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Boccaccio's Vernacular Classicism: Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity in the *Decameron*

In the following pages, I would like to explore two related questions that should be considered every time we are tempted to gloss a literary work such as the *Decameron* intertextually. The first question is one of method: when is a gloss necessary? What are the conditions in a work that require — rather than suggest, invite, or simply permit — that we bring a different text to its interpretation? The second question relates to the merit of the gloss: when is the intertext pertinent? How can we establish that a precise intertext is relevant to the understanding of the work we are studying? According to what parameters can we, in particular, advance the claim that an individual text rather than a permeating discourse, a book rather than common parlance, are to be taken into account? To put it another way, and in more essentially practical terms, when do we start looking for meaning outside the text? And most importantly, when do we stop looking for it?

Let me anticipate my theoretical conclusions, so that we may concentrate on the textual examples. An intertextual gloss is necessary when there is something odd about the text we study, when its terminology, syntax, theme or motifs are so peculiar that any reading, no matter how attentive, still leaves an inexplicable residue.¹ That is, an intertext is called for when a text diverges from a discourse: when it does not merely rehearse common wisdom, when it is not fully endorsing the party line of its culture. Correspondingly, an intertextual gloss is pertinent when the target text has literal connections with the one we are glossing; there is a cluster of elements (themes, syntax, and lexicon) that resonates in the text; and the evocation of the target text is able to reduce all elements of disturbance. In other words, an intertext is pertinent when it fully brings the text back into the discourse: when it makes its peculiar statements dialogue rather than clash with common wisdom, when it makes it a distinct yet harmonious interlocutor in a cultural debate.²

¹ See M. Riffaterre, *La production du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), 86.

² Background to these arguments and terminology may be found in C. Segre, *Teatro e Romanzo* (Torino: Einaudi, 1984), 103–18; for the debate in classical studies, see S.

The hermeneutic process thus sketched out is, of course, circular. It moves from text to context and back. In order to suggest that it may be also virtuously circular, I will explore two cases of intertextual interference, moving back and forth between the spheres of classical and romance antecedents with which the *Decameron* most closely dialogues. I will proceed mainly through examples, a series of flashcards, in order to stay as close to the *Decameron* as possible. Doing so will also allow me to provide examples of what kind of meaning intertexts may produce. By studying the parameters determining the intertextual dynamics of the *Decameron* we should be able to learn something about what the evoked intertexts tell us.

1. When is an intertextual gloss necessary?

A good example of what I deem a necessary intertextual gloss is the self-definition that the *Decameron* gives in its proem:

Adunque, acciò che in parte per me s'amendi il peccato della fortuna, la quale dove meno era di forza, sì come noi nelle delicate donne vegliamo, quivi più avara fu di sostegno, in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano, per ciò che all'altre è assai l'ago e 'l fuso e l'arcolajo, intendo di raccontare *cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo*, raccontate in dieci giorni da una onesta brigata di sette donne e di tre giovani nel pistelenzioso tempo della passata mortalità fatta, e alcune canzonette dalle predette donne cantate al lor diletto. (*Decameron* Proemio 13) ³

Boccaccio's definition consists of two parts. The generic term that should be defined ("novelle") and its threefold, hierarchically subsumed, specification: "favole, parabole, istorie." The triad's rhetorical pedigree has long since been recognized, and there is a wide range of texts that may be (and have been) offered as gloss. All fundamental Latin manuals of rhetorical instruction from antiquity agree in their content and terminology on this point: Cicero, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Quintilian, and Isidore converge in their assessment that there may be, in theory, three kinds of narrative: fables (which tell of events that have never taken place and couldn't have), histories (dealing with events which could take place, and indeed they did), and "arguments" (today we might call them "plots"): a third intermediate category of narratives recounting events that did not take place, but could have. The terminological compactness of the tradition is astounding.

Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext: Dynamics of Appropriation in Roman Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and for its modern counterpart G. Machacek, "Allusion," *PMLA* 122.2 (March, 2007), 522–36. M. Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003) can still prove useful.

³ All citations from the *Decameron* are from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. V. Branca (Torino: Einaudi, 1992³).

One would expect a higher degree of inconsistency from a series of texts spanning five centuries and belonging to a tradition which was notoriously belligerent when it came to issues of nomenclature:

Ea, quae in negotiorum expositione posita est, tres habet partes: fabulam, historiam, argumentum. Fabula est, in qua nec verae nec veri similes res continentur, cuiusmodi est: "Angues ingentes alites, iuncti iugo...". Historia est gesta res, ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota; quod genus: "Appius indixit Carthaginensibus bellum". Argumentum est ficta res, quae tamen fieri potuit. Huiusmodi apud Terentium: "Nam is postquam excessit ex ephebis, [Sosia]..." (Cicero, *De inventione* I.19.27)

Id, quod in negotiorum expositione positum est, tres habet partes: fabulam, historiam, argumentum. Fabula est, quae neque ueras neque ueri similes continet res, ut eae sunt, quae tragoediis traditae sunt. Historia est gesta res, sed ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota. Argumentum est ficta res, quae tamen fieri potuit, uelut argumenta comoediarum. (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* I.8.13)

Et quia narrationum, excepta qua in causis utimur, tris accepimus species, fabulam, quae uersatur in tragoediis atque carminibus non a ueritate modo sed etiam a forma ueritatis remota, argumentum, quod falsum, sed uero simile comoediae fingunt, historia, in qua est gestae rei expositio. (Quintilian, *Inst. or.* II.4.2)

Item inter historiam et argumentum et fabulam interesse. Nam historiae sunt res verae quae factae sunt; argumenta sunt quae etsi facta non sunt, fieri tamen possunt; fabulae uero sunt quae nec factae sunt nec fieri possunt, quia contra naturam sunt. (Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* I.44.5).⁴

When offered as a background for Boccaccio's introductory remarks, this host of authoritative sources seems to provide readers of the *Decameron* with an ideal situation. They are presented with a meta-poetic statement that reflects their readerly expectations. In proposing a new genre, the *novella*, the work certainly challenges its immediate audience in their understanding of the literary canon. In doing so, however, the *Decameron* also appeals to its audience's most traditional habits of categorization. For modern readers, Boccaccio's definition of his new genre seems to constitute a typical case of learned interdiscursivity: it reduces what is "new" in the text to what is "known" in its context. A compact body of writing, the capillary cultural diffusion of which

⁴ I quote the texts from: Cicéron, *De l'invention*, ed. G. Achard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1994); Cicerone, *La retorica a Gaio Erennio*, ed. F. Cancelli (Milano: Mondadori, 1992); Quintiliano, *L'Istituzione oratoria*, ed. R. Faranda (Torino: UTET, 1968); Isidori Hispaliensis *Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

is unquestionable, concurs in content and language with what we read in the text.⁵

Boccaccio's strategy is apparently so clear-cut that, in theory, a gloss might not even be needed. Were it not for the purpose of establishing a classical pedigree for the Proem's words (as opposed to a Romance or neo-Latin one), the gloss is redundant. In practice, things are a little less neat than they appear. The problem is, of course, the second term of the triad, which sources coherently render with the Latin *argumentum*, but that Boccaccio, surprisingly, chooses to render with *parabola*. In the tradition just explored, there is really nothing (or very little) that could justify his choice. The terminological difficulty is the second essential stumbling block in the text. As a corrugation that attracts attention to itself, it also works as an invitation, almost a provocation, for readers to account for its presence. The inconsistency in the passage, in other words, invites a supplement of interpretation.

There are more ways in which such a stumbling block may be removed; none, however, may prove more satisfactory than further intertextual research, especially when the text itself has already opened an intertextual possibility. If the Latin rhetorical tradition unanimously agrees on listing *fabulae*, *historiae*, and *argumenta* as the only three kinds of possible narratives, one may wonder if the voice of this tradition was the *only* voice that was available to writer and readers of the *Decameron*. As a matter of fact, it was not. The text that is at the origin of the Latin rhetorical tradition, Aristotle's Greek treatise on the art of rhetoric, has something to offer as an intertext. Proposing to look into the Aristotelian corpus in order to gloss a text by Boccaccio requires a small stretch of the limits of philological probability: Aristotle's Greek was most likely out of Boccaccio's reach. However, what was fully within his reach was one of its translations, and a relatively new one at that: Aristotle's *Rhetorica* enjoyed a renewed interest at the end of the thirteenth century and was circulating in a new translation through the Latin West. A crucial passage from that text, in the *nova translation*, drafted in 1270 by William of Moerbeke at the bequest of Thomas Aquinas, offers the most precise equivalent of the terminological triad we have found in Boccaccio's passage. Aristotle's definition of rhetorical example reads:

Primo quidem igitur *de exemplo* dicamus. Simile enim inductioni exemplum; inductio autem principium. Exemplorum autem due specie sunt. Una quidem enim species exempli est cum dicet *res prius gestas*; una autem cum

⁵ Still essential is the treatment of this issue in P. Stewart, *Retorica e mimica nel "Decameron" e nella commedia del Cinquecento* (Firenze: Olschki, 1986); but see also P. M. Forni, "Realtà/Verità," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1992), 235–56.

quod ipse facit. Huius autem unum quidem *parabula*, unum autem *fabule*
— velud Esopice et Lybice. (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* II.xx.1-6)⁶

The closer literal cogency of this new intertext changes the quality of the gloss we may decide to append to Boccaccio's passage. Far from being interdiscursive, the required gloss is definitely intertextual. And it bears some hermeneutic implications, the first of which should probably be that the *novella* is not Boccaccio's vernacular equivalent of the Latin generic *narratio*, but rather his allusive equivalent that of the more specific Latin *exemplum* or, if you will, of the strictly Aristotelian, Greek *enthymeme*. Glossing Boccaccio with Aristotle, in sum, may change our understanding of *novella* as a literary genre.⁷

Beyond the eventual adjustments that this self-definition may impose on our perception of the generic nature of the *Centonovelle*, we must pay attention to a further facet of Boccaccio's authoritative (because authorial) definition of the work.⁸ The definitional precision exercised in the coherent application of Aristotelian terminology is immediately balanced and perhaps neutralized in a lighthearted aside: *cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie, che dire le vogliamo*. While it may be phrased as to betray some impatience with the strictures of the potentially argumentative grammarians who may object to the *Decameron's* distinctive mixture of actual, potential, and implausible stories, the sentence that follows the definition potentially makes the carefully posited distinction completely obsolete. After we have been told with such allusive care that what we are about to read falls within the limits of a very specific rhetorical and literary category, we learn that we may call the novellas that make up the body of the work in whatever way we please. The gesture is, of course, ironic — if it means,

⁶ The text is cited from the manuscript Laurenziano 13.sin.6, f. 214v, sec. XIVⁱ, a codex to which Boccaccio might have had access.

⁷ For a more extended treatment of this argument, see S. Marchesi, *Stratigrafie decameroniane* (Firenze: Olschki, 2004), 1–16; analogous conclusions about the peculiar kind of 'exemplarity' embodied in the *Decameron* have been reached independently (and based on a different set of considerations) by T. Kircher, *The Poet's Wisdom: The Humanists, the Church, and the Formation of Philosophy in the Early Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), esp. Chapter 3, and T. Foster Gittes, *Boccaccio's Naked Muse: Eros, Culture, and the Mythopoeic Imagination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), esp. Chapter 4.

⁸ The nature of the *novella* has become the recurrent subject of discussion: see the three main volumes of conference proceedings, *La Nouvelle: Actes du Colloque International de Montréal* (McGill University, 14-16 octobre 1982), eds. M. Picone, G. Di Stefano, and P. Stewart (Montréal: Plato Academic Press, 1983); *La novella italiana: Atti del Convegno di Caprarola*, 19–24 settembre 1988 (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 1989); and *Favole Parabole Istorie: Le forme della scrittura novellistica dal medioevo al rinascimento* (Atti del Convegno di Pisa, 26–28 ottobre 1998), G. Albanese, L. Battaglia Ricci, and R. Bessi, eds. (Roma: Salerno, 2000).

as it should, that the new generic identity of the *novella* sums up and supersedes the threefold typology in which narratives and *exempla* are traditionally articulated.⁹ The new model pushes the old ones out of the inventory. And yet, one may ask, is irony all that there is to it? In positing a distinction only to immediately undo it, the author makes a gesture that, again, may invite interpretation.

Interpretive obstinacy is, of course, not a virtue, and my insistence on searching for additional meaning in the sentence might border on “aggressive hermeneutical treatment.” Yet there is an additional notable element to Boccaccio’s phrasing, which draws attention to its presence and calls for interpretation. The sentence is not only peculiar for its semantic import; it is also actually unprecedented in its syntax. The expression “che dir le vogliamo” is by now part and parcel of the zero-degree of Italian language. We use the phrase “che dir si voglia” so often in Italian that even a restricted Google search for the four-word idiom yields about 259,000 hits.¹⁰ However, in spite of its current overwhelming popularity, I have not been able to find any use of this expression to mean what Boccaccio meant with it before Boccaccio himself. Reading for exclusionary purposes is, of course, no exact science, and it may certainly be the case that I (or the OVI search engine) have missed some instance of this concessive relative clause in texts dating before Boccaccio’s death.¹¹ Even if its absence from any earlier text may never be proved conclusively, its statistical density in the late Boccaccio (*Decameron* and *Esposizioni*) is certainly telling. Boccaccio is fond of the expression, enough at least to reuse it three more times, always with definitional import. See, for instance, the following cases:

Oltre a questo, niuno scudiere, o famigliare *che dir vogliamo*, diceva trovarsi il quale meglio né più accortamente servisse a una tavola d’un signore, che serviva ella, sì come colei che era costumatissima, savia e discreta molto. (*Decameron* II.9.9)

L’aere, ancora per non esser dal fuoco risoluto, gli fugge inanzi e, quando tiene la via che fa l’umido, volendo tutto insieme essalare, e trovando i pori stretti, uscendo per la strettezza di quegli, fa col suo impeto quello stridore, o cigolare *che dir vogliamo*; e, convertito dall’impeto in vento, va via. (*Esposizioni* XIII (i) 40-42)

⁹ *Sed contra*, see M. Picone, “L’invenzione della Novella italiana: tradizione e innovazione,” in *La novella italiana*, 119–54.

¹⁰ Results from a Google search for “che dir si voglia”; the same parameters entered into Yahoo’s search engine yield 229,000 hits (October 29, 2007).

¹¹ The search engine for the *Opera del Vocabolario Italiano* is part of the ItalNet consortium. It can be accessed via the University of Notre Dame or University of Chicago servers at: <http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/efts/ARTFL/projects/OVI/>.

Dice adunque l'autore nello esemplo il quale induce, o comparazione *che dir la vogliamo....* (*Esposizioni XVI* (i) 94.99)¹²

Boccaccio might not have been the one who invented it (if anyone may be said to invent anything in language), but it is perhaps safe to say that he is most likely the first to make it graduate to a literary use in the charged locus of the *Proem*. The end result of Boccaccio's syntax is a double order of frames: the initial quasi-neologism "novella" is reinforced by the syntactic neologism "che dire le vogliamo" at its end; wedged between the two novelties we find what is most traditional, the series ranging from "favole" to "istorie"; wedged between the two well-known, perfectly traditional terms, we surprisingly find the novel "parabole." The structure of the sentence and its heightened rhetorical tone suggest that we might not have yet exhausted its potential for meaning. Boccaccio's alternation of confirmations and surprises may indicate that the *Decameron* resonates again with the voice of another intertext. It might be coincidental, but a text that comes close to Boccaccio's definitional musing does indeed exist, and it is located in a context no less self-conscious than the *Proem* to the *Decameron*. In the present context, I will refrain from discussing the specific coordinates and the philological probability of the classical fragment that I propose should be used to gloss once more Boccaccio's phrasing.¹³ Instead, I would like to concentrate on its syntax and, however subtle and impalpable it may be, on its tone. Here is a snippet of text from the *Epistles* of Pliny the Younger, which may illuminate Boccaccio's wording:

Proinde, sive epigrammata sive idyllia sive eclogas sive, ut multi, poematia seu quod aliud vocare malueris, licebit voces; ego tantum hendecasyllabos praesto. (Pliny, *Ep.* 4.14.9)¹⁴

Any evaluation of the fragment cannot do away with the differences it exhibits when paired with Boccaccio's: the object of the present classificatory meditation is poetry rather than prose; the Latin author fully embraces responsibility for the classification of his work, the vernacular apparently avoids it; finally, the movement from the term which is being defined to the dismissed alternatives is the opposite from the one

¹² I cite the text of the *Esposizioni* from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, ed. G. Padoan (Milano: Mondadori, 1965).

¹³ The so-called "one-hundred letter form" (1.1-5.6) of Pliny's *Epistles* is the philological bridge between his collection and Boccaccio's *Decameron*. I have discussed Boccaccio's knowledge of that branch of the tradition, in particular of ms. F., the Mediceo Laurenziano S. Marco 284, in "The two halves of a dialogue: Petrarch, Boccaccio, and the invention of the epistle," in *Inventing History: Italian Literature between Philology and History*, F. Finotti and W. Storey, eds. (forthcoming).

¹⁴ All citations from Pliny come from C. Plini Caecili Secundi *Epistularum libri decem*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

we find in Boccaccio — in Boccaccio, “X equals either A or B or C, whatever one may call it”: the Latin theorist postulates “either A or B or C, or D, or whatever, amounts to X.” All these differences notwithstanding, however, there might be something to say in favor of the pertinence of a classical discussion of a book’s title for a book that, like the *Decameron*, programmatically if defensively claims it is “senza titolo,” and with that alludes to the most classical *sine titulo* status of Ovid’s *Amores*.

Again, a measure of skepticism might be healthy. Even if we accept the pertinence of this accessory gloss, it remains to be seen whether it may also be in any way useful. I believe that it is. The first aspect that the new intertext illuminates is the idiosyncratic quality of Boccaccio’s expression “che dire le vogliamo”: one may invoke the Latin passage as an antecedent, in accounting for the syntactic neologism that concludes Boccaccio’s typology. As a still tentative and perhaps merely erudite note, a classicizing gloss may be appended to indicate that what appears to be Boccaccio’s new coinage has indeed clear Latin antecedents: *quod aliud vocare malueris* explains *che dire le vogliamo*. When I say that the Latin antecedent “explains” the vernacular turn of phrase, I do not mean that it determines its semantic value, but only that it helps to recover some sense of its surprising appearance. In theory, there is no compelling reason to intervene in the intertextual apparatus of the passage beyond its contextual relevance. It might be intriguing to speculate about the possible connection between Boccaccio and the Latin author who penned that definition of his poetry, but nothing imposes a strict intertextual reading. Unlike Aristotle’s discussion of enthymeme, the intertextual gloss we may agree should be appended to the passage is merely accessory: it is not susceptible, as far as I can see, to further interpretation.

There are, however, further aspects of Boccaccio’s syntax that the Latin passage may help illuminating: first, the value of the threefold “o” which articulates the typology of exemplary narratives in the *Decameron*. The Latin background, against which we may decide to project Boccaccio’s classification, clarifies that the ambiguous Italian disjunctive conjunction is inclusive rather than exclusive: Boccaccio presents the alternatives of *favole*, *parabole* and *istorie* in a system of *sive-sive*, not as *aut-aut*’s. But there is more. The initial inclusiveness is designed to produce a deeper exclusion — perhaps in both texts. The Latin author’s strong claim of independence may in some way resonate with Boccaccio’s terminological supersessionism. Pliny’s insistence on classifying his poetry as technically “hendecasyllables” against all other alternatives may anticipate Boccaccio’s use of *novelle* not only as a generic term that embraces fables, parables and histories in a wider scope, but also as the term to be used in their stead. The authorial

irony, so typical of the *Decameron*, hides beneath a very thin veil the seriousness of his meta-poetic statement. To be sure, it is a small interpretive step, one we may have taken anyway; but having a precise classical antecedent in mind may help us take it. The search for one extra-antecedent may have proved not to be otiose after all.

2. When is an intertextual gloss pertinent?

If the hermeneutic necessity of an intertextual gloss is the result of a tear in the semiotic fabric of the text, a void that readers are asked to fill, a consensus on what to use in order to fill this gap is often difficult to reach. The question is now one of choice: when can we say that an intertext is so precisely fitting, so convincing, that none other is needed? What are the conditions that allow us to argue, with some degree of confidence, that we have spotted the book that Boccaccio's text invited his readers to keep open alongside his *Decameron*? More importantly, is it an individual text or a diffuse discourse?

In order to explore this next set of questions, we move from the dense meta-poetic locus, which was treated in the first section, to a more pleasantly descriptive locus — technically, we move into one of the *loci amoeni* in the *Decameron*. The context of the following extended quotation is famous. We are at the beginning of Day III, and the *brigata* has just moved from its first meeting-place into a second palace on the hills surrounding Florence.¹⁵ A summary description of the new villa has just concluded with the highest praises being lavished on the “signore” of the palace (“sommamente il commendarono e magnifico reputarono il signor di quello,” notes the narrator at III.*intro*.4), and the *brigata* is ready to move into the garden. It is here, in the most perfect setting one may imagine, that the three following rounds of story-telling will be staged. As the segments I have strategically bolded show, the passage — with all its literary beauty — is a patchwork of recycled literature. The *Roman de la Rose* takes, as we know, the lion's share in providing material for the topical description:

Appresso la qual cosa, **fattosi aprire un giardino** che di costa era al palagio, in quello, **che tutto era da torno murato**, se n'entrarono [**RdR 129-35**]; e parendo loro nella prima entrata di maravigliosa bellezza tutto insieme, più attentamente le parti di quello cominciarono a riguardare. Esso avea dintorno da sé e **per lo**

¹⁵ On the axiological charge investing gardens in the *Decameron*, see L. Battaglia Ricci, *Ragionare nel giardino: Boccaccio e i cicli pittorici del “Trionfo dela Morte”* (Roma: Salerno, 1987), 125–32 and 166–80. For the literary tradition behind Boccaccio's treatment of the *topos*, see E. G. Kern, “The Gardens in the *Decameron* Cornice,” *PMLA* 66.4. (June, 1951), 505–23. See also G. Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's “Decameron”* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 107–11, similarly insisting on the *Roman de la Rose* as central intertext.

mezzo in assai parti vie ampissime, tutte diritte come strale [RdR 1320-22] e coperte di pergolati di viti, le quali facevano gran vista di dovere quello anno assai uve fare, e tutte allora fiorite sì grande odore per lo giardin rendevano, che, **mescolato insieme con quello di molte altre cose che per lo giardino olivano, pareva loro essere tra tutta la spezieria che mai nacque in Oriente. [RdR 1337-44]** Le latora delle quali vie tutte di rosa' bianchi e vermigli e di gelsomini erano quasi chiuse: **per le quali cose, non che la mattina, ma qualora il sole era più alto, sotto odorifera e dilettevole ombra, senza esser tocco da quello, vi si poteva per tutto andare. [RdR 1362-71]** Quante e quali e come ordinate poste fossero le piante che erano in quel luogo, lungo sarebbe a raccontare [RdR 1358-61]; ma niuna n'è laudevole la quale il nostro aere patisca, di che quivi non sia abondevolmente. [RdR 1323-26] Nel mezzo del quale, quello che è non meno commendabile che altra cosa che vi fosse ma molto più, era un prato di minutissima erba e verde tanto, che quasi nera pareva, dipinto tutto forse di mille varietà di fiori, chiuso dintorno di verdissimi e vivi aranci e di cedri, li quali, avendo i vecchi frutti e' nuovi e i fiori ancora, non solamente piacevole ombra agli occhi ma ancora all'odorato facevan piacere. Nel mezzo del qual prato era **una fonte di marmo bianchissimo e con maravigliosi intagli: iv'entro, non so se da natural vena o da artificiosa, [RdR 1429-35?]** per una figura, la quale sopra una colonna che nel mezzo di quella diritta era, gittava tanta acqua e sì alta verso il cielo, che poi **non senza dilettevol suono** nella fonte chiarissima ricadea, che di meno avria macinato un mulino. **La qual poi, quella dico che soprabondava al pieno della fonte, per occulta via del pratello usciva e, per canaletti assai belli e artificiosamente fatti fuor di quello divenuta palese, tutto lo 'ntorniava; e quindi per canaletti simili quasi per ogni parte del giardin discorrea, [RdR 1432-42]** raccogliendosi ultimamente in una parte dalla quale del bel giardino avea l'uscita, e quindi verso il pian discendendo chiarissima, avanti che a quel divenisse, con grandissima forza e con non piccola utilità del signore due mulina volgea. Il veder questo giardino, il suo bello ordine, le piante e la fontana co' ruscelletti procedenti da quella **tanto piacque a ciascuna donna e a' tre giovani, che tutti cominciarono a affermare che, se Paradiso si potesse in terra fare, non sapevano conoscere che altra forma che quella di quel giardino gli si potesse dare**, né pensare, oltre a questo, qual bellezza gli si potesse agiugnere. [RdR 635-44] Andando adunque contentissimi dintorno per quello, facendosi di varii rami d'albori ghirlande bellissime, tuttavia udendo **forse venti maniere** di canti d'uccelli quasi a pruova l'un dell'altro cantare, s'accorsero d'una dilettevol bellezza, della quale, dall'altre soprappresi, non s'erano ancora accorti: ché essi videro **il giardin pieno forse di cento varietà di belli animali, e l'uno all'altro mostrandolo, d'una parte uscir conigli, d'altra parte correr lepri, e dove giacer cavriuoli e in alcuna cerbiatti giovani andar pascendo e, oltre a questi, altre più maniere di non nocivi animali, ciascuno a suo di-**

letto, quasi dimestichi, andarsi a sollazzo: le quali cose, oltre agli altri piaceri, un vie maggior piacere aggiunsero. [**RdR 1372-79**]

We are in a clear situation of intertextuality. In the table that follows, I have included some passages from the *Roman de la Rose* that appear most pertinent to appreciate Boccaccio's combinatory art.¹⁶ This time, I have bolded what may be considered the connective segments in the primary intertext: the lexical and syntactic "hooks" that hold the two extended passages together.

1) Quant j'oi ung pou avant alé,
Si vi un vergier grant et lé,
Tout clos de haut mur bataillié,
Portrait et dehors entaillié
A maintes riches escritures,
Les ymages et les peintures
Du mur volentiers remiré
RdR 129-35

2) Et sachiés que **je cuidai estre**
Pour voir en Paradis terrestre,
Tant estoit li leus delitables,
Qui sembloit estre esperitables:
Car si com il m'estoit avis,
Ne féist en nul Parevis
Si bon estre, com il feisoit
Ou vergier qui tant me plaisoit.
RdR 635-44

3) **Li vergiers par compasseüre**
Fu faiz par droite quarreüre,
S'ot autant de lonc con de large;
RdR 1320-22

4) **Nus arbres** n'i a qui fruit ne charge,
Se n'est aucuns aubres hideus,
Dom il n'i ait **ou ung ou deus**
Où vergier, **ou plus**, se devient.
Rdr 1323-26

5) Si trovast qu'en eüst mestier,
Où vergier, mainte bone espice,
Clos de girofle et requalice,
Graine de paradis novele,
Citouaut, anis, et canele
Et mainte espice delitable,
Que bon mangier fait apres table.
RdR 1337-44

6) **Que iroie-je ci notant?**

¹⁶ I cite the text of the *Rose* from Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose. Édition d'après les manuscrits BN 12786 et BN 378*, ed. A. Strubel (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1992).

De divers arbres i ot tant,
Que moult en seroie encombrez,
Ainz que jes eüse nombrez;
RdR 1358-61

7) Me lis arbres, ce sachiez, furent
Si loing a loing con estre durent.
Li uns fu loins de l'autre asis
Plus de cinq toises, ou de sis:
Mès li rain furent gent et haut,
Et por le lieu garder dou chaut,
Furent si espes par deseure,
Que li solauz en nes une eure
Ne pooit a terre descendre,
Ne faire mal a l'erbe tendre.
RdR 1362-71

8) Oū vergier ot dains et chevriaus,
Si ot grant plente d'escuriaus,
Qui par ces arbres gravissoient;
Conins i avoit qui issoient
Toute jor fors par lor tanieres,
Et en plus de trente [.XXX.] menieres
Aloient entr'aus donoiant
Seur l'erbe fresche verdoiant.
RdR 1372-79

9) Il ot par leus cleres fontaines,
Sans barbelotez et sans raines,
Cui l'aubre fesoient ombre;
Je n'en sai pas dire le nombre.
Par petiz roissiaus et conduiz
Q'ot fet faire danz Deduiz,
S'en aloit l'eve aval, fesant
Une douce noise et plesant.
Antor les ruissiaus et les rives
Des fontaines cleres et vives,
Poingnoit l'erbe menue et dru.
Rdr 1380-90

10) Dedeanz une pierre de **marbre**
Ot **Nature** par **grant mestrisse**
Souz le pin la fontaine assise:
Si ot **dedanz la pierre escrites**
Ou bort amont lettre petite
Qui devoisoient qu'anqui desus
Se mori li biaux Narcisus.
RdR 1429-35

In two texts that certainly pay remarkable attention to the irrigation systems they depict, the “hydraulic” metaphor with which we are now used to describing the “influx” a text exerts on its “tributaries” is not completely out of place. The Garden of Deduit is for all intents and purposes the “source” of Boccaccio’s new Garden: the presence of singing

birds, an almost impregnable canopy of leaves and trees, fresh running water, odorous spice-plants, and caroling animals — in sum, the explicit Eden-like quality of Boccaccio's garden finds its main antecedent in Guillaume's garden of Deduit. And yet, is the *Rose* so compellingly unique?

As a matter of fact, there are other texts that could make a legitimate claim to the role of generic antecedents for the passage. The second table contains a small sampling of texts, one of which is again from Pliny the Younger, the Latin author whose definition of poetry we have used to gloss the authorial definition of the *Decameron*. All these examples may be used to contrast our first response to the text. They may help us second-guess the assurance with which we consider the *Rose* as the sole and exhaustive antecedent for Boccaccio. They show that we may be facing a collection of fragments of a common discourse, bridging vernacular and Latin descriptions of villas:

Boccaccio, *Filocolo* IV.17.

Andò adunque Filocolo, lodando il consiglio della donna, dietro a' passi di lei, e con lui i suoi compagni, e Caleon e due altri giovani con loro: e vennero nel mostrato prato, bellissimo molto d'erbe e di fiori, e pieno di dolce soavità d'odori, dintorno al quale belli e giovani arbustelli erano assai, le cui frondi verdi e folte, dalle quali il luogo era difeso da' raggi del gran pianeta. E nel mezzo d'esso pratello una picciola fontana chiara e bella era, dintorno alla quale tutti si posero a sedere; e quivi di diverse cose, chi mirando l'acqua chi cogliendo fiori, incominciarono a parlare. Ma però che tal volta disavvedutamente l'uno le novelle dell'altro trarompeva, la bella donna disse così: — Acciò che i nostri ragionamenti possano con più ordine procedere e infino alle più fresche ore continuarsi, le quali noi per festeggiare aspettiamo, ordiniamo uno di noi qui in luogo di nostro re, al quale ciascuno una quistione d'amore proponga, e da esso a quella debita risposta prenda. E certo, secondo il mio avviso, noi non avremo le nostre quistioni poste, che il caldo sarà, senza che noi il sentiamo, passato, e il tempo utilmente con diletto sarà adoperato —. Piacque a tutti, e fra loro dissero: - Facciasi re —. ¹⁷

Folgòre, *Sonetti de' mesi* 7.

Di giugno dovvi una montagnetta
 coverta di bellissimi arbustelli,
 con trenta ville e dodici castelli
 che sieno intorno ad una cittadetta,

ch'abbia nel mezzo una sua fontanetta;
 e faccia mille rami e fiumicelli,
 ferendo per giardini e praticelli
 e rinfrescando la minuta erbetta.

Aranci e cedri, dattili e lumie
 e tutte l'altre frutte saporose
 impergolate sieno per le vie;

e le genti vi sien tutte amorose,
 e faccianvisi tante cortesie,
 ch' a tutto 'l mondo sieno graziose.

¹⁷ I cite the text from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, ed. A. E. Quaglio (Milano: Mondadori 1967).

1) *omnia maceria muniuntur*: hanc gradata buxus operit et subtrahit.

3) *Ambit hunc ambulatio* pressis varieque tonsis viridibus inclusa; ab his *gestatio* in modum circi, quae buxum multiformem humilesque et retentas manu *arbusculas* circumit.

7) Medius patescit [hippodromus] statimque intrantium oculis totus offertur, *platanis circumitur*; *illae hederæ vestiuntur utque summae suis ita imae alienis frondibus virent. Hedera truncum et ramos pererrat vicinasque platanos transitu suo copulat*. Has buxus interiacet; exteriores buxos circumvenit laurus, *umbraeque platanorum suam confert*.

Rectus hic hippodromi limes in extrema parte hemicyclio frangitur mutatque faciem: *cupressis ambitur et tegitur, densiore umbra opacior nigriorque*; interioribus circulis — *sunt enim plures* — purissimum diem recipit.

9-10) pratum inde non minus *natura* quam superiora illa *arte* visendum; campi deinde porro multaque alia *prata* et arbusta....

... contra mediam fere porticum diaeta paulum recedit, *cingit areolam*, quae quattuor platanis inumbratur. inter has *marmoreo labro aqua exundat...*

.... nec cedit gratiae marmoris *ramos insidentesque ramis aves imitata pictura*. fonticulus in hoc, in fonte crater; circa *sipunculi plures* miscent *iucundissimum murmur...*

... sed ante piscinam, quae fenestris servit ac subiacet, *strepitu visuque iucundam*: nam *ex edito desiliens aqua* suscepta marmore albescit.

Hic quoque *fons nascitur simulque subducitur*.

Per totum hippodromum inducti strepunt rivi et, *qua manus duxit, sequuntur*. *His nunc illa viridia*, nunch haec, interdum simul omnia lavantur.

Contra fons egerit aquam et recipit; nam expulsa in altum in se cadit iunctisque hiatibus et absorbetur et tollitur.

(Pliny, *Ep.* 5.6)

Several details converge in these parallel places: the context of Boccaccio's own *Filocolo* represents the closest thematic antecedent, linking the bucolic setting of *Decameron* III with the *questioni d'amore* and the structured proceedings of an embryonic *brigata* of storytellers. Folgòre's sonnet is a stringent antecedent in its detailing of privileged essences and fragrances for the garden, the activities of the *brigata*, and the *giochi d'acqua*. The Latin fragments insist on the secluded quality of the garden, its shadowed paths, the hydraulic complexity of its irrigation system, its overall artistry. Though for different reasons, and admittedly with different degrees of pertinence, all these intertexts contribute something, probably worth a footnote.

These similarities having been noted, however, Latin and vernacular contextual sources do not exclude the *Rose*. Rather (and at the most), they suggest that in reading the *Decameron* we are presented with a complex interplay between a wider array of common places (*topoi*) and a specific text. Guillaume's *Rose* is certainly part of a topical discourse into which Boccaccio's taps: together with these and other parallel sources they form one of the most classical common places, that of the *locus amoenus*, in its specific garden-variety. However, the density of lexical connections, the clusters of thematic and verbal resonances, the presence of differential thematic elements such as the choice of spices, the perhaps merely accidentally divergent numberings in the catalogue of peaceful animals (thirty in the *Rose*, twenty in the *Decameron*), and the rhetorical insistence on a summative *praeteritio* in enumeration, all have a cumulative effect in singling out the Old-French garden as the target of a specific allusion for the *Decameron*. In sum, if the parallels traditionally proposed are found convincing, the intertextual connections thus established should not be seen as questioning in absolute terms the pre-eminence of the *Rose*: the issue is not one of absolute relevance, but of stratification and differential interplay. Paradoxically, bringing contextual parallels to the understanding of Boccaccio's redeployment of the *topos* actually reinforces the pertinence of the choice intertext as specific and unique. While Boccaccio's readers are invited to keep in mind a plurality of traditional texts –a discourse– when they are reading the *Decameron*, they are asked to keep the *Roman de la Rose* open on their desk.

If this is the case, and Boccaccio's intertextuality is actually a direct and straightforward allusion, a supplementary question arises: is the *Rose* able to account for *all* of Boccaccio's text as an antecedent? The answer is obviously negative. Not everything in Boccaccio's description finds a convincing antecedent in the *Rose*. Allusion and 'imitation' are, of course, creative activities. But in the present case, there is perhaps more: there is at

least one crucial detail of innovation. Boccaccio's text twice insists on the final destination of the water that the fountain at the center of the garden so forcefully pours forth. In what may appear at first reading as a mere quantitative simile, the authorial voice suggests that the water "might have been enough to propel a millstone"; at the end of the passage, the millstone comes back as a literal presence outside the garden but intimately connected to it: the water, "verso il pian discendendo chiarissima, avanti che a quel divenisse, con grandissima forza e con non piccola utilità del signore due mulina volgea." Of course, a simple argument could always be made that the detail of the millstone is motivated merely by extra-literary circumstances: Boccaccio adds a millstone to his villa description because the villa he imagines as the backdrop for the next two days of story-telling actually had one. Barring unforeseen archeological discoveries, the claim cannot be proved — and the argument perhaps is to be discarded.¹⁸ To an argument *a rebus* one may add a converging, and perhaps more compelling, argument *a verbis*: what at first makes its appearance in the text as a simile is then materialized. The fountain's water which started out "as if it could move a millstone" is in the end described as actually "moving a millstone — or two." Both arguments, however, risk missing the central cultural point the text is probably making. When set alongside the *Rose*, the *Decameron* appears to be insisting on the practical function of the fountain. In addition to the aesthetic pleasure that the garden-dwellers may derive from the admirable, gushing fountain and the murmuring streams and rivulets, something that unites them with the *compagnie* of the *Rose*, the *signore* of *this* garden has designed it so that it may offer at once pleasure and profit, *diletto* and *utilità*.¹⁹

Pleasure and profit, were already explicitly (albeit incidentally) at the core of the *Filocolo* passage. In the context of that work, time well spent was at once pleasurable and useful: the irrigation system of the present garden replicates that ideal verbal setting in its architecture. In their *longue durée*, the notions thus joined represent Boccaccio's distinctive and contrasting signature. The garden of Dedit, with its cortège of idleness and levity, was all about pleasure and in no way about profit. Once we put

¹⁸ Having no investment in promoting a specific site, I will refrain from putting Boccaccio's villa on any map. Traditionally, however, Villa Palmieri has been considered the strongest candidate. See, for instance, C. Bichi and M. Zoppi, *Giardini di Toscana* (Firenze: Edifir, 2001).

¹⁹ For an analysis of the two terms in the *Decameron*, see R. Hollander "Utilità," in *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 69-88.

this feature of Boccaccio's garden in focus, its presence acquires the value of a precise antithetical statement, one specifically targeting the *Roman de la Rose*. The pursuit of utility-with-pleasure is the specific difference that separates the members of Boccaccio's *brigata* from the court of love they intertextually mimic.

It may not be a random coincidence that the dialectics between pleasure and profit, beauty and usefulness, can be found in a different, and for Boccaccio radically alternative tradition. *Amoenitas* and *utilitas* are at the core of Classical treatments of villa gardens. In Roman literature, discussions of how the country estates owned by the cultivated ruling class should look like and what purposes they should serve was entrusted to the contrastive terminological couple we find joined in Boccaccio. The theme, first expounded in Varro's *De re rustica*, reaches as far as Pliny the Younger. In the summer of 2005, while collaborating on a study of Boccaccio's use of Livy in the *Decameron*, an Italian colleague, Professor Gaetano Braccini, directed my attention to two epistles by Pliny, which are devoted to a detailed, painstakingly precise and yet fully literary, description of two of his country estates.²⁰ *Ep.* II.17 presents the Laurentine villa (a property Pliny owned on the coast of Latium); *Ep.* V.6 repeats the ekphrastic exercise for a second villa, one he owned in Tuscany.²¹ While the coupling of *amoenitas* and *utilitas* is spelled out in the first letter, it is the second one that may be more interesting to readers of Boccaccio. Below, I quote the text of this second epistle almost in its entirety. In addition to the group I have listed above, I have now bolded other *loci* in the epistle that may be suggested as antecedents for descriptive and thematic details in the *Decameron*. In what may appear a perverse chronological order, I am now glossing Pliny with Boccaccio:

C. PLINIUS DOMITIO APOLLINARI SUOS.

²⁰ See G. Braccini and S. Marchesi, "Livio XXV, 26 e l'Introduzione alla prima giornata: di una possibile tessera classica per il *cominciamento* del *Decameron*," *Italica* 80.2 (2003), 139–46. The notes that follow about the resonance of Pliny's description of his gardens are deeply indebted to my conversations with Professor Braccini.

²¹ For Pliny's treatment of villas in an archeological and cultural vein, see G. Mansuelli, "La villa nelle *Epistulae* di C. Plinio Cecilio Secondo," *Studi Romagnoli* 29 (1978), 59–76; J. Bodel, "Monumental villas and villa monuments," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 10 (1997), 5–35; and A. Riggsby, "Pliny in Space (and Time)," *Arethusa* 36 (2003), 167–86. J. S. Ackerman's vast study *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) clearly outlines the cultural debates surrounding the Roman estates (for Pliny's case, see Chapter 2). For literary meditations on villas, see most recently J. Henderson, *Morals and Villas in Seneca's "Letters": Places to Dwell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

1 Amavi curam et sollicitudinem tuam, quod cum audisses me aestate Tuscos meos petiturum, ne facerem suasisti, dum putas insalubres. 2 **Est sane gravis et pestilens ora Tuscorum**, quae per litus extenditur; sed hi procul a mari recesserunt, quin etiam Appennino saluberrimo montium subiacent. 3 Atque adeo ut omnem pro me metum ponas, accipe temperiem caeli regionis situm villae amoenitatem, quae et tibi auditu et mihi relatu iucunda erunt.

7 Regionis forma pulcherrima. **Imaginare amphitheatrum aliquod immensum, et quale sola rerum natura possit effingere. Lata et diffusa planities montibus cingitur, montes summa sui parte procera nemora et antiqua habent.** 8 Frequens ibi et varia venatio. Inde caeduae silvae cum ipso monte descendunt.

11 **Prata florida et gemmea trifolium aliasque herbas teneras semper et molles et quasi novas alunt.** Cuncta enim perennibus rivis nutriuntur; sed ubi aquae plurimum, palus nulla, **quia devexa terra, quidquid liquoris accepit nec absorbit, effundit in Tiberim.** [Dec. VI. concl.20–24]*

14 **Villa in colle imo sita prospicit quasi ex summo: ita leviter et sensim clivo fallente consurgit**, ut cum ascendere te non putes, sentias ascendisse. [Dec. III.intro.3] A tergo Appenninum, sed longius habet; accipit ab hoc auras quamlibet sereno et placido die, non tamen acres et immodicas, sed spatio ipso lassas et infractas.

17 **Ambit hunc ambulatio pressis varieque tonsis viridibus inclusa; ab his gestatio in modum circi, quae buxum multiformem humilesque et retentas manu arbusculas circumit.** [Dec. III.intro.6] **Omnia maceria muniuntur** [Dec. III.intro.5]: hanc gradata buxus operit et subtrahit. 18 **Pratum inde non minus natura quam superiora illa arte visendum** [Dec. III.intro.8–9]; campi deinde porro multaque alia prata et arbusta.

20 Contra mediam fere porticum diaeta paulum recedit, cingit areolam, quae quattuor platanis inumbratur. **Inter has marmoreo labro aqua exundat** [Dec. III.intro.10] circumiectasque platanos et subiecta platanis leni aspergine fovet.

23 Fonticulus in hoc, in fonte crater; **circa sipunculi plures miscent iucundissimum murmur.** In cornu porticus amplissimum cubiculum triclinio occurrit; aliis fenestris xystum, aliis despicit pratum, sed ante piscinam, quae fenestris servit ac subiacet, strepitu visuque iucunda; 24 nam **ex edito desiliens aqua suscepta marmore albescit.** [Dec. III.intro.9–10]

32 Hanc dispositionem amoenitatemque tectorum longe longeque praecedat hippodromus. Medius patescit statimque intrantium oculis totus offertur, **platanis circumitur; illae hedera vestiuntur utque summae suis ita imae alienis frondibus virent. Hedera truncum et ramos pererrat vicinasque platanos transitu suo copulat.** Has buxus interiacet; exteriores buxos circumvenit laurus, **umbraeque platanorum suam confert.** 33 Rectus hic hippodromi limes in extrema parte hemicyclo frangitur mutatque faciem: cupressis ambitur et tegitur, **densiore umbra opacior nigriorque.** [Dec. III.intro.6]

36 [...] In capite stibadium candido marmore vite protegatur; vitem quattuor columellae Carystiae subeunt. Ex stibadio aqua velut expressa cubantium pondere sipunculis effluit, cavato lapide suscipitur, gracili marmore continetur atque ita occulte temperatur, ut impleat nec redundet. 37 [...] **Contra fons egerit aquam et recipit; nam expulsa in altum in se cadit iunctisque hiatibus et absorbetur et tollitur.**

40 **Hic quoque fons nascitur simulque subducitur. [...] Per totum hippodromum inducti strepunt rivi, et qua manus duxit sequuntur: his nunc illa viridia, nunc haec, interdum simul omnia lavantur.** [*Dec. III.intro.9–11*]

45 Habes causas cur ego Tuscos meos Tusculanis Tiburtinis Praenestinisque praeponam. Nam super illa quae rettuli, altius ibi otium et pinguius eoque securius: nulla necessitas togae, nemo accersitor ex proximo, placida omnia et quiescentia, quod ipsum salubritati regionis ut purius caelum, ut aer liquidior accedit. 46 **Ibi animo, ibi corpore maxime valeo. Nam studiis animum, venatu corpus exerceo. Mei quoque nusquam salubrius degunt; usque adhuc certe neminem ex iis quos eduxeram mecum, — venia sit dicto — ibi amisi.** Di modo in posterum hoc mihi gaudium, hanc gloriam loco servent! Vale.

*) For the pertinence of this fragment, cf. the description of the *valle delle donne*: Secondo che alcuna di loro poi mi ridisse, **il piano, che nella valle era, così era rondo come se a sesta fosse stato fatto, quantunque artificio della natura e non manual paresse.** [...] Le piagge delle quali montagnette così digradando giuso verso il pian discendevano, **come ne' teatri veggiamo** dalla lor sommità i gradi infino all'infimo venire successivamente ordinati, sempre ristignendo il cerchio loro. [...] Il piano appresso, senza aver più entrate che quella donde le donne venute v'erano, **era pieno d'abeti, di cipressi, d'allori e d'alcun pini sì ben composti e sì bene ordinati, come se qualunque è di ciò il migliore artefice gli avesse piantati:** e fra essi **poco sole o niente**, allora che egli era alto, entrava infino al suolo, il quale era tutto un prato d'erba minutissima e piena di fiori porporini e d'altri. (*Dec. VI.concl.20–24*)

When we consider it in its entirety, Pliny's letter appears to be more than simply casually related to Boccaccio's text. First, a geographical consideration: Pliny's villa is in Tuscany. Its larger topographical coordinates (with the peculiar metaphor of the amphitheater common to the two texts) anticipate those of the *Valle delle Donne* on which Day VI comes to a close. Architectural and landscaping details also correspond across the texts: the garden is fully enclosed (*che tutto era da torno murato: omnia maceria muniuntur*); the tender trees (*albuscelli : arbusculas*); the meadows (*pratelli : prata*), the central court in the palace (*un cortile nel mezzo : diaeta cingit areolam*); the fountain pouring forth water (*una fonte di marmo da cui usciva l'acqua che soprabondava al pieno : marmoreo labro aqua exundat*); the little channels irrigating the garden (*canaletti : spicunculi plures, inducti rivi*); the murmuring waters (*dilettevole suono : iucundissimum murmur*); the central water-show (*l'acqua alta verso il cielo, che ...nella fonte chiarissima ricadea : ex edito desiliens aqua*). We have seen all of this, listed as part of the 'common discourse' on villa gardens.

Beyond the frequency of parallel details, however, it is the opening and ending of the letter that seem particularly resonant of the larger themes of the *Decameron*. The care with which Pliny tells his correspondent not to worry about the salubrious nature of his estates in Tuscany brings to the

surface a term that might have caught Boccaccio's eye. Pliny admits that the rest of Tuscany is infested (most likely with malaria), especially along the coast, but his villa is in a more remote area, away from the "gravis et pestilens ora." Fleeing the plague-ridden city, and searching for a similarly safer place (even if only relatively so), the *brigata* seems to be driven by similar considerations (see *Dec. I.intro.* 65-66). Coming from the perspective of the *Decameron*, the evocative power of the word *pestilens* can hardly be overestimated. Both Pliny and Boccaccio's *brigata*, moreover, seem to have been right in their choice: in the envoy of his epistle, Pliny comes back to the practical concern of health and notes, with a touch of *scaramanzia*, that no one of his family (that is, of his slaves) has ever died there. The villa is apparently able to fend off death; the plague cannot walk through the threshold of its garden. Boccaccio's Edenic setting offers a similarly comforting, if just as temporary, shelter.

One final general interpretive remark may bring this exploration of some of Boccaccio's antecedents full circle. For Pliny's letter to be a good intertext, a viable hermeneutic supplement (if not a real alternative) to the overwhelmingly present *Roman de la Rose*, his texts should also be interpretable. The classical intertext should, in other words, be able to bear an alternative meaning — a semantic, cultural advantage over the garden of Dedit. Indeed, in its closing, the epistle may contain a hint at precisely that element of distinction, which will bring us back to the dichotomy of pleasure and profit with which we started. When Pliny writes that his health is never better than when he is in his villa, he also posits an important distinction. The health he refers to is both physical and intellectual: *Ibi animo, ibi corpore maxime valeo. Nam studiis animum, venatu corpus exerceo.* While a regimen of hunting exercises takes care of the body; *studia*, a generic term that embraces all intellectual activities, is what guarantees the mind's health. Being active rather than leisurely, Pliny's retreat into the countryside works as the counter-model for the one set by Guillaume's poem: the winning formula for the *Decameron* is not the one offered by Dedit in the vernacular romance, but a classical *otium cum studiis*. If Eden is to be recovered in full, the first pre-lapsarian mandate needs to be enforced as well: unlike the leisurely company of Dedit, Boccaccio's *brigata* has been given a literary and moral garden to tend. In their story-telling, this is precisely what its members will do.

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