

### *Decameron* II 4: the Matrices of Voice

**T**he apologizing for a story whose ending could not reach the wondrous turn of events in Pampinea's preceding tale, Lauretta narrates the adventure story of Landolfo Rufolo. This short tale lends itself to schematic summary. Landolfo, a merchant from Ravello on the Amalfi coast, sinks his already considerable capital into a shipload of cargo which is oversupplied at market. Landolfo is financially ruined and turns to piracy to recuperate his losses and possibly regain his fortune. A year later, he has doubled his original wealth. Fortune has been even kinder to him as a pirate than as a merchant. His wealth and good name restored, Landolfo decides to get out of piracy while the "getting is good" and sets sail for Ravello with his gains. Taking refuge against a harsh sea, Landolfo's ship is blocked in a cove by two Genoese ships. Landolfo is taken prisoner and barely left with the clothes on his back. However, the Genoese ship on which he is held is wrecked in a storm. Landolfo survives in the open sea by clinging first to a plank and then to a chest. Finally washed ashore on the island of Corfù, Landolfo is rescued by a woman who nurses the ex-pirate back to health. Once he discovers a cache of precious jewels in the chest which saved his life at sea, Landolfo prudently disguises them and sets off for Italy, making his way first to Brindisi and then, hugging the coast, to Trani. In Trani, Landolfo tells his adventures — except the discovery of the chest's contents — to some cloth makers and is reclothed and sent on his way home on horseback. Returning safely to Ravello, Landolfo sells the gems, more than doubling his original wealth. He then repays the generosity of the woman in Corfù and the cloth makers in Trani and settles down to a life in Ravello without any more seafaring and risky venture capitalism.

The narrative lines and presentation of Landolfo's adventurous tale of reversals of fortune are simple. Planning to increase his wealth, the merchant is ruined by the wheel of Fortune's turns. Only when he has been reduced practically to an inhuman form, the "sponge of a creature" attached to a chest washing up on the shore, does Fortune smile on him. Yet unlike the restlessly adventuresome hero Ulysses, after his return to Ravello, this ex-merchant does not tempt the fates again by returning to the sea for

more adventure.<sup>1</sup> The reversals of fortune suffered by Landolfo are reinforced by the simplicity of Lauretta's presentation. As we shall see, her style of storytelling in *Decameron* II 4 is reminiscent of the *Novellino's* skeletal narratives.<sup>2</sup> The action and Landolfo's deeds are narrated without dialogue and with little description of landscapes and even less psychological development.

The two literary matrices of this story are distinguished by voice. Landolfo Rufolo is essentially *voiceless*. Rather than hearing the cadences of Landolfo's dialect or the voiced calculations of his mercantile mind, as we do in the analogous merchant tale of Bernabò in Day Two (9), we are forced to listen to Landolfo's adventures exclusively through the voice of the story's second matrix, Lauretta.<sup>3</sup> His voice silenced, Landolfo becomes a pure representation of theme which serves Lauretta 1) to meet the day's narrative requirements and 2) to establish — in concert with her other performances in the *Decameron* — her own narrative persona as the voice of true honor, love, and nobility, that is, *gentilezza*. In this light, we will see Lauretta's narration of Landolfo's adventures as an appropriation of the merchant's voice to utilize the moral lesson of his story for her own purposes.

The theme of Day Two conditions our reading of the first matrix. We recall that the Day's narrative topic is: "Those who after different misadventures manage beyond their hopes to come to a happy ending in their story." Obviously at the heart of this theme of reversal is the implicit presence of the mythological figure of Fortune. Landolfo's tale is a story of two reversals of Fortune. The opening of the tale itself moves from the description of the natural beauty of the Amalfitan coast and its cities and gardens to the wealthy merchants who inhabit the region. Lauretta quickly situates among these wealthy and beautiful cities the town of Ravello, in which we find the very wealthy Landolfo Rufolo who wishes to double his

<sup>1</sup> Baratto (1970, 140) suggests that Landolfo resembles a Ulyssean archetype. Clark and Wasserman (1977) develop this suggestion, focusing on the archetypal dimensions of the hero's struggle with Fortune. In this same vein, that is, Fortune as the single motivator of the tale, see Almansi 1975 and Fido 1988.

<sup>2</sup> For those readers unfamiliar with early Italian literature, the *Novellino* is a late thirteenth-century collection of one hundred tales and anecdotes devoted to many of the same themes as found in the *Decameron*.

<sup>3</sup> Notably in Boccaccio's fourteenth-century transcriptional system, which had no convention for distinguishing quoted voices, especially in this episode — as we see throughout Boccaccio's own late transcription in MS. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 90 — there is no confusion between these two matrices.

already vast fortune. The quaint, natural beauty of this stretch of coast quickly gives way to the dominant repetition of wealth ultimately jeopardized and lost by greed:

la costa d'Amalfi, piena di picciole città, di giardini e di fontane e d'uomini ricchi e procaccianti in atto di mercatantia sí come alcuni altri. Tralle quali cittadette n'è una chiamata Ravello, nella quale, come che oggi v'abbia di ricchi uomini, ve n'ebbe già uno il quale fu ricchissimo [...] al quale non bastando la sua ricchezza, disiderando di radoppiarla, venne presso che fatto di perder con tutta quella se stesso. *Decameron* II 4, 5<sup>4</sup>

the coast of Amalfi, full of little cities, of gardens and of fountains and of wealthy men engaging in their merchant trade like few others. Among these towns was one locale called Ravello, in which, just as there are today a number of wealthy men, there was then one who was extremely wealthy [...] whose own money was never enough, wishing to double it, came close to losing it all, along with his own life.

In the space of two sentences, Lauretta introduces us to the story's initial setting and life of luxury (all there is to lose), the wealthy — yet greedy — Landolfo, and the disastrous losses and turns of Fortune which await him. They are lines which already mark for us the tension between the restful beauty of this “most delightful part of Italy” (“la piú dilettevole parte d'Italia” [*Dec.* II 4, 5]) and the industry of amassing fortunes in sea trade.

A seemingly typical, medieval adventure tale, a fictional genre revived and reformed by Boccaccio, the story relies also on a secondary tension: the mixture of realistic description and the mythological.<sup>5</sup> Lauretta's description of the natural and economic splendor of the Amalfi coast in the tale's opening lines calls upon two empirical commonplaces of medieval Italy: Amalfi's beauty and prosperity from sea trade. In truth, Amalfitan merchants had for some time traded extensively even with Syria and Constantinople, an historical fact which certainly underlies Lauretta's narrative.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as we shall see, Lauretta's Landolfo Rufolo would surely have struck a locally resonant, historical chord with her listeners, since members of Ravello's and Naples' Rufolo family, such as Lorenzo, were relatively well known for their mercantile activities and privateering.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all citations from Boccaccio's *Decameron* are from Branca 1985.

<sup>5</sup> For a review of the formulae of the adventure tale, see Tadie 1982. Boccaccio's revival of diverse genres is discussed in Branca 1975b.

<sup>6</sup> Haskins (1957, 21–22) notes Amalfi's economic development and trade especially with the East from the tenth to the twelfth century.

<sup>7</sup> Boccaccio's choice of the Rufolo family name from Ravello might have been inspired by Lorenzo Rufolo, who turned from shipping to piracy but died in a Calabrian prison in

However, Lauretta's departure from the model of Lorenzo's reality proves a significant change in the narrative strategy. For while the world of mercantile affairs supplies settings for Landolfo's tale, the literary motifs of Fortune and symmetrical reversal ultimately perform as the story's principal thematic vehicles. The narrative's reliance upon the uncontrollable forces of myth and chance is absolute, from Fortune's dominant hand to the mythological traditions of the treasure chest which saves Landolfo's life.<sup>8</sup>

The primary motif of our first matrix, the theme of reversed fortune, is the figure of the merchant. Much has been made of the portrayal of typical merchant characteristics: the accumulation of wealth, decisive action, industrious energy, and resourcefulness.<sup>9</sup> However, we actually see little of the merchant's business activities and practices. Certainly, the realities of fourteenth-century sea trade and business are confronted in the story: the risks of venture capitalism, the dramatic shifts between loss and profit, the balance between caution and courage, the importance of secrecy, and — especially — the world of piracy. In fact, piracy seems to have offered an alternative career to numerous medieval seafaring merchants.<sup>10</sup> Conse-

1291 (see Branca 1985, II 4, 5n8). The "addressivity" (the "apperceptive background of the addressee's perception of [the speaker's] speech" [Bakhtin 1986, 5]) of Lauretta's personalized narratives throughout the *Decameron* speaks not only to the contemporary historical knowledge of the work's readers, but especially to the fictional knowledge of her female companions who might have been familiar with her own personal history of lost love, betrayed virtues, and an unhappy marriage.

<sup>8</sup> Jones (1982, 36) points out that much of the Italian lore surrounding treasure chests includes a ghostly or mystical guardian of the treasure. It should be noted that the scene of the floating planks and chest from the wrecked ship ("essendo già il mare tutto pieno di mercatantie che notavano e di casse e di tavole" [*Dec.* II 4, 17]) distantly recalls the escape of Paul and his fellow prisoners from the storm-wrecked ship to the island of Melita in Actus Apostolorum XXVII 43–44. We remember that the centurion commands those who could swim to jump into the sea and get to land, "and the rest, some on boards and broken pieces of the ship" ("et caeteros alios *in tabulis* ferebant: quosdam super ea quae de navi erant") escaped to land.

<sup>9</sup> Several studies have emphasized the story's concentration on and usage of the realistic image of the merchant and mercantile language. See especially Baratto 1970, 138–41, Branca 1990, 134–64 ("L'epopea dei mercatanti"), and Getto 1966, 190–94.

<sup>10</sup> The topic of Italian pirates in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Mediterranean and Aegean seas is often unclear thanks primarily to a lack of distinction between the activities of privateering and piracy. Nevertheless, the suggestion that piracy provided an alternative career to the aristocracy, a later innovation among seventeenth-century English nobility, would be an anachronistic application in the context of our tale. For a general history of medieval piracy, see Gosse 1932 and Mollat 1958. Katele (1988)

quently it should not surprise us when “profit at any cost” motivates the greedy merchant’s career change. It was a time in sea merchant activities when a fine, if not — in fact — indistinguishable, line separated the trader from the privateer and the privateer from the pirate. Yet in Landolfo’s adventure story, the world of merchants and pirates ultimately becomes a literary-rhetorical pretext for Lauretta’s lesson on Fortune and *gentilezza*.<sup>11</sup>

As we recall, Landolfo does not stumble into piracy but carefully outfits a fast, light ship perfect for pirate raids (“da corseggiare”) in order to recover the economic losses of his bad business judgment (*Dec.* II 4, 9). It is benevolent Fortune which shines upon the economics of Landolfo’s piracy. But the narrator must salvage the relative morality of his enterprise, noting that while Landolfo set about the task of making the material goods of other men his own, he preyed especially upon the ships of the much hated and feared Turks (*Dec.* II 4, 9–10). Thus, we are to understand Landolfo as one of those ‘good pirates,’ or buccaneers, operating in certain circumstances as a privateer on behalf of the faith.

Reviewing the story’s narrative constructions, we discover immediately in Lauretta’s introduction to her storytelling (“non mi vergognerò io di dire una novella” [*Dec.* II 4, 4; “I will not be ashamed to tell a story”]) the primacy of Fortune itself: “Graziosissime donne, niuno atto della fortuna, secondo il mio giudicio, si può veder” (*Dec.* II 4, 3; “Most gracious ladies, no act of Fortune, according to my judgment, can be seen”). Lauretta clearly marks her familiarity with and yet critical distance from the practices of merchants (“sì come usanza suole esser de’ mercatanti” [*Dec.* II 4, 6), establishing immediately — as she did in *Decameron* I 8 — the perspective of her moral didacticism with the other narrators/listeners.<sup>12</sup> Most prominent in her narrative are the rhetorical and didactic devices of doubling, reversal, and symmetry. Here, as in other stories in the *Decameron*, ironic

concentrates on the Venetians’ struggle with piracy, but is informative for fourteenth-century pirating. Citing also Boccaccio’s firm knowledge of issues of sea travel in *Decameron* II 4, Tangheroni (1996, 220–27) provides a useful synthesis of the dangers of sea travel and the sometimes indistinguishable differences between piracy and “nationalized privateers” (*pirati* and *corsari*).

<sup>11</sup>We recall the general matrix noted by Stewart (1979, 73) by which historical truth is utilized not as an end in itself, but to serve the “effectiveness of the tale.” Stewart clarifies Boccaccio’s attention to narrative effectiveness as a rhetorical concern, literally — I would suggest — the glue of the *Decameron*’s world system, in which the narrative’s “essential plausibility” is the most important feature.

<sup>12</sup>The didactic principle and rhetorical style of Lauretta’s first story (*Dec.* I 8) are elucidated by Kirkham 2004, Volume 1 of the *Lectura Boccaccii* series.

doubling suggests the ambiguous presence of Fortune in human affairs.<sup>13</sup> Even the chest, which will save Landolfo's life and restore his wealth, initially seems to threaten his safety. When Landolfo first sees himself reduced to poverty, Lauretta's description of the merchant's sense of honor and his decision to steal from others repeats virtually the same motif of reversal:

veggendosi di ricchissimo uomo in breve tempo quasi povero divenuto, pensò o morire o rubando ristorare i danni suoi, acciò che là onde ricco partito s'era povero non tornasse. *Decameron* II 4, 8

seeing himself go in so short a time from being a very wealthy man to a poor soul, he decided to recuperate his losses by stealing or lose his life, so that he would not return poor to his home town from which he had left so rich.

Again at the close of the story, after his safe return to Ravello, Landolfo finds himself to be twice as rich as when he left: "egli era il doppio piú ricco che quando partito s'era" (*Dec.* II 4, 29). In both constructions, the narrator links the doubling motif to Landolfo's honorable return to Ravello. This same sense of honor is conveyed in the narration of Landolfo's decision to return to Ravello after he has doubled his original wealth with his windfall profits from pirating. But now the formula is dominated by the closure of Fortune's ever-present threat of loss:

egli si trovò non solamente avere racquistato il suo che in mercatantia avea perduto ma di gran lunga quello aver raddoppiato. Per la qual cosa, gastigato dal primo dolore della perdita, conoscendo che egli aveva assai, per non incappar nel secondo a se medesimo dimostrò quello che aveva, senza voler piú, dovergli bastare: e per ciò si dispose di tornarsi con esso a casa sua. *Decameron* II 4, 10–11

he discovered that not only had he recuperated the sum he had lost in his mercantile venture, but that in the long run he had doubled his wealth. Thus having healed from the first loss and knowing that he had so much money that he would not fall into a second such mistake, he reassured himself that his new riches were certainly enough without wanting more. He thus made ready to return home with his "earnings."

We should not forget that Landolfo's original goal at market in Cyprus was to double his great wealth. Consequently, when the returns from his piracy have met this goal, Landolfo is satisfied with the prospects of his wealth and honor and unwilling to tempt a second loss. The narrator's repeated use of *bastare* ("senza voler piú, dovergli bastare") in connection with the doubling of Landolfo's wealth ("quello aver raddoppiato") reveals the in-

<sup>13</sup> See Getto 1966, 274.

tervention of Lauretta’s narrative design of recall and symmetry (in this case of the merchant’s original plan to double his money [in *Dec.* II 4, 5]). As Landolfo prepares to return from Corfù to Ravello near the end of the story, Lauretta strengthens the didactic nature of her rhetoric by introducing Fortune itself and by recalling a key element of vocabulary from an earlier episode of loss (the lexical ‘refrain’ of *balestrare*):

Ma sí come colui che in piccol tempo fieramente era stato *balestrato* dalla fortuna due volte, dubitando della terza, pensò convenirgli molta cautela avere a voler quelle cose [the gems] poter condurre a casa sua [...]. *Decameron* II 4, 27

But fearing a third disaster, he — who in so short a time had been so fiercely ambushed by Fortune two times before — decided that great caution would be required if he wanted to get home safely with the gems.

Here the lesson of Lauretta’s narrative voice dominates the action of Landolfo’s adventure. The narrator concentrates the emphasis of the construction on a summary of Fortune’s rapid fury and violence which Landolfo can only hope to avoid for a third time by employing extreme caution. Lauretta’s selection of *balestrare* collects, summarizes, and reinforces the lesson of Landolfo’s previous misfortunes, recalling the threat of the Genoese crossbows (*balestra Dec.* II 4, 15) which forced him from his pirate ship and into captivity and poverty.

We should note at this point that the narrative techniques of Lauretta’s didactic elaboration upon the Rufolo family’s mercantile fame and fortune reveal also a medieval commonplace on the figure of the merchant. In the thirteenth-century *Novellino*, for example, a collection which concentrates often upon the definition of nobility, the merchant is a rare but poignantly castigated figure. Yet, for instance, in Novella 97 (“Come uno mercatante portò vino oltre mare”), the merchant is not — in fact — the subject of the story.<sup>14</sup> The novella begins with a knowledgeably precise description of the way that wine is loaded in ships by some merchants: “in botti a due palcora. Di sotto e di sopra avea vino, e, nel mezzo, acqua; tanto che la metà era vino e la metà acqua. Di sotto e di sopra avea squillette e nel mezzo no.” ([*Novellino* 97] “in casks with two dividers. The top and bottom compartments of the cask contained wine, and the middle was filled with water, so that half of each barrel was wine and half water. Each end had a tapped gimlet hole but the middle no”). Realism quickly changes to moral didacticism as the true subject of the story is revealed to be Fortune’s ra-

<sup>14</sup> All quotations from *Novellino* 97 are cited from *La prosa del Duecento* (Segre and Marti 1959, 878).

ther symmetrical correction of typical mercantile avarice: “Vendero l’acqua per vino e *radoppiaro* i danari, sopra tutto lo guadagno” ([*Novellino* 97] “They sold the water for wine and *doubled* their money, above all their profit”). On board the unscrupulous merchant’s ship, a large monkey, which appears to deliver the “judgment of God,” grabs the money, climbs the mast, and — one by one — takes the coins out of the merchant’s purse, alternately throwing one coin in the ship and the next in the sea. The narrator’s moral concludes the tale, pointing out that half the coins, the equivalent of the merchant’s fair profit, remained in the ship: “E tanto fece, che l’una metà si trovò nella nave col guadagno che fare se ne dovea” ([*Novellino* 97] “And the sum of its work was that one half of the coins remained in the ship as a just profit”).

In this simple story we find the essential tools of Lauretta’s narrative. The merchant and his customs are adapted for a moral lesson on greed and honor (“col guadagno che fare se ne dovea”). The doubling motif is linked not just to exorbitant mercantile profits, but to their fundamental cause: human greed. In *Novellino* 97, the monkey becomes Nature’s instrument to impose God’s judgment against mercantile greed. Lauretta’s narrative employs a similar symmetry of correction, but with a Boccaccian sense of ambiguity. Landolfo’s capture by the Genoese is a result of not only nature’s sea squalls, but also the fact that Landolfo is recognized by men of his own moral and commercial ilk: “udendo di cui egli era e già per fama conoscendol ricchissimo, sí come uomini naturalmente vaghi di pecunia e rapaci a doverlo aver si disposero” (*Dec.* II 4, 14; “upon hearing who he was and immediately recognizing his reputation as a very wealthy man, and being men naturally eager for money and greedy, they made ready to ambush him”).

Credit for his escape the following day goes exclusively to the tempestuous winds which send the Genoese ship to its ruin. In this same light, some have suggested that the sea is itself a principal character in the story.<sup>15</sup> Yet the next day, as Landolfo washes ashore barely recognizable as a human form but clutching the life-saving chest, the narrative interjects a doubt as to the mover of Landolfo’s fate:

o piacer di Dio o forza di vento che ’l facesse, costui divenuto quasi una spugna [...] pervenne al lito dell’isola di Gurfo, dove una povera feminetta per ventura suoi stovigli [...] lavava e faceva belli. *Decameron* II 4, 22

whether by God’s pleasure or the power of the winds, Landolfo, who had virtually become a sponge [...] floated to the coast of the island of Corfù,

<sup>15</sup> See especially Almansi 1975.



where — as fate would have it — a poor young woman was washing and polishing her pots and dishes.

Finally, after reaching Ravello, Landolfo thanks God for leading him home before he unties the small sack in which he has hidden the gems: “Quivi parendogli esser sicuro, ringraziando Idio che condotto ve lo avea, sciolse il suo sacchetto” (*Dec.* II 4, 29; “And when it seemed safe, giving thanks to God who had led him back home, he untied his sack”).

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We must, however, ask ourselves to what end Lauretta constructs such a tale of fortune, adventure, and morality. It is here where we must examine the story’s second narrative matrix: Lauretta. While it is still possible to see — as Billanovich (1947, 131–35) first suggested — the Petrarchan overtones in the figure of the *Decameron’s* Lauretta, certainty of the Petrarchan import from the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* in Boccaccio’s formulation of Lauretta the narrator is virtually impossible.<sup>16</sup> However, within the confines of the *Decameron*, a narrative agenda for Lauretta does emerge to help shape her portrait. Certainly in Lauretta’s own song at the conclusion of Day Three we learn not only about her unhappy second marriage to a man who has brought her dishonor, but also about her impassioned commitment to true love and the ideals of *gentilezza*. In many of her stories, Lauretta insists upon the ethics of the noble spirit nurtured and refined by experience and ideals rather than birth.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Even the play on words used by Dioneo, the king of Day VII, when he crowns Lauretta the queen of Day VIII (“vi coronò di voi medesima” [VIII conclusion,1; “I crown you with the laurel that reflects your name”]) makes no direct reference to a purely Petrarchan context. Cf. Billanovich 1947, 131–35. On the question of the Petrarchan “laureta,” also used as a fulcrum in these discussions, in the sonnet “Quando io movo i sospiri a chiamar voi” (*Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 5), see Storey 1993b, 243.

<sup>17</sup> The concept of *gentilezza* undergoes several mutations during the Italian Middle Ages. Already early in the history of its usage (mid-twelfth century), the term *gentile* deviated between two obviously related applications: 1) as a synonym for “noble by birth” (< OF *gentil* [highborn]), and 2) to express the result of ennoblement. Especially in an age when, in certain parts of Italy, political power was shifting from an aristocracy by birth-right (noble) to an aristocracy by economic right (ennobled), the definitions of “nobility” (*nobiltà*) and “gentility” (*gentilezza*) sought to accommodate the hegemonic realities of society. By the mid-thirteenth century, the idea of the “ennobled or refined spirit” of the individual not of high or noble birth was culturally so well developed that it found its way, under the rubric of *gentilezza*, into the philosophically sophisticated verses of the Bolognese poet Guido Guinizzelli as the object of a logically articulated moral system of love and even wisdom (see Avalle 1977 and Storey 1993b, 93).

In her own song at the end of Day Three and in several of her stories, Lauretta decries the ignoble faithlessness of jealousy (*Dec.* III 8; IV 3; VII 4). In *Decameron* VI 3, she demonstrates that a noble name does not assure noble behavior when the niece of the Bishop of Florence's brother is sold by her husband who, though from a good family, is greedy and unprincipled ("il marito di lei, quantunque di buona famiglia fosse, era avarissimo e cattivo" ["her husband, even though from a good family, was wicked and greedy"]). In *Decameron* VIII 9, the story of Buffalmacco and Master Simone, Lauretta's narrative unmasks the arrogance and falsehood of hollow titles, summarizing its own lesson as "how wisdom is taught to those who didn't seem to learn while at the University of Bologna" ("senno s'insegna a chi tanto non apparò a Bologna" [112]). Accepting the reign of the Eighth Day, Lauretta applies the evenhandedness and good judgment of the noble ethic she has engendered in so many of her tales by refusing to choose a feminist theme contrary to that of Dioneo's theme of Day Seven: "se non fosse ch'io non voglio mostrare d'essere di schiatta di can botolo che incontanente si vuol vendicare, io direi che domane si dovesse ragionare delle beffe che gli uomini fanno alle lor mogli" (*Dec.* VII conclusione, 3; "If it were not that I do not want to show myself to be one of those little yapping curs only out for revenge, I would suggest that tomorrow's theme be the tricks that men play on their wives"). Lauretta's language is noteworthy as she vehemently points out that hers is not a lineage of vengeful and ill-mannered dogs. And in her final story (*Dec.* X 4), true nobility, love, generosity, and wealth are redefined by the example of the etymologically notable Gentile de' Carisendi who returns Madonna Catalina to her husband. Nor should it escape our attention that in this final tale and in her preceding novella (*Dec.* IX 8), Lauretta chooses characters and motifs which reveal her familiarity with the great poet of the ethic of *gentilezza*, or the new nobility of the spirit, Dante Alighieri.

Guinizzelli's literary codification of *gentilezza* as the "condition of the ennobled spirit," elucidated in his "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore," was imitated by numerous Italian writers and poets of the later thirteenth century (among them Dante Alighieri, Monte Andrea, Chiaro Davanzati, and Pucciandone Martelli), leading ultimately to a wide diffusion and corruptive devaluing of *gentile* (see as evidence Avalle's study [1978] of *gentile* as a combining form). By the mid-fourteenth century, *gentile* and *gentilezza* no longer identify Guinizzelli's "ennobled spirit," a loss which Lauretta denounces and mourns, but have come generally to distinguish those having characteristics of the "wellborn" and "well-bred." For a history of this new concept of nobility and its development in the even earlier *Novellino*, see Mildonian 1979.

However, most immediate for our reading of *Decameron* II 4 is the opening of Lauretta's first narrative in *Decameron* I 8.<sup>18</sup> We recall that Pampinea's instruction for the First Day was simply for each to tell a story whose subject was most to the liking of the narrator. Lauretta opts to tell the story of how a truly good, noble, and well-spoken Guiglielmo Borsiere, also of Dantean fame and synonymous with the old ideals of honor, teaches a lesson in generosity to the richest but greediest man in all of Italy, a merchant by the name of Ermino de' Grimaldi ("di grandissime possessioni e di denari di gran lunga trapassava la ricchezza d'ogni altro ricchissimo cittadino che allora si sapesse in Italia" [*Dec.* I 8, 4; "of grandiose wealth and costly possessions who for some time had surpassed the riches of all the other wealthiest citizens known in Italy"]).<sup>19</sup> Her brief first tale includes a relatively lengthy sermon against those present-day men who consider themselves "noble and of good reputation" while continually revealing their vile and corrupt natures. Offered ostensibly as an introduction in contrast to the noble and virtuous Guiglielmo of days long past, Lauretta's Guinizzellian and Dantean tirade against the overwhelming numbers of the vile and corrupt in her own day's society actually does more to introduce her didactic agenda of *gentilezza*.<sup>20</sup> Near the close of her condemnation of the "mondo presente," we hear echoes of Dante's own confession and rejection of the "presenti cose / col falso lor piacer" ("enticements of the present / with their false pleasure") which led him from the path of truth and virtue (*Purg.* XXXI 34–36) as Lauretta denounces the corrupting influence of these so-called noble men: "con false lusinghe gli uomini gentili alle cose vili e scellerate ritrarre s'ingegnano il lor tempo di consumare" (*Dec.* I 8, 9; "with flattery such men do their best to entice men of true nobility into wicked and worthless activities").<sup>21</sup>

Lauretta's initial lesson in *Decameron* I 8 obviously augments the picture of the degradation and unraveling of society spelled out in the *Decameron*'s introduction. The corruption of society has turned its values and

<sup>18</sup> For a review and critique of Lauretta's first tale in the *Decameron* (I 8), see Kirkham 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Guglielmo Borsiere appears in *Inferno* XVI 70, among the sodomites in the seventh circle. See Presta 1971.

<sup>20</sup> In the same vein, Kirkham's study (2004) carefully investigates the classical and courtly concept of Courtesy utilized by Boccaccio's Lauretta in *Decameron* I 8.

<sup>21</sup> I discuss Dante's treatment of the worldly corruption of this nobility of the spirit and its ramifications in the poet's confession in *Purgatorio* XXXI in Storey 1993a and Storey 1994.

virtues upside down. Yet in the literary fiction of *Decameron* I 8, Lauretta offers an exemplary remedy. With a few well-chosen words and the power of his honorable reputation, Guiglielmo converts the greedy merchant into the most generous, refined, and noble man in all of Genova (“fu il piú liberale e il piú grazioso gentile uomo” [*Dec.* I 8, 18]). Lauretta’s choice of “gentile uomo” resounds in its reaffirmation of *gentilezza* as the socio-literary code which offers the miraculous possibility of restoration and healing.

In combination, *Decameron* I 8, II 4, and Lauretta’s song at the conclusion of Day Three also provide us with a picture of this particular story teller’s narrative motives. She is not necessarily anti-mercantile, but she — like Dante and Giordano da Pisa — sees and abhors the mercantile (and protocapitalist) ethic which plays havoc with social ingredients and notions of virtue, such as honor, love (often substituted in the *Decameron* by money-making activities), eloquence, largesse, and generosity.<sup>22</sup> Lauretta not only champions these ancient virtues, essentially from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but also sees herself as the victim of their subjugation at the hands of a dominant class which redefines nobility and honor in terms of financial wealth and justifies unscrupulous practices to obtain it. As we learn in Lauretta’s clearly autobiographical song, her own internal and external beauties and virtuous purpose have been conquered by “an ardent young man / who, passing himself off as noble and virtuous, / won me with falsehood / and grew jealous” (“un giovinetto fiero, / sé nobil reputando e valoroso, / e presa tienmi e con falso pensiero / divenuto è geloso” [*Dec.* III concl., 15]).<sup>23</sup>

If Guiglielmo’s truly noble comportment and phrase can change immediately the greediest merchant into the most generous and honorable man, then we must admit in *Decameron* II 4 that Fortune is slower in its reedu-

<sup>22</sup> In his discussion of the “etica mercantile,” Tangheroni (1996) highlights the Dominican Giordano da Pisa’s sermons, delivered in Florence in the first part of the fourteenth century, on the dangers of love of money for the good Christian and the salvation of the soul (326). On the frequent substitution in the *Decameron* of courtly virtues with capitalist pursuits, see Getto 1966, 96.

<sup>23</sup> Lauretta’s description of her desiring, airy, and graceful beauty as a divine sign of God’s concept of spiritually virtuous beauty (“Colui [...] mi fece [...] vaga, leggiadra, graziosa e bella, / per dar qua giú ogni alto intelletto / alcun segno di quella / biltà che sempre a Lui sta nel cospetto” [*Dec.* III concl., 13]) resounds not only with early Stilnovist notions of a miraculous beauty incarnate descended among the living (“e par che sia una cosa venuta / dal cielo in terra a miracol mostrare” [“Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare”; see Gorni 1996, 159–60]), but especially with Dante’s resolute fusion of spiritual and physical beauty in *Purgatorio* XXXI (see again Storey 1993a).

cation of Landolfo. Yet the central development of Lauretta's second story becomes clearer in the context of the narrator's ethic. Lauretta exchanges the sad end of the real Lorenzo Rufolo with the fortunate but exemplary end of the fictitious Landolfo as another lesson in mercantile reeducation. The narrator presents the story of a greedy merchant whose hardships punish and teach. Landolfo is allowed his doubled reward, by Fortune and not by clever business practices, only after he progresses through a series of dehumanizing adventures and hazards which teach him the value of true human fortitude, friendship, and honor. In this process, Landolfo must be reduced to less-than-merchant, less-than-pirate, and less-than-human to confront death itself before beginning his truly honorable return home. We recall that after his disastrous business losses and a year of pirating, Landolfo was already afraid of further mercantile ventures ("E pauroso della mercatantia, non s'impacciò d'investire altramenti i suoi denari" [*Dec.* II 4, 12; "Now fearful of trading, he wasn't about to invest his money again"]). But Landolfo has still not learned the moral lesson of honorable gains. He still believes his honor is measured by profit. Later, however, barely afloat in a high and stormy sea amidst the debris of the Genoese ship, Landolfo begins the final descent of his lesson. He must now face the reality of his previous rhetorical stance of death before a dishonorable and impoverished return to Ravello:

[...] il misero Landolfo, ancora che molte volte il dí davanti la morte chiamata avesse, seco eleggendo di volerla piú tosto che di tornare a casa sua povero come si vedea, vedendola presta n'ebbe paura. *Decameron* II 4, 18

[...] poor Landolfo, who so many times the day before would have called upon death itself, choosing to face the end rather than return home a penniless soul, now feared the very real death which faced him.

In this final descent into nonhuman form, Fortune provides Landolfo the ambiguous instrument of his demise or his salvation: the chest, which he pushes away fearing injury, but is finally forced — by a burst of wind — to grab onto as a "floatation device." Once Landolfo nears the shore of Corfù, the woman who saves him at first does not recognize him as a human form ("non conoscendo in lui alcuna forma" [*Dec.* II 4, 22]) but as some thing attached to a chest ("costei conobbe la forma della cassa" [*Dec.* II 4, 23]). Only after this final step of dehumanization is Landolfo brought to the woman's village "like a small child" ("lui come un piccol fanciullo ne portò nella terra" (*Dec.* II 4, 24) where he is nursed back to health.

The final passage of Landolfo's return to Ravello is a humble and cautious journey not on the high seas in triumphant return but along the coastline to Trani where, virtually for the love of God, Landolfo is given

decent clothes and a horse to get back home. From his gracious thanks to the woman in Corfù to his homecoming on horseback, Landolfo now cuts the figure of the humble, wise, and virtuous *uomo gentile*, a man of a new nobility, not of lineage or wealth but of experience which has taught him gratitude and largesse.<sup>24</sup> Laretta's narrative insists upon his ethical reform, noting that Landolfo sells the gems at a *reasonable* price ("a convenevole pregio vendendole" [Dec. II 4, 29]) and ends up *twice as rich* as before, but with wealth which he no longer foolishly squanders striving in greed to reinvest. Absent at this didactically critical point in the narrative is the rhetorical elaboration of his riches which, though they amounted to only half as much at the beginning of the story, dominated Laretta's description of Landolfo. Now Landolfo's greed is replaced by a generosity which handsomely repays those who helped him in nearby Trani and far away Corfù ("infino a Gurfo mandò una buona quantità di denari, per merito del servizio ricevuto, alla buona femina che di mare l'avea tratto" [Dec. II 4, 30; "in payment for the help he received, he sent a large quantity of money even to far away Corfù to the good woman who dragged him from the sea"]).

Laretta's ethical appropriation and reconstruction of *Lorenzo* Rufolo's real — and much more tragic — tale is, however, most evident at the close of the story. Her final phrase represents more than just the happy ending of Landolfo's story. It also provides the lesson's moral closure, concluding on a note of what I can only describe as Boccaccian ambiguity. After his generous distribution of funds to express his gratitude, the narrative now considers the vast wealth that remains at Landolfo's disposal. It is an amount, however, that Landolfo, no longer wanting to ply his past trade as a merchant, uses simply to live out his days honorably:

<sup>24</sup> Here again it is Dante's literary synthesis, elaboration, and codification of the *process* of virtuous refinement through experience ("per isperienza") as an integrated tenet of the "new nobility" (*gentilezza*) which informs Laretta's didactic narrative. This notion is already deeply rooted in and explicitly tied to the important concept of *intendimento* (that is, "understanding" notably analogous to an "*intelletto d'amore*"), for example, in Dante's early "Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare," vv. 9–11: "Mostrasi sì piacente a chi la mira, / che dà per gli occhi una dolcezza al core, / che 'ntender no'lla può chi no'lla prova" ([Gorni 1996, 160; my italics] "This miraculous being presents herself with such a profound beauty to those who look upon her [read: those who are virtuous enough perceive her] / that she instills a sweetness in the viewer's heart directly through the eyes / so that only those who experience the visual phenomenon of her beauty can understand it").

e il rimanente, senza piú voler mercatare, si ritenne, e onorevolmente visse infino alla fine. *Decameron* II 4, 30

and the rest of the money he kept for himself, wanting no longer to engage in the trading business, e he lived honorably until the end of his days.

Given the context of Lauretta's narratorship, the lesson seems complete. Landolfo stays true to his conversion toward the ethics of *gentilezza* and remains devoted to true honor for his entire life. The power of Lauretta's sententious conclusion "onorevolmente visse infino alla fine" ("he lived honorably until the end of his days") forges an enticing sense of closure to the narrator's lesson. "To live honorably until the end of our days" is a rhetorically compelling motif which Fido, for example, sees as one of the few reliable unifying themes throughout the *Decameron*.<sup>25</sup>

Nevertheless, behind Lauretta's didactically persuasive conclusion is the meddling copyist Boccaccio himself, who ultimately undermines the airtight closure of his narrator's rhetoric with two unique instances of ambiguity. The first is found in Lauretta's use of *onorevolmente*, which we can take to mean not only "honorably," but also "sumptuously," especially in the context of a narrator who proves herself to be a passionate reader of Dante. In the *Convivio* (IV xxv 5), Dante uses *onorevole* to illustrate a concept of honor expressed in wealth and power as the "condizioni orrevoli de lo rege" ("the sumptuous circumstances of the king").<sup>26</sup> Of equal note, however, is the use of *orrevolemente* in strict combination with the concepts of *ricchezza* (wealth) and *grande legnaggio* (noble lineage) in the story in the widely-circulated translation of the *Disciplina Clericalis* of the return of the merchant from Bagdad to his homeland with great pomp and fanfare: "E questi si parti da questo mercatante d'Egitto, emenonne questa sua donna, e giunse ne la terra sua *orrevolemente*, imperò ch'egli era ricco e di grande legnaggio" (my italics).<sup>27</sup> In fact, McWilliam's translation of

<sup>25</sup> Fido 1969, 155.

<sup>26</sup> On Boccaccio's uses and revisitations of Dante's *Convivio*, see especially Ferrari 1990, who discusses pointedly Boccaccio's parodic retrieval of the "question of nobility" presented in the *Convivio*. This view is open to question since we have, in truth, no evidence that Boccaccio ever read the *Convivio*. The dwindling reference to Dante's unfinished and 'unpublished' work in the three redactions of Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante*, from the Toledo manuscript (Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares 104.6) to the Chigiano version (Vatican Library, Chigiano L v 176), and the lack of any other reference — much less copy by Dante's strongest cultural supporter and reader — suggest that Boccaccio's familiarity with the work was distant at best. For a thorough analysis of this topic, see Arduini 2008, 73–85.

<sup>27</sup> Segre and Marti 1959, 259.

the final phrase of Lauretta's second tale (*Dec.* II 4) understands this more studied usage: "so he kept the remainder of the money and lived in splendor for the rest of his life."<sup>28</sup> With his original wealth of a vast sum doubled, Landolfo could certainly have lived out his days in splendor.

A second, even more profound, instance of ambiguity is embedded literally in the marginal area of the text known as "authorial variants" and casts an equal shadow of doubt on the ethical import of the ex-pirate's "onorevolemente visse infino alla fine." I believe this final case of ambiguity in Boccaccio's own hand confirms the double-edgedness of Lauretta's didactic narrative. In his autograph manuscript of the *Decameron*, MS. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 90 (probably copied in the early 1370s, long after the work's original composition),<sup>29</sup> Boccaccio transcribes the tale's final phrase as:

e il rimanente fença piu voler navigare mercatare si ritenne, e honorevolmente visse infino alla fine; MS. Hamilton 90, c. 17v

and the rest of the money he kept for himself, wanting no longer to engage in sea travel / the trading business, e he lived honorably until the end of his days.

This final service copy of the *Decameron*, which Boccaccio produced with a particular attention to the elegance of his script, does not appear to have many features of a working draft.<sup>30</sup> The underscoring of *navigare*, by a corrector or Boccaccio himself, assures us that the word was intended to be eliminated from the text.<sup>31</sup> Yet in the original moment of transcription, did Boccaccio consider *navigare* as an alternative to, or in reiterative combination with, *mercatate*? And why was *navigare* simply not erased by Boccaccio rather than positioning the two infinitives side by side? Boccaccio's reputation as an imprecise and sometimes inattentive copyist is well documented.<sup>32</sup> Yet the applicability of *navigare* in Lauretta's story

<sup>28</sup> See McWilliam 1972, 141 for the quoted translation.

<sup>29</sup> See col. A of c. 17v in Branca 1975a.

<sup>30</sup> See Ricci and Branca 1962, 12 and 37, who — in fact — indicate only five places in the entire transcription in which Boccaccio "did not make a definitive choice" of wording for his text (37).

<sup>31</sup> Ricci and Branca (1962) do not catalogue this occurrence ("navigare mercatare," c. 17v) in the manuscript. The error/variant does not appear in Branca's edition of the *Decameron*, nor in his volume of narrative and stylistic variations for codices Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, ital. 482 and Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Hamilton 90, in Branca and Vitale 2002 (see especially vol. 2, *Variazioni narrative e stilistiche*, p. 34).

<sup>32</sup> See Ricci and Branca 1962, 8 and 29–30; and Storey 1993b, 228.



in place of — or in addition to — *mercatare* certainly makes the variant more than a simple error of inattention on Boccaccio's part.

In fact, the copresence of *navigare* with *mercatare* in Boccaccio's own copy reveals not a significant error but a moment of significant narrative strategy. In combination with *mercatare*, *navigare* would have reinforced Landolfo's abhorrence simply for all the negative elements of his misadventures caused by his commercial and seafaring activities. Yet the lesson of Lauretta's story concerns primarily mercantile greed, not sea travel. And it was — as we remember — the strict control of the narrator which ameliorated Landolfo's morally questionable turn toward piracy on the high seas to recuperate his losses. But most of all, the *navigare* variant alone would have ruined the symmetry of Lauretta's didacticism by leaving a doubt about Landolfo's possible return to commerce. In this delicate moment of narrative strategy, the Proemio's commitment to "useful advice" ("utile consiglio") inherent in Lauretta's story prevails over the simple "enjoyment motif" ("diletto") which an enigmatic conclusion would have suggested. Nevertheless, it should not escape our attention that at this late date of circa 1370, Boccaccio is still tinkering with the narrative strategy of Landolfo's simple tale and Lauretta's didactic orientation toward the themes her storytelling addresses.

The elimination of *navigare* in favor solely of *mercatare*, an activity now completely disavowed by Landolfo, completes the symmetry of Lauretta's second lesson on greed and honor. Lauretta's repudiation of the single term *mercatare* for the rest of Landolfo's life seeks both a moral and a narrative sense of closure. As in the case of her first lesson in *Decameron* I 8, her appropriation of some Rufolo family history in *Decameron* II 4 concludes not only positively, but in favor of the rare condition of *gentilezza* against the widespread decline of a vile humanity devoted to greed, corruption, and false honor.

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