the social and religious importance and meaning of marriage in the medieval period – and the omnipresence of marriages in no fewer than sixty-five novelle – it seems unquestionable that Boccaccio investigates the institution and challenges his reader to do so as well. In the third chapter, the analysis turned to the text of the Decameron itself and found significant parallels between the Filocolo and the first three marriage-related tales of the Decameron. Matrimony is a central issue to both works, but by the time of the Decameron, Boccaccio must face several issues: first, a shift from the long narrative to the short narrative; then, a change in the treatment of the spiritual and love quest of his protagonists. The Filocolo univocally proffers a quest of mutual and faithful love that leads to honorable marriage between its protagonists, as well as a quest toward religious love in that the male and female protagonists ultimately convert to Christianity. The treatment of the love and spiritual quests oscillates in the Decameron. With the first three
marriage-related tales (1.5, 1.10, and 2.3), one finds great continuity with Boccaccio’s representation in the \textit{Filocolo}. The Marchioness of Monferrato (1.5) and the widow Madonna Malgherida (1.10), maintain their \textit{onestà} and defend their marital honor. In \textit{Dec.} 2.3, fortune brings together a young merchant and an English princess, who – much like Florio and Biancifiore – have a private marriage ceremony, a public, Christian marriage celebration, and have a happy married life together.

Indeed, the narrator of 2.3 provides evidence of their happy life together by recounting the joyous celebrations of their marriage in Italy and in France, as well as the peace their union brought back in England. After \textit{Dec.} 2.3, readers are left with a couple of important questions: Will the portrayal of matrimony stay the same in the remaining tales of Day Two? Will the sacralizing and uplifting vocabulary of 2.3 continue to describe the before, during, and after of protagonists’ nuptials? The responses to these questions led us to find that after the third tale of Day Two, Boccaccio began to unveil an increasingly multifaceted and complex view of matrimony. In many of the successive tales, a new narrative approach can be found. This new approach is unique to the \textit{Decameron} and embodies, in most cases, a shift away from recounting happiness after the marriage and gravitation towards the travails that protagonists face prior to arriving at a presumable happy ending. In all of these cases, in the context of Day Two (e.g., 2.6, 2.7, 2.8), the \textit{brigata} marginalizes the sacred, questions matrimony, and even parodies the traditional medieval viewpoint of marriage as a sacrament and indissoluble contract between one man and one woman.

Ultimately, certainly in Days Seven through Nine, with many anticipations in Day Three, Five, and Six, marriage provides much subject matter for the amusement of the
brigata, and also in Day Two matrimony seems to fail insofar as Fortune, accompanied by human deception, governs the second day’s storytelling. Thus, in the tales after Dec. 2.3 and before Day Five, one finds for the most part a serious shift and transformation in the representation of marriage as a love quest and a spiritual quest from the Filocolo to the Decameron. Boccaccio clearly wants the reader to keep in mind what he wrote in the earlier work, reminding us that in some cases people actually do respect matrimony and treat it as a sacred aspect of the medieval world. In Day Two, honorable matrimonies at times take place to compensate steadfast characters for the woes they suffer at the hands of Fortune (2.6, 2.8). At the same time, Boccaccio juxtaposes these honorable instances with subversive occasions that marginalize and even parody the sacred aspect of marriage. Alatiel undermines the concept of nuptial unions in sleeping countless times with eight different men prior to marriage and parodies the sacrament of marriage by marrying a king at the end as if she were a virgin. In the tenth tale of Day Two, Boccaccio draws attention to the fact that joining a couple in holy matrimony does not change human nature or eliminate sexual desire.

In Day Three, marriage and sacred bonds play an integral part of every novella told, and are inevitably broken by human ingenuity. In five tales of the day, a lay person, married or unmarried, utilizes his or her “industria” to corrupt not only a sacred, but also a marital union. In the other five tales, secular characters use their “ingenuity” to commit adultery with other married people. Immediately following Filostrato’s thematic announcement for Day Four – that of unhappy love stories – the narrator reiterates the perfection of the place in which the unhappy Filostrato and the brigata find themselves. Absolute peace reigns over the garden in which they find themselves. Wild animals do
not fear the young people or try to escape them; indeed, they seem to place chase with them. The brigata knows well what it means to run away and to survive. They run away from the plague and, in a way, tell stories to survive. This particular reminder of an irenic environment is starkly juxtaposed to Filostrato’s turbulent state of mind and the unfulfilled love between him and a woman of the group. It is if they have one foot in Eden, but they, much like the characters of their tales, cannot step in with both feet. This inability to achieve happiness and tranquility permeates the fourth day of the work. Many of its novelle contain examples not only of love gone awry, but also of marriages that cannot exist for several unfortunate lovers. Filostrato and the rest of the young people are surrounded by paradise. But, no matter how cleverly they manage to affabulate and construct their narrative worlds, they cannot totally excise death, unhappiness, or unpleasant conjugal rapports from the human experience. Most of the tales end by informing the reader that one or all of the protagonists’ loves end badly and stop there. However, several comment upon the possibility of love, or at the very least, undisturbed togetherness, after death. Furthermore, they seem to imply that the only relationships that can possibly be happy and enduring, are those that might or might not exist in the afterlife.

Chapter Six began by reiterating the historical and social meaning of marriage in medieval Italy: Marriage in the medieval period bestowed official recognition on a union between man and woman and, among all possible unions, matrimony was recognized by

205 According to this line, Guiscardo and Ghismonda were buried “con general dolore di tutti i salernetani, onorevolmente ammenduni in un medesimo sepolcro” (Dec. 4.1.62). Simona and Pasquino are buried in the same church: “... furono nella chiesa di San Paolo” (Dec. 4.7.24). Perhaps the most striking example is that of Girolamo e Salvestra. The two are buried together and united by death in “inseparabile compagnia”: “Presa adunque la morta giovane e lei così ornate come s’acconciano i corpi morti, sopra quell medesimo letto allato al giovane la posero a giacere, e qui di lungamente pianta, in una medesima sepoltura furono sepelliti ammenduni: e loro, li quali amor vivi non aveva potuti congiugnere, la morte congiunse con inseparabile compagnia” (Dec. 4.8.35).
people as the most legitimate means of perpetuating society without jeopardizing structural stability. One finds that marriage in medieval Christian Europe was recognized as an indissoluble bond between a man and woman that was sacred in that it represented on Earth the bond between God and humanity. Yet it also served the important social function of providing society with structural stability. Marriages are a part of every novella in Day Five; but rather than acting as a peaceful and socially unifying force fundamental to order and stability in society, the institution of marriage in the fifth day is built upon a foundation of strained and inauspicious circumstances. Through all of the trials and perils that the lovers of Day Five must pass to end with Fiammetta’s command for the “lieto fine,” one might ask oneself: Do the ends justify the means? Ultimately, these conditions call into question the credibility of the “happily-ever-after” endings that conclude each of the day’s novelle and force the reader to reflect upon the representation of marriage at the heart of the Decameron. Dioneo’s tenth tale in Day Five seems to provide an initial answer to the question of whether a happy life truly ensues after the wedding celebration or not, and if it is worth all the trouble to get there. In it one finds a married life in crisis, and Boccaccio offers a response for the attentive reader who might wonder how the protagonists’ lives actually might turn out. As a result of this marital representation in 5.10, and its continuity with the upcoming days of the beffa, Boccaccio questions and even parodies the institution of matrimony. Chapter Seven continued the interpretation of Boccaccio’s parody of marriage by taking a closer look at his mercantile background and the economic lens through which Day Five, and the work as a whole. One could thus conclude that Boccaccio interprets his world with economic explanations
and ties his commercial knowledge to the social, cultural and religious happenings of his day.

The eighth and final chapter of the study was dedicated to unveiling what post-wedding married life would be like in the “happily-ever-after” stories that comprise the first nine tales of Day Five. The subversive representation of marriage in 5.10 – along with its irreverent parody of Saint Paul’s idea of conjugal debt – presents an unflattering and unhappy interpretation of life after the wedding celebration. On the whole, the brigata persists in portraying marriage in a negative and destructive framework. In Day Six, we have the prominent example of Madonna Filippa, who presents her case in court and effectively has adultery legalized for women who, after satisfying their husbands, have a “love surplus” and do not take money for intercourse with other men. Dioneo will take up the subject of adultery during his seventh day rule in requiring narratives having to do with the ways wives cheat on their husbands. In Days Eight and Nine, too, one continues to see matrimony displayed and described in a frail, breakable, and often broken state, and in a negative and destructive framework (8.3, 8.6, 8.8, 8.9, 9.3, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, 9.9, 9.10). Distrust defines the foundation of married life for the husbands and wives in Days Seven, Eight, and Nine. In the eighth and ninth days, Boccaccio takes the beffa a step further than Day Seven’s specific target of violated marriages. He universalizes the beffa to characterize the fallen state of society; however, corrupted nuptials and troubled marriages are still a central, if not the exclusive consideration.

Ultimately, by the end of Day Nine, this sort of conjugal comportment and the storytelling tendencies of the group in the first nine days are arguably recognized by Queen Emilia as a “difetto.” She passes the crown to Panfilo, who has the task of
correcting their defect. I believe that the defect was defined explicitly by Dioneo in his introduction to the tenth tale of Day Five. In the first nine days of affabulation, the \textit{brigata} stories reflect the “guasto mondo,” not just of the plague, but of the entire world at large, in the words of Elissa, the youngest storyteller (\textit{Dec. 7.3.8}) and the many ways this corrupt world had negatively affected them. At the outset of the work, they admit they have witnessed some of the worst things happen to their friends and families because of the plague and its effects on people, and they resolve to leave the city to save their lives. Finally, by the tenth day, they decide to tell stories that affirm not the way the world is, but, rather, the way that it should be and could be reconstructed. In this creative atmosphere of positive, constructive values, the \textit{brigata} even presents marriage in a new light. One could argue, just as I have, that the norm for the \textit{Decameron}’s married couples in the first nine days consists of betrayal, distrust, and unhappiness. On the contrary, in the tenth day we witness for the first time a consistent representation of dignity and exaltation regarding the matrimonial bond and fidelity among married people.

The purpose of this dissertation has been to take a closer look at the bond between husband and wife, that of matrimony, which appears in all the frames of the \textit{Decameron} — description of the plague, the lives of the \textit{brigata}, and in all days devoted to storytelling — and occupies a central day of storytelling in the course of the ten young people’s journey outside of Florence. At a biographical level, and considering the

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\textsuperscript{206} Dioneo states: “‘Io non so se io mi dica che sia accidental vizio e per malvagità di costume ne’ mortali sopravenuto, o se pure è nella natura peccato, il rieder più tosto delle cattive cose che delle buone opere, e spezialmente quando quelle cotali a noi non pertengono’ (\textit{Dec. 5.10.3})

\textsuperscript{207} Pampinea underlines omnipresent death and the young ladies’ misery in general as reasons to leave the city: “‘Noi dimoriamo qui, al parer mio, non altramente che se essere volessimo o dovessimo testimonie di quanti corpi morti ci sieno alla sepoltura recati o d’ascoltare se i frati di qua entro, de’ quali il numero è quasi venuto al niente, alle debite ore cantino i loro ufici, o a dimostrare a qualunque ci apparisce, ne’ nostri abiti, la qualità e la quantità delle nostre miserie’ (\textit{Dec. 1. Intro. 56}).
predominantly negative representation of marriages in the work, one may wonder to what extent Boccaccio, who was born out of wedlock and never married, may be willing to question the institution – and even more so, the sacrament – of matrimony. However, the depth with which he and his brigata explore this topic as it is affected by history and the Black Death, by fortune in Day Two, by “industria” in Day Three, by unhappiness in Day Four, by supposed happiness in Day Five, by quick wit in the sixth, by the “beffa” in the seventh through ninth, and finally by magnificence and liberality in the constructive tenth day, should indicate to the reader that this topic goes far beyond the life of Boccaccio himself. Matrimony permeated all levels of society in medieval Florence and Italy and was a central concern of families, and especially heads of household, throughout the medieval and Renaissance periods. Florentines greatly valued honorable marriage, which consisted of a virgin bride being given to her husband; of a wife who maintained her fidelity; and of a widow who sustained a second maidenhood, serving only God and her children.

Boccaccio reminds the reader and his critics in his Author’s Conclusion that the time was right for him to compose his masterpiece, to select the specific stories that he did, and through those one-hundred “novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie” to question and criticize the society surrounding him. In this moment, he underlines that the tales were not told in church, among clerics or philosophers, “ma ne’ giardini, in luogo di

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208 In subsequent works, Boccaccio will depict many very exemplary lives of women of all ages and diverse marital conditions, primarily in De mulieribus claris.

209 Paolo da Certaldo deals with the proper and honorable way to marry in several of his 388 pieces of advice in the contemporary Libro di buoni costumi. Then, one often finds advice regarding proper marriage procedure and advice to sons on how to pick a wife in the diaries of Renaissance merchants. Anthony Molho treats such a diary of a Florentine merchant named Morelli: “Morelli urged his sons to ensure that they ally themselves with respectable merchant families in good standing in Florence, to choose wives whom they liked, whose parents were healthy and to make certain that their future spouses were physically well formed so as to not have difficulties childbearing (205).
sollazzo, tra persone giovani benché mature e non pieghevoli per novelle, in tempo nel quale andar con le brache in capo per iscampo di sé era alli più onesti non disdicevole” (Dec. Concl. 7). Chaos envelops the world of the brigata, and the most serious, sacred elements of their society are turned upside-down. Boccaccio seizes the moment and observes not only the symptoms of the plague in his introduction, but the symptoms of a diseased world in the first nine days of narration. In no fewer than sixty of the first ninety tales, the brigata diagnoses unhappy, dysfunctional marriage in their stories as a one of the many symptoms of their world’s dysfunction. In the tenth day, the centrality of matrimony persists, and the brigata consistently elevates the institution and proffers the happiness of wedded couples. Despite this overwhelming presence, matrimony in the Decameron has hardly been the sustained focus of the critics’ attention. It is my hope that I have been able to bring matrimony’s centrality to the fore of the scholarly debate, and to have opened a dialogue in Decameron criticism through which scholars can continue to discuss freely and openly, as Boccaccio would have each lady in love do so, “lasciando omai a ciascheduna e dire e credere come le pare” (Dec. Concl. 29).
Select Bibliography


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