

## Messer Torello's Magic Carpet Ride as Synecdoche for *Decameron* 10.9\*

Considered one of the most multifaceted medieval texts, Boccaccio's *Decameron* takes its reader from Europe to Asia and Africa, from Christianity to Islam to Judaism, from peasant shacks and merchants' houses to the castles of dukes and kings, from convent cells to the *camerette* (little rooms) of ladies in love, from urban to courtly life, from love to lust, and from friendship to treason. Yet whatever sort of people are involved in the action, the novella that tells their story must provide something new and notable in order to bring useful delight to the listener, and must do so with a certain uncommon verisimilitude, a style that implies all these various things could plausibly happen, although we rarely ever witness them.

The marvelous novella of Messer Torello and Saladin represents an example of this style of uncommon verisimilitude and sets in equal relation two characters of different cultures, faiths and social standings within a plot whose swift, magical resolution has Messer Torello travelling upon a bed draped with a magic carpet from Alexandria to Pavia in a single night. Having been away for some time, he miraculously arrives at the last moment, just as his wife's second marriage is about to take place. With this remarkable scene of recognition between the couple, followed by their subsequent return home, Boccaccio poses a series of meaningful questions about the virtue of liberality and the role of this *novella* within the *Decameron* as a whole. Every tale can be understood as an inset mirror that reflects the whole work, if not in full, at least in focused, refracted shards. Boccaccio positioned a fair number of tales, objects and characters to serve as these inset mirrors. My analysis of all the places to which the *Decameron* transports readers in the blink of an eye (and of the contexts and social classes

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contained therein) suggests that the magic bed on which Saladin sends Torello home again is another inset figure for the *Decameron* itself. It functions as that magical mode of transport that not only takes readers over the whole landscape of time and place, ethnicity and faith, sex and gender, but will bring its *brigata* home again to Florence just in the nick of time.

To summarize the novella briefly, Saladin, disguised as a merchant, is honorably hosted by Messer Torello in his family home in Pavia. When the third Crusade ensues and Torello has to leave, he appoints a date (“un anno, un mese e un dì” [10.9.42]) after which his wife may marry again. The crusading troops are taken prisoner by Saladin, and Torello, having become an expert falconer, is noticed by his captor. Saladin recognizes him and reveals his identity, treating him with all honor. When Messer Torello falls sick (“a giacer postosi, deliberò di morire” [10.9.67]), he is transported by magic arts to Pavia, where his wife’s second marriage is about to be solemnized. Upon presenting himself, Torello is recognized by his wife, and the two return home together.

The story of Messer Torello and Saladin is not the final tale in Boccaccio’s collection. Yet, some critics, and Valerio Ferme in particular, believe that it is Torello’s story that most fully embodies the theme of the tenth Day, and “more aptly closes the narration, whereas Griselda is, once more, Dioneo’s (and Boccaccio’s) attempt to subvert the direction of the day, and, as Millicent Marcus and others have already argued, to deny a perfected narrative pattern to the *Decameron* as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>

Panfilò, king of Day 10, embodies a sort of harmonious balance aimed at encouraging the *brigata* to embrace more virtuous behaviors.<sup>2</sup> He narrates the story of Torello, which most faithfully represents the Day’s topic in that it depicts one of the pinnacles of earthly liberality expressed by the *Decameron*’s characters. In accordance with Panfilò’s wishes, the Day’s tales focus on benevolent deeds which would achieve “laudevole fama” for the characters who accomplish them. As such, the account of Torello and Saladin acts as a fitting farewell for the *brigata* as they prepare to return to Florence, though it is Dioneo’s tale of Griselda and Gualtieri that concludes the tenth Day, as Dioneo, after the first Day, is allowed to digress thematically in the last story of each Day. Panfilò, however, has the singular privilege of narrating both the very first *novella* (ser Cepparello) and the one hundredth, or the ‘quasi’ one hundredth, particularly if we adopt Franco

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<sup>1</sup> Ferme 2009, 33 and 50, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Grimaldi 1987, 350–51, cited in Ferme 2009, 33.

Fido's perspective that the *Decameron* is a collection of 101 stories, counting the interrupted tale of Filippo Balducci that Boccaccio narrates in the prologue to Day 4.<sup>3</sup>

As Ferme pointed out, Panfilo's story of Messer Torello is more in tune than Dioneo's with the desire of the fictional frame characters to complete the narrative itinerary of the work. Interestingly, the two tales elicit very different reactions from the *brigata*: while Dioneo's narrative prompts ambiguous reactions, especially from the women ("e assai le donne, chi d'una parte e chi d'altra tirando, chi biasimando una cosa, un'altra intorno ad essa lodandone, n'avevan favellato" [10.Concl.1]), Panfilo's tale produces a harmonious consensus within the group ("Finita la lunga novella del re [Panfilo], molto a tutti nel sembiante piaciuta" [10.10.2]).<sup>4</sup>

Panfilo's narrative intentions demonstrate his constancy as a character. The story of Cepparello (Day 1.1), as Millicent Marcus has noticed, follows the model of medieval exempla, stories told in the vernacular, either real or imaginary, that medieval friars and preachers employed to communicate moral life lessons.<sup>5</sup> When it is Panfilo's turn to suggest the topic for the last Day of storytelling, he asks his fellow frame characters to narrate stories that display the enactment of positive exemplary behavior, such as liberality and magnanimity, "la quale, come il sole è di tutto il cielo bellezza e ornamento, è chiarezza e lume di ciascun'altra virtù" (10.1.2). As king of the tenth Day, Panfilo is representative of the totality of all virtues, and thus his selection for the focus of the final Day's tales pushes his fellow narrators to recount stories that "describe generosity and virtue in its highest form [...] and] are arranged in an increasing degree of selflessness."<sup>6</sup> However, this mandate creates a fairly repetitious and formulaic narration of stories, as has been observed by Franco Fido who claims that the stories of Day 10 "spingono al limite estremo la stilizzazione di comportamenti umani."<sup>7</sup>

Ferme's article in particular disputed the suggestion that Panfilo might embody all virtue and that frame characters are capable of accurately expressing the exemplary virtue of their own tales.<sup>8</sup> When, at the end of Day 9, Emilia crowns Panfilo king of Day 10, he responds that her rectitude and that of the other members of the *brigata* "far[anno] sì che io, come gli altri sono stati, sarò da lodare" (9.Concl.3). In other words, he sets himself apart

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<sup>3</sup> Fido 2004, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Ferme 2009, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Marcus 1979, 18.

<sup>6</sup> Ferrante 1965, 226.

<sup>7</sup> Fido 1969, 165.

<sup>8</sup> Ferme 2009, 37.

from the other frame characters, pointing out that the other characters' excellence will make his reign worthy of praise. Panfilo chooses as the theme of his Day "those who liberally or magnificently acted" with regard to "love" or "other things" ("di ragionare sopra questo, cioè: di chi liberalmente o vero magnificamente alcuna cosa operasse intorno a' fatti d'amore o d'altra cosa" [9.Concl.4]). He wishes to inspire his fellow narrators to act nobly and with courage, "ché la vita nostra [...] si perpetuerà nella laudevole fama; il che ciascuno che *al ventre solamente, a guisa che le bestie fanno*, non serve, dee non solamente desiderare ma con ogni studio cercare e operare" (9.Concl.5, emphasis added), which reminds us of two crucial lines of Ulysses' speech in *Inferno* 26.<sup>9</sup>

In his delineation between the other characters' *animi* ("animi vostri") and "our lives" ("vita nostra"), Panfilo implies that he already shares in the knowledge of this deeper meaning and that he will attempt to remediate the ignorance of the other frame characters. Panfilo's name, the lover of everything, seems to convey a subtle irony on Boccaccio's part at this point. His character embodies the virtues of a friend or lover, and as such, his understanding of friendship is founded on the belief that he should demonstrate to the *brigata* how one might act in order to live a virtuous and loving life, thereby distinguishing himself yet again from his fellow narrators.<sup>10</sup>

Neifile, the first narrator of Day ten, prepares the audience for the Day's theme in her opening lines and takes pride in the fact that "il nostro re me a tanta cosa, come è a raccontar della magnificenzia m'abbia preposta" (10.1.2), as we saw above. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considers munificence (or magnificence) the virtue that belongs to all those who seek righteous outcomes, no matter the sacrifice (4.2). Through an incorporation of Thomas Aquinas' commentary on the *Ethics*, Dante developed his own ideas on magnanimity, which he proposes in the eighth chapter of the first treatise of his unfinished *Convivio*. In the fourth treatise, he asserts that nobility is achieved through perfection in body and soul by pursuing the "moral virtues," and in particular those of liberality ("la quale è moderatrice del nostro dare e del nostro ricevere le cose temporali" [4.18.4]) and munificence ("la quale è moderatrice de le grandi spese" [4.18.5]), the two that are best suited to kings and rulers. Neifile's introduction to the Day's stories expands the understanding of munificence in asserting that this mindset enhances all other virtues, "magnificenzia [...] la quale, come il sole è di tutto il cielo bellezza e ornamento, è chiarezza e lume di ciascun'altra virtù"

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Inferno* 26.119–20: "Fatti non foste a viver come bruti, / ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza."

<sup>10</sup> Ferme 2009, 38.

(10.1.2), though Dante defines it solely as one of the eleven moral virtues (4.17.3). Liberality and munificence should be understood as “moral” because they concern the temporal and social (rather than theological) domain. This notion highlights the shift in Panfilo’s narrative exemplarity from his original focus on theological virtues in the first Day to those that govern humanity in the tenth. The tale also shares with Dante’s *Convivio* two important ideas: that “la virtù dee avere atto libero, e non sforzato” (1.8.14–16), and that a gift must be more useful to the receiver than to the giver (4.21.1). This last point, in conjunction with an earlier assertion (*Conv.* 1.8.5), point the reader to Seneca’s *De beneficiis* (4.9.1), where a benefit is considered desirable in itself, without regard to the interests of the benefactor.

However, some scholars have argued that most *Decameron* stories fail to demonstrate convincingly liberality and munificence, as defined by Dante. For example, Robert Hollander and Courtney Cahill discuss the inability of many of the tales recounted in Day ten to observe Panfilo’s chosen theme, given that these two virtues often represent unwarranted and dispassionate deeds, thanks in part to the narrators’ superficial understanding of liberality. The *brigata* fails to present stories that deal with self-initiated acts requiring no prompting or subsequent recognition.<sup>11</sup>

Filomena’s story (10.8) demonstrates for the first time that the liberality of characters must be evaluated differently, depending upon the social status of givers and receivers. Because the munificence of our equals is more praiseworthy than that even of kings, friendship is the relationship that promotes virtuous behavior more than any other. Only Filomena and Panfilo fail to stick to the topic, either because their stories “depict chaos and irrationality, mirroring their own fears and their own temptations,” as Hollander and Cahill argue, or because they are unable to offer examples of virtuous behavior after having spent several weeks beyond the limits of civilization while the plague ravaged their city, as Ferme has suggested.<sup>12</sup>

As king of Day 10, Panfilo must now restore his authority and return within the confines of the Day’s topic with the telling of his own tale, the ninth. The novella of Torello and Saladin represents an appropriation of elements belonging to previous stories, so as to demonstrate how being already predisposed to serve others might produce an unintentional *merito*. This unexpected reward, based on one’s selflessness, is in fact closely related to the Day’s topic. These borrowed elements include: the foreign example of

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<sup>11</sup> Hollander and Cahill 1995, 122.

<sup>12</sup> Hollander and Cahill 1995, 166; Ferme 2009, 44.

generosity of 10.3; Filomena's tale of amity in 10.8; the liberality displayed by kings and abbots in 10.1, 2, 6 and 7; the use of magic in 10.5; and the final banquet that reveals a character's identity and reunites a married couple in 10.4.<sup>13</sup>

Torello and Saladin are an unusual match; they reciprocally express magnanimity even though they typify characters who would presumably be sworn enemies. Panfilo seems to transpose the discussion of the theological motivations behind God's actions in Cepparello's tale (1.1) to a more concrete situation where individuals embody, in a visible and comprehensible way, the intrinsic values of friendship and faith in others, just as Saladin — an “enemy of the true faith” — is instrumental in Torello's reunion with his wife.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, it is in this very homecoming that the giver honors the new bond of friendship.

In his decision to recount the benevolence of both a great Muslim ruler and his supposed Christian adversary, Panfilo makes a bold choice: in an era defined by the Crusades, during which Christians and Muslims were involved in perhaps their greatest conflict, proffering an example of magnanimity could be interpreted as being rather audacious. In fact, Day 10 offers no other instance of liberality that bridges such extensive cultural and geographic divides. Saladin is on a secret mission to spy on the “apparecchiamenti de' signori cristiani a quel passaggio” (the Crusade) [10.9.5] when he meets Torello. A relationship of liberality, respect and friendship develops between them in spite of the unfavorable historical circumstances. Historical research has suggested that the figure of Messer Torello might have been based on a historical character politically connected to Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen, whose court was known for a relatively greater acceptance of foreigners of all types.<sup>15</sup> Yet the narrative is set among hostile relations, during the preparations of a religious war in the Middle East, on which the sultan has come to spy.

Janet Levarie Smarr has pointed out that, although most of the *Decameron's* adventures take place in Europe and among Christians, Asiatic and African places, as well as people of other races and religions, are also present.<sup>16</sup> In 10.9, the non-Christian characters interact with Europeans both in Europe and when the Christians travel to the Muslim world. The non-Christian character of Saladin is characteristic of Boccaccio's representation of Muslims not as typical businessmen or merchants, but as exotic

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<sup>13</sup> Ferme 2009, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Ferme 2009, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Smarr 1999, 115; Branca 1976, 1543.

<sup>16</sup> Smarr 1999, 113–36. See also Bosisio 2016, 43–48.



women in fantastic tales or legendary and larger-than-life characters from the East. Smarr argues that this is because Boccaccio was more likely to have known Jews in Italy than to have met practicing Muslims, given his connections with the business world.<sup>17</sup> Already in the second tale of the *Decameron* we are introduced to Abraham, a Jew who lives in Paris and is on friendly terms with the Christian businessman Giannotto, while the penultimate tale, perhaps functioning as a structural mirror, recounts Saladin's popular but fictional visit to Italy in a tale of friendship that transcends faiths.

Our novella presents an exchange of "magnificenzie," in which each act of generosity is carried out to the best of one's ability. To outdo the scope and reach of the previous tales, Torello and Saladin carry out not one but two acts of liberality. Torello begins by first offering Saladin a night's stay at his hunting lodge outside Pavia, then tricks the leader and his men into staying a second night, this time within the city itself at Torello's own home. The unknown guests marvel at Torello's unexpected liberality, splendid meals, beds, precious garments and fine horses, exclaiming that "più compiuto uomo né più cortese né più avveduto di costui non fu mai" (10.9.35). Torello's behavior is more closely associated with the aristocratic emphasis on liberality than with the typical merchant ethic, though he also senses that his guests are nobler than the merchants they purport to be. Before long, his courtesy wins Saladin's affection: "al Saladino il partirsi da messer Torello gravasse, tanto già innamorato se n'era" (10.9.36).

Part two of the tale takes place in Alexandria, where Messer Torello has been taken as a prisoner of war. Saladin first frees Torello and expresses the implausible invitation that they rule together as "parimenti signori." Just as Abraham (1.2) was called "il giudeo" in Christian Europe, so Torello in Muslim Alexandria is called "il cristiano," until Saladin recognizes him. Before the sixteenth century, the signs of ethnic differentiation were often more clearly recognized in clothing rather than personal features, and if Saladin had disguised himself as a Christian in Italy, Messer Torello, on his return to Pavia dressed as an Arab, must have been equally unrecognizable.<sup>18</sup> These men can become exactly like each other with a mere change of clothing. Clothing, a very important though often overlooked social code, denotes one's profession and social rank. And the corollary is similarly true: the lack of clothing, or the lack of proper clothing, signals a socially

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<sup>17</sup> Smarr 1999, 113.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson 2007, 98 and 100. See Grinberg (2017, 78–81) for a reflection on the literary representation of "ethnic passing" in 10.9 and on the "complexity of medieval ethnic identity in relation to textiles and garments" (81).

unacceptable lack of preparedness. Both Saladin and Torello readily fit in alongside foreigners of comparable generosity.<sup>19</sup>

When Saladin's necromancer delivers Torello back to his wife just before she is to remarry, the use of magic goes unquestioned. In place of criticism or concern about demonization, there is only praise for both giver and receiver.<sup>20</sup> The non-Christian world surpasses Italy in wealth and power, even magical power, yet Torello is represented as an equal in spirit and personal character. The bond of affection that brings good men together despite differences of religion and race moves Saladin to befriend a foreigner, even an enemy, whose personal qualities are worthy. There is no attempt at a realistic representation of Saladin; he represents an ideal, a comparison against which the West is to be measured.

Naturally, Christians commonly held ambivalent opinions regarding Muslims that were significantly more negative in the generations of the Crusaders than they were in later years. Even so, Boccaccio brings to life a fictional narrative realm set in an idealized past that moves the reader, immune to real theological issues, toward a general feeling of sameness and tolerance across the two cultures. This feeling is based not only on real contacts, such as those in ports or marketplaces, but also on a lack of such contacts, or rather, on a general ignorance about significant cultural differences. For the chroniclers and the author of the *Novellino*, Saladin was a celebrity whose charitable treatment of Christian captives (true or not) was gratefully appreciated. We see similar dynamics in *Decameron* 5.2 and 10.9.

Saladin first appears in the third tale of the *Decameron* (1.3). Ferme notes that the linguistic play on the number three seems to highlight the perfection of *Decameron* 10.9 and its contents. Following the traditional narrative account, Saladin appears as a character in the third and ninety-ninth stories of the *Decameron*, and dividing ninety-nine by three, we arrive at the number thirty-three, both the age attributed to Jesus at the time of His death according to the Gospel of John and the fundamental number that drives Dante's *Divine Comedy*.<sup>21</sup> The trope of rings in both Saladin tales proves equally relevant: in the third tale of the first Day, we have Melchisedech's account of the three rings, one for each Abrahamic religion, while in Day 10.9, Adalieta gives Torello a ring, much as Saladin later gives him one as well. Significantly, it is Adalieta's ring that aids in her recognition of her husband during the wedding banquet preceding her new marriage.

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<sup>19</sup> Gabriele 1996, 35.

<sup>20</sup> For the demonization of magic, see Sacchetti, *Sermoni* 27, and Passavanti, *Specchio*, especially the chapter entitled "Dell'altra scienza diabolica."

<sup>21</sup> Ferme 2009, 34.



By making Torello and the sultan exemplary figures of the virtue of munificence, Panfilo's last story forces Boccaccio's audience to acknowledge the remarkable integrity of both men. Saladin's opportunity to return the extravagant courtesies he had received enables the two men to become equal. Thus, class distinctions are overcome along with differences of race and religion. Given Saladin's popular reputation for extreme wealth and generosity, the tale seeks to show how a gentleman of Pavia can equal him in spirit, if not in material wealth. Here, the Muslim has become a model for emulation, and his religious difference is seemingly forgotten.

In the narrative realm, Saladin's generosity and splendor often evoke admiration accompanied by a certain exaggeration. For example, the *Novellino* (tale 25) tells how Saladin ordered someone to be paid 200 marks, though the scribe accidentally wrote 300; Saladin, not to be outdone by a slip of the pen, made the sum 400. As we saw in the *Decameron*, his generosity to Messer Torello includes the magical return home of his guest in a flying bed. This mini-anecdote of Saladin's payment sets up a longer, two-part anecdote in the *Novellino* that tells of a truce agreed upon by Saladin and the Crusaders, including mutual visits to observe "our behavior" and "Christian ways" ("i nostri modi [... e] la costuma de' Cristiani," 25.8–10), ostensibly with an eye to converting to the Christian faith. Saladin goes to the Christians' camp and admires the orderly, elegant and dignified way that the tables are arranged, but he strongly disapproves of the hierarchical distinction between rich and poor, between noble and commoner. He does not condemn the segregation based on the tenets of his own religion, but rather criticizes it as contrary to Christian principles, calling the poor "the friends of their lord" ("biasimò molto [il fatto] che li amici di lor Signore mangiavano più vilmente e più basso," 25.15).

Saladin then receives the Christian paladins at his own camp. Shrewdly embroidering crosses into the carpets as a pre-emptive measure, he sets up the Christians for failure:

I cristiani stolti entrarono dentro, andando con li piedi su per quelle croci, sputandovi suso siccome per terra. Allora parlò il soldano, e ripreseli forte: "Voi predicate la croce, e spregiatela tanto? Così pare che voi amiate vostro Iddio in sembianti di parole, ma non in opera. Vostra maniera e vostra modi non mi piace." Ruppero la triegua, e ricominciossi la guerra. (25.15–23)

Again, Saladin's condemnation invokes his visitors' religious imperatives, not his own; as noted, these tales often set up the alien observer as "more Christian than the Christians," better practitioners of Christian tenets than the Christians are themselves.

As in Busone da Gubbio's *Avventuroso Ciciliano* and in the thirteenth-century French *Récits d'un Ménestrel de Reims*, lasting friendships are formed across religious lines. Indeed, Europeans even compete with Saladin in contests of generosity, not wanting to be outdone according to their own western aristocratic ideals.<sup>22</sup> Saladin's character does not undergo any development in Panfilo's tale. He appears as a valorous and splendid ruler, a fixed star in the firmament of medieval legend, a standard of greatness and nobility.<sup>23</sup> Torello's talents and noble-mindedness, which define him as the moral equal of Saladin, create a new climate of cordiality and friendship, even if equality is measured in morality rather than social station. Indeed, there is a distinction between the moral and the social order, and Boccaccio is sure not to disturb the social hierarchy.

The novella we are examining seems to be tiptoeing around *Novellino* 25, with an intent to contest and dispute. The *Novellino*'s mutual visit — of Saladin to the Christians, and a Christian to Saladin — is obviously echoed in *Decameron* 10.9, and in the same sequence. The “magnanimity” and “generosity” of Saladin, which the *Novellino* tale is supposed to prove, is the topic of the whole of Day ten. And of course, there is the carpet, the object at once unnoticeable (the *stolti cristiani* do not see it) and essential, the hinge in the *dénouement*. Its embroidered crosses unmask their hypocrisy and legitimize both Saladin's abandoning his contemplated conversion, and the resuming of hostilities. In the *Decameron*, Torello's magic bed, described as a “ricco letto” (which we can visualize with a different carpet spread over it), brings together two distant realities within a night's journey of each other. It voids the intransigent bonds of time and space; it juxtaposes problematic difference in happy, generous harmony. Saladin's bed, which carries Torello so far and so swiftly, is the calculated reverse of Saladin's embroidered carpet in the *Novellino*. It is instead the calculated miniature of the *Decameron*, an almost magical tool that whisks the reader away to distant locations.

This representation of Saladin is not without its ambiguities. Although in his *Expositions* on Dante's *Comedy* Boccaccio identifies the sultan as a fierce enemy of Christianity, and therefore damned to perpetual punishment, he also notes that Dante contradicts himself with regard to this figure.<sup>24</sup> Boccaccio had earlier glossed Saladin's name with the usual praise of Saladin's magnificent generosity, mercy and regard for worthy individuals

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<sup>22</sup> Busone da Gubbio 1832, 353–54; *Récits d'un Ménestrel de Reims*, 104–09.

<sup>23</sup> Stewart 2004, 95.

<sup>24</sup> Boccaccio, *Expositions*, 2009, 4.lit.374–75.

but made a point of saying that he was an apathetic follower of Mohammed's laws. As we saw in the twenty-fifth story of the *Novellino*, Saladin is frequently closely connected to the Christian West, but the *Avventuroso Cicciliano*, the *Ménestrel de Reims*, *Jean d'Avesnes* and the *Chronique d'Outremer* all tell of the Sultan's secret desire to become Christian by self-baptism on his deathbed.<sup>25</sup>

The singularity of *Decameron* 10.9 is found not only in the grand munificence of its main protagonists, Saladin and Torello, but also in the figure of Adalieta, Torello's wife. Her own liberality matches that of her husband, as she accommodates her guests "non con femminile animo, ma con reale" (10.9.20) and gives them the finest garments, even thoughtfully including "panni lini" ('underwear,' 10.9.20). Saladin is so impressed with the generosity and graciousness she affords her guests in having provided for the most intimate needs of these men who are indeed far away from their own women that when Torello requests to be sent back to reunite with his wife, Saladin has no choice but to acquiesce. Boccaccio advances these examples of magnanimity by inserting an extraordinary narrative element to underscore Torello's noble spirit. Having finally arrived on his magic bed at San Pietro in Ciel d'oro in Pavia, he is recognized by the Abbot as his living nephew. Upon this discovery, Torello requests that the Abbot and his monks keep his identity a secret until he can verify with his own eyes whether his wife is taking pleasure in the idea of a new marriage ("Avanti che di mia tornata si sappia, io intendo di veder che contenenza sia quella di mia moglie in queste nozze," 10.9.99).

Sitting across from his wife at the banquet, Torello discovers to his delight that she is not enjoying the new wedding, "egli con grandissimo piacer riguardava [Adalieta], e nel viso gli pareva turbata di queste nozze" (10.9.102). According to Francesco da Barberino, the widow who remarries because of pressure from her family is justified, but Adalieta's demeanor during the nuptial banquet shows her inner nobility and her loyalty in not considering remarriage a desirable solution.<sup>26</sup> For Torello, Adalieta's solemn and grave disposition proves the catalyst in initiating the events that would precede his wife's recognition of him and their subsequent reunion. Ferme suggests that perhaps Torello, the ever-generous man, wants to ascertain whether his wife is truly happy to remarry before making his rightful claim as her husband.<sup>27</sup> This possibility is especially significant given that

<sup>25</sup> *Avventuroso cicciliano* 312–16; *Récits d'un Ménestrel de Reims* 111–12; Smarr 1999, 135, n. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Giusti 1996, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Ferme 2009, 46.

this story follows Filomena's tale of Tito and Gisippo (10.8), in which these two lifelong friends find themselves in a love triangle. Tito not only admits his love for Sofronia, Gisippo's fiancée, but also lays claim to her hand, rather than allowing them to fulfill their destiny.<sup>28</sup> Between Torello and Tito lies an entire spectrum of possible marital narratives, including death, of course. For the medieval woman, her husband's death sometimes meant acquiring an unprecedented socio-economic independence, thereby finding herself in a position difficult to maintain, as this independence was based on the legal ownership of her dowry or her husband's inheritance.<sup>29</sup> This is surely one of the reasons why widows are always relevant in Boccaccio's *Decameron*; whether as protagonists or secondary figures, widows enjoy more independence than practically all the *Decameron*'s other female characters.

Within the context of this interpretation, Panfilo's narration epitomizes secular liberality as expressed by the characters of the *Decameron* and does so to illustrate the virtue for his fellow storytellers. The tale ends happily when Adalieta overturns the banquet table at her own wedding to (re)embrace her husband. Such a conclusion inspires Panfilo to remark that ultimately, both Torello and "la sua cara donna" did in fact receive "il guiderdone delle lor liete e preste cortesie" (10.9.113). In line with the theme of the Day's tales, both the men and women represent ideal and praiseworthy characters.

Panfilo's description of the successful relationship of Adalieta and Torello might also clarify why Dioneo chooses to tell the story of Gualtieri and Griselda as the last tale of the Day,<sup>30</sup> that is, to facilitate the *brigata*'s reflection on the stories. In this sense, the Griselda story does not violate the theme of the Day but instead takes it to an extreme that requires reframing by way of Gualtieri's "matta bestialità" (10.10.3). Their story appears as the kind of subversion of the Day's topic to which Dioneo has accustomed us with his previous stories, especially if we see the tale as a direct response to Panfilo's own rather than an attempted *summa* of virtues for the Day, or even for the whole book.

Dioneo's reaction to Panfilo's story suggests the former interpretation. Before narrating his final tale, and during the *brigata*'s expressions of approval, Dioneo reveals that he does not share in their admiration. He demurs in claiming that their accolades are worth less than "due denari," and argues that, "Il buon uom che aspettava la seguente notte di far abbassare

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<sup>28</sup> Ferme 2009, 46.

<sup>29</sup> Giusti 1996, 40.

<sup>30</sup> See Ferme 2009, 47.

la coda ritta della fantasima, avrebbe dati men di due denari di tutte le lodi che voi date a messer Torello” (10.10.2). Dioneo appears here to be contending that Panfilo’s story defies any standard of credibility, further arguing that he will not discuss “cosa magnifica” but rather “una matta bestialità” (10.10.3). In Dioneo’s emphasis on Griselda’s inexplicable patience and fortitude, he even suggests that had another woman been cast out by her husband, naked and alone, she would have done well to give herself willingly to another for a new dress. The narrator’s conclusion seemingly derides the suggestion that Torello and Adalietta’s might be the perfect union by highlighting the true disparities within medieval marriage arrangements. However, whereas Torello allows his wife the possibility of remarriage and hesitates to reveal himself before he can verify her true feelings on the matter, Gualtieri on the other hand commands and controls every aspect of his relationship with Griselda and continually demeans her before the court. Such behavior serves to underscore both the social and gender inequality between the husband and wife. Panfilo’s chosen theme for Day 10, liberality and munificence, necessitates the particular compassion that Dioneo had in fact sought to circumvent. As might be expected, it is Dioneo who is least likely to acknowledge Panfilo’s authority as ruler of Day 10. Ferme, for example, interprets Dioneo’s concluding narration as a cautionary tale for women who might be inclined to embrace the harmonious ideal that Adalietta, Torello and Saladin represent. He argues rather that the tale functions as Dioneo’s final attempt to restore the *brigata*’s original purpose — entertainment — whereas Panfilo prefers to enlighten his fellow narrators and reestablish the value of both virtue and tradition.<sup>31</sup>

Ambiguity is an essential part of Boccaccio’s narrative strategy to give shape to the elegant and complex structure of the *Decameron*. This ambiguity creates a subtle intellectual suspense and makes it difficult to answer the question that inevitably comes to mind: what is Boccaccio’s own opinion on the novella? For example, Boccaccio poses his own positions on the questions he raises non-coercively. In the story of Torello, he has opened a dialogue with *Novellino* 25, though he does not announce or demand it. In the *Novellino*, Saladin putatively considers conversion to Christianity, only to dismiss the possibility after having set up the Christians to fail as ambassadors of their own faith and of their own “modi”: “Ruppesi la tregua, e ricominciossi la guerra.” The implication is that it is either conversion or war: it is one or the other. There is no balance, equality or equipoise. Truly, the *Decameron* has moved well beyond that binary opposition. Whereas the

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<sup>31</sup> Ferme 2009, 49.

author of the *Novellino* suggests that Saladin could either become a Christian and a friend, or remain a Muslim and an enemy, the *Decameron* transforms the antagonistic carpet of crosses into a magic bed to imply, slyly and indirectly, that there is indeed another way. Boccaccio seems to captivate his audience with his dynamic juxtaposition of ten Days of tales and, by doing so, underscores the multitude of tensions, such as class-structure, racial and gender, that are fundamental to the *Decameron's* structure. The one hundred stories work together and against each other to produce a work that straddles the turning point of an era, and thus Boccaccio's collection of tales demonstrates that the non-Christian world can also be a place of justice, liberality and honor.

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