

January 2003

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Recommended Citation

Smarr, Janet (2003) "The Marriage of Plautus and Boccaccio," *Heliotropia - An online journal of research to Boccaccio scholars*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.umass.edu/heliotropia/vol1/iss1/3>

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The Marriage of Plautus and Boccaccio

Biological children come from a coupling of parents, and this is often true for intellectual children as well. In the case of the reinvention of comedy in Italy at the beginning of the sixteenth century, two sources, Plautus and Boccaccio, converged in a happy and productive marriage that would have a long list of offspring. The marriage was prominently performed in 1513, although an engagement had taken place somewhat earlier. During the carnival festivities of 1513, two plays were performed, one in Florence and one in Urbino, that combined Plautine and Boccaccian materials. The Urbino performance was Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena's *Calandra*;¹ the Florentine play was Iacopo Nardi's *I due felici rivali*.

Bibbiena's combination of the two models was the more complicated as well as the more famous. When Baldassare Castiglione asked his friend Bibbiena to contribute something to the Duke of Urbino's 1513 carnival festivities, of which Castiglione had been put in charge, Bibbiena, despite the intense political negotiations in which he was engaged at Rome, sent in his *Calandra*, which drew almost evenly from Plautus's *Menaechmi* and Boccaccio's *Decameron*, taking much more from Boccaccio than a plot.² This play was so successful that it was performed and printed many times already within the first half of the century,³ thus influentially introducing Boccaccio as a major source for theatre.

Iacopo Nardi's *I due felici rivali* combined the plot from *Decameron* V.5 with a Greek setting and added characters popular from Plautus: the scheming slaves, the braggart soldier, and the parasite.⁴ Nardi had previously (1512?)⁵ dramatized one other *Decameron* tale, X.8,

¹ The play has appeared as both *Calandra* and *Calandria*; I am following here the spelling of Giorgio Padoan's recent edition, *La Calandra. Commedia Elegantissima per Messer Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena*, Medioevo e Umanesimo 57 (Padova: Editrice Antenore, 1985).

² On Bibbiena's borrowings from Boccaccio, see Anna Fontes-Baratto, "Les fêtes à Urbin en 1513 et la *Calandria* de Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena" in André Rochon et al. eds., *Les Écrivains et le Pouvoir en Italie à l'Époque de la Renaissance* (Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1974), 69–75; G. L. Moncallero, *Il Cardinale Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena Umanista e Diplomatico (1470–1520)* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 1953), 574–86; Padoan's introduction, 19–25.

³ Padoan's introduction (35ff.) lists a dozen editions before 1550, and the play continued to be frequently reprinted after that date as well. Performances included 1514 and 1515 at Rome, 1522 in Venice, 1532 in Mantua, and 1543 in Lyon for King Henri II and his Medici wife.

⁴ Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, *The Birth of Modern Comedy in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 110–12, comments briefly on Nardi's combination of these two models.

⁵ This is the date suggested by Guido Davico Bonino in his introduction to *Il teatro italiano II: La commedia del Cinquecento* v.1 (Torino: Einaudi, 1977), xli. Luigina Stefani, in the introduction to her critical edition of

as *La Commedia di amicitia*, performed before the Signoria. As this tale is the only one among the *Decameron's* hundred to be set in ancient Athens and Rome, it was clearly the classical setting that first suggested to the humanist Nardi a possible use of its plot for a new "classical" comedy. Boccaccio's story had emphasized the Athenian part of the story, with attention to the rhetorical strategies first of inner debate and then of the persuasion of a hostile audience. Nardi puts all this into the backstory of his play, condensing the time into a day in Rome. More interestingly, he marginalizes the main characters and events even in Rome — the potentially climactic scene of the friends' self-accusations at court in order to save each other takes place offstage —, while foregrounding instead the antagonism and maneuverings of a slave and a parasite, through whose self-serving perspectives the main story is chiefly perceived. Thus Boccaccio's tale becomes largely a background for amusing Plautine scenes. The attraction of the *Decameron* as a possible source for theatrical plots did not end with this first experiment. In order to use a second tale, however, Nardi felt the need to classicize its setting and, as before, to add the standard Plautine characters of parasite and slaves. Even more than before, the primary action takes place among these added servants rather than among Boccaccio's main characters. The scene of a drunken servant, the mutual suspicion between servants aiding opposite sides, and the self-conscious references to comedy all make this play much more Plautine than Boccaccian. Boccaccio chiefly supplies the conclusion, whereby one of the two rival lovers turns out to be a brother of the girl and thus disqualified from marriage. Even this element, involving the revelation of the girl's parentage, has its bases in Plautus as well as in Boccaccio. In short, Nardi saw that Boccaccio could offer new plots to vary what remains essentially Plautine comedy.⁶ Bibbiena, as we shall see, went much farther in creating an inextricable mix of his two models.

The use of Plautus was no surprise. The plays by this Roman, wildly successful in ancient times, had undergone an enthusiastic revival starting in the 1480s, with performances in Ferrara, Florence, Rome, and elsewhere. Performances, either in Latin or increasingly in Italian translation, were still flourishing in the early 1500s. Ariosto's *Cassaria*, the first well-known new Italian comedy⁷, performed in Ferrara for the carnival season of 1508, was heavily drawn from Plautine models. Even his bolder and more original *I suppositi* of 1509, now set in Ferrara rather than in Greece, was still recognizably imitative of Plautus, whose *Captivi* offers a source for the central idea of an exchange of clothing between master and servant. Of all of Plautus's twenty extant plays, the *Menaechmi* was the most popular. Its 1511 performance in Rome would have left a fresh impression on Bibbiena's mind. Its theme of twins enabled all sorts of comic situations, while its celebration of pleasure at the expense of duty fit

Nardi's two plays, acknowledges the uncertainty of the date for *Amicitia* but argues that although *Amicitia* predates the return of the Medici, it must have been written not too long before the second play. See Luigina Stefani ed., *Tre commedie fiorentine del primo '500* (Ferrara-Rome: Gabriele Corbo Editore, 1986), 9–10.

⁶ Stefani, 11–12, rightly notes that Nardi's plays bear relation also to the verse forms and didactic exempla of the Florentine *sacra rappresentazione*.

⁷ Il formicone (1503) predates the *Cassaria* as an original play but remained largely unknown; it was written by a student ("adoloscente") Publius Philippus and performed in his school in Mantua. Its source is not Plautus but an episode from Apuleius's *Golden Ass*. See Alessandro d'Ancona, *Origini del Teatro Italiano* (Roma: Bardi Editore, 1996), II, 388n.

the mood of the holidays for which it was created.⁸ The figure of the dumb braggart soldier, which recurs a number of times already in the Roman comedies although most famously in *Miles gloriosus*, was also a lasting success; besides the perennial humor derived from stupidity, the mockery of this character became an outlet for the anxieties of Italians during the invasions by France and Spain. Plautus's focus on clever or devious slaves was another enormously popular feature, allowing a kind of rough or sexy buffoonery among lower-status characters to coexist with or parody a more gentlemanly level of speech and action by at least some of the lovers.⁹

The use of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, on the other hand, was a brilliant innovation, enriching comic theatre for many years to come. It occurred to these two particular men for similarly political reasons. Bibbiena, whose play was set in Rome and performed first in Urbino, was, at the time of its writing, busy with two political projects: the restoration of the Medici to Florence (achieved at long last in the autumn of 1512), and the election of a Medici pope upon the anticipated death of Pope Julius II. His preoccupations linked Rome and Florence, and so did the two sources for his play. Nardi, as a Florentine and historian of Florence writing for performance in the palace of the recently restored Medici, would have seen the use of a tale from Boccaccio as a way of simultaneously celebrating Florentine culture and presenting something familiar to his audience. Moreover, in turning to Boccaccio rather than to any other Florentine, Nardi and Bibbiena were acknowledging the qualities of the *Decameron* that made it a fit spouse for Plautine theatre. What features did these "parents" share, so that they might be considered compatible, and what did Boccaccio bring into the theatre that was new? This paper offers a brief sketch of these issues.

In many ways, some of which we have already seen, the features of the *Decameron* coincided with those of Plautus's comedies. The setting for the framing narrative of the *Decameron* stories, a villa to which ten young men and women escape from the plague ravaging Florence, creates a game-like space and time outside normal reality, just as the holidays did for Plautus and as the carnival season did for early Renaissance theatre. In these game spaces, traditional moral values and social taboos can apparently be set aside on behalf of pleasure and entertainment.¹⁰ Outrageous behavior and insulting speech can go unpunished, offering vicarious pleasures. The aim of this freedom is recreation for the weary worker, health-giving

⁸ For analyses of the twins theme, see Giulio Ferroni, "Il sistema comico della gemellarità," in Ferroni ed., *La semiotica e il doppio teatrale* (Napoli: Liguori, 1981), 353–64; Giulio Ferroni, "I due gemelli greci a Roma: Il doppio e la scena nella *Calandria* del Bibbiena," *Studi Romani* 28.1 (Jan-Mar 1980): 23–33; Pamela D. Stewart, "Il Giuoco scenico dei 'Begli Scambiamenti' nella *Calandria*," *Retorica e Mimica nel Decameron e nella Commedia del Cinquecento*, Saggi di «Lettere Italiane» xxxv (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1986), 125–39. Erich Segal, *Roman Laughter: The Comedy of Plautus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) sets forth the carnivalesque nature and upside-down world of the *Menaechmi* and other plays.

⁹ See the speech on humor attributed to Bibbiena in Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano*, Book 2, for the distinction between buffoonery and humor appropriate to a gentleman.

¹⁰ This is not to suggest that either writer has no concern for moral values. On Plautus, see for example John Arthur Hanson "Plautus as a Source Book for Roman Religion," *TAPA* 90 (1959): 48–101, esp. 87–101. On Boccaccio, see for example Victoria Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 1993) and her essay "Morale," in Renzo Brigantini and Pier Massimo Forni, eds., *Lessico critico Decameroniano* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri editore, 1995), 249–68.

laughter for those threatened with sickness, and a spirit of comic detachment that ultimately permits a more objective look at oneself and one's society.

Nonetheless, what remained unacceptable even within this holiday situation differed in the two societies. Many of Boccaccio's plots, like Plautus's, entail the obtaining of a love-object despite external obstacles. Boccaccio, however, ventures beyond Plautus's moral limits here. For Plautus the love object was usually a courtesan, possibly — if she turned out to be a captive freeborn lady — a marriageable young woman. The obstacle might therefore be a stern or miserly father or a pimp demanding a high price; but the adultery of wives was strictly out of bounds. We do not see cases of Roman wives, no matter how unhappily married, actively seeking a lover. Freeborn women are examples of proper respect for what is right.¹¹ The wife in the *Menaechmi* may be a pain, but she is a faithful pain despite her husband's philandering. Alcmena in the *Amphitruo* is entirely unaware that any man but her husband has slept with her, for Jupiter comes in her husband's form. The play repeatedly emphasizes her innocence, and she herself expresses the values of honor and fidelity that she holds dear. This play is in any case, as its prologue acknowledges, an oddity given the inclusion of gods as comic actors. When the title character of *Miles gloriosus* thinks that he has been seduced into committing adultery with another man's wife, we know that the enticing woman is really a paid prostitute; and even so the *miles* is severely punished with a beating and a threat of castration, mercifully displaced to the loss of his sword. Either the Roman matron was too respected an institution for sexual insinuations even during holiday fun, or else the anxieties about controlling wives were so severe that the sexual desires of wives could not be made into a joking matter. The women who express desire in Plautus's plays can be either married or purchased by the young male.

For Boccaccio, on the other hand, the object of desire is often someone else's wife. The obstacle therefore is just as likely to be a husband as a father; and triumphant adultery is frequently the happy ending of the story. While Boccaccio shares with Plautus (*Casina*) the theme of the wife who blocks her husband's attempt to be unfaithful and humiliates him by substituting someone else for the woman he thinks he is meeting in bed, Boccaccio also introduces numerous examples of the unhappy wife as a person with sexual desires of her own for a lover outside marriage. Prostitution, on the other hand, is explicitly rejected by Boccaccio's narrators, who declare a woman available for money to be an unworthy object of desire. Men are deceived and robbed by prostitutes, not loved by them, and the male who falls for their apparent affection is a fool. The mere request for money is enough to chill male interest in tale VIII.1. Plautus would have been as surprised by this rejection of the attractive but money-seeking prostitute as by the sympathetic acceptance of the unfaithful wife.

Nardi does not deal with adultery. The plot of Bibbiena's *Calandra*, however, ends with both a marriage and a successful affair. Lidio is set up financially by marriage to the virtuous daughter of the merchant Perillo; at the same time, his adulterous affair with the married woman Fulvia has gone unpunished and seems likely to continue, made even easier now by the marriage of Lidio's twin sister to Fulvia's son. Since the virtuous young fiancée is protected from appearing on street and therefore kept off stage, the less virtuous Fulvia allows for the presence on stage of a female love interest. Meanwhile the prostitute hired to sleep

¹¹ See Erich Segal, *op cit.*, 241.

with Fulvia's stupid husband in place of the woman he wants is not the type of witty and attractive courtesan used for such tricks in Plautus's plays; rather she is an ugly and repulsive woman, referred to as a "sow" appropriate for the "capon" Calandro (III.i). Bibbiena's comic values concerning wives and prostitutes, and his notions of what is appropriate comic material, come unsurprisingly closer to Boccaccio's than to Plautus's.

Marriage relations play a larger role in the *Decameron* than in Roman comedy, although they are certainly not absent from Plautus's plays. Happy marriages as well as unhappy ones appear in the *Decameron*, and Boccaccio tends to give women, whether happy or unhappy, a larger positive role. Plautus may have his clever prostitutes and nagging or offended wives, but the *Decameron* offers intelligent upright women who easily pass as men, fill a man's job, and plan for themselves how to survive and beat their enemies. Alcmena gets a serious role and long reflective speech in the *Amphitruo*, the one play which Plautus calls "commixta... tragicomoedia" (60), but she certainly does not show any of the boldness or gender-crossing that we find in several of Boccaccio's women. She never ventures away from the home, nor does anything to resolve her own problematic situation.

By turning Plautus's male twins into a male and female pair, Bibbiena opened up not only the chance for a mad whirl of cross-dressing and clothing exchange, but also a major female role. The women of the *Calandra*, both Fulvia and Santilla, win our sympathy by speaking alone to us about their feelings, their complaints, their difficulties, and their desires. Santilla is the most serious and even melancholy character of the entire cast. Boccaccio's Zinevra (II.9) who flees in male attire from the unjust threat to her life, works as a male in a foreign city, and ultimately arranges the punishment of her foe and restoration of her marriage, revealing her female identity in the end, comes much closer to Santilla than any female character in Plautus. So too Fulvia, the wife disgusted with her husband, who finds a ploy to bring her lover into the house and with another ploy defeats the jealous vigilance of her husband, is an entirely *Decameronian* wife. Her reproaches to her husband echo those of Boccaccio's Catella to the man she still thinks is her husband (III.6). The scene of the arrival of her husband and brothers, in which she reverses the direction of accusations, is a clear derivation from *Decameron* VII.8. Even her misguided pursuit of the help of magic to attract her beloved possibly derives from the *Decameron* (VIII.7); as in the tale, so in the play, her gullible belief in magic allows the supposed magician to trick her. The blend of Boccaccian women in this one character creates a complex mix of audience reactions to her, partly mocking and partly sympathetic.

The same is not true of her husband Calandro, whose name reveals at once his *Decameronian* source. As Giorgio Padoan has pointed out, Calandro has none of the sympathetic qualities of Calandrino, but is simply a brutish oaf who can be the repeated butt of mockery, even cruel and painful mockery, while the audience is invited to respond only with derision.¹² In this regard, he comes closer to Plautus's idiotic braggart soldier than to the pathetic Calandrino. Indeed, he is tormented most not by friends and fellow-workers, as Calandrino is in the *Decameron*, but rather, as in *Miles gloriosus*, by the young lover's servant who, by serving the husband, eases his young master's access to the house. Thus Bibbiena's husband and wife

¹² Introduction to *Calandra*, pp. 29–31.

are both sites of explicit reference to the *Decameron*, but the husband can also refer to a readily recognizable Plautine model while the wife cannot.

Both Plautus and Boccaccio explore the intersection of human intentions and chance events. Humans lay their clever plans, only to have them interrupted by the sudden return of father or husband, or by some other unforeseen event. For both Plautus and Boccaccio, quick-witted adaptation to the new circumstances distinguishes the heroes, whether slave or wife or lover. Cleverness allows the lower-status character to win against a more powerful foe: servant against master, subject against ruler, wife against husband, child against parent. But fortune or sheer luck also plays an important hand in bringing about the resolution of problems. Plautus puts much of the intrigue into the control of an inventive slave, while Boccaccio allows young lovers to be inspired by their passion to invent their own ruses. In this regard the *Calandra* comes closer to Plautus than to Boccaccio, for the servants Fessenio and Fannio are the main instigators of most of the action, which consists primarily of *beffe*. Fulvia, however, devises some her own plans for action. This is part of the construction of her odd status in between the level of the servants on one hand and of the honest and serious Santilla on the other. Later comedies would similarly give an actively scheming role to the lovers themselves, and especially to women willing, like Fulvia, to don a disguise.

Whereas Plautus's intrigues develop in response to a situation and seek to achieve a stated aim, e.g. to trick the father out of money, to move the desired female from one place or man to another, or to distract the returning father from witnessing his son's misdeeds, Boccaccio's characters often develop a *beffa* or practical joke for the sheer pleasure of the joke itself. Their aim is not to extract a desired female or money from someone else's possession, but simply to mock and humiliate an inviting butt of humor. In this regard, the intrigues of the *Calandra* are more Boccaccian than Plautine. Santilla's trick on the doting but confused Fulvia accomplishes little other for her than to pass the time while trying to stay away from Perillo's home; Lidio and Fessenio's tricks on Calandro chiefly allow them to laugh at a stupid fellow who is in their way. Fessenio does not simply get Calandro out of the house; he piles up the gags against him. True, there are potentially some practical rewards: Santilla may expect to get some of Fulvia's money, the servant Fannio may expect to get some sexual activity, and Lidio may get an opportunity to visit Fulvia; nonetheless, the main attraction of these primarily gratuitous jokes is the laugh they will enable. "Questa è ben cosa da ridere. Ah!ah!ah!" (I.3). "Se ne trarrà piacere" (III.17). Machiavelli similarly in the *Mandragola* will have Ligurio offer his assistance not simply because of the promised reward but also because he is enjoying the joke.¹³

Nardi in each of his plays drew from the *Decameron* primarily the plot of one particular story and viewed it through the perspective of Plautine servants. Although the happy ending of *I due felici rivali* came from Boccaccio, its focus on a rivalry between lovers and their discovery of the girl's true identity made it readily assimilable to Plautine comedy. In the case of the *Amicitia*, the more original Boccaccian plot of mutually self-sacrificing friends became subordinate to its parodic reversal in the foregrounded scenes of self-serving hostility between

¹³ For the *Mandragola*'s debts to the *Decameron* see, among others, Luigi Vanossi, "Situazione e sviluppo del teatro machiavelliano," in G. Folena, ed., *Lingua e strutture del teatro italiano del Rinascimento* (Padova: Liviana Editrice, 1970), 57ff. ; Gay Bardin, "Machiavelli reads Boccaccio: *Mandragola* between *Decameron* and *Corbaccio*," *Italian Quarterly* 38.149–50 (summer-fall 2001): 5–26, esp. 9–16.

Plautine servingmen. Nardi did not see Boccaccio as a source for style, nor for specific details that could be recombined. He saw that some of Boccaccio's plots could be adapted into comedies with a Plautine cast of characters. Bibbiena's use of Boccaccio became more important for the future of theatre because he was not looking merely at the plot of one story; rather, taking his main plot from Plautus, he promiscuously gathered from the *Decameron* a variety of situations and quotations, demonstrating the very notion of building blocks which would be so important to the construction of Italian comedies. For Nardi, a *Decameron* plot became a Plautine play; for Bibbiena, a Plautine story became the framework for *Decameronian* language and action.

Many of the speeches of Bibbiena's characters, particularly Fulvia's and Fessenio's, are drawn in bits and pieces from the *Decameron*: e.g., Fulvia's complaint that women waste their love on faithless men (Act III, sc. 5 cf. *Decameron* III.6); her self-persuasion to make use of an opportune moment (same scene cf. *Dec.* III.5 and V.10); her consideration of the moving power of a lover's words (same scene, *Dec.* X.5); as well as her tirade against a faithless husband caught in the act (Act III, sc. 12, *Dec.* III.6) and her protestations of innocence and accusations of abuse in front of her brothers (Act V, sc. 8, *Dec.* VII.8), etc. Bibbiena wove together phrases from different stories to create the speeches of this woman, but the phrases come almost unchanged from their source. Similarly the clever servant Fessenio describes Calandro in derisive terms (I.iii) that echo fra Cipolla's description of his servant Guccio (VI.10) in an amusing reversal of master and servant roles. Fessenio's jokes on Calandro (I.vii and II.6) evoke phrases from *Decameron* VI.6, IX.5, IX.10, and from Boccaccio's introduction. Recognizing such quotations and allusions must have been one of the pleasures offered by this entertainment.¹⁴

Decameronian situations abound in the *Calandra*: the foolish husband who chases after one woman only to be duped when her place is taken by another; the wife who, unexpectedly encountering her husband, comes up with a ready excuse and turns the reproaches against him; the enraged husband who brings home his wife's brothers only to find to his embarrassment that she appears completely innocent; the trickster who mocks a foolish fellow with fake enchantments, and the woman who seeks the aid of magic only to be gulled; the victim's anguished shout that "spoils" the magic spell; the young woman who dresses as a man to protect herself or to gain her heart's desires; the man who has himself carried in a chest into the house of his beloved but unwilling lady; and even the scandalous possibility that a husband and wife might share the same lover. Many tales contribute at once to the situations, as to the speeches, of Bibbiena's play. Just as Ariosto had seen the possibility in combining elements from different plays of Plautus, so Bibbiena saw the possibility of recombinations of material from across Boccaccio's stories.

Bibbiena plundered the *Decameron* not only for recombinable bits of action or characters' speech, but also for eloquent expressions — often by Boccaccio's narrators — of general truth, especially about love and relations between the sexes. Boccaccio thus takes on the function of the expert teacher on matters of love, whose wise *sententiae* adorn the comedy. "O amore, quanto è la potenza tua! Qual poeta, qual dottore, qual filosofo potria mai mostrare quelli accorgimenti, quelle astuzie che fai tu a chi séguita la tua insegna?" (III.13), exclaims

¹⁴ Nardi does not participate in anything similar; his language, in short rhyming verses, is his own.

Fessenio, echoing the introduction to *Decameron* VII.4. Lidio defends his pursuit of Fulvia by affirming the necessary subjection of youth to love's power, echoing the argument of Gisippus in *Decameron* X.8.

One amusing game for the reader is to compare the situations in which such statements are made in the two works; for example, both Lidio and Gisippus are justifying their love for another man's wife or fiancée. Situations can stand in contrast as well as in parallel: the words of wisdom in the warnings of Dianora's husband (*Dec.* X.5), that she should avoid listening to other men because a lover's direct address has great power to move, become the basis for Fulvia's plan to go to speak in person to her neglectful beloved (III.5). She will be the speaker, not the recipient, of moving phrases. We have noted already how Cipolla's mocking description of his servant becomes the servant Fessenio's mocking description of his master. Sometimes the change of situation gives a twist to the original statement; thus Fulvia's lament, "Ahi quanto è trista la fortuna della donna! e come è male appagato lo amore di molte nelli amanti" (III.5) alters the more virtuous complaint of Catella for women's love misplaced "ne' mariti" (*Dec.* III.6). Bibbiena seems to intend our recognition and comparison of the two cases in order to get the joke.

Plautus and Boccaccio share a delight in playful language. Wordplay, sound patterns, risqué remarks, suggestive naming, and sheer invention of words characterize the language of both. The winners are not only clever but also eloquent, not only able to talk their way quickly out of a problem, but also relishing the pleasure of their flow of phrases. The crowing of a slave who is mastering the intrigue or the joyful performance of a Boccaccian fraud spinning his lies both manifest this pleasure. Plautus's most endearing characters are also self-consciously actors, playing a role to perfection, at times even complimenting each other on the performance; so too Boccaccio's very first tale and many others celebrate the virtuoso actor who can persuade most of the world with his performance while winning the astonished applause of a more knowing audience. This sense in the *Decameron* of playing for an audience (the performance of a saintly confession in I.1, or of a "miracle" in II.1, or of a generous deed in X.5, etc.) makes his work ripe for theatricalization.¹⁵ Bibbiena picked up from both sources the delight in wordplay through intentional misunderstanding (e.g. I.iv), double entendres (Fulvia's unfortunate phrasing of "in forma di donna" and the famous scene of III.x), mispronunciation (I.v; III.xvii), ridiculously misleading logic (I.vii; II.ix), and a series of parallel expressions (III.xxiii).

Boccaccio also uses language to distinguish the intellectual and social status of his characters. Levels of eloquence on Day IV, as Victoria Kirkham has observed, span from the rhetorical virtuosity of a prince's daughter (IV.1) to the totally inarticulate gestures of a lower class girl (IV.7).¹⁶ Dialect too contributes to Boccaccio's characterizations. For Plautus, the main class divisions are those between slaves and citizens; and as Plautus's slaves are frequently cleverer than their masters, eloquence and verbal mastery do not follow class lines in

¹⁵ On the theatricality of the *Decameron*, see Nino Borsellino, "Il *Decamerone* come teatro," in *Rozzi e Intronati: Esperienze e forme di teatro dal Decameron al Calendario* (Roma: Bulzoni Editore, 1976), 13–50.

¹⁶ V. Kirkham, "The Word, the Flesh, and the *Decameron*" in *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1993), 173–97, on the associations of speech with reason, and thus of different linguistic abilities with a hierarchy or rational to bestial humans.

his plays. When Bibbiena displays for our mockery the garbled language of the servant Samia, the dumb Calandro, and the fake necromancer, while allowing Fessenio and the twins more eloquent speeches, these differences are tied to intelligence rather than to class; for, as in Plautus, the more intelligent servant speaks better than the dumb master. Yet Lidio and Santilla, despite their lack of financial security, appear more elegant in their manners than the less honorable Fulvia and her crude brute of a husband; they have the sophistication of an international experience lacking in the local couple. The mocking of the linguistically provincial occurs in Bibbiena's Boccaccian use of dialect-colored speech for the porter; it recurs in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, where messer Nicio's local idioms are an object for our laughter. While Plautus and Boccaccio share the use of linguistic styles that distinguish the duper from the duped, the linguistic marking of social and regional difference is — though not entirely absent — a less obvious feature of Plautus's writing. His lower class characters tend to use more Greek words, suggesting both the foreign origin of slaves and their wildly un-Roman behavior.¹⁷ Boccaccio, however, gave to the stage the linguistic pleasures of regional diversity. Furthermore, he attends to the social and linguistic hierarchy in conservative as well as in carnivalesque modes. Both regional dialects and linguistic distinctions between the higher-class and lower-class characters would become a staple feature of comedy.

Character types were another site of convergence between Plautus and Boccaccio, especially satiric representations of authority figures whose self-assumed importance comedy perennially delights in deflating. We have noted already with regard to Calandro how both Plautus and Boccaccio offer characters whose combination of vanity and idiocy invites our pleasure in their humiliation. Machiavelli's messer Nicio continues this type of foolish but self-satisfied middle-class husband. Plautus's incompetent doctor in the *Menaechmi* could blend with Boccaccio's learned fool maestro Simone to form the family line of the ridiculous *dottore*. The blustering cowardly soldier comes solely from Plautus; on the other hand, absent from Plautus but temptingly offered by Boccaccio is the fraudulent cleric. The priests of ancient Italy seem not to have offered the same kind of target as the clergy of the fourteenth or sixteenth centuries, or else the taboos of ancient Roman culture kept priests as well as adulterous wives off the stage. The twisted logic of Boccaccio's feigned friar Tedaldo, persuading a reluctant female that sex in this case is not a sin (III.7), reappears in the mouth of Machiavelli's fra Timoteo, whose demonstrations to Lucrezia come close to Tedaldo's. The church, however, put a swift end to theatrical representations of the clergy; otherwise the fraudulent cleric was likely heading for a stage career as successful as his career in the *fabliau* and *novella*.¹⁸

By marrying Plautus to Boccaccio, Nardi used a Boccaccian plot to provide the outline for Plautine characters and scenes. Bibbiena went much farther in stirring his two models into an inseparable blend. He combined the plotting servant with the plotting wife, the intrigue for a stated aim with the *beffa* for the sheer fun of it, the exuberance of wordplay with *sententiae* on love. His use of features shared by both models, such as linguistic jokes and risqué references or the mockery of a vain and stupid fellow, emphasized the compatibility of his two sources. At the same time, he was able to develop Boccaccio's roles for women: both the

¹⁷ See Erich Segal, op cit., 33–40, on Plautus's concept of "Greeking it up."

¹⁸ *Tartuffe* resurrected this type on stage.

honest, capable woman who can pass as a man to protect herself from danger and the lusty, discontented wife who can simultaneously thwart her husband and enjoy herself under his nose. Most of all, he displayed to perfection the success of a theatrical construction from heterogeneous pieces of Plautus's and Boccaccio's texts. It is no wonder that this hardy offspring of such a marriage became a major influence on subsequent theatrical comedy.

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