

Mimesis on Trial: Legal and Literary Verisimilitude in Boccaccio's *Decameron*

Ex his, quae forte uno aliquo casu accidere possunt, iura non constituuntur.

[The rules of law are not established on the basis of what perchance occurs in one kind of case.]

—Digest 1.3.4

Neque leges neque senatus consulta ita scribi possunt, ut omnes casus qui quandoque inciderint comprehendantur, sed sufficit ea quae plerumque accidunt contineri.

[Neither the laws nor the senatus consulta can be formulated in such a way as to encompass all of the cases that might arise; it is enough that they encompass those cases that happen frequently.]

—Digest 1.3.10

Introduction

BOCCACCIO IS GENERALLY THE LEAST appreciated of the “Three Crowns” of the Italian literary canon (after Petrarch and Dante), yet his focus on the realistic, even gritty details of everyday life, everyday characters, and everyday language has no real precedent, at least not one of the scope of the *Decameron*. Studies of the novel typically identify Boccaccio’s masterpiece as an influential precursor in the development of modern literary realism, and Erich Auerbach devotes a critical chapter to the *Decameron* in his monumental history of Western mimesis.¹ Although recent scholarship has called into question Boccaccio’s supposed modernity, underlining the allegorical aspects of the *Decameron* and its continued debt to medieval textual

ABSTRACT This essay argues that the celebrated realism of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* responds to the new prominence of verisimilitude in legal contexts in his time. REPRESENTATIONS 139. Summer 2017 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 118–45. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2017.139.5.118>.

practices, it is difficult to deny that, at the very least, Boccaccio expands the frame of what can be legitimately represented in literature.

At the same time, something is inevitably lost when we view the *Decameron* from the end point of the modern novel. Our retrospective glance privileges a very specific conception of realism, a conception defined by its rejection of rhetorical notions of appropriateness and fittingness. (This unruly literary style befits a genre “in which one can tell absolutely any story in any way whatsoever.”²) Auerbach, for example, maintains that only once literature has freed itself from the rigid confines of classical decorum is it possible for authors to depict the world in its complex, particularistic entirety. Yet this version of realism does not admit the extent to which Boccaccio’s mimetic art remains preoccupied by rhetorical verisimilitude. While it’s true that Boccaccio incessantly interrogates the status of verisimilitude throughout the *Decameron*—what it means for something to “fit” in a given scenario—he does so by delving into the precise components of the *circumstantiae* (the who, what, where, when, why, and how of a case, deployed by an orator to enhance the “true-seemingness” of his argument). Even when exploring its inner contradictions, that is, Boccaccio innovates through, rather than from, rhetoric. Studies that neglect the influence of rhetorical verisimilitude on Boccaccio’s realism, preferring to imagine a seamless evolution from the plausible to the particular, miss this essential tension at the heart of the *Decameron* between competing notions of the real.³

Rather than treating the *Decameron* as a stepping-stone on the path toward modern realism, I will argue that Boccaccio’s realistic style is a historically specific response to a historically specific crisis of verisimilitude. This crisis was propelled by a critical institutional innovation: the rise and spread of the medieval inquisitorial procedure. In the inquisitorial trial, judges were frequently called upon to estimate the likelihood of circumstantial evidence; this migration of notions about the probable from the rhetorical to the judicial sphere, from persuasion to evidence, is Boccaccio’s primary focus and concern. Through the many trial scenes in the *Decameron*, he illustrates the dangers that arise when judges, witnesses, and prosecutors are “trapped by a picture”—when the theater of justice becomes a self-fulfilling mimesis of the already known and always seen. The singular, remarkable details that eventually come to the fore in these trials (and that characterize the plot lines of Boccaccio’s *novelle*) reveal the disconnect between norms of likelihood and the particulars of a case.

Not only do the trials in the *Decameron* probe the legal uses of verisimilitude as evidence, they also raise questions about verisimilitude as a literary device. What is the relationship between an aesthetic principle of “fittingness” and the normative knowledge of “what happens for the most part”? What is the role of innovation in an art of the probable? How can a plausible

account of the facts encompass historical contingency and singularity? These simultaneously legal and literary questions are exactly what the *Decameron* is wired to navigate: the degree to which the verisimilar picture must be open to the singular case, the structure open to the event.

My argument, then, is not simply that Boccaccio was influenced by rhetorical verisimilitude but also that he employs the numerous “procedural” tales in the *Decameron* to reflect critically on the nature of, and the increasing real-world power of, realistic narrative.⁴ Continually questioning the very realism he employs as a poet, he puts mimesis on trial.

From Verisimilar Narrative to Plausible Evidence

In ancient rhetoric, verisimilitude was discussed under the topic of arguments from probability. These rhetorical proofs were based on an assumption that human actions and events follow predictable natural patterns. As Aristotle wrote in his *Rhetoric*, “A probability [*eikos*] is what happens for the most part” (1.2.12.1357a).⁵ Arguing that a given reconstruction of events was *eikos* or *verisimilis*, Greek and Roman orators relied on a collective “picture” about what was natural and normal in the world.⁶ A subject’s behavior was deemed plausible because it conformed to a preestablished social imaginary: it was probable because it fit.

Aristotle strove to establish an epistemological function for arguments from probability; they were essential to his understanding of the enthymeme. However, for the Greek rhetors (as well as for Plato), arguments from probability were primarily tools for persuasion, not knowledge. In this skeptical vein, the Ciceronian rhetorical treatises that Boccaccio would have known differentiate clearly between “true” and “true-seeming.” In the beginning of the *De Inventione*, Cicero defines the first part of oratory, *inventio*, as the discovery of either true or verisimilar arguments that render one’s case plausible: “*Inventio est excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant*” (1.6.9).⁷ Cicero distinguishes between “true” and “similar to the truth” but treats this distinction as ethically neutral with respect to the goal of achieving credibility. The Pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.9.16 sets aside ethics entirely, urging orators to make their reconstruction of the facts as plausible as possible, especially when these “facts” are false:

Our Statements of Facts will have plausibility [*veri similis narratio erit*] if it answers the requirements of the usual, the expected, and the natural [*ut mos, ut opinio, ut natura postulat*]; if account is strictly kept of the length of time, the standing of the persons involved, the motives of the planning, and the advantages offered by the scene of action, so as to obviate the argument in refutation that the time was too short, or that there was no motive, or that the place was unsuitable, or that the persons

themselves could not have acted or been treated so. If the matter is true, all these precautions must nonetheless be observed in the Statement of Facts, for often the truth cannot gain credence otherwise. And if the matter is fictitious, these measures will have to be observed all the more scrupulously.⁸

Here the role of the orator is not to report the bare facts but to construct a verisimilar picture of an event, one that conforms to popular opinion of what happens normally and naturally.

In its original rhetorical context, then, verisimilitude was a device of the orator, not a criterion of the judge. Yet the epochal shift in state-prosecuted crime also fundamentally transformed the role of verisimilitude in courtroom proceedings. With the rise of the inquisitorial trial in the late middle ages, verisimilitude went from being a feature of effective *persuasion* to a basis of *judgment*.⁹

In traditional Romano-canonical procedure, trials were conducted according to what was known as the accusatorial procedure (*accusatio*). To initiate a legal action, a victim needed to come forward and lodge a formal accusation; otherwise the state's hands were tied.¹⁰ Hence the popular maxim from Roman law: "Without an accuser there can be no trial." In this framework, the judge's role was essentially passive: he was expected to mediate conflicts brought to trial by the contesting parties themselves.

In order to overcome the inherent limitations of this largely private approach to prosecuting crime, jurists devised an alternative judicial process, the so-called *inquisitio*. In such an "inquiry" it was both the right and responsibility of the judge to proactively investigate and uncover crime whenever the "clamor" of the populace "reached his ears."¹¹ The aim of the judge was no longer to mediate between warring factions but to establish the objective truth about a crime and produce a guilty subject. Originally conceived in an ecclesiastical context around the time of the Fourth Lateran Council as a means for the newly centralized church to keep tabs on its errant prelates, the inquisitorial trial was quickly adopted by secular judges throughout the Italian city-state.¹² By Boccaccio's time, inquisition had become the standard method for investigating crime, a permanent exception to the accusatorial trial justified by the oft-repeated maxim "It is in the public interest that crimes do not remain unpunished."¹³

In lieu of a tripartite structure, in which two opposing orators vied with each other to construct the most plausible and convincing depiction of events, the inquisitorial judge decided directly whether or not the evidence presented before him seemed "likely." In particular, the evaluation of the likelihood of public report or "*fama*" depended on a judge's discretion.¹⁴ According to an ingenuous legal fiction, the "accuser" in inquisitorial trials was not the judge himself but personified talk, the *fama* whispered in the

neighborhoods about scandalous crimes and disreputable characters. It was *fama* that reported the crime, *fama* that indicted a defendant.¹⁵

Once qualified as a *verisimile* or *probabile argumentum*—and separated out from mere rumor and gossip—what everyone said about a crime or suspect could have real, even deadly consequences, since such talk was considered a legal presumption and hence a “half-proof” (*prova semiplena*). While there remained a very high bar for criminal conviction even in inquisitorial trials—either the testimony of two unimpeachable witnesses or a confession—a much lower bar was set for a wide range of legal decisions that preceded sentencing. It was in this presentencing phase of an investigation that notions of probability and plausibility really came into play. Jurists agreed, for example, that verisimilar *fama* was enough to issue an arrest warrant, to indict, or, in some cases, even to torture a suspect. Eventually *fama* was considered admissible in the sentencing phase as well, provided it was supported by additional circumstantial evidence.¹⁶

The judge and jurist Albertus Gandinus illustrates the new prominence of verisimilitude in judicial inquests in his *Tractatus de Maleficiis*, composed between the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century. In one of its *quaestiones* drawn from everyday life, Gandinus inquires whether a judge has the right to torture a culprit whose arrest was prompted by public outcry based on past actions rather than by any new evidence, especially when this *fama* did not arise immediately after the crime had occurred (as required by law) but instead after several days had elapsed. “From such presumptions and circumstantial evidence,” he asks, “can a judge inquire against him using torture?”¹⁷

Gandinus’s answer in the affirmative insists on the validity of verisimilar evidence, especially in difficult or obscure crimes:

Since it seems to be have been proven that the man seized was in other respects a person of ill repute, it may be said that at the time of the crime that is being investigated he is presumed to be of the same status and reputation, because what was true about his status in the past is presumed to be true today. For this reason, it seems we ought to presume that he is more likely to have had some knowledge of the crime than another man of a different reputation. Thus, since this seems distinctly more plausible [*verisimilius*], and since in obscure and doubtful events a judge must examine and reconstruct those things which appear more likely and more fitting to the truth [*verisimiliora et vero aptiora*], it seems right he can be tortured.

Gandinus’s socially conservative view about the usual suspects is bolstered here by a citation from Justinian’s *Digest* (50.17.114) regarding likelihood and normal expectations: “In obscure things it is usual to consider what is more likely [*verisimilius*] or what happens for the most part [*quod plerumque fieri solet*].”¹⁸ For our purposes, it is crucial that in his portrayal of verisimilar

arguments Gaudinus moves seamlessly between epistemology and aesthetics, between what usually happens for the most part, “*plerumque fieri solet*,” and what is more fitting, “*vero aptiora*.”

Boccaccio grapples in the *Decameron* with this very ambiguity of the “like” in likelihood every time a public official rushes to judgment based on the verisimilar.¹⁹ He is especially concerned with what happens when the state’s monopoly of violence is married to a monopoly of verisimilitude. When this power of the lifelike is abused, the inquisitorial trial mutates into a macabre stage performance in which the actors read from a familiar script, solipsistically re-presenting what is already presumed. In *Decameron* 3.7, the Florentine Tedaldo degli Elisei realizes the potential dark side of such officially sanctioned mimesis when he returns from a self-imposed exile in Crete to find his former amorous rival falsely accused of having murdered him:

Tedaldo, udito questo, cominciò a riguardare quanti e quali fossero gli errori che potevano cadere nelle menti degli uomini, prima pensando a’ fratelli che uno strano avevan pianto e seppellito in luogo di lui, e appresso lo innocente per falsa suspizione accusato, e con testimoni non veri averlo condotto a dover morire, e oltre a ciò la cieca severità delle leggi e de’ rettori, li quali assai volte, quasi solleciti investigatori del vero, incrudelendo fanno il falso provare, e sé ministri dicono della giustizia e di Dio, dove sono della iniquità e del diavolo esecutori. (3.7.16)

[Having overheard the whole of this, Tedaldo began to reflect how fatally easy it was for people to cram their heads with totally erroneous notions. His thoughts turned first of all to his brothers, who had gone into mourning and buried some stranger in his own stead, after which they had been impelled by their false suspicions to accuse this innocent man and fabricate evidence so as to have him brought under sentence of death. This in turn led him to reflect upon the blind severity of the law and its administrators, who in order to convey the impression that they are zealously seeking the truth, often have recourse to cruelty and cause falsehood to be accepted as proven fact, hence demonstrating, for all their proud claim to be the ministers of God’s justice, that their true allegiance is to the devil and his iniquities.]

In Tedaldo’s characterization of the inquisitorial procedure, the original tripartite structure of the accusatorial trial (accuser, defendant, judge) has been reduced to a monologue of the corrupt magistrate, who, through the ventriloquism of torture (“*incrudelendo*”), generates a gruesome charade of the process of discovery, narcissistically reduplicating his own voice. (In the frame narrative, this tyrannical style is personified by the lovelorn Filostrato, who attempts to force the other storytellers to give voice to his tired fantasies.)

At this point, it would be tempting to celebrate Boccaccio’s clear-eyed critique of the abuses of verisimilitude for its modernity, based on a certain presentist complacency with regard to premodern law. Given that the histories of literary realism and legal evidence are both typically depicted

as moving progressively from medieval idealism/universalism to a modern reliance on facts, it would be easy to discount an official reliance on verisimilitude as a primitive artifact that our own society has long since transcended. In this telling we have moved, in both law and letters, from *evidentia*—the rhetorical technique of placing a verisimilar picture before the eyes of the jury—to evidence. Ian Watt essentially argues as much in *The Rise of the Novel* when he compares the novel’s interest in particulars with the centrality in modern trials of fact-based evidence—a shared “circumstantial view of life.”²⁰ But recent reports of police violence against minorities in the United States have brought home the costs of ignoring the enduring role of verisimilitude in our legal system. Without even touching upon the unconscious biases of the jury, a myriad of presentencing actions—such as stop-and-frisk, search-and-seizure, arrest, custody, and indictment—still depend on the criteria of plausibility and likelihood, on what a “reasonable” person would expect given the circumstances. Yet despite its ubiquitous presence in our daily life, the “probable” of “probable cause” remains largely unexplored, discussed, if at all, through the lens of statistics, its rhetorical prehistory forgotten.²¹

Boccaccio does not succumb to the illusion that the factual can ever fully supplant the plausible in our reconstructions of past events, either for the poet or for the judge. Instead of dismissing the verisimilar out of hand, he tests its limits in the *Decameron*, exposing the contradictions and blind spots that arise when what everyone knows hardens into received opinion and *doxa*. As an antidote to such calcification, within the experimental testing grounds of the *novella* probable accounts of events are continuously undermined by contingent detail and isolated historical fact. Literary scholars who extol Boccaccio’s “evidential” realism while neglecting the enduring influence of rhetorical verisimilitude on his work are thus telling only half the story. To chart this absence, I turn now to the two critics who have told this one-sided story most compellingly, Francesco de Sanctis and Erich Auerbach. Although these scholars underestimate the complex interplay of realisms plural in the *Decameron*, their groundbreaking accounts of Boccaccio’s use of concrete details and particulars reveal the fundamental epistemological challenges posed by the *novella* as a study of the singular case.

On Boccaccio’s Contingent Realism: De Sanctis and Auerbach

Our vision of Boccaccio as “modern” and “realist” begins with Francesco De Sanctis’s *Storia della letteratura italiana*. In De Sanctis’s Hegelian vision of literary history, Boccaccio inaugurates a degenerative strand of

formalism in Italian letters that would have to be reinvigorated by the conceptualism of Machiavelli and other political writers. Despite this stance, the pages De Sanctis dedicates to Boccaccio's works are remarkably vibrant and incisive. He cannot hide his admiration for the forcefulness with which Boccaccio breaks from the past in the *Decameron*: "It's not an evolution, it's a cataclysm, or a revolution—one of those sudden revolutions that from one day to another show us a changed world. Here we have the Middle Ages not only denied, but ridiculed."²² For De Sanctis, the emblem of this historic rupture is Boccaccio's naturalism and realism, which burst forth from a repressed Middle Ages: "Disowned reality was bound to take its revenge, and Nature to react in its turn. In opposition to that exaggerated spirituality came the inevitable reaction; naturalism and realism in ordinary life" (296). The poet's ability to become a mirror of his society, recording the world around him, evolves from his embrace of human nature in its complexity. Like a Flemish painter minutely drawing the creases of a dress, Boccaccio lavishes attention on the distinctive details of objects and personalities.

De Sanctis's characterization of Boccaccio as the painter of everyday life, however, is at odds with his fixation on the role of the "marvelous" and "extraordinary" in the author's stories.²³ Brilliantly exploring life's mishaps, Boccaccio's tales are "extraordinary cases placed on the stage by a fluke of chance."²⁴ Although De Sanctis ultimately denigrates this comic universe whose God is chance, his analysis of the "accidental" logic of the *novelle* is illuminating:

In this theater of human events left entirely to individual free will and guided in their results by chance, God and Providence are acknowledged by name alone, almost by a sort of tacit agreement, in the words of people who have sunk into complete religious, political, and moral indifference. Nor is there even that intimate force of things which endows the events with a sort of logic and necessity; the book, indeed, is charming for exactly the opposite quality; it is charming for its completely unexpected denouements, which are utterly different from anything we could reasonably have foreseen, and this by the whim of chance. It is a new form of the marvelous, no longer caused by the penetration into the human life of ultra-natural forces, such as visions and miracles, but by a curious conflux of fortuitous events that no one could possibly have foreseen or controlled. We are left with the feeling that the ruler of the world, the *deus ex machina*, is chance; we see it in the varied play of the inclinations of these people, all of them ruled by the changing chances of life. Since the machinery, the moving force of the stories, is the marvelous, the fortuitous, the unexpected, the extraordinary, it follows that their interest does not lie in the morality of their actions, but in the extraordinariness of their causes and effects. (336–37)

Likely influenced by Goethe's definition of the *novella* as an "unheard-of occurrence," De Sanctis situates it within a contingent realm of hazard and chance.²⁵

After De Sanctis, the most influential treatment of Boccaccio's realism remains Auerbach's discussion of the *Decameron* in *Mimesis*. Drawing on a close reading of the *novella* of Frate Alberto (who disguises himself as an angel to seduce the vainglorious and gullible Lisetta; *Decameron* 4.2), Auerbach examines the stylistic devices with which Boccaccio creates a representation of reality that is "true to life and natural" (206). He repeatedly praises Boccaccio for his attention to "sensory visualization," as well as for "his relaxed command of factual data and a sensory representation of multiplex phenomena" (214).

Despite this praise, Auerbach ultimately views Boccaccio negatively within the narrative of *Mimesis*. Similar to De Sanctis, Auerbach diagnoses Boccaccio's texts as symptoms of historical loss when compared to the fullness of Dante's worldview:

The figural unity of the secular world falls apart at the very moment when it attains—in Dante—complete sovereignty over earthly reality. Sovereignty over reality in its sensory multiplicity remained as a permanent conquest, but the order in which it was comprehended was now lost, and for a time there was nothing to take its place. This, as we said, must not be made a reproach against Boccaccio, but it must be registered as a historical fact which goes beyond him as a person. Early humanism, that is, lacks constructive ethical force when it is confronted with the reality of life; it again lowers realism to the intermediate, unproblematic, and non-tragic level of style. . . . When Boccaccio undertakes to depict all the multiplex reality of contemporary life, he abandons the unity of the whole; he writes a book of *novelle* in which a great many things stand side by side, held together only by the common purpose of well-bred entertainment. (228)

For Auerbach, Boccaccio's conquest of realism thus comes at a cost—a loss of "ethical force" and the "unity of the whole."

Echoing De Sanctis closely, Auerbach faults Boccaccio above all for the role of chance in his narratives, which he claims are driven only by "coincidence, the ever unexpected product of quickly and violently shifting events" (230). While Dante, in recounting the story of Paolo and Francesca, scorned "every kind of finely wrought coincidence," Boccaccio, in the tales of Guiscardo and Ghismonda, "devotes a considerable portion of his text to the complicated and adventurous methods the lovers are forced to employ in order to meet undisturbed" (230–31). The narrative structure of the *novelle* lacks the retrospective viewpoint of the *figura*, in which the decisive—and often tragic—significance of a life is distilled from an only *seemingly* random concatenation of events: "The worldliness of men like Boccaccio was still too insecure and unsupported to serve, after the fashion of Dante's figural interpretation, as a basis on which the world could be ordered, interpreted, and represented as a reality and as a whole" (231). Boccaccio may be an expert with singular details, but his reliance on happenstance prevents him

from binding those details in a meaningful structure; he remains stuck in the circumstances.

What both De Sanctis and Auerbach grant without qualification is Boccaccio's newness, the originality of his style. Yet since the publication of Vittore Branca's *Boccaccio medievale*, many scholars have taken aim at the *Decameron's* "modernity" by demonstrating its reliance on traditional medieval forms such as sermons, exempla, and saints' lives. Even Boccaccio's purported realism has been challenged as the figural and allegorical aspects of his work have been uncovered and revealed.²⁶ Most of all, and in sharp contrast with the views of De Sanctis and Auerbach, critics have illuminated the means by which the *Decameron* functions as a meaningful whole: its thematic unity, microcosmic and numerological structure, and complex inter- and intratextual echoing.²⁷ Acknowledging Boccaccio's use of "totality effects" in addition to his well-known "reality effects" makes the worlds of the *Divine Comedy* and the *Decameron* seem substantially closer.

What is lost in the debates over the *Decameron's* status—medieval or modern, allegorical or realist, united or fragmentary—is its fundamental dialectical nature.²⁸ In arguing over the periodization or historical position of the *Decameron*, scholars overlook the ways in which the work itself comprehends, contrasts, and attempts to reconcile diverse historical universes.²⁹ As an ordered series of *novelle* within a frame narrative, its very structure is designed to accommodate the novel and the contingent. After all, what are the narrators introducing into their highly ritualized storytelling if not "news"—the primary meaning of *novella* before Boccaccio's *Decameron* christened it as a new literary form? Traumatized by the bare facts of the plague, the Florentine *brigata* performs one hundred controlled experiments to see if, in contrast with the Roman laws cited at the beginning of this essay, they can encompass the unlikely and make law out of the singular case.

Verisimilar Frame and Popular Talk: The Trial of Licisca and Tindaro

The *Decameron* is the retelling of one hundred tales by a company (*brigata*) of ten storytellers (seven women and three men) on ten separate days. The storytellers have gathered outside the city walls to avoid the plague; on each day they elect a king or queen who will choose the theme of the day and organize the company's leisure time. The highly competent Pampinea (all the narrators are referred to by pseudonyms) is the first queen to be elected. She establishes the "cosmos" of the company, whose time is divided between eating, drinking, reclining, singing, dancing, game playing, storytelling, and generally living well. This pastoral setting in which

the *novelle* are inserted is traditionally known as the narrative “frame.” Boccaccio as narrator also directly intervenes in the text, especially in the preface, the introduction to the fourth day, and the conclusion, primarily to justify the provocative nature of the tales he is claiming only to record, not to compose.

Although critics interested in the realism of the *Decameron* tend to focus on the individual *novelle* rather than the narrative frame, it is the frame that cleaves most closely to an aesthetic grounded in the plausible. The world of the frame appears verisimilar because it still largely follows general and reliable norms. Once the *brigata* leaves the Church of Santa Maria Novella, they enter a world of painterly locales (the first castle, the man-made garden, the *Valle delle Donne*), which, however marvelous or even utopian, correspond to a fantasy of aristocratic luxury designed to feel both familiar and real. The pseudonymic storytellers are themselves predictable characters; they speak and act in a manner entirely befitting their class and gender, never rising to the level of historical individuality bestowed upon their counterparts in the *novelle*. Most important, despite the recent epistemological crisis generated by the plague, these *boni et graves cives* consolidate their community by repeatedly evoking a collectively shared, normative, and self-evident knowledge. This is especially noticeable each time a narrator, following the rhetorical precepts of *eikos*, introduces a tale by appealing to what generally happens (“*sí come le piú volte sono queglii de’ mercanti*” [1.1.7]; “*sí come de’ giovane avviene*” [5.8.5]; “*sí come il piú de’ gentili uomini avviene*” “*come di leggiere avviene*” [5.9.6–7]) and what one normally sees (“*come noi tutto il giorno veggiamo*” [2.3.20]; “*a giusa che far veggiamo*” [2.8.28]; “*come noi veggiamo che*” [7.5.20]; “*sì come noi veggiamo talvolta di state avvenire*” [5.7.11]; “*Ma come noi veggiamo assai sovente avvenire*” [3.2.9]; “*Sí come noi veggiamo tutto il dí*” [8.9.4]; “*sí come noi veggiamo nelle corti*” [4.1.6]).

The stability of this verisimilar representation of the world is continuously threatened, however, from the outside—at first by the plague itself and then, even after the *brigata* of storytellers has been safely established in the countryside, by news about the plague. As a preventive measure against this secondary epidemic, Pampinea admonishes the servants, who must necessarily travel to and from those outlying areas, to filter the information they glean from the outside world and prevent any bad news, any “*novella altra che lieta,*” from entering the garden: “*E ciascun generalmente, per quanto egli avrà cara la nostra grazia, vogliamo e comandiamo che si guardi, dove che egli vada, onde che egli torni, che egli oda o vegga, niuna novella altra che lieta ci rechi di fuori*” (And unless they wish to incur our royal displeasure, we desire and command that each and every one of the servants should take good care, no matter what they should hear or observe in their comings and goings, to bring us no tidings of the world outside these walls unless they are tidings of happiness; 1.Introduction.101).

As a reaction to the anxieties produced by a traumatic historical event, the company launches a ten-day storytelling contest that will occupy their entire time away from the city. In other words, the characters in the frame try to steel themselves against the contingency of *novelle* in the sense of “news” by circulating, within highly controlled conditions, *novelle* in the sense of “tales.” While the *novelle*-as-tales introduce proper names, singular details, narrative coincidence, the unheard-of, and the unprecedented into the world of the frame, they are never allowed to speak on their own. Unlike the short story, the *novella* for Boccaccio is not an autonomous genre, but must itself be compiled, cataloged thematically, framed by an explanatory introduction and conclusion, discussed, and judged. In this way its unsettling singularity is contained.

The dialectical nature of the work is nowhere more evident than when the “*romore*” from kitchen servants suddenly erupts into the otherwise highly managed and repetitive time of the frame, forcing the reigning queen Elissa to launch an inquisitorial trial into this novel occurrence. In the introduction to Day Six, as the company sits down to resume their storytelling, a loud ruckus escapes the confines of the kitchen—something Boccaccio stresses has never happened before:

E già l'ora venuta del dovere a concistoro tornare, fatti tutti dalla reina chiamare, come usati erano dintorno alla fonte si posero a sedere; e volendo già la reina comandare la prima novella, avvenne cosa che ancora adivenuta non v'era, cioè che per la reina e per tutti fu un gran romore udito che per le fanti e' famigliari si faceva in cucina. Laonde, fatto chiamare il siniscalco e domandato qual gridasse e qual fosse del romore la cagione, rispose che il romore era tra Licisca e Tindaro ma la cagione egli non sapea, sì come colui che pure allora giugnea per fargli star cheti, quando per parte di lei era stato chiamato. Al quale la reina comandò che incontanente quivi facesse venire la Licisca e Tindaro; li quali venuti, domandò la reina qual fosse la cagione del loro romore. (6.Introduction.4–6)

[When the time came for them to reassemble, the queen saw that they were all summoned in the usual way and they seated themselves round the fountain. But just as the queen was about to call for the first story, something happened which had never happened before, namely, that she and her companions heard a great commotion, issuing from the kitchen, among the maids and manservants. So the steward was summoned, and, on being asked who was shouting and what the quarrel was about, he replied that it was some dispute between Licisca and Tindaro. He was unable to explain the cause, as he had no sooner arrived on the scene to restore order than he had been called away by the queen. She therefore ordered him to fetch Licisca and Tindaro to her at once, and when they came before her, she demanded to know what they were quarrelling about.]

The insistent repetition of the word *romore* in this short passage suggests that the paradigmatic role of clamor is at stake, above and beyond its particular content in this instance. In fact, as we will soon see, Elissa's exemplary

handling of popular talk demonstrates nothing less than how a collective picture of reality can incorporate the novel event—or how a ritual space can be made open to history.

The *romore* that Elissa must respond to stems from an argument between Licisca and Tindaro about whether their neighbor, the wife of “Sicofante,” was a virgin on the first night of her marriage. Licisca ridicules this unrealistic male fantasy: “Madonna, costui mi vuol far conoscere la moglie di Sicofante e, né più né meno come se io con lei usata non fossi, mi vuol dare a vedere che la notte prima che Sicofante giacque con lei messer Mazza entrasse in Monte Nero per forza e con ispargimento di sangue; e io dico che non è vero, anzi v’entrò pacificamente e con gran piacer di quei d’entro” (Madam, this fellow thinks he knows Sicofante’s wife better than I do. I’ve known her for years, and yet he has the audacity to try and convince me that on the first night Sicofante slept with her, John Thomas had to force an entry into Castle Dusk, shedding blood in the process; but I say it is not true, on the contrary he made his way in with the greatest of ease”; 8). In both tone and content, Licisca’s outburst reaches new levels of sexual explicitness, especially her reference to the tearing of the hymen and accompanying bleeding. Yet this is only an extreme case of Boccaccio’s familiar practice of using metaphoric language to convey graphic sexual acts (“messer Mazza entrasse in Monte Nero”), as we see most blatantly in *Decameron* 3.10 where Rustico and Alibech put the “devil” back in “inferno.” In the author’s conclusion, Boccaccio vigorously defends his right to describe obscene acts using ordinary words—such as “hole,” “rod,” “pestle,” “sausage,” and “mortadella”—and aligns his erotic realism with that of the painters who depict anatomically correct images of Christ and Eve.

In her role as queen, Elissa wastes no time in putting this sexually explicit realism on trial. She orders Dioneo to preside *ex officio* as judge over the “*quistione*” and pronounce his “*sentenzia finale*” (12) at the end of the day’s storytelling. The choice to invest the ribald, anti-authoritarian Dioneo with the final say is a bold, even cheeky move, since within the frame he represents a challenge to authority and the exception to the norm (his stories are the only ones not constrained by the day’s topic, for instance). In fact, consistent with his unconventional character, Dioneo declares in his first act as judge that he does not need to follow “due process” by listening to further testimony (“*senza udirne altro*”; 13). In what amounts to a summary trial, he promptly judges in favor of Licisca, defaming Tindaro by labeling him a “*bestia*.” In this way, an exceptional character employs an exceptional legal procedure to contain an exceptional discursive event.³⁰

The trial of Licisca and Tindaro is a “form of accommodation” that is also a strategy of containment.³¹ The ladies laugh, expressing complicity with Licisca as she dissects Tindaro’s presumption, and Dioneo ratifies her

revision of commonplaces about female passivity. Subsequently, in his role as king, Dioneo allows her popular realism to infiltrate the tales themselves when he derives the theme of the seventh day—“le beffe, le quali o per amore o per salvamento di loro le donne hanno già fatte a’ suoi mariti, senza essersene avveduti o sí” (the tricks, which either in the cause of love or for motives of self-preservation, women have played on their husbands, irrespective of whether or not they were found out)—from her *romore* with Tindaro. The incursion of the servants’ disruptive clamor is thus incorporated into the cyclical, liturgical time of the frame, reviving its self-perpetuating patterns of mimesis. The entire carnivalesque episode unfolds as a controlled experiment, a holiday *within* the law rather than a revolutionary overturning of it. After all, Dioneo incorporates only a corollary of Licisca’s argument—that women often play tricks on their husbands—into the theme of the seventh day, and dismisses her main point—that she knows of no neighbor who was a maiden on the night of her wedding—as “childish” (6). Premarital female sexuality is still too destabilizing to register as more than a brief flicker in the consciousness of the frame.³²

Yet even within this successful example of the governance of common talk, Boccaccio hints that such strategies of accommodation can never fully neutralize the incursions of the real. For example, in the conclusion to the sixth day, when Dioneo’s proposed bawdy theme is met with resistance by the ladies, he is forced to remind them of the exceptional situation brought about by the plague, “la perversità de la stagione” (9), allowing, in this way, the banished world of the introduction to sneak back into the garden. To further allay their fears, he draws a sharp distinction between mere words (“*favellare*”)—which are allowed a greater moral liberty—and actual deeds (“*l’opere*”; 10). This distinction is quickly eroded, however, when the ladies return from their erotically charged escapade in the *Valle delle Donne*, having effectively “tricked” the men in the company. Dioneo slyly asks them: “cominciate voi prima a far de’ fatti che a dir delle parole?” (do you mean to say that you have begun to do these things even before you talk about them?; 34). Despite the care with which the *brigata* selectively inoculates itself from the outside world, their courtly bubble nonetheless remains at risk from contamination from the “*fatti*” of everyday life.

Elissa’s largely successful diffusion of public talk in the introduction to Day Six reproduces in its essential structural elements one of the more frequent plot devices of the *novelle*, the response to and subsequent investigation of *romore* whenever it arises among the populace. Yet there is also a substantive difference in the quality of the novel that is addressed in the tales with respect to the frame. The realism put on trial in the frame remains fundamentally normative and generic. Licisca and Tindaro are recognizably comic characters, whose names are drawn from Latin comedy,

and the materialistic, ribald subject matter of their argument is consistent with a top-down portrayal of the humble classes with which Boccaccio's readers would have been familiar. The actual trial of the servants, moreover, ends up pitting one verisimilar picture of reality against another rather than coming to grips with the details of a specific case (the alleged looseness of Sicofante's new bride). Thus, while Licisca's argument for what usually happens on a woman's wedding night, diversified by class and gender, is less totalizing than Tindaro's, it still insists that the real is realistic because it follows a set pattern, adducing as proof the self-evidence of what everyone knows (if not what everyone can say within a courtly context) about new brides *generally*. In contrast, the *novelle* are novel because they are steeped in particulars. The brand of realism they feature calls into question not so much the content of one verisimilar picture or another as the very nature of the probable.

**From “*quod plerumque fieri solet*”
to “*non suole avvenire*”:
Simona and Pasquino**

The *novella* that most starkly contrasts the irreducible facts of everyday life with the regular contours of the verisimilar is the tragic tale of Simona and Pasquino, *Decameron* 4.7.³³ Emilia, the narrator of the tale, recounts their tragic love story to satisfy the theme of the day: “Those whose love came to an unhappy end.” In the first of three sections, she describes the process by which two humble laborers for the woolen industry—Simona, a spinner, and Pasquino, an agent—fall in love. In the second section, Simona and Pasquino go with their friends Lagina and Stramba to a local public garden, where Pasquino accidentally poisons himself while cleaning his teeth with a sage leaf. In the third section, Simona is put on trial for killing her lover after being falsely accused by Pasquino's friends, and then she also dies, poisoning herself while reenacting Pasquino's death.

The story of Simona and Pasquino is one of Boccaccio's boldest experiments in the realist portrayal of everyday life. In no other *novella* does he treat more directly the work and life of those menial laborers who have to eke out an existence “*con le proprie braccia*” (6). The nonstereotyped depiction of the two humble woolworkers is a world away from that of the kitchen servants Tindaro and Licisca, who remain stock literary characters safely ensconced within a lowbrow comic realm. Emilia announces this aesthetic experiment in the prologue when she declares, in the language of jurisdictional power, that her tale will illustrate that Love demonstrates his command (*imperio*) even in the dwellings of the poor.

Boccaccio, too, is extending his jurisdiction in this *novella*, by including a portrait of Florentine reality not traditionally considered worthy of representation. Indeed, without a guild of their own, the unincorporated laborers Simona and Pasquino would have lacked representation in a very real political and legal sense as well. In the decade before the composition of the *Decameron*, workers in the wool industry frequently agitated for the right of association, which would guarantee them a voice within the guild-based Florentine republic. These efforts to organize were violently repressed by government officials.³⁴ In this context, simply making the daily lives of these workers visible is a political act.

The affecting depiction of how Simona and Pasquino first fall in love, simultaneously gracious and mundane, seems aimed at dignifying this world of wage laborers. Emilia takes her time at the beginning of the story to patiently reproduce the hesitant emergence of mutual feelings between the two lovers through a series of habitual imperfect verbs and durative participles: “*andava*,” “*avea*,” “*amava*,” “*avvolveva*,” “*gittava*,” “*filava*,” “*disiderando*,” “*attentando*,” “*filando*,” “*ricordando*,” “*sollecitando*,” “*prendendo*,” “*cacciando*,” “*invitando*” (4.7.6–9). In contrast, in the previous *novella*, Andreuola’s falling in love with Gabriotto is taken care of with a single punctual perfect: “*s’innamorò*” (4.6.8). De Sanctis and Auerbach criticize Boccaccio for focusing on the elaborate logistics necessary to bring lovers together in the tales of the fourth day, and for dwelling on the connective tissue of the plot rather than its tragic consequences. Yet in view of Emilia’s political-aesthetic pronouncement, her decision to linger on the *process* of love, its time and its work, seems clearly programmatic.

The workplace romance between Simona and Pasquino violates, moreover, one of the fundamental tenets of the *Decameron*, that love and work are not complementary. In the prologue, the author imagines himself addressing a public of lovesick ladies who need to be distracted by his *novelle* because they lack the outlets of physical activity and work that are afforded to men. Confined by the male members of their families, they sit in idleness, “*oziose sedendosi*” (10), yearning and reflecting. Boccaccio especially contrasts love and wool spinning: his *novelle* are directed at women *in love*, as other women can make do with “*l’ago e ’l fuso e l’arcolajo*” (the needle, the spindle, and the spinning wheel; 13).

In the tale of Simona and Pasquino, however, these activities are fused. Simona spins and sighs, works and reflects. Pasquino, her lover, is able to enter her otherwise guarded domestic space because he works as an agent for a wool manufacturer, delivering raw wool to women in the countryside to be spun for piece-rate wages (part of the so-called putting out system).³⁵ Further, Simona is “encouraged” (*sollecitata*; 8) by Pasquino to work more than the other hired spinners, an encouragement which in the next sentence

shifts seamlessly from the professional to the erotic: “Per che, l’un sollecitando e all’altra giovando d’esser sollecitata, avvenne che . . . insieme a’piacer comuni si congiunsero” (Thus, one encouraging and the other enjoying being encouraged, it happened that . . . they joined together in shared pleasure; 9). In fact, working together on the same job infuses their courtship with a striking mutuality—a mutuality emphasized by parallel structure and paired active and passive constructions: “l’un sollecitando . . . l’altra giovando d’essere sollecitata”; “l’un piú d’ardir prendendo . . . l’altra molta della paura e della vergogna cacciando”; “l’uno dell’altro aspettasse di essere invitato . . . l’uno all’altro invitando” (9).³⁶

When Simona and Pasquino decide to consummate their love by visiting a public garden on a double date with Lagina and Stramba, they further threaten to destabilize the verisimilar picture of reality established in the frame. In part, the woolworkers and friends’ country outing mirrors the situation of the storytelling *brigata*. Both groups, in fact, enter their respective gardens on a Sunday—a day of abstinence from work—in search of a greater degree of liberty and a temporary reprieve from the realities of normal life. Yet the all-too-real garden of Simona and Pasquino threatens the security of the verisimilar garden of the *brigata* by blurring the previously established boundaries between nature and culture, public and private, aristocratic and popular, and even frame and *novella*. Most obviously, the *novella*’s introduction of the details of the ghastly deaths of Simona and Pasquino, including their plaguelike bloated and spotted bodies, is exactly what the garden in the frame is supposed to keep out.

In the storytellers’ walled-in garden, art harnesses nature. From the sculpted fountain, irrigation canals, and water mills to the symmetrical vines and pergolas to the nearly domesticated animals, human ingenuity is conspicuously on display; this successful exertion of human will sets the stage for the celebration of “*industria*” on the third day. By contrast, in the garden of the *novella*, irrepressible nature strikes back (specifically in the guise of a wild sage bush and a poisonous toad). Everything the frame garden seeks to repress—sex, disease, confusion, death—emerges in this promiscuous public garden. Anyone from the city can enter here. Sexual pleasure is experienced directly rather than sublimated. Instead of delicate meals alternating with artful conversation, conversation is itself an extension of sustenance (Pasquino talks extensively about what he wants to eat right before dying). In an extreme example of this unruliness, the accidental deaths of Simona and Pasquino mark the return of the contingent as a haunting presence for the *brigata*, who witness how easily anomaly can pollute a space of ritualized play.

After Pasquino’s death, Simona screams and cries out for Stramba and Lagina, who come running and discover Pasquino not only dead but already

swollen, with his face and body covered with dark splotches. Stramba immediately (“*subitamente*”) accuses Simona of poisoning Pasquino: “E veggendo non solamente morto ma già enfiato e pieno d’oscure macchie per lo viso e per lo corpo divenuto, subitamente gridò lo Stramba: ‘Ahi malvagia femina, tu l’hai avvelenata” (When Stramba saw Pasquino not only dead but all bloated and full of livid spots, he cried out: “You bitch, you poisoned him”; 14). The ensuing ruckus or “*romore*” (15) attracts the neighbors, who, after viewing Pasquino’s swollen corpse and misinterpreting Simona’s traumatized silence, conclude that Stramba’s version of events must be correct and they collectively decide that Simona is guilty. She is thereby seized and led off by the entire group to the palace of the *podestà*.

How does Simona move so quickly from spending a Sunday afternoon with her lover to being falsely accused in a court of law by public *fama*? The culprit in this case, it turns out, is verisimilitude itself. At this point in the narrative, the cause of Pasquino’s death—the venomous breath of a toad—is still unknown, hidden beneath a sage bush. The signs observed by the assembled public indicate only that his body has been corrupted; they do not provide proof of who or what was responsible. Yet what the witnesses *think* they see is a standard illustration of a woman who has poisoned her lover, precisely what one would expect given the circumstances, and what seems to fit the scenario best. Because these beliefs are deeply ingrained within a collectively held picture of reality, they appear self-evident: Stramba can accuse Simona *subitamente* and almost as quickly convince the others of her guilt.

Boccaccio appears to have constructed the scene of Pasquino’s death out of a series of rhetorical commonplaces. One such commonplace found in rhetorical manuals asserts that women are more likely to be poisoners than men, especially women who are sexually promiscuous.³⁷ Even more significantly, several rhetorical handbooks explain a standard argument from probability with the example of a swollen corpse with dark spots, which they portray as a likely indication of criminal poisoning.

In the *Institutio Oratoria*, for instance, Quintilian uses the swollen and spotted corpse to illustrate the type of “sign” (*signum* or *indicium*) that may render an argument convincing and certain if supplemented with further circumstantial evidence: “There are some Signs which can be used by both parties, such as *livid spots and swelling of the body*, which may be due either to poison or to intemperance. . . . The force of these Signs depends entirely on the support they have from other sources” (5.9.11; emphasis mine).³⁸ In the Pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the author uses the example of the swollen and spotted corpse to illustrate the form of presumptive proof that occurs after a crime: “If the body of the deceased is swollen and black and blue (*tumore et livore decoloratum*), it signifies that the man was killed by poison” (2.5.8).³⁹

The judge in charge of Simona's case is thus greeted not only with a specific allegation but also with a form of rhetorical mimesis—one based on plausibility and possibility—that he would have recognized from his legal training. Arising properly from the neighborhood in which the crime was committed, the common *fama* accusing Simona provides the verisimilar suspicion necessary to launch an inquisitorial trial. Accordingly, the judge immediately begins an interrogation of Simona about the fact of the crime: “*essaminarla del fatto*” (16). Yet unlike Stramba and company, he does not rush to judgment, but instead returns to the scene of the crime (in line with Gandinus's advice to judges investigating *ex officio* to “personally visit the locale of a crime” in order to gather more reliable evidence).⁴⁰ He insists on verifying the circumstantial evidence presented before him, focusing on the who (“*costei*”), the where (“*il luogo*”), and the how (“*l modo*”; 16). In their contrasting reactions to the events in the garden, the crowd and the judge embody two distinct evaluative dispositions—maybe even two versions of “realism.”

For their part, Lagina, Stramba, and the other rustic accusers resemble the presumptive judgments of donna Berta and ser Martino in canto 13 of Dante's *Paradiso*, who believe that because they see someone steal or someone else make a charitable offering, they have insight into God's judgment with respect to salvation:

Non creda donna Berta e Ser Martino
per veder un furare, altro offerere
vederli dentro al consiglio divino;
ché quel può surgere, e qual può cadere. (ll. 139–42)

[Let not dame Bertha and messer Martin believe, because they see one stealing, another offering, that they see them within God's counsel, for that one can rise up, and this one can fall.]⁴¹

As Aquinas, who makes this admonishment, insists, judging by worldly appearances alone will always lead one astray. Dante uses this outburst against rash judgment to contrast the exterior and relatively stable “image” that a society constructs around an individual to an interior intention capable of changing in an instant, even in the last moment of one's life, as in the case of a deathbed conversion.⁴² Boccaccio, however, offers no promise of otherworldly judgment vindicating one's inner thoughts, no escape from a world of appearances.⁴³

For his part, the judge is able to see through the apparently self-evident picture before him, even though it is literally a textbook case. He recognizes that further inquiry into circumstances is necessary to understand the “*fatto*.” Yet his hesitation does not depend on any specific knowledge; he simply *suspends* his judgment, reasonably doubting its probable cause.⁴⁴

Rather than representing, as one might expect, the superiority of civilizing reason over the rustic emotions of the peasants, the judge embodies, if anything, the epistemological value of wonder. He “marvels” at the death of Pasquino and is “stupefied” (21) by the accidental death of Simona. He ponders these two deaths for a long time, not knowing what to say, before reaching the conclusion that the sage bush is uncharacteristically poisonous: “Mostra che questa salvia sia velenosa, il che della salvia *non suole avvenire*” (21, emphasis mine). Although we eventually learn that the cause of this anomaly is a poisonous toad, the judge’s decisions up until this point are all based on observations of phenomena that exist outside the knowable natural order of causes and effects—not what happens for the most part, “*quod plerumque fieri solet,*” but its exact opposite, what “*non suole avvenire.*” It is his ability to conceive of a realism of the *improbable*, to act upon the bare fact of a poisonous sage bush, that allows him to break through the circular mimesis of self-evident truths.

When it comes to the rest of the trials in the *Decameron*, however, this judge’s a priori openness is an exception. Much more typical is the attitude of Simona’s male accusers, who will require a surprise shock ending to dislodge them from their conviction about what “fits” in the picture of reality. All the while Simona is recreating the circumstances surrounding Pasquino’s death, they ridicule her story as a joke—her actions are “*frivole e vane*”—and demand that she be burned at the stake. In the face of such commitment to what everyone knows and sees, simply providing an alternative representation will not suffice. Only traumatic reenactment will reduce Simona’s public to the same “great wonder” (18) with which the judge began his investigation.

In the harrowing moments before she unwittingly proves her innocence, Simona is terrified into silence by the threats of her accusers. She thus attempts to recount the details of Pasquino’s death with acts rather than words. In miming Pasquino’s actions before his death, she rubs her teeth with the leaf from the same sage bush that killed him—and dies on the spot, exactly as he had.

Within the theater of public justice, this is an amazing piece of performance art, blurring the line between reality and representation. Simona’s end thwarts the spectators’ desire for poetic justice—that the poisoner should be cooked by fire—by mirroring Pasquino’s death *too* perfectly. She escapes from punishment by granting her accusers what they desire too blatantly, thereby finally silencing their clamor (from here on in they are mute characters in the tale). Yet it is only through *repetition*, not mimesis, that she can puncture the verisimilar perceptions of her accusers. As Emilia herself recognizes, perhaps not without irony, Simona is “fortunate” because by proving her case in death she saves her *image* from the stain of infamy.⁴⁵

After Simona's accidental death reveals the accidental cause of Pasquino's death, the judge moves quickly to restore order. First, to prevent further injury, he calls for the sage bush to be chopped down "to its roots" (21). Then, once the poisoned toad is finally exposed as the real culprit, the judge has both the bush and the toad burned in a huge fire. This cathartic destruction of the polluted sage bush and the unclean toad can be viewed as reestablishing categories that were first blurred when Emilia took up this odd story, neither fully tragic nor fully comic, of two humble woolworkers who fall in love.

Now that the mystery of the poisonous sage has been revealed and ritually purged, the *novella* appears to have reached its conclusion and, in a sense, proven its point: true love can exist even among laborers, although only in the form of a slightly unnatural anomaly. From this perspective, the tale can be viewed as simply another exemplar of love's ennobling capacity (proffered, perhaps, to fill a lacuna in Andreas Capellanus's treatise *De Amore*). Emilia declares as much in her introduction, proclaiming the extensive reach of Love's command. Moreover, when she makes an uncharacteristic interjection into the tale after the death of Simona, her solemnizing apostrophes ("*O felice anime*") juxtapose the lovers' grotesque end with the tragic finale of the stories of Pyramus and Thisbe and Tristan and Iseult, which serve as the master narratives for the entire fourth day. But the juxtaposition is not without an element of bathos. Indeed, from her top-down perspective—the perspective of the frame—the tale belongs safely to the category of mock epic, as the refined sentiments of Simona and Pasquino are offset tragicomically against a plebian backdrop of vulgar manners and expressionistic names. In this view, the "case" of Simona and Pasquino is the exception that proves the rule. It may provide a new precedent, but it does so without threatening the socio-cultural taxonomy that the *brigata* assumes underlies the structure of reality.

And yet something always escapes the frame, resisting systemization, just as when Dioneo set aside the question of a bride's virginity, failing to incorporate it into the argument of the seventh day. In the tale of Simona and Pasquino, this phenomenological remainder takes the form of the deformed bodies of the protagonists themselves, which, spotted and swollen, uncomfortably resemble the plague-afflicted bodies the company has been trying to forget. The scene of two public officials (the judge and the custodian of the garden) purging a contaminated enclosed space out of concern for the health of the populace cannot help but remind us of the similar—and failed—attempts of the public officials in the introduction to the *Decameron*, whose job it was to purge the city of filth and prevent the sick from entering it. This flashback to the chaos of the plague "contaminates" the *novella* at the very moment the epistemological pollutants it introduced into the body of the work are finally being brought under control.

Moreover, Emilia's totalizing perspective is undercut by the tale's dual conclusions. When the judge's investigation is completed, the *novella* appears finished as well, and Boccaccio encourages this final coincidence between trial and plot in the penultimate sentence, which reads like a closing sentence: "e fu finito il processo di messer lo giudice sopra la morte di Pasquin cattivello" (so ended the trial of his honor into the death of poor Pasquino; 23). But one final action exceeds the framing device of the trial, forming a coda to the main narrative. The bodies of the dead lovers still need to be disposed of: "Il quale [Pasquino] insieme con la sua Simona, così enfiati com'erano, dallo Stramba e dall'Atticiato e da Guccio Imbratta e dal Malagevole furono nella chiesa di San Paolo seppelliti, della quale per avventura erano popolani" (Pasquino, together with his beloved Simona, all bloated just as they were, were buried by Stramba and Atticiato and Guccio Imbratta and Malagevole in the Church of Saint Paul, which by chance was the parish to which they belonged; 24).

Unlike the public funeral concluding the previous *novella*, which involved the entire community and all levels of society, this bare-bones procession fails to provide a comprehensive picture of social reality. Instead, Boccaccio emphasizes the brute fact of swollen bodies carried off "just as they were" and the contingency of the pallbearers "by chance" all belonging to the same church. Similarly, the unfurling of proper nouns that accompanies this procession enhances not only its "reality effect" but also its fragmentariness: these names are bound to a fleeting, external reality, never to be seen again. Most strikingly, a new character is introduced here, in the very last words of the *novella*. We learn nothing else about him besides his name, Guccio Imbratta.⁴⁶

Boccaccio himself calls attention to the singularity, in various senses, of Guccio's cameo in this *novella* when he reuses his name to identify Frate Cipolla's filthy assistant in *Decameron* 6.10. In this latter *novella*, Boccaccio transforms Guccio Imbratta back into a stock comic type—a caricature even—and makes him the subject of a mocking lyric. He accordingly restores Guccio to the habitat appropriate for such characters (such as Tindaro and Licisca): the kitchen ("Era più vago di stare in cucina che sopra i verdi rami l'usignuolo" [Guccio wanted to be in the kitchen of an inn more than a nightingale desires to alight on the green branches of a tree]; 21). Instead of silently burying the dead, Guccio now chases after a grotesque and obese kitchen servant, Nuta. Rather than fusing courtly love with menial labor—as in the courtly romance of the humble Simona and Pasquino—the simile of the nightingale, expressed poetically through zeugma and inverted syntax, bathetically distances Guccio and Nuta from any refined sensibility.

Most telling for our purposes, the trade-off for Guccio in his promotion to full-fledged character is a loss in the specificity of his name: "Aveva frate

Cipolla un suo fante, il quale alcuni chiamavano Guccio Balena e altri Guccio Imbratta, e chi gli diceva Guccio Porco” (Brother Cipolla had a servant who some called Guccio Balena, some Guccio Imbratta, some Guccio Porco; 15). When the narrator, Dioneo, relativizes Guccio’s name by listing alternatives like Guccio Balena (Guccio Whale) and Guccio Porco (Guccio Pig), he transforms a possible proper name—“Imbratta” was not an uncommon family name in medieval Tuscany—into an expressionist common noun, one accurately describing Guccio’s character (*imbrattare* means to smear, besmirch). No longer a rigid designation pointing to a reality outside of the text, the signifier “Guccio Imbratta” functions more like a knowable *ius* than a singular *casus*. And judging by the critical interest in this latter, more fleshed-out version of Guccio, it is better to be significant than real.

The comic and expressionistic aspects of the tale of Frate Cipolla—including the base materialism that underlies the kitchen romance between Guccio and Nuta; the lack of discernment in the audience for the friar’s sermon; and the use of physical descriptors as personal names—retroactively bring out similar elements in the tale of Simona and Pasquino, to the detriment of its serious mimesis of everyday life. Yet why should the structural links of the work be the last word, cancelling out the effects of the tale on readers as it is experienced sequentially in time? When we take the totalizing effects of the *Decameron* at face value, we ignore the *work* necessary for containing the reality effects of each *novella*, a *process* Boccaccio dramatizes both in the trials of the *Decameron* and in the *Decameron* as a trial. However much Dioneo ridicules the reincarnated Guccio, the fact remains that he has to be put back in his place.

When the Florentine criminal court extends its jurisdiction to the houses of the poor, there are unintended consequences to recording what everyone says and knows, just as there are for the Florentine poet engaged in a similar activity: not every fact can be encompassed by a law, nor every contingency left to stand as an exception; inevitably, bits of life come to the fore that escape the significance of exemplarity. The redundancy in the final passage of this tale, for instance, obstinately resists Emilia’s own taxonomy. What is the relevance of specifying the name of the rustics’ parish? Why introduce Guccio Imbratta at all? The singular, contingent details of this last melancholic glimpse of Florence before the destruction of the plague are neither sublimated from the totalizing perspective of an end point, as in Dantean realism, nor are they comfortably located within the traditional boundaries of the comic. Whatever happens to Guccio in his Day Six after-life, at the moment of the *novella*’s conclusion, he remains trapped within the shadowy ontology of a list. The novelty of the *novella* in this ending is not incorporated within a higher order of meaning but merely serialized, and we are left reading off a funereal wall of names.

Notes

1. For recent accounts, see Guido Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel* (Cambridge, MA, 2017), 154–55, and Thomas G. Pavel, *The Lives of the Novel: A History* (Princeton, 2013), 74–90. See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, 2003), 203–31.
2. Mazzoni, *Theory of the Novel*, 16.
3. For the enduring influence of the forensic rhetoric of verisimilitude on later literary models of mimesis, see Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2015), and *The Invention of Suspicion: Law and Mimesis in Shakespeare and Renaissance Drama* (Oxford, 2007).
4. In a similar vein, see Albert Russell Ascoli's important discussion of Boccaccio's critique of realism in "Boccaccio's Auerbach: Putting up a Mirror to Mimesis," in *A Local Habitation and a Name: Imagining Histories in the Italian Renaissance* (New York, 2011), 59–79.
5. See George A. Kennedy's translation of Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse* (New York, 2007), 42.
6. On rhetoric and philosophical probability, see John Glucker, "Probabile, Veri Simile, and Related Terms," in *Cicero the Philosopher: Twelve Papers*, ed. J. G. F. Powell (Oxford, 1995), 115–43; and James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability Before Pascal* (Baltimore, 2001), 102–30; William M. A. Grimaldi, "Semeion, tekmerion, eikos, in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*," *American Journal of Philology* 101 (1980): 383–98. For the connection between legal and rhetorical *eikos* see Kathy Eden, *Poetic and Legal Fiction in the Aristotelian Tradition* (Princeton, 1986).
7. Cicero, *De Inventione*, ed. and trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 18.
8. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, ed. and trans. H. Caplan (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 29.
9. Ettore Dezza, *Accusa e inquisizione: Dal diritto comune ai codici moderni* (Milan, 1989); Mario Sbriccoli, "Vidi Communiter Observari: L'emersione di un ordine penale pubblico nelle città italiane del secolo 13," *Quaderni fiorentini* 27 (1998): 231–68; and "Giustizia negoziata, giustizia egemonica: Riflessione su una nuova fase degli studi di storia della giustizia criminale," in *Criminalità e giustizia in Germania e in Italia: Pratiche giudiziarie e linguaggi giuridici tra tardo medioevo ed età moderna*, ed. Marco Bellabarba, Gerd Schwerhoff, and Andrea Zorzi (Bologna, 2001), 345–64; Giorgia Alessi Palazzolo, *Prova legale e pena: La crisi del sistema tra evo medio e moderno* (Naples, 1979).

On the use of verisimilitude as an argument for sentencing, see Julius Kirshner, "Custom, Customary Law and Ius Commune in Francesco Guicciardini," in *Bologna nell'età di Carlo V e Guicciardini*, ed. Emilio Pasquini and Paolo Prodi (Bologna, 2002), 174–76; Isabella Rosoni, *Quae singula non prosunt collecta iuvant* (Milan, 1969), 97–119; Mario Sbriccoli, *L'interpretazione dello statuto: Contributo allo studio della funzione dei giuristi nell'età comunale* (Milan, 1969), 376–81; and Massimo Vallerani, "Il giudice e le sue fonti: Note su inquisitio e fama nel *Tractatus de maleficiis* di Alberto da Gandino," *Rechtsgeschichte: Zeitschrift des Max Planck-Instituts für europäische Rechtsgeschichte* 14 (2009): 40–61, and "Modelli di verità: Le prove nei processi inquisitori," in *L'enquête au Moyen Âge*, ed. Claude Gauvard (Rome, 2008), 131–34. For the influence of rhetorical theory on medieval theories of evidence and probability, see Alessandro Giuliani, "The Influence of Rhetoric on the Law of Evidence," *Juridical Review* (1962): 216–51;

- Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture*, 12–39; and Barbara J. Shapiro, “Beyond a Reasonable Doubt” and “Probable Cause”: *Historical Perspectives on the Anglo-American Law of Evidence* (Berkeley, 1991).
10. I adopt the term “state” despite its potential anachronism because I believe it best conveys Boccaccio’s contemporaries’ conception of public authority.
 11. “Si per clamorem et famam ad aures superioris pervenerit.” See Innocent III’s gloss of Genesis 18:16 in the decretals *Qualiter et quando* (X 3.2.8) and *Licet Heli* (X 5.3.3.1), in *Corpus iuris canonici*, vol. 2, ed. Emil Friedberg (1879; reprint, Graz, 1955).
 12. For the development and transformation of the inquisitorial trial from ecclesiastical to urban contexts, see Richard M. Fraher, “Conviction According to Conscience: The Medieval Jurists’ Debate Concerning Judicial Discretion and the Law of Proof,” *Law and History Review* 7 (1989): 23–88; Massimo Vallerani, *La giustizia pubblica medievale* (Bologna, 2005), 39–57, and “Modelli di verità”; and Marco Sbriccoli, “Vidi communiter observari: L’emersione di un ordine penale pubblico nelle città italiane del secolo XIII,” *Quaderni fiorentini* 27 (1998): 231–68.
 13. Richard M. Fraher, “The Theoretical Justification for the New Criminal Law of the High Middle Ages: ‘Rei publicae interest, ne crimina remaneant impunita,’” *University of Illinois Law Review* 577 (1984): 577–95. We can see the continued vibrancy of this maxim in the *Decameron* when the *brigata* uncharacteristically passes over the tale of Cecco Angiolieri in silence, “senza troppo o riderne o parlarne” (9.5.2). They are apparently disturbed that outside the protective jurisdiction of Siena, the “malizia” perpetrated against the twice-swindled Cecco has been “lasciata impunita” (9.4.25). Italian text based on Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, 2 vols. (Turin, 1992). English translation based on *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam (London, 1995).
 14. Chris Wickham, “Fama and the Law in Twelfth-Century Tuscany,” in “Fama”: *The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. Daniel Lord Smail and Thelma Fenster (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 12–26; Fraher, “Conviction According to Conscience,” 23–88. On the emergence of *fama* as a form of proof in the ecclesiastical justice system, see Julien Théry, “Fama: L’opinion publique comme preuve judiciaire. Aperçu sur la révolution médiévale de l’inquisiteur (XIIe–XIVe siècles),” in *La preuve en justice, de l’antiquité à nos jours*, ed. Bruno Lemesle (Rennes, 2002), 119–47; and Vallerani, “Il giudice e le sue fonti.”
 15. “Non tanquam sit idem ipse accusator et iudex, sed, quasi fama deferente vel denunciante clamore.” See the decretals *Licet Heli* (X 5.3.31) and *Qualiter et quando* (X 5.1.24).
 16. Rosoni, *Quae singula non prosunt collecta iuvant*.
 17. Text from the *Tractatus de maleficiis* in Hermann U. Kantorowicz, ed., *Albertus Gandinus und das Strafrecht der Scholastik* (Berlin, 1926), 2:47. I cite from a translation of this edition prepared by Patrick Lally and edited by Osvaldo Cavallar and Julius Kirshner. I am grateful to these scholars for generously providing me with this unpublished text.
 18. Citations and translations from the *Digest* based on *The Digest of Justinian*, ed. Theodor Mommsen and Paul Krueger, trans. Alan Watson (Philadelphia, 1985).
 19. In the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* (14.13), Boccaccio defends the poet’s right to create not strictly true but verisimilar (*veritati simillissima*) narratives as a privilege of his office or duty (*officium*). He argues that the poet should no more incur infamy for doing his job than a judge should when he condemns a man to death

- or a soldier should when he ravishes an enemy's field. Yet what happens when the privileges of judge, soldier, and poet are combined? For the text and translation of Boccaccio's *Genealogiae deorum gentilium*, see Jeremiah Reedy, ed., *In Defense of Poetry: Genealogiae deorum gentilium liber XIV* (Toronto, 1978).
20. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (Berkeley, 2001), 32.
 21. Shapiro, "Beyond a Reasonable Doubt" and "Probable Cause," and, by the same author, "Circumstantial Evidence: Of Law, Literature, and Culture," *Yale Journal of Law and of the Humanities* 5, no. 1 (1993): 219–41.
 22. "Non è una evoluzione, ma è una catastrofe, o una rivoluzione, che da un dí all'altro ti presenta il mondo mutato. Qui trovi il medio evo non solo negato, ma canzonato." Francesco De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana* (Turin, 1958), 2:290. English translations based on Francesco De Sanctis, *History of Italian Literature*, trans. Joan Redfern, 2 vols. (New York, 1968).
 23. "Ci si vede uno spirito curioso e profano che cerca il meraviglioso e lo straordinario negli accidenti umani" (De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, 325); "Nasce una nuova specie di meraviglioso . . . uno straordinario concorso di accidenti non possibili ad essere preveduti e regolati" (360). See also quotes in text.
 24. "casi straordinari tirati in iscena dal capriccio del caso"; *ibid.*, 365.
 25. From an epistemological standpoint, the *novella* so conceived stands in sharp contrast with medieval conceptions of the natural. For Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics, the natural encompasses what happens for the most part, in most cases (*ut frequenter, in pluribus*), according to a predictable chain of causes and effects. In contrast, the marvels of chance and fortune (such as a man being born with a sixth finger) occur in a minority of cases (*ut paucibus*) and are hence inscrutable from a human perspective, intelligible only to God's infinite wisdom. At least with respect to their narrative structure, Boccaccio's tales would appear more marvelous than natural, unfathomable unless framed by the perspective of a totalizing providential plot. On Aquinas and probability, see Franklin, *Science of Conjecture*, 124–26, and Edmund F. Byrne, *Probability and Opinion: A Study in the Medieval Presuppositions of Post-Medieval Theories of Probability* (The Hague, 1968).
 26. Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul Decameron* (Florence, 1986). For American Boccaccio scholars, see especially Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Two Venuses* (New York, 1977), and Victoria Kirkham, "An Allegorically Tempered Decameron," *Italica* 62, no. 1 (1985): 1–23. For the continued identification of Boccaccio with realism, see also Aldo D. Scaglione, *Nature and Love in the Late Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1963), and Mario Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel "Decameron"* (Rome, 1984). See especially the sophisticated overview in the entry "Realtà/verità" by Pier Massimo Forni in *Lessico critico decameriano* (Turin, 1995), 300–319.
 27. See at least two exemplary studies, one by Teodolinda Barolini, "Wheel of Decameron," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York, 2006), 224–44, and one by Robert M. Durling, "Boccaccio on Interpretation: Guido's Escape (*Decameron* VI.9)," in *Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton*, ed. Aldo S. Bernardo and Anthony L. Pellegrini (Binghampton, NY, 1983), 273–304.
 28. The dialectical quality of the *Decameron* is usually understood in terms of a tension between model and antimodel rather than structure and history. See especially Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel "Decameron"*, 11–19, and Franco Fido, *Il regime delle simmetrie imperfette. Studi sul "Decameron"* (Milan, 1988).
 29. See the discussion in Ascoli, "Boccaccio's Auerbach," 59–79.

30. Emma Grimaldi, *Il privilegio di Dioneo. L'eccezione e la regola nel sistema Decameron* (Naples, 1987); Giancarlo Mazzacurati, "La regina e il buffone: ordo e varietas nella costruzione del Decameron," in *All'ombra di Dioneo. Tipologie e percorsi della novella da Boccaccio a Bandello* (Florence, 1996), 37–43.
31. Thomas M. Greene, "Forms of Accommodation in the *Decameron*," *Italica* 45 (1968): 297–313. For the frame as a containing "screen," see Guido Almansi, *The Writer as Liar: Narrative Technique in the Decameron* (London, 1975).
32. We should not forget the role that force plays in this strategy of containment. At the end of the mock trial, after all, Elissa banishes the servants back into the kitchen, threatening to whip them if they make any more "romore." The male sexual violence undermined by Licisca's celebration of female pleasure returns as social violence.
33. This *novella* (*Decameron* 4.7) has received relatively little attention. See Jonathan Usher, "Courtly Allusions and the Unraveling of Metaphor in the Novella of Simona and Pasquino (*Decameron*, IV, 7)," *Italianist* 9, no. 1 (1989): 52–65; and by the same author, "Simona and Pasquino: 'cur Moriatur Homo Cui Salvia Crescit in Horto?,'" *MLN* 106, no. 1 (1991): 1–14; M. Pastore Stocchi, "Altre annotazioni 5: La salvia avvelenata," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 7 (1973): 192–96; Antonio Pace, "Sage and Toad: A Boccaccian Motif (and a Misinterpretation by Musset)," *Italica* 48, no. 2 (1971): 187–99; Valerio Ferme, *Women, Enjoyment, and the Defense of Virtue in Boccaccio's "Decameron"* (New York, 2015), 145–55; Jessica Levenstein, "Out of Bounds: Passion and the Plague in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *Italica* 73, no. 3 (1996): 326–27; Marga Cottino Jones, *Order from Chaos: Social and Aesthetic Harmonies in Boccaccio's "Decameron"* (Washington, DC, 1982), 74–75; Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the "Decameron"* (Toronto, 2003), 148; Daniela Delcorno Branca, *Boccaccio e le storie di re Artù* (Bologna, 1991), 24–29, 43; and Mario Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel "Decameron"*, 372–76.
34. John M. Najemy has provocatively illustrated how the woolworkers continuously agitated for guild representation even before the Ciompi revolt (and were especially active in the 1340s in Florence). See especially his *A History of Florence, 1200–1575* (Malden, MA, 2006), 157–60; "Audiant omnes artes: Corporate Origins of the Ciompi Revolution," in *Il tumulto dei Ciompi: Un momento di storia fiorentina ed europea* (Florence, 1981), 59–63; and "Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence: The Success and Ultimate Failure of Corporate Politics," *American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 53–71. See also Niccolò Rodolico, "The Struggle for the Right of Association in Fourteenth-Century Florence," *History* 7 (1922): 179–90.
35. On the "putting-out system," see Bruno Dini, *Manifattura, commercio e banca nella Firenze medievale* (Florence, 2001), 141–71; Franco Franceschi, "L'impresa mercantile industriale nella Toscana dei secoli XIV–XVI," *Annali di storia dell'impresa* 14 (2003): 229–49; Richard A. Goldthwaite, *The Economy of Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore, 2009), 318–22; and Raymond De Roover, "A Florentine Firm of Cloth Manufacturers: Management and Organization of a Sixteenth-Century Business," *Speculum* 16 (1941): 3–33.
36. In contrast, in *Decameron* 3.3, the noble protagonist betrays her husband because he is a vulgar woolworker (*lanaiuolo*). When she and her noble lover consummate their love at the end of the *novella*, their mutual disdain for the technical aspects of the husband's profession seals their erotic bond: "Biasimando i lucignoli e' pettini e gli scardassi insieme con gran diletto si sollazzarono" (Disparaging the slubs, the combs and the cards, they made love together with great delight; 3.3.54).

37. See also Quintilian, *Institutiones Oratoriae*, 5.10.25: “It is easier to believe highway-robbery of a man, poisoning of a woman,” and 5.11.39: “If an adulteress is on trial for poisoning, would she not seem condemned by Cato’s judgment that every adulteress is also a poisoner?” Text from *Institutiones Oratoriae*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russel (Cambridge, MA, 1999); and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.16.23: “Judged unchaste, she was also deemed guilty of poisoning.”
38. Compare also the “*signum*” or “*indicium*” of a past crime in this passage in Quintilian with the “*signo*” or “*indizio*” of future death found on the plague bodies in the *Decameron* (1.Introduction, 10, 12).
39. The swollen and spotted corpse is invoked again during the handbook’s discussion of the potential faults of a speech, namely, when one side focuses excessively on the *content* of the crime instead of on *who* committed it: “It is a fault, when you establish that a crime was committed, to believe you are thereby proving that it was committed by a specific person, as follows: ‘It is established that the corpse was disfigured, swollen, and discolored [mortuum deformatum, tumore praeditum, corpore decoloratum]; thereby the man was killed by poison’” (2.27.44). Stramba is in fact guilty of this fault when he jumps to the conclusion that it had to be Simona who poisoned Pasquino.
40. “Cum ergo iudex super aliquo crimine intendit inquirere, debet ipse personam ire ad locum vel ad loca, ubi debet fieri ipsa inquisitio”; Gandinus, *Tractatus*, 2:38.
41. Text and translation from *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, vol. 3, *Paradiso*, trans. Robert M. Durling (Oxford, 2011).
42. For a fuller discussion of this passage and Dante’s views about the social imaginary and the art of judgment, see Justin Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law* (Chicago, 2013), 29–35.
43. Emilia marks this divide between eternal justice and the immortal *fama* when she breaks into the narrative to apostrophize the departed souls. Simona and Pasquino *may* be rewarded with the Dantean fantasy of heavenly reunification (“*se insieme . . . se nell’altra vita*”; 19). But those of us who are left behind (“*che vivi dietro a lei rimasi siamo*”; 20) must contend with the enduring social imaginary, where appearance is everything. This is, as she says, “our judgment.” In her circumlocution for the living as those left behind, Emilia is echoing, from the other side, the prayer of the souls in *Purgatorio* for “*color che dietro a noi restaro*” (11.24).
44. In contrast with the previous and subsequent *novelle*, there are no physicians in this tale who can determine whether or not the lover died by natural causes. Removing the expert witnesses, Boccaccio can linger on the dilemma of the judge.
45. Francesco Migliorino, *Fama e infamia: Problemi della società medievale nel pensiero giuridico nei secoli XII e XIII* (Catania, 1985). For a suggestive treatment of the medieval social imaginary, see Giacomo Todeschini, *Visibilmente crudele: Malviventi, persone sospette e gente qualunque dal Medioevo all’età moderna* (Bologna, 2007), and for Dante’s literary engagement with *infamia*, see chapter 1 of Steinberg, *Dante and Limits of the Law*, 13–52.
46. The inclusion of Guccio as one of the pallbearers is absolutely unnecessary for the plot and appears instead to be justified by Fiammetta’s claim, in her introduction to the last Calandrino tale (9.5), that stories are more pleasurable for listeners when they stick to real names and actual facts: “Se io dalla verità del fatto mi fossi scostare voluta o volessi, avrei ben saputo e saprei sotto altri nomi comporla e raccontarla; ma per ciò che il partirsi dalla verità delle cose state nel novellare è gran diminuire di diletto negl’intendenti.”