Religious Parody and the Economy of Significance in *Decameron* Day Five

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ABSTRACT

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According to some critics, the fifth day of Boccaccio's *Decameron* represents a return to order. After Day Four's theme of tragic events and unhappy endings, the queen of Day Five, Fiammetta, requires that only stories with happy endings be told. Ironically, however, even though Day Five's stores are supposed to end happily with the celebration of marriage and the triumph of love, nearly all the events leading up to the irenic conclusions are shaped by tragedy, fear, violence, coercion and even 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 an unpropitious circumstances. The resultant representation of marriage is parodic, and the goal of the present study will be to underline Boccaccio's efforts to create a near total parody of the marriages witnessed through Day Five and to analyze how the various *novelle* utilize love and marriage to undermine social order. In addition, in chapter two, this study will seek to understand this parody in economic terms as employed by Boccaccio, a writer of a mercantile and commercial background.

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CHAPTER 1

MARRIAGE IN MEDIEVAL ITALY AND IN *DECAMERON* DAY FIVE

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.[1]

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

[1] 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, essemplo dato a coloro che sani rimanevano, quasi abbandonati per tutto languieno" (*Dec*. 1.Intro.26).

represent a critique on the part of Boccaccio.[2] He elaborates what it takes to survive and thrive in the pestilential mid-fourteenth century, and often he 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.[3] 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.[4] 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 alcuno amante, dopo alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti, felicemente avvenisse" (*Dec.* 5.1.1). Ironically, however, even though Day Five's stories are supposed to end happily with the celebration of marriage and the

[2] 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 a ogn'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).

[3] 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).

[4] 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 Fourtheme: "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 conclusion 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.*

triumph of love, 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 parody marriage, which in Day Five may be seen as undermining social order.[5]

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. The last tale – 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 could also offer a strong example of economic metaphor in the social interactions of Day Five with nothing less than a situation which parodies the Pauline notion of conjugal debt. In this parody of married life, this notion of debt is completely lost and thus a distortion of Paul's ideas results; marital sex to the apostle was a safeguard to human

[5] 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 strength of 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 relations 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. Furthermore, to understand the goals of this essay and the function of parody in the *Decameron*, I refer to Cervigni's definition derived from *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*: "… parody – etymologically, 'a song sung beside' a previous one – may be a critique, with serious or comic purposes, of a prevailing way of thinking and/or lifestyle; as such, parody is a metafiction by nature and thus highly reflexive" (2n5).

weakness, but Pietro, unwilling to render that which his wife exacts, arranges a situation that makes the idea of conjugal debt seem ludicrous.

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 ports 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 study will be to underline Boccaccio's efforts to create a near total parody of the marriages witnessed throughout Day Five and to analyze how the various *novelle* utilize love and marriage to undermine social order and to underline the desacralization of the Church as an institution.[6] Furthermore, the study will seek to understand this parody in economic terms. Finally, these economic and parodic elements will be analyzed in order to better understand what social critique Boccaccio had in mind

[6] 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 she does not treat the absence and desacralization of the institution of marriage in Day Five, Potter aptly describes Boccaccio's broader undertaking: "The *Decameron* 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.

with regard to Florentine society before, during and after the time of the plague and the language he used to describe it.[7] Before turning to that analysis, however, let us turn our attention to the historical significance and practices of medieval marriage.

Marriage in Medieval Italy

In order to offer an analysis and interpretation of Boccaccio's take on marriage in his *Decameron*, it will be advantageous to have an idea of the historical background of that institution. Although he does not particularly treat matrimony in Italy, George Duby's 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 "bestowed official recognition and singled out among all possible unions those that society legitimized as a means of perpetuating itself without endangering its structural stability" (4). 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 parody of the institution, to remember that there were two conflicting ideas of this vital union: the lay conception,

[7] Of particular interest to this portion of the study will be Stevenson's *Praise and Paradox: Merchants and Craftsmen in Elizabethan Popular Literature*, which I will seek to apply cautiously and critically to the Italian situation. Stevenson analyzes the phenomenon of praising merchants and commerce that developed in Elizabethan times and the paradox of the language used to describe them. Essentially, she argues that in such a period of rapid social and economic change, England's popular writers lacked a language to describe the new place of men with wealth from business interests with respect to the aristocracy. She notes: "In times of social change, tradition has greater psychological appeal than innovation. Before men abandon old paradigms and develop new ones that accurately describe what they observe, they strain their rhetorical concepts to the snapping point in an attempt to deny the possible ramifications of what they see" (7). With regard to the *Decameron*, it will be most interesting to analyze the language that Boccaccio uses to describe the social and economic situation of plague-period Florence. Is he, too, in search of a new paradigm to describe what is going on in the society around him? Are traditional rhetorical concepts pushed to the brink in search of this new paradigm? I will address these issues in the coming pages.

which safeguarded the social order, and the ecclesiastical model, which sought to protect the divine order.[8]

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.[9] 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,

[8] Whether considering the social or ecclesiastical aspects, Duby, like other marriage scholars, underlines the important distinction between marriage and the order and peace it should bring with the clandestine 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 offers no such agreements, order or peace.

[9] 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: "... 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 diffcoltà di definire i contorni del processo evolutivo, che non appare lineare, univoco, e nemmeno omogeneo da una regione ad un'altra" (xiii).

> ‘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 with direct effects on 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.[10]

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, “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

[10] 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 commonalities shared in Christendom. 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 *buona disposizione* 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.[11]

In addition to broad political and social harmony and safeguarding a tranquil future, by the Medieval period and 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.

[11] 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 "an aristocratic model, favouring legitimate marriage but allowing easy divorce, and tolerating the marriage of close relatives, opposed to a clerical model emphasizing indissoluble monogamous marriage" (D'Avray 14). 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 theologists 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 inconsistencies of social conventions and the expectations of the *Comune*: a civil society at the base of which one found marital alliances 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.[12]

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 "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). Gradually, the lay model was infiltrated and absorbed by priests, who were becoming more and more involved in the marriage 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

[12] Hughes cites several particular examples at this point in which strategic marriages helped to bring calm and order among political factions: in 1239 a series of secret marriages helped allay civil war; 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).

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.

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 immediately falls on the fifth day of storytelling which is effectively a day dedicated to questionably irenic conclusions achieved at the very end of the *novelle* through nuptial celebrations and the triumph of love. Ironically, however, even though Day Five's stories are supposed to end happily with, as Baldi puts it, "la celebrazione del trionfo d'amore," 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 Fourin the end are wrought with contradictions and are only superficially cheerful. These contradictions and this superficiality immediately raise several questions: does Boccaccio expect the reader to uncritically accept the superficially happy endings? Can these hastily conceived and 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 Day Five's tales to analyze the meaning, effects, and representations of matrimony in Boccaccio's literary world.

Marriage 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 citizens 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 strength of 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 *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). Often, and especially among the upper classes who could most afford to be ostentatious, the celebration of marriage and the construction of this *cellula fondamentale* was to be an ostensible and ceremonial act. To this point, Duby adds that "it called for celebration, a very public celebration, which, for a time, assembled large numbers of people attending a central rite" (4). 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

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. 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 in the *Decameron*.

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 "tutto l'arco della giornata, il 'lieto fine' si identifica con il matrimonio," as Zaccarello fittingly comments (142). 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.[13] 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, "forced conformity to conventional social standards, submission to parental will and authority, and the impersonal effects of adventures and ordeals", that in due course deprive lovers of sentimental freedom and undermine the stability of the marriages that, in the last several lines of the *novelle*, suddenly appear (Bonadeo 295). 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 […]

[13] 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).

felicemente avvenisse" – and the variable: "alcuni fieri o sventurati accidenti" (*Dec.* 5.1). 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 separations 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 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 exiles him in shame to the country where Cimone eventually happens upon a young woman sleeping in the forest.[14] In all her beauty, Efigenia 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 Efigenia, who he believes is rightfully his, as his bride. Much to his chagrin, Efigenia'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

[14] 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. Cozzarelli aptly indicates the parallel to be made with regard to the frame of the *dieci giovani*: "The storytellers fleeing the chaos and destruction of the city for the tranquility and pleasure of the country are attempting to create their own utopia" (341).

confirms the superficiality of his transformation to civility and the 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, as Cozzarelli writes, "Cimone's actions snowball downwards into destruction and violence" (342). He immediately prepares a ship to abduct Efigenia, and after "alcuni avvenimenti fieri o sventurati" he appears on her wedding day, slaughters her husband-to-be, among countless others, and takes Efigenia, weeping in opposition, to be his bride.

Julia Cozzarelli accurately describes the ultimate portrayal of love in Cimone's case by observing that overall, one finds "earthly love's portrayal in a negative and destructive framework" (346). By going against critics' ironic admiration of the ennobling effects of love on Cimone, she correctly denotes the downward spiral of Cimone's transformation, at the bottom of which one finds none other than marriage itself.[15] Cozzarelli underlines the irony of Cimone's "evolution" in that before he became "civilized," he was harmless and that "after his moment of inspiration, and despite, or rather assisted by, the cloak of 'civilization,' he becomes a raging beast unleashed on the innocents who happen, by ill-fate, to cross his path" (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).

[15] Bonadeo brings this irony to light in underlining how critics generally accept and admire the effects on an originally uncivilized Cimone. This uncritical admiration is especially difficult to accept when one focuses on the true inducement of the marriage, and "possibly because of this admiration they [critics] overlook the real determinant of the marriage, Cimone's irrational and brutal pursuit" (289).

These are both legitimate and intriguing possibilities, 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 charade marriage resultantly becomes, 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.[16] 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 morality and guidance which Cimone was denied, progress to their marriages in a constructive and peaceful way, or will external forces, violence, and coercion 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?

Although the extent of violence and the forms of coercion oscillate in the tales following that of Cimone, Day Five's Christian marriages and the events leading up to such ceremonies remain quite the same.[17] In the second tale of the day, one does not

[16] Interestingly, marriage is used to justify Cimone's abduction and destruction of two other marriages. Given the proximity of these two opposites – abduction versus marriage – it is interesting to note a distinction made by Diane Owen Hughes, in her essay "Il matrimonio nell'Italia medievale," between *rapimento* and *matrimonio*: "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" (15).

[17] Insofar as tales two through ten take place in Christian time and unite two baptized people, a man and a woman, those matrimonies constitute a sacrament. However, as critics such as Potter and Padoan note, 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: "È l'uomo, ed esclusivamente l'uomo, con le sue azioni, la sua intelligenza e la sua ingenuità, la sua liberalità e la sua varizia, al centro dell'interesse

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, and Martuccio are pushed to the limits and suffer greatly in order to arrive at an unverifiable, peaceable existence. [18] 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.

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*; 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 to suicide. Taking these demands into consideration and critically weighing their possible effects on the couples' happiness, Alfredo Bonadeo concludes: "Their love affair must be indelibly marked by the scorching experience of suffering, death and survival" (292). The echoes of Filostrato's unhappy endings 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 tragedy.

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narrativo del *Decameron:* miracoli ed eventi straordinari, che intervengano direttamente a mutare il corso dell'azione, sono tali solo nella mente degli sciocchi" (Padoan 46).

[18] 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).

Similarly, in the fourth *novella* of the day, extreme violence is lacking, but the strained and unpropitious circumstances preceding the tale's marriage are ever-present.[19] In this tale, two young people of seemingly aristocratic origin, 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 happens upon them in a most compromising position. Instead of flying off the handle and harming or even killing the young man, Caterina's cool and shrewd father sees marriage as an advantageous compensation to be exacted from the improvident seducer. Caterina's father 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.

In the seventh *novella*, familial intervention moves 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. 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

[19] In this first part of the 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 proceed in the next part.

of death, Violante tells her father everything, Pietro is tortured mercilessly, and Amerigo decides to have him executed.[20] The strands of misfortune propelling Lauretta's tale begin to unravel when Amerigo finds that Pietro is actually of noble birth. At this point, as Bonadeo correctly states, marriage is eagerly and perhaps brutally imposed upon the young man (294). Amerigo's harshness towards his daughter and Pietro continues the pattern of inauspicious and abnormal circumstances preceding marriage, and in the end, as one comes to expect of Day Five, Boccaccio, through the narration of Fiammetta, again to quote Bonadeo, "consigns them to an unverifiable blissful existence through a fable-like epilogue" (295).

Lauretta's tale 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. The question is: How can there be so many wedding celebrations and not one of them is held in a church or even fêted 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.[21]

[20] Further demonstrating this streak of cruelty 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.

[21] "Ma mentre che essi così parimente nell'amorose fiamme accesi ardevano, la fortuna, come se diliberato avesse questo voler che fosse, loro trovò via da cacciare la temorosa paura che gl'impediva" (*Dec.* 5.7.9).

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 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 know 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, given that the sacramental definition of marriage emphasized the betrothal and exchange of vows between the man and woman. 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)

However, given the weighty social and political significance of some marriages, the institution 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 given that in a day inundated with what was at the time, and still is, 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 parodically and 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).

La casa caduta: God, Church and Society in Day Five

As in the case of God's presence in the description of the plague, the appearances of things religious in Day Five seem to be most concerned with the breakdown of society and the institution of marriage. 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 the religious system, 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 of 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 destructive 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), but 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 drama 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 corruttore 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 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.

As a result, as the theme of misfortune turned to happiness cedes to a new day and the reign of Queen Elissa, Day Five's tales of questionably felicitous finales seem to pass through the narrative frame of the ten young listeners unscathed. Judging by the lack of criticism from the ten young people of the *cornice,* the reader is led to believe that by the fourth story Filostrato is forgiven and the sad case of unhappy endings has been closed. [22] Yet, to accept this superficial synopsis of the day's events and conclusions is to neglect the day's countless internal contradictions and the presence of tragedy that is on par with,

[22] After laughing heartily and uncontrollably at Filostrato's story of Ricciardo, Caterina and the nightingale, the Queen absolves the storyteller of his abuse of authority (in that he required sad stories on the fourth day of a trip intended to be an escape from pain and suffering) and his depressing motif: "Sicuramente, se tu ieri ci affligesti, tu ci hai oggi tanto dileticate, che niuna meritamente di te si dee ramaricare" (*Dec*. 5.5.2).

or certainly comparable to, that of Day Four. The inaugural tale of the fifth day exhibits abductions, bloodshed and death that are nothing less than tragic.[23] Throughout the day's storytelling these and other misfortunate events conclude abruptly in the closing lines of each *novella*, leaving the reader with nothing more substantial than the narrator's terse remark that the protagonists are married and "they live happily ever after." Though critics tend to stop short of noting these disparities and the parody that marriage resultantly becomes, some do manage to lead us up to that point. Potter provides a thorough and convincing framework for understanding desacralization of the Church in general and Giorgio Padoan draws our attention to the plague as a destructive force that breaks the most sacred bonds between human beings. It is, with hope, now clear that one of the most important and corrupted bonds treated by Boccaccio is the conjugal bond between husband and wife and the spiritual link between God and humanity.

[23] Indeed, as Sherberg opportunely notes, "Thus, the first story of the day does not break the mold of the previous day, but rather adheres to it" (233).

CHAPTER 2

ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE AND PARODY IN DAY FIVE

If 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.[24] 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 study, let us concentrate our efforts on a trait common to both of those experiences: the influence of the world of trade and merchants. 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 the situations leading up to these

[24] Padoan's study of this cohabitation 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).

felicitous finales, women protagonists become objects of exchange. In a pair of the stories, consumption styles for 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.[25] 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.

Although there are many merchant protagonists throughout the ten days of storytelling and the one hundred stories recounted, 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 activities.

[25] 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, "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).

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.[26]

The majority of Day Five's *novelle* take place in various regions and cities of Italy and in the not too distant past. As David Wallace suggests in his book, *Boccaccio, Decameron*, Boccaccio offers a wide range of locations and, at the same time, "offers us a variety of social formations and hence a variety of narrative paths to the common point of closure" (62). Simultaneously one could also conclude that Boccaccio offers readers such a broad geographic sampling to emphasize the universality of the day's theme, beginning with Emilia's second *novella*, "vicin di Cicilia è una isoletta chiamata Lipari, nella quale non è ancor gran tempo fu..." (*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).

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

[26] 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 parts 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.

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).[27] 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.

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, trade routes and more than likely 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: "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

[27] 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).

world even if he ultimately rejected the profession to pursue literature. Florentine merchants were the main human element in the growth and development of super-companies, but also for Italy in general, 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:

> 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)[28]

In order to achieve this influence at home and abroad, the super-companies' agents had to be skilled at dealing not only with business factors but also with lacking communications, numerous temperamental rulers, and hardly any international law.

Boccaccio's unique experience in this line of business afforded him the ability to create a literary world 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; however, many other places, either barely known and also well known, appear as well throughout the text. Branca

[28] Goldthwaite 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" (Goldthwaite 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."

aptly underlines the demarcation of the *Decameron*'s world and connects its geographical vastness to the frontiers frequented by Florentine companies: "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).

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.[29] 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). If Florentine companies and their agents understood and crossed economic and geographic boundaries, Boccaccio also crossed literary borders bringing with him several themes of the trade: notions of exchange, ideas of consumption and expenditures, and a particular understanding of debt.[30]

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[29] Branca skillfully describes this zooming out and enlarging of Italian and Mediterranean geography which had not been utilized or possible before Boccaccio: "…quel vasto sfondo europeo e mediterraneo su cui si tesse l'avventura, anzi la *quête* eroica dei 'mercatanti,' allarga anche singolarmente, come mai fino allora nella nostra letteratura, l'orizzonte dei paesaggi e degli ambienti ritratti" (18). 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.

[30] 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" (Hunt 43).

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 in the distant past, outside of Italy and outside of Christendom. 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" (*Dec.* 5.1.3). Despite his noble place in society and unmatched wealth, Aristippo is plagued by the fact that the most handsome and robust of his sons, Cimone, was a simpleton and refused to be educated, to dress or to comport himself as a civilized person.[31] Having rejected the learning of civilization, Cimone's father exiles his son in shame to the country where Cimone eventually happens upon a young woman sleeping in the forest.[32] As noted above, Efigenia acts as a catalyst that ignites the flame of Cimone's intellect and desire to learn and be "civilized."

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[31] If Boccaccio offers his readers a variety of narrative paths through a range of geographical locations, all of them situated in Italy (except for, quite significantly, Panfilo's opening tale, which is set in ancient times and in Cyprus *outside of Italy*), 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 that 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 più particulari 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 while Martuccio is a "giovane […] assai leggiadro e costumato e nel suo mestier valoroso" (*Dec.* 5.2.4), and this descriptive pattern continues throughout the remaining *novelle*.

[32] 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. Cozzarelli aptly indicates the parallel to be made with

Interestingly, one of the first results of Cimone's sudden transformation is the abrupt taste he has in selecting a woman. Panfilo, the narrator of the tale, informs the reader as follows, "E quinci cominciò a distinguer 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 ..." (*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 of beauty" and makes his wife 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 in "reacquiring" whom, or, as he views the situation, what he considers to be rightfully his own. 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 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 been taken. After battling the storm, Cimone faces yet another variable that also plagued commercial ventures of the time—unexpected

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regard to the frame of the *dieci giovani*: "The storytellers fleeing the chaos and destruction of the city for the tranquility and pleasure of the country are attempting to create their own utopia" (341).

government intervention.[33] 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 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 Efigenia, weeping in opposition, to be his bride.

In the second story of the day, Emilia recounts the tale of Martuccio Gomito and Gostanza in which the two young people fall in love and want to get married. However, Martuccio is rejected by Gostanza's father because he is not sufficiently wealthy to marry the young woman. Martuccio is handsome, well mannered, skillful at his profession and seems truly to love Gostanza, but he is not wealthy enough to please her father. Consequently, 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

[33] 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).

necessità avvenire o che il vento barca senza carico e senza governator rivolgesse, o a alcuno 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 was 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, veggendolasi per onesta cagion [cioè per matrimonio] vietare, ciascuno a doverla, in quella guisa che meglio potesse, avere si diede a procacciare" (*Dec.* 5.5.8). 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 correvano, 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.[34]

Social Class and the Economic Context

Throughout the stories of Day Five and alongside these representations of women, goods, and the marketplace itself, appear several economic conflicts between the nobility and non-nobles. It is noteworthy that Boccaccio generically attributes to many of the lover-protagonists a similar noble social identification which, as Luca Biagini affirms, sets up a "mondo convenzionale dalla tradizione letteraria amorosa, per far nascere in esso un certo tipo di amore" (162). Yet these social disparities also set the stage quite well for many relationships and marriages that are considered socially unacceptable, at times for 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

[34] In *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Renaissance Italy,* 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).

Gostanza's love and accentuates the social world of the *Decameron*, which, as Biagini points out, 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).

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 inevitably by the end of each story celebrate matrimony. Michelangelo Zaccarrello supports Biagini's affirmation: mixing of classes is not possible and the social hierarchy is rigid and stable throughout the work.[35] If one considers the social status of the protagonists in the first, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and ninth tales, Biagini and Zaccarrello's argument triumphs: in each of these stories the characters who fall in love and get married are noble, of gentle breeding and of substantial wealth.[36] These marriages uphold the static social and ideological idea that only nobles can marry nobles; there is no osmosis of classes. However, the second, third, and eighth tales present formidable challenges to these critics' interpretations 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.

[35] 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). Furthermore, he cites Padoan, *Il Boccaccio, le muse, il parnaso e l'Arno*, in order to define more precisely this ideological watermark: "La società ideale vagheggiata nel *Decameron* è una società rigorosamente divisa in classi, secondo una concezione gerarchica non ferrea ma salda, che conosce però eccezioni in virtù della forza d'amore e della nobiltà d'animo. … Sono i limiti della rivoluzione borghese fiorentina: la borghesia, intesa a democratizzare la società, rompendo i vincoli dinastici e feudali, è in ugual tempo restìa a spingere fino alle estreme conseguenze il processo [e], preoccupata per il continuo premere delle classi inferiori" (177-79).

[36] 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.

On the one hand, and 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.[37] Yet critics tend to read the fifth day's theme and storytelling as an attempt by the ten young people in the *brigata* to re-establish order amid their chaotic, plague-decimated world. What force, then, could be so substantial as to rupture the social order and marriage traditions of mid-fourteenth century Italy? If we consider Branca's commentary while keeping the economic context in mind, these irregularities seem to stem from a growing awareness and utilization of individual ingenuity as opposed to simply surrendering one's actions to Fortune. Branca convincingly presents us with a suture point between the mercantile world and that of the *Decameron*, arguing that "il Boccaccio voglia qui illuminare il contrasto fra l'ingegno umano e la Fortuna di una luce allusiva alla contrapposizione – a lui cara - fra la nobilità fortuita e quella conquistata nelle continue lotte di un'esistenza sempre aperta ai rischi più subiti e gravi..." (21). The world and time of the *Decameron* witnessed the rise of a significant need, and not just of a profound faith in God and Fortune, as in the Medieval period; Boccaccio is an astute observer of this change, among many others, and his characters, merchants and otherwise, increasingly depend on their individual *virtù* and ingenuity.[38]

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[37] 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 ridersi e beffarsi esser medicina certissima a tanto male: e cosí 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 piú ciò per l'altrui case faccendo, solamente che cose vi sentissero che lor venissero a grado o in piacere" (*Dec.* 1.Intro.21).

[38] 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

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. 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)

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

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origins as a family. Accordingly, Hunt accentuates the necessity and predominance of individual skill, 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).

both cases the male protagonists test their financial fortunes in continual acts of conspicuous consumption in order to win the love of a noble lady. In the case of Filomena's eighth tale, the story unfolds in the ancient city of Ravenna, which was known for its celebrated aristocracy.[39] 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 is without a wife, falls in love with a daughter of a nobleman from Ravenna, and attempts to win her love by means of his many accomplishments.[40] 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" (420).

As a result of his profligate spending and failure to attract the young girl, Nastagio's family and friends implore him to leave Ravenna. He makes grand preparations for his departure as if he was headed to France or Spain, but he only retreats about three miles outside of the city, to Chiassi, where he continues to lead an extravagant and most elegant life. One day, Nastagio ambles about in a nearby pine forest when he suddenly catches sight of a horrific scene: he sees a beautiful, naked

[39] 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).

[40] 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.

woman running through the forest with two feral mastiffs at her heels trying to bring her to the ground. A black knight follows closely behind the three, and when he reaches his halted prey, he warns Nastagio not to interfere as he is about to murder the woman. The knight explains that he and the young woman are acting out their eternal punishments: for excessively desiring the young woman during his life and ultimately killing himself, he must hunt down the young woman; for harshly rejecting him and resisting the knight's love in life, the young woman is condemned to be slain by him indefinitely at the same time and in the same place each week.[41] At first, Nastagio is afraid and even finds a limb with which to defend the unfortunate lady; however, he soon realizes that this recurrent scene could be of great use to him in his own situation.

Accordingly, 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 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. Everyone present is frightened and astonished, but, we are told, the young Traversari was most terrified and realized that the infernal scene concerned her above all.

[41] In the essay "Chastity and Love in the *Decameron*," Giovanni Sinicropi comments, "Boccaccio thus questions whether the social and religious value we place on chastity is in effect justified; whether chastity is really a virtue or rather an antisocial behavior; whether it actually leads to salvation or is simply the cause of grief and death" (106). This comment resonates well with an observation made by Kamber in regard to the questionable religiosity of the eighth tale's eternal punishments and "moral": "Ora, un dio che incoraggia la libertà sessuale mentre castiga la continenza, per quanto sia potente, non è il Dio cristiano" (62). This inversion of Christian morality seems especially significant since the storyteller, Filomena, offers this *novella* as an *exemplum* to the females of the *brigata*. Rather than acting as a short story with a religious or didactic moral, Filomena's story exhorts behavior that asks women to be "più arrendevoli a' piaceri degli uomini" (*Dec.* 5.8.44) or, in the context of Christian morality, less chaste and more licentious. Here again, it seems that Boccaccio strains the language of the traditional belief system of the Church to the snapping point in order to reflect on whether its systems and institutions are viable.

Greatly fearing the possibility of suffering a similar fate, that very evening the young Traversari girl changed 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).

In the article "Happy Endings? Resisting Women and the Economy of Love in Day Five of Boccaccio's *Decameron,*" Ray 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).[42] 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 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 *Decameron*'s social fabric just enough to allow Nastagio's new money to have value among a noble milieu.

[42] 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.

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.[43] 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" (426). 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 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.

Unfortunately, he has nothing to offer to Madonna Giovanna for dinner, until his glance falls upon his beloved falcon. Federigo has the falcon prepared, eats it along with his visitor, and, after the meal, Giovanna explains her situation to him. She pleads with Federigo as a desperate mother to give her son his beloved falcon: "'… e per ciò ti

[43] 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).

priego, non per l'amore che tu mi porti, al quale tu di niente se' tenuto, ma per la tua nobiltà, la quale in usar cortesia s'è maggiore che in alcuno altro mostrata …'" (*Dec.* 5.9.32). When she finds out that her request cannot not be granted, Giovanna at first chastises his killing so great an animal for any woman; but then, "e poi la grandezza dell'animo suo, la quale la povertà non avea potuto né potea rintuzzare, molto seco medesima commendò" (*Dec.* 5.9.32). In the end and after the period of her mourning and bitterness had passed, Giovanna's brothers repeatedly urge her to remarry. She admits that she would rather remain a widow; however, in recalling Federigo's worthiness and his generosity to do her honor, she will only agree to marry him. Her brothers chide and mock her for wanting so poor a man; she responds simply and naturally that she would rather have a man who lacks money than money that lacks a man. Her brothers, "udendo l'animo di lei e conoscendo Federigo da molto, quantunque povero fosse, sí come ella volle, lei con tutte le sue ricchezze gli donarono" (431). From that day on, the narrator adds, he was financially more prudent and lived happily with her the rest of his days.

In discussing the "economy of love" in the tale, Fleming offers Federigo's extreme generosity, display and consumption of wealth as a concrete sign of his valor and courtesy, but he also underlines that they are found to be excessive and lacking in temperance.[44] The critic also offers a useful insight to reconnect to Branca's discourse and the economic context of the *Decameron*'s fifth day; Fleming believes 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

[44] Fleming refers to temperance as "*the* cardinal virtue, *the* cherished ideal of Boccaccio's new commercial society emerging from the late Middle Ages" (39).

calculation and moderation on the other" (39). He then reads Madonna Giovanna as a counter-point to Federigo's lack of moderation and bourgeois values in a commercial world; yet this comparison seems lacking when considered in light of the aforementioned "unresolved tension." It is admissible that Giovanna possesses more temperance and perhaps more "maturity," as Fleming argues; 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.

The tension that Fleming speaks of seems more likely to be found on the hinge in 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, inexhaustible 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 exerting coercion via an infernal supernatural vision.[45] Nastagio prevails because he sees an opportunity and finds a way to use it for his own purposes. In the case of Federigo, a nobleman aspires to court and marry a noblewoman, exhausts his finite fortune in the process and ultimately prevails 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

[45] 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).

social behavior in medieval and early modern Europe: he imitates the nobility and seeks to enter its ranks, but this is not possible in the real world of the *Decameron*.[46]

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 often 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.[47] Andrea Baldi perceptively interprets the story's parodic probity as elements that render Christian morality "maliziosamente contaminata con l'ideologia cortese, attraverso l'assimilazione dei testi 'liturgici' secondo uno spirito laico" (24). 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 parody of matrimony and its social and religious function.

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

[46] 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).

[47] 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).

celebration as in the preceding stories.[48] From the beginning of the tale, one finds that Pietro di Vinciolo took a wife, because he

> forse piú per ingannare altrui e diminuire la generale oppinion 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 avea 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 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

[48] 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 licito (e cosí 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.

> 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.

In the article "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," Elizabeth 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)

Given the persistent presence of religious parody throughout the matrimonial happenings of Day Five and Boccaccio's experiences studying Canon Law, it seems plausible that he might be creating a parodic theological metaphor here.[49] Even if most laymen might not

[49] In the study "The Concept of Debt in *The Shipman's Tale,*" critic Robert 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).

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: "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. 7.1-2).

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 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. 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 debt is completely lost and a parody of Paul's ideas results; marital sex to the apostle was a safeguard to human weakness, but Pietro, unwilling to render that which his wife exacted arranged for a situation that makes the idea of conjugal debt ludicrous. From the ambiguous ending one cannot be sure 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.

Conclusion

The reader knows from the introduction of the first day and forward that one of the main goals of the ten young people of the *cornice* will be to escape from the tribulations of their plague-ridden city 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 the ten-day storytelling journey. While at Florence's church of Santa Maria Novella, the seven young ladies and the three young men talk of their trip from 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 reading 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 sì 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, "quest'ultima espressione, 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 [of the *Decameron*]" (Padoan 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 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 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. Despite these historical tendencies, one finds that rather than acting as a peaceful and socially unifying force fundamental to order and stability in society, 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 yield 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, there is also a strong presence of economic elements that contribute to a strong sense of parody in matrimonial as well as non-matrimonial situations. These economic and parodic elements ultimately reveal Boccaccio's critique that perhaps 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. In pushing the traditional understanding of matrimony to the brink in this way,

Boccaccio challenges his readers to reconsider, amid the turmoil of plague-period Florence, what it is that provides society stability and if traditional means are any longer sufficient to do so.

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