The Decameron

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

Giovanni Boccaccio was born out of wedlock into the Florentine merchant class in the early years of the 14th century. When he was about 13, he moved to Naples, where he apprenticed at his father's bank but found that he disliked the profession. However, his father's business connections granted Boccaccio access to a fine life among the Neapolitan nobility. He began his literary career in Naples, crafting some of his most famous works there, including two epic poems (*Il Filostrato* and *Tesieda*), and a prose romance translation (*Il Filocolo*). In 1338, Boccaccio's father returned from Naples to Florence, where he subsequently went bankrupt. Boccaccio followed him, reluctantly, about two years later, due to eroding political and economic security in Naples. He lost his stepmother in the 1348 outbreak of bubonic plague that is described in *The Decameron*, which he composed between 1349 and 1352. After 1350, Boccaccio became involved in Florentine politics, undertaking diplomatic missions throughout Europe through the 1350s and 1360s. It was as a representative of the city that he hosted the famous Italian poet and humanist Francesco Petrarch. The two remained friends and correspondents until Petrarch's death. In Boccaccio's later years, his writings turned to antifeminist works like *Il Corbaccio* (a dream vision narrating all the failures of women), moralistic biographies, and educational texts. His final years were marked by ill health, due to obesity and congestive heart failure. He died and was buried in Certaldo in 1375.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Decameron was written on the threshold of the Italian Renaissance, during a time of great political, religious, social, and intellectual upheaval in Italy. The failure of King Frederick of Sicily (mentioned in tales on Day II and V) and his successors to unify Italy meant that it had been broken into several competing, politically independent areas by the 14th century. More broadly, Italian political factions were divided between the Guelphs (who supported the pope and internal Italian control) and the Ghibellines (who supported the rule of the Holy Roman Emperor, who ruled present-day German and Italian lands). The Florentines were generally zealous Guelphs, and the political sentiments of members of the *brigata* are mentioned in passing on Day X. Within Florence, ongoing political strife between Guelph and Ghibelline factions led to high-profile political exiles, including Dante, who was exiled in 1302. Boccaccio's life also coincided with the so-called "Babylonian Captivity," or the nearly 70 years in which the pope ruled from Avignon, in France, rather than Rome. Because the Roman Catholic Church was a strong political force in the Middle Ages, its absence from the Italian peninsula contributed to the political infighting and brigandage in some of the collection's tales and contributes to the sense of complete chaos and disorder that pervades the Introduction to Day I. Despite political upheavals, however, Florence itself thrived during the first half of the 13th century, establishing itself as an international banking and trade center. This expansion of mercantile business made Florence and many Florentines wealthy; Boccaccio's father was a successful banker until the Florentine bubble burst in the 1340s. The social mobility and emphasis on business affairs in *The Decameron* reflects the economic and social shifts of the era in which it was composed. However, the Black Death's appearance, in early 1348, devastated the city. Although Boccaccio's description draws from an earlier plague narrative, there is no doubt that Florence, which lost half of its population, was drastically altered by the catastrophe that provides the narrative basis for *The Decameron*. Finally, on the cusp of the Renaissance, Boccaccio joined his friend and teacher, Petrarch, as a key figure in the development of humanism, which emphasizes the power of human, rather than divine, agency. Boccaccio's humanist ideals are evident in his scholarly work, which includes a survey of Dante's poetry, an encyclopedia of geographical allusions in ancient literature, and a genealogy of the Greek and Roman gods. *The Decameron* itself shows a humanist spirit by investing all sorts of human affairs—from romantic affairs and royal weddings to trade deals and customs-houses to sexual liaisons and ingenious trickery—with importance.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Giovanni Boccaccio is considered one of the "three crowns" of Italian literature, along with Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) and Francesco Petrarch (1304–1374). Dante was Boccaccio's favorite poet, and *The Decameron*, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, explores many facets of human nature—both good and bad. Moreover, many of the tales in *The Decameron* draw on ideas about the divinity of love expressed in the works of the *Dolce Stil Novo* group of poets, which Dante founded. The literary forebears of this movement, and of *The Decameron* itself, include *Roman de la Rose*, written in two parts by Guillaume de Lorris (c. 1230) and Jean de Meun (c. 1275). In this work, a lover falls asleep and dreams of being admitted into a lavishly beautiful garden where he becomes an acolyte of the God of Love (Cupid), who tells him love's commandments and causes him to fall in love with a rose (allegorically representing a

beautiful woman). The other primary source for *fin'amors*, or "refined loving," is the *De Amore*, written c. 1186–1190 by a man called Andreas Capellanus as an instructional guidebook for those who want to be successful courtly lovers. Many of *The Decameron*'s tales of sexual hijinks and misadventures come from the French fabliaux tradition, and from the earliest surviving Western novel, *The Golden Ass*, written by Apuleius in the second century. The frame narrative structure of *The Decameron* bears a marked similarity to *1001 Nights*, a collection of Middle Eastern folktales, although it's more likely that Boccaccio borrowed the frame idea from *The Seven Sages*, another collection of Eastern tales. In the century after Boccaccio's death, Geoffrey Chaucer used a frame narrative structure and borrowed some of his tales for *The Canterbury Tales*: the "Clerk's Tale" draws from Petrarch's Latin translation of Boccaccio's Griselda narrative (*The Decameron*'s final tale), and at least three other *Canterbury* tales (Franklin, Merchant, and Reeve) derive from *The Decameron* or from shared source material. And Shakespeare developed two plays from Boccaccio's work: *All's Well That Ends Well* is based on the story of Gilette of Narbonne from Day III, and *Cymbeline* comes from the tale of Bernabò and Zinerva on Day II.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Decameron, or Prince Galahalt
- **When Written:** Between 1349 and 1352
- **Where Written:** Florence
- **When Published:** 1352
- **Literary Period:** Medieval
- **Genre:** A collection of short stories, including examples of history, romance, pastoral, fabliaux, and other medieval genres.
- **Setting:** Florence and the surrounding countryside, 1349
- **Climax:** Each tale has its own climax.
- **Antagonist:** Each tale has its own antagonist.
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Love-Children. In one of his poems, Giovanni Boccaccio mourns the death of a beloved daughter, Violante, after whom two characters in *The Decameron* are named. It appears that she, and her four siblings, were all illegitimate, as Boccaccio himself was.

Boccaccio's Little Flame. Boccaccio suggests that he fell in love with Maria d'Aquino, illegitimate daughter of King Robert of Naples, after whom he created characters named "Fiammetta" or "little flame" in no fewer than eight of his works. However, Boccaccio may have invented this unreciprocated affair to increase his credibility within the tradition of *fin'amors* or "refined loving" that was popular in the Middle Ages.

PLOT SUMMARY

In 1348, the Bubonic Plague ravages the city of Florence, turning society upside down. During these dark days, seven young women—Pampinea, Fiammetta, Filomena, Emilia, Lauretta, Neifile, and Elissa—run into each other at the church of Santa Maria Novella. Pampinea suggests they temporarily flee the city to escape the plague. They recruit three men, Panfilo, Filostrato, and Dioneo, to join them and (along with their servants) they leave the city. In the countryside, Pampinea suggests that they pass the hot afternoons telling each other tales in cool **gardens**. Over the next two weeks (taking a break on Fridays and Saturdays), the members of the group, or brigata, tell ten stories apiece. Each day, one member rules as sovereign, directing the day's entertainment and setting the tales' theme.

Pampinea rules Day I. Although the day doesn't have an explicit theme, its tales all showcase human ingenuity and wisdom. Excessively wicked Cepperello cons his way into sainthood; Jewish Abraham's intellectual curiosity leads to his Christian conversion; and another Jew, Melchizedek, wisely avoids a dangerous question about whether Judaism, Christianity, or Islam is the true faith. A Young Tuscan Monk cleverly implicates his Tuscan Abbot in his own sexual sins, while the Marchioness of Montferrat subtly rebukes King Philip II for his inappropriate desire to sleep with her. A blasphemous citizen exposes religious hypocrisy. Courtier Bergamino criticizes his sovereign's stinginess with a parable, and Guiglielmo Borsiere criticizes Ermino de' Grimaldi's with a few words. A woman's cutting censure over the failure of the King of Cyprus to protect his citizens transforms his character, and Master Alberto shames some young women for mocking him. At the end of the day, the *brigata* decides to set themes for the tales, and Dioneo successfully petitions to ignore the themes and tell the tales he wants as the last speaker of the day.

The theme of the second day, under the rule of Filomena, is **Fortune**. Martellino's fortunes fall when it appears that he's mocking a local saint, only to rise again when he's saved from execution. After highwaymen rob Rinaldo d'Asti, he's taken in, fed, and bedded by a fine lady. Alessandro secretly marries a princess, restoring his uncles' twice-wasted fortunes. Merchant Landolfo Rufolo turns to piracy and although he's shipwrecked, he does make a fortune with some priceless jewels he recovers from the vessel; likewise, a Sicilian Woman cons Andreuccio out of his cash, but he regains his wealth through the theft of a giant ruby. Beritola is separated from her sons in exile, but they are reunited and restored to their homeland after many years. Fortune sends Alatiel through the hands of seven men after her shipwreck. Count Walter and his children, unfairly exiled, are

eventually reunited and returned to grace in France. Zinerva, suspected of cheating by her husband Bernabò, is cast out of her home, but her ingenuity protects her and allows her to recover her reputation, husband, and wealth. In Dioneo's tale, sexual weakling Ricciardo di Chinzica loses his wife to the pirate Paganino.

Neifile rules Day III, which explores the theme of perseverance. Masetto follows through on his plan to infiltrate a convent and bed the nuns. King Agilulf and his Groom engage in a cat-and-mouse game after the Groom sleeps with the Queen. A conniving Florentine Noblewoman makes a Florentine Friar the unwitting go-between of her affair. Friar Puccio zealously pursues holiness while Dom Felice pursues Puccio's Wife. Zima, undeterred by Francesco Vergellisi's stumbling blocks, finds a way to declare his affections for Francesco's Wife. Ricciardo Minutolo tricks Catella into sex, while Tedaldo's cleverness saves his lover's husband from execution. The Womanizing Priest imprisons simple-minded Ferondo, who believes that he's persevering in Purgatory until he's miraculously "resurrected." Gilette's unwavering intelligence, love, and honor eventually win her noble husband's love. And Alibech pursues sex so whole-heartedly that she nearly exhausts her lover.

On Day IV, Filostrato commands the *brigata* to tell tales of unhappy lovers, since he himself is one. The day's heartbreaking stories begin with Ghismonda's suicide. And after the funny tale of Friar Alberto impersonating an angel to conduct an affair, the stories return to tragedy. Three sisters run away with their lovers, and all six end up dead or exiled; Gerbino's attempt to kidnap the Tunisian Princess he loves leads to the death of both; Lisabetta dies of grief after her brothers steal the relics of her lover, whom they murdered. Andreuola's secret husband, Gabriotto, dies tragically. Simona and Pasquino are accidentally poisoned. Guillaume de Roussillon serves his wife his best friend's heart to punish her for their affair. Dioneo lightens the mood with the story of Ruggieri accidentally drinking a sleeping potion while visiting his lover.

Fiammetta balances out Filostrato with the theme of happy lovers on Day V. Cimon's love for Iphigenia ennobles him. Separated couples, like Gostanza and Martuccio Gomito and Pietro Boccamazza and Agnolella are reunited and married. Ricciardo Manardi and Caterina's night of lovemaking is followed by a shotgun wedding in the morning. The secret identities of Agnesa, Gianni and Restituta, and Teodoro are all revealed by their love affairs. After much grief and expense, Nastagio degli Onesti and Federigo degli Alberighi ultimately marry their ladies. And, while Pietro Vinciolo is upset about his wife's lover, when they agree to share him, everyone spends the night happily.

Day VI begins with an argument among the servants about how frequently women go to their weddings as virgins. After Dioneo settles the question (answer: practically never), Elissa guides the company into their tales of retort and riposte. Madonna Oretta rebukes a knight's poor storytelling; Cisti rebukes a rich man's apparent greediness; and Nonna de' Pulci claps back at the Bishop of Florence and his lustful friend. Chichibio's quick answer saves him from a beating. Forese da Rabatta and Giotto tease each other over their ugliness, while Michele Scalza "proves" that the Baronci are famously ugly because God made them before he knew what he was doing. Madonna Filippa's cleverness averts her execution for adultery. Fresco caustically criticizes his shallow niece, while Guido Cavalcanti hints at the empty heads of members of the Florentine nobility. Finally, with a clever pivot, Friar Cipolla hides the theft of his alleged relics.

The servants' argument on the previous day inspires Dioneo's theme for Day VII, the tricks women play on their husbands. Monna Tessa convinces her husband that her lover is a werewolf; Peronella convinces her husband that hers is buying their tub, then has sex with the lover while the husband cleans the tub. Surprised by her husband's return home, Madonna Agnesa pretends that her lover was doctoring their sick child. Tofano locks his cheating wife out of the house, but she tricks him into running outside and locks *him* out. A lonely wife sees through her jealous husband's disguise as her confessor, but he misses the clever strategy by which she sees her lover. Quick thinking allows Madonna Isabella to save her lover and rid herself of an unwanted admirer. Madonna Beatrice doesn't only cheat on her husband but tricks him into a position where her lover can beat him for her entertainment. Madonna Sismonda both escapes her husband's punishment for an affair and successfully makes him look like a fool. Lydia has sex with her lover in front of her husband, while convincing him he's seeing a magical vision. And two Sienese men discover that the taboo against sleeping with a godchild's mother doesn't mean anything in Purgatory.

Lauretta continues the fun on Day VIII, with stories about tricks played by men and women. Gulfardo tricks Guasparruolo's Wife out of a payment for sex, as the Worthy Priest also does to Belcolore. Bruno and Buffalmacco convince Calandrino he's discovered a magical stone. Piccarda rids herself of an unwanted admirer by tricking him into sleeping with her ugly maid. Three Florentine pranksters publicly pull down a judge's breeches. Bruno and Buffalmacco steal Calandrino's pig. A scholar in love with the widowed Elena viciously punishes her for tricking him into spending the night waiting for her in a snowy courtyard. Zeppa di Mino has sex with his friend's wife after he discovers Spinelloccio Tavena has been having sex with his own. Bruno and Buffalmacco get free meals from Simone da Villa, then dump him in a cesspit. And after a Sicilian conwoman scams Salabaetto, he tricks her in the exact same way.

On Day IX, Emilia allows her companions to tell tales of their choice. Although there isn't a set theme, each of the day's tales recalls or builds on a previously told story. Like Piccarda,

Francesca frees herself from unwanted lovers. Joining other lustful monks and nuns, Sister Isabetta's indiscretions lead to the discovery of Abbess Usimbalda's. Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Simone da Villa convince Calandrino that he's pregnant. Cecco Fortarrigo cheats Cecco Angiulieri of his worldly possessions. Bruno and company are at it again when they encourage Calandrino to pursue an affair with a prostitute, then reveal his actions to his wife. Two young gentlemen, staying in the home of a generous Host, hop in and out of beds all night, sleeping with the Host's Wife and daughter, Miss Niccolosa. Female stubbornness (previously demonstrated by Elena) reappears in the character of Margarita, who ignores her husband's prophetic dream and is mauled by a wolf. Biondello and Ciacco, professional mooches, play reciprocal tricks on each other (like Zeppa and Spinelloccio). And Solomon teaches Joseph how to properly beat his wife into submission, unlike Margarita. The day's final tale sees a priest using a magical "ritual" to have sex with his friend's wife right in front of him (like Lydia).

The tales of generosity on the final day, under the rule of Panfilo, evolve as the company members compete amongst themselves to come up with the most extreme example of generosity. King Alfonso rewards Ruggieri de' Figiovanni despite his bad luck. Ghino di Tacco generously cures the Abbot of Cluny, so the Abbot generously repairs Ghino's rift with the papacy. Nathan is willing to give Mithridanes his very life. Gentile de' Carisendi, despite feeling that he deserves to keep Madonna Catalina after rescuing her from death, nevertheless generously returns her to her husband. Gilberto, Ansaldo, and the Magician all try to outdo each other's generosity after a rash promise nearly forces Dianora to sleep with Ansaldo against her will. King Charles overcomes his lust for Ginevra and Isotta, generously providing them dowries and husbands. King Peter likewise rewards Lisa's noble sentiments with a husband, riches, and a noble title. Friendship inspires Gisippus to offer his fiancée to Titus, and Titus to risk his life to save Gisippus from execution. Torello and Saladin compete fiercely to be the most generous host. And finally, Gualtieri offers an antithetical portrait of extreme and unjustified meanness in his torturous tests of his wife's obedience.

As the tales of Day X end, Panfilo suggests that the company return to Florence before they attract any unwanted visitors or fall victim to rumors of sexual impropriety, although they've lived a moderate, balanced, and moral life in the countryside. The members of the company return to the city and disperse to their own homes. And in an Epilogue, Boccaccio has the last word in *The Decameron*, as he refutes any claims that his tales are improper.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Boccaccio – Boccaccio is the voice of *The Decameron*'s narrator—which may or may not be the same as Giovanni Boccaccio, the book's author. Although in both the Prologue and Epilogue, Boccaccio claims that he simply records the tales as told by the members of the brigata, he neither places himself in the action nor identifies himself with any of the male storytellers. The scant biographical details he offers indicate that he is bourgeois rather than aristocratic, that he is a working poet, that he once experienced fin'amors when he fell in love with a noblewoman who didn't return his affections, and that now he is a white-haired elder. Time, by the grace of God, made his burning love more bearable, so out of gratitude, he offers *The Decameron* as an entertaining diversion and an educational text for fine ladies. At the beginning of Day IV, Boccaccio defends himself against the criticisms that he is overfond of ladies with a parable and an appeal to nature, which gives men and women bodies to love and be loved. He claps back at critics who think his work unworthy of patronage, since enough people like his work for him to make a living. He also demonstrates the verbal play and wittiness that make so many of the tales entertaining when he lists graphic puns in the Epilogue, or when he subtitles his book, "Prince Galahat," after the stereotypical lovers' go-between of medieval literature. The personality of Boccaccio allows Giovanni Boccaccio to defend himself against potential critics, stake a claim for the value of vernacular literature, and indulge in fierce anticlerical satire while also maintaining a winking distance from all the ideas expressed in the tales, some of which are pornographic or blasphemous.

Pampinea – The oldest of the brigata's women, Pampinea's name means "full of vigor," and she is indeed a natural leader. In allegorical readings of the book, she is associated with the Christian virtue of prudence. She is related to one of the men, although it is not clear which one, and she brings her maid, Misia, with her to the countryside. The reasonable wisdom she demonstrates in proposing the company's sojourn in the countryside leads her companions to unanimously elect her the sovereign of Day I, and the company continues to follow the routine she establishes throughout the whole two weeks. She cares deeply about how women behave, praising the witty and the careful while criticizing the obstinate. Her own speech and actions are witty, confident, and lively. She shows both an ability to read the room and to restore balance when she counteracts a particularly grisly story (Ghismonda's suicide) with a funny one (Friar Alberto impersonating an angel).

Fiammetta – Fiammetta is a member of the brigata, whose name means "little flame." In allegorical readings of the book, she is associated with temperance because she is so frequently in the company of Dioneo (who represents lust). She takes her maid, Stratilia, with her to the countryside. Notably, Fiammetta is the only narrator described in physical detail, and she has long, golden curls, pure white skin, a round face, ruby-red lips,

and eyes that gleam like a falcon. This is particularly interesting since Giovanni Boccaccio includes a character named "Fiammetta" in at least eight of his major works, and these characters are often understood to represent the woman whom he loved. In *The Decameron*, Fiammetta plays the viol and is the sovereign of Day V, which focuses on happy lovers.

Filomena – Filomena is a member of the brigata, whose name means either "the beloved" or "the lover of song." Because Giovanni Boccaccio dedicates another of his works, *Il Filostrato*, to a "Filomena," she may be the object of Filostrato's affections within the company. Thus, in allegorical readings of the text, she is associated with fortitude since she can withstand Filostrato's anger. She takes her maid, Liscia, with her to the countryside. She is the sovereign of Day II, which takes **fortune** as its theme. Among the ladies, she initially seems to be the most cautious, worrying about the discord and strife that will follow if they leave Florence without men to guide them, but she's also one to whom the other women look for guidance. She signals her virtue when she rebukes Neifile for fearing gossip, claiming that no one should be afraid of what others say if their consciences are clear before God. However, the song she sings on Day VII strongly suggests that she's newly in love and that she may even have gone farther than just exchanging looks with this man, exciting speculation and envy among her peers.

Emilia – Emilia is a member of the brigata, whose name means something like "the attractive one." She is the sovereign on Day IX, where she gives her companions free reign to choose stories on topics of their choice. She is associated with feminine charm and humility; when Lauretta, crowning her, comments on her beauty, she blushes the color of roses.

Lauretta – Lauretta is a member of the brigata. Her name is a diminutive form of "Laura." Because "Laura" was the name under which Petrarch described the love that inspired his sonnets, she thus links Giovanni Boccaccio's work with that of his friend and mentor. She travels to the countryside with her maid, Chimera, and she is crowned the sovereign of Day VIII, featuring pranks and tricks. She writes her own songs, as she tells Filostrato at the end of Day III, and her plaintive song introduces the unsuccessful lovers theme of Day IV.

Neifile – Neifile is a member of the brigata. Her name means "newly enamored" and has been understood to connect her to Dante and the Dolce Stil Novo love poetry tradition. She thus links Giovanni Boccaccio's work and fame with the work of his favorite poet. She is initially embarrassed at the thought of going to the country with the *brigata*'s men, as she is the object of one's affections—although it's never revealed which one. Accordingly, she worries that if they go away from Florence unchaperoned, they will be subject to gossip and dishonor. Yet, she indulges in sexual innuendo while crowning Filostrato the sovereign of Day IV, demonstrating the pithy wit and repartee that women should be known for. She is cheerful and modest, blushing and casting down her eyes when Filomena crowns her the sovereign of Day III, and frequently downplaying her talents before telling her tales. Her theme is perseverance in the face of **fortune**'s whims, and it's she who instigates the observation of rest and prayer over the weekend.

Elissa – The last female member of the brigata, Elissa is another name by which Dido, an abandoned wife from Virgil's *Aeneid*, is called. In allegorical readings, then, she associates Giovanni Boccaccio's work with Virgil as an early Italian (Roman) poet, linking his present fame to his illustrious forebears. She is the sovereign of Day VII, which takes retort and repartee as its theme. In her role as sovereign, she becomes impatient with the smutty songs Dioneo offers to sing at the end of Day V. Her own song, sung at the end of Day VI, is accompanied by adorable little sighs and stuns her companions with its veiled allusions to the damage love has caused her physically and mentally. She is the one who takes the ladies to visit the Valley of the Ladies at the end of Day VI.

Panfilo – Panfilo is the one of the three men who join the brigata. His name literally means "all loving." In allegorical readings of the book, he is associated with reason, balancing out Filostrato (anger) and Dioneo (lust). He travels to the countryside with his valet, Sirisco. Pampinea invites him to tell the first story on the first day, and he is crowned the sovereign of Day X, with munificence (generosity) as its theme. It's also Panfilo who suggests that the company return to Florence before their idyll in the country can be marred by gossip or unwanted guests. His song, like Elissa's and Filomena's, excites speculation among his friends over its implication that he has already found what he was looking for with his beloved.

Filostrato – Filostrato is the second of the brigata's men. His name means "defeated by love." In allegorical readings of the book, he is associated with anger, a trait he displays when Pampinea tells a silly tale of frustrated lovers instead of a tragic one. As he complains when he's crowned sovereign of Day IV, he himself has been unlucky in love. Because another of Giovanni Boccaccio's works, titled *Il Filostrato*, is dedicated to a "Filomena," it's possible that Filomena is the object of his unreturned affections. Moreover, his tales throughout *The Decameron* frequently have a sexual component that sometimes denigrates women. However, he is gallant, and tolerates his companions' complaints about his depressing topic, even making amends with an excellent tale of successful lovers on Day V. When Neifile crowns him sovereign, he engages in some sexually charged jesting with her, but quickly backs off when he realizes that he's met his match (if not his superior) in her wit. He travels to the countryside with his servant, Tindaro.

Dioneo – Dioneo is the third of the brigata's men. His name links him with Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, and in allegorical readings of the book, he is associated with lust. He has singular charm and a quick wit and is the liveliest of the storytellers. After the first day, he always tells the last tale, and

eight of his ten stories feature sexual hijinks. Two are quite pornographic and were frequently edited or cut from early translations and editions of *The Decameron*. He travels to the countryside with his valet, Parmeno, and when the *brigata* are entertaining themselves throughout the day, he is frequently in the company of Fiammetta, singing songs of famous lovers. He establishes the absolute divorce between the horrors of plague-ravaged Florence and the beautiful countryside by first declaring that he's left all his troubles behind. He often accompanies the evening singing and dancing with his lute. He's also charmingly self-deprecating, as when he declares that the king on a chessboard would do a better job of ruling the company than himself. He travels to the countryside with his servant Sirisco.

Sirisco – Sirisco is Panfilo's servant, whom Pampinea puts in charge of the brigata's money as treasurer and purchaser of goods. In this capacity, he works under the instructions of Parmeno. His name, like the rest of the servants', derives from classical Roman plays and indicates his servile status while also suggesting a timelessness to *The Decameron*.

Tindaro – Tindaro serves as Filostrato's servant, and Pampinea assigns him to also help Dioneo and Panfilo when their servants—Parmeno and Sirisco—are attending to their communal duties as steward and treasurer. His name derives from classical Roman plays and indicates his servile status as well as the timelessness of *The Decameron*. At the beginning of Day VI, he gets into an argument with Liscia when he states his belief that his friend Sirisco's wife was a virgin on her wedding night. He thus serves as an example of the overly credulous man, along with many of the tales' husbands, but especially Bernabò.

Misia – Misia is Pampinea's maid. Along with Liscia, her mistress puts her in charge of the kitchen after the brigata leaves Florence. She's responsible to carry out Parmeno's instructions for meals. Her antique-sounding name is drawn from classical Roman plays and serves to indicate her subservient role as well as to emphasize the tales' timelessness.

Liscia – Liscia is Filomena's maid, and Pampinea assigns her to kitchen duty with Misia, bringing Parmeno's plans for meals to fruition. At the beginning of Day VI, she fights with Tindaro, arguing that his friend Sirisco's wife was certainly not a virgin on her wedding night. She performs the gender- and class-based stereotype of the talkative, somewhat abusive, and crude lower-class woman. Moreover, her insistence that women aren't foolish enough, as a rule, to preserve their virginity for marriage or to be chaste afterwards provides the impetus for the tales on Day VII.

Chimera – Chimera is Lauretta's maid. Outside of Florence, Pampinea pairs her with Stratilia and assigns her to look after the needs of all the ladies. Her name, like the rest of the servants', draws from classical Roman drama and indicates servility and the suspension of time in the frame narrative of *The Decameron*.

Ciappelletto – Cepperello, called Sir Ciappelletto by the French, appears in the first tale of *The Decameron*, told by Panfilo (I, 1). Based on a near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, in this tale, Cepperello is described as a short little notary from Prato. He's also possibly the wickedest man that ever lived: he not only lies, cheats, murders, gambles, and sleeps around, but he takes more pride in his sins than most people do in their virtue. He's also a great liar, able to dupe the Holy Friar into believing that he is such a holy person that he ends up being venerated as a saint.

Holy Friar – The Holy Friar appears in Panfilo's tale of Ciappelletto (I, 1). He is a holy and well-respected French friar (priest or monk) who hears Ciappelletto's dying confession and believes him to be an example for other Christians. His willingness to believe Ciappelletto both indicates his own innocence and demonstrates the inability of the church to properly judge the state of human souls.

Abraham – Abraham appears in Neifile's first tale (I, 2). He is friends with Jehannot de Chevigny As an extremely rich moneylender and a Jew, he represents commonly reviled categories in medieval Europe. But his wisdom and virtue earn him Christian friends and eventually lead him to convert despite the evident sinfulness of church leaders. In this way, he represents the medieval idea of the "virtuous pagan," and his conversion is a means to prove the superiority of Christian theology to other religions.

Melchizedek – Melchizedek appears in Filomena's first tale. He is an extremely wealthy Jewish moneylender living in Egypt under Saladin. Saladin's belief that Melchizedek won't willingly lend money aligns him with the medieval stereotype of the miserly usurer. But he also represents the "wise Jew" that was popular in medieval literature, and his wit and quick thinking ultimately earn him Saladin's respect and friendship.

Saladin – Saladin appears in Filomena's first story (I, 3) and Panfilo's tenth story (X, 9). In the first tale, he evaluates Melchizedek's wisdom, and in the second, he cunningly disguises himself to gather reconnaissance on the European forces before the Third Crusade, during which time he becomes the guest of Torello and Adalieta. He is based on a historical figure, Salah ad-Din, a respected Muslim leader who lived from 1137–1193 and led the Muslim military forces during the Third Crusade. In medieval Europe, Saladin had a reputation for diplomacy, military prowess, scholarship, and generosity, all traits which he shows in his two appearances in *The Decameron*.

Young Monk – The Young Monk appears in Dioneo's first tale (I, 4). He lives in a Tuscan monastery under the leadership of the Tuscan Abbot. When he encounters the Country Girl, he succumbs to his lust, both demonstrating the overwhelming

power desire has over people and becoming the first of many examples of clerical hypocrisy around sexual abstinence. He also demonstrates devious cleverness when he tempts his Abbot into committing the same sin.

Tuscan Abbot – The Tuscan Abbot appears in Dioneo's first tale (I, 4), where he oversees the monastery where the Young Monk lives. He is an example of clerical hypocrisy around sex, since he gives in to the same urges as the Young Monk and has sex with the Country Girl. But, in his ongoing series of poor decisions (not to confront the Young Monk immediately, not to publicly confront the Girl), he also represents the self-delusion that characterizes many of the religious figures in *The Decameron*.

The Country Girl – The County Girl appears in Dioneo's first tale (I, 4) as the lover first of the Young Monk and then of the Tuscan Abbot. Her striking beauty represents the power of sexual desire, and her willingness to have sex with both men demonstrates misogynistic medieval beliefs about women's excessive sexual appetite.

Marchioness of Montferrat – The Marchioness of Montferrat appears in Fiammetta's first tale (I, 5) as a portrait of the idealized medieval woman. Because she is beautiful, she attracts the love of King Philip II; because she is virtuous, clever, and tactful, she cools his passions without sacrificing either her honor or her safety.

King Philip II – King Philip II appears in Fiammetta's first tale (I, 5), as a fictionalized version of a medieval French king who reigned 1169–1223. He falls in love with the Marchioness of Montferrat based on her reputation, and he surprises her at home to try and take her as his lover. His desire, as a form of *amor du lonh* (love from afar), participates in the fin'amors tradition, and he demonstrates true nobility of character when he takes the Marchioness's hints and leaves without trying to convince her or take her by force.

Franciscan Inquisitor – The Franciscan Inquisitor appears in Emilia's first tale (I, 6), where he gives the Blasphemous Citizen excessive penance for a minor sin. Inquisitors were church officials charged with rooting out heretical (unorthodox) beliefs, but greed motivates the Franciscan Inquisitor at least as much as Christian doctrine. He thus engages in simony (selling church favors for money) and is a target of *The Decameron*'s ongoing anticlerical satire.

Blasphemous Citizen – The Blasphemous Citizen appears as the Franciscan Inquisitor's victim in Emilia's first tale (I, 6). His "sin" is bragging that Christ would have enjoyed his fine wine, but he's targeted because he has enough wealth to escape most of his penance with a generous donation to the Franciscans. When he criticizes the Church's greed and lack of charity towards the poor, he becomes a mouthpiece for *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire.

Can Grande della Scalla – Can Grande appears in Filostrato's first tale (I, 7). He is based on a historical figure who ruled Verona during Giovanni Boccaccio's lifetime and who was renowned for his military successes and his generosity. Yet, in *The Decameron*, he initially refuses to give his invited guests the customary **gifts**. When, after Bergamino's parable about Primas and the Abbot of Cluny, he resumes his customary generosity, he represents medieval ideas about the obligation of the wealthy aristocracy to be courteous and generous.

Bergamino – Bergamino appears in Filostrato's first tale (I, 7) as an extremely witty and brilliant entertainer invited and repudiated by Can Grande della Scalla. He demonstrates the value of quick wit and rhetorical brilliance when he shows Can Grande the error of his ways with a parable, cleverly correcting his social superior without inciting his anger.

Primas – Primas appears in Bergamino's tale-in-a-tale about generosity (I,7). Based on a famously witty 13th-century cleric and Latin poet, in Filostrato's version, a broke and unlucky Primas decides to call on the Abbot of Cluny to get a free meal. When the Abbot refuses charity, Primas teaches him the error of his ways.

Abbot of Cluny – The Abbot of Cluny appears in Filostrato's first tale (I, 7) and Elissa's tenth (X, 2). In both cases, his character is based in a medieval belief that the Abbot of Cluny—a famously wealthy and culturally powerful monastery—was the richest monk in Europe. In Filostrato's tale, his meals are lavish, while in Elissa's, he ruins his stomach from overindulgence in food and wine. He thus represents the worldliness of many figures in the medieval church, who lived like grand lords rather than humble monks and priests, contributing to *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire. His wealth, as well as his initial lack of generosity to Primas and hatred towards Ghino di Tacco, add him to the ongoing critique of clerical greed and sinfulness in *The Decameron*, yet in both cases he is persuaded to see the error of his ways.

Ermino de' Grimaldi – Ermino de' Grimaldi appears in Lauretta's first tale (I, 8), where he appears to be a fictionalized character based on a historical family, the ancient and powerful Genoese Grimaldis. He is an extremely wealthy miser who spends as little of his fortune on himself and others as he can. He thus represents the antithesis of the noble generosity celebrated throughout *The Decameron* and must learn the error of his ways from Guiglielmo Borsiere.

Gascon Gentlewoman – The Gascon Gentlewoman appears in Elissa's first tale (I, 9) as a pilgrim returning from Jerusalem. When she is raped in Cyprus—demonstrating the vulnerability of women to physical violence—her witty mockery of the ineffective King of Cypress shames him into action. She thus demonstrates the value of wit and wisdom in women's words.

King of Cyprus – The King of Cypress appears in Elissa's first tale (I, 9) as an extremely cowardly and ineffective ruler. The character is based on the historical figure Guy de Lusignan, a

notoriously weak king crowned during the Third Crusade. His transformation at the words of the Gascon Gentlewoman demonstrates nobility of character, however belated.

Master Alberto – Master Alberto appears in Pampinea's first story (I, 10). He is an old but brilliant Bolognese physician, based on one of Giovanni Boccaccio's contemporaries, a doctor named Alberto de' Zancari. He falls in love with Malgherida de' Ghisolieri despite his age, and when she and her friends mock him, he chastises them with some cuttingly clever remarks. He demonstrates the value placed on witty repartee throughout *The Decameron* and contributes to its arguments that one's character matters more than things like class, wealth, or age.

Malgherida de' Ghisolieri – Malgherida de' Ghisolieri appears in Pampinea's first tale (I, 10) as a beautiful and witty young widow who attracts the attentions of Master Alberto. After she and her ladies mock his feelings and he puts them back in their place with some dignified and witty retorts, she learns to respect his character more than his external appearance.

Arrigo – Arrigo appears in Neifile's second story (II, 1). He is a German man living in Treviso (Italy) as a poor porter who is renowned for his saintly ways. After his death, the people of Treviso venerate him as a saint. Martellino, Stecchi, and Marchese run into trouble for appearing to mock his sainthood.

Martellino –Martellino appears in Neifile's tale (II, 1) as a fictionalized version of a real Florentine clown. He visits Treviso with Marchese and Stecchi, pretends to be paralyzed to get close to Arrigo's body, then pretends to be miraculously healed. He's thus one of many figures in *The Decameron* who plays tricks and pranks. He's also **fortune**'s plaything: he's beaten by an angry mob for his alleged mockery of their saint, tortured, and nearly executed before his friends and Sandro Agolanti secure his release.

Sandro Agolanti – Sandro Agolanti appears in Neifile's second tale (II, 1). A Florentine living in Treviso, he is an influential friend of the local ruler. When Stecchi, Marchese, and their landlord tell him Martellino's story, he finds it amusing and intercedes on the clown's behalf with the prince. Thus, he is part of **fortune**'s reversals in Martellino's misadventures.

Rinaldo d'Asti – Rinaldo d'Asti is the protagonist of Filostrato's second tale (II, 2). He is a wealthy and devout merchant who places himself in the care of St. Julian (patron saint of travelers). He experiences **fortune**'s reversals when he is robbed on the road, then rescued by the Lady of Guiglielmo Fortress—who gives him food, shelter, and sexual favors—then set to rights when the thieves are apprehended and his property is returned.

Lady of Guiglielmo Fortress – The Lady of Guiglielmo Fortress appears in Filostrato's second tale (II, 2) as an unnamed widow who has become the lover of a local lord. She demonstrates misogynistic medieval stereotypes about excessive female lust when she sleeps with Rinaldo d'Asti, a stranger, after her lover fails to show up. She is also an agent of **fortune** in rescuing Rinaldo from the harsh elements.

Lamberto – Lamberto is a Florentine merchant who appears in Pampinea's second tale (II, 3). He and his brothers Tebaldo and Agolante inherit their father's huge fortune, spend it recklessly, become successful moneylenders in England, then spend their second fortune recklessly again. They're rescued by the good **fortune** of their nephew, Alessandro. They thus illustrate the turns of fortune's wheel, alternately elevated then humbled.

Tebaldo – Tebaldo is a Florentine merchant who appears in Pampinea's second tale (II, 3). He and his brothers Lamberto and Agolante inherit their father's huge fortune, spend it recklessly, become successful moneylenders in England, then spend their second fortune recklessly again. They're rescued by the good **fortune** of their nephew, Alessandro. They thus illustrate the turns of fortune's wheel, alternately elevated then humbled.

Agolante – Agolante is a Florentine merchant who appears in Pampinea's second tale (II, 3). He and his brothers Lamberto and Tebaldo inherit their father's huge fortune, spend it recklessly, become successful moneylenders in England, then spend their second fortune recklessly again. They're rescued by the good **fortune** of their nephew, Alessandro. They thus illustrate the turns of fortune's wheel, alternately elevated then humbled.

Alessandro – Alessandro appears in Pampinea's second tale (II, 3). He's the nephew of Lamberto, Tebaldo, and Agolante, and he takes over their moneylending business in England when his uncles return to Italy. He has solid business sense and good connections, so he earns his family great wealth before **fortune** interrupts his success in the form of a civil war. On his way home, he travels in the company of the Abbot in White. When he secretly marries the disguised princess, by the grace of fortune, the will of God, and his own good character, he's elevated from the merchant class to royalty.

Abbot in White – The Abbot in White is an English princess disguised as a man in Pampinea's second tale (II, 3). She travels in disguise for her protection (demonstrating female vulnerability) because she plans to run away from her father to avoid a forced marriage (demonstrating the secondary status of women in a patriarchal medieval society). When she meets Alessandro, she falls in love with him and marries him secretly, thus demonstrating her own virtue and avoiding any charges of excessive or uncontrollable female sexuality. In elevating Alessandro's social position, she is an agent of **fortune**, and she is also its beneficiary when she gets a young and handsome husband instead of an old man.

Landolfo Rufolo – Landolfo Rufolo appears in Lauretta's second tale (II, 4). He is an extremely rich merchant from the Amalfi coast, who is so greedy that he tries to double his fortune. When he fails, he turns to piracy. He represents

another of **fortune**'s victim-beneficiaries: after losing his second fortune and turning to piracy, he's captured by pirates who are then shipwrecked. He clings to a small box until he washes ashore, only later realizing that it's full of priceless jewels.

Andreuccio di Pietro – Andreuccio di Pietro appears in Fiammetta's second tale (II, 5). He is a wealthy but inexperienced and naïve horse dealer. He illustrates **fortune**'s turns: when he travels to Naples for fresh stock, he flashes his purse too many times and falls victim to the Sicilian Woman's con but escapes being murdered. Then he bumbles into a botched tomb robbery after which his associates leave him for dead in the tomb. But he luckily escapes in possession of a valuable ruby ring. He has a later counterpart in Salabaetto (VIII, 10), who runs into a very similar situation.

Sicilian Woman – The Sicilian woman appears in Fiammetta's second tale (II, 5). She is a beautiful, amoral criminal who cons Andreuccio out of his money, clothes, and dignity by pretending to be his long-lost half-sister in an elaborate con. She offers a warning to those who are too willing to believe women of low moral standing, like her fellow Sicilian, Jancofiore (VIII, 10).

Butch Belchface – Butch Belchface appears in Fiammetta's second tale (II, 5) as the Sicilian Woman's "bully." He has a thick beard and a threatening voice, and the Tomb Robbers recognize his description from Andreuccio. He represents the kind of low-life criminals who live in the bad part of Naples and who are willing to take advantage of honest, if naïve, merchants like Andreuccio.

Tomb Robbers – The Tomb Robbers are unsavory Neapolitan criminals whom Andreuccio joins after escaping the Sicilian Woman in Fiammetta's second tale (II, 5). Although they initially help the hapless merchant, they subsequently trap him in a tomb rather than sharing the spoils with him. They are thus agents of both good and bad **fortune**, as well as stereotypical of the criminal element represented in *The Decameron*.

Arrighetto Capece – Arrighetto Capece appears in Emilia's second tale (II, 6) as an esteemed courtier of Sicilian King Manfred. When King Charles defeats Manfred, Arrighetto is imprisoned and his family—wife Beritola Caracciolo and sons Guisfredi and The Outcast—escape into exile. His political fortunes illustrate the twists of **fortune**: although he is initially laid low, he is eventually reinstated and reunited with his family.

Beritola Caracciolo (Cavriuola) – Beritola Caracciolo appears in Emilia's second tale (II, 6). She is Arrighetto Capece's wife and mother of Guisfredi and The Outcast. Like her husband and sons, she is an illustration of **fortune**'s turns: she flees political imprisonment in Sicily but is castaway on an island and loses her children to pirates. She becomes attached to two fawns in their place and, when she's rescued by Currado Malespina and brings them along, she earns the nickname "Cavriuola" which means "doe." After many years, she is happily reunited with her children and husband.

Guisfredi (Giannotto) – Guisfredi (Giannotto) appears in Emilia's second tale (II, 6), where he is the older son of Arrighetto Capece and Beritola Caracciolo. He and his brother The Outcast are kidnapped by pirates and enslaved in the household of Guasparrino d'Oria, only restored to their former position and reunited with their family after many years. In this way, his story illustrates **fortune**'s twists, similarly to another wrongly enslaved nobleman, Teodoro (V, 7). But he also shows an innate nobility of character when he escapes forced slavery, becomes a paid servant in Currado Malespina's home, and falls in love with Currado's daughter, Spina.

The Outcast – The Outcast appears in Emilia's second story (II, 6), in which he is the younger son of Beritola Caracciolo and Arrighetto Capece. He was born in exile (hence his name), then kidnapped and enslaved with his brother Guisfredi (Giannotto). Like his brother and parents, he illustrates the twists and turns of **fortune**. When his identity is revealed, his former enslaver, Guasparrino d'Oria, quickly marries The Outcast to one of his daughters to cement a friendly relationship with his powerful family and avoid punishment for enslaving him.

Currado Malespina – Currado Malespina is a gentleman who appears in Emilia's second story (II, 6). Along with his wife, he rescues the castaway Beritola and her deer friends. When Guisfredi (Giannotto) becomes one of his servants and falls in love with his daughter Spina, Currado is horrified to catch them making love and throws them both into prison on account of the young man's alleged social inferiority. However, when he discovers Guisfredi's true identity, he happily allows him to marry Spina. His compassion towards Beritola, concern with his family's honor, and willingness to be guided by reason rather than revenge make him a portrait of a good nobleman.

Spina – In Emilia's second tale (II, 6), Spina is Currado Malespina's daughter (II, 6). She falls in love with Guisfredi (Giannotto), to whom she is married after his identity is revealed. Initially, she serves as a reminder of the importance of control over female sexuality (and female vulnerability) in medieval culture, since her father wants to kill her after catching them in the act. However, her love for Guisfredi also contributes to *The Decameron*'s argument that nobility of character supersedes the accidents of **fortune**, such as wealth and status.

Alatiel – In Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), Alatiel is the daughter of Sultan Beminedab and the most beautiful woman of her day. On her way to marry the King of Algarve, she is shipwrecked and passed, at the command of **fortune**, through the beds of Pericone da Visalgo, his brother Marato, a ship's Young Master, the Prince of Morea, the Duke of Athens, his brother-in-law Constant, the Turkish King Uzbek, his servant Antioco, and a Cypriot Merchant before she finally makes her way back home. Not only does she illustrate the twists of fortune—she's

described as fortune's toy—but Panfilo suggests that she is a warning against feminine vanity, since her beauty caused her nothing but trouble. And she further illustrates the misogynistic medieval stereotypes of women as fickle and excessively lustful, since she ends up being happy with each of the lovers who hand her from one to another like a very beautiful object.

The Young Masters – The two Young Masters appear in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7). They own the ship on which Marato carries Alatiel away from Spain. Overcome with love for Alatiel, they murder Marato before turning on each other. One dies in a knife fight over Alatiel and the other is grievously wounded.

Prince of Morea – In Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), the Prince of Morea hears about Alatiel's great beauty when she and the surviving Young Master land at Corinth. The Young Master's family hands Alatiel over to him, and he treats her more like a wife than a mistress. But when he shows her off to his friend the Duke of Athens, the Duke murders him to claim Alatiel as his own.

Duke of Athens – The handsome young Duke of Athens appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7). He is friends with the Prince of Morea. When he asks to see Alatiel, her beauty so enflames his desire that he murders his friend, has sex with her while covered in his friend's blood, and carries her home, where he keeps her as his mistress since he is already married to the daughter of the Emperor of Constantinople.

Constant – Constant appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), where he is the son of the Emperor of Constantine and the Duke of Athens' brother-in-law. When the Prince of Morea's allies attack Athens in revenge for the murder of the Prince, Constant supports the Duke. But he also ends up falling in love with Alatiel and takes advantage of the Duke's absence to turn his responsibilities over to his nephew Manuel, return to Athens, kidnap her and take her to an island near Turkey. Subsequently, he himself is kidnapped by Uzbek.

Uzbek – Uzbek appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7). He is the King of Turkey who kidnaps Constant and Alatiel so that he can take her as his wife. He becomes entangled in a proxy war waged by the Emperor of Constantinople over Constant's imprisonment and is killed in battle by Basano.

Basano – Basano appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7). As King of Cappadocia, he is negotiating an alliance with the Emperor of Constantinople against Uzbek. He gets more favorable terms after the Emperor discovers that Uzbek has kidnapped Constant, illustrating the political reach of **fortune**, whose machinations affect more than just Alatiel herself.

Antioco – Antioco is an old man and trusted servant of Uzbek who appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7). Despite his old age, Antioco falls in love with Alatiel while Uzbek leaves her in his care during the war. He is the first of Alatiel's lovers to speak her language, and when Uzbek dies, they flee Turkey together. When he falls ill and nears death, he leaves Alatiel in the care of his friend the Cypriot Merchant.

Antigono – Antigono appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7). Although he has been a wise advisor and emissary to the Cypriot king for many years, **fortune** has kept him from gaining wealth until he recognizes Alatiel and reunites her with Beminedab, for which he is richly rewarded. He uses his connections to reunite her with her father in grand style, and his cunning and compassion to help her come up with a believable tale about what she did while she was missing.

Walter – Walter, Count of Antwerp, appears in Elissa's second tale (II, 8). He is handsome, generous, noble, and recently widowed. The French Princess falls in love with him, then accuses him of rape when he refuses her advances, forcing him to flee France with his children Violante (Jeannette) and Louis (Perrot). His noble character helps him to accept his bad **fortune** with patience, and he spends many years working as a servant and groom in Ireland and England. He maintains his pride and his character no matter what he's lost and is ultimately restored and elevated.

French Princess –The wife of the French king's son, the French Princess appears in Elissa's second tale (II, 8). She relies on Walter's guidance in her husband's wartime absence and falls in love with him because she is young and lustful, providing another example of misogynistic medieval stereotypes about insatiable female sexuality. Her accusation of rape in the face of rejection recalls the Biblical story of Potiphar's wife—frequently invoked in medieval literature—who accuses her husband's servant, Joseph, under similar circumstances in the Book of Genesis (39:1-20). However, she becomes the agent of Walter's good **fortune** when she confesses to her lies on her deathbed.

Jeannette (Violante) – Jeannette (Violante) appears in Elissa's second tale (II, 8). She is seven years old when she goes into exile with her father Walter and brother Perrot (Louis). In England, she is fostered by Marshal and Madame Lamiens while she grows into a beautiful and virtuous girl. Jacques Lamiens falls in love with her and although she is happy to marry him, she demonstrates her virtue by categorically refusing to have sex with him under any other circumstances, even when Madame Lamiens tries to entice her to do so to cure Jacques's lovesickness. She, like Guisfredi (Giannotto) and The Outcast, is a victim of **fortune** whose noble character cannot be tainted by her circumstances.

Perrot (Louis) – Perrot (Louis) appears in Elissa's second tale (II, 8). He is nine years old when he goes into exile with his father Walter and sister Jeannette (Violante). His athletic ability and general attitude attract the attention of the Welsh Marshal, who raises him. After he becomes famous for good looks and military skill, he is picked to lead the English King's contingent in the second French-German war, during which

time he is reunited with his father and restored to his former identity and position in France. Like his sister, Guisfredi, and The Outcast, he is a victim of **fortune** whose noble character shines through no matter how harsh his circumstances.

Madame Lamiens – Madame Lamiens appears in Elissa's second tale (II, 8), where she is the wife of one of the English King's Marshals. She and Marshal Lamiens raise Jeannette (Violante) in their home. She's very class-conscious, and when she learns that her son Jacques Lamiens loves Jeannette, she's more willing for them to have an illicit sexual relationship than an honorable marriage. However, she eventually allows the marriage in order to save her son's life.

Marshal Lamiens – Marshal Lamiens appears, along with his wife Madame Lamiens and son Jacques Lamiens, in Elissa's second tale (II, 8). He is a class-conscious high official of the English king. Although he reluctantly allows Jacques to marry Jeannette (Violante) in the interest of preserving his life, he resents his supposedly low-class daughter-in-law and makes barbed comments about her and her children.

Jacques Lamiens – In Elissa's second tale (II, 8), Jacques Lamiens is the only son of the Marshal Lamiens and Madame Lamiens. When he falls in love with Jeanette (Violante) but fears his parents won't approve of their marriage, he becomes desperately lovesick. He demonstrates nobility of character when he rejects his mother's suggestion that he enjoy Jeanette by force. He is also charitable, providing food and shelter to the disguised Walter, although he sometimes speaks harshly to a man he believes to be of lower class than himself. When he's put in charge of the English forces alongside Perrot (Louis) and learns that his wife and father-in-law are French nobility, he graciously repents of any harsh treatment he gave his father-in-law in the past.

Bernabò Lomellin – Bernabò Lomellin appears in Filomena's second tale (II, 9). He is a Genoese merchant who brags that his wife (Zinerva) is the best and most chaste wife in the world and places a wager on it with another merchant called Ambrogiuolo. When Ambrogiuolo offers "proof" that he's seduced Zinerva, Bernabò believes him more easily than he believes his supposedly excellent wife. He has a proud character and is quick to anger, trying to have Zinerva murdered when he thinks she's cheated. Nevertheless, his **fortune**, which falls after his repudiation of his wife, eventually rises again when she reveals Ambrogiuolo's trick and reunites with her husband.

Ambrogiuolo – Ambrogiuolo appears in Filomena's second tale (II, 9). He is a merchant from Piacenza who "proves" that Zinerva isn't as good as Bernabò thinks by sneaking into her bedroom, stealing some of her belongings, and claiming she gave them to him as lover's **gifts**. Cheating when he realizes he can't seduce Zinerva shows his unscrupulous character, as does his continuing to claim that he did seduce her seven years later. Zinerva takes advantage of his greed to lure him to Alexandria, where she reveals his actions, and he is punished with a fittingly awful death.

Zinerva (Sicurano da Finale) – Zinerva appears in Filomena's second tale (II, 9) as Bernabò's clever and honest wife. She is a paragon of virtue and chastity. Her distinguishing mark is a mole below her left breast. When Bernabò tries to have her murdered, she disguises herself as a man, Sicurano da Finale, and escapes to the sea. Eventually, she enters the service of the Sultan of Alexandria, where her inherently noble character allows her to gain his trust. Although she is a victim of **fortune** in being the object of her husband's bet and Ambrogiuolo's lies, her own natural intelligence and virtue eventually see her good fortune and domestic stability restored.

Ricciardo di Chinzica – Ricciardo di Chinzica appears in Dioneo's second tale (II, 10). He is an older man and a well-established lawyer when he marries the young and vivacious Bartolomea. His advanced age means that he can't satisfy her sexual desires, however, so he tries to hide his poor performance behind an extensive list of days on which church law forbids sexual activity. His age, poor sexual performance, and jealous guarding of Bartolomea place him in the medieval literary stereotype of the *senex amans*, or old lover. He demonstrates his fundamental misappraisal of female sexuality when he believes that Bartolomea's honor would be more important to her than the sexual satisfaction she has with Paganino.

Bartolomea – Bartolomea is Ricciardo di Chinzica's dissatisfied wife in Dioneo's second tale (II, 10). Her marriage is so boring that she's happy to be captured by the pirate Paganino, and she demonstrates both female sexuality and also spunk and autonomy when she refuses to recognize Riccardo or return home with him.

Paganino de Mare – Paganino de Mare appears in Dioneo's second tale (II, 10). A famous pirate, he kidnaps Bartolomea from Ricciardo di Chinzica, and, because he's a much younger and more virile man, has the ability to satisfy her sexually. He treats her as a wife instead of a mistress and marries her when her first husband dies.

Masetto – Masetto is a handsome, strong young peasant who is the protagonist of Filostrato's third tale (III, 1). He disguises himself as a deaf-mute to infiltrate a convent, where he eventually becomes the lover of all the Young Nuns and their Abbess. He demonstrates the day's theme—perseverance—by clinging to his deception until he gets the sexual satisfaction that he wants.

Young Nuns – The eight Young Nuns of Filostrato's third tale (III, 1) defy conventional thinking about Brides of Christ. Their lack of kindness towards their first gardener and the abuse they heap on Masetto when they think he can't hear them contribute to *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire by showing

the nuns to be shallow and mean. Moreover, all of them, including their Abbess, give in to carnal lust with Masetto. Instead of keeping their vows of chastity, they hide their sins from the world.

Abbess – In Filostrato's third tale (III, 1), the Abbess is a poor example of religious leadership when she joins the Young Nuns in taking Masetto as her lover and hides the resulting children from the world. She thus contributes to *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire, particularly in the hypocritical delight she takes in an unnamed sexual pleasure that she had previously sharply criticized.

Agilulf – Agilulf is the wise king of the Lombards in Pampinea's third tale (III, 2). He is married to the beautiful and wise Theodelinda. When he finds himself cuckolded by a Groom, he displays tact by keeping the knowledge of his dishonor secret, rather than airing it publicly (like Amerigo Abate in V, 7 or Arriguccio Berlinghieri in VII, 8). Instead, he plays a wily cat-and-mouse game trying to identify the groom, and even when he fails, he weighs the possibility of his public dishonor against his desire for revenge.

Groom – In Pampinea's third tale (III, 2), the Groom who cares for Theodelinda's horse falls hopelessly in love with her. Despite being lowborn, he cleverly figures out how to infiltrate her bed disguised as her husband, and then how to escape Agilulf's attention. He demonstrates the day's theme—perseverance—by dint of his efforts to sneak into the queen's bed and his wily avoidance of the punishment his actions deserved.

Florentine Noblewoman – The Florentine Noblewoman appears in Filomena's third tale (III, 3), where she is unhappily married to a wealthy but bourgeois wool merchant. Finding her husband beneath her socially, she resolves to take the Florentine Nobleman as her husband instead. She demonstrates the day's theme—perseverance—and the cleverness that is generally celebrated in *The Decameron* by using the Florentine Friar as an unwitting go-between to signal her intentions to the Nobleman.

Florentine Friar – In Filomena's third tale (III, 3), the Florentine Friar is a caricature of clerical greed and cluelessness. Although he believes the Florentine Noblewoman's complaints about the Florentine Nobleman's sexual improprieties, he is more interested in defending his friend than protecting her. Moreover, he is easily swayed by her class and her sizable donations to the church, which has a hint of simony.

Friar Puccio – Friar Puccio is the hapless husband at the center of Panfilo's third tale (III, 4). His wife, Monna Isabetta, is significantly younger than he is, and either his age or his religious inclinations mean that he's unable to satisfy her sexually. He is a pious Franciscan tertiary (meaning he took less stringent vows than full monks and still lived in the world), and he actively cultivates the friendship and spiritual mentoring of Dom Felice. He demonstrates the day's theme—perseverance—in his willingness to engage in extreme penitential practices to gain salvation, even as Dom Felice cuckolds him with Isabetta.

Monna Isabetta – Monna Isabetta is Friar Puccio's young and beautiful wife in Panfilo's third tale (III, 4). Her sexual needs are unsatisfied by her pious older husband, so she readily accepts Dom Felice as her lover. She also demonstrates quick wit when she's able to convince her husband that she is piously fasting while she's actually having sex with Felice.

Dom Felice – In Panfilo's third tale (III, 4), Dom Felice is a handsome and intelligent young monk who gives people the impression of holiness. Friar Puccio cultivates his friendship for spiritual guidance. But he is inclined to gluttony (bringing a great feast to Puccio's house) and lust (sleeping with his wife Isabetta), so he is another facet of *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire.

Francesco Vergellesi – Francesco Vergellesi appears in Elissa's third tale (III, 5). This character is based on an early contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio who did become *podesta* (leader) of Lombardy in the early 14th century. In *The Decameron*, he is wealthy and judicious, but also very arrogant and mean. He tries to manipulate Zima's affection for Francesco's Wife to get a fine horse from him for free, for instance. But his obstinacy allows Zima to demonstrate the day's theme of perseverance, and doesn't prevent his cuckolding in the end.

Francesco's Wife – Francesco's Wife appears alongside Francesco Vergellesi in Elissa's third tale (III, 5). She demonstrates wifely obedience when Francesco orders her to listen but not respond to Zima's impassioned statements of love. However, she ultimately allows herself to be swayed by the power of love and avoids wasting her youth on an absent husband, taking Zima as her lover. Thus, while she is still the object with which Zima is rewarded for his perseverance, she also demonstrates female sexual agency.

Zima – Zima, the protagonist of Elissa's third tale (III, 5), earned his name, which means "the Dandy," because of his elegant dress and grooming. He loves Francesco's Wife but can't get her attention until he gives Francesco Vergellesi a fine horse in exchange for a private conversation with her. His speech is stuffed with the themes and motifs of fin'amors, and his perseverance in the face of her uncanny silence wins her affection in the end.

Ricciardo Minutolo – Ricciardo Minutolo appears in Fiammetta's third tale (III, 6). He is a Neapolitan gentleman who loves Catella Sighinolfo, although her jealous devotion to her husband keeps her from returning his affections. He demonstrates the day's theme—perseverance—when he resorts to trickery and has sex with her under the pretense that he is her husband. Afterwards, he blackmails her into

continuing the affair by threatening to tell her husband what she's done.

Catella – Catella is the object of Ricciardo Minutolo's affections in Fiammetta's third tale (III, 6). Her extreme and jealous devotion to her husband, Filippello Sighinolfo, leaves her vulnerable to Ricciardo's manipulations. She demonstrates the dangers of immoderation (even immoderate love for one's spouse), and the punishment for her immoderation highlights the inherent vulnerability of women to male subterfuge and blackmail.

Tedaldo degli Elisei – In Emilia's third story (III, 7), Tedaldo degli Elisei loves Ermellina, but leaves Florence when she suddenly spurns him. Becoming a wealthy merchant isn't enough to make him forget her, and he returns in disguise to check on her some years later, only to discover that her husband, Aldobrandino Palermi, has been accused of Tedaldo's murder. He demonstrates the power of love and the day's theme—perseverance—when time and distance aren't enough to diminish his love, and when he works assiduously to save his lover's husband from execution. In his disguise (as a friar and pilgrim), he delivers an important diatribe against clerical hypocrisy, contributing to *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire.

Aldobrandino Palermi – Aldobrandino Palermi is the husband of Ermellina, Tedaldo degli Elisi's lover in Emilia's third tale (III, 7). He is accused and convicted of Tedaldo's murder due to the affair. But he demonstrates wisdom and moderation when he promises the disguised Tedaldo that he will forgive his accusers if he is freed from jail.

Ermellina Palermi – In Emilia's third tale (III, 7), Ermellina Palermi is the wife of Aldobrando Palermi and the former lover of Tedaldo degli Elisi. She breaks off the affair when a friar warns her it will condemn her to hell, although she still loves Tedaldo. She repents and happily resumes the relationship when Tedaldo returns as if from the dead. The two demonstrate how worthy lovers behave towards each other—with fidelity and honesty.

Womanizing Abbot – The Womanizing Abbot appears in Lauretta's third tale (III, 8) as another part of *The Decameron*'s ongoing anticlerical satire. He is young, attractive, and his reputation for extreme holiness covers up the affairs he carries on with local women like Ferondo's Wife. He is also unkind, cultivating a friendship with Ferondo to make fun of his lack of intelligence and uncouth manners.

Ferondo – Ferondo appears in Lauretta's third tale (III, 8) as a wealthy but uncouth Tuscan yeoman (a farmer who owned his land). He is excessively jealous of his beautiful wife. His lack of common sense allows the Womanizing Abbot to imprison him and have a long affair with Ferondo's Wife and provides much of the tale's humor.

Ferondo's Wife – Ferondo's Wife appears in Lauretta's third tale (III, 8). She suffers from being married to Ferondo, the jealous buffoon. She illustrates several of the unsavory characteristics of women that surface throughout *The Decameron*: excessive sexuality (she agrees to sleep with the Womanizing Abbot even though she knows it's wrong) and greed (she is induced by his pretty **gifts**).

Gilette – Gilette is the protagonist of Neifile's third tale (III, 9). She is the only daughter of a renowned physician, and she grows up in the household of the Count of Roussillon, where she falls in love with her playmate, the count's son Bertrand. When she uses her father's medical knowledge to cure the French King, she asks to marry Bertrand in exchange. But when Bertrand repudiates his forced and bourgeois bride, she demonstrates her enduring love, noble character, generosity, and native intelligence by patiently working to fulfil his almost-impossible demands and win his love, thus showing that class has more to do with character than **fortune**. In her scheme she receives help from the Impoverished Noblewoman, whom she rewards generously.

Bertrand – In Neifile's third tale (III, 9), Bertrand is the Count of Roussillon's son and Gilette's childhood playmate. He grows up in the household of the French King to be a handsome but haughty young man who is angry when the King forces him to marry bourgeois Gilette. He insists that he will only acknowledge her or consummate the marriage if she meets impossible standards, and subsequently falls in love with an impoverished but nobly born young woman. When Gilette proves the nobility of her own character and meets his conditions, he finally comes to love and honor her as his wife.

Impoverished Noblewoman – The Impoverished Noblewoman is the mother of Bertrand's love interest in Neifile's third tale (III, 9). Although she has fallen on hard times, she recognizes Gilette's inherent nobility of spirit and the unfairness of her situation as a repudiated wife, so she risks her daughter's reputation to help Gilette win her husband over. Along with Gilette, she shows that nobility has nothing to do with accidents of **fortune** such as birth or wealth, but rather with one's character.

Alibech – Alibech is the protagonist of Dioneo's third tale (III, 10), who ultimately ends up married to Neerbal. She is a 14-year-old pagan girl who wonders how to serve God. When a Christian points her towards an ascetic life (practicing severe self-discipline and abstinence) in the desert, she follows her simple-minded adolescent impulse there. Eventually, Rustico takes her under his wing, but when he coerces her into having sex, she discovers how much she enjoys it. She thus illustrates the misogynistic medieval stereotype of women as excessively lustful.

Rustico – Rustico is the young desert hermit who takes in Alibech in Dioneo's third tale (III, 10). He illustrates pride, since he thinks his lifestyle of fasting and prayer will protect him from human sexual yearnings, but quickly gives into the urging of his

flesh and coerces Alibech into sex. He pays the price for this, since she likes it so much that she demands it from him until she's nearly exhausted his energy, and he is relieved when Neerbal takes her off his hands.

Filippo Balducci – Filippo Balducci is a Florentine merchant who appears in a tale Boccaccio tells while defending his literary works at the beginning of Day IV. After his wife's death, he retreats with Filippo's Son to the mountains to live an ascetic life (characterized by abstinence and self-discipline) serving God, but he finds that even this can't protect his son from the world.

Filippo's Son – In Boccaccio's exemplary tale, Filippo Balducci raises Filippo's Son in isolated religious devotion after his mother's death, but he is nevertheless not immune to the charms of the feminine sex when he returns to Florence with his father and sees women for the first time. Boccaccio claims his desire is an illustration of the inherent desire of men to devote themselves to women.

Tancredi – Tancredi, the Prince of Salerno, appears in Fiammetta's fourth tale (IV, 1). He is a good ruler and excellent man, but his selfish love of his daughter, Ghismonda, made him slow to find her a husband after she was widowed. When she begins an affair with Tancredi's valet, Guiscardo, he feels betrayed by his child and his servant; in his extreme wrath he has Guiscardo executed, then cuts out his heart and sends it to Ghismonda. In declaring Guiscardo unworthy of his daughter, he represents a noble attitude that class should be defined by wealth and birth (which are accidents of **fortune**) rather than character. His story mirrors that of Amerigo Abate (V, 7).

Ghismonda – In Fiammetta's fourth tale (IV, 1), Ghismonda is Tancredi's widowed daughter. Because her father is slow to find her a new husband, she takes his valet, Guiscardo, as a lover. Although she demonstrates the discernment (picking a good man) and circumspection (keeping it quiet) of a fin'amors lover, she falls victim to **fortune** when her father discovers the affair. She demonstrates virile self-control and self-determination when she avoids excessive emotional displays of grief and calmly takes her own life after Guiscardo is executed; in her suicide she reflects Roussillon's Wife, who demonstrates similar traits in taking her own life in a later tale.

Guiscardo – Guiscardo appears in Fiammetta's fourth tale (IV, 1) where he is Tancredi's valet and Ghismonda's lover. Despite his humble origins, his excellent character earns Tancredi's trust and Ghismonda's love. She praises him as an example of a humble man whose nobility comes from his character, in contrast to ignoble men whom **fortune** has blessed with wealth and status.

Friar Alberto – In Pampinea's fourth tale (IV, 2), Friar Alberto is the name assumed by Berto della Massa after his crooked reputation forces him to flee his hometown and assume a false identity in Venice. As Friar Alberto he develops a holy reputation that earns him the love and trust of many Venetians. Young, attractive, and virile, he also has a taste for the ladies, but he ends up as one of the day's unlucky lovers when Lisetta's in-laws discover the affair. He thus demonstrates the day's theme while also contributing to *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire by showing how manipulative religious figures can take advantage of gullible people.

Lisetta – In Pampinea's fourth tale (IV, 2), Lisetta is the wife of a wealthy Venetian merchant and Friar Alberto's lover. Her character both satirizes Venetians (trade rivals of the Florentines) as gullible, talkative, and less than intelligent—as her various nicknames (Numbskull, Birdbrain) indicate. Her vanity further exemplifies misogynistic stereotypes of female sins.

Ninetta – In Lauretta's fourth tale (IV, 3), Ninetta is the older sister to Maddalena and Bertella and the lover of Restagnone. She runs away with him, her sisters, and their lovers to Crete, but when Restagnone loses interest in her, she murders him in a fit of rage and is subsequently kidnapped and murdered by Maddalena's lover, Folco. Her unlucky end illustrates the day's theme—unlucky and unhappy lovers—but Lauretta also offers her murderous rage as a warning to ladies in the audience to control their anger.

Maddalena – In Lauretta's fourth tale (IV, 3), Maddalena and her twin Bertella are the younger sisters of Ninetta. She runs away to Crete with her lover Folco and her sisters. After Ninetta murders Restagnone, Maddalena has sex with the Duke of Crete to secure her sister's release, and Folco murders her in a jealous rage. Like her sisters, she illustrates the day's theme—unlucky lovers—but she also demonstrates the vulnerability of women and the importance of male control over female sexuality, since her own lover kills her as punishment for having sex with someone else.

Bertella – In Lauretta's fourth tale (IV, 3), Bertella and her twin Maddalena are the younger sisters of Ninetta. She runs away to Crete with them and her lover, Ughetto. But after the murders of Restagnone and Maddalena and the disappearance of Folco and Ninetta, Bertella and Ughetto are forced to confess to participating. They bribe the guards and escape to Rhodes, but nevertheless die ignoble and impoverished deaths there, in line with the day's theme of unlucky lovers.

Restagnone – In Lauretta's fourth tale (IV, 3), Restagnone is a nobleman by birth, but his family has fallen into poverty. He plans to enrich himself and run away with his lover, Ninetta, recruiting Folco and Ughetto to join them. In Crete, he falls in love with someone new, inciting Ninetta's extreme wrath, and he dies at her jealous hands, yet another victim of unlucky love.

Folco – In Lauretta's fourth tale (IV, 3), Folco is a wealthy young man in love with Maddalena. He pools his wealth with Restagnone and Ughetto and runs away with them to Crete. But when Maddalena sleeps with the Duke of Crete to free

Ninetta from her murder charge, Folco kills her in a fit of jealous rage, then sets out to sea with Ninetta, never to be seen again. He is thus another unlucky lover and an example of the damaging effects of immoderate jealousy and rage.

Ughetto – In Lauretta's fourth tale (IV, 3), Ughetto is the wealthy young man who loves Bertella. He pools his wealth with Restagnone and Folco and lives happily in Crete until he and Bertella are tortured into confessing that they were accomplices to Folco's murder of Maddalena. They escape to Rhodes, but as unlucky lovers, they die sad, impoverished deaths there.

William the Second – Based on a historical 12th-century king of Sicily, William the Second appears in Elissa's fourth tale (IV, 4) as Gerbino's grandfather. When Gerbino fails to respect the official promise William gave the King of Tunis regarding the Tunisian Princess's wedding, he executes his grandson and heir rather than lose his reputation as a ruler who keeps his word.

Gerbino – Gerbino is the entirely fictional grandson and heir of William the Second of Sicily and protagonist of Elissa's fourth tale (IV, 4). He loves the Tunisian Princess according to the dictates of fin'amors, falling in love with her from afar based on her reputation alone. He is unlucky in his love, however, when she is promised to someone else, and he is unable to kidnap her for himself. Because he holds his love as more important than affairs of state and he defies William's political promises, his grandfather has him executed.

Tunisian Princess – The Tunisian Princess of Elissa's fourth tale (IV, 4) is one of the day's unlucky lovers. Her reputation causes Gerbino to fall in love with her from afar, and she falls in love with his reputation as well. When her father, the King of Tunis, arranges for her to marry another man, Gerbino tries to kidnap her, but her father's guards murder her rather than hand her over. Her death comes from her father's control over her sexuality (choosing her husband) and demonstrates female vulnerability.

Lisabetta – In Filomena's fourth tale (IV, 5), Lisabetta is the daughter of a wealthy merchant. After their father's death, Lisabetta's Brothers fail to find her a suitable husband—demonstrating the power men hold over female sexuality in *The Decameron*. She takes their employee Lorenzo as her lover; after her brothers murder him, she buries his head in a pot of basil, then dies of sadness when her brothers steal this from her and abandon her rather than have their crime come to light. Lisabetta is one of Day IV's many unlucky lovers.

Lisabetta's Brothers – Lisabetta's Brothers appear in Filomena's fourth tale (IV, 5) as the agents of Lisabetta's unlucky love affair. They initially fail to find her a suitable husband, then they murder her bourgeois lover, Lorenzo, to protect their sister's reputation—and their own. Eventually, they abandon Lisabetta and flee lest their crime be discovered.

Negro de Pontecarraro – Negro de Pontecarraro is a nobleman and the father of Andreuola in Panfilo's fourth tale (IV, 6). He is kind and loving towards his daughter and participates in *The Decameron*'s argument that class has more to do with a noble character than wealth or status when he buries the poor but honorable Gabriotto as an honored son-in-law after his untimely death.

Andreuola – In Panfilo's fourth tale (IV, 6), Andreuola is the daughter of Negro de Pontecarraro. She and Gabriotto have secretly married, but she becomes an unlucky lover when he unexpectedly dies. She preserves her honor and demonstrates her fidelity by marrying Gabriotto instead of just taking him as a lover, by defending herself against a judge who tries to extort sex from her in the wake of the tragedy, and by retiring to a convent to live out her days.

Simona – Simona appears in Emilia's fourth tale (IV, 7), where she is a working-class woman who falls in love with the similarly poor Pasquino. Their tragic affair—both die of poisoning—aligns with the day's theme of unlucky lovers and demonstrates that love is just as capable of finding a place among the lowly as among the noble.

Pasquino – In Emilia's fourth tale (IV, 7), Pasquino's job as the porter of a wool-merchant introduces him to one of the spinners, Simona, who becomes his lover. He demonstrates the sometimes-cruel **fortune** that falls on lovers when he dies from accidental poisoning. His friends Stramba, Atticciato, Malagevole, and Guccio Imbratta bury him.

Stramba – In Emilia's fourth tale (IV, 7) Stramba's proper name is Puccino, but he goes by his nickname, which means "Dotty Joe" (a.k.a. "Weirdo"). He is Pasquino's friend and Ligina's lover and is in the **garden** when Pasquino dies. He leads Atticciato and Malagevole in harassing Simona in front of the magistrate and trying to get her executed for murder. But when the horrible accidental nature of Pasquino's and Simona's deaths is revealed, he joins with his friends and Guccio Imbratta to give them a proper burial.

Atticciato – Atticciato appears in Emilia's fourth tale (IV, 7), as a friend of Pasquino and Stramba. His name means "Potbelly," contributing to the tale's seedy atmosphere. Along with Stramba and Malagevole, he agitates for Simona's execution, believing that she murdered Pasquino. But when her accidental death proves her innocence, he joins with his friends and Guccio Imbratta to make sure the lovers receive a proper burial.

Malagevole – Malagevole appears in Emilia's fourth tale (IV, 7) as a friend of Pasquino and Atticciato. His name means "Killjoy," contributing to the tale's seedy atmosphere. Along with Stramba and Atticciato, he agitates for Simona's execution, believing that she murdered Pasquino. But when her accidental death proves her innocence, he joins with his friends and Guccio Imbratta to make sure they receive a proper burial.

Guccio Imbratta – Guccio Imbratta appears in Emilia's fourth

tale (IV, 7) and Dioneo's sixth (VI, 10). In Emilia's tale, he is friends with Pasquino, Stramba, Atticciato, and Malagevole, and assists in the burial of Pasquino and Simona. In Dioneo's tale, he is Friar Cipolla's servant, and he goes by several names, including Guccio Imbratta ("dirty Guccio"), Guccio Balena ("Guccio the Whale"), and Guccio Porco ("Guccio the Pig"). In general, he is a parody of a lower-class man. Friar Cipolla labels him, among other things, dishonest, disgusting, lazy, disobedient, argumentative, careless, and clumsy. His clothing is tattered and dirty and his beard is greasy, but this doesn't stop him from looking for a wife. Yet, his tastes in women are as uncouth as he is, and in Dioneo's tale he courts an unattractive and coarse kitchen maid called Nuta.

Girolamo – In Neifile's fourth tale (IV, 8), Girolamo is the son of a wealthy Florentine merchant. In his youth, he falls in love with the daughter of a local tailor, Salvestra. But because she isn't of his social class, his guardians try to squelch his love by sending him away to Paris on business. When he returns to find that Salvestra has moved on and married someone else, he dies of grief and anger in her bed, adding himself to the day's roll of unlucky lovers.

Salvestra – Salvestra appears in Neifile's fourth tale (IV, 8), as the daughter of a Florentine tailor. Her childhood friendship with Girolamo blossoms into love, but when he goes away to Paris for several years, she marries a man of her own class and pragmatically puts her youthful affections behind her. However, when she views Girolamo's body in the cathedral after he dies of grief, her former love for him bursts forth and overwhelms her, and she dies of grief on the spot. She is one of Day IV's unlucky lovers and her death also illustrates how the power of love can extend beyond life and death.

Girolamo's Mother – In Neifile's fourth tale (IV, 8), Girolamo's mother's class consciousness makes her reject Girolamo's love for the lowly Salvestra. When chiding and punishment fail, she resorts to subterfuge to send him away without breaking his heart. Neifile claims that Love is impervious to advice or interference at the beginning of the tale, and the failure of Girolamo's mother to end his love illustrates this. She also demonstrates an arrogant belief that she knows more than Nature in her attempts to change the course of her son's feelings.

Guillaume de Roussillon – In Filostrato's fourth tale (IV, 9), Guillaume de Roussillon is a Provencal knight. When he discovers that his best friend, Guillaume de Cabestanh, is having an affair with his wife, he becomes one of the day's unlucky lovers. In a jealous rage, he murders his friend and secretly feeds his heart to Roussillon's Wife for dinner. After she commits suicide, he flees to avoid the dishonor of having been cuckolded, responsibility for Cabestanh's death, and responsibility for his wife's suicide.

Guillaume de Cabestanh – In Filostrato's fourth tale (IV, 9), Guillaume de Cabestanh is a Provencal knight. He is best friends with Guillaume de Roussillon, at least until Roussillon discovers that he has been having an affair with Roussillon's Wife. Roussillon murders him and feeds his heart to her for dinner, but after her suicide, the local citizens bury the lovers together in one tomb.

Roussillon's Wife – In Filostrato's fourth tale (IV, 9), Roussillon's Wife follows the dictates of fin'amors when she falls in love with her husband's best friend, Guillaume de Cabestanh, because of his gallantry and nobility. When she discovers that Guillaume de Roussillon has murdered her lover and fed her his heart, she breaks from the feminine stereotypes in *The Decameron* and demonstrates a similar level of virile self-control to Ghismonda (IV, 1). She calmly rebukes her husband for his cruelty, then takes her life by throwing herself from a window. After her death, she's buried with her lover in a shared tomb.

Mazzeo della Montagna – Mazzeo della Montagna appears in Dioneo's fourth tale (IV, 10). Based on a historical, 14th-century physician, Mazzeo is a respected doctor who marries a young and beautiful woman (Mazzeo's Wife), whom he is subsequently unable to satisfy sexually. Thus, along with Ricciardo di Chinzica, Friar Puccio, and Nicostratos, he exemplifies the stereotypical medieval character of the *senex amans* (old lover). Further, he demonstrates a cavalier attitude towards the sexual mores of the lower-class members of his household, forgiving the Trusted Maid for an affair he wouldn't have been happy to discover his wife conducting with Ruggieri d'Aieroli.

Mazzeo's Wife – In Dioneo's fourth tale (IV, 10), Mazzeo della Montagna marries Mazzeo's Wife. Because she is young, pretty, and high-spirited, she is disappointed by his sexual inadequacies and takes Ruggieri d'Aieroli as her lover. In this way, she fulfills the misogynistic medieval stereotype of women's excessive sexual appetites. But she also demonstrates the quick intelligence celebrated in *The Decameron*'s characters when she and her Trusted Maid handle the apparent death of her lover in the house and his subsequent arrest for a crime he didn't commit.

Ruggieri d'Aieroli – In Dioneo's fourth tale (IV, 10), Ruggieri d'Aieroli becomes the lover of Mazzeo's Wife. Although he is a member of the aristocracy, his disreputable character has left him isolated from friends and family, so when he's accused of a crime he didn't commit, Mazzeo's Wife and her Trusted Maid must rescue him.

Trusted Maid – In Dioneo's fourth tale (IV, 10), the Trusted Maid serves Mazzeo's Wife faithfully and helps her conduct her affair with Ruggieri d'Aieroli. She helps her mistress dispose of his body when they think he's suddenly died and convinces the judge to drop the charges against him. She demonstrates the intersection of concerns about class and female sexuality; while noble Andreuola was praised for not having sex with the

magistrate in an earlier tale, part of the humor of Dioneo's tale is the way the maid readily acquiesces to his demands for sex in exchange for Ruggieri's acquittal.

Money-lenders – When Ruggieri d'Aieroli renders himself accidentally unconscious in Dioneo's fourth tale (IV, 10), Mazzeo's Wife and the Trusted Maid hide his body in a chest which these two Money-lenders subsequently steal. Conforming to medieval stereotypes of moneylenders, these men are both cheap and dishonest, stealing the chest so they don't have to spend as much money on furnishing their new home.

Aristippus – In Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1), Aristippus is a Cypriot nobleman whose fortune includes having the boorish and rude Cimon among his many children. He shows himself to be less noble than his newly improved son when he suggests that Cimon complete his education by having sex with Iphigenia, although Cimon prefers to wait until he can honorably marry her.

Cimon – In Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1), Cimon is the son of Aristippus. Despite his noble birth, he's uneducated, rude, and barely articulate. But, when he catches sight of the beautiful Iphigenia, he demonstrates the ennobling power of love and suddenly mends his ways, becoming an elegant, refined, and well-educated gentleman. Like a true fin'amors lover, his love inspires him to make himself into a better person, demonstrates his courage to Lysimachus, and gives him the strength and bravery to fight against Pasimondas to win Iphigenia as his bride, becoming an example of a happy lover.

Iphigenia – In Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1), Iphigenia is Cimon's love interest, even though she is betrothed to Pasimondas of Rhodes. She represents the power of female beauty by which Cimon is ennobled, and she is his reward for becoming a gentleman. However, her tale doesn't reveal whether she loves either Pasimondas or Cimon in return, leaving her own wishes unexpressed.

Lysimachus – In Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1), Lysimachus is the chief magistrate of Rhodes, who imprisons Cimon for attempting to kidnap Iphigenia, because her fiancée, Pasimondas, is one of Lysimachus's citizens. But because he is in love with Pasimondas's future sister-in-law, Cassandra, he forms a plan with Cimon to attack the wedding and kill their rivals. After murdering Cassandra's fiancée Ormisdas, he marries her himself. In this way, he demonstrates how the dictates of love can overpower civil responsibility. In winning Cassandra, he also becomes an example of a happy lover.

Cassandra – In Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1), Cassandra is betrothed to Pasimondas's brother, Ormisdas. But because she is the love interest of Lysimachus, he kills her fiancée and carries her off on her wedding day. Unlike Iphigenia, she doesn't serve as the vehicle for ennobling her lover, but she does demonstrate a similar lack of agency, since her desire to be with either Ormisdas or Lysimachus is never explored.

Gostanza – Gostanza appears in Emilia's fifth tale (V, 2). She is a beautiful young noblewoman whose parents won't allow her to marry Martuccio Gomito because he is poor. When she believes that he has drowned, she casts herself on the mercy of the waves and is eventually reunited with Martuccio in Tunisia, thanks to the help of Carapresa and the Saracen Lady. She and Martuccio become happy lovers when they're reunited, enriched by the **gifts** of Mulay Abd Allah, and married.

Martuccio Gomito – In Emilia's fifth tale (V, 2), Martuccio Gomito is a handsome and well-mannered young man who is nevertheless too poor to be accepted as a potential husband for Gostanza. He turns to piracy to make money, but when he's captured by the Tunisians, he languishes in jail until he provides them with a war-winning stratagem. He symbolizes constancy in love despite the ups and downs of **fortune** and becomes one of the day's happy lovers when he and Gostanza, newly enriched by Mulay Abd Allah, finally marry.

Carapresa – Carapresa appears in Emilia's fifth tale (V, 2). A poor Sicilian woman, she lives in Tunisia and rescues Gostanza when her boat washes ashore. Her name means "precious gain" and she represents renewed hope for Gostanza. She takes the castaway to the kindly Saracen Lady, who ultimately reunites her with Martuccio Gomito. And when the lovers return to Sicily, she goes with them.

Pietro Boccamazza – Pietro Boccamazza is the bumbling hero of Elissa's fifth tale (V, 3). A young man who belongs to an illustrious Roman family, he plans to elope with Agnolella when his family refuses to allow their marriage because she's not a noble. His story shows how **fortune**'s twists can affect lovers—he loses Agnolella after they take a wrong turn during their elopement and are attacked by soldiers, but when they're subsequently reunited and married, they become prime examples of happy lovers.

Agnolella – Agnolella is the beautiful and charming woman whom Pietro Boccamazza loves in Elissa's fifth tale (V, 3). She shows more attention and quicker wit than Pietro when she's able to escape an attack on the road and preserve herself from roving brigands in the forest. She also demonstrates the steadfastness of a true lover and is rewarded with marriage to her sweetheart in the end.

Ancient Man – In Elissa's fifth tale (V, 3), the Ancient Man and his wife, the Ancient Woman, live in the forest where Pietro and Agnolella get lost. He and his wife shelter Agnolella even though she must rely on her own wits to protect her from roving thugs. Although he doesn't have much to offer, he and his wife demonstrate kindness and generosity.

Ancient Woman – In Elissa's fifth tale (V, 3), the Ancient Woman and her husband, the Ancient Man, live in the forest where Pietro and Agnolella get lost. They shelter Agnolella even though she must rely on her own wits to protect her from

roving thugs. Although they don't have much to offer, they demonstrate kindness and generosity.

Lizio da Valbona – Lizio da Valbona, husband of Giacomina and father of Caterina, appears in Filostrato's fifth tale (V, 4). He is a nobleman with a generous and virtuous reputation, although his advanced age inclines him to impatience with his daughter's requests. He shows circumspection and wisdom when he turns his daughter's potentially dishonorable deflowering into an advantageous marriage to Ricciardo de' Manardi.

Caterina – In Filostrato's fifth tale (V, 4), Caterina is born to Lizio da Valbona and Giacomina as her father is reaching old age. She falls in love with her neighbor, Ricciardo de' Manardi, and arranges to sleep with him under her parents' noses. When they find the lovers sleeping naked together in the morning, Caterina's parents insist that they marry each other immediately, and so their sexual impatience grants them access to the rolls of happy lovers.

Ricciardo de' Manardi – Appearing in Filostrato's fifth tale (V, 4), Ricciardo de' Manardi is a neighbor of Lizio da Valbona, his wife Giacomina, and their daughter Caterina. Although Lizio and Giacomina think of him almost as a son, he falls in love with their daughter Caterina and arranges to sleep with her under her parents' noses. Upon being discovered, he willingly decides to marry Caterina rather than face her parents' wrath. He and Caterina are very happy lovers both before and after their marriage.

Guidotto da Cremona – Guidotto da Cremona appears in Neifile's fifth tale (V, 5), where he is an aging Lombard knight. During a period of civil disorder, he rescued Agnesa while plundering houses with Guiglielmino da Medicina, and he raised her as a daughter, planning to use the plunder for her eventual dowry. On his deathbed, he gives her over to the care of his friend Giacomino da Pavia.

Giacomino da Pavia – Giacomino da Pavia appears in Neifile's fifth tale (V, 5), as the good friend of Guidotto da Cremona who assumes responsibility for Agnesa after his friend's death. He brings her back to her hometown (despite not knowing her identity), where he weathers the disputes over her love between Giannole di Severino and Minghino di Mingole with measured wisdom.

Agnesa – In Neifile's fifth tale (V, 5), Agnesa was rescued from her home by Guidotto da Cremona at the age of two, during a period of civil disorder. He raised her as his own, giving her into the care of Giacomino da Pavia on his death. Many years later, she is reunited with her family (her mother, father Bernabuccio, and brother Giannole di Severino) when she is identified by a singular scar. Her parents lost her when they fled the civil strife and subsequently believed her to be dead. Before her identity is revealed, however, Giannole and Minghino di Mingole fight ferociously over her. Thus, although she is counted among Day V's happy lovers when she eventually marries Minghino, she also demonstrates the objectification and vulnerability of women in a patriarchal culture, since her feelings about her admirers are never expressed.

Minghino di Mingole – Minghino di Mingole is one of Agnesa's admirers in Neifile's fifth tale, and he fiercely fights with Giannole di Severino over her. Of the two, he seems to be a better suitor, cultivating her maid as a go-between and sending her love letters. Later, when Giannole tries to kidnap her, he rescues her and brings her home. Both because of his kind actions and because it turns out that Giannole is Agnesa's brother, he becomes a happy lover when he gets to claim her as his bride in the end.

Restituta – In Pampinea's fifth tale (V, 6), Restituta is the beautiful daughter of nobleman Marin Bòlgaro. She loves a young man named Gianni but has kept him at bay because she wants to preserve her chastity. She is kidnapped by pirates who give her as a "**gift**" to King Frederick of Sicily. When she and Gianni are reunited, she repents her former "cruel" refusal and willingly has sex with him (also because she's sure she's about to become a king's concubine). She is meant to symbolize a steadfast lover, and she and Gianni are married in the end. But she also ends up demonstrating female objectification in *The Decameron* when she is offered as a gift to the king and her worth is tied to her sexuality alone.

Gianni – In Pampinea's fifth tale (V, 6), Gianni is Restituta's admirer. He demonstrates his bravery and fidelity when he immediately sets out to rescue her from pirates, and he is rewarded for his devotion in the short term (when she agrees to have sex with him after they're reunited) and the long term (when they are married).

King Frederick – King Frederick of Sicily appears in Pampinea's fifth tale (V, 6). He has a taste for beautiful women, so he receives Restituta as a **gift** from pirates. He is outraged to discover his "property" in Gianni's arms and initially sentences the lovers to execution. However, when he realizes that they are both from the nobility, political and class concerns override his desire for revenge, and he oversees their wedding before sending them triumphantly home. His generosity to these lovers echoes other generous sovereigns described on Day X.

Amerigo Abate – In Lauretta's fifth tale (V, 7), Amerigo Abate is a wealthy Sicilian gentleman and father of Violante. Although he's impressed enough with the good breeding of his allegedly Turkish slave Teodoro to grant him freedom and sponsor his baptism, he's less pleased when Teodoro gets Violante pregnant. His immoderate wrath, based on class consciousness and an understanding that his honor depends on his daughter's chastity, makes him cruel. Not only does he prosecute Teodoro, but he orders Violante to commit suicide. However, when Teodoro's noble identity is revealed, he repents and welcomes him into the family. His immoderate rage and thirst for vengeance aligns him with Tancredi (IV, 1), but since his tale

occurs on the day of happy lovers, it has a very different ending.

Teodoro (Pietro) – In Lauretta's fifth tale (V, 7), Teodoro is the son of Phineas, an Armenian nobleman. But when he's kidnapped as a child, he's erroneously sold to Amerigo Abate as a slave. Nevertheless, his innate nobility and good breeding earn his master's love, and he is granted his freedom. He falls in love with Amerigo's daughter Violante, and when he's sentenced to execution for their affair, by a stroke of good **fortune** Phineas recognizes him and reveals his identity. He is one of Day V's happy lovers, but his experience as a slave, like those of Guisfredi and The Outcast, shows how external circumstances can't ruin inherent noble character.

Violante – Violante appears in Lauretta's fifth tale (V, 7) as Amerigo Abate's daughter and Teodoro's lover and eventual wife. She embodies misogynistic fears about women's weak wills when she reveals her lover to her father, even after promising Teodoro that she would keep the secret. But, because she is one of Day V's happy lovers, she is reunited with Teodoro and happily married to him in the end.

Nastagio degli Onesti – In Filomena's fifth tale (V, 8), Nastagio degli Onesti is a young nobleman who loves Paolo's Daughter despite her haughty disdain. When he sees a vision detailing the punishment of another cruel lady, he shows it to Paolo's daughter, convincing her to look more kindly on him and accept his offer of marriage. He is one of Day V's happy lovers and is meant as an example of a steadfast lover, although his strategy for convincing his lady is based on making her fearful.

Paolo's Daughter – Paolo's Daughter appears, along with her father, Paolo Traversari, and her admirer, Nastagio degli Onesti, in Filomena's fifth tale (V, 8). Filomena implies that her pride and vanity make her spurn Nastagio's attentions, but when he shows her a vision of the terrifying punishment another "cruel" lady receives for not returning a man's love, she's frightened enough to put herself at Nastagio's disposal and to accept his proposal of marriage. She is thus an example of the medieval stereotype of the "cruel" lady reformed.

Guido degli Anastagi – Guido degli Anastagi appears as the knight of Nastagio degli Onesti's vision in Filomena's fifth tale (V, 8). When the lady he loved refused his attentions, he earned eternal damnation by committing suicide. In hell, his punishment is to chase his lady through the Italian countryside, hunting her down and killing her like an animal each day. In this way, he is enacting hatred towards she whom he loved in life. His story enables Nastagio to convince his own lady, Paolo's Daughter, to reconsider refusing Nastagio's love.

Coppo di Borghese Domenichi – Coppo di Borghese Domenichi appears in the introduction to Fiammetta's fifth tale (V, 9). Coppo was a historical Florentine statesman whom Giovanni Boccaccio knew and admired. His brief biography in this tale illustrates the qualities of a good nobleman and a good storyteller, which Boccaccio aspires to be in composing *The Decameron*. His outstanding character outshines his noble lineage, demonstrating the importance of character rather than external circumstance in determining a person's true class and worth.

Federigo – Federigo, a young Florentine nobleman in love with Giovanna, appears in Fiammetta's fifth tale (V, 9). Because Giovanna is married and wants to preserve her chastity, she spurns his advances, and he spends all his wealth trying to woo her. However, because he demonstrates a truly noble character, even after he must retire to live an impoverished life in the countryside, he retains polite manners and the customs of the nobility, like keeping his prized hawk. When Giovanna wants the hawk, his last possession, for her son, he willingly gives it to her as a demonstration of his steadfast love. And this steadfast love eventually earns her respect and affection, and after she's widowed, she takes Federigo as her second husband.

Giovanna – Giovanna, the object of Federigo's affections, appears in Fiammetta's fifth tale (V, 9). She spurns his advances while her husband is alive to preserve her honor. But when she's left a young widow with a sick son, her maternal devotion overcomes her scruples, and she takes advantage of Federigo's affection for her to ask for the prized hawk that her son covets. When Federigo gives it to her gallantly, demonstrating his steadfast devotion and noble manners, she comes to love him and eventually takes him as her second husband. Although her reformation happens more gently, she, like Paolo's Daughter, demonstrates the "cruel" lady transformed.

Pietro di Vinciolo – Pietro di Vinciolo appears in Dioneo's fifth tale (V, 10). He marries Pietro's Wife, a lusty young woman, either despite his homosexual desires, or to draw attention from them. Although he shows no interest in her, he's upset to discover she is having an affair…at least until they decide to share the young man between them. In getting to share his wife's attractive young man, he does become one of Day V's lucky lovers.

Pietro's Wife – The unsatisfied wife of Pietro di Vinciolo, Pietro's Wife appears in Dioneo's fifth tale (V, 10). She is a redheaded (lustful) young woman who begins a series of affairs with men provided by the Beldam because her husband isn't interested in sex with her. She is an example of misogynistic stereotypes about excessive female desire, and of feminine hypocrisy when she denounces Ercolano's wife for the same sins she herself commits. But, in gaining her husband's acceptance for her affair (by sharing her lover), she becomes one of Day V's satisfied lovers.

Beldam – The Beldam appears in Dioneo's fifth tale (V, 10), where she uses her saintly reputation and old age as cover for the fact that she's a bawd who sets up affairs for dissatisfied wives. She is a source of antifeminist commentary about women's excessive desire, their fleeting desirability, and their "purpose" in life, which is to have sex and make babies.

Ercolano – In Dioneo's fifth tale (V, 10), Ercolano is Pietro di Vinciolo's friend. Their dinner is interrupted when Ercolano catches his wife's lover hiding in a closet. He thus provides a foil or contrast for Pietro and his wife: while Ercolano beats his wife's lover, Pietro shares his, to everyone's mutual satisfaction.

Madonna Oretta – Madonna Oretta appears in Filomena's sixth tale (VI, 1). A Florentine noblewoman with a reputation for conversational wit and good breeding, she exemplifies these traits when she gently teases a knight for telling her a good story badly. She is also the wife of Geri Spina, who appears in another tale (VI, 2).

Cisti – Cisti is the protagonist of Pampinea's sixth tale (VI, 2). He is a working-class Florentine baker, although he has become quite wealthy and has an inherent nobility of character. He demonstrates both this nobility and the quick wit that is respected in *The Decameron*'s characters when he chastises Geri Spina's servant for making his master look greedy and ungenerous.

Antonio d'Orso – Based on a historical bishop who was a near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, Antonio d'Orso appears in Lauretta's sixth tale (VI, 3), where he hosts Catalan nobleman and scoundrel Dego della Ratta. He ignores Dego's forced affair with his relative and is punished for making a sexist and demeaning comment to Nonna de' Pulci when she offers a scathing retort implicating the bishop's relative for her affair.

Dego della Ratta – Based on a historical Catalan nobleman and near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, in Lauretta's sixth tale (VI, 3) Dego della Ratta appears as a known womanizer, who buys the sexual favors of Antonio d'Orso's relative from her husband, then adds to her humiliation by cheating on the payment. He is stung by Nonna de' Pulci's quick retort to Antonio's suggestion that she's less than virtuous.

Nonna de' Pulci – In Lauretta's sixth tale (VI, 3), Nonna de' Pulci is a Florentine woman whom many of the brigata knew before she died in the outbreak of the plague. When she was a newlywed, Antonio d'Orso publicly suggested that she would happily have sex with notorious scoundrel Dego della Ratta, but Nonna's quick wit and stinging response leaves both men feeling ashamed. She demonstrates the power of a quick-witted woman and proves that, sometimes, a biting response is called for.

Currado Gianfigliazzi – The character of Currado Gianfigliazzi in Neifile's sixth tale (VI, 4) is based on a historical near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio who belonged to a Florentine banking family. Renowned for generosity in his lifetime, in *The Decameron* his humor and kindness are shown when his wrath at his cook Chichibio is diffused by Chichibio's ridiculous self-defense for stealing part of Currado's dinner.

Madonna Filippa – In Filostrato's sixth tale (VI, 7), Madonna Filippa is the wife of Rinaldo de' Pugliesi and the lover of her husband's sworn enemy, Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri. When Rinaldo catches her with Lazzarino, he has her indicted for adultery, which carries a punishment of death. But, because love makes her brave, Madonna Filippa not only successfully defends herself against the charge of adultery but gets the statutes changed. She thus demonstrates the power of a witty retort—especially coming from a woman.

Rinaldo de' Pugliesi – In Filostrato's sixth tale (VI, 7), Rinaldo de' Pugliesi has his wife, Madonna Filippa, charged with adultery after he finds her in the arms of his sworn enemy, Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri. Like Tofano, Arriguccio, and Zeppa di Mino, his rage over his wife's infidelity spills into public view, and when she successfully gains acquittal of the charges, he is further humiliated because their argument plays out in public.

Cesca – In Emilia's sixth tale (VI, 8), Cesca is the spoiled niece of Fresco da Celatico. Cesca is an unflattering caricature of a stuck-up, unintelligent, and impatient girl. In a day of tales that are frequently concerned with the power that women gain through wit and wisdom, Cesca provides an unflattering counterexample of how unpleasant an unintelligent woman can be.

Betto Brunelleschi – Betto Brunelleschi appears in Elissa's sixth story (VI, 9), drawn from a historical Florentine politician who was friends with Dante Alighieri and Guido Cavalcanti and the poet Dante. In *The Decameron*, Betto is a young nobleman who wants to draw the intelligent and wealthy Guido into his group of friends. When, however, Guido insults them, only Betto has the capacity to understand what has happened, demonstrating his superior intelligence.

Guido Cavalcanti – Guido Cavalcanti, a Florentine philosopher and poet who was a contemporary and friend of Dante Alighieri and who died shortly before Giovanni Boccaccio was born, appears as a character in Elissa's sixth tale (VI, 9). He is charming and sophisticated, and rather than taking offense when Betto Brunelleschi and his friends mock him, he demonstrates biting wit with a quick retort.

Friar Cipolla – Friar Cipolla (whose name means "Onion") is the protagonist of Dioneo's sixth tale (VI, 10). He belongs to the order of St. Anthony's Hospitallers, and he travels around with his servant Guccio Imbratta, displaying false relics and dazzling unsophisticated country-dwellers with his rhetorical skills. His false relics and his dazzling but empty rhetorical style make him part of the anticlerical satire threaded throughout *The Decameron*.

Gianni Lotteringhi – In Emilia's seventh tale (VII, 1), Gianni Lotteringhi is a wealthy Florentine master-weaver. He is simple and devout and frequently entertains holy men in his home. He is susceptible to the trick his wife, Monna Tessa, uses to warn her lover off—a faux exorcism—because of his religious beliefs. He is the first of Day VII's tricked husbands.

Monna Tessa – In Emilia's seventh tale (VII, 1), Monna Tessa is the unsatisfied wife of Gianni Lotteringhi. She takes Federigo di

Neri Pegolotti as a lover and demonstrates the quick wit of Day VII's tricky wives when she uses a fake exorcism to warn Federigo off and hide her affair from her husband.

Peronella's Husband – In Filostrato's seventh tale (VII, 2), Peronella's husband is a poor bricklayer married to Peronella. He becomes the victim of his wife's trick when he comes home unexpectedly one day while she is entertaining her lover. She can deceive him, at least in part, because he innocently believes in her chastity and honor.

Peronella – In Filostrato's seventh tale (VII, 2), Peronella is a poor spinner married to Peronella's Husband, although she has taken Giannello Scrignario as her lover. When her husband comes home unexpectedly, she demonstrates both quickness of wit in hiding her lover and brazenness in having sex with him in the same room as her husband.

Giannello Scrignario – The name of Peronella's lover, Giannello Scrignario, comes from a historical person who was living in Naples during Giovanni Boccaccio's lifetime, but about whom little else is known. In Filostrato's seventh tale (VII, 2), he helps to demonstrate the brazenness with which some women trick their husbands when he has sex with her in the same room as her unwitting husband.

Friar Rinaldo – In Elissa's seventh tale (VII, 3), Rinaldo is a Sienese gentleman who falls in love with his neighbor's wife and insinuates himself into the family by becoming their son's godfather. As her lover, he provides the impetus for Madonna Agnesa's trick on her husband; as a monk, he illustrates the sinfulness, avarice, and lustfulness of the clergy and contributes to *The Decameron*'s ongoing anticlerical satire.

Tofano – Tofano is the unlucky and bamboozled husband at the center of Lauretta's seventh tale (VII, 4). His wife, Ghita, tricks him twice: first by taking advantage of his immoderate consumption of wine to sneak out of the house, then by luring him outside and locking him out so she can portray herself as the victim of his unjust suspicion. Like Amerigo Abate (V, 7) and Arriguccio Berlinghieri (VII, 8), he shows little regard for his own honor when he shouts abuse at her within the neighbors' earshot. After she convinces everyone else of her innocence, he becomes excessively uxorious (showing excessive or submissive fondness towards a wife), agreeing that if she keeps it secret, she can have as many lovers as she wants.

Ghita –Ghita is Tofano's wife in Lauretta's seventh tale (VII, 4) and one of the day's devious wives. Her husband's unreasonable jealousy inspires her to take a lover, and she takes advantage of his excessive drinking to leave the house when she wants. When he catches her, she manipulates him and convinces the neighborhood of her innocence, thereby earning the ability to have lovers as she pleases, if she protects her husband's honor by keeping his cuckolding a secret.

Jealous Merchant – In Fiammetta's seventh tale (VII, 5), the Jealous Merchant is an example of immoderation. He protects the Jealous Merchant's Wife so fiercely that he won't even let her go near the windows, and when she asks to go to confession, he impersonates a priest to spy on her. However, his intelligence doesn't match his jealousy, and not only is his wife able to see through his disguise, but she turns his ploy into an opportunity to carry on an affair with their neighbor, Filippo.

Jealous Merchant's Wife – In Fiammetta's seventh tale (VII, 5), the Jealous Merchant's Wife is a level-headed and clever woman who sees through the Jealous Merchant's priestly disguise and turns his attempt to spy on her into a chance to conduct an affair with her neighbor Filippo. She reveals the "truth" to her husband, and while nothing that she says is technically wrong, it's not fully true either, showing how the clever manipulation of words can be used to a person's advantage.

Isabella – Madonna Isabella appears in Pampinea's seventh tale (VII, 6). She is a Florentine noblewoman who has grown tired of Isabella's Husband and has two lovers: Leonetto, whom she loves, and Lambertuccio, who has coerced her into having sex with him. She tricks her husband and her unwanted lover, saving herself from a bad situation. She shows that women's tricks aren't limited to their husbands.

Leonetto – In Pampinea's seventh tale (VII, 6), Leonetto is an accomplished and agreeable man despite his humble origins. He is evidence for *The Decameron*'s claim that character is more important than wealth and status, and he serves as the reason for Isabella's trick on her husband to cover up their affair.

Lambertuccio – In Pampinea's seventh tale (VII, 6), Lambertuccio is a Florentine gentleman who loves Isabella and forces her to have sex with him by threatening to ruin her reputation if she refuses; she subsequently employs a trick to dispose of him as a lover. His coercion demonstrates the vulnerability of women, especially to attacks on their character, given the value placed on their sexuality.

Anichino (Lodovico) – Anichino (Lodovico) appears in Filomena's seventh tale (VII, 7). Raised in the French royal household, Anichino displays nobility of character when he falls in love from afar (*amor du lonh*) with the reputation of Madonna Beatrice. He disguises himself as a servant and enters her husband's household, eventually becoming Beatrice's lover. In this way, he demonstrates steadfast love and the inherent nobility of a good character.

Beatrice – In Filomena's seventh tale (VII, 7), Madonna Beatrice is the beautiful wife of Egano de' Galluzzi and the lover of Anichino. Her beauty is so incredible that just descriptions of her are enough to cause Lodovico (Anichino) to fall in love with her sight unseen. In taking Anichino as her lover, she tricks her husband, but she also plays a second, meaner trick when she sets up a scenario in which Anichino can beat Egano for her entertainment.

Egano de' Galluzzi – In Filomena's seventh tale (VII, 7), Egano

de' Galluzzi is a nobleman married to Madonna Beatrice. He employs Anichino as a servant, and when Anichino and Beatrice become lovers, he falls victim to their fabliaux pranks, putting on women's clothes, waiting in the **garden** while his wife entertains her lover, and being beaten for his trouble by his rival.

Arriguccio Berlinghieri – Arriguccio Berlinghieri appears in Neifile's seventh tale (VII, 8) as the husband of Monna Sismonda. He is a social climber who married a noblewoman to break into aristocratic circles after becoming rich as a merchant. When he discovers the string Sismonda uses to communicate with Ruberto, her lover, he becomes enraged and tries to punish her with a brutal beating and by sending her dishonorably back to her family. But when Sismonda foils his plot with a second trick, she makes him look like a fool.

Monna Sismonda – In Neifile's seventh tale (VII, 8), Sismonda is Arriguccio Berlinghieri's wife and Ruberto's lover. She demonstrates quick wit when she avoids Arriguccio's wrathful punishment on discovering her means of communicating with her lover, but she sacrifices the safety of her maid to do so. Having made her husband look like a fool, she continues her affair with impunity.

Nicostratos – In Panfilo's seventh tale (VII, 9), Nicostratos is a noble lord of ancient Greece who marries Lydia in his old age. He thus exemplifies the *senex amans* (old lover), along with Ricciardo de Chinzica (II, 10), Friar Puccio (III, 4), and Mazzeo della Montagna (IV, 10). He is the victim of a particularly cruel series of tricks in which Lydia kills his favorite falcon, pulls out his hair and teeth, and has sex with his servant Pyrrhus in front of him.

Lydia – In Panfilo's seventh tale (VII, 9), Lydia is the young and beautiful wife of Nicostratos. When she falls in love with their servant, Pyrrhus, he sets her three difficult tasks to win his love. She accomplishes these by various tricks and subterfuges, then adds her own trick, cuckolding Nicostratos while he watches.

Tingoccio Mini – In Dioneo's seventh tale (VII, 10), Tingoccio Mini is a young man living in Siena. He is best friends with Meuccio di Tura, the godfather of Mita and Ambruogio Anselmini's child, and, eventually, Mita's lover. Since their relationship is considered incestuous by medieval standards, Tingoccio represents the power of love even against Christian morality.

Meuccio di Tura – In Dioneo's seventh tale (VII, 10), Meuccio di Tura is a young man living in Siena who is friends with Tingoccio Mini and an admirer of Mita. He represents the excessive credulity of the Sienese, since he whole-heartedly believes that sleeping with the mother of a godchild is committing a sin—incest—that will be punished with damnation.

Madonna Ambruogia – In Neifile's eighth tale (VIII, 1), Ambruogia is the wife of wealthy merchant Guasparruolo Cagastraccio. She asks Gulfardo to pay for her sexual favors, demonstrating the greediness of women who are willing to prostitute themselves for money instead of engaging in affairs for love. But he goes behind her back to bilk her out of the payment and is applauded for doing so because selling sex is condemned by *The Decameron*.

Worthy Priest – In Panfilo's eighth tale (VIII, 2), the Worthy Priest cares for the souls of a small country hamlet. He's not very educated but keeps his parishioners entertained with fun sermons and their wives from being lonely in their husbands' absence. He foolishly pawns his woolen cloak for sex with Belcolore, but then tricks her into having to return it for free. He is a part of *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire, with his interest in having sex and his reputation for ruining women's honor. He also demonstrates the power men wield over women in the patriarchal hierarchy of medieval society, threatening Belcolore with hellfire until she forgives him for his trick.

Belcolore – In Panfilo's eighth tale (VIII, 2), Monna Belcolore is the wife of Bentivegna del Mazzo and the object of the Worthy Priest's affections because she seductively drives the men wild when she plays the tambourine, sings, and dances. She's also said to be the best grinder in the village (suggesting that she sleeps around). However, trading sex for material gain as she does with the Worthy Priest is censured in *The Decameron*, and she falls victim to his tricks both because she is greedy and because she hasn't learned Panfilo's moral that all priests are untrustworthy.

Calandrino – Calandrino appears in four of *The Decameron*'s stories: Elissa's eighth (VIII, 3), Filomena's eighth (VIII, 6), Filostrato's ninth (IX, 3), and Fiammetta's ninth (IX, 5). "Calandrino" was the nickname of a thirteenth/fourteenth-century Florentine painter who was, like the character in *The Decameron*, famous for being simple-minded. He is friends with other painters, including Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello; is married to Tessa; and uses Simone da Villa as his physician. He is excessively gullible, tends to drink too much, and takes out his frustrations on his wife through physical and verbal abuse. In his various tales, he searches for a magic stone and beats his wife (VIII, 3); loses a pig to Bruno and Buffalmacco (VIII, 6); is convinced that he is pregnant (IX, 3); and falls in love with a prostitute, thinking that she is an aristocratic wife (IX, 5).

Bruno – Bruno appears in five of *The Decameron*'s tales told by Elissa (VIII, 3), Filomena (VIII, 6), Lauretta (VIII, 9), Filostrato (IX, 3), and Fiammetta (IX, 5). Unlike his friends, Buffalmacco and Calandrino, he doesn't appear to have a historical antecedent. In the tales, he is trickster who delights in playing pranks on the unintelligent and gullible, and he lives in fine style by fleecing others out of their hospitality and money.

Buffalmacco – Like Calandrino and unlike Bruno, Buffalmacco is based on a Florentine painter. He appears in tales told by Elissa (VIII, 3), Filomena (VII, 6), Lauretta (VIII, 9), Filostrato (IX, 3), and Fiammetta (IX, 5). A big, strong man, he is always with

Bruno. Together they trick Calandrino on several occasions, and he also defrauds Simone da Villa, earning a bunch of free meals in the process. Like Bruno, he is a trickster figure who delights in pranking the gullible.

Maso del Saggio – Maso del Saggio appears in two of *The Decameron*'s tales: Elissa's eighth (VIII, 3) and Filostrato's eighth (VIII, 5). Like Calandrino and Buffalmacco, he is based on a well-known Florentine prankster. And like Bruno and Buffalmacco, he loves to take advantage of the gullible and the ignorant, as when he instigates the heliotrope trick against Calandrino and when he coordinates the pantsing of Niccola da San Lepidio.

Piccarda – Monna Piccarda is a widow and the love interest of the Provost in Emilia's eighth tale (VIII, 4). She is young, lovely, and clever. When the Provost won't accept her gentle "no" for an answer, she and her brothers trick him into sleeping with her servant, Cuitazza. She demonstrates how an intelligent and shrewd person (even a woman) can treat people according to their just desserts without engaging in dishonorable conduct. Like Francesca de' Lazzari (IX, 1) she demonstrates how a clever woman can rid herself of an unwanted lover; examples of the wrong way to do this include Elena (VIII, 7) and Dianora (X, 5).

Provost – In Emilia's eighth tale (VIII, 4), the Provost is the priest who falls in love with Monna Piccarda. Because he continues to pursue her even after she's made her disinterest clear, she and her brothers trick him into sleeping with her ugly maid, Cuitazza, and then expose his dalliance to the bishop. He shows how clever and resourceful people can get the best of insufferable, arrogant, and spoiled people.

Niccola da San Lepidio – A judge brought to Florence by one of its avaricious and miserly chief magistrates, Niccola da San Lepidio is the victim of a prank played by Maso del Saggio, Ribi, and Matteuzzo in Filostrato's eighth tale (VIII, 5). He is skinny and unkempt and he dresses like a country bumpkin in clothes that are dirty and don't fit properly. This allows the pranksters to pull his pants down in public, exposing both his body and the magistrate's failure to bring good judges to the city.

Elena – In Pampinea's eighth tale (VIII, 7), Elena is a young and lovely widow who has taken a lover instead of remarrying and who becomes the object of scholar Rinieri's affections. She is vain, selfish, and shallow, willing to string Rinieri along because of her vanity and then to trust he has her best interests at heart even after she harmed him. She is an example of the "cruel" woman who ignores a man's love, going even farther in playing a mean-spirited and humiliating trick on Rinieri. Her painful punishment is an extremely misogynistic lesson that women shouldn't try to outsmart men or pretend to have virtue when they're willing to take lovers.

Rinieri – Rinieri is the protagonist of Pampinea's eighth tale (VIII, 7). A Florentine who went to Paris to achieve a university education, he falls in love with Elena on his return. After she tricks and humiliates him in front of her lover, he punishes her with painful and humiliating torture. His tirades against Elena are full of medieval misogynistic stereotypes and language, and he actively refuses to give in to compassion and mercy on several occasions. Many scholars have taken at least elements of his story to be a fictionalization of a real heartbreak suffered by Giovanni Boccaccio.

Zeppa di Mino – Zeppa di Mino appears in Fiammetta's eighth tale (VIII, 8) as a wealthy young Sienese man who is best friends and neighbors with Spinelloccio Tavena. When he catches Zeppa's Wife sleeping with Spinelloccio, he demonstrates wisdom in airing the affair publicly and in finding an exactly reciprocal revenge (sleeping with Spinelloccio's Wife and forcing his friend to witness it). In this way, his revenge contrasts with the excessive punishment Rinieri visits on Elena in the previous tale.

Simone da Villa – In Lauretta's eighth tale (VIII, 9), Simone da Villa is the victim of one of Bruno and Buffalmacco's tricks. He reappears in Filostrato's ninth tale (IX, 3), where he helps Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello convince Calandrino that he's pregnant. Simone is a pretentious doctor who has little intelligence or insight and very low taste in women. He cultivates Bruno's friendship to gain access to a fictional secret society, treating them to fine meals and giving them **gifts**. Even after they trick him, he continues to entertain them so they won't share the story of his humiliation around town.

Salabaetto – Salabaetto is the nickname of Niccolò da Cignano, a Florentine merchant who appears in Dioneo's eighth tale (VIII, 10). His name appears to belong to a historical person who was an active merchant in the middle of the 14th century. In *The Decameron*, Salabaetto is a young man who, like Andreuccio (II, 5), falls victim to a Sicilian conwoman. But Salabaetto, with the help of Pietro dello Canigiano, catches Madonna Jancofiore in her own trap, demonstrating cleverness and punishing her excessive greed.

Jancofiore – Madonna Jancofiore appears in Dioneo's eighth tale (VIII, 10). Like the Sicilian Woman (II, 5), she is a very beautiful conwoman living in Sicily who scams Salabaetto out of his money, demonstrating the power of female beauty and male lust. However, her greediness causes her to fall into Salabaetto's trap, and she becomes the victim of a version of her own con.

Francesca de' Lazzari – In Filomena's ninth tale (IX, 1), Francesca de' Lazzari is a young and beautiful widow of Pistoria who wants to rid herself of her two admirers, Rinuccio Palermini and Alessandro Chiarmontesi. But to do so without shame, she needs a good reason, so she sets each an impossible task and dismisses them when they fail. She demonstrates the proper way for a woman to get rid of an unwanted lover like Madonna Piccarda (VIII, 4) and in implied contrast to Elena

(VIII, 7).

Sister Isabetta – In Elissa's ninth tale (IX, 2), Sister Isabetta is a young nun who frequently consorts with her lover in her cell at the convent. When she's caught in the act by jealous and suspicious sisters, she calls out the hypocrisy of Abbess Usimbalda, demonstrating how **fortune** can save people from tricky spots and highlighting the hypocrisy of the clergy.

Abbess Usimbalda – In Elissa's ninth tale (IX, 2), Abbess Usimbalda runs the convent where Sister Isabetta lives. She sneaks her lover into the convent frequently, despite her pious reputation. She's caught when she accidentally puts her lover's breeches on her head in the middle of the night, and she immediately switches from chastising Sister Isabetta to excusing her actions. She is thus part of *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire.

Cecco Angiulieri – The Cecco Angiulieri who appears in Neifile's ninth tale (IX, 4), is based on a late 13th-century poet who knew Cecco Fortarrigo. In *The Decameron*, he is a handsome and chivalrous young man who wants to enhance his fortunes in the papal court and who falls victim to Fortarrigo's vices.

Cecco Fortarrigo – The Cecco Fortarrigo who appears in Neifile's ninth tale (IX, 4), is based on a historical person to whom Cecco Angiulieri dedicated two of his sonnets in the late 13th century. In *The Decameron*, he represents the dangers of immoderation though his vices of drinking and gambling, and he plays a mean trick on his friend Angiulieri.

Bachelor Filippo – In Fiammetta's ninth story (IX, 5), Bachelor Filippo is the son of the man who is building the villa where Bruno, Buffalmacco, Calandrino, and Nello are painting. It's his prostitute, Niccolosa, who becomes the object of Calandrino's affections, and Filippo joins with the painters in playing an elaborate prank on Calandrino.

Niccolosa – In Fiammetta's ninth story (IX, 5), Niccolosa is a Florentine prostitute who entertains Bachelor Filippo at his father's country estate. When Calandrino falls in love with her, she joins Filippo and Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello to prank him. Described as pretty, well mannered, and well-spoken despite her lowly occupation, her character has enough of a veneer of aristocracy to enable the satire of fin'amors in the tale.

Host's Wife – In Panfilo's ninth tale (IX, 6), the Host's Wife lives with the **Host**, Miss Niccolosa, and her infant in a small home outside of Florence. When the tale's bed-switching ensues, she enjoys unexpected sex with Adriano. As a fabliaux wife, she is clever enough to realize what's happening and to cover up the night's sexual antics before her husband realizes that both she and Miss Niccolosa have slept with the guests.

Corso Donati – Corso Donati appears in Lauretta's ninth tale (IX, 8), as one of the wealthy Florentines who support the lifestyles of mooches like Biondello and Ciacco. The character is based on a real Florentine who was the head of the political faction opposed to Vieri de' Cerchi, and he was exiled and murdered shortly before Giovanni Boccaccio's lifetime.

Melissus – In Emilia's ninth tale (IX, 9), Melissus is a nobleman who spends money trying—unsuccessfully—to get people to like him. He befriends Joseph on the road to Jerusalem to seek Solomon's wisdom. He illustrates the truism that to be loved, one must love others—a lesson that another rich young man, Mithridanes, must also learn later in *The Decameron* (X, 3).

Joseph – In Emilia's ninth tale (IX, 9), Joseph is a man who is married to the stubborn and disobedient Joseph's Wife. He befriends Melissus on the way to Jerusalem to ask Solomon how to improve her manners and learns that the problem is he hasn't been beating her enough. He illustrates how a husband who exercises insufficient authority can lead to a recalcitrant wife and learns to control her through violence.

Joseph's Wife – In Emilia's ninth tale (IX, 9), Joseph's Wife is a willful and disobedient woman who ignores her husband Joseph. She is a misogynistic stereotype of the disobedient and argumentative wife, and the tale claims that her recalcitrance arises from her husband's ineffectual discipline. When he beats her severely, she learns to be better behaved.

Father Gianni – In Dioneo's ninth tale (IX, 10), Father Gianni is an Apulian priest who supplements his church wages by becoming a small-time trader. He befriends Neighbor Pietro and his wife Gemmata. When he has sex with Gemmata in front of Pietro, he's performing the role of fabliaux priest and contributing to the anticlerical satire in *The Decameron* which sees priests as oversexed.

Gemmata – In Dioneo's ninth tale (IX, 10), Gemmata is the very young and very beautiful wife of Neighbor Pietro. She wants Father Gianni to teach them magic so they can increase their wealth; her desire for money rather than sex differentiates her from the typical fabliaux wife, even though the "spell" is an excuse for Father Gianni to have sex with her.

Ruggieri de' Figiovanni – Ruggieri de' Figiovanni appears in Neifile's tenth tale (X, 1). He is a Florentine nobleman of great courage who travels to serve in the court of King Alphonso of Spain. When he feels that he's not being adequately rewarded, Alphonso demonstrates that he's **fortune**'s victim before demonstrating his own generosity by giving Ruggieri substantial **gifts**.

Ghino di Tacco – Ghino di Tacco appears as the protagonist of Elissa's tenth tale (X, 2). The character is based on a historical Sienese nobleman who was exiled in the late 13th century and who had a reputation for stealing from the rich who passed along the highway to give to the poor. In *The Decameron*, he demonstrates this generosity in hosting the Abbot of Cluny and makes the case for his own noble character when he claims that he has only turned to thievery because his exile forces him to

live a life that's not suitable for a nobleman such as himself. For this, he is rewarded by the pope.

Nathan – Nathan is the protagonist of Filostrato's tenth tale (X, 3). He is a wealthy nobleman living in the East who builds a splendid palace from which to generously share hospitality and wealth with travelers. In this tale, he is an example of Christ-like generosity since he is willing to give up his life to make his sworn enemy, Mithridanes, happy. But his example inspires Mithridanes to become a better person.

Mithridanes – Mithridanes is the antagonist of Filostrato's tenth tale (X, 3) in contrast to the generous Nathan. Mithridanes is younger than Nathan and, like Melissus (IX, 9), wishes to become famous for his generosity and outshine his competitor. When Nathan shows that he's willing to give up his very life, Mithridanes learns that generosity should be its own end, not a way to achieve fame, and he becomes a better person.

Gentile de' Carisendi – Gentile de' Carisendi is the generous protagonist of Lauretta's tenth tale (X, 4). When he accidentally discovers that his beloved Madonna Catalina is not as dead as her family thinks, he rescues her and eventually returns her to her husband, Niccoluccio Caccianimico. By giving up that which he loves so greatly, even though he feels that he has a right to claim Catalina as his own, he demonstrates the day's theme of generosity.

Ansaldo Gradense – Ansaldo Gradense is Madonna Dianora's admirer in Elissa's tenth tale (X, 5). He cheats by hiring a Magician to help him fulfill the impossible condition she sets him but is generously willing to release her from her rash promise after seeing her husband Gilberto's inspiring example of generosity. He himself becomes the recipient of the Magician's generosity in turn.

King Charles – Based on the historical, 13th-century king of Naples and Sicily, in Fiammetta's tenth tale (X, 6), King Charles visits Neri degli Uberti to see his beautiful **garden**, where he becomes enamored of Neri's daughters, Ginevra and Isotta. When his counselor Guy de Montfort counsels him against abducting either one, he demonstrates royal generosity in providing dowries for their marriages instead and in his willingness to endure the pain of love until its hold over him is broken, rather than selfishly claiming the young women for himself.

Neri degli Uberti – In Fiammetta's tenth tale (X, 6), Neri degli Uberti is expelled from Florence by King Charles. He takes his family, including twin daughters Ginevra and Isotta, to the country where he builds a beautiful **garden**. When King Charles wants to see it, Neri entertains him generously despite their political animus. In doing so, he demonstrates noble character and is accordingly rewarded by the king.

Lisa – In Pampinea's tenth tale (X, 6), Lisa is the bourgeois daughter of Bernardo Puccini who falls hopelessly in love with King Peter of Aragon. When she surreptitiously informs him of her feelings, her circumspection and nobility of sentiment impress him so much that he gives her a dowry and a noble husband and serves for the rest of his life as her knight. She is thus the recipient of royal generosity.

Titus Quintus Fulvius – Titus Quintus Fulvius appears in Filomena's tenth tale (X, 8), where he is a noble Roman youth and brother of Fulvia. When he travels to Athens to study, he becomes best friends with Gisippus. He is the recipient of Gisippus's generosity when his friend hands over his fiancée, Sophronia, with whom Titus is hopelessly in love. And he shows his own generosity when he doesn't hesitate to risk his life to save Gisippus from execution for a crime he didn't commit.

Gisippus – Gisippus, son of Chremes, is Titus Quintus Fulvius's best friend in Filomena's tenth tale (X, 8). He demonstrates both generosity and the power of friendship when he helps Titus to secretly marry his own fiancée, Sophronia, in his place. And, later, he's the recipient of Titus's generosity when his old friend saves him from execution, restores his lost fortune, and gives him Fulvia (Titus's sister) as a wife.

Sophronia – In Filomena's tenth tale (X, 8), Sophronia is Gisippus's fiancée, but she unknowingly becomes Titus Quintus Fulvius's wife when the friends agree to trade places (since Titus is hopelessly in love with her). Like Catalina (X, 4), Dianora (X, 5) and her own sister-in-law Fulvia, Sophronia becomes an object by whose exchange the men around her can demonstrate their generosity to each other.

Torello – Torello appears in Panfilo's tenth tale (X, 9), as the Italian nobleman who, along with his wife Adalieta, generously entertains Saladin when the Muslim leader is traveling through Europe in disguise. His instinctive recognition of Saladin's noble character cements their friendship, and when he is later captured by the Saracens (the Muslim forces in the Third Crusade), he is reunited with his friend and becomes the recipient of Saladin's legendary royal generosity.

Adalieta – In Panfilo's tenth tale (X, 9), Adalieta is the faithful and "princely" wife of Torello. She is a paragon of feminine fidelity, loving and honoring her husband's wishes even after he appears to have died. And she's a paragon of aristocratic generosity when she helps Torello entertain Saladin when he comes to Italy disguised as a merchant.

Gualtieri – In Dioneo's tenth tale (X, 10), Gualtieri is the Marquis of Saluzzo. A confirmed bachelor, he marries Griselda under duress and proceeds to test her fidelity and obedience with sadistic acts like pretending to murder their children. Once she's proved herself to him, he restores all he's taken from her, and they live happily together.

Griselda – In Dioneo's tenth tale (X, 10), Griselda is the low-born, patient, and obedient daughter of Giannùcole and wife of Gualtieri. She is a caricature of wifely obedience—of the kind Margarita (IX, 7) and Joseph's Wife (IX, 9) don't have—and her

patience despite the apparent murder of her children strains belief.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Parmeno – Parmeno is Dioneo's servant, whom Pampinea appoints as the group's steward. Like the rest of the servants, his name comes from classical Roman dramas—emphasizing the ahistorical aspects of the brigata's time in the countryside—and it means "to stand beside," essentially indicating his servile status.

Stratilia – Stratilia is Fiammetta's maid, assigned with Chimera to chambermaid duties by Pampinea. Like the rest of the servants, she has a name drawn from classical Roman drama.

Jehannot de Chevigny – Jehannot de Chevigny appears in Neifile's first tale (I, 2). He is a wealthy Parisian merchant who works hard to convert his friend, Jewish moneylender Abraham, to Christianity.

Guiglielmo Borsiere – Guiglielmo Borsiere appears in Lauretta's first tale (I, 8) as the epitome of a refined and effective courtier. He visits Ermino de' Grimaldi and corrects his miserly tendencies without causing the nobleman shame or embarrassment.

Stecchi – The character of Stecchi appears in Neifile's second tale (II, 1), based on a historical Florentine clown who was renowned for his impersonations. Accompanied by Marchese and Martellino, Stecchi visits Treviso and views the body of the saintly Arrigo lying in the cathedral.

Marchese – The character of Marchese appears in Neifile's second tale (II, 1) as the companion of Stecchi and Martellino, with whom he visits Treviso and views the body of the saintly Arrigo lying in the cathedral.

Guasparrino d'Oria – In Emilia's second tale (II, 6), Guasparrino d'Oria is a Genoese merchant-pirate whose share of his ship's booty includes Guisfredi (Giannotto) and The Outcast as slaves. Initially an agent of their ill **fortune**, he apologizes for enslaving The Outcast by offering him a daughter in marriage.

Beminedab – In Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), Beminedab is the Sultan of Babylon in Panfilo's tale (II, 7). Among his many children is the world's most beautiful woman, Alatiel, whom he sends to marry his ally, the King of Algarve, in thanks for military assistance.

The King of Algarve – The King of Algarve appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7) as an ally of Sultan Beminedab. He asks for Alatiel as a reward for his military aid. He's part of the exchange of an objectified Alatiel, since he marries her after her many years of wandering.

Pericone de Visalgo –Pericone appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7) as Alatiel's first lover. When Alatiel is shipwrecked on the Spanish coast, he rescues her and ultimately resorts to trickery to convince her to become his lover. He's murdered by his brother, Marato.

Marato – Pericone's brother Marato, who appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), also loves Alatiel. He murders Pericone and kidnaps Alatiel as his own but is in turn murdered by the two Young Masters of their escape ship.

Curiaci – Curiaci appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), where he is the Prince of Morea's most trusted servant. He helps the Duke of Athens murder the Prince and is murdered for his trouble. The discovery of his body reveals the murders to the people of Corinth.

Emperor of Constantinople – In Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), the Emperor of Constantinople is the Duke of Athens' father-in-law, the father of Constant, and the grandfather of Manuel. When Constant is kidnapped by the Turks (because he has Alatiel), The Emperor of Constantinople and his allies go to war against them.

Manuel – Manuel appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7), where he is Constant's nephew and the grandson of the Emperor of Constantinople. Manuel assumes his uncle's responsibilities, allowing him to kidnap Alatiel and flee to Turkey.

Cypriot Merchant – The Cypriot Merchant appears in Panfilo's second tale (II, 7) as a friend of Antioco and as Alatiel's last lover.

Sultan of Alexandria – The Sultan of Alexandria appears in Filomena's second tale (II, 9), where Sicurano da Finale (Zinerva) is his trusted advisor. By elevating her and by eventually punishing Ambrogiuolo, he becomes an agent of **fortune**.

Theodelinda – In Pampinea's third tale (III, 2), Theodelinda is the wife of King Agilulf. When he disguises himself as her husband, she unknowingly has sex with the Groom. Because this happens without her knowledge or consent, she serves as the object over which her husband and servant display their cleverness.

Florentine Nobleman – The Florentine Nobleman in Filomena's third tale (III, 3) appeals to the Florentine Noblewoman as a potential sexual partner of her own class. He is clever enough to understand how she's using the Florentine Friar as a go-between and gamely plays along.

Filippello Sighinolfo – Filippello Sighinolfo is Catella's beloved husband in Fiammetta's third story (III, 6).

Bolognese Monk – The Bolognese Monk appears in Lauretta's third tale (III, 8), where his recent arrival to the monastery means that he can help the Womanizing Abbot by taking the role of Purgatorial jailor for Ferondo, since no one knows him.

Neerbal – Neerbal appears in Dioneo's third tale (III, 10). He is a dissolute young man who marries Alibech to claim her inheritance.

Honest Man – The Honest Man of Pampinea's fourth tale (IV,

2) gives Friar Alberto shelter when he's running from Lisetta's brothers-in-law. But he also exemplifies Venetian duplicity by turning on his guest, extorting protection money from him and turning him over to local justice anyway.

King of Tunis – The King of Tunis appears in Elissa's fourth tale (IV, 4), where he is an ally of King William the Second. When he arranges for his daughter, the Tunisian Princess, to marry, he seeks William's assurance that Gerbino won't interfere.

Lorenzo – In Filomena's fourth tale (IV, 5), Lorenzo is the unlucky lover of Lisabetta, who is murdered by Lisabetta's Brothers when they discover the affair.

Gabriotto – In Panfilo's fourth tale (IV, 6), Gabriotto is Andreuola's poor but worthy secret husband. He dies of natural causes in his wife's arms, as one of Day IV's unlucky lovers, and receives a noble burial from his generous father-in-law, Negro de Pontecarraro.

Ligina – In Emilia's fourth tale (IV, 7), Ligina is Simona's friend and Stramba's lover, who is in the **garden** when Pasquino dies.

Pasimondas – Pasimondas appears in Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1) as Iphigenia's fiancée and Ormisdas's brother. Cimon murders Pasimondas so that he can claim Iphigenia as his own bride.

Ormisdas – In Panfilo's fifth tale (V, 1), Ormisdas is Pasimondas's brother. He is betrothed to Cassandra and is killed by Lysimachus.

Saracen Lady – In Emilia's fifth tale (V, 2), the Saracen Lady shows kindness to the castaway Gostanza. She demonstrates that nobility of spirit and kindness can reside in non-Christians ("Saracen" is a medieval designation for "Muslim"), and it's by her aid that Gostanza is reunited with Martuccio Gomito.

Mulay Abd Allah – In Emilia's fifth tale (V, 2), Mulay Abd Allah is the Muslim king of Tunis who follows Martuccio Gomito's military advice and wins his war against Granada. He subsequently elevates Martuccio's fortunes by raising him to a powerful position in the kingdom and giving him great wealth.

Liello di Campo di Fiore – In Elissa's fifth tale (V, 3), Liello di Campo Fiore is a Roman nobleman who is on good terms with Pietro's and Agnolella's families. They escape to his castle and are the beneficiaries of his generosity via Liello's Wife.

Liello's Wife – In Elissa's fifth tale (V, 3), Liello's wife recognizes Agnolella's noble character, despite her lower status, and arranges her marriage to Pietro, thus ensuring that they achieve their happy ending.

Giacomina – In Filostrato's fifth tale (V, 4), Giacomina is Lizio da Valbona's wife and Caterina's doting mother.

Giannole di Severino – Giannole di Severino is one of Agnesa's admirers in Neifile's fifth tale (V, 5), although it later turns out that he is her biological brother. He cultivates Crivello as his go-between when he attempts to kidnap Agnesa from her home.

Guiglielmino da Medicina – Guiglielmino da Medicina appears in Neifile's fifth tale (V, 5) as a onetime companion of Guidotto da Cremona and an important witness in identifying the long-lost Agnesa.

Bernabuccio – Bernabuccio appears in Neifile's fifth tale (V, 5). He is Agnesa's father, who thought that she perished in a fire during the period of civil unrest when she was a child.

Marin Bòlgaro – Marin Bòlgaro appears in Pampinea's fifth tale (V, 6), as the father of Restituta. He is based on a 14th-century courtier whom Giovanni Bocaccio personally knew and wrote a biography of.

Ruggieri de Loria – Ruggieri de Loria appears as the very wise and well-connected admiral of King Frederick's royal fleet in Pampinea's fifth tale (V, 6). He recognizes Restituta and Gianni and intervenes on their behalf with King Frederick, securing their release.

Amerigo's Wife – Amerigo's Wife appears, along with her husband, Amerigo Abate, and her daughter, Violante, in Lauretta's fifth tale (V, 7). She tries to help her daughter conceal her pregnancy, and she begs, unsuccessfully, for mercy on the lovers in the face of Amerigo's wrath.

Messer Currado – In Lauretta's fifth tale (V, 7), Messer Currado is the viceroy who hands down Teodoro's sentence for having slept with Violante.

Phineas – Phineas, Teodoro's father, appears in Lauretta's fifth tale (V, 7), where his fortuitous recognition of his son's strawberry birthmark saves him from execution and reveals his noble identity.

Paolo Traversari – Paolo Traversari appears in Filomena's fifth tale (V, 8), as the father of Nastago degli Onesti's love interest, Paolo's Daughter.

Geri Spina – Geri Spina appears in Pampinea's sixth tale (VI, 2). Based on a historical Florentine merchant and near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, Geri Spina serves as the foil against which Cisti the Baker can demonstrate his nobility of spirit despite his lowly class.

Chichibio – Chichibio is a Venetian cook employed by Currado Gianfigliazzi in Neifile's sixth tale (VI, 4). After his girlfriend Brunetta convinces him to steal part of Currado's dinner feast, **fortune** comes to Chichibio's aid and gives him a retort that disarms his master's anger with laughter.

Brunetta – Brunetta appears as Chichibio's girlfriend in Neifile's sixth tale (VI, 4). She's a parody of female shrewishness when she threatens and cajoles Chichibio into giving her a cut of Currado Gianfigliazzi's juicy crane.

Forese da Rabatta – Forese da Rabatta was a famous lawyer and political figure in late 14th-century Florence and was a contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio. In Panfilo's sixth tale (VI, 5), his proverbial ugliness contrasts with his great knowledge and his quick-witted conversation with painter Giotto.

Giotto – Giotto was the most important Italian painter of the fourteenth century. A Florentine and near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, Giotto receives high praise from Panfilo (VI, 5) for his artistic achievements, humble nature, and great wit—despite his unattractive physical appearance.

The Baronci – Panfilo references the Baronci in describing Forese da Rabatta's ugliness (VI, 5), and they appear again in Fiammetta's sixth tale (VI, 6), where their legendary bad looks underwrite Michele Scalza's witty argument with his friends about nobility.

Michele Scalza – In Fiammetta's sixth tale (VI, 6), Michele Scalza is a Florentine gentleman who bets Neri Mannini that he can prove that the Baronci are the noblest family in Florence, because they are the ugliest and therefore the oldest.

Neri Mannini – In Fiammetta's sixth tale (VI, 6), Neri Mannini is a friend of Michele Scalza who loses a bet to his friend when he can't refute Michele's claims that the Baroncis' ugliness proves that they are the oldest and thus noblest family in Florence—and the whole world.

Piero di Fiorentino – In Fiammetta's sixth tale (VI, 6), Piero di Fiorentino is hosting the dinner at which Michele Scalza and Neri Mannini make their bet and he judges their contest.

Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri – Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri appears in Filostrato's sixth tale (VI, 7) as the lover of Madonna Filippa and the sworn enemy of her husband, Rinaldo de' Pugliesi.

Fresco da Celatico – In Emilia's sixth tale (VI, 8), Fresco is a gentleman who wittily chastises the vanity and petulance of his niece Cesca.

Giovanni del Bragoniera – In Dioneo's sixth tale (VI, 10), Giovanni del Bragoniera is a young man who (along with Biagio Pizzini) steals one of Friar Cipolla's fake relics and replaces it with some coal, thereby setting up the circumstances under which Cipolla demonstrates his quick wit and rhetorical brilliance.

Biagio Pizzini – In Dioneo's sixth tale (VI, 10), Biagio Pizzini is a young man who (along with Giovanni del Bragoniera) steals one of Friar Cipolla's fake relics and replaces it with some coal, thereby setting up the circumstances under which Cipolla demonstrates his quick wit and rhetorical brilliance.

Federigo di Neri Pegolotti – In Emilia's seventh tale (VII, 1), Federigo di Neri Pegolotti is Monna Tessa's handsome young lover; his nighttime visit necessitates the trick she plays on her husband.

Madonna Agnesa – In Elissa's seventh tale (VII, 3), Madonna Agnesa becomes Friar Rinaldo's lover, even though he is the godfather of her child with Madonna Agnesa's Husband (their relationship qualifies as incest by medieval standards). When she's nearly caught with him, her trick manipulates her husband's love for their child.

Madonna Agnesa's Husband – In Elissa's seventh tale (VII, 3), Madonna Agnesa's Husband becomes the victim of Madonna Agnesa's adulterous trick when he surprises her at home with her lover, their neighbor Friar Rinaldo.

Filippo – In Fiammetta's seventh tale (VII, 5), Filippo is the neighbor of the Jealous Merchant and Jealous Merchant's Wife. When the wife finds a way to secretly communicate with him and trick her husband into sitting by the door all night, he climbs over the roof and becomes her lover.

Isabella's Husband – In Pampinea's seventh tale (VII, 6), Isabella's Husband unwittingly helps Isabella dispose of her unwanted lover, Lambertuccio, all the while remaining unaware of that affair and of her dalliance with Leonetto, thanks to her quick wit and ability to trick her husband.

Ruberto – In Neifile's seventh tale (VII, 8), Ruberto is Sismonda's lover.

Sismonda's Mother – In Neifile's seventh tale (VII, 8), Sismonda's Mother provides an unflattering characterization of men like Sismonda's husband Arriguccio Berlinghieri who have the wealth, but not the class and breeding, to be members of the nobility.

Pyrrhus – In Panfilo's seventh tale (VII, 9), Pyrrhus is a favorite servant of Nicostratos and Lydia because of his good looks and skill. Afraid that an affair with his mistress is dangerous, he sets Lydia difficult tasks to prove her love, necessitating the tricks she plays on her husband.

Lusca – Lusca (whose name means "squint-eyed") appears in Panfilo's seventh tale (VII, 9) as Lydia's maid and go-between in her affair with Pyrrhus.

Ambruogio Anselmini – In Dioneo's seventh tale (VII, 10), Ambruogio Anselmini is the husband of Mita.

Monna Mita – In Dioneo's seventh tale (VII, 10), Mita is the wife of Ambruogio Anselmini, who eventually takes their child's godfather, Tingoccio Mini, as her lover.

Gulfardo – In Neifile's eighth tale (VIII, 1), Gulfardo is a former German mercenary living in Milan. He loves Ambruogia, who asks for payment like a common prostitute. Gulfardo plays a trick on her when he borrows the money from her husband Guasparruolo Cagastraccio and "pays" it back to her.

Guasparruolo Cagastraccio – Guasparruolo Cagastraccio is a wealthy merchant and moneylender and the cuckolded husband of Ambruogia in Neifile's eighth tale (VIII, 1).

Cuitazza – Cuitazza is Monna Piccarda's ugly and old maid in Emilia's eighth tale (VIII, 4). She demonstrates how various classes of female sexuality were valued: because she's just a servant, her virtue is easily sold for a smock and to protect the virtue and honor of the aristocratic Piccarda.

Ribi – Ribi is a friend and fellow trickster of Maso del Saggio and Matteuzzo in Filostrato's eighth tale (VIII, 5), where he

helps his friend expose judge Niccola da San Lepidio by pulling down his pants in court.

Matteuzzo – Matteuzzo is a friend and fellow trickster of Maso del Saggio and Ribi in Filostrato's eighth tale (VIII, 5), where he helps his friend expose judge Niccola da San Lepidio by pulling down his pants in court.

Spinelloccio Tavena – Spinelloccio Tavena appears in Fiammetta's eighth tale (VIII, 8) as a wealthy young Sienese man who is best friends with Zeppa di Mino and is having an affair with Zeppa's Wife.

Zeppa's Wife – In Fiammetta's eighth tale (VIII, 8), Zeppa's Wife is married to Zeppa di Mino and having an affair with his friend, Spinelloccio Tavena. When Zeppa catches her, she confesses and helps him with his revenge scheme.

Spinelloccio's Wife – In Fiammetta's eighth tale (VIII, 8), Spinelloccio's Wife is married to Spinelloccio Tavena. She is forced into having sex with Zeppa di Mino in revenge for the affair of her husband and Zeppa's Wife.

Simone's Wife – In Lauretta's eighth tale (VIII, 9), Simone's Wife is married to Simone da Villa.

Pietro dello Canigiano – Pietro dello Canigiano was a fellow Florentine and contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, who appears in Dioneo's eighth tale (VIII, 10) as a wise counselor to the young and foolish Salabaetto.

Rinuccio Palermini – In Filomena's ninth tale (IX, 1), Rinuccio Palermini is a Florentine expatriate living in political exile in Pistoria—invoking the Florentine political upheavals of Giovanni Boccaccio's lifetime. Rinuccio loves Francesca de' Lazzari but loses his chance to woo her when he fails her impossible mission.

Alessandro Chiarmontesi – In Filomena's ninth tale (IX, 1), Alessandro Chiarmontesi is a Florentine expatriate living in political exile in Pistoria—invoking the political upheavals in Florence during Giovanni Boccaccio's lifetime. Alessandro loves Francesca de' Lazzari but loses his chance to woo her when he fails her impossible mission.

Nello – Nello appears in Filostrato's ninth tale (IX, 3) and Fiammetta's ninth tale (IX, 5), as a friend and co-conspirator of Bruno and Buffalmacco and the relative of Calandrino's wife, Tessa.

Host – In Panfilo's ninth tale (IX, 6), the Host is a poor man who provides food and drink to travelers for his livelihood. He lives with the Host's Wife and their two children, an infant and the teenaged Miss Niccolosa. One of his frequent guests is Pinuccio.

Miss Niccolosa – In Panfilo's ninth tale (IX, 6), Miss Niccolosa is the teenaged daughter of the Host and the Host's Wife. She and Pinuccio fall in love, and his desire to sleep with her instigates the bed-switching plot of the tale.

Pinuccio – In Panfilo's ninth tale (IX, 6), Pinuccio is a young Florentine gentleman who frequently enjoys the Host's hospitality on the road and thus falls in love with Miss Niccolosa. He enlists the help of his friend, Adriano, to insinuate himself into Miss Niccolosa's bed.

Adriano –In Panfilo's ninth tale (IX, 6), Adriano is Pinuccio's friend. He joins the plot to bed Miss Niccolosa, and when the Host's Wife accidentally climbs into his bed, he gives her a good time.

Talano d'Imolese –In Pampinea's ninth tale (IX, 7), Talano d'Imolese is the long-suffering husband of the shrewish Margarita. He represents a kind husband despite his wife's bad character, and his grace highlights her haughty and uppity behavior.

Margarita – In Pampinea's ninth tale (IX, 7), Margarita is a misogynistic caricature of an uppity, argumentative wife. Her disagreeable and self-willed behavior towards her husband, Talano d'Imolese, is punished by a wolf attack, demonstrating the misogynistic idea that it's dangerous for a woman to contradict her husband.

Ciacco –In Lauretta's ninth tale (IX, 8), Ciacco is a professional mooch. His name, based on a character made famous by Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, indicates that he's a glutton. When his professional rival, Biondello, tricks him one day, he gets revenge by playing a trick on Biondello.

Biondello –In Lauretta's ninth tale (IX, 8), Biondello is a professional mooch, like his rival Ciacco. In addition to his taste for fine food and wine, he's a dandy who is always impeccably dressed and groomed, and it's this image that Ciacco's revenge trick destroys.

Vieri de' Cerchi – Vieri de' Cerchi appears in Lauretta's ninth tale (IX, 8) as one of the wealthy Florentines who keep Biondello and Ciacco living in fine style. The character is based on a powerful man who was exiled from Florence shortly before Giovanni Boccaccio's lifetime.

Filippo Argenti – Filippo Argenti, based on an ostentatiously wealthy historical Florentine nobleman, appears in Lauretta's ninth tale (IX, 8). In *The Decameron*, he has a nasty temper and is unwittingly recruited into Ciacco's trick on Biondello.

Neighbor Pietro – In Dioneo's ninth tale (IX, 10), Neighbor Pietro is a poor, small-time trader who is married to Gemmata and friends with Father Gianni. Employing a fabliaux trick, Father Gianni cuckolds Pietro to his face.

King Alphonso – In Neifile's tenth tale (X, 1), King Alphonso of Spain accepts Ruggieri de' Figiovanni as his knight. He claims that **fortune**'s stinginess is the cause of Ruggieri's frustration, then demonstrates his own royal generosity by giving the knight a massive fortune.

Catalina – In Lauretta's tenth tale (X, 4), Madonna Catalina is Niccoluccio Caccianimico's wife and the object of Gentile de'

Carisendi's affections. She becomes the object by which he demonstrates his extreme generosity when he returns her to her husband after rescuing her from death.

Niccoluccio Caccianimico – In Lauretta's tenth tale (X, 4), Niccoluccio Caccianimico is the husband of Madonna Catalina and the recipient of Gentile de' Carisendi's generosity.

Dianora – Madonna Dianora's rash promise is at the center of Elissa's tenth tale (X, 5). She is married to Gilberto and admired by Ansaldo Gradense, and she becomes the vehicle by which her husband and admirer can demonstrate their generosity.

Gilberto – In Elissa's tenth tale (X, 5), Gilberto lives with his wife, Madonna Dianora. He shows his generosity by his willingness to let her have sex with Ansaldo Gradense to fulfill her rash promise. He is the recipient of Ansaldo's generosity when he frees Dianora from her promise.

Magician – The Magician of Elissa's tenth tale (X, 5), makes a magical **garden** for Ansaldo Gradense—for a high price. When Ansaldo generously releases Dianora from her rash promise, the Magician is in turn inspired to generously waive his fee.

Guy de Montfort – Based on a historical person, in Fiammetta's tenth tale (X, 6), Guy de Montfort is a retainer and companion of King Charles who visits Neri degli Uberti's **garden** with him. His counsel inspires King Charles to demonstrate self-control and generosity rather than selfishness.

Ginevra – Ginevra and her twin sister Isotta are the daughters of Neri degli Uberti in Fiammetta's tenth tale (X, 6). She charms the king, and he generously provides her a fitting dowry and a suitable husband.

Isotta – Isotta and her twin sister Ginevra are the daughters of Neri degli Uberti in Fiammetta's tenth tale (X, 6). She charms the king, and he generously provides her a fitting dowry and a suitable husband.

Bernardo Puccini – In Pampinea's tenth tale (X, 7), Bernardo Puccini is a wealthy Florentine apothecary living in Palermo with his wife and daughter, Lisa.

King Peter – Based on the 13th-century king of Sicily, in Pampinea's tenth tale (X, 6), King Peter of Aragon is the object of Lisa's unrequited love. He demonstrates nobility of character in styling himself as her knight and royal generosity in giving her a dowry and a noble husband.

Minuccio d'Arezzo – Based on a troubadour who was a contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio, in Pampinea's tenth tale (X, 7), Minuccio d'Arezzo is a renowned minstrel who sings Lisa's lovelorn message to King Peter.

Chremes – In Filomena's tenth tale (X, 8), Chremes is an old friend of Titus Quintus Fulvius's father and is Gisippus's father. He hosts Titus when he comes to Athens to study.

Marcus Varro – In Filomena's tenth tale (X, 8), Marcus Varro is the Roman praetor to whom Gisippus falsely confesses murder.

Fulvia – In Filomena's tenth tale (X, 8), Fulvia is Titus Quintus Fulvius's sister, whom he gives to his best friend, Gisippus, as a wife, further cementing their friendship.

The Abbot of San Pietro – In Panfilo's tenth tale (X, 9), The Abbot of San Pietro is Torello's uncle.

Giannùcole – In Dioneo's tenth tale (X, 10), Giannùcole is Griselda's father.

Nuta – In Dioneo's sixth tale (VI, 10), Nuta is the unattractive kitchen maid who has Guccio Imbratta's attention while Giovanni del Bragoniera and Biagio Pizzini steal Friar Cipolla's false relics.

Bentivegna del Mazzo – In Panfilo's eighth tale (VIII, 2), Bentivegna del Mazzo is Monna Belcolore's husband. His name, which means "may you have joy of the rod" is a phallic pun and adds to the overall colorful and humorous feeling of the tale.

TERMS

Anticlerical Satire – Anticlerical satire uses humor, irony, and exaggeration to critique the Roman Catholic Church and its clergy. Medieval anticlerical satire aimed at the hypocrisy of the religious, especially after the church became incredibly wealthy and politically powerful during the 11th and 12th centuries. The pope and his cardinals, priests, and monks and nuns came under criticism from medieval writers for hypocrisy and greed, especially simony, or the practice of selling of religious favors or positions.

Antifeminism/Misogyny – Misogyny is a dislike or prejudice against women, while antifeminism represents opinions that are opposed to a belief in women's political, sexual, and economic equality with men. While neither word was in use in the Middle Ages, scholars use both terms to describe ways women were treated in society or discussed in literature. Women in the Middle Ages were considered incomplete, imperfect specimens of humanity, prone to weakness, a lack of self-control (especially when it came to sex), and excessive emotionality. They were placed by law and custom under the guidance and leadership of men: their fathers, brothers, or other male relatives until they were married, and their husbands afterwards. Although the degree to which women could own land and act independently varied across the medieval period and based on where a woman lived, in general, women were second-class citizens. Women were also vulnerable to vicious attacks against them in literature, especially in an entire genre of "antifeminist literature," which lays out ideas about the physical, intellectual, and moral inferiority of women compared to men.

Bourgeoisie – The word "bourgeoisie" means "middle class." The term itself comes from medieval France where it was used

from the 11th century on to describe people who were enriching themselves as the urban centers ("bourgs") were increasing in power and wealth. The medieval bourgeoisie was made up of merchants, tradesmen, bankers, and artisans. It's important to note that the negative connotations that are sometimes attached to "bourgeoisie" in the 20th and 21st centuries arose from the 19th century philosophy of Karl Marx and communism and should not be applied to medieval texts.

Brigata – Giovanni Boccaccio identifies the group of seven young women and three men who tell *The Decameron*'s tales as the *lieta brigata*, or "the happy band." Once they have left their plague-ravaged city behind, they are indeed happy, exemplifying the qualities of young noblemen and women and engaging in noble recreations like feasting, dancing, and storytelling. While the introduction to Day 1 suggests that they are based on real people, the names and identities of the brigata's members are drawn from literary or mythological sources, including some of Giovanni Boccaccio's other works.

Crusades – The Crusades were a series of religiously-inspired wars conducted by European Christian powers during the Middle Ages. The early crusades were aimed against Muslim powers in the eastern Mediterranean with the hope of wresting Jerusalem and the surrounding "Holy Land" (modern-day Israel, Palestine, and parts of Syria, Turkey, and Lebanon) from Islamic control. The Third Crusade, referenced specifically in *The Decameron*, ran from 1189–1192 with the goal of taking back Jerusalem from **Saladin**, who had conquered it in 1187.

Cuckold – Cuckold is an antiquated term for a man whose wife is unfaithful; it is also used as a verb to indicate the act of an unfaithful wife cheating on her husband. In the medieval imagination, cuckolds were often pictured with horns on their heads.

Dowry – A dowry is made up of the money and property a woman brought into her marriage. It was paid by her family and was sometimes considered a gift or "bride-price" to the groom and his family. At other times, however, the dowry was preserved under the woman's name (even if her husband had control over it during his lifetime as the head of household) so that if she was widowed or divorced, she wouldn't become immediately destitute.

Fabliaux – Fabliaux are funny short stories composed primarily in France in the 12th and 13th centuries, often anonymously. Frequently obscene, they are characterized by a focus on sex and scatological (relating to excrement) themes. They feature unintelligent peasants, cuckolds, devious priests, and women with loose sexual morals. Their tendency to feature priests engaged in amoral and unflattering behavior links them with other forms of medieval anticlerical satire.

Fin'amors – Fin'amors is a refined, stylized expression of romantic love that was popular in medieval literature and culture. It is sometimes called "courtly love." Early expressions of fin'amors arise in the poetry of the Southern French troubadours, drawing on influences from the Bible, ancient Rome, and Islamic cultures. By the 13th century, fin'amors had been codified and given expression in handbooks like Andreas Capellanus's *On Loving*, where it is defined as an overwhelmingly powerful, often contradictory experience. Fin'amors is painful but ennobling, erotic and spiritual, and characterized by a tendency to elevate the beloved woman to an almost divine level while her faithful knight-lover worships her and performs noble deeds in her honor while serving her with absolute obedience.

Moneylending/Usury – Moneylending is the practice of offering loans to an individual, which must be repaid with interest; in the Middle Ages it was often called by an older name, "usury," which came to imply the charging of excessively high interest rates. Although moneylending was necessary throughout the Middle Ages to finance building projects, wars, and other activities, and to underwrite the expansion of trade and the merchant class, the charging of interest was also considered an abusive practice. Thus, moneylenders were frequent targets of social and literary attack, and moneylending was usually practiced by specific and often marginalized groups of people, such as Jews. Jewish moneylenders were often permitted to live in European countries only as long as their services were helpful to their surrounding community or local prince, and they were vulnerable to racist attacks and expulsions.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

LOVE AND SEX

Stories of love abound among the tales and songs composed by the members of the brigata (the ten young women and men who narrate *The Decameron*'s tales) who have escaped plague-ridden Florence for the countryside. Love appears in many guises, although it primarily falls into the exalted literary guise of fin'amors (refined love) or, in stark contrast, the funny and sometimes graphic exploration of human sexuality that can be found in the fabliaux tradition—raunchy stories about illicit sex.

Many of the tales explore traditional themes of *fin'amors*. Jacques Amiens suffers lovesickness because of his feelings for Jeannette, and middle-class Lisa also becomes lovesick over King Peter. Other symptoms of refined love are more subtle. The burning metaphors in Filomena's and Panfilo's love songs

also characterize Gilette's feelings for Bertrand. And refined lovers often weep and sigh, like Girolamo beneath Salvestra's window or Lodovico in Beatrice's presence. Tears and sighs fill the love-songs of Pampinea, Lauretta, Filostrato, Dioneo, and Elissa. Gerbino's love for the Tunisian Princess exemplifies love from afar (or *amor du lonh*). But perhaps the clearest hallmark of *fin'amors* is the ennobling nature of love. This is demonstrated in the tale of rude and undereducated Cimon, who is so inspired by Iphigenia's beauty that he accomplishes a better education in four years than most men attain in a lifetime.

Other tales explore basic human lust. These even include some of the more refined tales of noble lovers, like the hilarious description of Teodoro and Violante progressing from huddling and declaring their love to holding hands, to kissing, to embracing, to having sex—all in the space of a short summer storm. These tales depict women as autonomous sexual agents: wives whose husbands can't meet their sexual appetites are likely to stray, like Bartolomea leaving her old husband for a pirate, Monna Isabetta jumping into bed with her husband's spiritual coach, or Mazzeo's wife polishing Ruggieri d'Aieroli's family jewels because her husband is too frail to have sex with her. Nor are the tales' men—especially priests—shy about their sexual desires or slow to fulfil them.

The book's overarching message about love is that it drives human behavior through its irresistible power, for good or ill. Sometimes, this means ennobling a lover, but other times, it means circumventing vows of chastity and marital fidelity, inspiring pranks and cons, and forcing women to acquiesce to male desires. Sometimes, it even leads lovers straight into the arms of death, demonstrating its frequent dominance over reason, morals, and law.

MEN AND WOMEN

Although Boccaccio dedicates *The Decameron* to women, who make up the majority of the brigata (the ten storytellers) and are the protagonists of many of its tales, the book's outlook is decidedly patriarchal and even directly anti-woman. In general, the tales' women are assigned negative character traits, objectified by the men around them, and find themselves vulnerable to physical and emotional violence.

The Decameron aligns with medieval gender hierarchies that place men over women. Filomena worries about needing male guidance in the countryside; Lauretta claims that women are more wrathful than men; and Emilia says that nature and custom subject them to male authority. Many of the tales highlight supposedly "feminine" vices. Monna Lisetta, Paolo's Daughter, and Elena are mocked or punished for their vanity. Disobedient wives face violence: Margarita from a wolf, and Joseph's Wife from her husband. And many women, from the Country Girl to the Lady of Guiglielmo Fortress to Abbess Usimbalda, demonstrate the excessive lust ascribed to women in the Middle Ages. Moreover, outstanding women are often praised in masculine terms: Ghismonda and Roussilon's Wife demonstrate virile (male) courage in their suicides, and Adalieta has a "princely" spirit. Perceived female inferiority also leads to objectification, of which Alatiel is the clearest example; she is repeatedly stolen and passed from one lover to another. Women's bodies can enhance political alliances—the Tunisian Princess is betrothed to her father's ally, and the pirates who kidnap Restituta give her as a "**gift**" to King Frederick—or personal ones, as when Gisippus gives his fiancée to his best friend.

And, thanks to male cultural dominance, women's sexual autonomy and physical safety are frequently endangered in the tales. Many are raped, violently or through trickery: the Gascon Noblewoman, Alatiel by the Duke of Athens, and Catella by Ricciardo Minutolo. Others are coerced into sexual relationships: judges attempt to extort sex from Andreuola, Simona, Maddalena, and the Trusted Maid. Elena suffers verbal abuse and physical punishment as "justice" for snubbing and tricking Rinieri. Joseph, Calandrino, and Arriguccio all beat their women for various reasons. Madonna Filippa faces a death sentence for adultery but escapes it; others are not so lucky. Soldiers kill the Tunisian Princess rather than hand her over to Gerbino; Tancredi drives his daughter Ghismonda and Roussillon drives his wife to suicide by killing their lovers. Thus, despite his often-repeated claims to love and cherish ladies, *The Decameron* displays a decidedly anti-woman bent.

MODERATION AND EXCESS

The ladies and gentlemen who tell *The Decameron*'s tales leave Florence to escape an outbreak of the bubonic plague which has profoundly destabilized their society. Their country lifestyle demonstrates the moderation that a functioning society requires. In its exploration of moderation and excess, *The Decameron* presents excess as always detrimental and moderation as one of the highest virtues.

The excess desire of King Philip II for the Marchioness of Montferrat and the French Princess for Walter threatens political disorder. Excessive sex is physically dangerous, too: Masetto can't keep up with all the Young Nuns, Alibech exhausts Rustico, and in one of Dioneo's tales, poor Tingoccio Mini sexes himself to death. Other forms of excess are mocked and punished as well. Excessive drinking allows Perdicone to take advantage of Alatiel; Tofano's wife, Ghita, exploits his drunkenness to sneak out; and Calandrino's drunken stupor allows Bruno and Buffalmacco to steal his prize pig. Ermino de' Grimaldi is criticized for his love of money, while immoderate desire for riches nearly kills Landolfo Rufolo and Martuccio Gomito. Ricciardo Minutolo tricks Catella into sex by preying

on her excessive jealousy of her husband, and excessive wrath leads to the exiles and deaths of sisters Ninetta, Maddalena, and Bertella and their husbands.

In contrast, moderation is held up as a virtue. Low-born Gilette demonstrates her noble character in part by restoring balance to her estranged husband's lands. Men who react moderately to their women's affairs (and rapes)—like King Agilulf and Lisabetta's Brothers—are praised for their wisdom while men who don't, like Tofano and Arriguccio, face ridicule. After Pampinea tells the tale of Rinieri's immoderate revenge against Elena, her peers suggest that less excessive punishment can also be effective, including Zeppa's exactly reciprocal revenge on Spinelloccio and Ciacco's on Biondello. Finally, as the company prepares to return to Florence, Panfilo congratulates them on the unfailing and laudable moderation of their lives in the country, and in the Epilogue, Boccaccio explains that moderation is the key to enjoying stories, alcohol, and even fire—all of which are only dangerous in excess.

INTELLIGENCE

In the Prologue to *The Decameron*, Boccaccio explains that he wrote it to entertain and teach the ladies to whom it is dedicated. Both the frame story—in which a group of ten young, noble Florentines flee to the country to escape the plague—and the tales they tell stress the importance of intelligence and wit. Despite its emphasis on love, intelligence may in fact be the highest and most powerful virtue in *The Decameron*, allowing characters to outwit rivals and avoid harm. The value that *The Decameron* places on having and using intelligence explains its somewhat incoherent or inconsistent moral system.

When intelligence is prized, the gullible and the credulous are punished. Florentine pranksters Maso del Saggio, Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello continually abuse the hapless painter Calandrino and dense doctor Simone da Villa. And the simple-minded piety of men like Friar Puccio and Ferondo make them vulnerable to manipulation by their wives and priests. Further, wit and guile frequently allow characters to access sex, or to avoid paying the consequences of adulterous affairs. Masetto pretends to be deaf and dumb to infiltrate a convent, where he ends up playing husband to all the Young Nuns and their Abbess, while King Agilulf's Groom cleverly impersonates his master to slip into the queen's bed, then thinks on his feet to avoid punishment. The Florentine Noblewoman, Zima, and Mazzeo's Wife all use wit to gain or keep access to a lover, and the many tricks played by wives on their husbands in Day Seven's tales and elsewhere allow or conceal their sexual dalliances. And intelligence can be used nefariously, as when two different Sicilian women use their sexual charms to defraud young and inexperienced merchants Andreuccio and Salabaetto.

At other times, however, quick thinking saves a tale's protagonist from danger. The Marquess of Montferrat, Piccarda, and Francesca all employ wit to rid themselves of unwanted admirers. When Saladin threatens Melchizedek the Jew by asking him an impossible question, Melchizedek's great wisdom protects him and earns the sultan's respect. And when Chichibio steals a juicy bit of his master's dinner, his quick, silly lie about cranes only having two legs in flight saves him from a beating. In a myriad of ways, the members of the brigata (the ten young people who tell *The Decameron*'s tales) and their tales' characters both demonstrate the benefits of wit and use their own natural intelligence for entertainment and edification.

CLASS AND CHARACTER

The members of the brigata, the ten young people who tell *The Decameron*'s tales while waiting out the plague in the countryside surrounding Florence, are all aristocratic. In contrast, many of the tales' characters are middle-class merchants, doctors, lawyers, and artists; some are peasants and servants. This mix of social classes allows *The Decameron* to claim that character is a better indication of nobility than wealth or status. While some characters are consigned to the roles of servants or country bumpkins, for the most part, the tales demonstrate a surprising degree of fluidity and social mobility.

Some characters demonstrate noble character despite impoverishment or ill **fortune**. Several orphans, like Guisfredi (Giannotto) and Teodoro (Pietro) are captured and sold into slavery, but their noble behavior eventually betrays their true identities. Aristocratic gentleman Federigo retains his noble manners even after he spends his fortune; when Monna Giovanna finally agrees to marry him, it's because she'd rather have a gentleman without riches than riches without a gentleman. And even when Walter, Count of Antwerp, disguises his children as vagrants, the inherent nobility of Perrot (Louis) and Jeannette (Violante) attracts the attention of noble patrons and eventually earns each child a noble spouse.

And in other tales, true nobility of character shines through regardless of a person's external circumstances. Simona and her boyfriend Pasquano are the first working-class lovers in Western tragic literature, and they are rewarded with a lover's tomb and eternal fame. Martuccio Gomito becomes a pirate to earn enough money to marry Gostanza; after being captured, he becomes an indispensable advisor to Mulay Abd Allah, the Tunisian King. The hospitality of middle-class Florentine baker Cisti is more gracious than that of nobleman Geri Spina. Ghismonda loves her father's valet, Giancarlo, because of a sterling character that belies his lowly status. And sometimes, a noble character eventually gains a noble title, as when Gilette wins the right to marry Bertrand, Count of Roussillon, or when Lisa's courtly love for King Peter earns her a noble husband and great riches. Throughout, the tales prove Ghismonda's claim

that Fortune blindly makes individuals rich or poor, while manners and merit determine whether they ought to be called noble or base.

FAITH VS. RELIGION

The Decameron's frame narrative begins in a church, where ten young noblemen and women decide to leave plague-ravaged Florence for the countryside. There, they tell one hundred tales that are firmly embedded in medieval literary and cultural contexts that, in turn, assume a nearly universal practice of Christianity. But although Christianity undergirds the work's worldview, the members of the brigata (the ten storytellers) treat sincere faith as a separate entity from the religious and political Roman Catholic Church and its clergy, which are routinely mocked and denigrated. Most of the tales with monks, nuns, or priests include extensive anticlerical satire, criticizing the clergy for excessive appetites, sexual indulgence (both heterosexual and homosexual), and greed. The tales also mock and criticize the excessive gullibility of the faithful who allow themselves to be hoodwinked by impressive-sounding rhetoric or clearly fake relics, as Friar Cipolla's audience does. The Abbot of Cluny demonstrates the hypocrisy of the clergy, who preach moderation and abstinence while indulging their own appetites, when he denies charity to Primas in one tale and ruins his stomach with an immoderate diet in another. And a sinner exposes the hypocrisy of the Inquisitor who shakes down the heretical for money while providing wastewater as charity to the poor. And, across the tales, many, many monks, nuns, and priests enjoy sex—both among themselves and with members of the laity. The few friars who aren't inveterate sinners are gullible: the excessively sinful Cepperello convinces a Holy Friar that he's led the life of a virtuous saint and the Florentine Noblewoman makes the Florentine Monk an unwitting go-between when she establishes her affair with the Florentine Nobleman.

Separately, however, the value of Christianity is affirmed at the beginning and end of *The Decameron*. In the collection's second tale, the fact that the message of Christianity could withstand the sinfulness of the clergy convinces Abraham the Jew to convert. Although this is an example of a problematic medieval motif that tokenizes Jewish people to demonstrate the supposed superiority of Christianity, it nevertheless claims that the Christian faith can remain noble, despite the flaws of its earthly practitioners. Likewise, even when Ghino di Tacco is placed under interdict (denied access to church rites), he and his men still profess their fear of God.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GARDENS

Gardens symbolize the possibilities that exist outside of the traditional spaces of society or the constraints of "real life." The book begins in plague-ravaged Florence, but when the ten members of the brigata (the ten young people who narrate the tales) agree to leave the town to get some relief from the danger, trauma, and social upheaval caused by the plague, they retreat to a series of country estates which have lush and beautiful gardens. Throughout *The Decameron*, gardens are distinguished from nature by the care and order with which they are planned and constructed; they contain decorative elements like paths, fountains, flowerbeds, walls, and semi-domesticated animals. They thus represent the order that human beings can impose on chaos and function as a middle space between the wholly constructed world of the city and the often-lawless realm of nature. And they belong to the literary tradition of the *locus amoenus*, or "pleasant place," representing safety and harbor from the danger and the harshness of life—especially in the context of the Black Death as described on Day I. Pleasant gardens are also markers of class, belonging to princes like Tancredi and King Frederick or wealthy, often noble men like Neri degli Uberti, Bernardo Puccini, and Torello.

The Decameron's gardens are also linked to the medieval idea of the *hortus conclusus*, or "enclosed garden," which has its roots in the *Song of Songs*, a book in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. In medieval Christian theology, the *hortus conclusus* is linked to the Garden of Eden and the inviolable purity of the Virgin Mary; in *The Decameron*, gardens represent an Edenic space apart from the messiness of life and the pain of death. In medieval literature, the *hortus conclusus* is further linked to fin'amors (refined love) stories. Accordingly, lovers like Andreuola and Gabriotto, Simona and Pasquino, Caterina and Ricciardo de' Manardi, and Dianora and Ansaldo meet in gardens. In fabliaux-inspired tales (raunchy stories about illicit sex), the association of gardens with love can devolve into metaphors for female genitalia: Massetto wants to tend the nuns' garden *and* their sexual needs; lovers access the bedrooms of the Florentine Noblewoman and Francesco's Wife through their gardens; and Dioneo describes Tingoccio's affair with Monna Mita as gardening in her rich soil.

FORTUNE

Fortune symbolizes the capricious and random changes of life and circumstances. It is based on the medieval conception of "Fortuna," a goddess or semi-deified force. The idea of fortune's wheel, drawn from ancient philosophy and literature, was popular throughout the Middle Ages. In *The Decameron*, fortune is an amoral force, elevating

and humbling people at random, although it is also sometimes invoked as an excuse for a character's choices or, in a few cases, tied to divine intervention. Fortune and her wheel are responsible for elevating the lowly and humbling the mighty, or sometimes doing both to one person over the course of their adventures. Rinaldo d'Asti, Landolfo Rufolo, and Martuccio Gomito are all humbled by fortune before having their wealth restored; likewise, the vicissitudes of political fortunes first destroy the lives of Beritola and her sons but then see them restored to their former wealth and position.

Fortune is essentially amoral, neither conforming to ideas of Christian morality or personal worthiness. Sometimes fortune abets sexual adventures, handing Alatiel from one lover to another, helping the Jealous Merchant's Wife find a lover, allowing Lydia to cuckold (cheat on) her husband, or protecting Sister Isabetta from punishment for her affair. But, at other times, it punishes lovers for their happiness, including Ghismonda and Guiscardo, and Simona and Pasquino. Sometimes, fortune puts a noble character into a position of low social status, like Guiscardo or Cisti, the Florentine baker. At other times, it elevates the lowly, as when moneylender Alessandro marries a princess. And at still others, it ignores those who deserve a better fate, like Ruggieri de' Figiovanni, who deserves better rewards from King Alfanso than fortune allows, or Lisa, whose noble spirit is trapped in a bourgeois family. However, in the end, fortune's decisions are immutable, and it's better for people to accept them than to fight against them, as Titus Quintus Fulvius eloquently argues.

GIFTS

In *The Decameron*, physical gifts represent the power dynamics of relationships between people. They symbolize and enact a complex system of relationships and obligations between individuals, primarily serving to demonstrate generosity, recognize a person's worth, or create obligations between one person and another. Kings and noblemen demonstrate generosity with gifts, including Can Grande Della Scalla; Mulay Abd Allah; and the Abbot of Cluny. Nathan offers his life to Mithridanes. Gilette, King Charles, and King Peter all provide dowries for impoverished women. Gifts can also confirm the recipient's worth, as when the French King forgives and restores Walter with gifts. Gifts can discharge obligations between people, as when Landolfo Rufolo repays his debt to the peasant woman who rescued him from the sea with a gift and Madonna Piccarda pays for Cuitazza's help with the gift of a smock. Or gifts—particularly lover's tokens—can create obligation: the Womanizing Abbot gives Ferondo's Wife jewelry to convince her to have sex with him and the Worthy Priest tries to do the same with Belcolore; Gerbino and the Tunisian Princess express their mutual attraction through the exchange of gifts; and Rinieri demonstrates his desire and makes a claim on Elena's affections with letters and gifts. Thus, while sometimes gift-giving can be a mutual exchange, it can also establish one-sided or imbalanced relationships and ties of obligation between people.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Penguin edition of *The Decameron* published in 2003.

Day 1: Introduction Quotes

❝ Swayed by this argument, and sparing no thought for anyone but themselves, large numbers of men and women abandoned their city, their homes, their relatives, their estates and belongings, and headed for the countryside, either in Florentine territory or, better still, abroad. It was as though they imagined that the wrath of God would not unleash this plague against men for their iniquities irrespective of where they happened to be, but would only be aroused against those who found themselves within the city walls; or possibly they assumed that the whole of the population would be exterminated and the city's last hour had come.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 8

Explanation and Analysis

The Introduction to the first day of *The Decameron* lays out the gruesome circumstances which brought the ten narrators together. Its lengthy description of the 14th-century outbreak of the bubonic plague in Florence is emotionally compelling, even though Boccaccio largely copied it from literary accounts of previous plagues. This passage records a variety of responses among Florentines to the illness, including running away from the city entirely. The selfishness of these deserters contrasts with the generosity Boccaccio emphasizes in the book's Prologue. And the pell-mell, chaotic way in which they head for the countryside contrasts with the orderly, rational way the *brigata* themselves will leave. This passage also points towards the humanistic orientation of *The Decameron*. Giovanni Boccaccio was an early adherent and father of the Renaissance humanism movement, which concentrated on what it meant to be human and how to be a virtuous person outside (although not necessarily in opposition to) the structure of religion and the late medieval church. Boccaccio pokes fun at people whose religious beliefs incline them to interpret the plague as a sign of divine

punishment while simultaneously acting like God's power ends at the city walls of Florence. Leaving the city is absurd not only from a religious point of view, but also from a scientific one, since people in the countryside clearly fell ill and died of the plague, just like people in the city did.

❝ For not only did people die without having many women about them, but a great number departed this life without anyone at all to witness their going. Few indeed were those to whom the lamentations and bitter tears of their relatives were accorded; on the contrary, more often than not bereavement was the signal for laugher and witticisms and general jollification—the art of which the women, having for the most part suppressed their feminine concern for the salvation of the souls of the dead, had learned to perfection.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In describing the horrors of the plague, Boccaccio talks at length about how the customs that used to attend a person's death were abandoned or entirely replaced. In the past, a person's death was mourned by female relatives and neighbors, but now people die alone and often no one grieves. This passage invokes the chaos and disorder of the plague era, with a yearning to return to the more moderate and balanced practices of the past. It also introduces important ideas about gender and gender roles. Women were expected to perform domestic tasks related to the care of the sick and the preparation of bodies for burial, including public displays of grief like weeping (women were sometimes even hired to weep at the funerals of wealthy and important people). These expectations were based in gendered assumptions that considered women prone to emotional displays and associated them with the virtue of compassion. Throughout the Middle Ages, in fact, compassion or pity almost seems to be a requirement for women. The services of caring for the sick while they are living and praying for their souls after death are linked through the idea of compassion, since both activities acknowledge the importance of a victim's suffering and do what is possible to reduce it. The image of women not only failing to do their duty towards the dying and the dead, but finding in tragedy an excuse for laugher and joking, not only points to the chaos and disorder occasioned by the plague but also draws on antifeminist stereotypes that painted women as particularly sinful and selfish.

❝ Accordingly, whether I am here in church or out in the streets or sitting at home, I always feel ill at ease, the more so because it seems to me that no one possessing private means and a place to retreat to is left here apart from ourselves. But even if such people are still to be found, they draw no distinction, as I have frequently seen and heard for myself, between what is honest and what is dishonest; and provided only that they are prompted by their appetites, they will do whatever affords them the greatest pleasure, whether by day or by night, alone or in company. It is not only of lay people that I speak, but also of those enclosed in monasteries, who, having convinced themselves that such behavior is suitable for them and is only unbecoming in others, having broken the rules of obedience and given themselves over to carnal pleasures, thereby thinking to escape and have turned lascivious and dissolute.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 15

Explanation and Analysis

The seven women of the *brigata* happen to find each other in church, where they have come to pray. Pampinea, rationally reviewing the state of the city, proposes that they leave. This passage is part of her rationale for that suggestion, and it illustrates the total breakdown of social norms brought about by the plague. As a woman, Pampinea is vulnerable to male violence, and the chaotic lawlessness of Florence means that violence can happen anywhere, so her fear of being attacked or raped isn't far-fetched. Moreover, her vulnerability is increased because she has no male relatives to protect her. Medieval European culture was generally patriarchal (governed and controlled by men), and many tales in *The Decameron* emphasize the protection or control of female sexuality by male relatives. But gender-based violence isn't the only sign of total social breakdown: there is also the overt immorality of the clergy. Medieval society was grouped by three "estates": the clergy (religious authorities), the nobility (political authorities), and the peasantry (the working and middle classes). By the late Middle Ages, when Giovanni Boccaccio was writing, there was a well-established literary tradition of anticlerical satire, which criticized the clergy for hypocritically engaging

in all types of sin while forcing everyone else to undergo punishing and expensive penance for the same offenses. Monks and nuns, having taken special, binding vows of poverty, humility, and chastity, should be more holy than the average person, but in the excessive and unbalanced era of the plague, they can't even follow the normal rules of propriety. Many of *The Decameron*'s tales will pick up on and expand this anticlerical sentiment.

❝ It is not our foresight, ladies, but rather your own good sense, that has led us to this spot. I know not what you intend to do with your troubles; my own I left inside the city gates when I departed thence a short while ago in your company. Hence you may either prepare to join with me in as much laugher, song, and merriment as your sense of decorum will allow, or else you may give me leave to go back for my troubles and live in the afflicted city.

Related Characters: Dioneo (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 20

Explanation and Analysis

After the band of companions leaves the city, they travel to a beautiful, isolated country home. Dioneo, having taken in the views, declares his intent to enjoy their time together, come what may. Dioneo first acknowledges that the plan to leave the city belongs to the ladies, and thanks them for their intelligence. This aligns with Boccaccio's declarations of love and respect for women in the Prologue, Introduction to Day 4, and Epilogue, even though the respect for female intelligence will not be universal in the book, thanks to gendered stereotyping and misogynistic beliefs. In allegorical interpretations of the book, Dioneo represents impulsivity and lust rather than rationality and continence, so it is appropriate that he would be the one to encourage the group's happiness. But this also demonstrates a great deal of social intelligence: keenly aware of the group dynamic, Dioneo wants to build his friends up, not create unhappiness or acrimony between them. The special dispensation he will later receive to tell a tale on whatever theme he wants allows him to maintain the harmony and happiness of the group, since it gives him the opportunity to balance out days whose stories are particularly serious or tragic.

After the heart-wrenching descriptions of the chaos that reigns in Florence, it's somewhat unbelievable that Dioneo and the others would be able to forget so easily the horror they're leaving behind. But Dioneo's comments mark the point where the *brigata* crosses from reality into the idealized world of the countryside. In contrast to the chaos of the city (and the chaotic flight of other Florentines from the city), the *brigata* will be an example of idealized moderation, rationality, and balance during their time together. His "carpe diem" (seize the day) argument also points to the role of fortune: since no one can know what their future holds, it's best to enjoy life when possible.

Day 1: Second Tale Quotes

❝ "[Nobody in Rome] who was connected with the Church seemed to me to display the slightest sign of holiness, piety, charity, moral rectitude, or any other virtue. On the contrary, it seemed to me that they were all so steeped in lust, greed, avarice, fraud, envy, pride, and other like sins and worse (if indeed that is possible), that I regard the place as a hotbed for diabolical rather than devotional activities. As far as I can judge, it seems to me that your pontiff, and all of the others too, are doing their level best to reduce the Christian religion to nought [*sic*] and drive it from the face of the earth, whereas they are the very people who should be its foundation and support."

Related Characters: Abraham (speaker), Neifile, Jehannot de Chevigny

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 40-41

Explanation and Analysis

Neifile's first tale concerns a Jewish moneylender, Abraham, whose friend, Jehannot, tries to convert him to Christianity. Ultimately, Abraham says that if the behavior of the pope and all his clergy support Jehannot's claims about the superiority of the Christian faith, he will convert. Unfortunately, in Rome, he discovers that the papal court is a hotbed of iniquity, which he describes in this passage. In general, Abraham's comments form part of *The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire, since they pillory the supreme head of the Christian faith for his willing commission of most of the seven deadly sins (which are pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth). It's also possible that his irritation with the worldliness of Christ's officer on earth reflects contemporary Italian attitudes towards the church hierarchy, since Giovanni Boccaccio was writing *The Decameron* in the context of the "Babylonian Captivity," the period between 1309 and 1376 when the papal court resided at Avignon (in France) rather than its traditional seat in Rome. This had cultural and political implications,

more than spiritual ones, but Giovanni Boccaccio was a well-connected Florentine who was deeply involved in local and Italian politics, including negotiations with the papacy. Not only was the church centered outside of Italy during these decades (insulting Italian pride), but the popes were all Frenchmen, under the control of or in political alliances with the French king.

Abraham's conversion is typical of the character he represents, the "virtuous pagan." The relationship between Christianity and Judaism was strained in Medieval Europe, and Jews were often subject to expulsions and violent pogroms (periods of religious and cultural persecution). Yet, based on their shared heritage, medieval Christians frequently sheltered a hope that the Jewish people would see the error of their ways and convert as a group to Christianity. Stories like this one are often marked by an unresolved tension between the wish that everyone would see the superiority of Christianity and peacefully convert and a clear acknowledgement of the moral and ethical failures of the Roman Catholic church.

Day 1: Fourth Tale Quotes

❝ One day, about noon, when all the other monks were asleep, he chanced to be taking a solitary stroll round the walls of the monastery, which lay in a very lonely spot, when his eyes came to rest on a strikingly beautiful girl, perhaps some local farmhand's daughter, who was going about the fields collecting wild herbs. No sooner did he see her than he was fiercely assaulted by carnal desire.

Related Characters: Dioneo (speaker), Young Monk, The Country Girl, Tuscan Abbot

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

In Dioneo's first tale, a young monk has sex with a country girl in his room, where he is spied by his Abbot. He avoids being punished for this infraction when he cleverly tricks his abbot into a compromising situation with the girl, witnesses it, and then blackmails the abbot with his knowledge. This passage describes how the young monk initially encounters the country girl. First and foremost, the setting of the encounter between the two is drawn from two closely related, popular literary genres in the Middle Ages: *pastourelle* and *fabliaux*. Both were vernacular poetic genres (meaning they were written in a language like French or Italian rather than Latin) which had their roots in France. *Pastourelles* featured a debate about love between a knight and a shepherdess that took place in the isolated countryside; frequently the shepherdesses were subject to rape by the knights. *Fabliaux* were crude and humorous stories about sexual tricks played on a dunderheaded or gullible man; these regularly featured priests and monks having sex with women under their husband's noses. The girl's description and the isolated setting in Dioneo's tale suggest the outlines of a *pastourelle*, while the quick assault of lust on the monk, foreshadowing sexual hijinks to come, is reminiscent of a *fabliau*.

In terms of *The Decameron*'s themes, this passage speaks to the dangers of excess in all its forms and highlights the vulnerability and objectification of women that are common in a work highly influenced by antifeminist and misogynistic medieval stereotypes about women. The fact that our hero is wandering along outside of the monastery walls while his brothers are all asleep suggests that he is prone to exceeding the boundaries and rules by which he should be living his life. Since he's wandering about freely when he should be keeping himself within the confines of the monastery (and of his monastic vows), it's not surprising that he's susceptible to the power of lust that asserts itself when he lays eyes on the girl. Like many of the other tales in *The Decameron* (even the ones told by the ladies), this story is told from a masculine perspective that doesn't demonstrate much curiosity about the country girl's humanity or desires: she exists as an object to tempt the young monk and for him to enjoy.

❝ The girl, who was not exactly made of iron or of flint, fell in very readily with the Abbot's wishes. He took her in his arms and kissed her a few times, then lowered himself on to the monk's little bed. But out of regard, perhaps, for the weight of his reverend person and the tender age of the girl, and not wishing to do her any injury, he settled down beneath her instead of lying on top, and in this way he sported with her at considerable length.

Related Characters: Dioneo (speaker), Tuscan Abbot, The Country Girl, Young Monk

Related Themes:

Page Number: 45

Explanation and Analysis

Once the Abbot has locked himself in the Young Monk's

room with the local girl, he, too, is overcome by lustful feelings. After he makes laughable excuses for what he's about to do, thus assuaging his conscience, he assures the girl that she's not in trouble and suggests that she have sex with him too. Her ready willingness to have sex with another stranger illustrates misogynistic medieval stereotypes about women, which painted them as excessively lustful and prone to sexual deviance. But because she has been caught in the act (or at least in a place where she should not be), it's also possible to interpret his suggestion of sex as a form of blackmail. He has the ability to punish her or expose her sins publicly if she doesn't agree to his wishes. Both clerical hypocrisy and human immoderation and weakness are on display in the abbot's quick shift from condemning the young monk's actions to copying them, meaning that this tale contributes to the anticlerical satire that runs through *The Decameron*.

And for all the suggestion about feminine sexual deviance in this passage, it is the abbot himself who initiates a particularly naughty sex act. Medieval beliefs about the inherent superiority of men and their authority over women meant that the only acceptable sexual position was with the man in his proper position, on top of the woman. Thus, when the monk takes the lower position, he's assuming the feminine position, which is degrading to his dignity and which carries a hint of homosexuality (based on a belief that in homosexual sex, one man would have to take the subordinate, "feminine" position).

Day 1: Fifth Tale Quotes

❝ Whereas men, if they are very wise, will always seek to love ladies of higher station than their own, women, if they are very discerning, will know how to guard against accepting the advances of a man who is of more exalted rank. For which reasons, and also because of the pleasure I feel at our having, through stories, begun to demonstrate the power of good repartee, I have been prompted to show you, fair ladies, in the story I have to tell, how through her good words and actions a gentlewoman avoided this pitfall and guided her suitor clear of its dangers.

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49

Explanation and Analysis

Fiammetta tells the first day's fifth tale. She follows several tales where a protagonist's cleverness and wit have helped them avoid varying types of danger. In her preface to the tale of the Marchioness of Montferrat, who cleverly avoids the attentions of a risky suitor, she introduces an important intersection of *The Decameron*'s themes: the rules and dictates of *fin'amors* (refined loving); the vulnerability of women to men's power; and class distinctions.

In offering her tale as a lesson in avoiding dangerous love situations, and in her clearly defined ideas about what kind of lovers are (and aren't) appropriate, Fiammetta's introduction bears a marked resemblance to the classical textbook of *fin'amors* (Andreas Capellanus's *De Amore*, written in the early 13th century), which carefully lays out scenarios for how lovers of the lower, middle, and upper classes should approach their low-, middle-, or upper-class love interests. In the context of *The Decameron*'s argument about personal worth—that one's character is more important than wealth or status—Fiammetta's approval of men who can gain the love of higher-status women makes sense, since to do so these men would have to prove the nobility of their character. Her warning for women who are pursued by higher-status men points to the vulnerability of women in a patriarchal society (controlled by men), who are subject to male violence. A higher-status man, Fiammetta implies, may not have enough concern for the reputation of a lower-status woman to respect her honor and chastity.

❝ Being an intelligent and judicious woman, she sent back a message to say that she was glad to have been singled out for this uniquely great favor, and that the king would be very welcome. She then began to wonder why such a great king should be calling upon her in her husband's absence. Nor was she wrong in the conclusion that she reached, namely, that he was being drawn thither by the fame of her beauty. Nevertheless, with her habitual nobility of spirit she made ready to entertain him[.]

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker), Marchioness of Montferrat, King Philip II

Related Themes:

Page Number: 49-50

Explanation and Analysis

Fiammetta's tale relates how King Philip II of France fell in love with the wife of one of his noblemen just from hearing about her reputation from other people. This is an example of "*amor du lonh*," or "love from afar," which is a standard

fin'amors (refined loving) trope. In this passage, she has just received a letter informing her that King Philip plans to visit her home on his way to the Crusade. While it was customary for kings to expect hospitality from their noblemen, and Montferrat is on the route the king would have taken to embark for the Holy Land from Genoa (as he in fact did during the Third Crusade), visiting in her husband's absence is suspicious. And the Marchioness immediately understands that King Philip has planned his visit precisely because she is vulnerable. Without her husband's protection, the king has the opportunity to seduce her—or to force her into fulfilling his desires if he wants. However, she demonstrates the feminine virtue for which she is renowned in her devotion to her husband, her moral rectitude, and her careful, clever plan. While *The Decameron* praises intelligence generally and purports to value feminine wit, in the tales, women's intelligence is a double-edged sword, sometimes good and sometimes bad. The Marchioness's cleverness is praised because it is in line with her reputation for honesty and because she uses it to protect herself without insulting a powerful man.

Day 1: Tenth Tale Quotes

❝ Just as the sky, worthy ladies, is bejewelled with stars on cloudless nights, and the verdant fields are embellished with flowers in the spring, so good manners and pleasant converse are enriched by shafts of wit. These, being brief, are much better suited to women than to men, as it is more unseemly for a woman to speak at inordinate length, when this can be avoided, than it is for a man. Yet nowadays, to the universal shame of ourselves and all living women, few or none of the women who are left can recognize a shaft of wit when they hear one, or reply to it even if they recognize it. For this special skill, which once resided in a woman's very soul, has been replaced in our modern women by the adornment of the body. She who sees herself tricked out in the most elaborate finery, believes that she should be much more highly respected and more greatly honored than other women, forgetting that if someone were to dress an ass in the same clothes or simply load them on its back, it could still carry a great deal more than she could, nor would this be any reason for paying it greater respect than you would normally accord to an ass.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Pampinea prefaces her first tale (which features a wise old man cleverly turning the tables on a pretty, young woman who tried to mock him) with an extended lecture on the importance of wit for women. While wit requires intelligence both to appraise a situation and to come up with an appropriate response, in this case, she's also talking about a specific kind of conversational repartee. In an earlier tale (I, 5) the Marchioness of Montferrat demonstrates this skill when she baits her suitor into making a pun that she then uses to rebuke his advances. In comments prefacing a later tale (VI, 1), Filomena will repeat Pampinea's ideas verbatim.

But while it does praise women who are witty, Pampinea's aside suggests that most women, to their detriment as a sex, aren't witty at all. Her complaint about modern women draws on antifeminist stereotypes, since it emphasizes their vanity and tendency to talk too much. And while many women in *The Decameron* try to be witty and clever, many of them don't succeed. According to Pampinea's comments here, then, they are demonstrating the deficits to which women are prone. Too much attention to external appearances, rather than the cultivation of one's inner powers and intelligence, makes most women look foolish (like asses).

Day 2: First Tale Quotes

❝ Meanwhile, with the matter proceeding along these lines, word had reached Marchese and Stecchi that the judge was giving him a rough handling and had already put him on the strappado. "We have made a fine mess of things," they said, shaking with fright. "We have taken him out of the frying-pan and dropped him straight in the fire." Being determined to leave no stone unturned, they tracked down their landlord, and explained to him what had happened. The landlord, who was highly amused at their tale, took them to see a man called Sandro Agolanti, a Florentine living in Treviso who had considerable influence with the ruler of the city.

Related Characters: Neifile (speaker), Martellino, Marchese, Stecchi, Sandro Agolanti

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

On the second day, Neifile tells the story of three Florentine

entertainers who happen upon the wake of an alleged saint. One pretends to be paralyzed then miraculously healed by the saint, but when his deceit is uncovered, the locals attack him for mocking their beloved saint. His friends claim that he's a pickpocket, and his arrest by local authorities removes him from the angry mob but exposes him to torture—a frequently-used judicial tool in the Middle Ages. In this passage, they are desperately trying to extricate their friend and themselves from this sticky situation. The passage—indeed, the whole story—illustrates Giovanni Boccaccio's mastery of humor. Many moments in this tale, and many moments in the rest of *The Decameron*'s tales, are genuinely funny. And the use of the phrase "out of the frying-pan and into the fire" is one of the earliest vernacular examples of a phrase that wouldn't show up in English for another 200 years.

This passage also shows that fortune isn't always a purely external force: while it was bad luck for Martellino to be recognized, he deserves some of the Trevisans' wrath for his performance. His faux miracle compromises the case for Arrigo's sainthood, since saints could only be proved by working miracles. Moreover, his fortunes don't improve on their own, but through the ongoing effort of his friends to save him. The presence of a well-connected and widely-respected Florentine in Treviso (an Italian city separated from Florence by more than a hundred miles of rugged terrain) speaks to the interconnected networks of trade and travel that knit Europe together in the late Middle Ages—and the importance of Florence as a powerful city.

Day 2: Third Tale Quotes

❝ The whole company, men and ladies alike, listened with admiration to the adventures of Rinaldo d'Asti, commending his piety and giving thanks to God and Saint Julian, who had come to his rescue in the hour of his greatest need. Nor, moreover, was the lady considered to have acted foolishly (even though nobody openly said so) for the way she had accepted the blessing that God had left on her doorstep. And while everyone was busy talking, with half-suppressed mirth, about the pleasant night the lady had spent, Pampinea […] started planning what to say.

Related Characters: Rinaldo d'Asti, Lady of Guiglielmo Fortress, Filostrato, Pampinea

Related Themes:

Page Number: 82-83

Explanation and Analysis

In Filostrato's second tale (II, 2), a rich merchant named Rinaldo d'Asti was robbed naked on the road, but he was taken in by a noblewoman in a nearby town who gave him shelter, clothing, food, and her sexual favors. This shows the efficacy of his prayers to St. Julian, the patron saint of travelers. This passage shows readers the reactions of the *brigata* in ways that speak to *The Decameron*'s themes of love and sex, gender expectations, and moderation and balance. The tacit acceptance of the affair by everyone—including God himself!—despite its transitory and illicit nature, exemplifies *The Decameron*'s attitude towards religion. The social and religious mores of medieval Christianity inform the book, but few if any of the tales demonstrate any true or deep concern with upholding the standards of traditional morality. This also links up with ideas about moderation and excess: the members of the *brigata* can enjoy the story precisely because they represent moderation and balance. Although they may feel excessive forces of lust and temptation, they are offered up as examples of how moderation and good breeding can prevail over temptations. And while Rinaldo's adventures (including, presumably, his sexual exploits) are openly praised, no one is willing to openly condone the lady's actions, illustrating the sexual double standard that allowed more sexual license to men than to women.

❝ Excellent ladies, if the ways of Fortune are carefully examined, it will be seen that the more one discusses her actions, the more remains to be said. Nor is this surprising, when you pause to consider that she controls all the affairs we unthinkingly call our own, and that consequently it is she who arranges and rearranges them after her own inscrutable fashion, constantly moving them now in one direction, now in another, then back again, without following any discernable plan. The truth of this assertion is clearly illustrated by everything that happens in the space of a single day, as well as being borne out by some of the previous stories.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 83

Explanation and Analysis

The theme of the second day's tales is fortune, specifically,

how individuals who have experienced bad luck find their situations reversed by a happy ending. In this passage, Pampinea prefaces her tale with a description of fortune. In the Middle Ages, fortune was imagined as a goddess-like figure that controlled the destiny of people. Often, she was imagined as a servant of God or the divine will, but at other times, she seems to be making her chaotic and random decisions on her own. Importantly, as this passage describes, fortune applied to everyone (aristocratic or poor, happy or unlucky) every day. In this passage, fortune comes across as a more intimate force on a person's life than even God. This suggestion is jarring from a Christian perspective but aligns nicely with the humanistic tendencies in Boccaccio's work, which emphasize the value of human endeavor and action on their own, outside of a religious or spiritual context.

Fortune was frequently symbolized by a turning wheel, which illustrated how the lowly could be suddenly elevated (bad fortune turning to good fortune) or the lucky could be thrown down into the dirt. Pampinea's description of fortune claims that there is a cohesive plan behind the constantly changing circumstances of one's life. That's certainly true in the tales of Days 2 and 3, which show how fortune works behind the scenes to bring about fair and happy endings. But Pampinea's words also suggest that, just perhaps, fortune is chaotic and random after all, as it moves a person first in one direction and then back again.

Day 2: Fourth Tale Quotes

❝ The stones he possessed were, he discovered, so valuable and numerous that, even if he sold them at less than their market value, he would be twice as rich as when he had set out. So that, having taken steps to dispose of his gems, he sent, by way of payment for services received, a tidy sum of money to the good woman of Corfu who had fished him out of the sea. And likewise, he sent a further sum to the people at Trani who had given him the new clothes. He was no longer interested in commerce, so he kept the remainder of the money and lived in splendor for the rest of his days.

Related Characters: Lauretta (speaker), Landolfo Rufolo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In Lauretta's second tale, Landolfo Rufolo turned first to trade, then to piracy, to double his considerable wealth. But when he was first captured by pirates and then shipwrecked, his fortune seemed to have turned against him. However, he washed ashore with a chest stuffed full of valuable jewels. After he found his way home, he contented himself with his newfound riches and didn't tempt fate again. This passage details the happy ending of Landolfo's story, which vividly illustrates the caprice of fortune. His own efforts to double his wealth failed, yet fortune did indeed make him as rich as he wanted to be (twice as rich as when he started out).

In addition to describing the role of fortune in Landolfo's life, this tale also offers a cautionary lesson about greed and excess. Landolfo was among the richest men in his community before he sought to double his estate. Thus, his bad fortune in the tale's middle seems to be a rebuke of his excessive greed. The acts of kindness which helped get him home—hospitality from a poor peasant woman, clothing and a borrowed horse from some other merchants—came from people far less wealthy than Landolfo once was, suggesting that the riches he sought weren't so important after all, especially compared with his life, which their generosity saved. He recognizes their life-saving aid with generous monetary gifts meant to both recognize and discharge the debt of gratitude he owed them.

Day 2: Fifth Tale Quotes

❝ Nature demanded that he should relieve his belly, which was inordinately full, so he asked […] where he could do it, and the boy showed him a door in one of the corners of the room […] Andreuccio passed jauntily through, and chanced to step on to a plank, which came away at its other end from the beam on which it was resting, so that it flew up in the air and fell into the lower regions, taking Andreuccio with it. Although he had fallen from a goodly height, he mercifully suffered no injury; but he got himself daubed from head to foot in the filthy mess with which the place was literally swimming.

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker), Andreuccio di Pietro, Sicilian Woman

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

Andreuccio di Pietro, an inexperienced young man from Perugia, traveled to Naples to buy horses. But because he incautiously flashed his money in the market, he drew the attention of a Sicilian conwoman who lured him to her home with the claim that they're long-lost half-siblings. She wined and dined him to encourage him to sleep, at which point she and her cronies intended to rob and murder him. But before they could, he fell through the floor of the privy into the muck collected in the alleyway below. Andreuccio's story is meant to illustrate the changes of fortune, and this misadventure illuminates two key features of luck: fortune can influence small events (like going to the bathroom) just as much as big ones, and sometimes bad luck is good luck in disguise. The muck in the alley saved Andreuccio from serious harm, and escaping the house saved him from the conwoman's murderous plot.

This passage is also a humorous literalization of Andreuccio's situation: his youth and naivete have gotten him into deep trouble in Naples. And its vulgar humor illustrates an important truth about medieval literature. Despite the power of the medieval Christian church over politics and society, there was still considerable room for and appreciation of comedy in literature. Andreuccio's unfortunate fall shows that medieval audiences didn't always expect—or want—serious or overtly moral stories.

Day 2: Seventh Tale Quotes

❝ When he learnt about the circumstances of her arrival in the city, he saw no reason why he should not be able to have her. And indeed, once the wounded man's relatives discovered that the Prince was putting out inquiries, they promptly sent her off to him without asking any questions. The prince was highly delighted, but so also was the lady, who considered that she had now escaped from a most dangerous situation. On finding that she was endowed with stately manners as well as beauty, the Prince calculated, since he could obtain no other clue to her identity, that she must be a woman of gentle birth, and his love for her was accordingly redoubled. And not only did he keep her in splendid style, but he treated her as though she were his wife rather than his mistress.

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker), Alatiel , Prince of Morea, The Young Masters

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 133

Explanation and Analysis

In Panfilo's tale, Alatiel is an extraordinarily beautiful Babylonian princess who is shipwrecked on her way to be married to the King of Algarve, setting off a chain of kidnaps and murders that sees her passing through the hands of seven men over the course of several years. This passage explains how Alatiel comes to her fourth lover, the Prince of Morea. She's come to the city in the company of two merchants (the Young Masters) who helped her second lover kidnap her from her first. Out at sea, they threw her second lover overboard and then fought with each other over her. One died, and the other was grievously wounded.

The tale holds Alatiel (or at least her beauty) responsible for her lovers' actions. But though the men in the story are portrayed as helpless, it's really Alatiel who is vulnerable. She has had to hide her identity to protect herself, and to keep word of her promiscuous adventures from staining her reputation and destroying her value as a wife—the primary role for women in the patriarchal (controlled by men) system of the Middle Ages. Her inability to communicate her desires to her lovers, since she doesn't share a language with any of them, only highlights her isolation and vulnerability. And these men treat her less as a person than as a valuable piece of property to be owned—and stolen. In this way, although it's meant to show his kindness, the idea that the Prince treats her more like a wife than a mistress merely highlights her vulnerable position (since she's *not* his wife) and offers a cruel reminder of the safe life she was supposed to have with the King of Algarve. When she arrives in Morea, her position is acutely "dangerous" because she is held responsible for the earlier death of the first Young Master and the potentially fatal injuries of the second.

This quote also illustrates *The Decameron*'s ideas about class and character, namely, that one's character is a more important determinant of worth than one's wealth or status. Although no one knows who Alatiel is, her royal character is evident to everyone both through her beauty and her good manners; the Prince is not the first (or the last) lover who is attracted to her because of her evident sophistication.

Day 2: Eighth Tale Quotes

❝ Sweet friend and master, dearest one of all, since you are wise you will readily acknowledge that men and women are remarkably frail, and that, for a variety of reasons, some are frailer than others. It is therefore right and proper that before an impartial judge, people of different social rank should not be punished equally for committing an identical sin. For nobody would, I think, deny that if a member of the poorer classes, obliged to earn a living through manual toil, were to surrender blindly to the promptings of love, he or she would be far more culpable than a rich and leisured lady who lacked none of the necessary means to gratify her tiniest whim.

Related Characters: French Princess (speaker), Walter, Elissa

Related Themes:

Page Number: 150

Explanation and Analysis

In Elissa's second tale, Walter, Count of Antwerp, becomes a key advisor to the royal women while their husbands are conducting a war against the Germans. During her husband's absence, the French Princess falls in love with Walter (who is a handsome and eligible widower) and tries to begin an affair with him. This passage contains part of her rationale for her feelings. She engages with the idea of love's overwhelming power as part of her excuse for going after another man in her husband's absence—all people, she claims, are "frail" and subject to the urgings of their physical desires. But her argument goes on to employ ideas about gender and class. She claims that she herself is triply weak: not only as a human being, but also as a woman, and a member of the upper nobility. She points to women's particular susceptibility towards sins (especially sexual ones) based on misogynistic beliefs that associated men with rationality and strength and women with emotionality and weakness. Her argument that nobility excuses lust is based on an understanding that she, as a princess, has little control over her life and little meaningful work to distract her from her desires. In this way, her argument replicates Boccaccio's rationale for writing *The Decameron* to provide solace for wealthy women in love: they are subject to their parents' whims and don't have the ability to distract themselves from their feelings, as men do, with various forms of entertainment.

Her ideas, particularly the implication that love is appropriate for wealthy people but not for the working class, are drawn from classic texts of *fin'amors* (refined loving), which limit the types of people for whom love is appropriate.

❝ But knowing her to be a woman of gentle birth, doing penance for another's sin through no fault of her own, the Lord above, who rewards all according to their deserts, arranged matters otherwise. One must in fact conclude that He alone, out of His loving kindness, made possible the train of events which followed, in order to prevent this nobly-born maiden from falling into the hands of a commoner.

Related Characters: Elissa (speaker), Walter, French Princess, Jacques Lamiens, Jeannette (Violante)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 154

Explanation and Analysis

In Elissa's second tale, Walter and his children are forced to flee France after he refuses the French Princess's love and she accuses him of potential rape. As a refugee in England, Jeannette is fostered by Madame Lamiens, who promises to find her a husband when she is old enough. But Jeannette's true identity (along with her class status) is hidden, and since aristocratic men are disinclined to marry women who are neither wealthy nor of their own class, her options are limited. Thus, Jeannette requires the intervention of fortune and divine will to ensure that she gets a suitable husband.

This passage explores the connection between fortune and divine will. Day 2's theme is people who experience unexpected happiness after a series of misfortunes; therefore, Jeannette is one of fortune's victims, and her story involves a full revolution of fortune's wheel, which sees her laid low as a refugee, then returned to her proper status in the French Court. However, fortune is blind, and her decisions are inscrutable; when it's truly important (for example, making sure an innocent victim isn't punished too much for her misfortune), the narrators of *The Decameron* tend to invoke divine will to ensure that the right people are rewarded, or punished. This further contributes to the sense that, although the clergy and structure of the church are corrupt, individual faith in God is still valuable to the book and its narrators.

It also further emphasizes the importance of class in this

tale. Although in general *The Decameron* argues that a person's character is more important in determining their worth than their wealth or their class status, at heart, it never fully abandons the medieval social hierarchy, and thus it shows a marked preference for characters who are both noble in spirit and in status. Therefore, the tale works to protect Jeannette from a marriage that would be beneath her.

> The doctor was holding [Jacques] by the wrist, taking his pulse, when Jeannette [...] entered the room in which the youth was laying. When he saw her coming in, the flames of passion flared up in the young man's breast, and although he neither spoke nor moved, his pulse began to beat more strongly. The doctor noted this at once, but concealing his surprise, he remained silent, waiting to see how long his pulse would continue to beat so rapidly.
>
> As soon as Jeannette left the room, the young man's pulse returned to normal [...] [The doctor] waited for a while, and then, still holding the patient by the wrist, he sent for Jeannette [...] and no sooner did she enter the room than the youth's pulse began to race all over again: and when she departed, it subsided.

Related Characters: Elissa (speaker), Jacques Lamiens, Boccaccio, Jeannette (Violante)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 155

Explanation and Analysis

In Elissa's second tale, Jacques Lamiens grew up with Jeannette in his home because his parents fostered her after her flight with her family to England. He's fallen in love with her, acknowledging her nobility of spirit, even if her actual social class is still a mystery. But he's kept his love a secret, since his parents wouldn't approve of a match between their son and a woman of unknown (and presumably common) birth. In the Prologue to *The Decameron*, Boccaccio described secret or hidden love as more dangerous than acknowledged love, and Jacques's dire illness confirms his assertions.

In the Middle Ages, the medical conception of the human body held that it was governed by four humors, fluids produced by the liver, gallbladder, spleen, and brain. These humors had properties of hot/cold and wet/dry. Health was understood as a balance, and any imbalance in the humors (for example, the flames of passion turning up the heat in a body) could lead to illness. Thus, *fin'amors* (refined loving) was often associated with physical disease, or lovesickness. In the humoral model, the line between mental distress and physical illness was very thin, demonstrating the overwhelming power of love over not only human actions but also their very bodies. Jacques's forbidden and secret love imbalances his body so severely that he tips into sickness, and his parents call for medical doctors to cure him.

The pulse test through which Jacques's perceptive doctor diagnoses him has deep roots in the Middle Ages. Medically, physicians as far back as Galen (who lived in the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE) described a similar scenario. It also appears in the story of Antiochus and Stratonice, which was particularly popular in the period. Antiochus fell in love with his father's second (much younger) wife and was in danger of dying until a physician happened to notice the change in his pulse when she entered the room. Upon discovering the source of his son's sickness, Antiochus's father quickly divorced his wife and married her to Antiochus, who made a full recovery. This context would suggest to medieval audiences very clearly that, no matter how opposed Jacques's family might be at this moment, his love for Jeannette is likely to reach a happy conclusion.

Day 2: Conclusion Quotes

> Come, Love, the cause of all my joy,
> Of all my hope and happiness,
> Come let us sing together:
> Not of love's sighs and agony
> But only of its jocundness
> And its clear-burning ardour
> In which I revel, joyfully,
> As if thou were a god to me.
>
> Love, the first day I felt thy fire
> Thou sett'st before mine eyes a youth
> Of such accomplishment
> Whose able strength and keen desire
> And bravery could none, in truth,
> Find any complement.
> With thee I sing, Lord Love, of this,
> So much with him lies all my bliss.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of each of *The Decameron*'s 10 days, one member of the *brigata* offers a song on the topic of love, which Boccaccio transcribes. Day 2's singer is Pampinea, and her song, quoted here in part, is a celebration of love that describes many of the elements of the *fin'amors* (refined loving) style of expression that characterizes love in the book. First and foremost, this song speaks to love's power, which provides the singer "all" her joy, hope, and happiness. She addresses a personified force in Lord Love, who is "almost a god." Although the song stops short of placing Love on par with the Christian God—emphasizing that "almost"—it comes very close to doing so, illustrating the force of *fin'amors* as a type of secular religion in the medieval period.

The song engages with other *fin'amors* images and ideas as well, including the mixture of pleasure and pain—which the singer can't avoid mentioning, even if her son focuses on the pleasure. The repeated images of heat, in which love is "clear burning" and feels like "fire," are common in expressions of *fin'amors* and link to medieval humoral theory, according to which the burning sensations of love could imbalance the body's homeostasis and lead to illness. And, finally, the connection of love to class and worthiness comes through in the singer's description of her lover, who is desirable because he is strong, brave, and loving.

Day 3: Introduction Quotes

❝ The sight of this garden, and the perfection of its arrangement, with its shrubs, its streamlets, and the fountain from which they originated, gave so much pleasure … that they all began to maintain that if Paradise were constructed on earth, it was inconceivable that it could take any other form, nor could they imagine any way in which the garden's beauty could possibly be enhanced … [And] the garden was liberally stocked with as many as a hundred different varieties of perfectly charming animals […] Here were some rabbits emerging from a warren, over there hares were running, elsewhere they could observe some deer lying on the ground, whilst in yet another place young fawns were grazing. And apart from these, they saw numerous harmless creatures of many other kinds, roaming about at leisure as though they were quite tame, all of which greatly added to their already considerable delight.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

The beginning of Day 3 sees the *brigata* moving to a new, even more beautiful location than their first country retreat. This estate and its gardens receive a much longer and more detailed description emphasizing their Edenic nature and tying them closely to the *locus amoenus* tradition. A "locus amoenus" (Latin for pleasant place) is a literary tradition in which stories are set in places of pleasure and safety. The garden's animals are all harmless or tamed, suggesting that this is a place where the potential chaos in nature—its ability to harm or kill people through accident and illness—have been defanged.

But the primary image through which the *brigata* experience this garden is that of Paradise, or heaven. According to Christian theology, humanity's chance for a perfect world was lost when Adam and Eve sinned and were cast out of the garden of Eden. Perfection is now only available after death, in Heaven (paradise). The descriptions of this garden in *The Decameron* evoke a pre-sin, pre-chaos, Edenic perfection that can be imagined in literature even if it can't be achieved in real life.

As places where human ingenuity and design (balance, moderation) are imposed on the power of nature (chaos, unbridled growth), the gardens of *The Decameron*, including this one, represent an unattainable, perfect world. They are thus sites where the normal rules of society (for instance, rules against the unchaperoned mixing of the unmarried young men and women of the *brigata*) are suspended. This dovetails with the *brigata*'s representation of what a perfectly ordered, moderate, and balanced society could look like.

Day 3: First Tale Quotes

❝ Thus it was that Masetto, now an elderly and prosperous father who was spared the bother of feeding his children and the expense of their upbringing, returned to the place from which he had set out with an axe on his shoulder, having had the sense to employ his youth to good advantage. And this, he maintained, was the way that Christ treated anyone who set a pair of horns on His crown.

Related Characters: Filostrato (speaker), Masetto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 199

Explanation and Analysis

As a young man, Masetto pretended to be a deaf-mute gardener to get work at a convent, where he eventually insinuated himself into the beds of all the nuns and their abbess. After many happy years of fathering children with them, he returns to his village as an old man. This passage claims that his life of promiscuous sex, sleeping with women who'd taken vows of chastity, and avoiding responsibility for raising his children is the best kind to live. Because this is so far outside of the values of medieval society (which called for sex to be within marriage, for nuns to be chaste, and for parents to be responsible for their children), this passage displays the irreverent attitude *The Decameron* often displays towards traditional morality and religion. According to Catholic theology, nuns were considered brides of Christ. So, it isn't just that Masetto entered an essentially polygamous relationship with the convent's nine women—he also shamed Christ by stealing Christ's brides. Putting horns on the crown calls to mind the medieval image of the cuckold, a man whose wife cheated on him and who was symbolized with horns on his head. The fact that Masetto nevertheless lives to an old, happy age suggests that perhaps God is less concerned with the chastity of his brides than the Roman Catholic Church would have people believe.

This quote is also notable for its literary elements. Masetto's axe is clearly a metaphor for his other male tool and the good use to which he put it. And this tale presents a "carpe diem" or "seize the day" argument praising Masetto for putting his youth to "good use," by having lots of sex. This aligns with the nuns' "carpe diem" excuses for having sex with Masetto in this story and those offered by (or to) other young men and women throughout the tales who excuse their promiscuity by claiming they don't want to waste their youths.

Day 3: Second Tale Quotes

❝ On hearing these words, the King immediately came to the conclusion that the Queen had been taken in by an outward resemblance to his own physique and manner. But he was a wise man, and since neither the Queen nor anybody else appeared to have noticed the deception, he had no hesitation in deciding to keep his own counsel. Many a stupid man would have reacted differently, and exclaimed "It was not I. Who was the man who was here? What happened? Who was it who came?" But this would only have led to complications, upsetting the lady when she was blameless and sowing the seeds of a desire, on her part, to repeat the experience. And besides, by holding his tongue his honor remained unimpaired, whereas if he were to talk he would make himself look ridiculous.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker), Agilulf, Theodelinda, Groom

Related Themes:    

Page Number: 202-203

Explanation and Analysis

In Pampinea's third tale, a lowly groom (a servant who takes care of horses), in love with King Agilulf's wife Theodelinda, spies on the couple until he can impersonate the king well enough to have sex with the queen. When King Agilulf comes to Theodelinda right after the groom and she expresses surprise that he's back for more so soon, he immediately realizes that he's been cuckolded. Pampinea's tale is notable for its celebration of cleverness—both that of the groom and of the king. Thus, the tale contributes to *The Decameron*'s celebration of humanism, a philosophy that focuses on and celebrates human actions rather than religious concerns.

In this moment, however, it is the king's self-control that is uniquely praiseworthy. Rather than giving in to excessive anger and jealousy, he holds his tongue and keeps his newfound knowledge secret, showing great wisdom. Importantly, he believes in his wife's innocence, rather than assuming her complicity in whatever encounter has just happened. Still, his generosity is somewhat tempered by the misogynistic fear that if she knew she'd had sex with someone other than her husband, she might want to do so more often. Holding his tongue protects both his reputation and hers, at least until he can figure out what's happened, confirming the claims of other characters such as Ambrogiuolo in II, 9 and Francesco's wife in III, 5 that hidden or secret sins are somehow better than ones that have been publicly revealed.

Day 3: Third Tale Quotes

❝ The story I propose to relate [...] should prove more agreeable to a lay audience inasmuch as the priesthood consists for the most part of extremely stupid men, inscrutable in their ways, who consider themselves in all respects more worthy and knowledgeable than other people, whereas they are decidedly inferior. They resemble pigs, in fact, for they are too feeble-minded to earn an honest living like everybody else, and so they install themselves wherever they can fill their stomachs.

Related Characters: Filomena (speaker), Florentine Noblewoman, Florentine Nobleman, Florentine Friar

Related Themes:

Page Number: 205

Explanation and Analysis

Filomena's third tale features a Florentine noblewoman who, dissatisfied with her marriage, uses an unsuspecting friar as a go-between to arrange her affair with a charming Florentine nobleman. This passage is part of Filomena's introduction to her tale, and it is one of the frankest statements of anticlerical sentiment in *The Decameron*. She skewers the clergy for being stupid and hypocritical, since they commit the same sins that they judge others for. But the worst of clerical sins is greed. Medieval people understood society as broadly divided into three estates: the clergy (those who prayed), the nobility (those who fought), and everyone else (those who worked). In exchange for prayer and spiritual guidance, the clergy were supported by the charity of the aristocracy and everyone else. But, by the late medieval period when *The Decameron* was written, concerns abounded about priests who took advantage of their position to enrich themselves. Throughout this tale, the noblewoman plays on the friar's greed by offering him sizeable donations in exchange for his help in handling the Florentine nobleman.

The noblewoman's plot involves telling the priest that the nobleman has been harassing her; when the priest then admonishes the nobleman (his friend) for his behavior, the nobleman gets a hidden message telling him what the lady wants him to do. Yet, even after the friar delivers his lectures, the lady continues to return with new complaints, suggesting that the friar is unable to see or accept the evidence that his admonitions are ineffective. He thus demonstrates clerical stupidity as well as greed.

Day 3: Fourth Tale Quotes

Friar Puccio thought he could detect a certain amount of vibration in the floorboards. When […] he had recited a hundred of his paternosters […] without leaving his post, he called out to his wife and demanded to know what she was doing.

His wife […] who at that moment was possibly riding bareback astride the nag of Saint Benedict or Saint John Gaulbert, replied:

'Heaven help me, dear husband, I am shaking like mad.'

'Shaking? … What is the meaning of all this shaking?'

His wife shrieked with laughter […] 'What,' she replied, 'You don't know its meaning? Haven't I heard you saying, hundreds of times: "He that supper doth not take, in his bed all night will shake"?'

[…]

'Wife,' he replied […] 'I told you not to fast, but you would insist. Try not to think about it. Try and go to sleep.'

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker), Friar Puccio, Dom Felice, Monna Isabetta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 220

Explanation and Analysis

To enjoy the companionship of Friar Puccio's beautiful young wife, Isabetta, his spiritual mentor, Dom Felice, invents a penitential practice that occupies the pious old man all night. In this passage, Friar Puccio thinks he hears suspicious noises emanating from the bedroom where Dom Felice and Isabetta are having sex, but Isabetta's quick-thinking lies divert his attention.

This tale derives from the tradition of *fabliaux*, which were humorous and frequently obscene stories about women cheating on their husbands, often with members of the clergy (meaning that they are part of the period's anticlerical satire). Some of the humor in this moment comes from the fact that Friar Puccio is worried enough to ask what's going on with his wife, but not worried enough to ask before he has reached a convenient stopping point in the 600 prayers he's supposed to recite each night of his penance.

While *fabliaux* draw on antifeminist stereotypes about women's infidelity and tendencies to lie, they also suggest that women's sexual satisfaction is important. They thus occupy a complex position in terms of medieval morality and gender assumptions. Isabetta is susceptible to Dom Felice's

advances because her own husband is more worried about fasting and prayer than about pleasing her. *Fabliaux* husbands are gullible, if not downright ignorant. In this vein, Friar Puccio is quick to accept Dom Felice's assurances that if he performs the right penitential actions, he'll earn a guaranteed ticket into heaven. He's also quick to accept Isabetta's explanation for the strange vibrations coming from her bedroom, despite her shrieking laughter. On the other hand, *fabliaux* wives, in addition to being lustful and unfaithful, are frequently clever and quick-witted, as Isabetta is in this moment.

Day 3: Fifth Tale Quotes

Dearest beloved, since I am yours and you alone have the power to fortify my soul with some vestige of hope as I languish in the fiery flames of love, I beseech you, as your most humble servant, to show me some mercy and mitigate the harshness you have been wont to display towards me in the past. Your compassion will console me, enabling me to claim that it is to your beauty that I owe, not only my love, but also my very life, which will assuredly fail unless your proud spirit yields to my entreaties, and then indeed people will be able to say that you have killed me. Now, leaving aside the fact that my death would not enhance your reputation, I believe, also, that your conscience would occasionally trouble you and you would be sorry for having been the cause of it.

Related Characters: Zima (speaker), Francesco's Wife, Francesco Vergellesi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

Zima is madly in love with the exceptionally beautiful and faithful wife of Francesco Vergellesi, yet she doesn't return his affection. When Francesco wants to acquire Zima's fine horse, he thinks he can do so by manipulating the young man's feelings, and Zima offers to trade the steed for a chance to have a private conversation with Francesco's wife. This passage is part of that conversation in which Zima declares his love.

Although Zima is wealthy, he isn't a noble, unlike Francesco and his wife. In the classic medieval conception of *fin'amors* (refined loving), the kind of love that Zima describes here is reserved for the social and cultural elites. Thus, by participating in the tradition of refined love, Zima stakes a claim to nobility in terms of his character, if not in terms of his class status. In this way, he participates in *The Decameron*'s argument that class status is secondary to one's actions and outlook in determining worthiness.

In *fin'amors*, the beloved woman is elevated so far above her lover that she may as well be a goddess-like figure, as Francesco's wife is here. At the beginning of this passage, Zima sounds more like he's praying to Francesco's wife than telling her about his feelings. He casts himself as her humble and abused servant, gently criticizing her for failing to recognize or return his love in the past. But by the end of the passage, his words of praise have subtly turned into a veiled threat: if she doesn't return his love, he may die of grief, in which case she will be guilty of murder. Even as he professes his love and proclaims her power over his very life and death, then, Zima reminds Francesco's wife of her vulnerable position as a woman. She is dependent on the opinions of others (mostly men) to maintain her status and reputation. If she doesn't give Zima what he wants, he suggests that her reputation will suffer.

Day 3: Seventh Tale Quotes

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 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.

Related Characters: Emilia (speaker), Aldobrandino Palermi, Tedaldo degli Elisei

Related Themes:

Page Number: 239-240

Explanation and Analysis

Tedaldo fled Florence after his lover, Ermellina, repudiated him. Yet he can't escape love, so he returns home in disguise to check on her. On arriving in the city, he discovers that Ermellina's husband, Aldobrandino, has been arrested and convicted for murdering a man believed to be Tedaldo. During a sleepless night at a nearby inn, Tedaldo overhears the real murderers celebrating their escape from justice. In this passage, he reflects on the fragile nature of justice and

the ways in which human judgement is likely to fail.

The twist in this tale is that Tedaldo had a doppelganger (a stranger who looks identical), a soldier from another area of Italy who tried to rape one of the innkeepers' wives, so they murdered him. But because he appeared to be Tedaldo, and because Tedaldo's brothers knew about his affair with Aldobrandino's wife, their accusations that Aldobrandino murdered Tedaldo fit with the apparent facts: Tedaldo was dead, and Aldobrandino was the only suspect. These "facts" were confirmed by Aldobrandino's confession, which was extracted from him under judicial torture (a common, if unfortunate, feature of medieval law). Although *The Decameron* is marked with evidence of Boccaccio's budding humanism, which focuses on human beings and their actions rather than on supernatural or divine forces and concerns, it retains an awareness of the limitations of human judgement, which this passage illuminates. If Tedaldo hadn't happened to reappear in Florence at just the right moment, Aldobrandino would have been unjustly executed for a crime he didn't commit.

Day 3: Eighth Tale Quotes

❝ "Ferondo, be of good cheer, for God has decreed that you should go back to earth, where, after your return, your wife will present you with a son. See that the child is christened Benedict, for it is in answer to the prayers of your reverend Abbot and your wife, and because of His love for Saint Benedict, that God has done you this favour."

This announcement was received by Ferondo with great glee.

"I am very glad to hear it," he said. "God bless Mister Almighty and the Abbot and Saint Benedict and my cheesy-weesy, honey-bunny, sweetie-weetie wife."

Related Characters: Lauretta (speaker), Womanizing Abbot, Ferondo, Ferondo's Wife

Related Themes:

Page Number: 262

Explanation and Analysis

In this *fabliau*, the Womanizing Abbot has kidnapped and imprisoned Ferondo, convincing him that he has died and gone to purgatory. For ten months, the abbot has sex with Ferondo's wife, until she discovers that she's pregnant. This necessitates "resurrecting" Ferondo to avoid a scandal. And, to cover up what's been going on in his absence, the abbot primes Ferondo to expect a baby soon after his return to earth. The abbot's language here parodies a Biblical narrative. According to Luke 1, the parents of John the Baptist, Zacharias and his wife Elisabeth, were well beyond childbearing years when an angel appeared to Zacharias in the temple and told him "Fear not Zacharias: [...] thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John." Ferondo is told to call his son "Benedict" after Benedict of Nursia, the founder of Christian monasticism. It's an ironic and sly clue that the impending baby may have more to do with the monastery (and the womanizing abbot who leads it) than with God's divine grace. In contrast to the abbot's biblical language, Ferondo's response emphasizes his stupidity and contributes to the tale's portrait of him as an exceptionally uncultured country bumpkin.

Day 3: Ninth Tale Quotes

❝ "Sire," said Bertrand, "you have the power to take away everything I possess, and hand me over to anyone you may choose, for I am merely your humble vassal. But I can assure you that I shall never rest content with such a match."

"Of course you will," said the King, "for she is beautiful, intelligent, and deeply in love with you. Hence we are confident that you will be much happier with her than you would ever have been with a lady of loftier birth."

Related Characters: Bertrand (speaker), Gilette

Related Themes:

Page Number: 267

Explanation and Analysis

The daughter of a famous physician, Gilette grew up in the home of the Count of Roussillon, where she was playmates with his son, Bertrand. Gilette fell in love with Bertrand as they grew, and her love didn't fade even after Bertrand went to the French King's court in Paris. Now an adult, Gilette cures the king of an intractable injury on the promise that she can pick her own husband from the men in his court, and she chooses Bertrand. In this passage, the king commands Bertrand to marry Gilette, but Bertrand protests.

Because her father wasn't noble, Bertrand believes that Gilette is beneath him. Thus, he expresses a traditional view of class as the result of the random chance of one's birth, including parents' rank or wealth. In contrast, Gilette exemplifies *The Decameron*'s more socially mobile understanding of class, which locates a person's worth in their character and actions. But although the king tries to point out Gilette's good qualities to Bertrand, his admiration

is limited: he wouldn't have allowed her to choose a royal husband for herself (since that would be jumping too many rungs on the class ladder), and he leans on the fact that Bertrand is a vassal (subject) to the king when he forces the young man to accept Gilette as his bride.

But the king's words are also prophetic. Gilette is indeed beautiful, intelligent, and deeply in love with Bertrand (despite his abominable treatment of her). And she must rely on all three of these traits to come up with and carry out the plan that allows her to woo and ultimately win the love of her husband. This allows her to demonstrate her worth, as well as to contribute to *The Decameron*'s overall celebration of intelligence as a force in human affairs.

Day 3: Conclusion Quotes

"Now we shall discover whether the wolf can fare any better at leading the sheep than the sheep have fared in leading the wolves."

On hearing this, Filostrato laughed and said: "Had you listened to me, the wolves would have taught the sheep by now to put the devil back in Hell, no less skillfully than Rustico taught Alibech. But you have not exactly been behaving like sheep, and therefore you must not describe us as wolves…"

"Allow me to tell you, Filostrato," replied Neifile, "that if you men had tried to teach us anything of the sort, you might have learned some sense from us, as Masetto did from the nuns, and retrieved the use of your tongues when your bones were rattling from exhaustion."

On perceiving that the ladies had as many scythes as he had arrows, Filostrato abandoned his jesting and turned to the business of ruling his kingdom.

Related Characters: Filostrato, Neifile (speaker), Rustico, Alibech, Young Nuns, Masetto

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

As Neifile places the crown on Filostrato's head, marking the first point at which a male member of the *brigata* has been appointed sovereign, the two joke about whether the women ("sheep") or the men ("wolves") are the better leaders. Their metaphor draws on gendered stereotypes of men as active and powerful and women as helpless and docile. Yet Neifile doesn't seem helpless in this moment, and she in fact wins the debate when Filostrato abandons his weapons.

The tales that the two reference are explicit, and Filostrato and Neifile's casual banter betrays no surprise or dismay over their sexual content. Dioneo's tale describes in rather explicit detail how the hermit Rustico instigates a sexual relationship with a young woman named Alibech by claiming that sex is how a person "puts the devil back in hell." Masetto pretended to be mute until he ended up as the sexual partner of nine nuns, and he had to break his silence to put them on a schedule to prevent exhaustion. The implied threat of Filostrato's words—that being truly in charge would turn the men into predators who would make sure to have their way with the ladies—doesn't bother Neifile. Instead, she strikes back in the same terms, claiming that the ladies would have utterly tired the men out if they'd tried to instigate lovemaking. Because the *brigata*'s morality is unimpeachable throughout the course of the book, the audience isn't meant to take their banter seriously. Instead, it is another form of aristocratic entertainment, a verbal match of wits. It shows the ladies to be at least as capable as the men—and Neifile wins. When she does, she demonstrates the truth of the claims Pampinea made before her first tale (I, 10), that wisdom and wit are the crowning jewels of the worthy young lady.

This passage is also one of several points in *The Decameron* where the *brigata* discuss the preceding tales, debating their merits or making connections between them. They thus model an active and involved form of readership that asks modern audiences to consider how the separate tales relate to or comment on each other.

Day 4: Introduction Quotes

In the course of my lifelong efforts to escape the fierce onslaught of those turbulent winds, I have always made a point of going quietly and unseen about my affairs, not only keeping to the lowlands but occasionally directing my steps through the deepest of deep valleys. This can very easily be confirmed by anyone casting an eye over these little stories of mine, which bear no title and which I have written, not only in the Florentine vernacular and in prose, but in the most homely and unassuming style it is possible to imagine. Yet in spite of all this, I have been unable to avoid being violently shaken and almost uprooted by those very winds, and was nearly torn to pieces by envy.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 284

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of Day 3, Boccaccio offers a preemptive excuse for his collection of tales. He anticipates some of the criticisms to which it might be subject and ascribes all ill-will towards him and his work to envy. This passage performs two functions: it defends Boccaccio's use of vernacular prose (written in Italian, rather than the "literary" language of Latin) and it subtly brags about Boccaccio's talents.

In the earlier Middle Ages, important literature and scholarship was written exclusively in Latin, and was thus available to well-educated, usually upper-class, and primarily male readers and writers. Vernacular languages—the local, spoken languages of people throughout Europe—were associated with uneducated women and devalued as a vehicle for literary exploration. Giovanni Boccaccio, although he could and did write in Latin, was devoted to the project of expanding vernacular literature, and most of his work, including *The Decameron*, was composed in his Florentine Italian dialect. If the vernacular was as worthless as its critics believed, then it would follow that Boccaccio's work is beneath anyone's attentions. But the fact that he *has* critics suggests instead that people are paying attention to and reading his vernacular prose stories. And this forms part of his claim for the value of vernacular literature as an important art form.

In addition, although Boccaccio claims that he's not only ordinary ("keeping to the lowlands") but downright lowly ("in the valleys"), he is merely performing humility. Despite these claims, his first 30 tales have demonstrated his mastery of storytelling, ability to manipulate his readers' emotions through pathos and humor, and his own wide reading (since his stories come from a variety of source materials). Thus, the contrast between his alleged humility and the fierce assaults of envy (which only really attack the powerful and important) constitute reverse bragging through assumed humility.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 288

Explanation and Analysis

The primary complaint Boccaccio says people have about *The Decameron* is that it is dedicated to and focused on ladies. In response, he offers an abbreviated tale explaining the inescapable power of women to attract men. In this passage, which comments on his tale, Boccaccio sings the praises of women, whose beauty and worthiness are the source of his inspiration.

Despite his claims of affection and pledges of service, in this passage, Boccaccio betrays the gender essentialism and misogynistic stereotypes that undermine his pro-woman claims. Importantly, his appreciation of ladies is limited to their physical beauty and their compassion—a trait that was assigned to them as part of gendered expectations for men and women. And it's this very trait that is often used to coerce women into having sex with their admirers, since it's "compassion" on a man's suffering (in other words, giving him what he wants) that is the mark of a true lady. Even in this passage, the ladies' compassion only fans the flames of a man's passion.

Nevertheless, despite its misogynistic assumptions that women are made for male pleasure, Boccaccio does develop an intriguing claim for the power of love to serve a higher purpose. The *stil novisti* poets, headed by Dante Alighieri, claimed that the ennobling potential of love could be used to point humanity towards spiritual truths. Boccaccio's claims about the importance of women and love to his poetic project are firmly rooted in this tradition. Although he is mocked for his "natural affection," it's the very thing that pushes him to write for entertainment, but more importantly, for his audiences' edification and instruction.

❝ Am I to be abused by these people, then am I to be mauled and mangled for liking you and striving to please you, when Heaven has given me a body with which to love you and when my soul has been pledged to you since childhood because of the light that gleams in your eyes, the honeyed sounds that issue from your lips, the flames that are kindled by your sighs of tender compassion? […] it is perfectly clear that those who criticize me on these grounds are people who, being ignorant of the strength and pleasure of natural affection, neither love you nor desire your love, and they are not worth bothering about.

Day 4: First Tale Quotes

But leaving this aside, consider for a moment the principles of things, and you will see that we are all of one flesh and that our souls were created by a single Maker, who gave the same capacities and powers and faculties to each. We were all born equal, and still are, but merit first set us apart, and those who had more of it, and used it the most, acquired the names of nobles to distinguish themselves from the rest. Since then, this law has been obscured by a contrary practice, but nature and good manners ensure that its force still remains unimpaired; hence any man whose conduct is virtuous proclaims himself a noble, and those who call him by any other name are in error.

Related Characters: Ghismonda (speaker), Guiscardo, Tancredi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 297

Explanation and Analysis

Without a socially approved outlet for her sexual desires (because her father refuses to arrange a second marriage for her), Ghismonda, the recently widowed daughter of the Prince of Salerno, Tancredi, begins a love affair with Tancredi's valet, Guiscardo. She chooses him because of his outstanding personal virtue, and the pair are happy until her father discovers the affair. Tancredi is horrified by Ghismonda's dishonorable, extramarital sex, but also by her choice of lover. He implies that he would have been less upset if she'd chosen a nobleman. This passage is part of Ghismonda's lengthy response to her father's accusations. In it, she defends her choice and offers a critique of a purely class-based assessment of a person's value.

Social rank, according to Ghismonda, was initially accrued by a person's merit. Over time, the distinctions between noble and ignoble men coalesced into the current class system, in which rank is handed down from parents to their children. Nevertheless, God created all people equal and of the same nature. Distinctions of rank are given to a person by the blind fortune that assigns a person to his or her parents. This tale provides further evidence for *The Decameron*'s claims that nobility is to be found in character rather than in rank or wealth, as seen in the contrast between the noble love shared between Ghismonda and Guiscardo and the selfish, excessive, and vindictive actions of Tancredi, who executes Guiscardo and drives his daughter to suicide.

Save those tears of yours for a less coveted fate than this of mine, Tancredi, and shed them not for me, for I do not want them. Who ever heard of anyone, other than yourself, who wept on achieving his wishes? But if you still retain some tiny spark of your former love for me, grant me one final gift, and since it displeased you that I should live quietly with Guiscardo in secret, see that my body is publicly laid to rest beside his in whatever spot you choose to cast his remains.

Related Characters: Ghismonda (speaker), Guiscardo, Tancredi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

Because of his selfish affection for his daughter Ghismonda, Tancredi failed to quickly remarry her after she was widowed. Eventually, she takes his valet, Guiscardo, as her lover. After Tancredi discovers the affair, he has Guiscardo executed and sends his heart in a chalice to Ghismonda. After sprinkling Guiscardo's heart with tears, Ghismonda commits suicide by poison. This passage contains her dying words to her father.

For the most part, *The Decameron* hues close to traditional ideas about gender, including considering men rational and women excessive and emotional. In this tale, however, it is Tancredi who has excessive feelings, including selfish love for his daughter and anger over what he perceives as her betrayal. In contrast, Ghismonda always maintains self-control, restraining her own tears and rejecting her father's. She greets her death calmly and willingly, as a "coveted" or desired fate, since it will reunite her with Guiscardo.

Tancredi's primary issue with the affair had been that his daughter chose an allegedly ignoble man, because Guiscardo was a commoner, not an aristocrat like Ghismonda. Her dying wish is, in part, a form of vindication against her father. He feared dishonor if it was discovered that his daughter was in love with someone from a lower class, but she asks him to publicly acknowledge the affair. And she asks to be buried with Guiscardo, even if her father "casts" his remains into a place that isn't fit for a princess like her. She's willing to give up her rank since she considers it unimportant compared to the nobility of her character.

Day 4: Eighth Tale Quotes

❝ Excellent ladies, to my way of thinking there are those who imagine that they know more than others when in fact they know less, and hence they presume to set this wisdom of theirs against not only the counsels of their fellow men, but also the laws of Nature…Now, there is nothing in the whole of Nature which is less susceptible to advice or interference than Love, whose qualities are such that it is far more likely to burn itself out of its own free will than to be quenched by deliberate pressure. [So I will] tell you a story about a lady who … sought to be wiser than she actually was, and by flaunting her cleverness in a matter that was beyond her competence, succeeded at one and the same time in driving both Love and life from the body of her son.

Related Characters: Neifile (speaker), Girolamo's Mother, Girolamo, Salvestra

Related Themes:

Page Number: 342-343

Explanation and Analysis

The Decameron values wit and wisdom as the crowning jewels of humanity, but Neifile's tale of Girolamo and his mother shows how clever-seeming plans can backfire if they don't consider the way the world works. This is because Girolamo's mother tries to match her wits not with another person, but with love, despite its overwhelming power over the lives of humans. In this tale, love is associated with nature. In the Middle Ages, nature was a goddess-like figure who was responsible for procreation. Making babies made love equally the handmaid of God, who commanded humans to be fruitful and multiply in the Bible, and of Venus, the goddess of love and thus the human sex drive. She thus represents the powerful, potentially untamable force of love.

Girolamo falls in love with a lower-class girl called Salvestra. His mother, terrified he will marry beneath his class, contrives to send him away to Paris on business, but his feelings survive his absence. Her plan backfires because love is not only immune to control, but efforts to control it only make it burn more fiercely. Thus, Girolamo's love survives his mother's attempt to squash it, while Salvestra's love diminishes naturally over the course of his absence. The tale implies that if the mother had left well enough alone, she might have gotten a better result, and, by extension, that human wisdom can be severely limited when people are unable to understand or unwilling to acknowledge the way things (in this case, love) work.

Day 5: First Tale Quotes

❝ On catching sight of this vision, Cimon stopped dead in his tracks, and […] began to stare at her, rapt in silent admiration, as though he had never before set eyes upon the female form. And deep within his uncouth breast, which despite a thousand promptings had remained closed to every vestige of refined sentiment, he sensed the awakening of a certain feeling which told his crude, uncultured mind that this girl was the loveliest object that any mortal being had ever seen […] Having suddenly been transformed from a country bumpkin into a connoisseur of beauty, he longed to be able to see her eyes, but they were closed in heavy slumber.

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker), Cimon, Iphigenia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 358

Explanation and Analysis

Although Cimon (whose name means "Simpleton") is the son of a nobleman, he resists his father's efforts to instill manners in him or provide him an education. Eventually, his father gives up and sends him to live in the country where his rude manners will not stand out. However, when Cimon spies Iphigenia sleeping in the woods one day, the love he conceives for her unlocks new avenues for his character. This passage illustrates the power of love and the idea of love as an ennobling force, both of which are important aspects of *fin'amors*, a medieval philosophy of refined loving.

First, it describes love's power over the lives of Cimon and Iphigenia: Cimon is stopped in his tracks at the sight of her beauty. But Iphigenia is also vulnerable to love's force, which instigates events (up to and including her kidnapping) that are wholly outside of her control. This complicates the tale's attempt to claim that she is responsible for Cimon's actions, since he does them out of love for her. Iphigenia's beauty empowers and ennobles Cimon, but it reduces her to the motivating force of and prize for his transformation.

Second, Cimon's love improves his character. In *The Decameron*, a person's worthiness derives more from their character than their class status. Although he was born a nobleman, Cimon has only demonstrated ignoble character traits. But the tale can't escape an ingrained belief that one's birth does mean something; love unlocks Cimon's latent capacity for manners and intelligence (the gifts given to him by fortune through his noble birth) rather than giving him completely new skills. Over the course of the tale, Cimon completely transforms himself from a country bumpkin into an educated, intelligent, and brave young man to make

himself worthy of Iphigenia. But even in this moment, something has shifted: he longs, not to harm or ravish the sleeping woman, but to look into her eyes and to earn her love through his newly awakened refined sentiments.

Leaving the house full of blood, tumult, tears, and sadness, they made their way unimpeded to the ship, keeping close together and carrying their spoils before them. Having handed the ladies aboard, Cimon and Lysimachus followed with their comrades just as the shore began to fill with men who were coming to the rescue of the two ladies. But they plied their oars with a will, and made good their escape.

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker), Cimon, Lysimachus, Iphigenia, Cassandra, Pasimondas, Ormisdas

Related Themes:

Page Number: 378

Explanation and Analysis

After catching sight of Iphigenia in the woods, the formerly rude and uneducated Cimon is transformed into a paragon of intelligence and bravery. But her family insists on marrying her to another man. After being arrested for kidnapping Iphigenia, Cimon joins forces with Lysimachus, who loves Iphigenia's potential sister-in-law, Cassandra. Lysimachus and Cimon invade the feast celebrating the double wedding of Iphigenia to Lysimachus and Cassandra to his brother Ormisdas. This passage describes the carnage as they murder the grooms and carry off the brides.

Although the tale claims that love has ennobled Cimon, this passage shows some of the tensions inherent in the ideas of ennobling love. First and foremost, although she has the power to ennoble Cimon, Iphigenia has no autonomy. She is at the mercy of Cimon's desires, and he carries her off as the spoils of victory rather than as a beloved woman. The tale studiously avoids examining Iphigenia's desires, although there are suggestions that she may not be happy with the turn of events at her wedding, characterized as it is by tears, sadness, and chaos. Furthermore, the suggestion that men gather to "rescue" Iphigenia and Cassandra implies that they are victims rather than willing partners in the escape.

Second, the tale raises but does not resolve a tension between the ideas of love and violence. Medieval romances require men in love to perform deeds of bravery and martial skill. But Cimon and Lysimachus invade a wedding by stealth, rather than facing enemies on the field of honor. While Cimon experiences his love as an empowering and ennobling force, these tensions suggest that this idea of love itself may be fundamentally flawed, especially when viewed from the perspective of anyone but the lover himself.

Day 5: Fourth Tale Quotes

When there was no longer any sound to be heard, Ricciardo climbed over a wall with the aid of a ladder, then climbed up to the side of the house by clinging with great difficulty to a series of stones projecting from the wall. At every moment of the ascent, he was in serious danger of falling, but in the end he reached the balcony unscathed, where he was silently received by the girl with very great rejoicing. After exchanging many kisses, they lay down together and for virtually the entire night they had delight and joy of one another, causing the nightingale to sing at frequent intervals.

Related Characters: Filostrato (speaker), Caterina, Ricciardo de' Manardi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 396

Explanation and Analysis

Filostrato likes to remind his friends that he has been unlucky in love, a frustration which dictated his choosing the theme of unlucky lovers on Day 4. The other members of the *brigata* complained loudly about this, so he prefaces his tale on the next day with an apology for his harsh views on love, promising to make up for them with the happy tale of Caterina and her neighbor Ricciardo. The plan of these young lovers involves Caterina sleeping on the balcony, where Ricciardo can climb up the garden wall and into her bed. This passage describes Ricciardo's ascent.

Despite his claims to have changed his tune, Filostrato still resents happy lovers, including the pair at the center of his tale. Ricciardo has access to a ladder and to stones built into the house wall that make climbing easy because they project outwards. Thus, it's hard to believe the claim that he's in "serious danger," and it's hard to believe that any other outcome than reaching the balcony "unscathed" (unharmed) was possible. Filostrato's description reads as a parody of the danger true lover-heroes must face in medieval romances. Because Ricciardo hasn't done much of anything to earn his night of bliss with Caterina, Filostrato seems to be mocking the lovers for how easy they have it.

In addition to his mockery, Filostrato exploits a common symbol of lovers to humorous effect in this passage (and the

story as a whole). Because they were active at night, nightingales symbolized lovers in the Middle Ages. In this tale, Filostrato uses "nightingale" as a euphemism for both Ricciardo's anatomy and for sex generally. This aligns with the day's theme of joy and happiness and somewhat softens the scorn that otherwise seems to fill a tale about successful lovers who fill Filostrato with jealousy.

Day 5: Seventh Tale Quotes

When certain galleys arrived from the Levant belonging to Genoese pirates, who had captured a great many children along the Armenian coast, he purchased a number of them, believing them to be Turkish. For the most part, they appeared to be of rustic, shepherd stock, but there was one, Teodoro by name, who seemed gently bred and better looking than any of the others [...] as he grew older, being prompted by his innate good breeding rather than by the accident of his menial status, he acquired so much poise and so agreeable a manner that Messer Amerigo granted him his freedom [...] had him baptized and re-named Pietro, and placed him in charge of his business affairs, taking him deeply into his confidence.

Related Characters: Lauretta (speaker), Teodoro (Pietro), Amerigo Abate

Related Themes:

Page Number: 412

Explanation and Analysis

Messer Amerigo Abate uses slaves to help him run his wealthy household. This passage describes how he bought enslaved children (including the tale's hero, Teodoro) from Genoese pirates. Teodoro is, at least at first, a victim of fortune's accidents. Although it's later revealed that he is the son of an important and well-connected Armenian nobleman, he has still somehow been kidnapped and sold into slavery. Despite fortune's oppressions, however, his noble spirit cannot be repressed. Teodoro isn't just a nobleman by birth; he's also a noble man in character. This is evident to everyone from his actions, his manners, and even how much more refined his physical appearance is compared to the more "rustic" (in other words, poor) children among the pirates' collection. Even his master concedes his excellence, not only trusting him with important household business but eventually freeing him. It is important to note, however, that Teodoro's "freedom" merely promotes him from "slave" to "servant;" he is still subject to Amerigo's will until it's revealed that he is a nobleman in his own right.

The story of Teodoro's enslavement also illustrates strains of medieval racism. According to Christian theology at the time, it wasn't acceptable to enslave other Christians (although they could be forced to take on menial roles as servants to wealthier people). This is why the story clearly states that Amerigo believed he was buying Turkish children. Because they were Muslim, they could be enslaved according to religious and secular law. But there are indications that Amerigo should have been more cautious: in addition to Teodoro's refined (read: noble) appearance and manners, the pirates evidently explain that they captured the children along the Armenian coast. Although the medieval kingdom of Armenia and Turkey shared a border, from the 12th century on, Armenia was a Christian land and an important ally of European powers in the Middle East. Amerigo's cluelessness (or possibly, his willing ignorance) becomes inescapable when he sponsors the "conversion" of Teodoro (whose name literally means "adorer of God") and changes his name to Pietro.

Day 5: Ninth Tale Quotes

You are to know, then, that Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, who once used to live in our city and possibly lives there still, one of the most highly respected men of our century, a person worthy of eternal fame, who achieved his position of pre-eminence by dint of his character and abilities rather than by his noble lineage, frequently took pleasure in his declining years in discussing incidents from the past with his neighbors and other folk. In this pastime he excelled all others, for he was far more coherent, possessed a superior memory, and spoke with greater eloquence.

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker), Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, Boccaccio

Related Themes:

Page Number: 425-426

Explanation and Analysis

Before she tells her tale on the fifth day, Fiammetta explains that she heard it from the repertoire of Coppo di Borghese Domenichi. Giovanni Boccaccio has Fiammetta pay homage to a real, historical Florentine whom he revered for his distinguished career as a civil servant. According to the historical record, Coppo very well may have died in the plague, despite Fiammetta's hope that he still lives. Using him confers on her story a sense of nobility and old-fashioned chivalric (knightly) virtue. It's also a nice example of how Giovanni Boccaccio used historical and quasi-

historical figures in *The Decameron*: in addition to providing a sense of realism, they frequently allow him to allude to historical events or invoke desirable virtues.

But Giovanni Boccaccio also appears to have an ulterior motive in incorporating this description of a noble and respected man who also happens to be an excellent storyteller. This tale (number 49) sits almost exactly at the middle of *The Decameron*, and thus it's fitting that it includes a reminder of the book's rationale as laid out in the Prologue. There, Boccaccio stated his intention to write a book that would help love-sick ladies pass the time pleasantly, distracted from their suffering, and would perhaps teach them something of value in the process. Coppo, according to Fiammetta, excelled in this same enterprise: not only did he tell his stories well (as she directly states), but the fact that she herself is retelling one of his stories points to their enduring power and value.

Day 5: Tenth Tale Quotes

❝ And since, as on previous occasions, the task I am about to perform has no other object than to dispel your melancholy, enamoured ladies, and provide you with laughter and merriment, I shall tell you the ensuing tale, for it may well afford enjoyment although its subject matter is not entirely seemly. As you listen, do as you would when you enter a garden, and stretch forth your tender hands to pluck the roses, leaving the thorns where they are. This you will succeed in doing if you leave the knavish husband to his ill desserts and his inequities, whilst you laugh gaily at the amorous intrigues of his wife, pausing where occasion warrants, to commiserate with the woes of her lover.

Related Characters: Dioneo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 432-433

Explanation and Analysis

Before telling his tale on the fifth day, Dioneo reminds his audience of his rationale in selecting his stories and prepares them for the somewhat salacious events to come. In his tale, Pietro di Vinciolo marries a young woman to disguise his homosexuality; she's unhappy with his lack of attention and takes a lover; when he catches her lover in the house, the couple decide to share him between them. The contrast between this story and the previous one (Fiammetta's tale of Federigo's undying love for Monna Giovanna) couldn't be much greater. But Dioneo's introduction to his tale echoes Fiammetta's introduction to hers: both point towards the importance of entertainment as a rationale for the tales in *The Decameron*. And, as Dioneo claims, entertainment can be derived from low sources as well as from sophisticated ones.

In this passage, Dioneo also invokes the symbolism of the garden in the tales. He suggests his audience pick and choose what to take from his tale, just as a person can do in a garden, picking a rose and avoiding its thorns, taking what they want and leaving the more objectionable elements. His tales are just on the fringe of the socially acceptable, and only because they cover their blasphemous and lewd content with euphemism and suggestion. Similarly, gardens are places on the border of the wild and the civilized, where the chaotic and excessive procreative force of nature (represented by animals and plants, especially blooming flowers) is moderated and guided in pleasing ways by human engineering. In a garden, civilization has generally taken what they wanted from nature and left the rest alone. Dioneo suggests that the audience approach his stories—and, by implication, the tales in *The Decameron* generally—in the same way.

Day 6: First Tale Quotes

❝ Whereupon this worthy knight, whose swordplay was doubtless on par with his storytelling, began to recite his tale, which in itself was indeed excellent. But by constantly repeating the same phrases, and recapitulating sections of the plot, and every so often declaring that he had 'made a mess of that bit,' and regularly confusing the characters, he ruined it completely. Moreover, his mode of delivery was completely out of keeping with the characters and the incidents he was describing, so that it was painful for Madonna Oretta to listen to him. She began to perspire freely, and her heart missed several beats, as though she had fallen ill and was about to give up the ghost.

Related Characters: Filomena (speaker), Madonna Oretta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 447

Explanation and Analysis

The theme of Day VI is clever comebacks and retorts, and Filomena's first tale showcases a fine lady wittily yet pointedly critiquing a knight for his botched telling of a fine tale. Although storytelling isn't a main theme for *The*

Decameron, it contains several defenses of the practice throughout, some attributed to the narrators of the *brigata*, and others in the mouth of Boccaccio-as-narrator. This passage, found embedded in a tale, is a delightful catalogue of what can ruin a story, and, by extension, what makes for a good one in the opinion of the narrators themselves. In general, it seems, the *brigata* favors stories that are linear and proceed smoothly from beginning to end rather than those engaged in digression or marred by backtracking. It's also important to keep the characters straight. Perhaps most important, the register in which the story is told—its use of language, metaphor, and humor (or not)—must match its theme.

Bad storytelling, this tale suggests, is so terrible that it can make a refined person like Madonna Oretta physically ill. But because the tales in *The Decameron* aren't marred by these storytelling sins, this passage also obliquely contributes to Boccaccio's bragging over his skills. This is most clearly seen at the beginning of Day 3, where he explains that his silly little tales have become the victim of others' envy, thus suggesting that they are neither silly nor little after all.

Day 6: Second Tale Quotes

❝ I would assuredly curse Nature and Fortune alike, if I did not know for a fact that Nature is very discerning and that Fortune has a thousand eyes, even though fools represent her as blind. Indeed, it is my conviction that Nature and Fortune, being very shrewd, follow the practice so common among mortals, who, uncertain of what the future will bring, make provision for emergencies by burying their most precious possessions in the least imposing [...] parts of their houses, whence they bring them forth in the hour of their greatest need [...] In the same way, the two fair arbiters of the world's affairs frequently hide their greatest treasure beneath the shadow of the humblest trades, so that when the need arises for it to be brought forth, its splendor will be all the more apparent.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker), Cisti, Cimon

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 448

Explanation and Analysis

Cisti the baker is a man of exceptionally honorable and noble character, although by the accidents of fortune, he was born in a humble class. Although he is very wealthy, he respects the boundaries of class and refuses to insinuate himself into the activities of the nobility, although he does employ a clever ruse that allows him to show generosity and hospitality to Messer Geri Spina and his important out-of-town guests in this tale. Because of his personal excellence, Cisti's tale is yet another place where *The Decameron* investigates issues of class and character.

While this passage generally holds that a person's worth comes more from their character than their wealth or class status, it also invokes the ideas of nature (the force in charge of procreation and responsible for crafting babies with their specific combination of traits) and fortune, whose caprice can elevate the humble and lay the mighty low. This adds a layer of complexity to *The Decameron*'s claims about personal worthiness, but also implies that "class" is always predetermined, whether by birth or by the gifts of nature. Pampinea claims that nature and fortune conspire to hide nobility in low-status people as an insurance policy, since those who are born and live in high places don't always show the character befitting their class. Her ideas here link up with other tales that claim that nature and fortune, as much as birth and upbringing, can make a person ignoble or refined. And her words recall the situation of Cimon (IV, 1), whom Nature gave a noble temperament (because his father was an aristocrat) that fortune imprisoned beneath rude behavior and ignorance until the key of love freed it.

Day 6: Fifth Tale Quotes

❝ Hence, by virtue of the fact that he brought back to light an art which had been buried for centuries beneath the blunders of those who, in their paintings, aimed to bring visual delight to the ignorant rather than intellectual satisfaction to the wise, his work may justly be regarded as a shining monument to the glory of Florence. And all the more so, inasmuch as he set an example to others by wearing his celebrity with utmost modesty, and always refused to be called a master, even though such a title befitted him all the more resplendently in proportion to the eagerness with which it was sought and usurped by those who knew less than himself or by his own pupils. But for all the greatness of his art, neither physically nor facially was he any more handsome than Messer Forese.

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker), Giotto, Forese da Rabatta

Related Themes:

Page Number: 457-458

Explanation and Analysis

This tale, told by Panfilo on the sixth day, celebrates the wisdom and wit of two historical Florentine men: lawyer and politician Forese da Rabatta and painter Giotto. In alignment with the day's theme, the men verbally spar, teasing each other for their ugliness. Yet, their inner virtue shines out in opposition to their physical appearance. This passage, describing Giotto in glowing terms, examines the importance of character while also making strong statements about the nature and purpose of art and pointing towards the artistic rebirth of the Renaissance.

In terms of character, Giotto is another example of how internal rectitude and nobility are far more important than outwards signs of favor, such as wealth, status, or beauty. It is notable, however, that the examples of ugly men who are also noble are much rarer in *The Decameron* than examples of poor men who are noble: the association of a person's external appearance with character was evidently harder to break than the association of wealth with status that was rapidly being challenged by the expanding merchant class. But Giotto is also, like Boccaccio, an artist, and some of his claims to nobility and worth derive from his unique position in a society on the cusp of a broad cultural shift.

Born at the beginning of the 14th century, Giovanni Boccaccio was writing on the cusp of the Italian Renaissance. The evidence of a growing interest in humanism (a focus on human concerns and affairs rather than the supernatural or divine that helped to differentiate Renaissance art from what came before it) can be found in *The Decameron*. Boccaccio's own investment in vernacular literature also contributed to the cultural reorganization underway in the Italy of his day. This description of Giotto's artistic style aligns with narratives about the Renaissance, which saw itself as reaching back across the so-called "Dark Ages" to recapture the light and wisdom of the classical Greek and Roman worlds. Giotto, as this quote says, uncovered a "light" in art which had been buried for centuries.

This passage drips with hometown pride; Giotto was a native Florentine and was considered even in his day to be one of the most important painters of his generation. At a time when rivalries with Venice and other cities were reducing Florence's importance as a center of banking and trade and when broader trends in European politics had reduced the importance of the Italian peninsula generally (the papacy was, for most of Boccaccio's life, located in France rather than in Rome), claiming primacy in art was one way to salvage the city's reputation. And, in doing so, Boccaccio subtly claims similar importance for his own literary work.

Day 7: Fifth Tale Quotes

❝ And so it was that the jealous wretch, having thought himself very clever in ferreting out his wife's secret, saw that he had made an ass of himself. Without saying anything by way of reply, he began to look on his wife as a model of intelligence and virtue. And just as he had worn the mantle of the jealous husband when it was unnecessary, he cast it off completely now that his need for it was paramount. So his clever little wife, having, as it were, acquired a license to enjoy herself, no longer admitted her lover by way of the roof as though he were some kind of cat, but showed him in at the front door. And from that day forth, by proceeding with caution, she spent many an entertaining and delightful hour in his arms.

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker), Jealous Merchant, Jealous Merchant's Wife

Related Themes:

Page Number: 513

Explanation and Analysis

In Fiammetta's seventh tale, an excessively jealous husband disguises himself (poorly) as a priest to eavesdrop on his wife's confession, fearing that her sins are sexual in nature. She turns the tables on him and uses her "confession" to trick him into watching the door of their house all night, allowing her lover to climb into her bedroom from the roof. This passage, at the conclusion of the tale, sums up their life together after she unmasks his heavy-handed strategy. As the tale draws to a close, Fiammetta criticizes the husband's jealousy and praises the wife's cleverness.

Excess, in all its forms, is treated with suspicion in *The Decameron*. When the wives of jealous husbands cheat, it would seem to confirm their husbands' fears. But because jealousy is (according to the book's worldview) an excess of attention or love, being cuckolded is a suitable and ironic reprimand for previously baseless suspicions. That's the case here, where the husband didn't just watch his wife closely, but deprived her of access to the church and the opportunity to go to confession, which the Roman Catholic Church required each believer to do at least once a year. And, while a jealous husband's fears arise out of a misogynistic belief that women are excessively lustful, in this tale (as in the rest of the book), the wife only takes a lover *after* her husband imprisons her.

This tale celebrates feminine cleverness, according to the theme of the day, which is tricks wives play on their husbands. But the wife's successful trick (getting her husband to watch the door so her lover can access the roof) is further contrasted with his totally unsuccessful attempt

to trick her by dressing up as a priest. In part, his inability to see through her trick confirms how blind his unreasonable jealousy has made him to the facts. But her ability to see through this confirms that women are just as capable of cleverness and action as men, at least in stories that derive from the *fabliaux* genre, which gives room to female desire and action.

Day 7: Eighth Tale Quotes

God in heaven, you think he had picked you up out of the gutter! [...] These country yokels, they move into town after serving as cut-throat to some petty rustic tyrant, and wander about the streets in rags and tatters, their trousers all askew, with a quill sticking out from their backsides, and no sooner do they get a few pence in their pockets than they want the daughters of noble gentlemen and fine ladies for their wives. And they devise a coat of arms for themselves and go about saying: "I belong to such-and-such a family" and "My people did so-and-so."

Related Characters: Sismonda's Mother (speaker), Arriguccio Berlinghieri, Monna Sismonda, Neifile

Related Themes:

Page Number: 531

Explanation and Analysis

In Neifile's seventh tale, a wealthy merchant named Arriguccio Berlinghieri tries to insinuate himself into the Florentine aristocracy by marrying Monna Sismonda. But because he's frequently away from home (as a merchant), she takes a lover. One night, Arriguccio discovers his wife's means of communication with her lover. The quick-thinking Sismonda hides while Arriguccio savagely beats a maid (thinking she is Sismonda), so when he fetches her family to return her to them and she is unharmed, he ends up looking like a fool for accusing her. In this passage, Monna Sismonda's mother takes her son-in-law to task for his social climbing.

Arriguccio's mother-in-law saves her harshest words, not for Arriguccio's treatment of Sismonda, but for his grasping attempt to jump classes. While *The Decameron* is generally sympathetic to lower-class characters, it retains an elitism when it comes to class. It's just based on a person's behavior and character more than their wealth or status. Thus, Arriguccio is punished because he's failed to demonstrate his own nobility of spirit. Rather than deal with the affair quietly and privately (as King Agilulf did in III, 2), he turned to violence and retribution. His low-class background and class climbing suggest greed, an excessive desire for wealth. And excess is in his nature, as he demonstrates when he beats the maid (thinking she is Sismonda) to within an inch of her life. The success of Sismonda's story, that Arriguccio got drunk and imagined the incident, hinges on her family believing that Arriguccio is prone to excess; her mother's words, which focus on the greed of the *nouveau riche* social climber, show that she does indeed believe her son-in-law to be capable of excesses that aren't befitting the true nobility.

Day 8: Second Tale Quotes

Her name was Monna Belcolore, she was married to a farmworker called Bentivegna del Mazzo, and without a doubt she was a vigorous and seductive-looking wench, buxom and brown as a berry, who seemed better versed in the grinder's art than any other girl in the village. When [...] she had occasion to play the tambourine, and sing [...] and dance a reel or a jig [...] she could knock the spots off every single one of her neighbors. Master Priest was so enthralled by all these talents of hers that he was driven to distraction [...] Whenever he caught sight of her in church on a Sunday morning, he would intone a *Kyrie* and a *Sanctus*, trying very hard to sound like a master cantor when in fact he was braying like an ass, whereas if she was nowhere to be seen he would hardly open his lips.

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker), Bentivegna del Mazzo, Worthy Priest, Belcolore

Related Themes:

Page Number: 555-556

Explanation and Analysis

Panfilo's tale on Day 8 is one of "country love" as opposed to *The Decameron*'s usual preference for *fin'amors* (refined loving) and middle-to-upper class characters. This tale is full of class markers poking fun at the simplicity of the country folk. It's also interested in mocking the priest and highlighting his hypocrisy and ridiculousness.

The heavy-handed naming and cliched descriptions of the characters helps to cement the tale's low-class flavor. Belcolore's name literally means "beautifully colored," pointing to how attractive she is. But she's also "vigorous" and "brown," both good qualities in a peasant who labors out of doors most of the time. Rather than suggesting that ideas of beauty can encompass women like Belcolore, the contrast between Belcolore and traditional medieval standards of beauty (for example, the description of Fiammetta at the end of Day 4) suggests that the opinions

of her neighbors and the priest are deficient. Her husband's name, which means "may you have pleasure from the rod," doesn't so much suggest the idea of sex as blare it out loud, offering a further reminder (if one is necessary) that readers aren't among quiet or refined people anymore. While *The Decameron* is invested in questioning traditional ideas of rank and worth, it only goes so far, and it is willing to exploit the caricatures of the lower class for humor.

The other recipient of the tale's satire is the priest, who is known as a good sermonizer (despite his lack of education) and who has a reputation for seducing women in the parish. Belcolore is musical—she can play the tambourine, sing, and dance—so it's natural that the priest would attempt to show off his own musical talents to impress her. Unfortunately, he sounds more like a barnyard animal than a good singer, and so he makes a fool of himself. But this also points to the danger of a priesthood more intent on satisfying their own desires than caring for the souls of their parishioners. In an age when most people were illiterate and access to the religious rites that could earn a person salvation was entirely through priests, it is spiritually dangerous for the priest to be paying more attention to his crush than his prayers.

"How much is it worth?" said the priest. "Why, I'll have you know that it's made of pure Douai, not to say Trouai, and there are those in the parish who would claim that it's Quadrouai. I bought it less than a fortnight ago from Lotto, the old-clothes merchant, for exactly seven pounds, and according to Buglietto d'Alberto, who as you know is an expert in such matters, it would have been cheap at half the price."

"Is that so?" said Belcolore, "So help me God, I would never have believed it. But anyway, let's have a look."

Related Characters: Worthy Priest (speaker), Belcolore

Related Themes:

Page Number: 558

Explanation and Analysis

The priest propositions Belcolore for sex and offers her small gifts as lovers' tokens. But she wants money if she's going to sleep with him, and she requests a large sum. Because he can't come up with the cash, she offers to take a surety against the sum, the cloak which he describes in this quote. The passage features funny verbal sleight-of-hand that further emphasizes its characters' lower-class status. The cloak, as a careful reader quickly discerns, isn't worth much. The priest bought it second-hand for seven pounds, but the used-clothes seller suggested that it was only worth half that amount. Fabric from Douai, in Flanders, was indeed valuable, but the priest then exaggerates the cloak's fineness with a pun that plays with the Italian words for two (which resembles "Douai"), three, and four. Belcolore believes him, indicating the limits of her own knowledge, since she doesn't recognize that "Trouai" and "Quadrouai" cloth don't exist.

This passage also highlights Belcolore's greediness, setting her up for the trick the priest will play on her at the end of the tale. *The Decameron* has been very clear on prostitution: demanding or accepting money for sex is an irredeemable wrong (see VI, 3, where a husband sells his wife to a visiting diplomat, ruining both their reputations; VI, 7, where a local statute decrees the death penalty for prostitutes; and even the immediately preceding story, VIII, 1, where Gulfardo makes a fool of Guasparruolo's wife for asking to be paid for sex). But while Belcolore's demands for money do make her sound greedy, they also emphasize the general poverty of the characters in this tale. The reason she wants cash is to redeem items of her own that she previously pawned. And she only asks for it after the priest refuses to take her initial "no" for an answer. Thus, while her greediness is worthy of punishment, she isn't shamed or put to death. Instead, she loses only the payment she illegitimately sought for sexual favors that ought to have been offered freely, if at all.

Day 8: Fourth Tale Quotes

"Heaven be praised!" said the Provost, who could scarce contain his joy. "To tell you the truth, madam, I am amazed that you should have held out for so long, seeing that this has never happened to me with any woman before. And in fact, I have sometimes had occasion to reflect, that if women were made of silver you couldn't turn them into coins, as they bend too easily. But no more of this, when and where can we be together?"

Related Characters: Provost (speaker), Emilia, Piccarda

Related Themes:

Page Number: 571

Explanation and Analysis

In this tale, the Provost (the head priest of the cathedral) of a small town has fallen in love with a young widow named Monna Piccarda. Although she has refused him several times, he hasn't accepted her answer, so she comes up with a plan to humiliate him by tricking him into sleeping with her ugly maid. She sets the trap by pretending to have changed

her mind, and this passage contains part of his response. It paints a portrait of a man without morals, decency, or humility. Although as a priest he has taken a vow of chastity, he's overjoyed at the thought of an illicit sexual liaison with Piccarda—and, his words suggest, this won't be his first affair. He also comes across as an arrogant buffoon since he was surprised that Piccarda could resist his charms, although the tale clearly states that neither she nor any of his parishioners really like him.

He also uses significantly antifeminist language to express his surprise. In his metaphor, he associates female virtue with silver and suggests that women are, by nature, so soft and yielding that they cannot resist their desire for sex. Yet, even as he disparages women for being easy, he doesn't acknowledge the hypocrisy in his own eagerness to take advantage of this alleged gender flaw. This, along with the very fact that Piccarda must trick him and humiliate him to get him to leave her alone, demonstrates the vulnerability of women in a culture that simultaneously believed them to be uniquely prone to sin and subject to male authority.

Day 8: Sixth Tale Quotes

❝ Calandrino is a mean sort of fellow, who's very fond of drinking when other people pay. So let's go and take him to the tavern, where the priest can pretend to play the host to the rest of us and pay for all the drinks. When he sees that he has nothing to pay, Calandrino will drink himself into a stupor, and then the rest will be plain sailing because there's no one else staying at the house.

Everything turned out as Bruno had predicted. When Calandrino saw that the priest would not allow him to pay, he began to drink like a fish, and quaffed a great deal more than he needed to make him drunk.

Related Characters: Bruno (speaker), Calandrino, Buffalmacco, Filomena

Related Themes:

Page Number: 580

Explanation and Analysis

In this tale, Calandrino goes to the country to collect a pig from his wife's farm. His friends Bruno and Buffalmacco want him to sell it, use the money to party, and then tell his wife it was stolen. But Calandrino, fearing his wife's wrath if he doesn't bring such a valuable food item home, refuses. Bruno and Buffalmacco then plan to steal the pig themselves. This requires taking advantage of Calandrino's excessive nature, which manifests in both excessive simplicity (his ignorance and gullibility are the point of the four stories in which he's a character) and his excessive drinking.

In one way, there isn't much that separates Calandrino from his friends: Bruno and Buffalmacco want to take advantage of his relative wealth to support their own lifestyles, while Calandrino is more willing to drink when someone else is paying for it. The distinguishing factor seems to be the disproportionate amount Calandrino consumes. He doesn't just enjoy someone else's treat, he drinks "like a fish," and "into a stupor." *The Decameron* consistently punishes characters for their excesses of vice (and even, sometimes, for excessive virtue), so it's not surprising that Calandrino's friends would get away not only with stealing his pig but with making a fool of him in front of his neighbors.

Day 8: Seventh Tale Quotes

❝ Feeling somewhat aggrieved that things had not worked out as the scholar had told her, she said to herself: "I strongly suspect that he was trying to give me a night like the one I provided for him; but if that was his intention, he's chosen a feeble way of avenging himself, for the night he spent was at least three times as long, and the cold was far more severe." But as she had no desire to be found up there in broad daylight, now prepared to descend, only to discover that the ladder had gone.

Related Characters: Pampinea (speaker), Elena, Rinieri

Related Themes:

Page Number: 597

Explanation and Analysis

In this, the longest tale in *The Decameron*, a scholar falls in love with a vain widow named Elena. When she tricks and mocks him in front of her lover, his admiration turns to hate, and when her lover leaves her, Rinieri seizes his opportunity for revenge. In this passage, Elena realizes what has happened, although she is only at the beginning of her ordeal.

When she tricked Rinieri, Elena pretended to invite him to her home for a tryst, only to lock him in a courtyard overnight during a snowstorm. He nearly froze to death while she mocked him and had sex with her lover in the warm house. To revenge himself, Rinieri traps Elena on top of an isolated tower, completely naked, in the height of

summer. His punishment is based on the idea of *contrapasso*, or the law of nature that Dante Alighieri invented for hell in the *Divine Comedy*. According to contrapasso, sinners in hell are punished with torments equal and fitting to their sins. Since Elena trapped Rinieri, he will trap her; since she exposed him to the elements, he will do the same. At first, although she recognizes the reciprocity of their positions, Elena thinks that her punishment has been lighter than his, since the night has been mild. But this is only the beginning of her ordeal, as she discovers when she finds that the ladder has been removed.

> But even supposing I were a charitable man, you are not the sort of woman who deserves to be treated with charity. For a savage beast of your sort, death is the only fit punishment, the only just revenge, though admittedly, had I been dealing with a human being I should already have done enough [...] I intend to harry you with all the hatred and all the strength of a man who is fighting his oldest enemy.
>
> ...it was not for lack of trying that you failed to murder a gentleman (as you called me just now), who can bring more benefit to humanity in a single day than a hundred thousand women of your sort can bring to it for as long as the world shall last.

Related Characters: Rinieri (speaker), Elena

Related Themes:

Page Number: 600

Explanation and Analysis

Rinieri's love for the beautiful but vain Elena was turned to hatred when she tricked him into spending the night waiting for her in a snowy courtyard. He waited until he had an opportunity for revenge, and he trapped her (naked) on top of an isolated tower at the height of summer. While she becomes increasingly upset, dehydrated, and sunburned, he stands at the bottom of the tower, mocking her and refusing her pleas for mercy. Although her suffering pleases his thirst for revenge, he does have a conscience and her cries do make him feel sorrow.

To satisfy his thirst for revenge, he must dehumanize Elena, as he does in this passage. He refuses to grant her humanity, naming her a "savage beast" or animal and calling her his "oldest enemy"—language which suggests an antifeminist identification of women with the Devil, the ancient enemy of humankind. In fact, if she were worthy of the designation "human," he would have to stop punishing her now, or risk his actions becoming excessive. But in Rinieri's view, women aren't even worthy of being considered full human beings, so nothing he can do will be too much. Her life is less than worthless compared to his, since she is a mere woman, not an educated gentleman. Moreover, his words even suggest that he didn't see her as a fully autonomous human being before he began to hate her. She humored his advances initially because they flattered her vanity, but he operates under the assumption that because she encouraged him, she owed him sex. Thus, he punishes her not just for humiliating him in front of her lover, but also for refusing him in the first place.

> And even supposing that all my little schemes had failed, I should still have had my pen, with which I should have lampooned you so mercilessly, and with so much eloquence, that when my writings came to your notice (as they certainly would), you would have wished, a thousand times a day, that you had never been born.
>
> The power of the pen is far greater than people suppose who have not proved it by experience. I swear to God [...] that you yourself, to say nothing of others, would have been so mortified by the things I had written that you would have put out your eyes rather than look upon yourself ever again.

Related Characters: Rinieri (speaker), Elena

Related Themes:

Page Number: 602

Explanation and Analysis

In this tale, Elena encouraged Rinieri's affections, then tricked him and mocked him in front of her lover. As revenge, Rinieri has trapped her atop a tower where the sun burns her while she begs for mercy and Rinieri circles the tower screaming antifeminist invective against her. In this passage, he brags that although she fell into this particularly painful trap, there was no way for her to avoid punishment for rejecting him, since at the very least he could have written and published stories lambasting her and humiliating her among her peers. At a very superficial level, this passage points towards the power of the pen and the ability of writers to shape the views of their readers—issues of concern for a well-respected author like Giovanni Boccaccio. And this passage both engages with and points towards the tradition of antifeminist writing in the Middle Ages. Although Rinieri is mad at Elena, his words often slip into generalized complaints about women in general.

Finally, scholars have raised the possibility that this tale, the longest in *The Decameron*, may have ties to Giovanni Boccaccio's own experiences. A few years after writing *The Decameron*, Boccaccio completed *Il Corboccio* ("The Crow"), a novel in which the protagonist (a scholar) frees himself from the labyrinth of love when he realizes how horrible the woman who repudiated him (a widow) was. It's possible that this later work, which bears a marked similarity to this tale, is semi-autobiographical, because it connects to other events in Giovanni Boccaccio's life. It's also possible that it is just an exercise in antifeminist writing. In either case, both this tale and *Il Corboccio* demonstrate Boccaccio's involvement in the production of antifeminist writings throughout his career and call into question his often-mentioned devotion to and love of amorous ladies.

Day 8: Tenth Tale Quotes

❝ In the seaports of all maritime countries, it used to be the practice, and possibly still is, that any merchant arriving there with merchandise, having discharged his cargo, takes it to a warehouse, which in many places is called the *dogana* and is maintained by the commune or by the ruler of the state. After presenting a written description of the cargo and its value to the officers in charge, he is given a storeroom where his merchandise is placed under lock and key. The officers then record all the details in their register under the merchant's name, and whenever the merchant removes his goods from bond, either wholly or in part, they make him pay the appropriate dues. It is by consulting this register that brokers, more often than not, obtain their information about the amount and value of the goods stored at the *dogana*…

Related Characters: Dioneo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 632-633

Explanation and Analysis

The protagonist of Dioneo's tale on Day 8, Salabaetto, is a young Florentine merchant. In Sicily, he falls under the sway of a conwoman who steals the money he made from his deals; he ultimately gets revenge on her by tricking her into accepting a repayment in the form of a warehouse full of goods that turn out to be worthless. Of all the tales in *The Decameron*, this is the one most concerned with the details of the international trade that was so important to Florence in terms of wealth and cultural cachet. This passage is one of the earliest descriptions of late-medieval bonded customs houses. The level of detail it contains suggests that it was based on Boccaccio's own experience with these important hubs of trade, which he would have most likely gained in working for his father's banking business as a young man.

Although this description is necessary for the audience to understand the way Salabaetto's revenge-trick works later in the tale, it's vastly different from the usual feeling of Dioneo's tales, which are funny, sexy, and irreverent. This suggests the workings of Giovanni Boccaccio himself, the outside author imposing himself on the world of the frame to ensure that his story works as it is meant to.

Day 9: Fifth Tale Quotes

❝ Hence, albeit we have referred many times to the doings of Calandrino, they are invariably so amusing, as Filostrato pointed out a little earlier, that I shall venture to add a further tale to those we have already heard about him. I could easily have told it in some other way, using fictitious names, had I wished to do; but since by departing from the truth of what actually happened, the storyteller greatly diminishes the pleasure of his listeners, I shall turn for support to my opening remarks, and tell it in its proper form.

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker), Calandrino, Filostrato

Related Themes:

Page Number: 669

Explanation and Analysis

Fiammetta's tale on the ninth day is the final of four stories dealing with the humorously ignorant character of Calandrino. The second-to-last day doesn't have a specific theme, allowing the members of the *brigata* greater leeway in choosing their tales. Thus, almost all the tales on this day recall, build on, or disagree with tales told earlier in the book. The collection of tales in *The Decameron* shows evidence of careful planning and crafting by Giovanni Boccaccio, and it is full of internal references to itself like the one presented in this quote. Thus, as the tales draw towards a close, the narrators are reminding the audience of the immense effort and skill necessary to have written the book.

But Fiammetta makes other claims, too, about the importance of truthfulness in storytelling. She suggests that she could have changed the names and identities of the individuals in her story, but that part of the tale's value arises from its commitment to the truth. And Calandrino the

character is based on a person who lived in Florence during Boccaccio's lifetime, and whom many of his original audience might have known. Thus, Fiammetta's words are a defense of Boccaccio's use of real people throughout the book, even in situations where their inclusion may not have been flattering. This links to Boccaccio's defense of the accuracy of his historical tales at the beginning of Day 4, suggesting not only Boccaccio's scrupulous attention to exactness, but also its importance in adding to the pleasure to be found in reading his work.

❝ He gave her a friendly greeting, which she acknowledged, then she began to stare at him, not because she found him the least bit attractive, but because she was fascinated by his odd appearance. Calandrino returned her gaze, and on seeing how beautiful she was, began to think of various excuses for not returning with the water to his companions. However, not knowing who she was, he was afraid to address her, and the girl, perceiving that he was still staring at her, mischievously rolled her eyes at him a couple of times, and fetched a few little sighs, so that Calandrino instantly fell in love with her and stood rooted to the spot till she was called inside by Filippo.

Related Characters: Fiammetta (speaker), Calandrino, Niccolosa, Bachelor Filippo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 669-670

Explanation and Analysis

In this tale, Calandrino falls into love—in a fashion he believes to be *fin'amors* (refined loving)—with a prostitute. His friends encourage his feelings all while mocking him behind his back, and they ultimately expose his attempted affair to his wife, humiliating him in the process. In this passage, Calandrino first notices Niccolosa and moves very quickly from sight to attraction to love, according to the descriptions of *fin'amors* that fill medieval romances, poems, and handbooks of love. But because Calandrino is a bumpkin and a painter, while Niccolosa is a prostitute, their "love" is a satirical imitation of noble ideals.

According to medieval theories of love popular since the 12th century, love enters a person through his or her eyes, when they look on an attractive person and that image lodges firmly into their brain. If they ruminate on this image too much, they can become lovesick, but if the other person also forms a favorable opinion through their gaze, then the love can be mutual and successful. Lovers are conspicuous from their sighs. Thus, when Niccolosa perceives that Calandrino is openly staring at her, she suspects his attraction and pushes him over the edge with a few sighs suggesting to him that the feeling is mutual.

Niccolosa is successful in hooking Calandrino, the tale suggests, at least in part because she is a prostitute, and thus skillful at pleasing men. While prostitution is vilified in *The Decameron*, Niccolosa gets a pass in this story because her profession adds to the humor. Not only does Calandrino make a fool out of himself by acting the part of a besotted lover, but he mistakes the prostitute's passable manners for an indication that she is a noblewoman, showing his complete inability to judge character.

Day 9: Ninth Tale Quotes

❝ Lovable ladies, if the order of things is impartially considered, it will quickly be apparent that the vast majority of women are through Nature and custom, as well as in law, subservient to men, by whose opinions their conduct and actions are bound to be governed. It therefore behooves any woman who seeks a calm, contented, and untroubled life with her menfolk, to be humble, patient, and obedient, besides being virtuous, a quality that every judicious woman considers her especial and most valuable possession.

Related Characters: Emilia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 689-690

Explanation and Analysis

In Emilia's second-to-last tale, a struggling husband learns an important lesson from watching a mule driver administer a harsh beating to a stubborn animal that was afraid to cross the stream at Goosebridge. Thanks to wise advice from Solomon, he realizes that his wife is shrewish because he never learned how to beat her properly into obedience. Emilia prefaces her tale with an extended comment on gender roles, and this passage marks the beginning of her advice.

Notably, Emilia addresses herself to "loveable ladies." Her first audience, of course, is the *brigata*, which is composed mostly of women. But, in the book's Prologue, Boccaccio clearly states that he composed the work for the benefit of wealthy, lovelorn women who need distraction, entertainment, and education. Thus, the tale addresses itself outwards towards the book's larger readership in this moment, indicating that this is one of the instances in which

education will be combined with pleasure. Readers, then, are encouraged if not instructed to apply Emilia's words to themselves.

The "lesson" at hand is based in deeply antifeminist stereotypes about women and the patriarchal understanding of gender roles that held sway over medieval society. Based on Biblical interpretations that saw Eve as responsible for human sinfulness and which directed husbands to be masters over their wives, medieval women were expected to be virtuous and obedient to male authority. In the introduction to Day 1, in fact, Filomena worried that the group of women shouldn't go into the country without male guidance, because without someone to keep them on the right path, they were liable to argue and fight with each other.

Antifeminist stereotypes like the ones engaged here cast women as irrational and childlike, in opposition to an assumption of rationality and power in men. In this passage, Emilia places the responsibility for their peace and safety entirely on the shoulders of women, implying that those who are punished by their husbands, fathers, or other male relatives "deserve" their treatment. Thus, this passage both illuminates misogynistic beliefs that were common in the period and belies Boccaccio's claims to love and respect women.

❝ I repeat, therefore, that in my judgement, all those women should be harshly and rigidly punished, who are other than agreeable, kindly, and compliant, as required by Nature, usage, and law.

Hence I should like to acquaint you with a piece of advice that was once proffered by Solomon, for it is a useful remedy in treating those who are afflicted by the malady of which I have spoken. It should not be thought that his counsel applies to all women, regardless of whether they require such a remedy, although men have a proverb which says: 'For a good horse and a bad, spurs are required; for a good woman and a bad, the rod is required.' Which words, being frivolously interpreted, all women would readily concede to be true: but I suggest that even in their moral sense they are no less admissible.

Related Characters: Emilia (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 690

Explanation and Analysis

Emilia's defense of female submission to men comes from three sources: nature, usage, and law. "Nature" arguments, based in medieval theories about the body, claim that women are soft, small, timid, and less fully formed versions of humanity, compared to men, who are perfect exemplars of the species and who are large, brave, and in command. "Usage" points to social mores and expectations of women and men, but these assumptions were often tinged with misogyny, including consistent assertions in *The Decameron* that women are prone to emotional excesses, uncontrollably lustful, and that their honor (or dishonor) directly reflects on the men in authority over them (whether fathers, brothers, or husbands). And law points to the fact that religious and secular authorities were united in their opinion that women were inferior, subservient, and vulnerable to men. Even Emilia's assertion that only disobedient women deserve punishment fails to offer adequate protection for women generally, as their level of obedience is determined by the same men with the power to beat them. And the book has already given examples of husbands who were jealous or suspicious of their wives without good reason, implying that no one's individual judgement is infallible.

This passage also obliquely critiques female sexuality when it suggests how easily women will agree with the proverb that good and bad women deserve the "rod"—if "rod" is interpreted as a metaphor for a man's genitals. Women, the passage suggests, are happy to receive sexual pleasure from men's rods even though they're hesitant to accept correction from men for their faults.

Day 10: Third Tale Quotes

❝ Fear me not, then, and rest assured that in view of the loftiness of your motives, no other living person loves you as greatly as I, for you do not devote your energies to the accumulation of riches, as misers do, but to spending what you have amassed. Nor should you feel ashamed for having wanted to kill me to acquire fame, or imagine that I marvel to hear it. In order to extend their dominions, and hence their fame, the mightiest emperors and greatest kings have practiced virtually no other art than that of killing, not just one person as you intended, but countless thousands, setting whole provinces ablaze and razing whole cities to the ground.

Related Characters: Nathan (speaker), Mithridanes, Filostrato

Related Themes:

Page Number: 716

Explanation and Analysis

The tales of the final day are on the topic of generosity, and the members of the *brigata* compete to present the best example. As the day wears on, the tales become more and more exaggerated. Filostrato follows tales in which a man was generous to a friend, and then a man was generous to a stranger; to compete, his tells a tale of generosity between strangers that even extends to a willingness to lay down one's life. Nathan is a very wealthy man whose extreme generosity has given him an outstanding reputation. Mithridanes is a much younger, equally wealthy man, who wants to be as loved and revered as Nathan is. So he also performs generous acts. But when he realizes that his generosity will never measure up to Nathan's (because he's acting generously to enhance his own reputation rather than because he's truly generous), he sets out to kill his rival. After he learns of the plot, Nathan still offers his life freely to Mithridanes, surprising the young man and changing his anger and jealousy into respect and love. In this passage, Nathan explains why he doesn't (and can't) hate Mithridanes, even though the younger man had planned to murder him.

In his willingness to die to please Mithridanes, Nathan becomes something of a Christ-figure, willing to give up his life so that another person can be saved. His rationale here derives both from his generosity and also from a sort of pragmatic awareness of the violence and chaos inherent in the world. Nathan values Mithridanes's generosity, considering the ends more important than the means. Mithridanes's actions were basically selfish, rooted in a desire to enhance his own reputation. But the only person harmed by his attitude, Nathan's argument suggests, was Mithridanes himself: the good of his generous deeds benefitted the world at large, while the bad of his unhappiness over what he perceived to be an insufficiently famous reputation was confined to him alone. Nathan also cites the myriad bad reasons why people kill each other, noting the disorder in a world where the powerful can do what they want to other people. In this context, Nathan's individual death seems small and meaningful, making it easier for him to offer his life.

Day 10: Fifth Tale Quotes

"What I want is this," replied the lady, "In the month of January that is now approaching, I want a garden, somewhere near the town, that is full of green plants, flowers, and leafy trees, exactly as though it were the month of May. And if he fails to provide it, let him take good care never to send you or anyone else to me again. For if he should provoke me any further, I shall no longer keep this matter a secret as I have until now, but I shall seek to rid myself of his attentions by complaining to my husband and kinsfolk.

Related Characters: Dianora (speaker), Ansaldo Gradense, Gilberto, Emilia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 727

Explanation and Analysis

Ansaldo Gradense loves Madonna Dianora, but although he has done everything a good, refined lover should do according to *fin'amors* (refined loving), she continues to reject him. Ultimately, to get rid of him, she gives him an impossible task, which this passage details. She sends a message saying that she will become his lover when he can make a lush garden appear in their cold, northern town in the middle of the winter. In other words, she tells him she will become his lover when something impossible happens, like when hell freezes over.

It's fitting, however, that her chosen impossible task involves a garden, since gardens are often metaphorically associated with love in *The Decameron*, as in medieval literature generally. As gardens represent the order that human ingenuity can impose on the lush but often chaotic generative force of nature, so too does Dianora want to impose limits on the chaotic love of Ansaldo. Her request is both a statement that she won't return his love and a critique of his inability to control himself. No matter how firmly she says "no," he continues to pursue her.

This passage also reminds readers of the vulnerability of women in a society in which they are under the power and governance of men. She has been keeping Ansaldo's actions secret for his benefit; she implies that her male relatives would threaten him if they knew. Yet telling isn't without risk to her, and other women in the tales have been threatened with ruined reputations if they complain about their suitors' advances. The garden is a last-ditch effort to avoid having to take the direct route, which carries danger for both the lover and his lady.

Day 10: Seventh Tale Quotes

Love, ever since I fell in love
With him, you always granted me
More fear than courage; wherefore I
Could never show it openly
To him who takes away my breath,
And death is hard as I lie dying.
Perhaps he would not be displeased
If he were conscious of my sighing
And I could find the power to show
To him the measure of my woe.

Related Characters: Minuccio d'Arezzo, Lisa, King Peter

Related Themes:

Page Number: 741

Explanation and Analysis

In this tale, bourgeoise (middle-class) Lisa falls hopelessly in love with King Peter of Aragon when she watches his performance in a joust at a tournament. Because her love is impossible to fulfill, she falls into lovesickness which the doctors can't heal. Before she dies, she wants to tell the king of her feelings, so she asks for a popular minstrel, Minuccio d'Arezzo, to come sing songs at her bedside. She confesses her feelings to Minuccio, who in turn has a songwriter named Mico da Siena compose lyrics that he sings to King Peter. This passage is one of the verses of the song.

This passage, and the song, use many of the motifs, images, and ideas of *fin'amors* (refined loving), including the empowering nature of love (replacing the lover's fear with boldness), but also its pain and suffering, which are described here as breathlessness and painful dying. Like every other mortal human being, Lisa is powerless to resist the force of love, even when it inspires feelings that cannot ever be acted upon, since the king is out of her league.

Lisa's song also demonstrates the communal and common nature of the kind of love celebrated in the literature of *fin'amors*: multiple people help her get her message to the king, and they all—no matter what their class status—share a metaphorical and conceptual language that allows them to convey Lisa's message in an artful form, rather than just blurting out the facts. Moreover, the song demonstrates Lisa's circumspection and cleverness, since she finds a way to say what she needs to that won't dishonor either the king or herself. Part of the reason why King Peter is moved to help her is that he's impressed with her behavior, which is that of a lovestruck noblewoman, even though she is the daughter of a middle-class family.

Day 10: Eighth Tale Quotes

Friendship, then, is a most sacred thing, not only worthy of singular reverence, but eternally to be praised as the deeply discerning mother of probity and munificence, the sister of gratitude and charity, and the foe of hatred and avarice, ever ready, without waiting to be asked, to do virtuously unto others that which it would wish to be done unto itself. But very seldom in this day and age do we find two persons in whom its hallowed effects may be seen, this being the fault of men's shameful and miserly greed, which, being solely concerned with seeking its own advantage, has banished friendship to perpetual exile beyond earth's farthest limits.

Related Characters: Filomena (speaker), Titus Quintus Fulvius, Gisippus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 763

Explanation and Analysis

In this tale, Titus and Gisippus are best friends. When Titus falls in love with Gisippus's fiancée (Sophronia), Gisippus helps to arrange a clandestine marriage between the two, claiming that a true friend is far rarer and more valuable than any woman. Later, after Gisippus's fortune turns sour, he follows Titus to Rome, where the friends are reunited. This passage, part of the tale's conclusion, praises friendship as a general good for society.

Much of this tale is written in the form of a rhetorical exercise, which accounts for the tale's length and its wordy digressions. Giovanni Boccaccio, at the beginning of *The Decameron*, promised to draw his tales from many sources, and evidently schoolboy exercises are one of them. This is why this passage (and the tale generally) are characterized by intense language, long sentences, and lists.

Thematically, it's notable to find an example of friendship in a book that prefers to tell tales based around heterosexual romantic relationships. Apart from the amity that characterizes the *brigata*, this tale has the only meaningful example of friendship in the book. Most of the rest have been unbalanced and unlucky—to give just a few examples, Calandrino's friends take advantage of him (VIII, 3; VIII, 6; IX, 3; IX, 5); the bad Cecco defrauds his friend the good Cecco of his worldly belongings (IX, 4); Guillaume de Cabestanh falls in love with the wife of his best friend, Guillaume de Roussillon, and Roussillon kills him (IV, 9).

The day's theme is generosity, which, this passage claims, is the crowning jewel of true friendship. True friends, it claims, care more about each other than about themselves. This kind of balanced love contrasts with a world of chaotic

greed and selfishness. In other words, this passage suggests that friendship is a possible solution to the chaos and immoderation of the world. Most of the sins the Florentines engaged in during the plague (hoarding, drinking, immodesty, abandoning the sick) were inspired by greed (to have nice things for oneself) and selfishness (to take care of oneself instead of others). But now, near the end of the book, through Filomena, Giovanni Boccaccio claims that balance and affection can provide a path forward for humanity. And, if the members of the *brigata* are the other example of friendship in the book, it's also telling that Filomena fears that friendship has been banished from the real world, since they spend most of *The Decameron* in otherworldly, Edenic gardens.

Day 10: Conclusion Quotes

❝ For as far as I have been able to observe, albeit the tales related here have been amusing, perhaps of a sort to stimulate carnal desire, and we have continually partaken of excellent food and drink, played music, and sung many songs, all of which may encourage unseemly behavior among those who are of feeble mind, neither in word nor in deed nor in any other respect have I known either you or ourselves to be worthy of censure. On the contrary, from what I have seen and heard, it seems to me that our proceedings have been marked by a constant sense of propriety, an unfailing spirit of harmony, and a continual feeling of brotherly and sisterly amity. All of which pleases me greatly, as it surely redounds to our communal honor and credit.

Related Characters: Panfilo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 795-796

Explanation and Analysis

After the final tale on the tenth day, Panfilo notes that the *brigata* has been in the countryside for two weeks (including the weekends, which they took off from storytelling) and asks his companions whether they should return to the city or remain where they are. He reminds them of their goals in leaving Florence, all of which they have achieved: relaxing, remaining healthy, and escaping the sadness and anguish of the plague. This quote picks up at that point, with Panfilo's assessment of how well the *brigata* has behaved itself.

The *brigata* and their country retreat represent moderation and equanimity in contrast to the chaos and disorder of the world, of which the plague is just an extreme example. Thus, it's fitting that Panfilo would praise them for their commitment to moderation. And this achievement is even more conspicuous since they have been telling sexy stories, consuming good food and wine, and enjoying pleasant pastimes, while living together in a coed group without chaperones. Less self-controlled people than the *brigata*, he implies, would have had difficulty maintaining discipline and respectability under these circumstances. This is a reminder that the group represents an ideal that society should aspire to, even though it is unlikely that real people would be able to attain to the same level of propriety.

Author's Epilogue Quotes

❝ Like all other things in this world, stories, whatever their nature, may be harmful or useful, depending upon the listener. Who will deny that wine, as Tosspot and Bibler and a great many others affirm, is an excellent thing for those who are hale and hearty, but harmful to people suffering from a fever? Are we to conclude, because it does harm to the feverish, that therefore it is pernicious? Who will deny that fire is exceedingly useful, not to say vital, to men and women? Are we to conclude, because it burns down houses and villages and whole cities, that therefore it is pernicious? And in the same way, weapons defend the liberty of those who desire to live peaceably, and very often they kill people not because they are evil in themselves, but because of the evil intentions of those who make use of them.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 799

Explanation and Analysis

In the Epilogue, Boccaccio offers a final defense of *The Decameron*, especially those stories that may strike a reader as too sexy, improper, or profane to be considered good literature. The main defense of his work, as laid out in this passage, is based in ideas of moderation, which has been one of the book's important themes. Boccaccio claims that things in and of themselves are neither good nor bad; their benefit or harm comes instead from the result of the thing itself. Thus, some wine is good for the restoration of health, while too much makes a person into a drunk. This example in particular calls to mind one of the Middle Age's key examples of the importance of moderation and balance: the healthy body. Medieval ideas of health were based in the ancient system of humoral medicine, which imagined a body controlled by four opposing forces, called the "humors."

When the humors (associated with fluids produced by the brain, liver, spleen, and gallbladder) were in balance, a person was healthy. A sick person may be too "cold" and need warming wine to bring them back to health. But a healthy person, by drinking too much warming wine, could make themselves ill. Humoral theory encouraged balance in all activities: eating, drinking, having sex, exercise, even thinking too much about serious things.

This is how Boccaccio wants his audience to take the tales collected in *The Decameron*: as tales that are morally neutral. If someone with bad intentions reads them (perhaps taking one of the *fabliaux* as an excuse for having an affair, or lying to a husband), then it's not the tale's fault, it's the fault of the reader for behaving badly. Conversely, however, Boccaccio wants his readers to take the instructive elements of the tales and apply them freely, imagining them to be as life-giving as medicinal wine for the sick or fire to hold the cold of winter at bay.

❝ I confess that I do have weight, and in my time I have been weighed on numerous occasions; but I assure those ladies who have never weighed me that I have little gravity. On the contrary, I am so light that I float on the surface of the water. And considering that sermons preached by friars to chastise the faults of men are nowadays filled, for the most part, with jests and quips and raillery, I concluded that the same sort of thing would not be out of place in my stories, written to dispel the woes of ladies. But if it should cause them to laugh too much, they can easily find a remedy by turning to the Lament of Jeremiah, the Passion of Our Lord, and the Plaint of the Magdalen.

Related Characters: Boccaccio (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 801-802

Explanation and Analysis

This passage comes from Boccaccio's defense of *The Decameron* in its Epilogue. The second complaint he anticipates critics making is that the tales are too silly when they should be serious and educational. In this passage, he answers that he never intended his stories to be too serious. And, as if to prove that point, he jokes and puns throughout the passage. First, he puns on the idea of "gravity" indicating weight as well as seriousness. He has the first, but not the second, as would be confirmed by any lady lucky enough to have "weighed" him in the past. By specifically invoking ladies as the people who have weighed him, though, he suggests his past sexual partners, women who would have had the chance to test his weight while lying beneath him (since the only proper way to have sex, according to medieval authorities, was with the man on top). Then, as if to prove the point, he claims that he floats on the surface of the water. Boccaccio presents this evidence as if it is miraculous, when in fact it's fairly common (all people are generally somewhat buoyant), in much the same way that Friar Cipolla (VI, 10) and Bruno and Buffalmacco (VIII, 9) present normal occurrences as miraculous to their gullible audiences. But his phrase also hauntingly recalls the words of Arnaut Daniel, who famously identified himself in one of his poems as "Arnaut who nets the breeze / … / and swims against the rising seas." Daniel was a 12th century troubadour praised by Dante Alighieri with whom Boccaccio may have also been familiar, since there are references to the troubadours elsewhere in *The Decameron* (IV, 9).

Finally, before he's done, Boccaccio takes a swipe at the clergy, who use humor to get people's attention in their sermons. The priests who use humor in the tales have all been the subject of anticlerical satire, so it's unlikely that Boccaccio means to suggest that if the priests do it, it's okay for him. Instead, he seems to point to a universal human desire to mix the serious with the humorous, the light with the profane. And in a work that examines the importance of balance and moderation to the proper ordering of human societies, it's also fitting that he defend himself using the idea of balance between the light (humorous) and the heavy (serious).

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

PROLOGUE

Boccaccio confesses that he was tormented by love in his youth; it was painful because his emotions were overpowering, even though the lady he loved wasn't cruel. Back then, his friends could alleviate his pain by keeping him company. Now that God has reduced Boccaccio's love to a manageable level, he feels more pleasure than pain.

Giovanni Boccaccio, the author of The Decameron, *places himself in the book as the recorder of the tales. In this capacity, he writes a prologue, an epilogue, and an authorial aside at the beginning of Day IV to defend his stories. The character of "Boccaccio" should not be confused with the author Boccaccio, and may or may not fully represent his viewpoints and ideas. At the very beginning of the book, Boccaccio introduces two of its main themes: love and moderation. The torments Boccaccio describes undergoing when he was in love are classical descriptions of lovesickness as it was portrayed in medieval literature. And the overpowering love that can make a person sick is, by definition, an example of immoderation.*

Boccaccio, remembering the kindness shown to him while he was lovesick, plans to show his gratitude by offering solace and instruction to others, especially women, since they are more vulnerable to being hurt by love. He suggests that they tend to hide their feelings dangerously, and, because they are under the authority of parents and male relatives, they're often confined to idleness, even though excessive solitude encourages love to turn into melancholy.

Boccaccio sets himself up here as an author and an authority—ideas that were closely associated in the Middle Ages. He also gestures towards the differing social expectations of men and women. Love preys on the idle, who don't have a lot of distraction to fill up their time, because endlessly ruminating on the object of one's affections tends to increase feelings of love and to make the experience more painful. And women, confined physically and by social expectations, are particularly susceptible to imbalanced emotional reactions, such as melancholy. Medieval descriptions of melancholy, which is often associated with love, are like 21st-century understandings of depression.

Men in love travel, socialize, hunt, play games, or work to avoid melancholy, since mental engagement relieves love's suffering. But Boccaccio thinks that female hobbies—sewing, weaving, spinning—aren't distracting enough. In this way, **fortune** is unfair, subjecting women to greater lovesick suffering while providing them less access to therapeutic distractions. Boccaccio will tell one hundred stories to distract lovesick ladies and give them useful advice.

Boccaccio draws on the handbooks of fin'amors *(refined love) to describe the various cures for lovesickness, which include recreational distraction. Again, social expectations separate men, who have a great deal of freedom, from women, who don't have as much access to therapeutic distractions. This is also the introduction of fortune as an independent force in the book. In medieval literature and thought, "Fortuna" is a goddess-like force who hands out good and bad circumstances to people essentially at random.*

DAY 1: INTRODUCTION

Because women are naturally compassionate, Boccaccio worries that the opening of his book will bother the sensitive ladies for whom he wrote it, since it describes the recent outbreak of Bubonic Plague. But this shouldn't dissuade his audience; rather, the painful beginning will make the ensuing stories much sweeter, just like a steep preceding hike enhances a beautiful view. He can't avoid it, anyway, since it's the context that brought the company together.

Boccaccio's warning to his female readers not only plays on gendered assumptions about females as weak and emotional, but it also capitalizes on the strong medieval association of compassion with women and with noblepersons that will reappear throughout the book. Although Boccaccio claims that he must describe the plague, since it was the circumstance that brought the brigata *together, the literary rationale for including it is to increase the contrast between the chaos and disorder of Florence and the idyllic, moderate, and pleasant life the* brigata *lives in the countryside.*

The plague comes to Florence in 1348. Some think it's divine punishment, and others think it's caused by astrological events. Regardless, it can't be prevented or prepared for. It is characterized by swollen lymph nodes and bruises. Physicians can't treat it, either because they don't understand it well enough or because it is incurable. It passes like wildfire between the sick and the well, even affecting animals.

The Bubonic Plague did indeed hit Florence in 1348, and if Giovanni Boccaccio didn't witness it himself from inside the city, he knew people who did. However, his description in the book is drawn from earlier plague narratives. The variety of responses to the plague illustrate how surprising and destabilizing it was for Florentine society.

Of course, everyone is terrified and tries to avoid catching it. Widespread responses include carrying on normally but using medicinal herbs for protection; forming groups and living quietly and moderately in isolation; living it up, drinking, and partying (which is only possible because so many civil authorities have died that it's impossible for them to enforce societal rules); and abandoning the city, as if God's punishment is confined by its walls.

Those Florentines who use the plague as an excuse to abandon moral and civil codes behave excessively, in contrast to those who live quiet and moderate lives (foreshadowing the brigata*). Carrying medicinal herbs (or "posies") was a common, if unhelpful, practice to ward off the plague. Giovanni Boccaccio's humanism is on display in his disdain for people who think of the plague in terms of divine punishment that can be escaped by leaving the city itself.*

When people inevitably fall ill, they are abandoned by everyone: neighbors, relatives, close family members, and servants. Parents even refuse to take care of their sick children. This leads to some morally questionable practices, like male servants taking care of sick noblewomen, who willingly expose their naked bodies to these servants, which probably explains why plague survivors show less chastity than normal.

Fortune's blindness causes the plague to strike at random, and no one is immune. The chaos and disorder of the plague is highlighted with the images of parents abandoning their children and male servants caring for noblewomen. This latter situation also has gendered overtones of concern over female chastity, which is demonstrated by the sly poke at the female survivors who are particularly promiscuous. And the suggestion that noblewomen would engage in sex with servants raises concerns about maintaining the divisions between the upper and lower classes.

Before the plague, female relations and neighbors would gather to mourn a person's death, while male relations and neighbors would carry the body to the priest for burial. But during the plague, people die alone and un-mourned. Their bodies are carried to the church by the cartload, a new service invented by enterprising members of the lower classes who charge a large fee to haul away corpses. Funeral services are abbreviated, and people are buried in mass graves.

The total breakdown of social norms, including funeral rituals, continues the theme of chaos and anarchy unleashed by the plague. The novel disease upends the order and moderation that used to characterize society. And once again, gender roles are used to emphasize these shifts: one consequence of the plague is that women aren't performing their usual roles in mourning any longer.

Many regular people die in their homes, discovered only when their corpses begin to stink. Neighbors leave victims in the streets to be picked up, carried to the church, and buried in mass funerals. In fact, plague victims are treated with less respect than dead goats. The dead must be buried in mass graves because churches are running out of consecrated ground. People in the countryside aren't safe either; their suffering is in fact magnified by a lack of doctors and servants. They also neglect their responsibilities, feasting on their livestock instead of tending to their fields.

It's only now, with an explicit mention of middle-class and poor plague victims, that it becomes clear that the entire description so far has been focused on aristocratic people. The plague is a force that comes for rich and poor, and the fact that no one is immune continues the theme of chaos and anarchy—and a lack of moderation, which is on display just as much among the poor who feast and abandon their social roles as among the rich. The ubiquity of death also points back to the ridiculousness of thinking that leaving the city, as some people did, would provide protection.

Between March and July, 100,000 people died. Boccaccio mourns palaces emptied of lords, ladies, and servants; prestigious family lines abruptly ended; riches lost; and the handsome men and charming ladies who died. The more he thinks about what was lost, the sadder he becomes.

Although this number is vastly overstated (the total population of Florence in the 1340s was less than 100,000 according to best estimates), the exaggeration helps to convey the scale of the deaths. In his mourning, Boccaccio uses the "ubi sunt" motif, which asks "where are" the lovely things of the past—in this case, lords, ladies, fine families, and immense wealth.

During this chaos, seven ladies bound by kinship and friendship descend on the Church of Maria Novella on a Tuesday morning to pray. They are between the ages of 18 and 27, intelligent, well bred, beautiful, and charming. Boccaccio will give them pseudonyms (based on their character or temperament) to prevent any embarrassment that might arise from naughtiness in their stories. They are Pampinea, Fiammetta, Filomena, Emelia, Lauretta, Neifile, and Elissa.

The level of detail Giovanni Boccaccio uses to describe the ladies of the brigata *suggests that they are—or could be—based on real people, but it is only a literary device. The women are clearly not meant to be real people, but are representations of literary, mythological, and cultural ideas. As characters, the ladies of the* brigata *represent the ideal version of womanhood and aristocratic values.*

Having met by good **fortune**, when they're done praying, Pampinea reminds the other ladies it's natural to try to preserve their lives. In the city, they can only pray, count corpses, and hope to escape the thugs partying in the streets. Anyone who can has already left Florence, and since total anarchy has engulfed society, she's afraid. She wonders why they're still in Florence: do they think they're somehow immune to harm?

Fortune, having spared these ladies from the plague's ravages, plays a key role in bringing the brigata *together. But because fortune is blind, or at least random, their good luck isn't guaranteed, and staying in the city would be tempting fate. The vulnerability of women in medieval society to gendered violence creeps into Pampinea's speech, since one of the reasons to leave is to escape Florentine street thugs. Pampinea's argument here is essentially humanist, appealing to reason in place of other responses to the plague that have already been described, including religion (fasting, praying), superstition (the use of posies and herbs to ward off illness), or license (using the plague as an excuse to party in the streets).*

Instead, Pampinea proposes that they leave the city together and in comfort but "without overstepping the bounds of what is reasonable" at a country estate, surrounded by pleasant scenery, fresh air, and fewer corpses. Since their families are all dead or escaped, they have no one to hold them in the city. They can take maidservants to handle their daily needs while they pursue the pleasures and entertainments left in these dark times until the plague ends. It's better to go away and preserve their honor than to stay and forfeit it.

Pampinea's plan is to leave the chaos of the city behind so that she and the others can return to living a moderate life, guided by reason rather than superstition or chaos. Bringing their maids to the country invokes class and offers the reminder that although these characters are presented as an ideal to which anyone can aspire, they are still wealthy, aristocratic people. The contrast between the chaotic city and idyllic countryside starts to come into focus here, before the brigata *have even left. And, part of the country's appeal is the ability for the ladies to preserve their chastity, which puts them in contrast to the promiscuous aristocratic women who were waited on by male servants during the height of the plague's chaos.*

Most of the other ladies are eager to go, but Filomena urges caution: she's worried that without male guidance they might quarrel and split up. Elissa agrees, wondering where they can find the right men. Meanwhile, Panfilo, Filostrato, and Dioneo enter the church looking for their lady-loves (who are among the company) because even the terrible plague hasn't cooled their passion. Pampinea immediately declares **fortune** has sent just the right men to join the group.

When she worries that the group will fall apart without a strong man to guide them, Filomena expresses a standard medieval antifeminist sentiment, which isn't softened in the mouth of a woman. And again, fortune intervenes, providing the right number of men to make the group 10—a number representing order, perfection, and completion.

Neifile flushes with embarrassment and begs Pampinea to be careful; traveling together might lead to gossip. Filomena retorts that gossip can't harm a person who lives honestly and has a clear conscience before God. She agrees with Pampinea that **fortune** seems to be smiling on them. Pampinea invites the trio, and they leave at dawn the next day.

In the strict world of medieval gender roles, the merest hint of sexual desire—especially for unmarried, aristocratic women like those in the brigata*—was grounds for scandal and the kind of ruined reputation they hope to avoid by leaving the city. But since the men, by good fortune, are also noble of character and tied to the women by kinship and affection, the* brigata*'s arrangement dodges these concerns.*

Their first stop lies two miles outside of Florence. It's a palace on a hill surrounded by shrubs, trees, courtyards, **gardens**, meadows, and wells of cool water. It's well-stocked, clean, and decked with flowers. Dioneo declares that he's left his troubles behind in Florence, and Pampinea suggests a system to preserve their happiness: each day they will select a sovereign to decide how they will live. She is unanimously elected first and crowned with laurels.

The garden—an important symbol in the book—appears almost as soon as the brigata *leaves Florence. In their first resting place, the garden is a "hortus conclusus" or enclosed space, which alludes to both the Christian narrative of the Annunciation to the Virgin Mary—where the garden is a moral and sacred space symbolizing Mary's virgin womb—and to medieval romances, where gardens are places for love. The fact that no one appears to be at this villa, yet it is still cleaned and prepared for visitors, highlights the contrast between the chaotic city and the peaceful life of the* brigata *in the countryside. Not too far from Florence, the* brigata *is reasserting order and moderation by setting up their own rational court—and because Pampinea represents reason, it's fitting that she is the first sovereign.*

Pampinea assigns jobs to the servants, commanding them to keep bad news away from the company. They eat a lavish breakfast, play music and dance, then retire for a siesta. Afterwards, Pampinea leads them to a shaded meadow where they find chess and other games. But she decrees that the best way to pass the afternoon is by telling stories—on any topic—because it amuses both the teller and the audience. Turning to Panfilo, she asks him to go first.

With the election of Pampinea as the first day's sovereign, the last vestiges of the plague-ravaged world fade away, to be replaced with an idealized vision of a society ruled by friendship and reason. The entertainments that the brigata *enjoys on this and all subsequent days are solidly aristocratic, and are underwritten by a class of servants whose work is largely invisible and ignored by the* brigata.

DAY 1: FIRST TALE

Panfilo remarks that it's appropriate to invoke God at the beginning of a project, so he will relate one of God's miracles. Things on earth are temporary and troublesome, but God's grace strengthens and enlightens people—not as a reward, but through God's mercy and the saints' intercession. Because human wisdom can't penetrate heaven, it's possible that some of those venerated as saints are, in fact, in hell. But God honors a supplicant's motives, even if the "saint" in question is bad, as the tale will demonstrate.

Panfilo's mention of the temporary nature of things on earth recalls the plague and its graphic reminder that human life is fleeting. The framework of his story draws on the Roman Catholic conception of saints, miracles, and intercession. Saints are people who lived particularly holy lives, are thought to have gone to heaven after death, and are believed to have the power to intercede with God—in other words, to ask for things on behalf of the living. Their special heavenly status is often proved through working miracles on earth.

An Italian merchant who needs to settle his affairs, including collecting loans made in Burgundy, secures the help of Sir Cepperello, a fellow Italian who is so dishonest that he would be offended if any of the legal papers he'd drawn up were accidentally truthful. He lies for fun, delights in causing discord among friends and relatives, cheerfully commits crimes (including murder!), blasphemes, loses his temper, hires male and female sex workers, drinks, and gambles.

Because the Italian merchant needs to settle loans he made to people in France, he represents the increasingly international practices of trade in the late Middle Ages. He—and Cepperello—also represent the upwardly mobile merchant and banking class that was coming into power and wealth in the 14th century. Cepperello is also the exact opposite of a virtuous person, and his sins are another example of excess and immoderation.

Cepperello agrees to collect the merchant's loans because he is unemployed. The French don't know him, so he hides his wicked ways. But he falls ill in the home of two Italian moneylenders, who worry that if he dies and they can't give him a proper Christian burial, they will be run out of town. This is a likely scenario: if Cepperello refuses to confess, the local priests won't bury him; if he *does* confess, the priests may refuse to absolve his terrible sins or bury him at their church. Cepperello, overhearing them, declares that another sin won't change his fate, and he asks for a friar to hear his confession.

Cepperello's hosts are doubly vulnerable since they are foreigners living in France and they are moneylenders—an almost universally reviled occupation in the Middle Ages. To receive a Christian burial, a medieval person had to be in good standing with the church, by making a confession of all their sins and receiving absolution—a formal pronouncement that their sins have been acknowledged and addressed in life and won't keep them from heaven. Cepperello's willingness to lie while he's confessing indicates a profound lack of concern for Roman Catholic beliefs.

Although they don't trust Cepperello's plan, his hosts bring him a respected Holy Friar, who leads him through confession sin by sin. Cepperello denies lust, claiming to be a virgin. He admits gluttony because he pigs out on bread and water; he admits greed because he desires to make money to give to the poor; he admits anger because he hates when he sees other people sin; and, finally, he admits to thievery, saying that he once accidentally gave someone incorrect change. He wails about his sinfulness, and the Friar maintains that even if he'd committed all the sins in the world, he's so contrite that God would forgive him. The Friar isn't even bothered to learn that Cepperello cursed his own mother, since God will certainly forgive him.

The Holy Friar leads Cepperello through a full confession, examining his conscience and past actions as they relate to the seven deadly sins. This classification system arose in the early centuries of the Christian Church and was standard by the 13th century. The seven deadly sins are pride, greed, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, and sloth. In his confession, Sir Cepperello not only denies having sinned but claims a level of holiness that's humorously unbelievable. The Holy Friar's willingness to take Cepperello's words at face value is part of the book's anticlerical satire, suggesting that many members of the clergy are gullible and lack critical thinking skills.

While his eavesdropping hosts can barely contain their laughter, the Holy Friar absolves Cepperello and offers to bury him in the convent. When Cepperello dies, the Friar's sermon on his virtues inspires the rest of the monks and the townsfolk to venerate him as a saint, even claiming that he has worked miracles. This proves either that God, in his infinite mercy, forgave him in the end, or that he hears prayers even when they're made through the wrong channels.

The Holy Friar buys Sir Cepperello's story, indicating his gullibility and critiquing church leaders who don't think critically. Yet, Cepperello nevertheless appears to be a successful saint. This either shows God's infinite mercy or suggests that the religious structures set up by the Roman Catholic Church—confession, absolution, sainthood, intercession—are themselves at least faulty, if not totally ridiculous. This introduces a theme that runs throughout the tales of Day I and the book as a whole: the belief and actions of the faithful are admirable and are often rewarded by God, while, at the same time, questions are raised about organized religious structures that would allow such an incredible sinner to be named a saint.

DAY 1: SECOND TALE

Neifile, seated next to Panfilo, tells the next tale, about how God's mercy can even overcome the shortcomings of the people who should most confess it but refuse to accept it.

Neifile is talking about Jewish people, whom medieval Christians tended to judge harshly for stubbornly "refusing" to accept the Christian faith even though Jesus Christ was himself Jewish.

Neifile's tale concerns Jehannot de Chevigny, a Parisian merchant, and his friend, a Jewish moneylender called Abraham. Jehannot worries that upright and honest Abraham will be dammed for his incorrect religious beliefs. He tries to convert Abraham, but he clings to the Jewish faith. After some debate, Abraham decides that he will go to Rome. If the behavior of the Pope and cardinals confirms Jehannot's arguments, he'll convert.

As groups, both moneylenders and Jewish people were marginalized and stigmatized in medieval society. Because some interpretations of the Bible indicated that Christians shouldn't make loans to other Christians, Jews often filled the commercial void by becoming the main moneylenders in medieval communities and kingdoms. Although medieval Jews in Europe commonly faced religious persecution and racism, the friendship between Jehannot and Abraham appears to be true, based in each man's recognition of the other's good character and wisdom. However, rather than being interpreted as faithfulness, Jehannot interprets Abraham's persistent Jewish faith as stubbornness—and the book's original medieval audience would have understood it this way, too.

Since Jehannot knows that the clergy in fact lead wicked lives, he tries to dissuade Abraham. But Abraham insists, and when he arrives in Rome, he discovers that almost all church dignitaries indulge in sex with men and women. They also engage in immoderate consumption of food and wine, money-grubbing (asking the faithful to donate more money than they truly need), and lying. As a sober and honest man, he's deeply offended by their behavior.

What Abraham witnesses in Rome is a strong indictment of the behavior of Roman Catholic church leaders, who don't live the very values of chastity, moderation, poverty, and honesty that they profess. Although he is from the "wrong" faith (Judaism), Abraham possesses a superior moral compass to the leaders of the "right" one (Christianity). This contributes to the book's anticlerical sentiment, as another criticism of the church and its leaders for failing to live up to the moral standards of the faith.

Back at home, Jehannot asks Abraham what he found, and Abraham doesn't hold back: he thought the papal court was a hotbed of wickedness, and that the clergy are trying to destroy the reputation and honor of Christianity with their sinfulness. But, since it is flourishing nevertheless, Abraham now believes that it must be the true faith. Jehannot sponsors his baptism at Notre Dame, Abraham changes his name to John, and he becomes a learned and devout Christian.

Abraham's conversion despite the sinful behavior he witnessed in Rome differentiates faith in Christian doctrines from mindlessly following the Roman Catholic Church, just like Panfilo's story (I, 1). Moreover, stories like Abraham's, in which a Jewish person converts to Christianity when they look at the faith objectively, were common in the Middle Ages and were used to criticize the stubbornness and reticence of Jews who refused to convert.

DAY 1: THIRD TALE

Filomena speaks next. She thinks it's time to turn to the adventures of humans. Her tale will teach her friends to be careful in answering questions because wisdom protects a person from peril while foolishness brings misery.

The stories of Day I don't have an assigned theme, but they still follow a few threads, one of which is the exercise of wisdom. Abraham was presented as wise both in general and in his conversion to Christianity, and Filomena will tell another tale about a wise Jewish person.

Saladin, the Muslim leader of a great and successful empire, needs some quick cash. He turns to an unfortunately tightfisted Jewish moneylender named Melchizedek. Saladin doesn't want to take his money by force, so he covers his motives with a clever strategy. Saladin invites Melchizedek to visit his court, then asks whether he thinks Judaism, Christianity, or Islam is the true religion.

This story takes place entirely outside of the European setting of the book, with its setting in Egypt and its focus on a Muslim ruler (Saladin) and Jewish moneylender (Melchizedek). There were significant, visible populations of Jewish people throughout Europe and the Middle East by the 13th century. They frequently filled an important role as moneylenders to merchants and kings, but their marginal status (as both a religious minority and practitioners of a reviled profession) made them susceptible to individual and communal acts of expulsion and violence. In this tale, Melchizedek initially fulfills the stereotype of the miserly Jewish moneylender, who was happy to receive excessively expensive interest payments but significantly less willing to lend his money out to others.

Melchizedek sees that Saladin is trying to bait him into an argument, but he is wise and quick-witted. He tells a parable about a man who leaves his incredibly precious ring to his heir. It passes through generations until it comes to a man with three equally splendid and beloved sons. Unable to pick, the father secretly commissions a jeweler to make two copies, and he gives one ring to each son. Each desires his father's estate and title, using the ring to prove his rights. But because it's impossible to differentiate the rings, the matter of the inheritance is never settled.

Saladin's question is obviously a trap and a threat: if Melchizedek answers that Islam is the true religion, he will have betrayed his own people; if he answers that Judaism is, he will have angered his Muslim ruler and patron. However, he displays his powerful intelligence through the parable of the nearly identical rings. The story is especially pleasing for being a story-within-a-story within the book's frame.

Likewise, Melchizedek tells Saladin, Jews, Christians, and Muslims all think that they possess the correct laws and observe the correct commandments of God. The question of primacy remains unresolved because their claims are so similar. Recognizing that Melchizedek has ingeniously avoided the trap, Saladin admits his strategy and then asks Melchizedek outright for a loan, which he receives. After he pays the money back, the men remain lifelong friends.

In contrast to the previous tale, Melchizedek doesn't recognize the superiority of Christianity and convert. The potential blasphemy of the claim that it's impossible to tell which religion is right (in the context of Christian-majority medieval Europe, the correct answer would be, of course, Christianity) is softened by putting the answer into the mouth of a Jewish man. And at the end of the story, Melchizedek has changed from fulfilling the stereotype of the miserly Jew to the stereotype of the wise Jew. In this capacity, he demonstrates that wisdom is the ability to recognize a situation and handle it with tact and grace.


DAY 1: FOURTH TALE

As soon as Filomena finishes, Dioneo pipes up. Because the point of telling stories is to give each other pleasure, he thinks people should tell tales they think most likely to do that. His will show how a monk cleverly avoided a severe punishment.

Dioneo's opening declares that his story will be of a different kind entirely. And throughout the book, he often fulfills the role of offering a funny story to offset the serious or sometimes even tragic tales told by his friends. His story looks back to the religious themes of Panfilo's tale of Cepperello (I, 1).

Dioneo's tale takes place in a Tuscan monastery where a Young Monk goes for a country walk at noon one day. He finds a beautiful Country Girl—maybe a farmhand's daughter—collecting herbs. Overcome by lust, he invites her to his cell, where the pair "cavort" together quite noisily. The monastery's Tuscan Abbot hears the commotion as he passes. Instead of confronting the Young Monk immediately, he decides to lay a trap.

This tale's setting links it with the medieval pastourelle, a French genre concerned with the love lives of shepherdesses and other girls living in the country. Pastourelles had a deeply sexualized atmosphere, which contrasts with the monastic setting and already hints at the sexual deviance and humor that will characterize this tale (and all of Dioneo's tales throughout the book). The monk's dalliance with the girl both illustrates the power of love and sex over human beings—despite his monastic vows of chastity, the Young Monk has the same physical urges as anyone else—and contributes to the anticlerical satire of the book, since the monk doesn't seem to feel guilty about betraying his vows. And, like the Holy Friar in Panfilo's tale (I, 1), the Tuscan Abbot doesn't make clear-headed or rational decisions about how to proceed.

Thinking he heard a noise in the corridor, the Young Monk excuses himself from the Country Girl and sees the Tuscan Abbot through a hole in the wall. Expecting a punishment, the Young Monk quickly thinks up a trick. He leaves the girl in his cell, tells the Abbot that he needs to finish gathering logs from the woods, and turns over his key. The Abbot decides against calling witnesses when he enters the Young Monk's cell in case the girl is a respectable or important person.

As in many of the tales on this day and throughout the book, the actions of a character who believes themselves to be clever (the Tuscan Abbot, trying to lay a trap) are outmaneuvered by the truly clever (in this case, the Young Monk)—the proof of wit and wisdom is in the outcome. It's important to note that part of the Abbot's rationale for entering the room alone is that the girl might be "respectable"—a patriarchal obsession with female chastity ties concerns about gender (women should be virginal) and class (especially if they are aristocratic) together.

But when he goes in to confront the Country Girl, the Tuscan Abbot is overcome with lust. He justifies indulging his desires—he's not likely to have another opportunity like this again!—and the girl readily accepts his advances. As they get busy, he lets her be on top. The Young Monk peers through the hole in the wall and watches before creeping away.

The Abbot is just as susceptible to fleshly desires as his charge. His hollow justifications simply underline the fact that the clergy are just as sinful—if not more!—than normal people, despite their ready willingness to call out and punish the sins of others. This is made even more apparent when he has sex with the girl, since he takes the bottom position; to a medieval audience, a man taking a subordinate/female position in sex suggests homosexuality. Throughout the tale, the Country Girl's needs and desires aren't really investigated, and her ready acceptance of the Abbot's advances just after having sex with the Young Monk demonstrates medieval misogynistic beliefs about the excessive lustfulness of women.

Once he's had his fill of pleasure, the Tuscan Abbot calls the Young Monk and orders him into solitary confinement. But the young monk immediately apologizes for breaking the monastery's rules, saying that he now understands that the proper way to be with a woman is to take the bottom position. He promises to follow the Abbot's example in the future. Realizing he has been caught in the act, the Abbot pardons the monk, swearing him to secrecy. And, Dioneo adds, they probably bring the Country Girl back on a regular basis.

The sinfulness and hypocrisy of the clergy are on full display both in the Abbot's attempt to punish the monk for a sin he himself shares and in their mutual agreement to continue to unrepentantly engage in sinful behavior while covering it up. However, the monk's reply also recalls Melchizedek's and demonstrates the same quality of wisdom: he recognizes the situation but addresses it tactfully enough to avoid angering the Abbot, even while pointing out the latter's sin.

DAY 1: FIFTH TALE

Listening to Dioneo, the ladies were embarrassed and amused. When he finishes, they gently rebuke him for the naughtiness of his story. It's Fiammetta's turn next. Her tale reminds the company that women must be extremely cautious about accepting advances from men who outrank them.

Dioneo's tale forces the brigata *to consider the limits of reasonable pleasure. Although it initially embarrasses the women's modesty, they eventually acknowledge its humor. The goal of the* brigata *in leaving Florence was to find pleasure in living moderately, and Dioneo's tales consistently demonstrate the limits of the moderate/moral without crossing the line. Fiammetta picks up on the theme of wit and wisdom that both draws on earlier medieval texts governing romantic relationships (in providing an example of how a woman can rebuff a man who outranks her) and offers a contrast to the Country Girl's wordless acquiescence to the Young Monk's and Abbot's sexual advances in the preceding story (I, 4).*

The Marchioness of Montferrat is outstandingly beautiful, virtuous, and wise. While her husband is away on the Third Crusade, King Philip II of France falls in love with her because of her reputation. Planning to detour by her home on his way to the Crusade, he sends her a message. Because the Marchioness is as insightful as she is beautiful, she realizes that he must have dishonorable reasons for visiting while her husband is absent.

The Marchioness of Montferrat and King Philip II of France are the book's first (but not last) historical characters. But Giovanni Boccaccio tends to use historical characters loosely, as he does in this case—the historical Marchioness would have been an old woman and is unlikely to have been desired by the French King during the tale's timeframe. In this tale, however, she is the epitome of feminine virtue and wisdom. King Philip's desire is an example of "amor du lonh" or "love from afar," a feature of the fin'amors *(refined loving) that was popular in medieval literature and culture. And the Marchioness's instinctive understanding of the King's immoral plans offers a reminder of the precarious and vulnerable situation of women in a society where their chastity was of the utmost importance, but they were also vulnerable to the authority and physical threats of men.*

The Marchioness comes up with a clever plan. She gathers as many hens as she can find and orders her cooks to prepare a royal banquet with each dish featuring chicken. Upon meeting the Marchioness, King Philip becomes even more lovestruck, but his pleasure turns to puzzlement when he realizes that every dish at the banquet is chicken. Curious but not wanting to embarrass her, he jokes that there seem to be a lot of chickens around but no roosters.

King Philip's comment about the cocks (which carry the same vulgar association as in modern English) underlines the Marchioness's vulnerability in the absence of her husband—she is like a hen without a rooster to protect her. He tries to be witty, but he isn't as wise as he thinks himself to be.

The Marchioness answers that there aren't any roosters and that the women of her country are exactly like women elsewhere. King Philip understands her rebuke and, knowing that neither sweet words nor force will overpower her virtue, he thanks her for her generosity, and quickly leaves her home.

The Marchioness's answer basically tells the king that she knows what he's up to and that he should find another woman (presumably one less virtuous than she is) to pay attention to. King Philip has at least enough wisdom to understand her and enough character to leave without further embarrassing himself or resorting to violence to take what he wants from her—another reminder of the vulnerability of women to the desires of men in medieval society.

DAY 1: SIXTH TALE

Emilia relates the story of a Franciscan Inquisitor whose zeal is directed by his greed. A wealthy citizen boasted in a drunken state that some of the wine in his cellar was so delicious that even Jesus Christ would have enjoyed drinking it. Because the Blasphemous Citizen is very rich, and because the Inquisitor, like many clergy members, suffers from "Golden-Mouth" sickness, or a greedy desire for wealth, he pressed charges. The cure for his sickness is "St. John Golden-Mouth's ointment"—donations—of which the Blasphemous Citizen applies a liberal amount.

Emilia's tale is a biting anticlerical satire against the Franciscans, a monastic order founded on an ideal of poverty by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209. Yet, by the 14th century, some branches of the order had become quite wealthy and powerful, especially in their association with the Inquisition—a movement to combat heresy and dissent in the Roman Catholic Church that began in the 1100s. Inquisitors were basically church police, with the power to fine, imprison, or otherwise punish people deemed to have heretical (unorthodox) religious beliefs. The Franciscan Inquisitor, by reducing the Blasphemous Citizen's penance in direct relationship to the size of his monetary donations, is practicing simony, or the selling of church benefits for money. This was a serious concern for church leaders and laypeople by the 14th century, and it contributes to making the Franciscan Inquisitor a villain in this tale. Although the Blasphemous Citizen's boast is a minor example of excess, the excessive punishment and excessive greed of the Inquisitor are far more serious offenses against order.

The generosity of the Blasphemous Citizen's donation reduces his punishment to wearing a pilgrim's badge, attending daily mass, and reporting to the Inquisitor about it. One day, the Citizen reports that he feels sorry for the Franciscan monks. He's heard the Gospel message that whatever one gives away for God in life will be returned—multiplied by a hundred—in heaven. Each day, the Franciscans give away the water from preparing their vegetables as alms for the poor. Multiply each day's "offering" by a hundred and add them together, and the Citizen worries that the Franciscans will drown in vegetable water in heaven.

The Blasphemous Citizen's rebuke of the Franciscan Inquisitor and his brothers is disguised as a very simple-minded and literal understanding of a Biblical text. In fact, the citizen has understood the lesson better than the religious "authorities," who offer what is essentially refuse and trash as "charity." The Franciscan friars have much more that they could give away to earn their reward in heaven, but they live lives of worldly greed.

While the other Franciscan friars sitting with the Inquisitor burst out laughing—understanding the Citizen's mockery—the Inquisitor himself flies into a rage and is only prevented from adding on to the Citizen's sentence because he realizes that his greedy handling of this situation has already damaged his reputation.

Although all the friars realize they're being judged and mocked, their responses vary. While most seem to take the rebuke with good humor, the Inquisitor (whose immoderate greed began the story) flies into an immoderate rage. His concern for his reputation motivates him, rather than concern for Christian ideals like forgiveness, adding to the anticlerical indictment of his sinful and base behavior.

DAY 1: SEVENTH TALE

The company is delighted by Emilia's story, and after the laughter dies down, Filostrato prefaces his tale with the claim that it's easy to hit a sitting target, like the evil clerical greed. In contrast, he thinks his hero deserves more praise because he criticizes a wealthy and powerful prince.

Filostrato's tale moves from the "soft" target of greedy priests and sinful monks into much more delicate territory. Everyone criticizes the clergy, but it's much more dangerous to criticize the rich and powerful.

Can Grande della Scala is one of the best princes Italy has seen in modern times. He invites courtiers and entertainers to a festival, but then changes his mind and sends everyone home with poor token **gifts**. One of the invited entertainers, the witty Bergamino, hangs around but while he waits, he must pay his innkeeper with two rich robes given to him as gifts by other princes.

Like other characters throughout the book, Can Grande della Scala is based on a historical figure who was renowned (and praised by Dante) for his generosity. In the context of a ruler's court, the "gifts" that Bergamino expects are payment for his services as an entertainer. In this way, they function to mediate the relationship between the ruler and others. He's not being greedy, but rather is waiting around for the fair payment of his wages.

When Bergamino is down to his last robe, he tells Can Grande the story of witty Parisian priest Primas, who decided to visit the famously generous Abbot of Cluny at breakfast to get a free meal. Since he had to walk a long way, he brought three loaves of bread to eat if he got lost. At the monastery, the Abbot disliked his scruffy guest and refused to allow him a meal. Primas ate his bread, and by the time he started the third loaf, the Abbot felt guilty and asked his guest's identity. Discovering that he was none other than Primas, the Abbot gave him food and **gifts**. Chastened by this parable, Can Grande settled Bergamino's bill at the inn, rewarded him richly, and sent him on his way.

Like Filomena (I, 3), Filostrato nests the story of Primas and the Abbot of Cluny within the story of Can Grande and Bergamino. This allows Bergamino (like Melchizedek in I, 3) to demonstrate wisdom and tact, because he's not directly implicating Can Grande even while he's criticizing his lack of generosity.

DAY 1: EIGHTH TALE

Lauretta picks up on the theme of greed and rebuke with the tale of Ermino de' Grimaldi, the wealthiest and most miserly Italian of his day, also known as "Ermino Skinflint." While he's busy building his wealth, a courtier named Guiglielmo Borsiere arrives in Genoa. In an aside, Lauretta reminds her audience that back in Grimaldi's day, courtiers were refined and eloquent, occupied in making peace and negotiating treaties, unlike modern courtiers who engage in lewd acts, indulge gossip, and generally sow divisions among people.

Lauretta's story of Ermino de' Grimaldi picks up on the stinginess shown by the Abbot of Cluny and Can Grande della Scalla in the previous tale. In doing so, Giovanni Boccaccio draws on proverbial Florentine stereotypes about Genoese stinginess. Guiglielmo Borsiere appears in Dante's Inferno, as a homosexual who nevertheless demonstrated virile bravery and generous manners. Lauretta's aside provides an opportunity for the book to look back at the good old days when courtiers were moderate in their manners and refined in their attitudes.

Guiglielmo visits Grimaldi because he's curious about the miser's reputation. Grimaldi seeks his advice on the image he should commission to decorate the hall—he wants something no one has ever seen. Guiglielmo can't suggest something totally new, but he can suggest something that Grimaldi hasn't ever seen: generosity. Chastened, Grimaldi becomes the most generous man in Genoa from that day forward.

Like other protagonists in Day I's tales, Guiglielmo tactfully rebukes Grimaldi for his failings in a way that preserves the latter's dignity. Thus, Grimaldi can change his miserly ways without losing face and find his reputation enhanced for the rebuke, rather than diminished by it.

DAY 1: NINTH TALE

Elissa, hoping to give the company a good and useful moral, relates how a Gascon Gentlewoman, returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, is raped while passing through Cyprus. She wants to complain to the King of Cyprus, but he's so cowardly that he not only fails to punish criminals generally, but also won't even defend himself from insults. Without hope of justice, she hopes to make herself feel better by taunting the king.

The King of Cypress—cowardly, unjust, and thin-skinned—is the opposite of what a good king should be. In this way, he provides a parallel with Ermino de' Grimaldi, whose wealth and status should make him generous, rather than stingy (I, 8). As in the previous tale, the Gascon Gentlewoman realizes that a direct statement of the King's failings won't accomplish much of anything, so she relies on her intelligence to find some form of relief for her suffering—in this case, mocking a man who should be able to protect her but who does not. Her experience of rape while on pilgrimage (a trip to visit sites of religious importance, usually in the area that is modern-day Israel and Palestine) points to the gender-based violence to which medieval women were subject, and her inability to avenge herself in any meaningful way emphasizes this vulnerability.

The Gascon Gentlewoman asks the King of Cyprus to give her advice about how to endure being wronged, since he's a master at ignoring insults. Her words seem to rouse the King from sleep, and he both avenges her rape and from that day forward defends his reputation with vigor.

The Gascon Gentlewoman is the book's second example of the power of feminine wit to rebuke and correct men. Female wisdom and retort are a running theme of the book, which Pampinea picks up when she starts to speak next.

DAY 1: TENTH TALE

Pampinea sums up one of the day's major themes—wit—which greatly embellishes pleasant conversation. Unfortunately, modern women care more about pretty clothes and makeup than using their wit. Nowadays women are easily bested in arguments because they don't guard what they say.

Pampinea's praise of feminine wit is tempered by the antifeminist sentiment she expresses—although a witty woman is wonderful, modern women care more about looking pretty than speaking smartly. This is an example of antifeminist ideas being voiced by the book's female characters, a circumstance that recurs throughout the tales.

Master Alberto, a brilliant but elderly physician, is so consumed by passion for a young widow named Malgherida de' Ghisolieri that he behaves like a love-struck youth. He parades in front of her house at all hours, and once Malgherida and her ladies realize that he's in love, they begin to mock him. They invite him into their splendid **garden** and ask him why he loves Malgherida, who has more appropriate suitors.

Master Alberto is an example of the medieval "senex amans" or "old lover" stereotype. In this instance, Alberto's infatuation demonstrates the overpowering nature of love, which makes him act in ways that look foolish despite his education and respectable status. Senex amans *lovers are usually mocked—just like Malgherida and her women mock Alberto. They take him into the garden—a place that represents a break from the everyday world of suffering and toil—and it's here that he will turn the tables on them.*

Alberto answers that although older men may lack the sexual prowess of the youth, they have a better understanding of who deserves love. And anyway, he often sees women eating the green leaves of leeks rather than their delicious white bulbs, so how was he to know that Malgherida wouldn't have as strange a taste in lovers as some women do in vegetables? Malgherida is abashed and impressed; she offers him her love, but he declines. Although she thought she could mock an old man, in the end, she was bested.

Alberto's answer, like many of the other retorts from Day I's tales, rebukes the women for their mockery indirectly. His comment about the leeks is an involved joke about sexual prowess and experience: the leek's green leaves are like young men, while its white bulb and roots represent the white hair of an old man. Because people usually consume the white parts of the leek rather than its tough green leaves, Alberto's metaphor allows him to imagine a world in which it's more natural for women to prefer older and more experienced lovers, rather than younger, stronger men. Instead, he lives in a world where women prefer the look of youth (the green leaves) rather than a good taste (the bulb and roots). And, true to the world he imagines, Malgherida is indeed impressed by his wisdom and offers to take him as her lover. His repudiation can be interpreted as punishment for her earlier coldness—she comes to realize his value too late.

DAY 1: CONCLUSION

As the sun begins to set, Pampinea addresses the company, crowning Filomena the next sovereign. Filomena overcomes her modesty and gives her first commands: she confirms the assignments that Pampinea gave the servants and declares that the next day's activities will be the same—free time, breakfast, siesta, storytelling—except that she will announce a theme, so everyone has time to prepare their story in advance.

In the countryside and away from the chaos of plague-ridden Florence, the brigata *live a moderate, orderly, and enjoyable life. The contrast between the two worlds highlights the importance of moderation in human societies but also contributes to the otherworldly, idyllic, and even Edenic feeling of the Tuscan countryside—the lives of the* brigata *are lovely, but aspirational, and it's not likely that anyone could replicate them in real life.*

Everyone is subject to **fortune**, so Filomena wants to hear stories about "those who after suffering a series of misfortunes are brought to an unexpected state of happiness." Dioneo asks that an exception be made so that he can tell his stories on any theme he likes. To avoid messing up the flow, however, he offers to always go last. Because Filomena knows that he's funny and entertaining, and that he can change the mood if the stories get too heavy, she agrees.

Filomena introduces the first theme for the tales; except for the first and the ninth days, a predetermined theme links the tales together. Importantly, the first theme is fortune. The goddess Fortuna survived the shift from the Roman religion to Christianity and persisted as a powerful symbol into the Middle Ages, where the turns of her wheel, which changed a person's luck for the better or worse, were often seen as an extension of God's divine will. Given the horrors the brigata *left behind in Florence, it's not surprising that Filomena would ask for tales where bad fortune is followed by good fortune and a happy ending. This is also the introduction of Dioneo's exception, which allows him to tell* The Decameron*'s dirtiest stories without upsetting the carefully balanced, moderate order of the rest of the tales.*

After supper, the company plays music and dances while Emilia sings a love song in which the singer delights in her own beauty so much that she can't love anyone else. Although they wonder what it means, the company are pleased enough with the song to join in on the chorus.

The songs at the end of each day are often places where Giovanni Boccaccio includes the tropes of the fin'amors *(refined loving) that was widespread in medieval literature and popular culture. The singer's delight in her own beauty invokes the classical myth of Narcissus, a youth so exceptionally beautiful that he fell in love with his own reflection in a pond and eventually died of starvation when he couldn't tear himself away, making him an example of the dangers of immoderation as well. Narcissus and his pool (often transformed into a fountain in medieval texts) are key symbols of* fin'amors.


DAY 2: INTRODUCTION

As the sun rises, illuminating the **gardens** and meadows, the young men and women wake up to wander through the pleasant countryside and weave flower garlands. After breakfast, dancing, and a siesta, they gather to tell stories under the rulership of Filomena, who asks Neifile to tell the day's first tale.

The introduction to Day II again invokes the idea of the "hortus conclusus" or enclosed garden, reminding readers that the brigata *are in a place entirely removed from the cares and woes of normal life—and in a place associated with love stories and magically happy endings.*

DAY 2: FIRST TALE

Neifile's tale begins with Arrigo, a German who worked as a porter in Treviso and lived a very holy life. Because the church bells spontaneously rang at the moment of his death, the locals believe he was a saint, and they flock to the cathedral where his body lies, hoping for miracles. Three Florentine entertainers—Stecchi, Martellino, and Marchese—arrive during this uproar. The cathedral is so crowded that they must use subterfuge to get inside: Martellino disguises himself as a paralytic and Stecchi and Marchese carry him to the cathedral to be healed by the saint.

Saints—people who lived holy lives and were thought to have the power to ask God for favors on behalf of the living—came in two flavors in the Middle Ages, local and official. Arrigo's holy life—and the fact that the cathedral bells miraculously rang on their own at the moment of his death as if to announce his ascension to heaven—has inclined people to consider him a saint, but to go from being a "local saint" to a saint officially recognized by the Roman Catholic Church, he would need to perform more attested miracles. Anyone looking for a miracle, such as healing from a dreadful disease or a congenital defect, would try the new saint out, providing the means for the Florentine pranksters to infiltrate a crowded cathedral. The fact that a German expatriate could become a saint in an Italian city is a reminder of the links of trade, culture, and sovereignty that tied medieval Europe together.

In the cathedral, Stecchi and Marchese lay Martellino on the saint's body. After a few minutes, he dramatically pretends to be healed. When someone in the crowd recognizes Martellino and laughs at his trick, a mob of angry locals attacks him for mocking their saint. His friends pretend he's a pickpocket, "saving" him by getting him arrested for theft.

Martellino's prank is harmless, although it does raise questions about how easily one should put faith into the power of the saints if miracles can be so easily faked. However, as established by the story of Cepperello (I, 1), praying to the wrong saints can still sometimes inspire God's mercy. Fortune (bad luck) comes into play when Martellino is recognized and called out for his trick by someone in the crowd. And, hilariously, Stecchi and Marchese's attempt to save him just makes things worse, both underwriting the tale's humor and setting the stage for a dramatic reversal of fortune in line with the day's theme.

The harsh judge, angered by Martellino's attitude, tortures him to obtain confession. But Martellino can't confess to crimes he's accused of and he never picked anyone's pocket in Treviso. Sandro Agnolanti, an influential Florentine living in Treviso, intervenes on Martellino's behalf after hearing the story from his friends. Despite the judge's reluctance to release Martellino, he eventually complies, and Martellino is taken to the local prince. He rewards the trio for their hilarious antics with new clothing before sending them on their way.

Fortune's wheel spins again when the local prince gets involved and not only excuses Martellino from punishment but rewards him for his funny prank. The clothing that the prince gives the trio recalls the gifts with which Can Grande rewarded the courtier and entertainer Bergamino in I, 7. The presence of an influential Florentine in Treviso recalls the interconnected political and social world of medieval Europe. And, it is a small example of Giovanni Boccaccio's hometown pride, which will reappear in the many stories set in Florence or featuring Florentine protagonists and saviors.

DAY 2: SECOND TALE

While the company is still laughing over Neifile's story, Filomena commands Filostrato to tell the next tale. Rinaldo d'Asti is a traveling merchant who unfortunately falls into the company of three disguised highway robbers. As the robbers make small talk with him, they compare the prayers they say for protection on the road. Rinaldo is partial to St. Julian's paternoster, while the robbers claim to use the *Dirupisti*, *Intemerata*, or *De Profundis*. One of the robbers suggests that they compare whose prayers are rewarded with the best sleeping arrangements at the end of the day.

Florence was at the heart of important medieval trade networks, and Rinaldo d'Asti is one of many merchants in The Decameron *who fall into sticky situations. St. Julian is considered the patron saint of travelers in the Roman Catholic Church; the prayers listed by the robbers are much more general purpose and include two Psalms and a prayer to Mary. While their lack of devotion to the traveler's saint should perhaps raise Rinaldo's suspicions, the theft of his goods also demonstrates the difference between what one deserves and one's fortune: even though he's doing everything right—not travelling alone, praying to the right saints—he still falls prey to misfortune.*

At nightfall, the thieves attack Rinaldo, whose servant abandons him and runs to the nearby fortress town, Castel Guiglielmo. Rinaldo is nearly naked in the gathering gloom of night and a raging snowstorm. With no other options (since a war has recently destroyed the countryside), Rinaldo walks towards the fortress, but it's locked up tight for the night by the time he arrives. Fortunately, he finds an alcove near a door, with a pile of hay that offers him a little protection from the weather.

The escalating disasters faced by Rinaldo emphasis his unluckiness in this moment: not only was he robbed, but it's winter, it's storming, and a recent war cleared the countryside of shelter and food. The desertion of the servant points to class stereotypes: the servant is an afterthought (only appearing in the story to run away and make Rinaldo's situation that much worse) rather than being important in his own right. And his cowardly behavior betrays a suspicion that the lower one is on the social ladder, the worse one's character is.

The door leads to the home of a widowed Lady of Guiglielmo Fortress who has become a local aristocrat's mistress. Expecting a visit from the aristocrat, she has prepared a meal and a bath, but when he is called away at the last minute, she decides to enjoy the bath herself. Through the wall, she overhears Rinaldo's loud prayers of complaint to God and St. Julian, and she sends her maid to investigate. Pitying him, the two women usher him in, warm him in the bath, clothe him, and feed him supper. All the while, he thanks St. Julian for blessing him.

While Rinaldo is wealthy, he's still just a merchant, and the aristocratic pleasures of the Lady are even greater than the accommodations he would have been able to afford in the town. Sometimes, this story suggests, divine intervention and good fortune can be helped along by human ears and human hands: the Lady overhears Rinaldo and her maid opens the door to him. Gaining access to the fortress town represents a turn in Rinaldo's fortunes, but it's also a confirmation of his faith in St. Julian, who will indeed make sure he has a safe (and pleasant!) place to spend the night. And, in taking pity on Rinaldo and offering him generous hospitality, the Lady is conforming to expectations of her gender (women were expected to be kind and compassionate) and class (generosity is a mark of nobility in medieval literature and thought).

Rinaldo is handsome, and the Lady is already in a romantic mood. To her eyes, Rinaldo is a gift from **fortune**. She flirts with Rinaldo, who not only willingly accepts but reciprocates her advances. Before long, they are in bed together, thoroughly enjoying themselves.

It turns out that Rinaldo and the Lady are both beneficiaries of fortune: she's gotten a replacement lover for the evening, and he's gotten a good meal, a soft bed, and a lovely bed companion. Her willingness to trade one lover for another highlights misogynistic medieval concerns about excessive female sexual desire, but in this tale of good fortune and a fleeting encounter, no harm comes to either the woman or her bedmate. But the flip side of excessive lust is the understanding that medieval women were active agents in control of their own sexuality, which the Lady demonstrates when she instigates the sexual encounter with Rinaldo. It's also worth noting that many of Filostrato's tales feature sexual escapades and also strong female characters.

First thing in the morning, the Lady gives Rinaldo some old clothes and money, secretly letting him out through the door. He enters the front gates as if at the end of a long journey, and while he's looking for his ignoble servant, the thieves—arrested after a second robbery attempt—are brought in. They confess their crimes against Rinaldo and return his belongings—except for a pair of garters. Thanking God and St. Julian, Rinaldo rides home.

The ending of Filostrato's tale illustrates fortune's wheel at work: as Rinaldo's fortunes rise again, the fortunes of the robbers sink. The fact that they return everything except for a pair of garters—the bands tied around the top of socks to keep them up in the days before elastic—adds a humorous touch to the tale.

DAY 2: THIRD TALE

While everyone is laughing at Rinaldo's good **fortune** (and the Lady's!) Pampinea prepares to tell her tale, which will illustrate how inscrutable fortune's motives are. She introduces Lamberto, Tebaldo, and Agolante, the sons of a rich Florentine merchant. Their father dies while they are still teenagers, and they quickly waste their inheritance in a "reckless orgy of spending." To pay their debts, they first pawn and then sell everything they own. Finally, their destitution forces them to emigrate to England. They start moneylending and quickly rebuild their fortune.

Although no one will acknowledge openly the Lady's luck—because of gendered expectations for female chastity—everyone in the brigata *recognizes it. To balance out a tale in which rewards and punishments perhaps seemed to fall too neatly where they were deserved, Pampinea's tale will illustrate how fortune can overrule the good or bad choices people make. The reckless orgy of spending in which Lamberto, Tebaldo, and Agolante waste their inheritance shows the dangers of immoderation, but their punishment for their recklessness is temporary, and fortune blesses their moneylending business. It's important to note that they go to England to lend money there, in keeping with the international and marginalized role of moneylenders in medieval Europe—moneylenders were usually outsiders in a community, since charging interest on loans made to one's friends and neighbors was considered inappropriate if not sinful. This story also betrays a bourgeoise attitude towards money and the upward mobility of the merchant and business classes in medieval Europe: the brothers are sober and business-like while earning their money, but they don't know how to handle it when they have achieved great wealth.*

The brothers return to Florence but send their nephew Alessandro to England to continue running the moneylending business. In Florence, they resume their extravagant lives, paying their expenses with their English moneylending profits. But when civil war divides England, Alessandro loses control of their assets, the income dries up, and the brothers lose their property again. They are thrown into debtors' prison while their wives and children fall into poverty.

Fortune's wheel continues to spin for these brothers and their family—Alessandro's success in England increases their wealth, but an unexpected civil war demolishes it again. The brothers, who didn't learn from their first experience of spending beyond their means, are once again not only impoverished but thrown into debtors' prison.

Several years into the war, Alessandro decides to go home. Not far into his journey, he meets with a large group of travelers, including an Abbot in White and two knights whom he happens to know. They invite him to join their traveling company, as they go with the Abbot to Rome. Because he is so young, the Abbot must ask special permission from the Pope to run a monastery.

The abbot's white outfit indicates that he belongs to the Cistercian Order—a group of monks associated with austerity, humility, and which generally received much less anticlerical ire than other orders like the Franciscans or Dominicans. Like Rinaldo (II, 2), Alessandro knows it's better to travel in a company to protect himself from highway robbers, and falling in with this well-armed group of travelers heading in the same direction as himself (back to Italy) represents a stroke of good fortune.

As they travel, the Abbot in White and Alessandro become friendly. The Abbot finds Alessandro to be the most handsome and agreeable person he's ever met. Alessandro's history fills the Abbot with pity, and he assures Alessandro that God will restore to him the wealth that **fortune** has stolen.

In medieval literature, pity is a strongly gendered trait associated with women, and the Abbot's pity is a hint that his identity is not exactly as it appears. However, at this point, the primary force of attraction between Alessandro and the Abbot is a shared nobility of character: they enjoy talking together on the road. When the Abbot promises Alessandro that his fortunes will be restored, it seems to indicate some knowledge that remains hidden from Alessandro and the readers. A connection between fortune and divine providence is sometimes made throughout The Decameron *and can be found in other medieval writings. But, as this day's tales will show, fortune just as frequently has nothing to do with just deserts or Divine will.*

After a few days, they arrive at a small town. Alessandro finds everyone a room at the local inns, but the only space available to him is the Abbot in White's closet. Having overheard the innkeeper telling Alessandro to sleep in the closet, the Abbot invites him into the bed instead. The Abbot caresses Alessandro intimately, and just as Alessandro starts to worry about the Abbot's impure sexual desires, he undresses and puts Alessandro's hand on "his" breasts, revealing that he is a disguised woman.

Pampinea's tale plays with anticlerical opinions and fears that monks—living in gender-segregated communities—were prone to homosexuality. However, the bed games merely serve as the device to reveal the Abbot's secret—"he" is a woman in disguise. This revelation diffuses the potentially uncomfortable sexual tension that appeared to be building between the companions on the road, and explains the Abbot's attraction to Alessandro. Women disguised as monks were a literary trope—and occasionally a historically attested occurrence—throughout the Middle Ages.

Realizing that his beloved friend is a woman, Alessandro quickly embraces her. The Abbot in White stops him because she's a virgin. She feels that **fortune** sent Alessandro to her, so she confesses her love and offers herself as his wife. He doesn't know her identity, but he surmises that she's rich and noble from the number of people traveling with her, so he quickly agrees. The two exchange vows and rings, then spend the rest of the night sporting in bed.

Despite her attraction to Alessandro, the Abbot isn't one of those women prone to give in easily to the temptations of the flesh: she's a virgin and a woman of character who insists that she won't sleep with Alessandro unless they're married. Again, she drops a hint here about her true identity that Alessandro and the audience must wait to see fully explained later in the tale. Despite her virtue, the evident strength of character it takes to disguise herself as a man to undertake a difficult and dangerous journey to Rome, and her declaration of personal agency in proposing marriage to Alessandro, it's notable that she doesn't ever get her own proper name but remains "the Abbot" and the "lady" throughout, which seems to indicate that her individuality is less important than his. It's also important to note that the exchange of rings and vows, even without witnesses, would have constituted a legally and morally binding marriage according to medieval civil and religious law.

When the group arrives in Rome, the Abbot in White reveals herself to the Pope as the English King's daughter. She was supposed to secure his blessing for her marriage to the King of Scotland, but she ran away to avoid that marriage. The Scottish king is old, and she worries that being the young bride of an old man is a setup for falling into adultery. In any case, she found her ideal husband in Alessandro (even if he isn't royalty), and she asks the Pope to officially bless the marriage they contracted secretly.

The marriage which the English princess wished to avoid, between an older man and a younger woman, is frequently the set-up for either tremendous unhappiness or adulterous hijinks in medieval literature. While her concern over the potential for falling into adultery reflects the misogynistic fears about female lustfulness, it is also based on a medieval acceptance of the sexual drive as a natural part of human nature—she imagines cheating not because her husband is old, per se, but because he can't fulfill her sexual needs. Medieval concepts of married sex were based on the idea of the "marital debt"—husbands and wives were both responsible to fulfill each other's sexual needs. In averting this potentially disastrous marriage, fortune has blessed the princess almost as much as it has blessed Alessandro, by raising him from the reviled bourgeoise profession of moneylending to the level of royalty.

Alessandro is delighted to discover that the Abbot in White is a princess, but the two knights with whom they travelled are less pleased. The Pope must intervene to prevent them from killing the couple. The Pope is also surprised—both by the princess's disguise and by her request—but he nevertheless arranges a splendid wedding ceremony. As a bridegroom, Alessandro is so handsome and fine that he looks more like a prince than a moneylender.

Although Alessandro and the Abbot are legally married and they only ask the pope to publicly confirm and bless their union, the knights' angry reaction demonstrates the vulnerability of women due to concerns about gender and class in medieval society. The knights want to kill Alessandro for taking advantage of the princess, and they want to kill her for allowing her honor to be besmirched by marrying both a foreigner and someone so far below her own social status.

Alessandro and the former Abbot in White leave Rome and return to Florence, where the lady pays off his uncles' debts and reestablishes their riches. The couple is honorably received by the King of France before returning to England, where Alessandro is welcomed as a worthy son-in-law and given a noble title. Because of his personal virtues, Alessandro wins over the entire British people, and he later conquers Scotland and is crowned its king.

In this tale, fortune not only restores but elevates both those who deserve it (sober, careful Alessandro and his lady) and those who don't (Alessandro's spendthrift uncles). Alessandro's elevation to royalty demonstrates The Decameron*'s ongoing argument that character—rather than external markers like status or wealth—determines the value of a person. Alessandro, because he was a moderate and sensible businessman, a fittingly noble companion for a princess, and a circumspect secret husband, deserved to be recognized for his noble qualities.*

DAY 2: FOURTH TALE

Lauretta speaks next, noting that no one could describe a greater distance for **fortune** to raise someone than from poverty to kingship, as it did Alessandro. Although her tale won't relate such a change, its protagonist will be subject to even greater misfortunes. The incredibly wealthy Landolfo Rufolo lives on the Amalfi Coast. Not content with his wealth, he fills a ship with goods for Cyprus, intending to double his riches by their sale. But when he arrives, other ships with identical goods are already in the port, forcing him to sell his goods at a loss.

Day II's theme of fortune instigates a friendly competition among the storytellers, who each try to top each other's tales with a greater reversal of fortune. This same competitive spirit can be seen on Day 10, where they try to outdo each other in tales of generosity. Landolfo Rufolo brings on his own misfortune by greediness to increase his fortune, thus demonstrating immoderation. But, since these are tales with happy endings, we already know that he will end up rewarded for his greed in the end. Fortune can bless or punish the good as well as the bad. Landolfo is also, despite his wealth, clearly a merchant—a working man, not a noble. He is one of many merchants that populate the tales and who emphasize the importance of trade for Giovanni Boccaccio's Florentine audience and patrons.

To recoup his losses, Landolfo turns to piracy, and his raids of Turkish vessels make him twice as rich as when he was as a merchant. Content with this, he turns homeward, but when a storm forces him to anchor his vessel behind an island, he is surprised and overpowered by two Genoese merchant ships. The Genoese merchants imprison Landolfo—stripped to his underwear—aboard one of their ships. They're soon caught in another gale that wrecks the ships. Landolfo, who had been praying for death instead of captivity, rediscovers his will to live and clings to a bit of the mast.

Piracy was a problem in the medieval Mediterranean Sea, and while Landolfo is the first of the tales' pirates, he won't be the last. Because he's the hero of this tale, though, it is important that he raids Turkish ships—in other words, he's stealing from Muslims, not from his fellow Christians. The Genoese had a reputation for excessive greediness (see Ermino de' Grimaldi in Lauretta's previous tale, I, 1) and for piracy. When Landolfo is shipwrecked, his fortunes are about as low as they can be without death: he's got nothing left but his body, his underwear, and his will to live.

While Landolfo and his mast drift through the night, a particular chest keeps floating past him. Because he is afraid it will break his mast, he pushes it away when it comes too close. Ultimately, however, a surprise wave crashes the chest and mast together, destroying the mast. Landolfo, too exhausted to swim, clings to the chest for the next day and night. On the second day, as waterlogged as a sponge, he arrives at the island of Corfu, where a peasant woman spies him and drags him ashore.

The chest taunts Landolfo as he drifts on the sea and reminds readers of what they know but he can't—that his story will feature a reversal of fortune for his benefit. Thus, Lauretta gleefully ratchets up the tale's tension by describing his attempts to literally push away his good fortune. The peasant woman, who kindly takes care of Landolfo despite being something of a country bumpkin, illustrates the distinction between character and social status.

The peasant and her daughter take Landolfo and his chest home and nurse him back to life. When he forces the chest open, he discovers precious jewels, which cheer him up considerably. Afraid that **fortune** may reverse this latest stroke of good luck, he cautiously puts the jewels into a sack and heads home. On the way, he runs into some cloth merchants who, hearing his sorry tale, give him a **gift** of new clothes and a horse.

Landolfo's experiences have taught him that fortune is capricious, and his former excessive greed is replaced with prudent caution. He waits to celebrate until he gets home, and he preserves his newfound wealth by accepting the charitable gifts made to him by other merchants rather than spending it. The other merchants likely recognize the inherent instability of their trade and their own vulnerability to fortune in Landolfo's tale.

When Landolfo finally arrives at his home, he sells his gems, sends a **gift** to the peasant woman, and repays the merchants who provided his clothes. Swearing off the risks of commerce, he lives grandly on the remaining money for the rest of his life.

Landolfo sends a gift—which symbolizes the ties of generosity between them—to the peasant woman to thank her for her role in reversing his fortunes. And, because he has learned not to tempt fate, he lives in splendid but not excessive style for the rest of his life.

DAY 2: FIFTH TALE

Fiammetta remarks that Landolfo's jewels have reminded her of a tale with as much adventure as Lauretta's—but which is more exciting because it happened in the space of one night. Her protagonist is a young Perugian gentleman named Andreuccio di Pietro, a horse dealer by trade. Hearing that there are good horses in Naples, he stuffs his purse with money and sets off for the city. Once there, he makes several offers. He can't seal any deals, even though he keeps showing off his fat purse.

Fiammetta's tale, like Lauretta's, attempts to one-up its predecessor. Several days later, Dioneo will tell a tale with a very similar setting, setup, and cast of characters (VIII, 10). Andreuccio, like Landolfo in the preceding story, is a merchant looking to increase his wealth quickly. However, he's distinguished from Landolfo (whose greed was excessive) by his youth and inexperience. While Landolfo hid his chest of priceless jewels, Andreuccio flaunts his fat wallet without thinking about the consequences.


While Andreuccio naively flashes his cash, he catches the attention of a beautiful young Sicilian Woman. She would love his money, but for the moment she walks on. The old woman she's with, however, runs up and embraces Andreuccio, who recognizes her and makes her promise to visit him. She later tells the Sicilian Woman how she served Andreuccio's father in Sicily and Perugia. She knows many details about Andreuccio and his family, which she reveals to the Sicilian Woman, who hatches a plan to steal his money.

The Sicilian Woman demonstrates that wit and wisdom—those virtues praised earlier by Pampinea in women (I, 10)—are by themselves neutral and can be used for good or ill. She is as careful and crafty as Andreuccio is careless and inexperienced.


After preventing the old woman from keeping her appointment, the Sicilian Woman sends a servant to convey Andreuccio to her home. When the servant tells Andreuccio that a Neapolitan gentlewoman wants to see him, he concludes she must have fallen in love with him—as if he were the only handsome young man in the city. He agrees to follow the servant immediately.

In addition to his inexperience and thoughtlessness, Andreuccio has the arrogant self-assurance of youth, and he believes that the Sicilian Woman is in love with him. This increases the tension in the story—since the tale necessarily involves his misfortune before his happy ending, the audience knows that his arrogance is about to be thwarted.


The maid brings Andreuccio to a part of town called "Evil Hole" on account of its bad reputation. Not knowing any better, he thinks it's a perfectly respectable part of town. When he arrives at the Sicilian Woman's home, her beauty and rich clothing impress him. He's taken aback when she warmly embraces him, but he willingly follows her into her bedroom. Her fancy bed and expensive decorations further confirm his belief that she's a wealthy aristocrat.

Andreuccio betrays his inexperience—or obliviousness—when he passes through what is obviously a redlight district without recognizing it for what it is. However, he is also taken in by the opulent setting and rich adornments of the conwoman and her home. His inability to properly assess her or her decor suggests that he may have money, but he doesn't have class.


The Sicilian Woman finally explains her strange behavior. She claims that she's Andreuccio's half-sister and that her mother—a widowed gentlewoman of Palermo—fell in love with Andreuccio's father. When he returned to Perugia, she says he abandoned her and her mother. When she grew up, she married a wealthy nobleman, but the couple got caught up in political intrigues and fled to Naples with just the clothes on their backs. Fortunately, the Neapolitan king generously welcomed them and provided them with riches and property.

The conwoman's tale within a tale is a mini lesson on fortune's reversals as she's alternately cast down and elevated. It's also believable enough to draw Andreuccio in—and indeed, the decades just prior to and during Giovanni Boccaccio's life were filled with political upheavals and intrigues throughout the Italian peninsula. Casting herself as Andreuccio's long-lost half-sister functions to create trust between the two of them that is stronger than her sex appeal alone.

Andreuccio believes the Sicilian Woman's story, both because she speaks with assurance and because her tale matches what he knows about his father's business history and about young men in love. He tells her that he feels surprised and delighted to meet his sister, although he wonders how she knew that he was there. She tells him that they share a mutual acquaintance in the old woman, who told her Andreuccio was in town earlier that day. And to further convince him, she asks after all of his relatives by name.

Andreuccio may be a credulous and gullible innocent, but the conwoman is also an intelligent liar and credible storyteller. This is one of several moments throughout The Decameron *that point—either seriously or tongue-in-cheek—to the power of a well-told story, which would obviously have been a concern to a writer such as Giovanni Boccaccio.*

When Andreuccio prepares to return to the inn for supper, the Sicilian Woman feigns hurt and insists that he show his love for her by staying for supper. So he won't look ungrateful to his hosts, she offers to send a messenger to the inn with his excuse. After they eat, she offers him a place to sleep, saying that the messenger she pretended to send told the innkeepers not to expect him back that night.

Having ingratiated herself with Andreuccio, the Sicilian Woman sets the hook for her theft by convincing him to stay in her home rather than return to the relative safety of the inn.

After undressing for bed, Andreuccio needs to relieve himself, but on his way into the privy, he dislodges a loose board and falls into the muck below. Cursing his bad luck, he shouts loudly for help. Meanwhile, the Sicilian Woman locks the doors to the house and takes the contents of his purse.

The toilet in which Andreuccio attempted to relieve himself is suspended above an alley between two buildings, where the waste would pile up. Thus, at this moment, Andreuccio is literally and metaphorically buried in a mountain of excrement.

Finally beginning to understand that he has been hoodwinked, Andreuccio climbs out of the cesspit and begins to pound on the Sicilian Woman's door. The servant, barely able to contain her laugher, pretends to not know him. Now completely beside himself with rage, Andreuccio tries to smash the door with a rock. This wakes the neighbors, as well as a gruff man (later identified as Butch Belchface) inside the house who threatens to beat him up if he doesn't leave quickly. Scared by the man's alarming appearance and the neighbors' warnings, Andreuccio gives up and wanders in the direction of his inn.

It takes falling into the toilet and finding himself locked out of the house for Andreuccio to suspect that he may have been tricked. But his naiveté and disadvantage as an out-of-towner mean that he has no recourse. If the Sicilian Woman's appearance misled Andreuccio, Butch Belchface's threatening demeanor removes any doubts about the nature of the people Andreuccio has trusted, or the rough part of town he's found himself in.

Because he smells so bad from falling into the cesspit, Andreuccio makes a detour towards the ocean for a bath. Before he gets there, he encounters two men carrying iron tools through the darkness. When he tells them his story, they recognize Butch Belchface's description and assure Andreuccio that he has been lucky: if he had fallen asleep in the house he would surely have been murdered as well as robbed. They themselves are Tomb Robbers on their way to loot the tomb of the recently deceased archbishop. They offer to share the profits with him if he will help.

The Tomb Robbers help Andreuccio understand that misfortune isn't always what it seems—falling into the toilet, as humiliating and disgusting as it was, likely saved him from death. This insight should remind Andreuccio to question what looks like good luck at the moment—encountering two helpful men who dangle the opportunity to recoup his lost wealth. But it doesn't, and he foolishly joins them.

On the way to the cathedral, the trio stops at a well for Andreuccio to bathe (since he still stinks). When two night watchmen appear looking for a cool drink, the Tomb Robbers run away briefly, but they come back for Andreuccio. When the trio arrives at the cathedral, they pry the lid off the tomb and argue about who will go inside to collect the bishop's valuables. Andreuccio resists volunteering until the Tomb Robbers threaten to kill him.

Andreuccio bathing in a well that others use for drinking water is a vivid, if brief, reminder of a time before urban sanitation schemes. A proper bath could symbolize Andreuccio's luck improving, but that's not what he gets. He should see a warning in the willingness of his "friends" to ditch him, but instead of abandoning the project he instead tries to outsmart them.

Andreuccio fears that the Tomb Robbers will find a way to deprive him of his loot, so he slips the bishop's ruby ring on his own finger and pretends he can't find it. They grow impatient with his bumbling and drop the lid back on the tomb, trapping Andreuccio. He tries to escape and then bursts into tears over his impending death. Just as he's about to lose hope, he hears voices. Another band of robbers has come to loot the archbishop's riches, and they are also arguing about who will climb into the tomb. Finally, a priest reminds the group that the dead "don't eat the living," and starts to climb in.

Given his previous interactions with the criminal elements of Sicilian society, Andreuccio shouldn't be surprised when his attempts to outsmart the Tomb Robbers fail. His pattern of lucky and unlucky breaks mirrors the tale the Sicilian Woman told him about herself. The priests coming to rob the tomb of the bishop is a criticism of clerical greed, which respects neither the living nor the dead.

Andreuccio grabs the priest's ankle. He shrieks, scrabbles out, and the second group of robbers flee, leaving the lid ajar. Andreuccio escapes and wanders through town until he stumbles on his inn. On hearing the tale of his misadventures, his innkeeper advises him to leave Naples as quickly as possible. So instead of investing in Neapolitan horses, Andreuccio "invested" his money in a valuable ring.

In the final turn of fortune's wheel, Andreuccio finds himself on top once more, and he wisely leaves Naples before he can experience another reversal. Despite his foolishness and inexperience, he comes out of this adventure relatively unscathed, with his wealth intact. This shows one of the ways in which fortune operates blindly: despite his poor choices, he still came out on top in the end.

DAY 2: SIXTH TALE

The entire company listens to Fiammetta's tale with uproarious laughter. Emilia assures her companions that the happy ending of her story will contrast with the unbelievably "intense and protracted" sufferings that arise from **fortune**'s "erratic course."

In contrast to the previous few tales, Emilia's has a much more serious, even tragic, tone. She thus reminds her companions (and readers) that the twists and turns of fortune aren't always humorous.

Arrighetto Capece is an esteemed courtier of the Sicilian King Manfred. He has a lovely and aristocratic wife, Beritola Caracciolo, and a son named Guisfredi. When Manfred dies in battle with King Charles, Arrighetto prepares to flee, but he is captured before he can get his family to safety. Fearing the worst, a pregnant Beritola flees with Guisfredi, giving birth in exile to a son whom she names The Outcast. She hires a nurse and books passage on a ship to return to her family in Naples.

As in other tales, social and political upheavals of the late 13th and early 14th centuries provide context for this tale. One's personal fortune is dependent on uncontrollable factors, such as which political party or king is in ascendency.


Extreme winds force the ship to shelter behind an island for several days. Beritola finds an isolated cave where she can privately grieve her ill **fortune** each day. While she is crying in the cave, pirates capture Guisfredi, The Outcast, and their nurse along with her ship, and Beritola finds herself alone. Abandoned, anguished, and afraid, after a day she is reduced to eating grass like an animal. While foraging, she encounters a female deer who leads her to the cave where her two little male fawns lie. Beritola nurses them, and the deer come to accept her companionship.

The fortunes of Beritola and her sons—as Emilia promised—go from bad to worse. The children are captured by pirates and Beritola is forced into an animalistic struggle for survival. But she demonstrates her feminine compassion and noble character when she nurses the fawns despite her own desperate straits. The doe and fawns clearly represent Beritola and her own children, and nursing the fawns not only allows her to act on her maternal instincts but suggests enough hope to keep her alive until she and her family can be reunited.


After several months, a ship carrying Currado Malespina and his wife is also driven to shelter at the island. When Currado's dogs catch the young bucks' scent and chase them to their cave, Beritola chases them away with a stick. Finding a noblewoman on the island greatly surprises Currado and his wife, who coax Beritola into telling her sad story. Currado's wife ultimately convinces Beritola to leave with them, and they bring her three deer companions along. Beritola assumes the name "Cavriuola" and lives a quiet life as a lady-in-waiting to Lady Malespina.

Currado Malespina's landfall on the same island is the first sign of Beritola's improving fortune—but it's also a realistic detail that suggests the vagaries of travel on the Mediterranean in the 13th century. It seems like ships are regularly driven aground on this island. Beritola's desire to stay communicates her distress at the horrific loss of her entire family. But staying would be denying her improving fortunes. And in the arena of gender, Currado can't convince Beritola to change her mind, and his wife must use emotional appeals to convince her to leave.

In the meantime, Beritola's sons and their nurse are handed over to a Genoese merchant-pirate named Guasparrino d'Oria, who puts them to work as domestic slaves. The clever nurse, worried that the boys will be harmed if their identities are revealed (and hoping that **fortune** might eventually relent), begins to call Guisfredi "Giannotto" (The Outcast gets to keep his name). Guisfredi (Giannotto) finds servitude distasteful and after several years he runs away and becomes a sailor. Eventually, he finds employment with Currado.

As elsewhere in The Decameron, *the Genoese are associated with piracy. Religious and civil laws forbade Christians from enslaving other Christians, but Guasparrino doesn't seem to be bothered by forcing Guisfredi and The Outcast to serve him (their situation can be compared to Teodoro, also kidnapped and sold into slavery, in V, 7). Guisfredi's noble temperament chafes under the bondage of slavery. His escape and subsequent success as a sailor and a gentleman's servant demonstrate that this nobility of character can't be destroyed by the accidents of fortune, even being forced into slavery. The nurse also demonstrates considerable sense, despite her lowly social status. In terms of the luck and chances blind fortune offers and withholds, many chance encounters in the several years of his exile bring Guisfredi into position for his bad fortune to be reversed.*

While Guisfredi (Giannotto) serves Currado, he falls in love with Currado's daughter Spina. The intensity of their love overpowers caution, and one day her parents catch them making love in the forest. Dismayed by his daughter's dishonor, Currado plans to execute them both. Although his wife counsels mercy and convinces him to spare their lives, he imprisons them and makes their existence full of sorrow, starvation, and loneliness.

Currado's murderous anger at finding his daughter having sex with a servant has both gendered and class triggers: patriarchal control of female sexuality places a high importance on women's chastity and Currado doesn't value his daughter as highly if she's no longer a virgin. And, her sleeping with Guisfredi—whose servile position seems to show that he is a member of a much lower social class than her own— is worse, because the infraction can't be remedied by a speedy marriage. Fortunately, Currado's wife—following medieval associations of women and pity—is able to convince her husband to choose mercy instead of vengeance. However, in fortune's game, often long-term good luck is temporarily disguised as bad luck, and on a day devoted to happy, fortunate endings, the tale's audience is wise to remember that Guisfredi and Spina's luck is likely to change, despite its current horrors.

While Guisfredi (Giannotto) languishes in prison, the political winds shift. On hearing that King Charles has been expelled from Sicily, he complains to his guards that this good news comes too late since he is held captive. They wonder how the affairs of kings could possibly matter to a servant, and Guisfredi (Giannotto) reveals his true identity, now that his father's enemy has been ousted. A guard carries this information to Currado, who confirms the story with Beritola—without revealing the source of his information. Currado then realizes that he can salvage his honor (and Spina's) by marrying her to her lover.

Guisfredi's fortunes—and those of the rest of his family—are beginning to shift, but their eventual good luck is still concealed by bad luck, since the change in political fortunes seems to have come too late to save any of them. Currado's caginess with Beritola (and everyone else) serves to increase the drama of the tale, and deliver the emotional catharsis Emilia promised at the outset. The revelation of Guisfredi not only solves the riddle of his noble character (despite his evidently lowly social status) but also means that Currado can repair the damage to Spina's honor—and by extension, his own—with a legal marriage between his daughter and another nobleman's son.

Currado visits Guisfredi (Giannotto) to complain about his dishonorable actions with Spina. But since he has learned that Guisfredi (Giannotto) is a "man of gentle birth," he offers the chance to turn their "dishonorable friendship into an honorable marriage." Although this is exactly what the young man wants (since he's still deeply in love with Spina), he won't allow such remarks against his character to stand. He defends himself, swearing that his love for Spina was pure, unmotivated by desire for power or riches. Any impropriety was the fault of his youth, and he reminds Currado that he was once young, too. He says that he would have asked for Spina's hand in marriage honorably if he had thought that Currado would have consented. The noble sentiments Guisfredi (Giannotto) expresses in self-defense only make Currado respect him more.

The tense conversation between Guisfredi and Currado illustrates class and gender-based tensions in the tale—and in broader medieval culture. Guisfredi's impassioned defense of himself shows that class isn't just a matter of wealth and status, but also of character. Loving Spina purely, without desire to enrich himself or improve his fortunes, demonstrates that he retained his noble and generous character even in forced slavery and later in servitude. The shifting of fortune is offering Guisfredi everything he wants—restoration of his name, his wealth, and marriage to the woman he loves—but he won't compromise or endanger his personal honor and worth over it. And it works: his future father-in-law is impressed by his fortitude and honor. His reminder that Currado was young once, too, points to the sexual double standard that calls for female chastity but excuses young men from playing around sexually.

Currado sets the stage for reunion. He asks Cavriuola (Beritola) if she'd like Guisfredi back and Spina as a daughter-in-law. Then he asks his wife if she'd like Guisfredi as a son-in-law. Of course, neither would object. Similarly, Guisfredi (Giannotto) tells Currado he would like his mother back, but he can't imagine that she survived her terrible misfortunes. He and Beritola didn't recognize each other in Currado's home, but when Currado presents the bride and groom, Beritola can now see that the servant she knew as "Giannotto" is her son, and Guisfredi recognizes his mother. The two reunite tearfully.

Beritola and Guisfredi somehow instantly recognize each other now, despite not being able to during the whole time they were together in Currado's home. This seems to be the work of fortune, which clouded their awareness when their luck was low, and clears it now that their luck is again climbing. The marriage of Spina and Guisfredi will confirm the friendship between Currado's Wife and Beritola, whose life she once saved through her compassion and kindness.

Guisfredi asks Currado to retrieve The Outcast from Guasparrino. While he is initially reluctant to believe that his lowly slave is a noble, once Guasparrino verifies the truth he is ashamed by his contemptuous treatment of The Outcast. To make amends—and because Arrighetto is a well-connected man—he offers The Outcast his own daughter as a wife. Guasparrino's party arrives at Guisfredi's wedding along with the happy news that Arrighetto has survived and is now in possession of his old land and titles.

Guasparrino's initial refusal to recognize The Outcast as a nobleman emphasizes the rigidity of class lines: noblemen weren't slaves, so it's just about impossible to imagine that a slave could be a person with any social worth. Yet, he's wrong, and other tales (specifically V, 7) will also feature noblemen illegally sold into slavery. However, once he's realized his mistake, Guasparrino works quickly to make amends and protect himself from punishment or retribution. Offering his daughter both assuages his guilt and creates a protective kinship tie. It's also a very clear example of female objectification: his nameless daughter is a thing given from one man to another.

After the wedding, Beritola, Guisfredi, Spina, The Outcast, his wife, and the nurse sail back to Sicily under favorable winds, where Arrighetto greets them with exceptional joy. As far as anyone knows, they live long, happy, and peaceful lives, always grateful for the blessings God has bestowed on them.

The end of Emilia's tale suggests a relationship between divine intervention and fortune, which is also hinted at in other tales. However, The Decameron *avoids offering a singular view of fortune, and while God might have used the changing fortunes of Arrighetto and his family to bless them with wealth and power, it's not necessarily a sign that all fortune—good or bad—is divinely intended. Fortune can work with God's purposes, but it doesn't always.*

DAY 2: SEVENTH TALE

Panfilo begins his tale with some general comments on **fortune**, noting that it's hard for humans to judge their luck. Sometimes poor people acquire wealth only to be murdered, or lowly people gain power only to realize that it comes with endless fear and worry. Others have longed for strength or beauty. But no one is immune to the "accidents of fortune"—especially people who are sinful or prone to excessive desire. Panfilo singles out ladies, who desire to be beautiful and will often go to extreme lengths to improve their looks. As a corrective, he offers the tale of a girl whose extraordinary beauty brought her only ill fortune.

Like Emilia, Panfilo suggests that fortune's randomness can sometimes intersect with the divine will; in the preface to his tale, he suggests that it can function as punishment for sin and excess. He also explicitly notes that fortune can only be judged by the outcome: sometimes good fortune masquerades as bad fortune and vice versa. However, although the protagonist of his tale is indeed incredibly beautiful, there's no suggestion that she's especially vain. Panfilo's attempt to connect his tale to a larger moral against female vanity hints that his tale will be solidly in the tradition of antifeminist writings.

Alatiel, a daughter of Beminedab, Sultan of Babylonia, is the most beautiful woman on earth in her day. Her father's ally, the King of Algarve, asks to marry her, and her father puts her along with servants and guards aboard a ship bound for Algarve. Near the end of the voyage, they're overtaken by a huge storm. On the third day of the storm, the ship begins to founder. The crew—and all the other men aboard—rush onto a smaller boat that ultimately sinks. Only Alatiel and her maids are still aboard when the ship runs aground in Spain.

Importantly to the coming action, Alatiel isn't a Christian woman, but a Muslim. Like many other women throughout the tales, she becomes an object traded among men when her father offers her as a gift of thanks to his military ally. Sending her on a guarded ship only emphasizes the importance of her chastity in this role. The woman on a rudderless or storm-beset ship is a typical trope in medieval literature, both illustrating the movements of fortune (for example, Beritola's unfortunate voyage across the Mediterranean in the immediately preceding tale) and also metaphorically suggesting a female tendency towards lawlessness or directionless-ness, which will come to bear on Alatiel's story shortly.

The next morning, after the storm has passed, Alatiel gathers her maids. The ladies bemoan their plight until midday, when a local nobleman named Pericone da Visalgo passes by. Despite their language barrier, he pities the ladies, retrieving them and their valuables. The quality of their goods demonstrates Alatiel's nobility. And even though she's pale and disheveled, her overwhelming beauty immediately inspires Pericone to possess her, if not as his wife then as his mistress. But, despite his handsome figure, she ignores his advances—which only increases his desire.

Alatiel's great beauty, like fortune, is neither good nor bad. In this moment, it is her salvation, but as Panfilo's introduction suggested, it can quickly turn into a curse: Pericone's immediate desire to have sex with her suggests her vulnerability as a single, unprotected woman, especially since he can see from the things she owns that she is a noblewoman (the class whose valuable sexuality usually deserves to be protected in the world of the tales). The language barrier between Alatiel and her rescuer is realistic (at least this early in her sojourn in Europe), one of the countless mundane details that Giovanni Boccaccio includes throughout The Decameron*'s tales. However, after living many years in exile, it becomes far less believable that Alatiel would be unable to communicate with anyone. In that respect, the language barrier also functions as a mechanism for objectifying her and reducing her humanity.*

Alatiel, recognizing that she's landed in a Christian country, hides her identity. She instructs her maids to keep her secret and preserve their chastity if they can. Even as she realizes that she won't be able to evade Pericone's advances forever, she declares her intention to remain a virgin and submit sexually to no one but her promised husband. The harder Pericone romances her, the more firmly she rejects him, and the hotter his passion burns.

Alatiel, as a Muslim and as a woman, is doubly vulnerable as a castaway in Christian Europe; she is wise to hide her identity from her rescuers. Her value as a female lies in her chaste sexuality, and her initial intent is to cling to her virtue as strongly as any other noble heroine in the tales. But she's aware that she doesn't have any real protections, and holding Pericone at bay only serves to whet his appetite.

Understanding that he can't woo Alatiel with flattery and not wanting to force her, Pericone decides to use trickery. Alatiel (because she is Muslim) is unused to drinking wine, but she has quite a taste for it. So Pericone holds a feast and gets her drunk. After dinner, he follows her to her room, where she undresses and gets into bed. He snuffs the lights, undresses himself, and follows her into bed. Alatiel doesn't resist his embraces, at first because she is naïve, and then because she enjoys it. It's almost like she regrets having put Pericone off for so long.

Alatiel's desire to cling to her chastity doesn't inspire Pericone with respect; it makes him resort to trickery. Again, her Muslim identity provides a small but realistic detail in the story: since Muslims typically abstain from all alcohol consumption, it makes sense that she'd be uniquely vulnerable to the effects of intoxication. But savoring the wine despite its illicit nature in her religion also suggests that Alatiel may not be as serious about maintaining her chastity as she said she was initially: her immoderate love of wine foreshadows an immoderate desire for sex. In this way, Alatiel confirms misogynistic medieval fears about the excessive lustfulness of women.

Fortune has reduced Alatiel from a king's bride to a baron's mistress and is planning to debase her even more. Pericone's young brother Marato has also fallen in love with Alatiel and thinks that she reciprocates his feelings. He first makes arrangements to sail on a ship bound for Greece, then he and several of his friends kill Pericone in his sleep, kidnap Alatiel, and carry her with more of Pericone's "most precious possessions" aboard the ship.

In this story, we see fortune's wheel turning a full revolution: Alatiel was a princess engaged to a ruler, now she's a baron's mistress, and she's about to fall to even lower-class lovers. Like his brother, Marato falls victim to Alatiel's excessively powerful beauty, which serves as a metaphor for the uncontrollable nature of the sex drive. And, in associating Alatiel herself with Pericone's other valuable belongings, the tale emphasizes her role as an object to be traded (or stolen) by men and possessed by them, rather than as a human being in her own right.

Initially, this new catastrophe distresses Alatiel greatly, but Marato has the help of "Saint Stiffen-in-the-Hand" and he "consoles" her so pleasantly that she begins to love him and forgets Pericone.

Panfilo jokes that Marato can comfort Alatiel with help from "Saint Stiffen-in-the-Hand"—in other words, by having sex with her. As with her encounters with all the rest of her lovers, Alatiel's easy acceptance of a new man after he has sex with her represents misogynistic fears about female lustfulness. It doesn't seem to matter to Alatiel who has her or how he got her, as long as she enjoys having sex with him. Of course, in a tale where she lacks the language to communicate with any of her lovers and where our last insight into her desires was her early insistence that she would remain a virgin—a goal long since lost—Alatiel's motivations are filtered through Panfilo's assumptions and broad generalizations. It's impossible to know how she takes these reversals of fortune and whether she truly enjoys being traded from one lover to the next or not.

Fortune has still more in store: the two Young Masters who own the ship are moved by Alatiel's beauty as well. Discovering that they both love Alatiel, they plan to share her, as if love were a fungible good like money. When the opportunity arises, they throw an unsuspecting Marato overboard and then rush to comfort Alatiel. But when they disagree about who gets to take her to bed, they pull their daggers. At the end of the fight, one man is dead, and the other is grievously wounded. Alatiel disembarks with the wounded survivor at Corinth.

The Young Masters' plan to share Alatiel emphasizes her objectified status in this tale. And yet again, her incredible beauty inspires equally excessive behavior in the men around her who murder each other to possess her. Fortune was often portrayed in the Middle Ages as an active agent (for good or bad) in people's lives—like a demi-goddess. This active interference in people's lives is the most evident in Panfilo's tale, in which fortune seems to become Alatiel's adversary. At this point, it's worth recalling the ostensible moral of the tale, that women shouldn't be vain. Panfilo's advice seems odd set against the details of his tale, in which fortune goes out of its way to toss Alatiel from one man to another and to put her in vulnerable situations: she's at the mercy of these men and their relatives and is held responsible for their action inspired by her beauty.

At Corinth, the fame of Alatiel's great beauty reaches the Prince of Morea, who falls in love with her at first sight. Given her circumstances, he sees no reason why he shouldn't have her, and the wounded Young Master's family readily turns her over. Recognizing Alatiel's inherent nobility only further delights the Prince, who treats her with the honor due to a wife, not just as a mistress. Alatiel is relieved to be absolved of responsibility for the Young Masters' fight and by her improved luck.

The Prince of Morea can't imagine why he shouldn't be able to have Alatiel because her series of lovers—starting with Pericone and leading through Marato and the Young Masters—have ruined her virtue and reduced her to a sexual object rather than an independent, autonomous being or a noblewoman whose sexuality has a value. Notwithstanding that he treats her better than a mistress, that's still all she is to him. Her noble status isn't enough to overcome assumptions that female worth is tied exclusively to sexuality. Alatiel's delight in her new lover seems to stem in part from his wealth and nobility—he can keep her in better style than the merchants who last stole her—but also arises out of the relative stability she can find in his home. The Young Masters' families might hold her accountable for their demise, but she's absolved of this responsibility when she enters the Prince's protection.

But the Duke of Athens, a friend of the Prince of Morea, hears about Alatiel's beauty and decides he must see her himself. After he asks the Prince if she is really that beautiful, the Prince brings his friend to Alatiel's bedroom so he can show her off. The three sit together, and her beauty speaks even though she still doesn't know the language. The Duke thinks that looking at her will be enough, but her beauty is powerful enough to poison him through his eyes. He becomes enflamed with passion and decides to take his friend's "beautiful [...] plaything" for himself.

As in all her previous situations, Alatiel is little more than a plaything or precious object to her current lover, and the Prince of Morea signs his own death warrant when he shows her off as if she's just another one of his many possessions. The Duke of Athens appears to be unaware of how dangerous looking is in medieval conceptions of lovesickness, but a long tradition in literature and medieval medicine links excessive looking at a beautiful woman with the kindling of excessive desire that leads to lovesickness—which can only be cured by possessing the desired woman.

The Duke of Athens devises a cunning plan. With the help of Ciuriaci (the Prince of Morea's most trusted servant), he enters the Prince's room at night, stabbing him in the back while he peacefully looks out the window. Then the Duke strangles Ciuriaci and throws master and servant from the window. Alatiel, who slept through the murders, accepts the Duke into her bed thinking that he's the Prince, and he makes love to her with his hands covered in the Prince's blood. He takes Alatiel to Athens, leaving her in a splendid palace just outside the city as his mistress.

The antifeminism that suffuses Panfilo's story comes to the surface again when Alatiel enjoys sex with the Prince's murderer. And the horror of her endless, excessive sexual appetite is enhanced by the idea that she doesn't even notice the literal blood on her new lover's hands. Just as when Pericone tricked her, she doesn't put up a fight, because according to misogynistic stereotypes, women are not discerning enough about their lovers. Yet, the tale doesn't fully engage with or account for the fact that she's tricked and stolen time and again. Her objectified status complicates efforts to paint her as a villain because she enjoys having sex with murderers, since she is never given the opportunity to refuse. In this misogynistic horror story, Alatiel's overwhelming beauty causes men to lose all sense of virtue and moderation: time and again, brother turns against brother or friend murders friend because of her.

Citizens find the Prince of Morea's murdered corpse under the window. They assemble an army that sets out toward Athens to avenge him. The Duke of Athens mobilizes his own forces for war, calling on his brother-in-law Constant—who is the son of the Emperor of Constantinople—and Constant's nephew Manuel. The Duke's wife complains bitterly to her brother, Constant, about Alatiel, and begs him to fix the situation for her. Constant and Manuel ask the Duke to introduce them to Alatiel, and although he should know how lethal her beauty can be, he prepares a banquet in a beautiful **garden** so that he can show her off.

Fortune's campaign against Alatiel has political consequences; the fate of a foreign princess is bound to her captors/rescuers in complicated ways. By now, we have seen the pattern repeat enough times to know what is about to happen: Alatiel's beauty will overwhelm Constant and he will engage in whatever evil deeds are necessary to take her by force from the Duke; and, since the tale is decidedly antifeminist in its outlook, rather than react with horror, we know Alatiel will simply enjoy having sex with her new lover. Thus, at this point in the narrative, the Duke's willingness to show off Alatiel feels like a joke. Constant sees Alatiel first in a garden, places which, throughout the tales, represent a break from the cares of the world and which are so often places dedicated to love.

Constant is so overpowered by Alatiel's beauty that he understands why the Duke of Athens has gone to such great lengths to possess her. Soon he's so in love with her that he's lost interest in the war, and while the Duke is with his troops, Constant gives his responsibilities to Manuel, returns to his sister in Athens, and promises to end her husband's affair. He does this out of lust instead of brotherly love, ultimately kidnapping Alatiel and setting sail for Chios, where he thinks they will be safe from the Duke and his father. Although initially distressed at this new misfortune, Alatiel eventually succumbs to Constant's charms, and even begins to enjoy this newest gift of **fortune**.

Even if the audience has become used to the objectification and exchange of Alatiel and to her willingness to forgive her captors as long as they're good in bed, the misogynistic feeling of the tale is somewhat punctured by the real distress of the Duke's wife, who wants her husband's affair to end. Unfortunately, she must rely on the men around her for help, even after all the tale's men have shown themselves to be powerless to resist Alatiel's charms. Regardless, Constant's kidnapping of Alatiel feels even more horrible in that it both shows one sibling betraying another's trust and shows a man repudiating male bonds of friendship and political alliance. And Alatiel, as before, finds Constant's sexual prowess so pleasing that she considers him a gift, rather than a punishment, of fortune.

The Turkish King, Uzbek, hears rumors of Constant and his mistress, kidnaps the two from their bed one night, and takes Alatiel as his wife. The Emperor of Constantinople was negotiating an alliance with King Basano against Uzbek, which he formalizes quickly after his son's kidnapping. Called to war against Basano, Uzbek leaves Alatiel in the care of a trusted advisor named Antioco, who has fallen in love with Alatiel because of her beauty. Antioco speaks her language, and, despite his advanced age, they are soon lovers.

For a second time, Alatiel has become reason for political upheavals. It's hard at this point to accept Panfilo's projected moral that the story will correct women's excessive vanity, since Alatiel has shown no sign of vanity and her beauty seems to have a life and power of its own. It's so powerful that it can even overcome natural laws. Because Antioco is old, according to medieval medical theories (called humoral medicine), his nature should be impervious to Alatiel's charms; yet he is not an impotent old man but a lover able to please her endless sexual appetite. It's also important to note, however, that Antioco is the first lover who seems to care about Alatiel as a person: he is her caretaker for some time before they become lovers, and because he can speak her language, they appear to have an emotional connection, not just a sexual one.

When Basano defeats Uzbek and marches on Turkey, Antioco and Alatiel flee to Rhodes. They are staying with a Cypriot Merchant when Antioco falls ill. On his deathbed, he leaves his possessions to the Merchant, asking him to cherish and take care of Alatiel. A few days later, the Merchant and Alatiel leave for Cyprus, pretending to be married for her protection. Accordingly, they bunk together on the ship and what with one thing and another—the heat, the pleasantly rocking ship, their enforced idleness during the voyage—they soon become lovers, despite the memory of their friend Antioco.

Although his will still seems to group Alatiel in with his other valued possessions, Antioco is the first of Alatiel's lovers to speak of her with affection instead of just lusting after her sexual charms. It's notable, in this context, that he dies of natural causes and that no one steals Alatiel from him. Yet, the antifeminist stereotypes of dangerously excessive female lust reappear as soon as Alatiel sets sail for Cyprus, where the attentions of her newest lover make her easily forget her affection for Antioco.

While Alatiel is living as the Merchant's wife in Cyprus, she encounters a lowly gentleman named Antigono—another one of **fortune**'s playthings—whom she recognizes from her father's court at Alexandria. He tells her that her father and her people have thought her dead for many years. Alatiel replies that drowning would have been preferable to her "appalling misfortunes." When she describes them to Antigono, he weeps for pity. And he assures her that because she concealed her identity, she can be restored to her rightful position.

In meeting Antigono, Alatiel finally has a non-sexual encounter with a man, but because of her gender, she is still dependent on his male help and support. As in many of the tales' other examples of fortune's schemes, the good and bad fortune of Alatiel and Antigono are tied together. Restoring her to her family also offers a means for him to improve his own lackluster fortune. He also provides a reminder that fortune has a will of its own—he has been sidelined and underappreciated through no fault of his own, since he has served his king well. It's also notable that, near the end of her story, Alatiel once again has a voice and she belies Panfilo's continual characterization of her excessive sexuality by calling her adventures "appalling misfortunes," showing how little she has truly appreciated what has happened to her.

Antigono arranges Alatiel's triumphant return to Egypt. To account for her absence, she tells her father that after the shipwreck she was taken in by a convent of nuns devoted to "Saint Stiffen-in-the-Hollows." Hiding her identity on account of her religion, once she could communicate in their language, she claimed to be the daughter of a Cypriot nobleman. Eventually, the Abbess sent her "home" under the protection of some relatives. At the harbor, her identity was protected when she happened to see Antigono, who went along with her ruse that he was her father. Then he helped her return home. Antigono adds that Alatiel's chaperones praised her excellence and virtue in the convent and while traveling.

The story that Antigono and Alatiel tell her father bears sly hints as to what truly happened in her time away—for example, this reference to a St. Stiffen that seems remarkably like the saint that came to Marato's aid earlier. The devotion of the fictional nuns to this saint also provides a sliver of anticlerical satire in the midst of the tale. But this version can be understood as the fantasy of how she would have liked her exile to go. In this story, Alatiel is protected by women rather than being victimized by men, thus keeping her chastity intact, as she indicated she wanted to do early on. And she learns to speak the language, which allows her to advocate for herself and become an active agent in her return, rather than fortune's passive plaything.

The delighted Beminedab rewards Antigono and reestablishes Alatiel's betrothal to the King of Algarve. And somehow, even though she's had thousands of sexual encounters with her eight lovers, Alatiel enters his bed as if she were a virgin, ultimately convincing him that she is. She thus proves the proverb that a kissed mouth turns up new again like the moon.

The story ends on an antifeminist note that plays on the fear of female sexual freedom: somehow, Alatiel uses her feminine wiles to convince her new husband that she's a virgin even though she's had a cornucopia of sexual experiences already.

DAY 2: EIGHTH TALE

Panfilo's tale inspires many a sigh from the ladies—maybe from pity for Alatiel, maybe from jealousy at her sexual exploits—but everyone laughs at the ending. Elissa begins her tale next, setting it in the context of a war between France and Germany.

Fears of female sexual desire are raised—but neither confirmed nor denied—by the ladies' sighs. But the laughter of the ending serves as a reminder that the purpose of the stories is to entertain their listeners and readers.

The French king and his son mobilize their forces and go to war, leaving Walter, Count of Antwerp, to oversee the kingdom. Walter is a noble, intelligent man who's skilled in the arts of war and diplomacy. He's also blessed with good looks and fine manners and is a recent widower who has a son and a daughter. In her husband's absence, the French Princess falls in love with him.

In Elissa's tale, Walter is an incredibly eligible and attractive widower—a portrait of the ideal nobleman, who is as accomplished and upright as he is handsome. The fact that he can both fight and negotiate points to the moderation and balance prized in the tales, and speaks to his intelligence and noble character. The trust the royal family places in him gives him a lot of power, but also makes him vulnerable, especially when the Princess falls in love with him.

In her bedroom, the French Princess confesses her inability to escape love's urges to Walter, both because of her husband's extended absence and because she doesn't have enough to occupy her attention. She believes that a noble woman's affair is harmless if it's with a worthy man and kept secret. She asks Walter to take pity on her as she melts "for [him] like ice before a fire," bursts into tears, and throws herself into his arms. He pushes her away, chastising her and declaring that he would prefer to be drawn and quartered than to permit anyone to sleep with the prince's wife, much less himself.

The French Princess's confession casts her sexual desires as an example of disordered, excessive female desire. But the invocation of the absent husband also speaks to a medieval understanding that sex had an important place in people's lives, as long as it was practiced moderately and within the bounds of custom and law. However, her love isn't orderly, but overwhelming, pointing to the powerful love described by poets throughout the Middle Ages. Thus, it's not surprising when she invokes ice and fire in the same breath, as this language recalls the paradoxical or oxymoronic conceits that fill the love poetry of Giovanni Boccaccio's contemporary and beloved friend, Francesco Petrarch. And, although she's the first character to raise the idea that a secret love affair with a sufficiently noble lover is harmless—casting incaution or class-jumping as bigger sins than infidelity—she's hardly the last, since this idea is typical in medieval depictions of stylized fin'amors *(refined loving).*

The French Princess's passion turns to rage. She tears her dress, musses her hair, and begins to accuse Walter of trying to rape her. His conscience is clear, but Walter worries that envious courtiers will take advantage of the situation and harm his reputation. He hurries home, gets his children, and flees to England. These actions seem to confirm his guilt; the king and his son condemn Walter's family to eternal exile and offer a reward for his capture if he returns.

The French Princess's passion, because it is unbalanced and excessive, easily turns to rage. When she accuses Walter of rape—ironically, given that she does it out of anger that he repudiated her advances—the French Princess reenacts the story of Potiphar's Wife, which can be found in the Bible in Genesis 39. Versions of this ploy—which confirm misogynistic fears about female sexuality and deviousness—are sprinkled throughout medieval literature. Fortune is at play in this situation because Walter has done the right thing but is nevertheless punished for it.

Dressed in rags, Walter and his children reach London. To protect their identities, he begins to call his son "Perrot" and his daughter "Jeannette," and he tells people they fled France because of crimes committed by an older son. Eventually, the wife of one of the English king's marshals (later named as Madame Lamiens) takes pretty and sweet Jeannette into her home. She promises to raise her well and find her a suitable husband someday. Walter and Perrot travel to Wales, where the king's Welsh marshal is so impressed by the boy's manners and athleticism that he takes him into his home. Walter lands in Ireland, where he patiently endures years of hard work and suffering as a servant in noble houses.

Despite their newly desperate situation at the bottom of fortune's wheel, the inherent nobility of Walter and his children is evident even when they are impoverished refugees; an instinctive recognition of their value inspires the offers of the marshal's wives to foster Perrot and Jeannette. They attract the attention of noble persons because they themselves are noble. The children are wholly innocent and are thus somewhat protected from the vagaries of their ill fortune—they are protected and cared for by noblepersons. As one of fortune's victims, Walter's situation is more painful and physically taxing. But his external circumstances can't extinguish his internal nobility of character.

Years pass, and Madame Lamiens begins to think of finding a husband for Jeannette. Fortunately, God has a plan to prevent the noble Jeannette from being married beneath her station in life: it just so happens that Madame Lamiens's son (later identified as Jacques) has fallen violently in love with Jeannette. Fearing parental reproach for loving someone they believe to be a commoner, he keeps his feelings secret, but this just intensifies his suffering. Secret love makes him so sick that his parents must call many physicians to his bedside.

The idea of Jeannette marrying across class lines is categorically excluded by everyone: Madame Lamiens, unaware of her noble status, can't imagine Jeannette marrying her social betters, and fortune is imagined as actively intervening to prevent her from being married to a man of inferior status. And Jeannette's inherent nobility of spirit, despite her lowly social status, is part of the reason that Jacques falls in love with her. His suffering is a stereotypical example of lovesickness, in which excessive, unrequited love makes a person physically ill—note that his parents call doctors to his bedside. This is one of the occasional moments where fortune takes on the power of divine will, and it also recalls the idea of fortune's wheel—Jeannette's inherent nobility attracts Jacques, and this will be the means by which she's saved from the horrible situation her family was thrown into when her father's inherent nobility attracted the affections of the French Princess.

None of Jacques's physicians can identify or treat his illness until one happens to be taking his pulse when Jeannette walks into the room. Noticing that this makes Jacques's heart race, the doctor waits for an opportunity to call her back in. When she returns to the room, Jacques's heart races again, and the doctor realizes that he's suffering from lovesickness over the young woman. He tells Jacques's parents that "unmistakable symptoms" show that Jacques is "ardently in love" with the oblivious Jeannette.

Jacques's diagnosis parallels a story that was popular in the Middle Ages, in which a doctor diagnoses Antiochus's mysterious wasting illness as love for Stratonice. In turn, this story develops out of an early medical text authored by the Roman doctor Galen, who describes the diagnosis for lovesickness by observing the pulse of patients when their lovers' names are mentioned.

Jacques's parents are relieved to know the cause of his illness, but they're disturbed by his love for a supposed commoner. Madame Lamiens tells Jacques that she knows why he is sick and that she's willing to help him recover. Unfortunately, her plan isn't marriage, but suggesting to Jeannette that she take Jacques as a lover. But Jeannette is horrified by the idea, and she declares that she will guard her chastity with her life and will love no man but her lawful husband. She says she would even refuse to be the king's lover despite his power and good looks.

Madame Lamiens's plan highlights the relationship between class and the value placed on female chastity: she's more afraid of Jacques damaging his honor by marrying someone who she thinks is beneath his social class than she is of ruining Jeanette's sexual honor, even though she promised Walter to make sure the girl was honorably married when the time came. But it's Jeannette's inherent nobility of character that attracts Jacques's love anyway, and her horror over compromising her integrity and being forced to take him as a lover merely emphasizes it. In her insistence on doing what's right, she also aligns herself with her father's repudiation of the French Princess's indecent proposal.

Madame Lamiens, although impressed by Jeannette's morals, is frustrated. She suggests locking Jeannette in Jacques's room so he can have his way with her. But Jacques finds this plan horrifying and suffers a relapse. Finally deciding that they'd rather have an unsuitable daughter-in-law than a dead son, Marshal Lamiens and his wife relent and allow Jacques to marry Jeannette, much to the young couple's mutual delight.

Madame Lamiens's attempt to cure Jacques's lovesickness by making Jeanette his lover is doomed to fail anyway, since she's trying to apply a sexual cure to a case of true love. Jacques demonstrates his own worthiness (and shows that he's a suitable match for Jeanette) when he also reacts with horror to his mother's indecent suggestion that he essentially rape Jeanette. Fortune smiles on Jeannette and makes sure that her honor is preserved and that she gets an appropriate husband.

Meanwhile, handsome, fearless Perrot makes a favorable impression on his benefactors. And God also provides him a suitable spouse: when a plague sweeps through Wales, most of the marshal's family dies, leaving just one marriageable daughter who quickly takes Perrot as her husband.

Perrot's tale, though less detailed than his sister's, also demonstrates how a truly noble character cannot be repressed or overcome by circumstance and bad fortune. And in his case, too, fortune aligns with divine will to ensure that he ends up in a situation that befits his social class. The quick dispatch of his wife's family by plague—necessary so that he can easily marry her and come into her money—seems a bit harsh in light of the frame narrative's setting at the height of the Bubonic Plague. But the fact that the plague here can be just a simple narrative device also highlights the impermeable wall that seems to sit between the brigata *and the harsh realities they left behind.*

After 18 years, Walter decides to check on his children and returns to England. Age, labor, and hardship have made him almost unrecognizable. In London, he loiters near Jeannette and Jacques's home. When Jacques invites him to receive charity, their children instinctively love their grandfather in disguise. They become so attached that the family hires him as a servant to play with the children. Marshal Lamiens, spiteful towards his "common" daughter-in-law, takes his grandchildren's attachment to Walter as proof of their mother's low birth.

The irrepressible character of Walter, Perrot, and Jeannette is evident in the family's third generation, and the children's instinctive love for Walter—whom they don't know and can't recognize—proves their own noble spirits. Marshal Lamiens is blinded by class-consciousness and takes this affection as a sign of the children's low class rather than realizing it could also indicate Walter's true character. He can't see through Walter's downtrodden appearance to recognize his true nobility, which shines there despite decades of hard labor and ill fortune.

In the past, the French king made peace with the Germans, but his son resumes the hostilities after his father's death. The English king sends an army to his aid under the command of Perrot and Jacques. Walter joins Jacques's contingent as a groom (someone who cares for horses). The French Princess, having fallen ill, makes a deathbed confession of her love for Walter and her false accusation of him. The new French king grieves over Walter's undeserved exile, decides to restore his honor and status, and offers a reward for information on his whereabouts.

The illness and confession of the French Princess shifts the narrative, illustrating how chance and happenstance can easily change the direction of fortune's wheel and restore those who have been demeaned. And, once again, the relationship between political affairs and fortune comes into play.

Walter reveals the truth of his identity—and his children's—to Perrot and Jacques. He tells Perrot that Jacques married his sister without a dowry (the property and wealth a woman brings into her marriage), so it's best for Jacques to claim the king's reward as a dowry. Perrot recognizes his father, and their tearful reunion astonishes and delights Jacques. He begs forgiveness for the times he spoke harshly to Walter under the assumption he was a lowly servant rather than a nobleman.

As in the story of Beritola and her sons (II, 6), somehow, neither Jeannette nor Perrot recognize their father until after their fortunes are about to be reversed—which illustrates the power fortune has over the lives of humans. This also allows the tale to explicitly explore one of the book's themes—the importance of inherent nobility of character over circumstance and factors like wealth or social status.

Jacques presents Walter and Perrot to the king, claiming the great reward, and the king gives Walter the **gift** of "clothes, servants, horses, and accoutrements" appropriate to his status. Walter asks Jacques to remind Marshal Lamiens that his grandchildren aren't descended from a lowlife on Jeannette's side, and they all live happily ever after.

In the context of a rigidly class-based society, even though Walter's inherent nobility has carried him through the decades of his exile, the restoration of his status is still dependent on the restoration of his wealth and power. Although the tales praise those who, like Perrot's wife or Jacques, can recognize nobility in a person's character, a noble identity must still be confirmed by the appearance of wealth and power.

DAY 2: NINTH TALE

It's now Filomena's turn, since Dioneo has permission to tell the day's last tale. She recalls a proverb which says that "a dupe will outwit his deceiver," which her tale will prove.

Dioneo's exception shows that sometimes balance and moderation are achieved through bending the rules slightly: the day's sovereign has the ability to pick the order of narrators, except that Dioneo always has permission to go last—and he usually tells a tale that balances out any seriousness in the rest of the day's tales.

A group of Italian merchants at a Parisian inn brag about their sexual exploits while on the road. They all assume that their wives don't let the "grass … grow under their feet" either. Only one, Bernabò Lomellin, disagrees. He believes that his wife (whose name is Zinerva) is without equal: she is beautiful, excellent at handicrafts, a "paragon of intelligence and good manners," as capable on a horse or with a falcon as any man, an avid reader and writer, and—above all—the most chaste woman anywhere. He's sure that even if he went missing for ten years, she'd be faithful.

The merchants boast about their own sexual prowess—and since they're presumably sleeping with other men's wives, they take it for granted that their own wives are also probably cheating. Their rather nonchalant attitude towards sex contrasts with the emphasis placed on female chastity in other tales—but then again, these men are merchants. While great lords must worry about having legitimate children to inherit their wealth, titles, and power, throughout the tales, middle- and lower-class characters consistently demonstrate a more casual attitude towards sex. The narrator, Filomena, doesn't reveal whether Bernabò joins with his fellow merchants in womanizing while on the road, but he does expect his wife to be chaste in his absence. And, since ideas about sexual continence and class are frequently linked, it's notable that his description of her explicitly positions her as a fine, noble lady who outclasses the rest of the merchants and their wives. And it's also important to note that one of her good qualities is intelligence—another important theme that threads between the tales of The Decameron. *Notably, this entertaining and beautiful tale was the inspiration for William Shakespeare's play,* Cymbeline.

A young merchant named Ambrogiuolo, laughs at Bernabò and asks who gave him such an unnaturally good wife. He is sure that Bernabò *believes* what he's saying, but Ambrogiuolo doesn't. He thinks Bernabò is a credulous fool, ignorant of human nature. Specifically, everyone knows that men are more perfect than women, and that they consequently have greater willpower. But if men can't control themselves around beautiful women, how can they expect women to control themselves when faced with the sexual advances of an intelligent lover?

Ambrogiuolo is repeating standard medieval beliefs about the relationship between men and women, which were based both in cultural assumptions and in scientific theories. Scientifically and medically, medieval people usually ascribed to a model of humanity in which males were thought to be the full exemplar of humanity, while women were comparatively underdeveloped. Ambrogiuolo, in typical medieval fashion, links this to theological and cultural arguments which say that men should be dominant over women, including their daughters, sisters, and wives, because of their greater physical and moral perfection. The consistent worry about female lustfulness is based on the idea that women are less able to control their actions than men, because they are less developed and more child-like. If this is true, and men can't control themselves around women, it's naïve to assume that women can control themselves around men—and this idea recalls Panfilo's recent tale (II, 7) of Alatiel, whose insatiable sexual appetite easily matched all her lovers' desires.

Bernabò, a merchant rather than a philosopher, accepts that foolish women are weak but maintains that those who truly want to guard their honor (like his wife) are stronger than men. Ambrogiuolo questions how anyone would know, since horns don't actually sprout on adulterers' heads. He boasts that he could easily seduce Zinerva. Bernabò puts money against that claim, and the two men formalize their bet with a contract. Ambrogiuolo has three months to seduce Zinerva and prove his conquest with lovers' tokens or secret knowledge.

Bernabò's wife may be a sophisticated lady, but he himself is a practical, no-nonsense merchant. Ambrogiuolo raises the possibility that Bernabò's wife might actually be cheating but just covering her tracks so well that he doesn't know, since there are no visible signs of being cuckolded (cheated on by one's wife)—a fact that contributes to misogynistic mistrust of female sexuality and the belief that women are willing to lie about their virtue (like Alatiel convincing her husband that she is a virgin when they get married in II, 7). In pictures, cuckolds are imagined with horns sprouting out of their heads, but in real life, men must either catch their wives in the act or make guesses.

In Genoa, Ambrogiuolo learns (to his dismay) that Zinerva is as upright as Bernabò claimed. Winning the bet will require trickery, so he befriends Zinerva's friend and bribes her to secretly convey him into the house in a chest. At night, he opens the lid, memorizing the details of Zinerva's bedroom, then uncovering her while she sleeps. He sees a distinguishing mole under her left breast. Although he's tempted to have his way with her, he resists because of the reports of her moral rectitude. Finally, he steals some of her jewelry and trinkets.

Ambrogiuolo got Bernabò to make his wager based on the idea that only hard evidence can be trusted, but once he's realized that he can't win his bet fair and square, he resorts to cheating and trickery—thus calling into question any "hard evidence" that can be given against any woman. And Zinerva's vulnerability to his lies offers a reminder about the various forms of violence to which women are subject. Although he desires to rape Zinerva, he resists, which contradicts his earlier argument that, since men are powerless to resist their sexual urges, women must be even more so. Zinerva's upright reputation is thus amply confirmed by Ambrogiuolo's act of restraint.

After the old woman retrieves the chest, Ambrogiuolo hurries to Paris where he describes Zinerva's bedroom and displays his prizes to Bernabò, who demands more proof, since anyone could get a description of the room or some stolen rings from the servants. Ambrogiuolo describes the mole, and this convinces Bernabò. His heart broken at her alleged betrayal, he pays the wager, then goes home with murder in his heart. From his estate outside of the city, he sends a servant to murder Zinerva.

Bernabò is right to be suspicious of Ambrogiuolo—but unfortunately, he's not quite suspicious enough. Gender allegiance means that, in the end, no matter how noble Zinerva is, he trusts the word of another man rather than his wife. His plan to murder her without confronting her (and thus learning the truth) demonstrates immoderate wrath (to match his insufficient thoughtfulness) and emphasizes her vulnerability to male violence.

Luckily, quick-thinking Zinerva convinces the servant to spare her life. Disguised as a man, she runs away while the servant brings her torn clothing to Bernabò as proof of her death, claiming that wolves devoured her body. Zinerva begins to call herself Sicurano da Finale and she sails as a cabin boy on a Catalan merchant's ship. When they deliver a shipment to the Sultan of Alexandria, Sicurano's impressive manners earn him a spot in the Sultan's household, where Sicurano quickly earns respect and admiration.

Zinerva, however, proves herself to be as good as Bernabò's description of her. Her quick thinking marks her as one of the most intelligent women in a book that places a high value on intelligence—especially female intelligence—and mitigates the bad turn of her fortunes. It's not surprising that Bernabò accepts the thin evidence of her ruined clothing, since he's already shown himself to be susceptible to lies bolstered with thin physical evidence. Zinerva's exile, like that of Walter (II, 8), proves the depth of her noble character, which shines through her disguise and allows her to distinguish herself sufficiently to earn the respect of a king—even after she lost her husband's respect.

Because Sicurano (Zinerva) can speak the language of Christian merchants, the Sultan sends him to the Acre trade fair, where he stumbles on Ambrogiuolo's stall and discovers some of his stolen belongings. Ambrogiuolo, not recognizing Zinerva, explains that he acquired them after sleeping with Bernabò's wife and proving that all women are untrustworthy and fickle. Zinerva understands what has happened to her and she vows to punish Ambrogiuolo.

Fortune brings Zinerva back into contact with Ambrogiuolo so that she can restore her reputation and regain her former status. The pair illustrate fortune's wheel perfectly: she's the only one who could possibly know that he is a liar, and their chance encounter signals the rising of her fortunes and the approaching fall of his.

Zinerva—still disguised as Sicurano—befriends Ambrogiuolo, convincing him to go to Alexandria with the promise of a sizeable investment. She also entices Bernabò, who has fallen into poverty, to Alexandria. With both men in place, she asks Ambrogiuolo to tell his story to the Sultan of Alexandria, where Bernabò will be in attendance. The Sultan laughs at first, but then demands the truth; terrified to be the subject of the Sultan's interrogation, Ambrogiuolo tells the truth.

Zinerva displays her intelligence and tact again when she deftly plays on Ambrogiuolo's greed to tempt him into her trap—after he lied about having sex with her to win a sizeable wager he made with her husband. His excessive greed (and willingness to cheat and lie to enrich himself) are at the root of his coming problems.

Still in her disguise, Zinerva turns on Bernabò and demands to know what he did after hearing falsehoods about his wife. Bernabò confesses that he had her killed because he was enraged by his loss of money and honor. Zinerva, heaping shame on Bernabò for his stupidity and Ambrogiuolo for his lies, promises to reveal the lady in question if the Sultan of Alexandria will pardon the dupe and punish the deceiver. She then reveals herself to be Zinerva, displaying her breasts (with their identifying mole) as proof.

As elsewhere, male honor is tied to female sexuality—Bernabò felt that his own reputation was compromised by his wife's alleged infidelity. And he connects this blow to his ego with the loss of the wagered money, which makes his relationship to Zinerva sound more like that of an owner and his belonging than a man and his wife. Nevertheless, Zinerva fulfills feminine expectations of compassion in her desire to protect Bernabò from punishment for his attempted murder.

The Sultan of Alexandria, recovering from his shock, praises Zinerva's virtue and strength of character, and he immediately gives her **gifts** of fine clothes and servants. Bernabò begs for forgiveness, which she graciously offers. Then the Sultan has Ambrogiuolo fixed to a pole, smeared with honey, and left to be devoured by insects. He bestows the deceiver's wealth on Zinerva along with many presents from his own treasury. When the greatly esteemed Zinerva and her husband return to Genoa, Ambrogiuolo's bones hang from their post as an ongoing testimony to his wickedness.

Like many of fortune's playthings, both on Day 2 and throughout The Decameron, *fortune doesn't just restore Zinerva to her former position but elevates her even higher—mostly thanks to her intelligence and noble character. Similarly, Ambrogiuolo not only loses his ill-gotten gains, but is gruesomely executed, bearing the punishment that Bernabò wished to enact on his wife—but which Ambrogiuolo deserved.*

DAY 2: TENTH TALE

Everyone praises Filomena's tale, especially Dioneo, who nevertheless contends that it's foolish to think that women will forego sex, which his tale will prove while also showing how foolish it is for a man to marry out of his league.

Although Filomena's tale had a happy ending, Dioneo disagrees with its thesis that women are virtuous—he holds that Bernabò is lucky to have won his bet, not wise. His tale will pick up on the theme of mismatched spouses (Zinerva's fidelity and intelligence contrasted with her husband's wrath and gullibility) and also Alatiel's hyper sex drive.

In Pisa, a wealthy judge named Ricciardo di Chinzica wants a young, beautiful wife, even though he's brainy, not brawny. His wife, Bartolomea, is pretty and charming—at least by Pisan standards. But just consummating the marriage nearly kills him. Realizing the limits of his sexual capacity, he tries to hide them by adopting a pious observance of sexual abstinence on saint's days, church holidays, the eves of important saints' days, Lent, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and certain phases of the moon. They have sex once a month at best. And Ricciardo constantly keeps Bartolomea away from other men.

The mismatched couple at the heart of Dioneo's tale—an old husband and a young and attractive wife—is a classic setup for a fabliau *(a tale of sexual tricks). According to medieval understandings of human physiology—a theory called the "humoral system"— the older a person got, the colder and drier their body became, while sex requires the heat and moisture that characterize the young. The pious observance behind which Ricciardo attempts to hide his sexual inadequacy has some grounding in medieval canon law (church law), which did indeed encourage married couples to abstain from sex during periods of the church year, such as Lent, or on specific holy days and weekdays. Dioneo pokes fun at this calendar, suggesting how infrequently medieval churchgoers probably took it seriously—and he increases the humorous setup by adding extra days (certain moon phases) of abstinence. While excessive sexual desire could be problematic, excessive abstinence is bad in its own way. Old husbands were often satirized in medieval literature for their excessive jealousy (since they didn't have the sexual capacity to satisfy their wives, they feared rivals), and Ricciardo fulfils this stereotype too, with the close watch and strict rules under which he forces his pretty wife to live.*

One hot day, Ricciardo takes Bartolomea and some of her lady-friends on a fishing expedition. They are surprised by Paganino de Mare, a famous pirate, who captures Bartolomea's boat while Ricciardo makes it safely back to shore. All Ricciardo can think to do is wander through the streets bemoaning the wickedness of piracy.

The separate fishing boats give Bartolomea and her ladies enough room and explain how Paganino can kidnap her so easily from under her jealous husband's nose. But the gendered segregation of the vessels also points to the lack of physical intimacy between Ricciardo and Bartolomea, seeming to suggest that even being in the same boat together is more intimacy than Ricciardo can handle. His subdued reaction to her loss emphasizes his feebleness: since he can barely muster the energy to have sex with his wife on rare occasions, it makes sense that he hasn't got enough vigor to rescue her. His ineptitude in the face of the pirate's bold actions adds to the story's humor, while also hinting at what Bartolomea will find in Paganino: a satisfactory man.

Paganino, unable to comfort Bartolomea with words, eventually turns to comforting her with deeds—since he's not the kind of man who follows the church calendar. Bartolomea enjoys his effective (and continual!) consolations, and Paganino treats her like his wife. When Ricciardo discovers they're living together in Monaco, he goes there to pay whatever ransom is necessary to get Bartolomea back.

Like Alatiel's lovers (II, 7), when words fail Paganino, he turns to actions. And, because women in The Decameron *enjoy sex just as much as men—despite gendered expectations of female chastity—she enjoys her time with the pirate. Dioneo maintains that Paganino treats Bartolomea as a wife in part because he fulfils her sexual needs, because sex is a part of the respect that a husband should have for his spouse. The medieval idea of "marital debt" held that husbands and wives were both responsible to fulfil each other's sexual needs, something that Ricciardo has utterly failed to do in his marriage.*

Paganino and Ricciardo agree that if Paganino's lover recognizes Ricciardo, Paganino will hand her over. Ricciardo, confident that Bartolomea will of course recognize her beloved husband, is surprised when she ignores him completely. Assuming that his sufferings have made him unrecognizable to her, he reminds her of their fishing expedition and asks why she doesn't recognize him or the expense of retrieving her.

Bartolomea pretends not to recognize Ricciardo, and his surprise betrays his real inability to recognize his own failings. He misunderstands her and misjudges his own performance. Even while claiming he loves his wife, his complaints about the time and expense of retrieving her make his mission feel more like a business transaction than an act of love, further emphasizing his sexual and romantic inadequacies.

Thinking Bartolomea may be afraid of Paganino, Ricciardo asks to speak to her alone. Bartolomea finally admits that she knows Ricciardo but accuses him of failing to recognize her existence as his wife. He should have known that a young woman has needs more than just clothes and food, even if her modesty won't let her say so. Her husband shirked his duty to tend her "field" with his excessive calendar. She considers herself blessed to have been given to a man who cares more about hard work than abstaining.

Paganino allows Ricciardo to speak with Bartolomea in private—something that Ricciardo (as a jealous yet underperforming husband) would never have allowed. Clearly, Paganino has nothing to fear from this other man. Bartolomea's complaints are based on the idea of the marital debt and an understanding that both men and women have sexual needs. She reiterates the idea that even abstinence can become excessive. Her metaphors equate sex with productive labor—an ongoing theme in a book that focuses so intently on trade and the concerns of the merchant class.

Ricciardo can't understand why Bartolomea would rather live as Paganino's whore than as his wife, casting away her honor and living in mortal sin because of her immoderate sexual appetite. He promises to do better if she comes home. Bartolomea thinks that her parents neglected her honor when they gave her to a man who couldn't satisfy her needs. As for living in "mortar sin, it can be pestle sin too!" And anyway, he's clearly so sickly and dried up that he won't be able to do any better than he did before.

Ricciardo's disbelief is based on a traditional understanding of Christian morality that says sex outside of marriage is sinful. Bartolomea rejects this worldview, and although The Decameron *operates in the context of a Christian society, it is not overly invested in traditional or legalistic morality; she is not punished for her sins but is instead rewarded with a satisfactory husband. The argument that men and women should enter sexually matched marriages, to avoid sins of the kind into which Bartolomea has fallen, recalls the reasons the Abbot in White gave for fleeing the marriage her father arranged for her and an elderly ally (II, 3). Bartolomea's malapropism—mishearing "mortal" sin as "mortar" sin—allows Dioneo to insert a joke about sex. A mortar and pestle is a kitchen tool used to crush or grind substances; a "mortar" is a bowl and a "pestle" is a club-shaped object that fits inside it. The action of grinding ingredients recalls vulgar descriptions of the sex act.*

Realizing the foolishness of an impotent man taking a young wife, Ricciardo returns to Pisa, goes mad, and wanders the streets saying, "there's no rest for the bar." After his death, Paganino and Bartolomea marry and labor daily, regardless of holidays. Based on this example, Dioneo concludes, Bernabò's faith in his wife may have been rewarded, but he was taking a great risk by believing in her.

Although Ricciardo ultimately realizes his own responsibility for losing Bartolomea to another man, he nevertheless shows ongoing jealousy in his madness. The "bar" is a double entendre: it points to the law that Ricciardo used to practice, but rods and bars bear a physical resemblance to male anatomy, so Ricciardo's ranting constitutes a complaint about Bartolomea's limitless sexual appetite, an obsessive jealousy over Paganino's superior sexual performance, or both. Bartolomea and Paganino also demonstrate the day's theme—fortunate endings—since they are mutually satisfied with their marriage.

DAY 2: CONCLUSION

Everyone laughs until their sides ache. They agree with Dioneo that Bernabò was foolish to trust his wife. Once the laughter dies down, Filomena crowns Neifile as the next day's sovereign. Her modesty—she blushes and lowers her eyes—only makes her more beautiful. She suggests a pause in the storytelling until Sunday afternoon, given Friday and Saturday's customary fasts and the ladies' custom of bathing on Saturdays. She proposes moving to a new place to avoid others before setting the next theme: people who, through hard work and perseverance, achieve a desired object or recover a lost one.

The members of the brigata *appreciate the humor in Dioneo's story, and because he told it so well, they're inclined to agree with him that Ricciardo finds himself in a likelier situation than Bernabò—in other words, that women are more likely to be unfaithful than steadfast. Good storytelling here, as in the rest of the tales, makes a story's moral (when there is one) convincing. As the day draws to a close, Filomena elects the next sovereign, reinforcing the order and balance by which they live their lives in the countryside. Neifile's suggestion to resume storytelling after the weekend is another example of this order—the company maintains the weekly religious observances—and points to the Christian context in which the book is situated. In this way, she reasserts order and traditional morality among the company, who are neither allowed nor interested in the excesses enjoyed by the characters in their tales.*

The company whiles away the time before supper in the garden and then eats with laughter and merriment. After the meal, they dance while Pampinea sings a song about love, which brings joy and hope as much as it causes pain and suffering. When two people love each other mutually, nothing could be better.

The company enjoys aristocratic pursuits and entertainments on this day, untouched by the chaos raging in plague-ridden Florence or the fortune-tossed lives of the tales' characters. Pampinea's song emphasizes the characteristics of fin'amors *(refined loving) but also picks up on the theme of satisfied lovers that popped up throughout the day in the relationships of Alessandro and the Abbot in White; Guisfredi and Spina; Jacques and Jeannette; and Paganino and Bartolomea. Notably, when love is mutual—that is, in balance—it is the most satisfying, reminding readers of the ongoing importance of balance and moderation to the book's worldview.*

DAY 3: INTRODUCTION

On Sunday morning, accompanied by birdsong and flowers, the company moves to a new place, which is every bit as beautiful and well-appointed as the first. It has a lavish, walled **garden** so full of fragrant flower beds, elaborate fountains, and clever streamlets that they consider it an earthly Paradise. It is also stocked with charming, nearly tame animals. After following the normal course of their day, they gather to tell tales.

The brigata *move from one "locus amoenus," an idealized setting characterized by order, beauty, and safety, to another. Although the ravages of the plague aren't mentioned again after the introduction to Day 1, the repeated descriptions of the lovely settings in which the* brigata *spend their time continue to emphasize the order, moderation, and pleasantness of their surroundings, in contrast to Florence, which represents the world's chaos. The new garden is enclosed by a wall, making it a "hortus conclusus"—literally "enclosed garden" in Latin—which has associations with heavenly or Edenic settings generally. The nearly tamed wild animals add to the sense that this garden is like the Garden of Eden. The "hortus conclusus" also has associations with love in the literature of* fin'amors *(refined loving). This garden recalls the gardens of other famous medieval books about love, specifically* The Romance of the Rose, *by Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris. In* The Decameron *generally, gardens represent what balance and moderation can achieve, as they are spaces which gain their charm after human ingenuity is applied to harmoniously arrange natural elements.*

DAY 3: FIRST TALE

Filostrato remarks that there are a lot of ignorant people who think that nuns and peasants don't have any carnal feelings, even though this would be contrary to nature's design, as his tale will demonstrate.

Like fortune, in the medieval conception of the world, nature was a semi-deity in charge of procreation. She had a complicated position in the Christian faith, since she was imagined as handmaiden to both Venus (the Roman goddess of love) and God. Nature is thus often used as a way to describe the human sex drive, which—as this tale will show—is more powerful than religious vocation or moralistic laws.

A long time ago, there is a convent with a very beautiful **garden** where eight nuns and their Abbess live. When their gardener quits, he complains to a handsome young peasant named Masetto that the pay was terrible and that the nuns tended to yell at him. Masetto, tingling with desire to live with these nuns, decides to pretend to be a deaf-mute beggar to convince them that he is harmless. The convent's steward and Abbess, taken in by this trick and appreciating his hard work, quickly hire him.

Not only are gardens appropriate settings for love stories, but they also symbolize female genitalia, and there are certainly sexual overtones to the importance of the garden in drawing Masetto to the convent. Even before Masetto arrives, however, Filostrato starts to drop hints that the nuns aren't very upright in the sense of traditional Christian morality, such as their rude, impatient treatment of the gardener. Masetto further demonstrates the power of intelligence when he comes up with his clever plan to infiltrate the convent.

Masetto plans to tend more than one kind of **garden**, and because the Abbess thinks he's "lost his tale as well as his tongue," she doesn't pay attention when the nuns (believing he can't hear them) harass him.

In case the sexual connotations of the garden weren't already clear, Filostrato reiterates the connection when Masetto arrives planning to tend to the convent's garden but also the sexual needs of its residents. This recalls the imagery of sex as productive labor and field cultivation used by Beritola in Dioneo's last story (II, 10) and is an image he will use again in a later tale (VII, 10). There is no suggestion that the Abbess was foolish to fall for Masetto's deaf-mute charade, but she does demonstrate a lack of common sense when she seems to assume that losing the use of his tongue has also rendered this handsome young man impotent or harmless.

One day, two of the Young Nuns stumble on Masetto pretending to sleep in the garden. The first one, having heard about the pleasures of the flesh, sees an opportunity to experience them herself—despite pledging her virginity to Christ. Masetto can't tell on her, and she doubts that he'd even understand what was happening, since he's such a "dim-witted hulk." Having convinced her companion, the pair lure Masetto to a shed where they take turns keeping watch and testing his "riding ability."

In the Roman Catholic tradition, nuns were "Brides of Christ," and the vows they made on entering a convent echoed the wedding ceremony. Nevertheless, these young women still have sexual urges, reminding the audience that the clergy are still human beings and are prone to the same sins and shortcomings as everyone else—although the frequency with which religious figures in The Decameron *jump into bed with others is also a part of the book's anticlerical criticism, showing how the clergy are even less vigorous in holding themselves to the moral standards they represent. The Young Nuns take Masetto to be a peasant or country-bumpkin caricature that emphasizes the difference between his class and theirs—as most nuns would have come from the middle and upper classes of medieval society. But like the Abbess, their assumption that he is harmless because he is lower-class is unfounded, and in truth, although they think they're coming up with their own clever plan, they are merely fulfilling his.*

The rest of the Young Nuns eventually discover these goings-on and join the fun, as does the Abbess, who requires Masetto to indulge her with the pleasure she used to condemn most fiercely.

Although the Abbess's condemned pleasure isn't specified, the specific pleasure she derives from indulging in it highlights the hypocrisy of religious figures and criticizes church leaders for enjoying the very things they themselves forbid.

Eventually, Masetto becomes so exhausted that he drops the ruse. One night, he "miraculously" recovers his speech and tells the Abbess that while one cock can satisfy ten hens, ten men can barely satisfy one woman, and he himself is responsible for nine.

The day's theme is those who get what they desire through hard work, and by the time he's brought all the nuns into his arms, Masetto is certainly working very hard. His exhaustion is understandable, given that he is having sex with all eight of the nuns and the Abbess. But it also draws on misogynistic medieval fears about women's excessive sexual desire, suggesting that they'd be insatiable no matter how many men were responsible for them.

Luckily the steward just died, so the Abbess reports Masetto's miraculous healing to the neighborhood, appoints him the next steward, and he lives at the convent, pleasuring the nuns and fathering their children for many years. He returns to his village as a prosperous old man, rewarded with peace and prosperity for setting a pair of horns on Christ's head by cuckolding him.

Masetto earned his comfortable position at the convent (as steward and lover) through perseverance and hard work. But his life there is far from traditional standards of morality: not only have the nuns ignored their religious vows of chastity to sleep with Masetto, but they've also created what is essentially a polygamous colony together. While this tale might be poking sly fun at the idea of each and every nun as a bride of Christ (how many wives would God thus have?), it's also simply painting an extreme example of the kind of religious hypocrisy that The Decameron *consistently mocks as part of its anticlerical satire—instead of being devoted to God, these nuns are devoted to sex and lying to the public about their curious lifestyle.*

DAY 3: SECOND TALE

The ladies alternately blush and laugh at Filostrato's tale, and Pampinea is still laughing when she begins her tale. Agilulf, king of Lombardy, is married to the beautiful and virtuous Theodelinda. A certain Groom, who came from a very low-born family, loved her hopelessly. He had the good sense to keep his feelings to himself, although his greatest pleasure was brushing up against the queen's clothing when she rode her horse.

The groom's love is hopeless because he is low-born yet he loves a queen—a social difference too great to be bridged.

Realizing that the only way to bed Theodelinda would be to deceive her, the Groom looks for a way to impersonate Agilulf. He hides in the palace, where he witnesses Agilulf—wrapped in a cloak and carrying a torch and a big stick—knock on Theodelinda's door and gain admittance. After some time, he returns to his own room. After the Groom procures a cloak, torch, and stick, he takes a long bath to wash away the smell of the stables. He then hides in the palace.

Pampinea is associated with prudence and her stories and comments are often focused on the importance of intelligence—especially, but not exclusively, in women. It's thus not surprising that her tale focuses on the clever stratagems deployed by the groom—and later King Agilulf—throughout their cat and mouse game. However, his intention to sleep with Theodelinda under false pretenses—essentially to rape her—is uncomfortable and highlights the vulnerability of women to male trickery just as much as to male violence. The big stick and the torch are obvious phallic symbols, which indicate Agilulf's sexual prowess. The image of a lustful king entering a woman's room with his blazing torch is repeated in the later tale of Restituta and Gianni (V, 6).

When everyone has fallen asleep, the Groom wraps himself in the cloak and knocks on Theodelinda's door. A sleepy maid lets him in, and he climbs into the queen's bed, where he makes love to her repeatedly. No sooner has the Groom torn himself away than Agilulf himself appears. When Theodelinda expresses surprise that he's come back for more already, the savvy king realizes what's happened. But he holds his tongue to avoid upsetting his blameless wife and compromising his own honor.

Theodelinda's surprise at what she thinks is a second visit from her husband pushes back against the stereotype of oversexed, excessively lustful women that recurs throughout The Decameron. *If the Groom demonstrated cleverness, Agilulf's decision to hold his tongue is an example of true rationality, since it requires him to delay his desire for revenge and to avoid an excessively emotional display of anger. Concerns over female sexuality throughout the book are underwritten by the assumption, made explicit here, that the honor of a man is intimately tied up with the sexual chastity of the women under his authority (whether this is his wife, sister, or daughter).*

Agilulf goes to the servants' dormitory, realizing that the adulterous servant's heart would still be racing after his exertions, and checks everyone's pulse. The Groom, although afraid for his life, pretends to be asleep to see what the king will do. Agilulf, marking his heartbeat, cuts off a lock of his hair and leaves. Understanding that this will allow the king to single him out for punishment in the daylight, the Groom cuts a lock from the rest of the servants' hair.

Both smart and calm under pressure, Agilulf is the epitome of wisdom. The Groom, although afraid, is just as smart as his master. Although the two are separated by many rungs of social status, their wits are equally matched.

The next morning, Agilulf calls all his servants together, but when he begins to inspect them, he realizes they all have the same odd haircut. Realizing that he can't punish the low-born but clever fellow without revealing the crime, he tells everyone that whoever did it had "better not do it again." The servants wonder at these strange words, except for the Groom, who never visits Theodelinda again.

The ability of the lowly groom to outwit his master places them on the same level in terms of intelligence, if not in terms of wealth or social status. The theme of the day's tales is about getting what one wants after much effort, and for the groom this was sleeping with Theodelinda. But in outsmarting the king, he also achieved a kind of parity between lowly servant and mighty king.

DAY 3: THIRD TALE

Filomena prefaces her tale with an acknowledgement that it is more suitable for a lay audience than a clerical one, since it shows how most priests are extremely ignorant and greedy.

While several of the preceding tales have flirted with or included elements of anticlerical satire—literature criticizing the priests, monks, nuns, and leaders of the medieval church for their hypocrisy and sinfulness—Filomena's tale is a classic, fully articulated example of the genre in which the greed and stupidity of the Friar not only allows but helps the Florentine Noblewoman to conduct an affair behind her husband's back.

A Florentine Noblewoman deeply resents her marriage to a wealthy but bourgeoise wool merchant. She avoids his "beastly caresses" as much as possible and resolves to take an attractive Florentine Nobleman as a worthier lover. Noticing that he was on friendly terms with a Florentine Friar, she hatches a plan to use the holy man as a go-between to establish their affair.

This tale also engages directly with class commentary. Although many of the stories feature merchants and engage with the concerns of the merchant/middle class (as trade was the foundation of the Florentine economy and politics in the 12th and 13th centuries), the Florentine Noblewoman has great disdain for her nouveau riche (new money) husband—a disdain that also attaches itself to other men whose wealth has allowed them access to the better rungs of society like Arriguccio Berlinghieri (VII, 8) and Nicola da San Lepidio (VIII, 5). Her attitude suggests that wealth and class are distinct. Although she disparages her husband, this is in line with The Decameron*'s ongoing argument that character, attitude, and behavior, rather than wealth or social status, confer nobility on a person. It's also notable that while she can't control her marriage, she can exert control over her sexuality, depriving her husband of sex and giving it to a man that she thinks is worthy.*

The Florentine Noblewoman approaches the Florentine Friar, who happily agrees to hear her confession since she's clearly rich. At the end, she expresses deep love for her husband and complains that the Florentine Nobleman has been stalking her. She's telling the Friar in the hope that he can handle the situation quietly, but if not, she threatens to get her husband and brothers involved. The Friar promises her help in exchange for which she gives him a large charitable donation.

The Florentine Friar's eagerness to gain a rich client betrays greed—one of the seven deadly sins in the Christian tradition. He's also gullible and open to the Noblewoman's deft manipulation. Her threat of involving her male relatives—which would bring scandal if not outright violence—reminds the audience of how deeply male honor was wrapped up with female sexuality.

The Florentine Nobleman is somewhat surprised when the Florentine Friar reproaches him for stalking the Florentine Noblewoman, but because he's perceptive he realizes something is afoot. He begins to walk past her house frequently and comes to reciprocate her feelings of attraction.

The Nobleman is as intelligent and quick as the Friar is gullible and stupid; in a book that celebrates human intelligence in many forms, it isn't surprising that a lack of wit would be a key criticism of the clergy.

The Florentine Noblewoman takes a purse and belt to the Florentine Friar, claiming that the Florentine Nobleman sent them to her as a **gift** and she doesn't know how to return them. The Friar again excuses his friend, promising to return the gifts and set him straight. At his next confession, the Nobleman is delighted to receive expensive lover's tokens from his lady. Finally, the Noblewoman goes to the Friar claiming that, in her husband's absence, the Nobleman entered her garden, climbed a tree near the wall, and tried to get into her bedroom. Of course, the Nobleman wastes no time in following her instructions and "before you could say knife," the two are enjoying each other's embraces while laughing at the friar's ignorance and the wool merchant's lack of class. Filomena prays to God that she and all "like-minded Christian souls" might have a similarly enjoyable fate.

An important part of courtship rituals in the Middle Ages, the exchange of lover's tokens often cements a romantic partnership—just as gifts more generally cement relationships between people throughout The Decameron. *It's also notable that the gifts are expensive—she punishes her uncouth husband not only by cheating on him, but also by stealing from his wealth. When the Nobleman climbs into the room as fast as saying "knife," the pun is describing his speed while at the same time making a joke, since knives are often symbolic of male anatomy. The consummation of the affair also fulfils the day's theme—perseverance—since it took such careful planning and work for the Noblewoman to fully communicate her plan to her potential lover. Filomena's prayer at the end is challenging, since she seems to be praying that God would help people find lovers—which is contrary to Christian morality and religious teaching. While it's possible that her prayer is simply blasphemous and indicates a late-medieval, humanistic turn away from traditional Christianity, there are other potential interpretations. For example, the Noblewoman and her lover are equally matched through their wit and intelligence (as well as their class), and well-matched, mutually satisfactory romantic relationships are a frequent theme of the tales, so it's possible that this is the fate for which Filomena prays.*

DAY 3: FOURTH TALE

Panfilo tells the next tale, which will illustrate a saying that many people accidentally send someone else to Paradise while they're trying to get into heaven themselves.

Panfilo's introduction picks up and plays with Filomena's prayer that God would grant her a happy fate, noting that oftentimes people's religious efforts and prayers have unintended consequences.

When Puccio di Rinieri gets on in years, he becomes a Franciscan tertiary of great piety. Friar Puccio attends mass and recites his prayers faithfully, as well as fasting and performing self-discipline that may include flagellation. However, his young and pretty wife, Isabetta, suffers from his strict regimen, which frequently entails offering her a sermon when she would prefer to have sex. Things stand this way when Dom Felice, a handsome young monk, returns from Paris and begins to cultivate Friar Puccio's friendship—mainly because Puccio feeds him well.

Tertiaries were not full monks or nuns but were laypeople who took simple vows and lived according to some parts of a monastic order's rules, while still living outside of the monastery and conducting their own business affairs. In the 14th century, most tertiaries were attached to the Franciscan Order (a type of religious observance founded by St. Francis of Assisi in 1209), and many were involved in the flagellant movement—meaning that they practiced extreme forms of physical penance for their sins, most frequently whipping themselves. Friar Puccio's piety seems to be sincere, in stark contrast to the hypocrisy and sinfulness that characterizes most agents of the Roman Catholic Church (monks, nuns, and priests) in the tales. Dom Felice's interest in Friar Puccio's generous meals illustrates this hypocrisy, suggesting that he's prone to the sin of gluttony (excessive consumption of food or alcohol).

Dom Felice soon notices Isabetta and, with meaningful looks, kindles her desire. But they're prevented from acting on them because Isabetta will only agree to an assignation in her home, which Friar Puccio never leaves. After a great deal of thought, Dom Felice comes up with a plan.

Puccio and Isabetta's January-May marriage (a mismatch between an old husband and a young wife) is a classic setup in fabliaux *(short, funny stories of sexual tricks), as is the presence of a friendly religious figure—Dom Felice—who will provide the wife with the sex she craves.*

Dom Felice takes Friar Puccio aside and praises him for his saintly aspirations. He offers to teach Puccio the secret method by which the Pope and other clergy achieve holiness. The knowledge is secret because if it leaked out and laypeople could easily become holy, the church would lose its main source of revenue—charitable donations from pious layfolk. After swearing Puccio to secrecy, Felice explains the method.

The secret knowledge that Dom Felice dangles in front of Friar Puccio is part of the tale's anticlerical satire, suggesting that the clergy are more interested in keeping their revenue streams intact than they are in saving people's souls, even though that's their alleged mission in the world.

After confessing his sins, Friar Puccio will need to abstain from even touching his wife for forty days. During this time, he will spend the whole night propped against a plank with his arms outstretched (in imitation of the crucifixion) while looking into the heavens and praying 300 paternosters and 300 Hail Marys. Allowed only a short rest in bed, Puccio will then spend the rest of his day occupied in prayer.

It's convenient, of course, that Friar Puccio's religious observance will require him to abstain from sex with his wife. Nor does this seem to be hard since he barely has sex with her already. The extremely difficult and uncomfortable nature of the penance Dom Felice describes seems to poke fun at the flagellant movement, which already encouraged its adherents to practice extremely painful and punishing physical acts.

Friar Puccio plans to start as soon as possible. When he explains the plan to Isabetta, she endorses it and agrees to join him in fasting. During Puccio's long penance, Dom Felice comes by to share a lavish meal and spend the night in Isabetta's bed.

Isabetta pretends to support her husband by joining him in fasting, although this is the easiest part of the punishing program of penance Dom Felice has imagined. However, she's practicing a bunch of sins, including lying, gluttony, and lust. Friar Puccio's humble, gullible willingness to fast and practice penance throws the immoderate feast and romping sex shared by Dom Felice and Isabetta into sharp relief, increasing the sting of the tale's anticlerical satire.

One night when they're particularly loud, Dom Puccio thinks he hears something through the wall, so he calls out to ask Isabetta what's happening. Isabetta, maintaining her presence of mind even while riding Dom Felice, calls back that she's shaking on account of the fast. Gullible Puccio accepts her at her word and returns to his prayers. Thus, all the while Puccio did penance, it was his wife and Dom Felice who were in Paradise.

Now the meaning of Panfilo's proverb becomes clear, and it hinges on a literal meaning of "paradise" as heaven and a figurative meaning, where "paradise" indicates an extremely pleasant situation, such as the sex enjoyed by Dom Felice and Isabetta. Their ability to dupe the trusting Friar Puccio is a standard feature of fabliaux, *as is the quick wit Isabetta displays in explaining the suspicious noises Friar Puccio hears. And Dom Felice's willingness to use his piety as a cover for his gluttony and lust contributes to* The Decameron*'s ongoing criticism of clerical hypocrisy. This tale fulfils the day's theme—perseverance—in two ways: despite his discomfort, Friar Puccio persists in his penance, and despite the difficulties posed in initiating the affair, Dom Felice persists until he has full enjoyment of Isabetta.*

DAY 3: FIFTH TALE

Elissa prefaces her tale with a moral, reminding her listeners against the arrogance of assuming that one knows a lot while everyone else knows nothing—a belief that can backfire when other people are clever.

Elissa's story on Day 3 features a person who thinks he's very intelligent getting his comeuppance when he encounters someone cleverer than he himself is—almost like a rehashing of Pampinea's story about the equally matched King Agilulf and his wife's Groom (III, 2). It will demonstrate the perseverance of the second man, in alignment with the day's theme, but it also previews the theme of Day VI, when Elissa is sovereign—clever answers, retorts, and ripostes.

Francesco Vergellesi is wealthy, shrewd, and arrogant. When he is appointed Governor of Milan, he finds himself in need of a horse grand enough to match his title. The only suitable horse happens to belong to a man of humble birth called Zima ("The Dandy"). Zima loves Francesco's Wife, and Francesco thinks he can leverage this to get the horse for free.

Francesco clearly thinks highly of himself, and although his social status and wealth support his arrogance, his lack of a suitable horse shows that even the most wealthy and powerful men are sometimes subject to limits. But instead of taking this as a lesson in humility, he believes that he can manipulate Zima—one of his social inferiors—into giving him for free that which he could buy if he weren't a miser. His stinginess is a form of excess for which he will be rebuked in the tale. Each man has something the other wants, and while Francesco demonstrates greed and stinginess, Zima's willingness to give the horse up for free indicates his generosity—and inherent nobility of spirit in contrast to the wealthier man.

In exchange for the horse, Zima asks Francesco for permission to speak a few words in private to his wife. Francesco readily agrees but forbids his wife from replying in any way. Although Francesco's Wife resents this arrangement, she has no choice but to comply. Taking her to the side, Zima embarks on a lengthy speech outlining his feelings in the tradition of fin'amors. He speaks of his suffering and submits himself to her possession, begging her to take pity on him.

Despite his humble origins, Zima is well-versed in the tropes and traditions of fin'amors *or refined love—sometimes called "courtly love" for its association with the aristocratic classes. In nobility of spirit he is thus at least Francesco's equal, if not his better; in intelligence he is clearly superior, since he finds a way to subvert Francesco's attempt to limit his communication (or plan an affair) with the woman he loves. Francesco's Wife, however, is a pawn in play between the two men, reduced to an object that her husband can trade for what he really wants—a fine new horse.*

Previously, Francesco's Wife has never appreciated Zima's advances, but in listening to his speech, she is moved to love and, although she remains silent, she can't suppress a tiny sigh. When Zima realizes that something is preventing her from saying what she obviously wishes to, he assumes her voice and replies to himself, promising to consummate their love after Francesco leaves for Milan and explaining how they'll conduct their affair. Zima then resumes his own voice, thanking his lady for her kindness and generosity and promising his eternal gratitude.

Although she initially participated in the audience with Zima grudgingly, Francesco's Wife responds favorably to his speech now, because his performance of aristocratic love has elevated him in her opinion. It also suggests that she responds favorably to a man who is far cleverer than her husband. Her sighs—a characteristic sign of love in medieval literature—are at least as effective in communicating her feelings as words would have been, and they allow her to "talk" with Zima without disobeying her husband's orders.

After Zima leaves Francesco's Wife, he complains to Francesco that he may as well have been talking to a statue. Francesco is pleased with his wife's obedience. After Francesco leaves for Milan, his Wife asks herself why she's wasting her youth and decides to enjoy herself with Zima. She follows his plan to the letter, and he happily comes to her. Kissing "a hundred thousand times," they go directly to bed to enjoy "exquisite pleasure."

In making Francesco believe that his strategy has worked, and that Zima's advances have indeed been frustrated, Zima displays his superior intelligence. Francesco's Wife may have obeyed his orders in letter, but her sighs mean that she disobeyed in spirit. But by letting Francesco believe in her obedience, Zima also adds a layer of protection to their eventual affair—Francesco will henceforth suspect nothing of the two, since he thinks his trust in his wife has been confirmed. The argument Francesco's Wife has with herself illustrates the "carpe diem" or "seize the day" literary trope, where the advent of old age is used as an incentive to enjoy love in the present moment.

DAY 3: SIXTH TALE

Fiammetta's tale describes how an ingenious lover coerces the prudish object of his desire into his embraces. Ricciardo Minutolo loves Catella, the wife of Filippello Sighinolfo. But because she is truly devoted to her husband, all of Minutolo's efforts fail to win her affection, driving him to distraction.

Fiammetta's tale fulfills the day's theme in showing how Ricciardo Minutolo's dogged persistence allowed him to sleep with Catella, the object of his affections. She also picks up on the theme of intelligence that's on display in clever deceptions of other lovers in this day's tales—including Zima in the previous story. However, even in the earliest moments of the tale, it's clear that Catella isn't interested in Ricciardo's advances, and his refusal to respect her wishes speaks to the vulnerability of women in the face of masculine desire.

Catella is jealous of Filippello to the point of fearing that the "very birds flying in the air" might steal him. Eventually, Ricciardo Minutolo realizes he can take advantage of her jealousy. He stops pursuing her to gain her trust, and after cultivating her platonic friendship, he drops hints about her husband's alleged affair. When Catella presses him for details, he claims that his wife has received advances from Filippello, maybe as revenge for Minutolo's pursuit of Catella. Minutolo claims to know about it because his wife showed him Filippello's love messages.

In his manipulation of Catella, Ricciardo demonstrates his cleverness, but also shows that intelligence is neither good nor bad; its value depends on the ends towards which it is used. This tale also has a cautionary moral about excess, since her unhinged jealousy—her fear of the birds flying off with her man obviously isn't based in reality—leaves her vulnerable to Ricciardo's suggestions. It's also notable that in the story Ricciardo tells, his wife demonstrates obedience and faithfulness by telling him about Filippello's advances. This suggests that he doesn't want to imagine his own wife cheating on him even as he is busy tricking Catella into cheating on her husband. This strong sexual double standard—where Ricciardo feels his behavior is justified but he wouldn't accept it in his wife—betrays the tale's deep roots in antifeminist and misogynist gender stereotypes and fears about female infidelity, notwithstanding its female narrator (Fiammetta). This is one of many moments throughout The Decameron *that contradicts Boccaccio's claims in the Prologue and elsewhere to love and respect women.*

But Ricciardo Minutolo claims that when Filippello arranged a secret meeting with his wife at a bath house, he felt the time had come to tell Catella. He suggests that Catella hide herself in his wife's place in order to surprise her husband when he comes to the meeting. Catella, blinded by her jealousy to Minutolo's character and motivations, readily agrees to his plan.

Again, Catella's story offers a warning about excess in all its forms, because of the way it makes a person blind to the facts in front of them. Catella's jealousy is so overpowering that she can't see how her former suitor could be manipulating her. It's also interesting to note that, in a work which consistently worries about women's faithfulness to their husbands and lovers, Catella's fidelity to her husband becomes a source of mockery and disdain in this tale; the misogynistic and antifeminist strains in The Decameron *allow her to be punished for faithfulness that in other tales would be a credit to her character.*

Having laid his trap, Ricciardo Minutolo hides himself in the darkest room of the bath house, where he waits for Catella's arrival. Her suspicions were confirmed the previous evening when Filippello was less affectionate than usual, and she arrives at the bath house promptly. When Minutolo embraces her, Catella returns his affections enthusiastically, anxious to play the part of the expected lover. Soon they are having sex. Afterwards, she reveals herself to be Catella and proceeds to heap abuse and scorn on the man she thinks is her cheating husband.

Yet again, Catella's excessive jealousy makes her see things that aren't there. And although the ostensible moral of the story is that sometimes an ingenious lover must trick a woman into an affair that she will enjoy (suggesting that she'll come around to Ricciardo in the end), it's impossible to ignore the fact that he has essentially raped her.

Ricciardo Minutolo enjoys Catella's speech. When she tells "Filippello" that maybe she should repay him by taking Minutolo as her lover, he reveals himself, telling her that love taught him to obtain by deception that which he could "not achieve by mere wooing." This revelation upsets Catella. Minutolo warns her that if she tells anyone about his trick, he will say that she came to him freely and that her complaints serve to cover her guilt and save her reputation. Moreover, if Filippello finds out, he and Minutolo will become enemies and one may end up killing the other. Because she isn't the first or last deceived woman, Minutolo counsels her to accept his humble and sincere love. Although she is sorely annoyed, once Minutolo has applied enough "honeyed endearments," Catella eventually comes around to his way of thinking, accepting him as her lover from then on.

Catella is understandably upset when Ricciardo reveals his deception. And to add insult to injury, he threatens to destroy her reputation if she complains to anyone about his dishonorable actions. Since women were subjected to male authority, in a contest of his word against hers, he would undoubtedly win. Although he claims to love her humbly and sincerely, the relationship that Ricciardo proposes here is direct extortion, since Catella must continue to have sex with him to avoid anyone finding out that she's having sex with him. Her eventual capitulation to these "endearments" and acceptance of the relationship is meant to show that Ricciardo has honestly earned her love, although the tale sidesteps the questions raised by the initial trick and the ongoing threats to her honor if she doesn't give Ricciardo what he wants.

DAY 3: SEVENTH TALE

Emilia, the next narrator, tells the story of Tedaldo degli Elisei, who has an affair with Ermellina, the wife of Aldobrandino Palermini. But one day, **fortune** decrees herself Tedaldo's enemy, and Ermellina spurns him without explanation. After trying and failing to regain her love, Tedaldo secretly flees Florence. Eventually, he lands in Cyprus, where he becomes a rich and successful merchant.

Thus far, sexual and romantic fidelity have been a concern for the tales within marriage, but in the context of fin'amors *(refined loving), lovers were bound by ties of affection at least as strong, if not stronger, than wedding vows—which is why Tedaldo can't stop loving Ermellina even after she dumps him. From his perspective, there's no reason for her to have done this, so he understands her changed attitude as a downturn of fortune's wheel.*

But when Tedaldo hears a song that he composed for Ermellina, he remembers his undaunted love for her and decides to return to Florence disguised as a pilgrim. There, he finds her home locked up tight and all his brothers in mourning. A neighbor tells him that Tedaldo degli Elisei was recently murdered and Aldobrandino has been convicted of the crime.

When Tedaldo hears the song he wrote for Ermellina, it just confirms that he can't run away from his love, because a true lover never stops loving his beloved. And if he thought that fortune intervened to change Ermellina's attitude before, now it's even clearer that outside forces are at work, since his lover's husband stands accused of an impossible crime—murdering Tedaldo.

Tedaldo's shock prevents him from sleeping that night, and he hears footsteps on the roof. Peeping through a crack in his door, he overhears three men and a woman whispering about Aldobrandino's conviction, which will allow them to get away with Tedaldo's murder. Understanding that Aldobrandino has been falsely accused and convicted with fabricated evidence, Tedaldo hatches a plan to save him and reveal the truth.

It's a mark of Tedaldo's character—and his devotion to the truth—that he's willing to help save his lover's husband. While this strikes modern sensibilities oddly—why would he help a man who is, essentially, his rival?—the complex codes and traditions of fin'amors *(refined loving) as they had developed by the 14th century really only condemned husbands who* interfered *in love affairs. In a society where many aristocratic people were married based on convenience or alliances, love matches were often imagined as happening outside of marriage, and* fin'amors *partly filled that gap.*

The next day, Tedaldo (still disguised as a pilgrim) presents himself to Ermellina, claiming to have been sent by God to set things right. He proves his prophetic skills by explaining Aldobrandino's case. He also claims that Ermellina is being punished for the unconfessed sin of snubbing her lover Tedaldo. Under the pretense of examining her conscience, Tedaldo asks why she turned her back on him.

As with other lovers and lost children (see, for example, Beritola and her sons in II, 6 and Walter and his children in II, 8), Tedaldo's identity remains concealed from his lover as long as it's convenient for him. Disguised not only as a pilgrim but as a religious authority, Tedaldo puts himself in God's shoes as an emissary—claiming that God will set things right. But this position also allows him to ask the question he would most like answered—why she turned her back on him—and even puts him in a position from which he could force her to make amends (as "penance") for repudiating him.

Ermellina reveals that she mentioned the affair in confession, for which she was warned that she would be sent to Hell unless she mended her ways. Frightened, she cut ties with Tedaldo, but she admits that she still loved him and was about to take him back when he disappeared. Tedaldo scolds her for repudiating love that she had freely given—if the eternal consequences were important to her, she should have thought of them before beginning the affair. Because she and Tedaldo gave themselves to each other freely, they each owed the other loyalty; by depriving Tedaldo of her love she was robbing him of a **gift** she had freely given to him.

When the choice is between religious devotion and love, the tales in The Decameron *invariably side with love, and Tedaldo's impassioned defense of* fin'amors *is an example of this. Tedaldo's argument—that it is worse to have broken off an affair than to have begun it in the first place—clearly prioritizes* fin'amors *and romantic love above religious commandments. It also parallels Bartolomea's arguments about marital debt (II, 10) and emphasizes the mutuality of romantic relationships, where lovers are tied by bonds of affection as well as responsibility.*

Claiming to be a friar himself, Tedaldo then makes a very long speech outlining the hypocrisy and sinfulness of modern-day clergy, whose clothing is splendid instead of shabby, who desire riches and women instead of holiness, who charge extortionary prices for caring for laypeople's souls and who insist that the laity conform to standards they themselves reject.

Ermellina's alarming experience with the priest also gives Tedaldo the opportunity to make one of the most pointed anticlerical speeches in the entire book. His characterization of clerical hypocrisy matches many examples throughout The Decameron.

And anyway, Tedaldo continues, even if adultery is a bad sin, isn't theft worse? Having extramarital sex is a "natural sin," but theft and attempted murder can only proceed from "evil intentions." Ermellina robbed Tedaldo of her love, and because this cruelty nearly killed him, she's also guilty of attempted murder. She's also responsible for his years-long exile. Tedaldo—still impersonating the friar—extols the virtues of Ermellina's lost lover and condemns women's cruelty towards their lovers. She's paying for this sin, and her penance is to take Tedaldo back as her lover if he were ever to reappear. Ermellina swears that she would do so happily. Tedaldo throws off his costume. At first, she thinks she's seen a ghost, but she is jubilant when she realizes that her lover has indeed returned.

Medieval theology did indeed hierarchize sins in the way Tedaldo suggests—for example, homosexual sex was considered far more sinful than extramarital sex; because the former couldn't have any procreative purpose, it was considered less "natural" than the latter. In his disguise as a friar, Tedaldo is playing the role of a priest and guiding Ermellina through a confession—only it's a confession focused on the codes and morals of fin'amors. *In this way, he recreates and corrects the original confession that scared her into breaking off the affair. Importantly, her most serious sin, attempted murder, is the result of "cruelty," which is the charge made against any woman who spurns a man's romantic advances, regardless of her reasons. The sexual double standards at play in the book and its culture claim to elevate women but in reality often punish them for failing to follow men's desires.*

Hurrying to Aldobrandino, Tedaldo promises to secure his release if he will pardon Tedaldo's brothers for accusing him and fabricating evidence. Aldobrandino says it's hard to ask a man to forego his revenge, but he will since he wants liberty and to preserve his soul for heaven. Next, Tedaldo goes to the court and explains the truth. The actual murderers—the innkeepers and a servant—readily confess to the murder (which they did after "Tedaldo" attempted to rape one of their wives) rather than undergo torture. Tedaldo, assured that Aldobrandino will be released in the morning, returns to Ermellina, gives her the good news, and spends the night with her.

It is in the context of a work that is heavily influenced by the development of humanism—a precursor to the Renaissance and a line of thought that placed more emphasis on human behavior and choice than on religious commandments and observance—that Aldobrandino's choice of mercy over vengeance is motivated both by religious reasons (to avoid hell) and worldly ones (to get out of jail, to avoid being executed). Fortune's wheel, which earlier brought Tedaldo low by separating him from his lover, continues to revolve, and his luck improves while murderers who thought they would get away with their crime find themselves caught.

When Aldobrandino is released, he and Ermellina invite the "pilgrim" (Tedaldo) to stay with them. When Tedaldo hears that his brothers are being mocked, he decides it's time to set everything straight, and he asks Aldobrandino to publicly forgive them. Aldobrandino invites the brothers, still in mourning, to a great feast, where Tedaldo throws off his disguise and reunites with his family and (publicly, at least) with Ermellina.

Fortune has many victims in this tale: Tedaldo, Aldobrandino, and even Tedaldo's brothers. But because her wheel continually turns, everyone is restored as quickly as they were oppressed.

Many people, including Tedaldo's brothers, harbor a faint suspicion that he's not really Tedaldo until they solve the mystery of the murdered man. One day, a group of soldiers mistakes Tedaldo for their friend Faziuolo, as the two men are nearly identical. Confirming his identity puts the story to an end, and everyone lives happily ever after.

It's hard for people to accept that Tedaldo's not a ghost—at least until a logical and rational explanation is discovered. The contrast between humanistic rationality and superstitious belief aligns with the earlier differentiation between rationality and religion demonstrated in Aldobrandino's various motives for displaying mercy. In terms of the day's theme, perseverance, it's the steadfast nature of Tedaldo's love that fortunately brings him back to Florence at the exact moment necessary to save the lives and reputations of his lover, her husband, and his brothers.

DAY 3: EIGHTH TALE

Lauretta's tale, told next, picks up on the theme of a supposedly resurrected man, but her protagonist isn't as clever as Tedaldo. In Tuscany, a Womanizing Abbot with a reputation for holiness becomes acquainted with Ferondo, a wealthy but simple-headed man who happens to have a very beautiful wife. Ferondo's Wife is quite lovely, and Ferondo is jealous and protective. The three often walk together in the monastery's **grounds**, and eventually Ferondo's Wife comes to the Abbot for confession.

Lauretta's tale weaves together many threads from Day 3's tales, in addition to Tedaldo's evident resurrection (III, 7): it recalls Panfilo's account of Friar Puccio, where a mismatched couple are befriended by a religious figure and the holy man gains access to the wife's bed through trickery (III, 4), and it includes the theme of excessive jealousy first introduced by Fiammetta (III, 6). The triad of beautiful wife, sexy abbot, and dunderheaded husband is drawn from fabliaux *(humorous stories about sexual tricks) with their inherent bias against hypocritical religious figures.*

Ferondo's Wife complains to the Womanizing Abbot about being married to a bumpkin like Ferondo and being subject to his jealousy. Seeing that **fortune** has given him an opportunity, the Abbot offers to teach Ferondo a lesson by allowing him to "die," sending him to Purgatory to be cured of his jealousy, then resurrecting him with certain prayers. In exchange for these services, the Abbot asks for her love since he's been burning and pining for her. Ferondo's Wife is horrified at this request, especially since she's always believed the Abbot to be very holy.

The concept of Purgatory—a place that is neither heaven nor hell, where people who don't deserve eternal damnation in hell but who can't gain immediate access to heaven because they have unconfessed or unrepented sins to work off—developed over the course of the 12th century. And, while Ferondo's obtuseness is at the center of the story, his wife's willingness to believe that the Abbot can send her husband to the afterlife and then bring him back suggests that she may not be so bright herself. It's also not entirely clear whether her surprise at the Abbot's indecent proposal is a result of naiveté or willful ignorance. The Decameron *provides myriad examples of lustful priests, suggesting that common people in the Middle Ages understood that priests were prone to this type of sin.*

The Womanizing Abbot answers that sex is only a sin of the body, and that saintliness resides in the soul; besides, Ferondo's Wife should take it as an extreme compliment to her beauty that he, accustomed to seeing heavenly beauties, should find her so desirable. He also presents her with a magnificent ring, implying that he has more where that came from. Despite lingering uncertainty, the lady is eventually swayed by his compliments and **gifts**.

The Abbot's comments here recall the hierarchy of "natural" sins that Tedaldo laid out in the previous tale (III, 7)—but in general, his arguments are overly legalistic and not very convincing. When reason fails, he falls back on gendered assumptions of feminine greed and vanity, offering the woman a beautiful ring. The gift demonstrates how lover's tokens work: it is both a sign of the Abbot's affection and a valuable object that creates a bond of obligation between its giver (the Abbot) and recipient (the woman).

When Ferondo visits the monastery a few days later, the Womanizing Abbot drugs him with a special powder he procured in the East. Ferondo falls unconscious to the floor and none of the monks can find his pulse. They call his family to the monastery and bury him. Later that night, the Abbot and a Bolognese Monk retrieve him from his coffin, dress him in monks' robes, and hide him in a windowless cell to sleep off the drug's effects.

In 14th-century Europe, the East was associated with exotic and secret knowledge, such as the Abbot's sleeping powder.

The following day, the Womanizing Abbot visits Ferondo's Wife to pay his respects—and to arrange to come by later. She readily accepts when she sees "another fine ring" on his finger. Later that night, dressed in Ferondo's clothes, the Abbot returns to sleep with her. During the long time he keeps up this habit, people sometimes see him walking between the monastery and her house, but they assume he's Ferondo's ghost, doing penance for his sins.

Repeated references to the Abbot's jewelry pointedly remind the audience of the way in which church officers hoard wealth despite their vows of poverty, forming part of the tale's anticlerical satire. The fact that Ferondo's Wife never fails to notice them suggests that she is prone to greed and vanity—two charges frequently made against women in antifeminist medieval writings. This focus on the exchange of goods and services also suggests prostitution or selling sex for money and places their affair outside of the aristocratic tradition of fin'amors *(refined loving). The Abbot and his woman are debased by their affair rather than being ennobled by it.*

When Ferondo comes to, the Bolognese Monk pretends they're in Purgatory, beating him with sticks and scolding him for his jealousy towards his wife. The Monk claims that he is also condemned to a period in Purgatory along with other ridiculous things that Ferondo accepts at face value—namely, that the dead still need to eat, that Ferondo's Wife makes offerings of food and wine to the church and that these offerings are brought to him in Purgatory, and that sometimes God sends people back to earth after they've worked off their sins.

Ferondo's willingness to believe obviously ridiculous things illustrates the simplemindedness for which he's punished by the tale's logic.

The Bolognese Monk keeps up this charade—while the Womanizing Abbot continues his affair with Ferondo's Wife—for ten months, until she realizes that she's pregnant. They agree it's time to recall Ferondo from Purgatory in enough time to think he's fathered her child. That night, the Abbot disguises his voice to tell Ferondo that, on account of the prayers of the Abbot and his wife, God is returning him to earth and sending him a child that he should name Benedict. Ferondo is pleased by this good news.

Usually in fabliaux, *there are no real consequences for sex; the person most likely to suffer is the duped husband. But in a nod towards the realism that threads through* The Decameron*'s tales—a sign of Giovanni Boccaccio's mastery of his craft—nearly a year of sleeping with the Womanizing Abbot does leave Ferondo's Wife pregnant. This necessitates the final trick, making Ferondo think that he is the child's legitimate father. The "vision" in which the Abbot talks to Ferondo as if in the voice of God recalls the Biblical narrative of John the Baptist, whose birth was foretold to his father, Zacharias, in very similar terms in the first chapter of the gospel of Luke.*

The Womanizing Abbot drugs Ferondo, dresses him in his own clothes, and puts him back in his coffin. He emerges the next day much to the surprise of the monks. He throws himself at the Abbot's feet, grateful to have been resurrected because of his prayers. Pretending that it's a miracle, the Abbot instructs him to run home and comfort Ferondo's Wife. Barely nine months later, she gives birth to "his" son. Ferondo's resurrection enhances his reputation, and he tells his neighbors all sorts of ridiculous stories about their dead relatives, as well as the revelations he received from "Arse-Angel Bagriel." The miracle also enhances the Abbot's saintly reputation, even as he continues to enjoy Ferondo's Wife.

Although a pregnancy resulted from the Abbot's illicit affair with Ferondo's Wife, in true fabliaux *fashion, there are no bad consequences. Ferondo deserved to be cuckolded thanks to his extreme lack of intelligence and common sense—illustrated humorously though his boasts that he spoke to the Archangel Gabriel, although he misremembers his name—and the jealousy with which he unfairly guarded his wife. The lack of punishment points to the competing value systems in* The Decameron*: although the logic of the tales is often organized around and expressed in the language of traditional Christian morality, in the end, few if any sexual sins are ever punished.*

DAY 3: NINTH TALE

Neifile's turn comes next, since Dioneo has the privilege of going last. Protesting how hard it will be to follow up Lauretta's entertaining tale, she offers her own "for what it is worth."

Throughout The Decameron, *Neifile is characterized by her modesty, as when she downplays her tale in introducing it.*

The invalid Count of Roussillon keeps a doctor called Gerard of Narbonne as a member of his household staff. Gerard's daughter Gilette grows up alongside the Count's son Bertrand. When the Count dies, his son goes to the king's court to be fostered. This breaks Gilette's heart, since she has fallen head-over-heels in love with Bertrand, despite her tender age.

Via several intermediary translations of Giovanni Boccaccio's work—first into French and then into English—Shakespeare adapted the premise of this tale for his play All's Well That Ends Well. *Although Gilette and Bertrand grow up together, he is the son of a nobleman, and she is the daughter of a doctor—a middle-class occupation. Thus, Gilette's love is precarious, since it crosses class lines.*

Gilette's love doesn't diminish as she grows up, burning even hotter when she reaches a marriageable age. Learning that the king suffers from a painful fistula that no one can cure (but which she knows how to treat), she sees a chance to win Bertrand's hand in marriage. The king, after many painful attempts, has given up on treatments, but he can't refuse the charming and beautiful Gilette. Because he doesn't take her seriously, he promises to find her a "fine and noble" husband if she cures him. Gilette extracts a promise that she can pick the man as long as he's not royal.

Gilette possesses two of The Decameron*'s highest virtues: intelligence—demonstrated by understanding her father's craft well enough to practice medicine herself—and steadfast love for Bertrand that is not stinted by time or distance. However, she is disadvantaged by gender and class. Although her father was a famous physician, the king can only see a pretty face, not a competent healer—even though there were several famous and successful female physicians in the Middle Ages. And her promise to the king emphasizes her bourgeoise status—aspiring to royalty would be aiming too far. In the beginning of the tale, Gilette is constrained by a definition of worth that looks at social class and wealth, not personal character.*

Gilette heals the king and asks for Bertrand as her husband. Bertrand is unwilling and indignant because Gilette is a "she-doctor" and her family is beneath "his own noble ancestry," but the king is unwilling to break his promise and compels him. He swears he will never "rest content" with the marriage, despite royal assurances that she is "beautiful, intelligent…deeply in love" and a better match than many a loftier lady.

Bertrand's reaction betrays his rigid understanding of gender and class: instead of being impressed by Gilette's intelligence and her medical skill, he's bothered that she's practicing an occupation reserved for men. And instead of remembering how well her father cared for his own—the fact that Gilette was raised among the noble children in the household suggests that the old Count respected his doctor, despite their class difference—he would rather lose his wealth than marry a bourgeoise (if wealthy) wife. However, at this point, the king is starting to see the strength of Gilette's character and realizes that she's a better catch than many a girl with a better pedigree.

Compelled to marry Gilette, Bertrand refuses to consummate the marriage except in Roussillon, and he avoids returning by offering to help the Florentines in a war against Siena. An unhappy Gilette arrives alone in Roussillon, where she restores order to Bertrand's neglected estates, thus winning his subjects' love. When she informs her husband of her achievements, he sends a message saying that he will never live with her unless she first wears his favorite ring on her finger and carries his child in her arms.

Although Bertrand can't—or won't —acknowledge Gilette's worth, she possesses both steadfast love and steady intelligence. Despite his alleged superiority thanks to his class, Bertrand's land is in chaos and confusion thanks to his extended absence. When Gilette restores moderation and order, she earns the love of her subjects and demonstrates that she has the skills and knowledge necessary to make a good wife and Countess alongside Bertrand. Her subjects recognize her value even if her husband can't see past her allegedly humble origins.

Although she is initially dismayed, Gilette sets about winning her husband back. Reminding his subjects of her hard work on their account and her husband's coldness, she tells them that she has decided to spend the rest of her life as a pilgrim in exile so that Bertrand can return. Despite their pleas for her to stay, she dresses in pilgrim's garb, takes an ample supply of money, and departs for Florence.

In contrast to her vain and easily agitated husband, Gilette is strong and composed, not to mention clever—a wife that anyone should be proud to have. In the face of his ongoing repudiation, she doesn't despair but instead decides to match wits with him and figure out a way to earn his love. In her eventual success, she will prove The Decameron*'s thesis that nobility is better found in character than in wealth or status.*

In Florence, Gilette soon catches sight of Bertrand. Her innkeeper explains that he is an affable gentleman who is hopelessly in love with the daughter of a noblewoman who has fallen into poverty but still protects her daughter's honor. Gilette ingratiates herself with the Impoverished Noblewoman, promising that if they work together, they can overcome their ill **fortune** and be restored. She reveals her identity and offers to pay the daughter's dowery if they will help her.

Bertrand's love interest, noble in title but impoverished, is the opposite of Gilette, who was wealthy but bourgeoise before their marriage. In paying attention to this new girl, Bertrand shows the consistency of his views—even if he is valuing the wrong indicators of worth. However, because he's already married, the only relationship Bertrand could have with this girl—his social equal—is an illicit one that would ruin her reputation, which suggests that his values aren't entirely consistent. In this way, despite his noble title, he is inferior to Gilette, who demonstrates constancy and intelligence. The proposal Gilette makes to the Impoverished Noblewoman is yet another example of fortune's machinations. Although all three women have been turned to the bottom of fortune's wheel, by working together they can rise up once again.

Gilette wants the Impoverished Noblewoman to send a messenger to Bertrand saying that her daughter is ready to become his lover, but first she wants his ring as a **gift**. Once Gilette has it, she wants the Noblewoman to secretly invite him to sleep with her daughter, but to substitute Gilette (who needs to become pregnant). Because any hint of sexual involvement with Bertrand will ruin her daughter's reputation, the Noblewoman is wary. But believing it to be noble and correct to help Gilette retrieve her husband, she agrees to participate.

As women, the reputations of both Gilette and the girl are subject to their sexual experience: the girl must preserve her virginal reputation at all costs, while Gilette must find a way to get pregnant to ensure her place at Bertrand's side. It's risky for Gilette because it's her only path to regaining her husband, and it's risky to the girl because marriage to a wealthy man is her only path out of poverty. Gilette has the Impoverished Noblewoman demand Bertrand's precious ring as a lover's token—a valuable gift that confirms his intentions—so that she can fulfil the first of his conditions. But as a lover's token, it also functions to create a bond of obligation between Bertrand and his love interest: since he has given her a gift, he expects her to have sex with him. Finally, it's notable that Gilette employs a switched-lover ploy, which also featured in Fiammetta's Day 3 tale of Catella (III, 5), but whereas in Fiammetta's tale the trick was played in bad faith on a faithful wife, this time it is played for upright reasons by the faithful wife.

Bertrand falls for their plan, and contentedly sleeps with Gilette—thinking her to be the Impoverished Noblewoman's daughter—many times. Once she realizes that she's become pregnant, Gilette gives the Noblewoman a generous **gift** of thanks and then returns to her inn, where she stays until she gives birth to twin sons who are the exact image of their father. Meanwhile, Bertrand returns to Roussillon.

Bertrand's delight in the affair he thinks is with the girl but is actually with his wife emphasizes how silly and shallow his repudiation of Gilette was: they have a shared upbringing, she's charming and intelligent, she has shown her capacity for leadership of his lands, and they're erotically well-matched; the only thing that separates them is his noble title and her comparatively humble roots. This encapsulates The Decameron*'s argument that nobility and the value of personal character always show whether someone is rich or poor.*

After their babies are born, Gilette secretly returns to Roussillon just in time for a great feast. Wearing the ring and carrying his children, she enters Bertrand's palace and throws herself at his feet. She tells her story, and he is so impressed with their children's beauty and with her persistence and intelligence that he not only honors his promise to accept her as his wife but does so willingly, and with great affection. From that day forward, he "loved her and held her in the greatest esteem."

In the end, fortune not only restores Gilette to her husband's side but elevates her beyond her initial position, since Bertrand finally loves and esteems her as an intelligent, faithful, and persistent wife. Notably, her character hasn't changed throughout the tale; only his ability to see it and to understand its value has.

DAY 3: TENTH TALE

Dioneo, noting that love's urgings can be felt in the rugged wilderness as much as in a dainty bedchamber, prepares to teach the company how to put the devil back into Hell.

The preceding story's plot was based on aristocratic concerns for wealth and status and featured a persistent woman. In his typical fashion, Dioneo will take these themes and use them as an excuse to tell a raunchy tale.

In Gafsa, a 14-year-old girl named Alibech begins a spiritual quest. Although she herself is not Christian, she asks one of the town's many Christians how to best "serve God" and is told that it is to flee earthly goods, like the ascetic holy men in the desert. Being a literal-minded adolescent, Alibech heads straight for the desert.

Like Alatiel (II, 7), Alibech isn't a Christian, and this is an important early clue that her adventures are going to take place outside of traditional Christian moral paradigms. The advice of the Christian sends her into the desert to live like the Desert Fathers—early Christian hermits whose lives of privation and prayer in the North African deserts paved the way for the development of monasticism. Although these men were generally considered very holy, and the setup of this tale echoes Neifile's first tale (in which a virtuous "pagan" converted to Christianity), because this is Dioneo's tale, readers should be ready for a sudden shift of register.

Several days later, nearly dead, Alibech stumbles upon the hut of one of these holy men. The hermit gives her food and water, but (mindful of sexual temptation) sends her on her way. She passes from one hut to another until she meets Rustico, a young hermit who wants to test his willpower and who therefore invites Alibech to stay with him.

The first few desert hermits Alibech encounters provide her Christian charity but quickly send her on her way, since they're wise enough to understand that no amount of fasting or holiness can completely quench the human sex drive. Rustico, however, is young and arrogant enough to believe in the strength of his virtue. This setup also draws on the stories of Desert Fathers who were visited and tested by the Devil in the guise of a beautiful woman.

Unfortunately, Rustico's faith in his ability to resist temptation was unfounded, and he is soon plotting for a way to subtly seduce Alibech. He realizes that he can take advantage of her complete innocence of sexual knowledge. After delivering a long sermon about the devil's power and the importance of helping God by casting him back into Hell, he undresses and has Alibech do the same. They kneel as if for prayer, and looking at Alibech's naked body causes the "resurrection" of Rustico's flesh. Confused by his erection, she asks what is sticking out in front of his body, and he tells her that it's the devil attacking him. He then explains that although she doesn't have a devil, she does have Hell, and if they can put the devil there, maybe he will stop attacking Rustico.

No sooner has Rustico realized that his faith in his own willpower was too generous than he's planning what is essentially rape. His willingness to take advantage of her naiveté—highlighted by the innocence she displays when she is confused by his erection—makes their initial sexual encounter very uncomfortable for the audience and highlights the vulnerability of women that reappears throughout the tales. In addition to saying something about the power of lust generally, it also contributes to the tales' anticlerical satire, since this man who has devoted himself to extreme asceticism not only coerces a young woman into having sex, but he uses a sermon about resisting the Devil to do so and lies to her when he describes sex as a religious practice.

Because she is a virgin, Alibech complains that it hurts when Rustico first puts the devil back in Hell, but the more they put the devil back, the more she comes to enjoy the practice. She thinks she understands why the holy men of Gafsa told her that serving God was extremely satisfying. Unfortunately for Rustico, Alibech demands to "serve God" by "put[ting] the devil back in Hell" so frequently that he becomes entirely depleted of vital energy. Feeling that she's not serving God as much as she would like, Alibech complains that since she helped Rustico tame his devil, the least he can do is help her quiet her Hell. Although he tries, he has become so feeble that it's like "chucking a bean into the mouth of a lion."

Although Alibech's subsequent pleasure in sex seems to invite the audience to excuse the initial deception, the uncomfortable fact that she was tricked at first remains—again recalling the story of Alatiel in II, 7 and highlighting both medieval misogynistic stereotypes about insatiable female lust and the inherent vulnerability of women, especially young and inexperienced girls like Alibech. Because the desert hermits made extreme fasts, Rustico doesn't have the energy reserves to satisfy the young and healthy Alibech, and so his inability to control or moderate his lust is punished through an excessive amount of sex. The metaphor of the bean in the lion's mouth both expresses a belief about excessive female desire, which is as alarming as a fierce lion, and humorously describes Rustico's insufficient stamina.

At this point, a fire breaks out in Gafsa, killing Alibech's entire family. A young man named Neerbal, wanting to inherit her wealth, tracks her down in the wilderness. Much to her consternation but Rustico's relief, Neerbal brings her home and marries her. Before their marriage is consummated, the village women ask Alibech what it was like to serve God, and she describes—with words and gestures—putting the devil back in Hell, all the while complaining that Neerbal has done God a disservice by keeping her from this work. The women, laughing, tell her that people in Gafsa also put the devil back in Hell and that Neerbal will be more than happy to help her.

The fire is an example of fortune at work: it rescues Rustico from the hole he dug for himself while also giving Neerbal a chance to increase his wealth, and giving Alibech—although she's reluctant to leave Rustico—the opportunity to have a sexual partner who could satisfy her needs. But because Neerbal marries Alibech as a means to access her familial wealth, it offers a pointed reminder that women were often considered or treated as property and traded between men for wealth and social status.

DAY 3: CONCLUSION

Dioneo's tale makes everyone shake with laughter. Neifile places the crown on Filostrato's head, joking that it is time to see if the wolves can lead the sheep any better than the sheep led the wolves. Laughing, Filostrato declares that if he had been in charge before, the wolves would already have taught the sheep to put the devil back in Hell. Neifile retorts that if he had, the women would have taken a page from the Young Nuns in his story and exhausted them like Masetto. Realizing that Neifile's wit matches his own, Filostrato abandons his jibes and turns to business.

Dioneo's graphic tale meets with approval from all the members of the brigata, *belying modern stereotypes of the Middle Ages as a time of religious repression. The flirty conversation between Neifile and Filostrato shows an openness to certain forms of feminine empowerment—if they stay within the bounds of propriety. In other words, it's okay for Neifile to make sexually suggestive comments as she demonstrates her superior wit and intelligence, but it would not be okay for her to act on her words. But even in this exchange, the extended metaphor, which compares women to sheep and men to wolves, reminds the audience of female vulnerability.*

Because he himself has long been enslaved by his love for one of the ladies (who remains unnamed), Filostrato knows all too well that following the rules of love doesn't necessarily guarantee success. Therefore, he proposes that the next day's theme be "those whose love ended unhappily"—as he expects his own love to end.

Filostrato's name means "vanquished by love," and his character demonstrates the intersection of love's power and fortune's: although he loves his lady as a refined lover should (following the rules of fin'amors *or refined loving), she hasn't accepted his advances. Notably, only one of the tales on Day 4, which feature unhappy lovers, tells the story of unrequited (unreturned) love. This conflict in the frame narrative—in contrast to the tales, where true love is almost invariably returned—adds a touch of realism, since it shows that not everyone has a fairy-tale happy ending.*

The company remains in the delightful **garden**—some hunting, some singing songs about romances, others playing games—until supper, after which they prepare to enjoy some music. Filostrato asks Lauretta to sing, and she offers one of her own songs with the warning that the only songs she can remember are sad. Her song of lamentation complains about the unhappy fate of a woman whose lover has died and who has been given in marriage to a jealous and unworthy husband.

Lauretta's song, which previews Day 4's theme of unhappily ended love affairs, contrasts sharply with the delightful setting of the garden and the joy of the brigata*'s aristocratic activities. No matter how excessive the day's stories become—and the next day will feature some very sad stories indeed—the return to the* brigata *at the end of each set imagines order being reimposed on a sometimes-chaotic world. It also highlights the status of women as vulnerable to male control, exemplified by the unsuitable marriage and the jealous husband.*

DAY 4: INTRODUCTION

Boccaccio interrupts his narrators at the beginning of the fourth day with some of his own remarks. Although he used to think that only the powerful and popular were assailed by the winds of Envy, even his humble vernacular prose stories have critics. These people make five attacks: he's too fond of ladies; it's degrading for a wise man to indulge in feminine genres like vernacular romance; he should dedicate himself to the Muses; he should write what people will pay for; and his stories are factually inaccurate. He takes this "calmly and coolly" but thinks it necessary to offer a rebuttal before he goes any farther.

Giovanni Boccaccio was an important figure in the rise of vernacular literature—meaning things written in a language other than Latin—in the late Middle Ages. Because it could be read by women with basic literacy, vernacular literature was initially considered inferior to Latin writings, which only people (usually men) with many years of schooling could decipher. However, a burgeoning tradition of lyric poetry, popular romances, and texts like The Decameron *began to challenge the supremacy of Latin. And vernacular masterpieces often translated stories and ideas directly from Latin texts into more widely available forms. The introduction to Day 4 is the second place where Boccaccio explains and defends his deep and abiding affection for women, although many of the tales told on the first three days have featured misogynistic, antifeminist stereotypes that were popular and widespread in the Middle Ages, and almost all of the women in Day IV's tales will meet grisly ends. It's also notable that Boccaccio's aside begins with what readers today might call a "humblebrag": people can criticize him only because his works are popular enough to have merited widespread attention. The Muses are figures from classical Greek mythology, where they are the nine goddesses of various forms of poetic inspiration.*

Boccaccio offers a story to help rebut the first of these criticisms. A long time ago, a widower named Filippo Balducci fled Florence with his two-year-old to serve God as hermits. They went to Mount Asinaio, where they lived, fasting and praying, in a cave. Thus, Filippo's Son grew up innocent of worldly things—when it was necessary, Filippo went to Florence for supplies alone.

Although it is abbreviated somewhat, Boccaccio's tale in the introduction to Day 4 pushes the total number in the collection to 101. Prior to the late 20th century, editors and translators who were bothered by the pornographic nature of the last tale of Day 3 frequently substituted this tale for that one. Filippo and his son would have gone to Monte Senario, where many Florentine hermits lived in caves, but to add to the story's humor, Boccaccio mispronounces the name to make it "Mt. Asinaio" or "Mount Donkeyman," which hints at Filippo's foolishness.

But when Filippo's Son is 18, he offers to help Filippo Balducci with these errands. Relying on the strength of his son's innocence and dedication to God, Filippo brings him to Florence, where he is amazed by the wealth, architecture, and grandeur of the city. When they pass some elegantly dressed ladies, Filippo's Son is confused and asks what they are called. Grudgingly, Filippo identifies them as "goslings," and even without previous knowledge of feminine charms, all Filippo's Son now wants is a "gosling" of his own.

Unlike the hermit Rustico in the previous tale (III, 10), Filippo and his son live the way hermits ought to—humbly dedicated to a life of fasting and prayer. Their pious example, which directly contrasts with the portrayal of most of the monks, nuns, and priests in the tales, places value in true faith, rather than the trappings and appearance of medieval religion. The reaction of Filippo's son to the Florentine ladies is meant to illustrate the power that a woman's beauty holds over any man. Despite being so sheltered he doesn't even know what a woman is, Filippo's son is nevertheless naturally attracted to them. But, more subtly, the story aligns the women with the other fascinating sights of the city, reducing them to objects to be admired and possessed rather than allowing them full humanity. Thus, even as he uses this story to allegedly prove his devotion to ladies, Boccaccio reveals a superior, objectifying attitude towards them.

Filippo Balducci says that these "goslings" are evil, but Filippo's Son maintains that they are lovelier than the images of angels that he's seen. He promises to feed his new pet by hand. Filippo, regretting the trip, tells his son that these birds are evil and quips that women's mouths aren't where his son thinks they are, nor is their diet what he expects.

Even in a story designed to demonstrate affection for women, Boccaccio can't escape misogynistic stereotypes of excessive female desire, which Filippo gestures to when he warns his son that these "birds" have a special diet (in other words, insatiable sexual appetites). And Filippo's blanket statement that women are just "evil" is an overt example of the antifeminism that can be found in The Decameron.

At this point, Boccaccio cuts the tale short since it has already illustrated the overpowering nature of female beauty. Boccaccio freely admits his fondness of ladies and desire to please them. If a man yet unaware of the amorous kisses and "blissful embraces" that women can bestow were captivated by them, how could he resist? God, through Nature, has given men bodies to love women, so Boccaccio's adoration is natural.

Boccaccio invokes Nature, a goddess-like figure in medieval society who was understood to fulfil God's will that humans be fruitful and multiply by encouraging their sex drive. Although once again Boccaccio is claiming to be motivated by love and adoration for women, his excuses for himself come dangerously close to suggesting that women themselves are to blame for the attention he pays them.

As for his age, Boccaccio quips that the leek's tail stays green even when its head is white, and history offers many examples of older men who pleased their ladies. The Muses are ladies, but they are too distant to inspire him, unlike the women he sees around him each day. He tells critics who mocked his poverty that he doesn't want their money anyway, and he challenges those who complain about factual accuracy to point to specific mistakes. He promises to redouble his efforts to please readers, and then he returns to his story. On the morning of the fourth day, the companions arise and pleasantly while away the hours in the **garden** until Filostrato gathers them together and asks Fiammetta to tell the first tale.

Boccaccio's comments about leeks play on the vegetable's visual similarity to male anatomy, as well as playing with the contrast between its green leaves (where green represents youth and vigor) and white head (which, with its white, hair-like roots, resembles the head of an old man). This metaphor recalls the arguments made earlier by Master Alberto defending the affections of older men (I, 10), even as it pushes back against the consistent representation of old men as sexually impotent (for example, Ricciardo di Chinzica in II, 10 or Friar Puccio in III, 4).

DAY 4: FIRST TALE

Fiammetta thinks it's cruel to be asked to tell tales of unhappy lovers, especially since the company left Florence to avoid their woes. Nevertheless, she will fulfil Filostrato's command with the story of Tancredi and his daughter (later identified as Ghismonda). Tancredi loves Ghismonda so much that he takes longer than usual to find her a husband, and when she's quickly widowed, he doesn't bother to find her a new husband at all but keeps her home with himself.

Day 4 begins with a complaint about the theme and a suggestion that Filostrato's desire to hear stories of misery is, in some important way, as unbalanced as the chaos the brigata *left behind in Florence. Nevertheless, the company is made up of self-controlled young men and women, and she will follow the command of her (temporary) sovereign to the best of her ability. Her tale begins with a harsh reminder of the second-class and objectified position of women, who are subject to their male relatives (husbands, fathers, brothers). Tancredi hesitates to find her a husband the first time and refuses outright the second, and she is captive to his desire to keep her.*

Ghismonda is beautiful, vivacious, and "has rather more intelligence than a woman needs." Living a grand life in her father's home but with her sexual needs ignored, she decides to take a lover. She falls for Tancredi's valet, Guiscardo, who is of humble birth but has an excellent and noble character. He returns her affections, and the two look for a way to be together.

Although The Decameron *generally celebrates intelligence and at several points feminine wit is especially praised, here Ghismonda's intelligence is presented as a liability. Fiammetta, like many of the* brigata*'s women, is as likely to voice antifeminist sentiment as her male companions. Again, despite Boccaccio's claims to love and respect women, the book's general outlook on females is based in medieval misogynistic or antifeminist stereotypes. Ghismonda has very little recourse when her father decides to keep her as his own possession instead of arranging a second marriage for her. Thus, Tancredi sets up himself the circumstances under which Ghismonda will allegedly stain his honor by taking a secret lover to fulfil her natural sexual longings. The contrast between Guiscardo's social status and his excellent character contributes to the book's argument that a person's true worth is to be found in their character rather than their station in the world or their wealth.*

Ghismonda smuggles a letter to Guiscardo explaining that a huge cave lies under the palace with steps leading up to a door in her bedroom. The cave can be accessed through a shaft on the hillside that has been obscured by years of undergrowth. Ghismonda tells Guiscardo to wear a leather suit for protection from the brambles, to drop into the cavern, and to climb the stairs to her room. She excuses her maids, Guiscardo climbs the staircase, and the two make rapturous love for the better part of the day.

Ghismonda demonstrates her intelligence when she comes up with a way to meet with her lover and a clever way to get the message to him secretly. As in other tales, Giovanni Boccaccio includes specific details that add to the feeling of realism in his writing, in this case the protective clothing Guiscardo must wear to protect himself from the brambles.

Having established this discreet way of meeting, they enjoy each other often until their happiness attracts the envy of **fortune**. Tancredi habitually comes to Ghismonda's bedroom to chat. One day, while she's in the **garden**, he sits down behind her bed to wait for her, and he falls asleep. He wakes up to the sound of Ghismonda and Guiscardo having sex. Horrified, he keeps quiet, and when the lovers part, he climbs out of a window and secretly returns to his own rooms.

Tancredi expresses his immoderate love for his daughter when he expects to be able to have access to her for conversations whenever he wants. Even her bedroom isn't a private space, demonstrating her vulnerability to his control. The theme of the day's tale dictates that her happy affair will be short-lived, but the tale places the blame on fortune, since the lovers are discovered through no indiscretion of their own, but through random chance. The garden is one of the few spaces to which Ghismonda has access, although in this tale it doesn't represent a place of protection for the lovers, but rather a space of danger, since her time there indirectly allows Tancredi to observe Ghismonda and Guiscardo together.

At nightfall, Tancredi has Guiscardo arrested. The prince chastises the valet for the crime he has committed "against that which belongs to me." Guiscardo answers, "Neither you nor I can resist the power of Love." The next day, Tancredi confronts Ghismonda. He so completely trusted her honesty and virtue that he couldn't have imagined she would take a lover unless he saw it for himself—which he did. He's also horrified that she picked a base-born servant. He is torn between punishing her as she deserves and forgiving her out of love, and he demands an explanation before deciding.

When Tancredi chastises Guiscardo for taking one of his possessions, he means sexual access to his daughter. Although he's failed in his duty to find Ghismonda a new husband, she—and her sexuality—are under his control until he does. Guiscardo's retort implies that Tancredi's love for his daughter is in some way inappropriate, or at least uncontrollable. Tancredi also articulates a worldview shared by other aristocratic and royal characters in the tales that love affairs might be natural, but crossing class lines should be avoided at all costs.

Ghismonda assumes that Guiscardo is already dead, and, resolved to quickly follow him, answers her father with a proud heart that helps her to overcome her feminine weakness. Instead of "screaming and sobbing" like most women, she answers Tancredi with neither contrition nor "womanly distress." She admits to loving Guiscardo, a circumstance that was in part prompted by her father's refusal to find her a new husband and her enforced idleness in his home. Pointing out that she is flesh and blood, young, and sexually experienced, it's only natural that her "amorous longings" would find an outlet.

Ghismonda's self-control in the face of enormous personal tragedy is very impressive. And it is a notable contrast to antifeminist assumptions about women being weak and emotional. Throughout this tale, Ghismonda proves herself to be the self-regulated one while her father is guided by excessive emotionality. In defending her actions, she raises the specter of excessive female desire that forms an important part of antifeminist stereotypes, but her explanation remains calm, measured, and rational, based in an understanding of the human sex drive as natural and necessary. And the "enforced idleness" that contributed to her falling in love with Guiscardo recalls the lovesickness of the French Princess in II, 8 and the reasons given by Boccaccio for why women suffer more acutely from love than men in the Prologue.

Ghismonda didn't take a random lover but looked carefully for someone who was worthy of her love. Tancredi implied that he would have preferred her to have taken a noble lover, but **fortune** frequently elevates the unworthy and oppresses the noble-spirited; class shouldn't be taken as the only indication of a person's worth. Ghismonda was attracted to Guiscardo's character, which Tancredi's high opinion confirmed. One can't call Guiscardo base, and if he's poor it's only because of Tancredi's stingy payments. Ghismonda, refusing to beg for mercy and prepared to die, sends Tancredi away.

Ghismonda's defense of her choice of lover is one of the clearest indictments in the tales of the idea that wealth and status are the markers of nobility rather than character or temperament. She also connects status to fortune—the blind force that moves humans about more or less at random. Titles and wealth are accidents of fortune since they are more often conferred by birth rather than earned by integrity and effort. If Guiscardo isn't a gentleman it's not his fault but the fault of fortune, and maybe Tancredi's for refusing to pay him as richly as his character deserves.

Tancredi doesn't believe that Ghismonda will commit suicide, so he decides it's safe to get the revenge he wants by killing Guiscardo. He has Guiscardo's heart put into a gold chalice and sent to Ghismonda with the words: "Your father sends you this to comfort you in the loss of your dearest possession, just as you have comforted him in the loss of his." Ghismonda has already prepared a poisonous potion. Declaring that the gold vessel is a worthy coffin for Guiscardo, Ghismonda sends a return message to her father saying that his **gift** clearly shows how he loves her.

It doesn't seem like Tancredi's anger is fully satisfied by executing Guiscardo, so he taunts Ghismonda as well. Although he's clearly underestimated her in his belief that she won't commit suicide, it's possible to interpret the "gift" of Guiscardo's heart as a test designed to see if she loves her father more than her lover. Its excessive nature is also an example of Tancredi's inability to control himself. Notably, the words of his message remind Ghismonda that women are subject to the control and authority of their men generally while they reassert his ownership of Ghismonda specifically. And finally, Tancredi's spiteful actions demonstrate his inability to be as dignified as either his daughter or her allegedly low-class lover.

Looking at Guiscardo's heart, Ghismonda curses her father's cruelty and mourns the short life allotted to her lover by **fortune**. She floods the chalice with silent tears and kisses the heart over and over. When she feels that her mourning has been sufficient, she adds the poison to the chalice and, without any fear, drinks it and lies down with the heart to wait for death. Her maids, confused by her words and unaware of the heart's origin, fetch Tancredi, who "bursts into floods of tears" on seeing her. Reproaching her father for his cruelty, Ghismonda asks that she be buried publicly with Guiscardo. She then dies. Amid much mourning and tardy repentance, Tancredi honorably buries his daughter with her lover.

Although fortune may have allotted Guiscardo a short (and low-class) life, Ghismonda is clear that responsibility for his death, the gruesome abuse of his corpse, and her impending suicide lie with her father. The maids are confused about what's happening because the affair was a closely-kept secret and only gained the power to ruin Ghismonda's reputation (or Tancredi's) after he gave in to his overpowering jealousy and thirst for revenge. Her dying wish drives this circumstance home in forcing Tancredi to publicly acknowledge his daughter's affair, which he feels dishonors himself. Her silent tears yet again show her to be in far greater command of herself than her father is, and they vividly contrast with his excessive display of emotion (coded as womanly according to the book's gender stereotypes) over her death.

DAY 4: SECOND TALE

Everyone weeps at the conclusion of Fiammetta's tale, except Filostrato, who declares that Ghismonda and Guiscardo were luckier than him; they got to enjoy love for a time, but he dies a thousand daily deaths with no hope of reward. He asks Pampinea to speak next, and she—wanting to lighten the mood—decides to tell a lighthearted tale that still technically fits Filostrato's theme. It also illustrates the hypocrisy of members of the religious orders, who are humble in asking for the money they crave but bold in criticizing people for their sins, even though the monks and nuns are often sinful themselves.

While most of the company expresses sympathy for the plight of Ghismonda and Guiscardo, Filostrato expresses jealousy instead, in line with his characterization as a love-tortured soul. Pampinea demonstrates her characteristic tact and wisdom in quickly reading the mood of the room and selecting a story that will cheer her companions up while also obeying the sovereign's commands. The introduction to her tale directly criticizes the clergy for their hypocrisy and greed, and her tale will provide one of the funnier examples of anticlerical satire in the book.

An extraordinarily wicked man named Berto della Massa, having destroyed his reputation in his hometown, moves to Venice pretending to be a holy man, then joins the Franciscans under the name Friar Alberto. Friar Alberto seems to live a holy life and preaches about repentance and abstinence, but he's just biding his time until he has an opportunity to return secretly to his sinful ways. In addition to his monastic vocation, Friar Alberto even gets himself ordained, and as a priest, he celebrates the mass while weeping copious tears over Christ's Passion.

Friar Alberto's primary character trait is excess: he's excessively sinful as a lay person and he's excessively emotional as a priest. His tearful display while celebrating mass echoes famous 12th-century holy women called "beguines," many of whom were known for their copious tears. Priests and monks were separate categories in the medieval church, although some men took both monastic and clerical (priest's) vows as Friar Alberto has done here.

His tears and holy reputation convince many Venetians to trust Friar Alberto with their souls and their worldly goods. One of these credulous Venetians is the wife of a wealthy merchant, a "frivolous and scatterbrained" woman named Monna Lisetta. While her husband is away, she comes to Friar Alberto for confession, during which he demands to know if she has a lover. Monna Lisetta is offended, declaring that although anyone with eyes can see that she's beautiful enough to have as many lovers as she wants, she doesn't serve every man who comes along because her charms would be exceptional even in Heaven.

Of course, being an evidently holy man grants Friar Alberto easy access to money, meaning that he has an easier time coming by ill-gotten gains as a priest than he did as a criminal before. The idea that priests were as bad as or worse than criminals is a keystone of anticlerical satire. The portrait of Monna Lisetta involves both antifeminist stereotypes (for example, her vanity and lack of intelligence) and Florentine stereotypes about Venetians, which were founded in their cities' competition as important late-medieval trade centers. In this caricature, Venetians are scatterbrained, gullible, and ignorant.

Realizing that Monna Lisetta is easy prey because she's not bright, Friar Alberto falls in love with her. He chastises her vanity, greatly offending her. But a few days later, he visits her at home to beg forgiveness. That same night, the Archangel Gabriel appeared to him in a dream and beat him with a stick for having the impertinence to insult Monna Lisetta, whom Gabriel loves almost as dearly as he loves God. "Lady Bighead" is delighted, and there's more: Gabriel wants to spend the night with her while inhabiting a human body. He asked Friar Alberto to arrange it for him.

Monna Lisetta may not be very bright—and the story Friar Alberto tells certainly strains belief—but his behavior towards her is still uncomfortably predatory, emphasizing the vulnerability of women to the tricks of men.

Because Gabriel loves her, Monna Lisetta should consider herself "the most blessed woman on earth." She is thrilled and ready to accept if the angel promises not to leave her for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Friar Alberto humbly suggests that she ask the angel to use his body as a vehicle, while his soul will rest safely in heaven. Thinking this will make up for the beating he endured on her behalf, Lisetta agrees.

The language Friar Alberto uses here draws on the story of the Annunciation, where the Archangel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary and told her that she had been chosen to bear the son of God. Lisetta demonstrates her ignorance and vanity when she is silly and sacrilegious enough to believe that an angel wanted to be her lover and to fear that the famously virginal Mary would be a credible rival.

After this interview, Monna Lisetta struts around her room with her head held so high that "her smock rose clear of her bottom." Meanwhile, Friar Alberto eats meat and other delicacies to ensure an adequate performance in bed. After dark, he puts on an angelic costume and goes to Lisetta's bedroom. She falls on her knees and "Gabriel" blesses her before they go to bed. Friar Alberto is a virile lover who greatly delights Monna Lisetta with his physical prowess.

While the image of Monna Lisetta's bigheadedness is certainly an indictment of women for their vanity (compare this, for example, to Filostrato's warnings against vanity at the beginning of II, 7), it's also simply a funny image that works to dispel the trauma of the preceding story. When Friar Alberto stuffs himself with fine food, he both prepares for his upcoming sexual adventures (since he will need his strength) and he acts out another sin for which the medieval clergy were often criticized: gluttony, or excessive indulgence in food and alcohol. When Lisetta falls on her knees before the "angel" and Alberto blesses her, they assume the positions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Archangel Gabriel in the Annunciation, both recalling the language Alberto used in relating his dream, and emphasizing Lisetta's vanity, since she seems to believe herself to be on Mary's level. The adoration and blessing and the description of the sex are also meant to be funny.

The next day, Monna Lisetta visits Friar Alberto, who claims to have no idea what happened to his body while his soul was in Paradise. She gives him a clue: there's a kiss under his left breast that will be there for a week. "Gabriel" comes to Monna Lisetta at regular intervals until gossip of the affair comes out after she brags to a friend about how her beauty snared her a heavenly lover. The friend finds this so unbelievable and hilarious that she can't help but chatter about it to her other friends, and ultimately Monna Lisetta's brothers-in-law hear about the affair.

Monna Lisetta, in the throes of lovemaking, put a hickey on Alberto's body when it was possessed by "Gabriel." In contrast to other lovers in this day's tales, it's not the caprice of fortune that endangers the affair, but Lisetta's vanity and inability to resist the temptation to brag about her superlative lover. And her friend's reaction to the story dispels doubt that anyone but a nitwit would have believed Alberto's story.

Monna Lisetta's brothers-in-law lay in wait to catch her lover, and the next time Friar Alberto stops by they are pounding at the door as he takes his clothes off. He leaps from the window and swims across the canal below, then throws himself on the mercy of an Honest Man living nearby, who puts Alberto to bed and tells him to stay there while he attends to his own business.

In the absence of her husband from Venice, Lisetta's brothers-in-law act together to protect his honor by catching her and her lover in the act. And although Alberto is neither an angel nor possessed by one, his fear certainly encourages him to "fly" (or fall) from the window.

By morning, the Honest Man has heard the rumors about the "angel" who left his wings with Monna Lisetta the previous night. Putting two and two together, he demands a large sum of money from Friar Alberto for his silence, then offers to smuggle him out of town in disguise, since there's a carnival going on. Alberto is too scared of Monna Lisetta's in-laws to refuse.

The "Honest Man" is quick to blackmail Friar Alberto when he senses an opportunity to make some easy money, adding to the tale's stereotype of Venetians as dishonest and greedy. While Friar Alberto was willing to dress in a ridiculous costume to bed Monna Lisetta, he's wisely more cautious when it comes to donning this new disguise—although he's at the mercy of his host and protector. Since the day's theme is lovers whose affairs end badly, his fear foreshadows his coming embarrassment—or worse.

The Honest Man smears Friar Alberto with honey, covers him with feathers, gives him a mask and a club, and chains him to some dogs. Meanwhile—remember that everyone knows Venetians are dishonest tricksters!—his friend spreads the word that the Archangel Gabriel will be at the carnival. When the Honest Man leads Alberto to the square, he ties him to a pillar and dramatically unmasks him. Recognizing the allegedly holy man, onlookers hurl trash and abuse at Friar Alberto until the rest of the Franciscans whisk him off to the monastery, where he ends his days in miserable penance.

Friar Alberto's host disguises him as a Wildman, a medieval character covered in hair or fur (the honey-stuck feathers of Alberto's costume) and frequently associated with madness or a repudiation of societal norms. The association with insanity seems to be a particular point of this tale's humor: having dressed himself up and played the part of a priest and an angel, Alberto is exposed as a potentially insane object of ridicule. And his love story ends unhappily when he finds himself confined in the monastery for the remainder of his days.

DAY 4: THIRD TALE

Filostrato, annoyed that Pampinea told a funny tale, hopes that Lauretta will do better. Despite her feeling that his focus on misery is unkind to lovers, Lauretta nevertheless offers a pitiful tale warning against anger. Anger is a "thoughtless impulse" that "expels all reason" and sets "hearts ablaze," and it's most damaging in women, who are more easily angered and whose wrath burns hotter, because they are "more delicate" and "capricious" than men.

Filostrato, who picked the day's theme evidently hoping to either wallow in his own misery or force his companions to feel some of his pain, is upset that Pampinea has skirted his intent, although he can't directly fault her since she prudently fulfilled his command and told a story where a love affair ends unluckily. Lauretta's turn as narrator begins with a lengthy diatribe criticizing women for the vice of anger. The way she describes it, anger is a sin of excess, inherently opposed to rationality and intelligence, so her story will also contribute to The Decameron*'s exploration of moderation and imbalance. Lauretta's explanations for why women are particularly prone to this sin are based both in antifeminist sentiment vilifying women generally and in medieval conceptions of anatomy and physiology, which considered women to be made of lighter, less substantial matter than men. Yet her characterization of women flies in the face of the day's first tale, where Ghismonda demonstrated masterful self-control and it was her father, Tancredi, who was prone to violent rage and excessive displays of emotion (III, 1).*

In Marseilles, relatives of N'Arnald Civada have arranged marriages for his daughters, contingent on his return home. Ninetta and Maddalena are twins, and their younger sister is named Bertella. Ninetta loves a poor but noble-born man named Restagnone, and they've been carrying on an affair for a while. Meanwhile, two wealthy young men, Folco and Ughetto, are in love with Maddalena and Bertella, respectively.

This tale returns again to the world and concerns of merchants and their families. The three sisters come from wealth but aren't nobly born. In contrast, Restagnone is noble but poor, reminding the audience that accidents of fortune such as wealth and title are poor indications of a person's true character or worth.

When Restagnone learns about the men courting Ninetta's sisters, he thinks he can repair his own **fortune** with their wealth. He promises Folco and Ughetto that if they give him one third of their combined wealth, he will help them to carry their ladies far away to live happily. The extremely lovesick young men readily agree and pick Crete as their destination. Once everything is prepared, Ninetta gets her sisters' agreement and, stealing money and jewels from their father's stores, they join their lovers and set sail for Crete, where they live "like lords."

In tying her sisters' elopement to her own, Ninetta shows that men aren't the only ones who can callously use women as bargaining objects. The girls' theft of money and jewels from their father's coffers parallels their theft of themselves—and the wealth and connections their arranged marriages would have provided—from him. In Crete, they are initially happy since their lovers' status and wealth can underwrite a lavish lifestyle.

But, as everyone knows, too much of a good thing often leads to sorrow. Restagnone becomes bored with Ninetta and falls in love with a Cretan girl. Ninetta, "distraught with jealousy," subjects Restagnone to verbal abuse, but her resentment only confirms Restagnone's infatuation. Soon, Ninetta's love has turned to "bitter hatred." In a "paroxysm of rage" she buys poison from an old crone and serves it to Restagnone.

It is Ninetta's misfortune that the apparent safety she finds with her lover in Crete eventually bores him so much that he finds a new lover to pursue. While jealousy in the tales (as elsewhere in medieval literature) is usually associated with husbands and male lovers, like Catella (III, 6), Ninetta expresses jealousy, too. And although her jealousy is a reasonable response to Restagnone's betrayal, the tale leans on antifeminist stereotypes in painting her rage as excessively emotional and unreasonable.

When the crone runs afoul of the law, she confesses to her part in Restagnone's murder, and the Duke of Crete arrests Ninetta. Folco, Ughetto, and their ladies beg leniency for Ninetta. Maddalena goes further and offers to sleep with the Duke, who loves her, if he will release her sister and keep the affair quiet. Pretending that he's executed Ninetta by drowning, the Duke smuggles Ninetta to her sister in a sack.

If Ninetta was initially unlucky to lose Restagnone's interest, fortune has worse in store for her when the old crone implicates her in her lover's murder. Given that jealousy lay at the root of her sister's misfortune, it is somewhat surprising that Maddalena would risk sleeping with the Duke to free her sister. Her actions could be interpreted through the lens of excessive female lustfulness, or as a shrewd use of the slim power she possesses as a woman in a culture dominated by men.

But despite Maddalena's best efforts, Folco discovers Ninetta hidden in their home. Knowing that the Duke of Crete loves Maddalena, Folco immediately suspects what's happened, and although she desperately tries to spin a believable tale, Maddalena eventually confesses the truth. In a "fit of blazing fury" Falco strikes her dead with his sword, then hurries Ninetta aboard a ship with the promise that he's taking her to safety. Trusting him and anxious to complete her escape, she goes willingly, but they're never seen again.

Despite Lauretta's claim that women are more prone to excessive anger than men, Folco reacts to Maddalena's infidelity in the exact same way that Ninetta reacted to Restagnone's unfaithfulness. Moreover, Folco's disappearance with Ninetta suggests that he's guilty of murdering twice as many people. Interpreting the same behavior more favorably when done by a man than a woman is typical of antifeminist bias.

The next day, the Duke of Crete hears about the discovery of Maddalena's corpse. He arrests Ughetto and Bertella, torturing them until they confess to being responsible with Falco for her death. They bribe their guards and escape to Rhodes, where they soon die in miserable poverty.

Although Bertella and Ughetto are innocent of the excessive jealousy and anger that destroy the others, they aren't immune to fortune's decrees. Despite not deserving it, they also find themselves at the bottom of fortune's wheel.

DAY 4: FOURTH TALE

Elissa offers her tale as evidence against the erroneous belief that love can only strike his victims through their eyes and that no one can fall in love with someone based on their reputation. When William the Second of Sicily's son dies before him, he raises his grandson, Gerbino, as his heir apparent. Gerbino grows into a handsome man with a reputation for valor and courtesy.

The idea of love striking a victim through the eyes comes directly from medieval conceptions of fin'amors *(refined loving), and it is particularly important in the poetry of the "dolce stil novo" group headed by Giovanni Boccaccio's friend and mentor, Petrarch. However, it's also possible for a person to fall in love with someone from afar (called "*amor du lonh*") by hearing a description of their great beauty or exceptionally worthy character. Other examples in* The Decameron *include King Philip's desire for the Marchioness of Montferrat (I, 5) and Lodovico's love for Madonna Beatrice in (VII, 7). While William the Second was a historical ruler of Sicily, Giovanni Boccaccio has invented his son and grandson. As he often does throughout the tales, he intermingles historically accurate details and names with characters and events of his own creation.*

Because her father is a tributary of his grandfather, the Tunisian Princess hears about Gerbino and falls in love with him. Likewise, when tales of her beauty and grace reach Sicily, Gerbino falls no less passionately in love with her. Although he can't find a reasonable excuse to travel to Tunis, they send messages and **gifts** through Gerbino's friends while they wait for **fortune** to give them an opportunity to meet.

*Gerbino and the Tunisian Princess experience classic "*amor du lonh*" for each other. Their similar social standing, equal physical attractiveness, and equally noble temperaments make them the kind of well-matched couple that usually finds a happy ending in* The Decameron. *Yet, because their story is told on Day 4, the audience already knows that the gifts they exchange to show their devotion are in vain and that fortune won't give them the opportunity they desire.*

While they wait, the Tunisian Princess's father plans to marry her to the King of Grenada, greatly distressing the lovers. Somehow, he knows enough about Gerbino's devotion to ask King William the Second for assurances that he won't interfere with the wedding plans. The King sends a glove as a token of peace, catching Gerbino between his grandfather's promise and his love for the lady. The latter wins.

Like so many other women in the tales, the Tunisian Princess is subject to her father's authority and is reduced to an object that he has the power to give to another man. Although he has diplomatic ties with Sicily, unfortunately for Gerbino, the king of Tunis plans to give his daughter to another ally as a wife. Just as Gerbino and the Princess exchanged gifts that bound them together, the gift of King William's glove establishes a promise that neither he nor Gerbino will interfere in the Tunisian king's affairs.

Gerbino outfits two ships to intercept the Tunisian Princess's ship, promising all the plunder to his crew. When he announces himself, the officers wave King William the Second's glove and make it clear that they won't surrender without a fight. Quipping that the glove is useless without a falcon, Gerbino sets a small boat aflame and rams it into the Princess's ship. Rather than surrendering, the Tunisian officers kill the Princess and throw her into the sea, saying, "Take her thus…in the form that your treachery deserves."

The power of love over all other forces, including political alliance and familial duty, induces Gerbino to mock the token his grandfather offered to another ruler as an earnest promise of noninterference. Being murdered by her own guards demonstrates the Tunisian Princess's value as one of her father's possessions rather than his child: it's better to kill her than to allow the wrong man to have her.

Gerbino and his pirates clamber aboard for plunder, but their victory is unrewarding. Gerbino retrieves the Tunisian Princess's body from the sea and buries it in Sicily. When her father hears what has happened, he protests the breach of promise to King William the Second, who arrests Gerbino, sentences him to death, and has him immediately beheaded rather than lose his own reputation for keeping his word.

For Gerbino, love is more important than political alliances or personal honor. But for his grandfather, William, it's the opposite. Gerbino's uncontrollable love for the Tunisian Princess, while honorable in the context of fin'amors, *is dangerous in the context of intricate political alliances.*

DAY 4: FIFTH TALE

Filomena, sighing over the fate of Gerbino and the Tunisian Princess, begins the story of Lisabetta next. Because Lisabetta's Brothers inexplicably failed to arrange a proper marriage for her after their father's death, she falls in love with one of their employees. The handsome Lorenzo reciprocates her feelings, and all goes well for them until the oldest brother happens to see Lisabetta visiting her lover under the cover of darkness. He keeps his silence until he and the others can figure out how to end the affair without bringing discredit on the family's name.

Like other women in the day's tales (for example, Ghismonda in IV, 1), Lisabetta is under the authority of the men in her family and is therefore at the mercy of her brothers' delay in finding her a suitable husband. Because The Decameron *accepts the human sex drive as natural and appropriate, the tale places more blame on the brothers for failing to give Lisabetta an appropriate sexual outlet (marriage) than it does on her for finding an illicit one with Lorenzo. The fact that Lorenzo is their employee, not their social equal, emphasizes their blame—if they had acted, they could have found a suitable match. Unlike Tancredi (IV, 1) and more like the wise King Agilulf who appeared on Day 3 (III, 2), although Lisabetta's brothers are distressed to discover her affair—since female honor equals family honor—they try to preserve her reputation and their own by keeping it quiet.*

Lisabetta's Brothers invite Lorenzo on a pleasure trip to the country, then murder him and bury his body. Back at home, they say that he's off on a trading mission. Lisabetta becomes increasingly miserable and starts to pester her brothers about his continuing absence, and they warn her that if she keeps poking, she might find "the answers that [she] deserve[s]."

To preserve their family's honor, which would be ruined if Lisabetta's sin (having sex outside of marriage) were discovered, the brothers commit the sin of murder. Lisabetta's increasingly desperate questions about Lorenzo risk betraying the affair (since she doesn't yet know that her brothers already discovered it). Yet they refuse to acknowledge that the affair happened, and they threaten her into silence.

One night after she's cried herself to sleep, Lorenzo appears to Lisabetta in a dream. He tells her that Lisabetta's Brothers murdered him and describes where they buried him. Without mentioning the dream to her brothers, Lisabetta gets permission for her own vacation and makes a beeline for the area Lorenzo described. There, she finds his body "showing no sign as yet of decomposition or decay." Since she can't carry his whole body back, she severs his head, which she brings home and buries in a pot of basil.

While Lisabetta's dream seems like it could simply be her subconscious working out of her brothers' threats to get the "answers she deserves," it is better understood as a miraculous vision, since it contains information that only Lorenzo and the brothers would know. The miraculous preservation of Lorenzo's body, which is still intact when Lisabetta finds it, is the first and most common sign of sainthood, and so the tale suggests that he is a kind of martyr to love.

Lisabetta lavishes care on her basil, watering it with expensive essences or her tears. Due to her care—and Lorenzo's decomposing head—the basil grows luxuriantly, but Lisabetta's strange behavior attracts the attention of her neighbors. At first, Lisabetta's Brothers just chide her for being strange, but when she continues, they steal the pot, dig up the basil, and discover Lorenzo's head. Fearful that their crime will be exposed, they rebury Lorenzo's head, wrap up their affairs, and skip town. Lisabetta incessantly asks where her pot of basil has gone. Eventually, she cries herself to death and inspires a song that the ladies of the company have heard many times before.

Despite their best efforts, Lisabetta's strange behavior threatens to expose not only her affair but also her brothers' murder of Lorenzo. When they steal Lorenzo from her a second time and then leave Lisabetta behind, they completely abdicate their responsibility for their sister. In a world where women like Lisabetta are reliant on men for safety, shelter, and even to arrange their marriages, it's not surprising that she follows her lover in death so quickly.

DAY 4: SIXTH TALE

Panfilo, inspired by Lisabetta's dream, prefaces his tale with a few observations about dreams. While everyone has them, people interpret them differently. Because some dreams feel realistic, some people put as much faith in them as in reality. Others refuse to believe that dreams can be prophetic until it's too late. Panfilo believes that, while not all dreams come true, some do. Those who live virtuously have nothing to fear from bad dreams, but evildoers shouldn't trust auspicious dreams.

Panfilo's introduction covers the range of basic beliefs about dreams in medieval culture. Panfilo himself comes down on a moderate position, claiming that while many dreams are meaningless phantasms, some are indeed prophetic. Unfortunately, prophetic dreams are usually proved when they come true—for good or ill.

In Brescia, nobleman Negro da Pontecarraro has an unmarried and very beautiful daughter named Andreuola. She falls in love with her neighbor, Gabriotto, who is handsome and admirable although he is from a lower class. They marry in secret and frequently meet in her father's **garden**.

The other unmarried girls in Day 4's stories rebel against fathers and brothers for their failure to arrange marriages in a timely fashion, but there is no indication that Negro da Pontecarraro has failed in his duty towards his daughter. The only hint of why she might have married Gabriotto in secret lies in their class difference: she is a noble, but he is from a lower class. Nevertheless, his character proves his worth. Unlike many of the day's other women, Andreuola takes her fate into her own hands while remaining within the bonds of social propriety: although her marriage to Gabriotto is secret, that doesn't make it any less legal. Like many happy lovers, they spend time in each other's arms in the idyllic setting of a beautiful garden.

One night, Andreuola dreams that she and Gabriotto are making love in the garden when a dark shadow comes out of his body, takes ahold of him, and pulls him out of her arms and underground. She's so terrified when she wakes up that she won't see Gabriotto the following night. But she can't keep him away forever, and on the third day they meet in the **garden**, where red and white roses are blooming.

Andreuola's dream foreshadows tragedy and very clearly indicates her husband's impending death—he's pulled from her arms and underground as if into the grave. But fortune can't be put off, and her attempts to avoid him are doomed to fail. The garden's roses represent both enduring love and resurrection in medieval literature, and the fact that they are blooming when she and Gabriotto meet again indicates that her dream will soon come true.

Gabriotto laughs at Andreuola when she tells him her dream, since he thinks it's silly to believe in dreams. He had a nightmare himself on the same night, in which he captured a pleasant doe while hunting in the woods. He put a gold collar and chain on its neck, but while he was sitting with it, a starving black dog appeared from thin air. It bit him on the left side and gnawed until it reached his heart, which it pulled out and carried away. The dream was so vivid that when he woke up, he had to run his hands over his chest to make sure it hadn't really happened. But it didn't stop him from coming to see his wife tonight.

While Andreuola represents Panfilo's naïve dreamer, Gabriotto represents the foolish person unwilling to listen to the warnings of his dreams. The fact that his dream so clearly parallels Andreuola's should make him more concerned, not less. In his dream, the tamed white deer represents Andreuola and the dog foreshadows his death. It is an interesting detail that the dog bit out his heart, although neither Gabriotto nor the audience yet have enough information to understand what this signifies.

Andreuola is terrified, and as she feared, Gabriotto drops dead after a few minutes. Andreuola tries to revive him to no avail. She fetches a maid, and after they weep for a while, they decide to wrap him in a silk shroud and deliver him to his family's home. They hope this will preserve Andreuola's reputation, keep her marriage secret, and ensure that Gabriotto is properly buried.

Both lovers' dreams come true when Gabriotto dies suddenly in his wife's arms. Although their marriage was legal, it was secret and may not have had any witnesses (witnesses weren't necessary for legal Christian marriages until the late 1500s). The concern and control over female sexuality mean that she must handle the situation carefully to protect her own honor. Her concern over ensuring that Gabriotto is both returned to his loving family and properly buried demonstrates the depth and endurance of her love.

Andreuola places her wedding ring on Gabriotto's finger, and the two women carry him out of the garden. Unfortunately, they are surprised in the street by two guards. Realizing how suspicious her actions look, Andreuola volunteers to go with them and explain herself to the Magistrate. Doctors examine the body and determine that Gabriotto died of natural causes, namely a burst abscess near his heart. But convinced that Andreuola must be guilty of something—and feeling lustful—he offers to trade her freedom for sex. She refuses, and he tries to rape her, but she successfully defends herself.

The meaning of the black dog in Gabriotto's dream becomes clear when his autopsy reveals that his heart was to blame. However, fortune isn't done playing with Andreuola, and when she is sent to the magistrate, he handles her roughly based on misogynistic stereotypes about feminine guilt and his own desire to have sex with her. Women like Andreuola aren't even safe in the company of officers of the law. But, since she is noble both by birth and because of her character, she successfully defends herself.

In the morning, Negro da Pontecarraro hurries to the Magistrate's office. After hearing the whole story, he demands Andreuola's release. To get ahead of potential rape accusations, the Magistrate praises her chastity, tells her father that he's fallen deeply in love with her and wants to marry her—even though her first husband had been of such a "lowly condition."

The magistrate's attempt to secure himself a noble wife is based in the intersection of ideas about gender and class: he suggests to Negro de Pontecarraro that his daughter is "damaged goods" because her first husband was a poor man from a lower social class than her own, suggesting that this marriage debased her. It's also a cynical attempt to cover up his own misdeeds since he tried to take advantage of Andreuola when she was vulnerable.

Andreuola falls at Negro da Pontecarraro's feet, weeping and begging forgiveness for marrying without his permission. She doesn't ask him to spare her life, but says she wants to die as his "daughter, and not … his enemy." Her generous and affectionate father bursts into tears, telling her that he always wanted her to marry a worthy man; if she was pleased by Gabriotto, then his wish was granted. He's sad that she didn't trust him enough to tell him, but now that he knows about his son-in-law, he intends to honor him with a splendid funeral.

Although Andreuola weeps, it's not a display of excessive feminine emotion. She doesn't debase herself by begging her father for special treatment, although she does make sure that he understands she had a legal marriage rather than an illicit affair. His tears match hers and demonstrate the bonds of affection between a good father and his daughter. Unlike the other men in the day's tale, who fail in their duty to sisters and daughters, Negro da Pontecarraro's concerns are not over how his daughter's actions affect him, but over her own happiness. The affection he demonstrates towards his tragically dead son-in-law shows how a person should weigh true value of character against wealth or status.

Gabriotto's family joins Andreuola's to mourn the young man's death, and he is grieved in splendor in the **garden** before being buried as a nobleman. Although the Magistrate reiterates his proposal, Negro da Pontecarraro supports Andreuola's decision to enter a convent, where she spends the rest of her life in prayer and service to God.

Although Andreuola's garden has become a place of tragedy and mourning, it is rehabilitated by Gabriotto's wake, which both honors a virtuous young man and publicly acknowledges his marriage to Andreuola. And while his death means that Andreuola and Gabriotto fit the day's theme of unlucky lovers, her reconciliation with her father and his permission for her to enter a convent instead of remarrying—thus remaining faithful to her dead husband's memory—somewhat soften the story's tragedy.

DAY 4: SEVENTH TALE

Filostrato demonstrates his lack of pity for Andreuola by bidding Emilia to begin her story immediately. While it bears a similarity to Panfilo's—hers is also set in a **garden** and her lady also escapes the law—it's different because it demonstrates how love can also hold court in the "dwellings of the poor." It also returns to their own beloved city of Florence, where a poor man's daughter named Simona is in love with a wool-merchant's porter named Pasquino.

Simona and Pasquino have the distinction of being the first working-class lovers in European tragic literature. They fulfill this role in the context of a work which maintains that a person's worthiness comes from their inherent character rather than their wealth and status.

Pasquino brings the merchant's wool to various spinners, including Simona. Pasquino flirts with her under the pretext of examining her work, and love makes her sigh a thousand sighs over each skein of thread. The two are soon lovers. One day, they plan to make love in a certain pleasant **garden**. They meet there with their friends Lagina and Puccino (called Stramba or "Dotty Joe"). They pair off in different corners of the garden, with Simona and Pasquino settling down to make love under a large sage bush.

Given the tales' focus on the concerns of the merchant class, it's not surprising that the work arrangements that bring Pasquino together with Simona receive such a detailed description. And even though they are working-class people, unschooled and possibly unaware of the traditions of love established in literature and aristocratic culture, they show that the experience of love—sighing, flirting—is indeed universal. Because gardens are so frequently associated with the aristocratic classes in medieval literature—and in The Decameron *specifically—Simona and Pasquino's date there stakes a claim on the garden (and love) for all classes.*

Afterwards, because they planned to have a picnic too, Pasquino plucks a sage-leaf and rubs it against his teeth to keep the food from sticking to them. But while he's still discussing the picnic, he suddenly dies. Simona's wails attract the attention of Lagina and Stramba. They rush over to see Pasquino's body swollen and covered in dark blotches. Stramba accuses Simona of murdering him, making enough racket to attract the attention of the authorities.

Pasquino's death (unlike Gabriotto's in the preceding tale) is clearly unnatural. Stramba's suspicion thus seems reasonable at first, even if it entails cruel treatment of the vulnerable and obviously distraught Simona.

Pasquino's friends Atticciato ("Potbelly") and Malagevole ("Killjoy") join Stramba in pressing the magistrate to interrogate Simona. Unsure what to think, he takes her to the **garden** and asks her to show him what happened. Simona demonstrates everything, including rubbing a sage leaf on her teeth. Stramba, Atticciato, and Malagevole mock her, denounce her wickedness, and ask the judge to execute her.

Although lovers Simona and Pasquino are elevated by their love and portrayed positively despite their low social status, Pasquino's friends are caricatures of working-class people, with unflattering nicknames that question their personalities (Stramba essentially means "Weirdo") or mock their physical appearance (like Potbelly). Elitism is at play here, despite the book's claim that character is more important than wealth. But it's elitism based in demeanor, and these men prove the lowliness of their attitudes—not just their class status—in their relentless attack on Simona. For her part, her vulnerability to the men around her, and their assumptions about her character and guilt, is on display throughout her trial.

But Simona is blessed by **fortune**, who preserves her good name against false accusation and reunites her with her lover: within minutes, she has died in the exact same way as Pasquino. The shocked judge orders a gardener to cut down and burn the sage bush, beneath which they discover a toad whose foul breath has poisoned the leaves. Stramba, Atticciato, Guccio Imbratta, and Malagevole bury Pasquino and Simona in their local church.

Simona's death is both unfortunate, because she is so young, and lucky, because it demonstrates that she was telling the truth. Fortune shows itself here, as always, to be capricious. While the poisonous toad hiding beneath the sage bush seems like a somewhat ridiculous plot device, Giovanni Boccaccio draws the idea from a popular 13th-century superstition that this exact thing could (and did) happen.

DAY 4: EIGHTH TALE

Neifile begins her story with a comment about the importance of humility and wisdom, calling to account those who think they know more than they do and who are foolish enough to set their own wisdom against nature. Nothing is as resistant to reason as love, as her tale will illustrate.

Neifile's comments at the beginning of her tale emphasize humility, a trait that she exemplifies herself. She also invokes nature, a goddess-like figure in medieval conceptions of the world that was responsible for procreation. For this reason, nature was strongly associated with love and sexual urges, and this tale will show how her power, combined with the power of love, are more than sufficient to overcome human wisdom.

In Florence, Girolamo is the son of a wealthy merchant, whose father dies shortly after his birth. He grows up under the watchful care of his mother and guardians, but he still falls in love with a neighborhood girl. Salvestra is the daughter of a tailor, and Girolamo's Mother scolds him for his inappropriate affection. Afraid that he will marry the poor girl secretly, she decides that the best course of action is to send Girolamo away. Other options, like making sure Salvestra married someone else, might backfire, causing Girolamo to die of love.

Girolamo falls in love with his childhood playmate, Salvestra, even though they belong to distinct social classes. The story's premise thus recalls other tales, specifically Jacques' love for Jeannette in II, 8 and Gilette's love for Bertrand in III, 9. And, as other tales have also demonstrated, his mother's fear that he will secretly (and irrevocably) marry the undesirable girl are well-founded. Although she's intelligent enough to recognize that the situation must be handled carefully, Neifile's comments about the power of nature and love foreshadow the failure of any of her plots with the not-noble woman. In fact, her fear that he will waste away and die is almost too prophetic.

Girolamo's guardians try to send him to Paris to oversee business affairs there, but he categorically refuses. Girolamo's Mother is livid, but she eventually gets him to agree to go for just one year, after which she and the guardians detain him for two years more.

Romantic love is stronger than familial affection, and Girolamo resists his guardians' suggestion that he go to Paris where he would take over his dead father's business affairs. However, drawing on antifeminist stereotypes about female deviousness, Girolamo's mother eventually tricks him into going and staying away for long enough (she hopes) to extinguish his love.

When Girolamo returns to Florence after three years, he is still completely in love with Salvestra, who has married another man in his absence. She ignores him when he wanders in front of her house like the lovelorn youth he is. Finally, he sneaks into her house and hides in her bedroom. Later, when he's sure that her husband is asleep, he wakes her. She whispers that the time for their love has passed; her marriage is calm, and she won't resume their relationship.

However, true love is steadfast, and absence did not make Girolamo's heart grow cold. Unfortunately, Salvestra has married in his absence, and when he renews his wooing of her, she rejects his advances since she is content within her practical marriage. One way to interpret Salvestra's coldness is through misogynistic stereotypes about the fickleness of women or through an assumption that lower-class individuals can't truly understand love. But it also illustrates a pragmatism necessary for women who weren't wealthy and cared for by their bourgeoise or aristocratic families. Moreover, since his family was so set against their relationship, her choice to stay with her husband also seems to show her awareness that her future with Girolamo would be unstable and risky, especially compared to her respectable marriage.

This drives Girolamo to the brink of despair, and he longs to die. Saying that he's become cold in the night air, he begs Salvestra to allow him to warm up next to her in the bed, promising to avoid talking to or touching her. Taking pity, Salvestra allows it, and he lies down next to her, resolves to die, and holds his breath until he has expired.

Girolamo's death illustrates the exceptionally, excessively strong power of love, and the power of his own will despite his mother's strategies and his former sweetie's rejection.

After a while, Salvestra wonders why Girolamo hasn't left. On discovering that he is dead, she wakes her husband and asks what they should do. Although he's flustered to find a dead man in his bed, he rationally decides to carry Girolamo back to his own house before any rumor or resentment can attach itself to Salvestra.

The moment in which Salvestra reveals to her husband that her dead former suitor is lying dead in their bed is horrifying, but also a rare moment of humor on a day of tragic tales. Their concern to get him out of the house as quickly as possible before his death is discovered and rumors start to fly shows the potentially disastrous intersection of female vulnerability with the vulnerability of the lower classes.

Because no blow can be found on the body, the doctors correctly hypothesize that Girolamo has died of love. Salvestra and her husband attend his funeral to see if anyone has connected her to the tragedy. When she looks at Girolamo's corpse, the flames of her love rekindle. With a scream, she throws herself onto his body and instantly dies of grief. The story of the preceding night—which her husband tells—only increases everyone's sorrow. The people prepare Salvestra for burial and place her in Girolamo's tomb. Thus, those who love failed to join in life are eternally joined in death.

Although it's a standard figure of speech to claim that one will die from unreturned love (Filostrato himself makes this claim in his response to the tale of Ghismonda and Guiscardo in IV, 1), very few literary lovers actually do. Girolamo's death humbles his mother, who thought she could overpower nature by stifling his love for Salvestra. And Salvestra's sudden grief and shocking death illustrate the power of love, which reclaims her despite her pragmatic choice to stay with her husband.

DAY 4: NINTH TALE

Not to be outdone on his own theme, Filostrato prepares to tell a tale that will arouse more pity than Neifile's, since its subjects are fine aristocrats and their fate is crueler.

Filostrato's tale takes aim at Neifile's tale and Emilia's, both of which claimed that the lowly are as subject to the power of love as the mighty. But in contrast to the main argument about class and character in the book (that personal integrity is a better sign of worth than wealth or status), Filostrato openly claims that aristocratic lovers are more important (and their tragic affairs have more pathos) than their social inferiors.

In Provence, there are two grand knights who are the best of friends: Guillaume de Roussillon and Guillaume de Cabestanh. Cabestanh happens to fall hopelessly in love with Roussillon's Wife; flattered by the attentions of such a noble man, she reciprocates and the two become passionate lovers. But one day, Roussillon spies them in the act, turning his great love for Cabestanh and his wife to hatred.

Good fortune or bad, the affair between Cabestanh and his best friend's wife shows that everyone is powerless to resist the pull of love. In this case, the fact that the two knights are barely distinguishable, including having the same name, makes love's power feel especially random: although Roussillon's wife is flattered by Cabestanh's attentions, there's nothing to indicate that she is unhappy with her husband or that her lover is in any way a better lover or more noble knight.

Roussillon invites Cabestanh to his home to discuss travel arrangements for an upcoming tournament, but he lies in wait to ambush and murder him. Then Roussillon cuts out Cabestanh's heart.

Although Roussillon's anger at his wife and best friend makes sense, his ambush of Cabestanh, because it deprives the other man of the chance to defend himself, is dishonorable. Thus, while his wife's affair hurt his pride, it is giving in to his excessive, murderous rage that compromises his honor.

Roussillon's Wife, anticipating Cabestanh's visit, is perturbed when her husband returns home alone. Roussillon gives the heart—claiming it's from a boar—to the cook and asks him to make it into a particularly fine dish for supper. He serves the heart to his wife, who finds it so delicious that she eats every last morsel. Roussillon tells her that he's not surprised she likes the cooked heart since she enjoyed it so much when it was alive.

Feeding his wife her lover's heart mirrors the "gift" Tancredi sends to his daughter, which is actually her lover's heart (VI, 1). The cannibalistic elements in this tale come from Greek mythology, specifically the story of Thyestes, who was unknowingly served his own sons to eat in an act of revenge by his lover's husband. But they also literalize metaphors used to describe love, including the idea of lovers exchanging hearts and love's all-consuming nature.

After a heavy silence, Roussillon's Wife asks what Roussillon has given to her to eat. He confesses it was the heart of Cabestanh. Despite her anguish, she maintains her composure. She admonishes Roussillon for his cruelty towards his friend, saying that she ought to have been punished instead since she freely gave the man her love. Swearing that no other food will ever pass her lips, she throws herself out a window. Because of its height, she's not only killed by the fall but horribly disfigured. Panicked and repentant, Roussillon flees, and when the sordid affair becomes common knowledge, the people prepare one tomb for Cabestanh and Roussillon's Wife, recording their story on the tombstone.

Roussillon's wife, despite her husband's chilling words, maintains her composure instead of giving into womanly emotion. In contrast, Roussillon's excessive act of revenge, because it involved murdering his friend, has marked him as a criminal and forces him to flee. In addition,by leading to his wife's death, it brings him more shame by revealing the affair publicly.

DAY 4: TENTH TALE

Dioneo expresses relief that the terrible stories of star-crossed lovers have finally come to an end, since he has no desire to add to the collection. Instead, he promises a more agreeable theme. In Salerno, Doctor Mazzeo della Montagna marries a beautiful young woman in his old age. Because he's rich, he keeps her in fine style, but Mazzeo's Wife often feels chilly at night because he fails to keep her properly covered.

Dioneo's tale begins with a familiar setup: the old husband who can't satisfy his beautiful wife. While Dioneo's tales usually provide a humorous end to the day, nowhere is it more necessary than at the end of Day 4's collection of tragedies. The oddly circumspect language with which he cloaks his discussions of sex in this tale, beginning with the metaphor of Mazzeo's insufficient sexual power as a too-small blanket, adds to the humor of one of his silliest tales.

Like Ricciardo di Chinzica (from Dioneo's story on the second day), who used a calendar of saint's days to keep from having to bed his wife too often, Mazzeo della Montagna tells his wife that so many days are necessary to recover from making love to a woman. Frustrated, Mazzeo's Wife decides to protect her husband's family jewels by polishing someone else's. She settles on Ruggieri d'Aieroli, a nobleman who has led such a disreputable life that all his friends and even his family have disowned him.

Dioneo's explicit reference to his own earlier story emphasizes the tales' interconnected nature; The Decameron *is a carefully planned and arranged work. Unlike Ricciardo, however, Mazzeo relies on the authority of medicine, representing human ingenuity, rather than religion when he claims that a certain number of days are necessary to recover from sex. While this ties in with medieval medical ideas about the depletion of physical energies, it also points to Mazzeo's age, implying that a certain number of recovery days are required for men who are old and not very powerful lovers. Mazzeo's wife's lack of concern for Ruggieri's bad reputation since he has a good body is an exception to the book's general preference for true character rather than appearances.*

After Mazzeo's Wife and Ruggieri d'Aieroli have been lovers for a while, Mazzeo della Montagna happens to receive a patient who needs an amputation. He plans to perform the surgery in the evening and orders a bottle of anesthetizing potion, which he leaves sitting on a windowsill. Just as he's getting ready to operate, he gets called away on a more urgent matter, allowing his wife to invite Ruggieri over.

The amputation scenario bears all the hallmarks of fortune's caprice, since it provides a reason for Mazzeo to leave the house and pointedly introduces a sleeping potion to the story. It's also a realistic reminder of how harsh medical treatment could be in the Middle Ages.

Arriving at the house quite thirsty, Ruggieri d'Aieroli spies the bottle of potion and drinks it all down, which puts him out cold. When Mazzeo's Wife comes to the bedroom, she can't wake him, and she becomes alarmed when he sleeps through a fall from the bed to the floor. Unlike her husband, she's not a great physician, so she concludes that he's dead, and after a few minutes of weeping, she begins to think about what's necessary to protect her honor. She summons her Trusted Maid to help her.

Ruggieri's great thirst and lack of attention to what he is drinking suggest a hint of gluttony or excessive consumption in his character, so the misfortunes that befall him later in the story can be interpreted as "punishment" for this vice. Although Mazzeo's wife seems genuinely upset to discover him as if dead, she quickly turns to the practical matter of protecting her honor, since maintaining it is necessary for her safety—especially after a day's worth of tales that have highlighted female vulnerability to male violence and revenge.

Trying to settle on a place to leave Ruggieri d'Aieroli where his death won't implicate them, the Trusted Maid suggests that they put him into a trunk that's outside of a nearby carpenter's shop, stab him a few times to make it look like someone else's foul play, and leave him. Mazzeo's Wife categorically refuses the stabbing but likes the trunk idea. They carry him out and stuff him into the trunk.

Had they followed the trusted maid's plan, the women would have accidentally murdered Ruggieri. And while this might have been the outcome of the tale if told by any of the other members of the brigata, *since Dioneo has special dispensation to tell the tales he wants, the tragedy is easily averted by the wife's refusal to abuse what she believes to be a corpse.*

But two Money-lenders, recently arrived in the neighborhood, decide to steal the trunk because they need furniture and they're too cheap to buy it. Although it's heavier than they expect, they carry it home under the cover of darkness. Ruggieri d'Aieroli eventually wakes up, although he's still somewhat muddled. He can't move or see, so he's not sure if he is awake, asleep, or dead. He tries to roll over, overturning the trunk and tumbling out.

Because moneylenders earned their living by charging interest (sometimes at excessive rates), they were generally distrusted and disliked in medieval society and they often came from marginalized groups. These moneylenders live up to the stereotypes of their profession by being dishonest (they steal the chest that's been left in the open) and penny-pinching (they steal it because they don't want to spend money on furniture).

The Money-lenders sleep through this commotion, but their ladies hear the crash and the sound of Ruggieri d'Aieroli stumbling through the dark. They wake the neighbors with their screams of "Burglar!" A confused and astonished Ruggieri is quickly arrested and taken to the magistrate, who tortures him into confessing that he intended to rob them.

Ruggieri's evening is certainly not going as he expected it to. But sometimes, when one's fortunes go from bad to worse, it's a source of humor rather than tragedy.

News of Ruggieri d'Aieroli's arrest spreads quickly through Salerno, much to the astonishment of Mazzeo's Wife and the Trusted Maid, who were sure that he was dead. They start to suspect that maybe the previous night's events were a dream, until Mazzeo della Montagna returns home and demands to know who moved his sleeping potion. Suddenly understanding Ruggieri's state the previous evening, Mazzeo's Wife sends the Trusted Maid out for news. The Maid reports that the judge plans to execute him, and none of his friends or family show any intention of helping him out. She also discovers that the Money-lenders had taken the trunk into their home.

Mazzeo's return marks the moment when Ruggieri's fortunes, recently brought low, begin to shift. Although she didn't have the medical skill to realize that Ruggieri was not dead but merely drugged, Mazzeo's wife is nevertheless clever, as demonstrated by her quick realization of how the pieces of the previous night's puzzling events fit together. Sending the maid out for more information is another sign of her wisdom.

Mazzeo's Wife begs the Trusted Maid to help her save Ruggieri d'Aieroli without revealing the affair. The maid goes to Mazzeo della Montagna and tells him that she's been having the affair with Ruggieri, to whom she gave the potion under the impression it was water. She's very sorry and worried about the price Ruggieri is going to pay for her mistake. The doctor is angry to hear about the affair but can barely keep from laughing at the image of the maid being disappointed when her lusty lover turned into a drugged "slug-a-bed." Warning her to keep Ruggieri away in future, he forgives her and sends her to the judge to finish straightening things out.

While the first concern of Mazzeo's wife on finding her lover "dead" was to protect her honor by getting rid of the body, she doesn't value her maid's honor highly at all. In fact, she treats it as disposable when she asks the maid to confess to the affair in her place. Mazzeo's anger over the maid's alleged dalliance—and his insistence that she break it off, or at least not dishonor his house by meeting with her lover there—confirm his wife's wise strategy, since they suggest that there would have been dire consequences if he had realized that she was actually Ruggieri's lover.


The Trusted Maid wheedles her way into an interview with the judge, and because he thinks she's a "tasty dish," he asks for a nibble before hearing her case. Knowing this will incline him to generosity, she gives him a snack without any objections. Then she picks herself up and tells him the same story she gave the doctor. The judge summons Mazzeo della Montagna, the carpenter, the Money-lenders, and Ruggieri d'Aieroli for testimony, and after hearing all the evidence, he finds Ruggieri innocent. Ruggieri, the Maid, and Mazzeo's Wife have many a laugh about the story, and their love continues to flourish.

Like the other judges and magistrates in Day 4's tales, this judge uses his power to extort sex from vulnerable women (compare to the Duke of Crete in III, 3 and the judge who pursues Andreuola in III, 6). The maid is more than happy to give him what he wants, illustrating misogynistic stereotypes about women as excessively lustful and unconcerned about their virtue. And, because she is a maid, not a fine lady, her honor isn't as valuable as her mistress's.


DAY 4: CONCLUSION

Dioneo's merry story dispels the day's melancholy. As the sun sets, Filostrato apologizes handsomely for picking such a disagreeable topic. He then places the crown on the blonde head of the incredibly beautiful Fiammetta. To truly teach Filostrato the error of his ways, Fiammetta declares that the next day's topic will be lovers who survived misfortune and calamity and lived happily in the end.

As the day's tales draw to an end, Filostrato gallantly apologizes for forcing such an unpleasant theme on the company. In doing so, he rehabilitates himself in their eyes and demonstrates that he has a truly noble character. His frustrated affections for his unnamed lady incline him towards melancholy and anger, demonstrating love's power, but now he reasserts self-control. Fiammetta signals the restoration of balance by decreeing the next theme to be happy lovers.

The men and ladies entertain themselves in the endlessly beautiful **garden**. After supper, so that his sad woes will blight no further days, Fiammetta asks Filostrato to sing a song. He sings a lament complaining about the cruelty of the singer's lady, who spurns his advances. The song's lover wishes for death to end his suffering. The song obviously illustrates Filostrato's feelings, and if the light were better, the ashamed blushes of the guilty lady might have further enlightened the company.

Despite the horrors of the world and the tragic theme of the day's tales, the garden continues to provide a place of rest and rejuvenation for the members of the brigata. *Although Filostrato's love interest isn't ever identified in the book, because Giovanni Boccaccio dedicated an earlier work called* Il Filostrato *to a "Filomena," it's generally accepted that she is the "guilty party" who should be blushing to hear about the terrible pain she's caused Filostrato. In this context, it's interesting to note that Filomena will sing her own song, which seems to indicate that she has a newfound love interest, at the end of Day 7.*

DAY 5: INTRO

The sun's rays are already peeking over the horizon when Fiammetta awakens to the sounds of birdsong. The company whiles away the time pleasantly in the **garden** and surrounding fields until it is time for breakfast. Then, after their siesta, they gather for storytelling.

In the countryside, the brigata *live moderate and pleasant lives according to the rhythms of nature. The idyllic gardens represent the best combination of natural beauty and human order, and thus are a perfect setting for their orderly entertainments, including storytelling.*

DAY 5: FIRST TALE

Panfilo addresses the ladies, saying that his tale not only shows the fate of happy lovers—the day's theme—but also offers an important lesson about the ennobling nature of love.

The ennobling nature of love which Panfilo's tale explores is what sets fin'amors *(refined loving) apart from other ideas about love. Although other tales have shown how love either recognizes or enhances the stature of true lovers, this tale will present a more literalized example of love's power.*

In Cyprus, a rich, noble gentleman named Aristippus is cursed with a son who is as unintelligent as he is handsome. Despite the efforts of his father and tutors, Galesus can't remember his lessons or his manners. Thus, everyone thinks of him more as an animal than a person, and he's called "Cimon," or "simpleton." Aristippus eventually sends him to live in the country, where his lack of education and boorish manners will be less evident, and Cimon is happy there, attending to his father's estates.

Cimon brilliantly illustrates the idea that class status, wealth, and appearance are poor indicators of a person's worth: although he has all three, he is a barely educated, uncouth bumpkin. The fact that he can't be educated or civilized but that he can be trusted with some of his father's business suggests that he's unwilling—not unable—to learn his lessons or behave appropriately. And while Cimon demonstrates that rich people can be yokels, too, the tale can't resist the classist assumption that country people tend to be less intelligent and accomplished than others, making Cimon feel right at home.

One May morning, Cimon stumbles on a lovely young woman and her attendants, sleeping beside a cool fountain in a beautiful wood. The vision of this scantily clad beauty wakes a "certain feeling" in the "uncouth breast" that had been so resistant to education and improvement. Cimon thinks this woman (later identified as Iphigenia) is the "loveliest object that any mortal being had ever seen." He thinks about rousing her, but he's afraid that she might be a goddess and doesn't want to incur her wrath.

Cimon has stumbled into a typical romance setup, with its springtime date, idyllic setting, and water feature, and it's worth noting that his journey towards excellence begins in the same kind of place where the brigata *are telling their tales. Other features of typical medieval romances in this meeting are Iphigenia's extreme, almost other-worldly beauty and Cimon's love at first sight.*

Waking to discover a man staring at her, an astonished Iphigenia recognizes Cimon. His reputation precedes him, and his staring makes her worry that he might attack her. She wakes her servants and tries to "bid [him] good day," but Cimon insists on escorting her home. Cimon then goes back to his father's house, declaring that he no longer wishes to live in the country.

Iphigenia fears that Cimon will rape her, a reaction based in part on feminine vulnerability and in part on his wild and uncivilized reputation. He discredits her fears when he walks her safely home, but he also disregards them. In this story, then, Iphigenia is less an individual in her own right than a tool for love to accomplish its ennobling of Cimon. Notably, her attempts to dismiss him are the only time she speaks for herself in the tale.

Cimon's previously impenetrable heart, having been pierced by Love's arrows, is so roused by Iphigenia's beauty that he undergoes a complete transformation. He starts wearing nice clothes, associating with other young gentlemen, improving his manners, and applying himself to study zealously enough to become a "paragon of intelligence and wit." Over four years, Cimon is transformed and the "lofty virtues" which were his birthright—but which **fortune** had locked away in his heart—were released by love's power.

While the ways in which love ennobles its disciples in medieval romances are generally more subtle, in this tale, love literally becomes Cimon's teacher and he becomes as superlatively intelligent as a nobleman as he was exceptionally uncouth as a bumpkin. His education also brings his internal disposition in line with his wealth and class status, showing that while these accidents of fortune don't guarantee a person's worth, they can greatly augment the value of a man with a noble spirit. His story also argues that, between love and fortune, love is the stronger power, in what might be a gentle rebuke to Filostrato's insistence on hearing about unfortunate lovers on the previous day.

Aristippus, pleased with the transformation of his "ass" son "into a man," encourages Cimon to "taste Love's pleasures to the full." But Cimon refuses to approach Iphigenia dishonorably, instead repeatedly asking her father for permission to marry her. But her family has arranged her marriage to Pasimondas, a gentleman from Rhodes. When it's time for Iphigenia's wedding, Cimon knows he must prove his devotion and use the manly virtues Iphigenia awakened in him. He enlists a group of men to carry off Iphigenia while she sails to Rhodes.

Cimon's insistence that he will only have an honorable relationship with Iphigenia demonstrates the totality of his transformation and proves that his love is the true and enduring kind, although it also offers a subtle reminder of women's dependence on their lovers being this honorable. Yet when his father raises the possibility of having her by force, it reminds the audience of women's vulnerability to the men around them. Her arranged marriage to another man instigates the next phase of Cimon's education, in which he will have to show his military prowess to win her back from a rival in a distant land.

Cimon and his men overtake Iphigenia's ship, and Love inspires him to act with vigor and bravery. The sailors soon surrender, turning Iphigenia over when Cimon explains that she is all he wants. Despite his avowals that his "constant love" gives him "more right to possess" her than Pasimondas, Iphigenia is distressed by this turn of events. Cimon steers his ship towards Crete, but **fortune** intervenes to turn his "boundless joy" into "sad and bitter weeping."

From Cimon's perspective—and the main perspective of the tale—his love for Iphigenia gives him a more legitimate claim on her than the man whom she is going to marry. While the tale shows us her tears, it doesn't indicate whether her distress is a response to the sudden turn of events and the violent takeover of the ship or a sign that she doesn't want to be with Cimon. But since she is just the inspiration for Cimon's improvement, her desires are unimportant and therefore unconsidered in the tale. Although Day 5's lovers are eventually successful, the day's theme still calls for an exploration of fortune, the caprice of which is on full display in the quick turn of Cimon's luck from bad to good and back to bad.

Within a few hours, a violent storm blows the ship off course. Iphigenia blames Cimon, believing it's divine punishment for kidnapping or for trying to marry her against the gods' will. When hope is almost lost, an island appears. Unaware that it's Rhodes, the company safely shelters their ship in the exact same bay as Iphigenia's ship. With the light of dawn, they realize the precarity of their situation and try to sail away but are run aground. As Cimon and his company try to steal into the woods, they're recognized, seized by a mob of Rhodians, and carried to the magistrate, Lysimachus.

Fortune continues to play with Cimon and his crew throughout the night, compressing an entire quest's worth of changing luck into just a few hours. It's also notable that fortune doesn't pick sides: Cimon has been ennobled by his love, but this hasn't exempted him from the caprice of fortune.

Cimon is imprisoned while the Rhodian noblewomen comfort Iphigenia and prepare for her wedding. Pasimondas wants Cimon to be executed, but he receives a life sentence instead, since he hadn't killed any of the Rhodian ship's crew. This allows **fortune** to lay the groundwork for freeing him. Lysimachus loves Cassandra, fiancée of Ormisdas, Pasimondas's brother. Their wedding has been postponed several times, but now arrangements are made for a double wedding and Lysimachus plans to abduct Cassandra first.

The fact that Iphigenia needs to be comforted yet again suggests that she doesn't want Cimon's love, but since the tale focuses on his improved character and she is just a means to accomplish that, her desires remain unexamined. Likewise, the tale clearly describes Lysimachus's love for Cassandra, but doesn't provide any insight into her desires. In contrast to the lustful and dishonest judges seen in Day 4's tales, Lysimachus is upright and fair, so the fact that his own frustrated love parallels Cimon's serves to reinforce Cimon's claim on Iphigenia.

Reasoning that Cimon would be a loyal accomplice, Lysimachus sends him a message complimenting his love-inspired evolution from "insensate beast" to an extraordinarily brave and noble man, laying out the similarity of their situations regarding Iphigenia and Cassandra, and promising Cimon the restoration of his liberty and his lady in exchange for his help. Cimon readily agrees. Lysimachus proposes that they enter the house on the night of the wedding feast, kidnap the ladies in plain sight, and sail away quickly.

Lysimachus flatters Cimon in part to gain a co-conspirator. But his approval for the change in Cimon also reiterates the importance of internal character in establishing a person's worth and reasserts the importance and power of love as a force in human affairs.

On the appointed day, Lysimachus frees Cimon. Then, executing their plan with military precision, they enter the brothers' house and carry off Iphigenia and Cassandra (crying and screaming), and murder Pasimondas and Ormisdas. Leaving the house full of "blood, tumult, and tears," they run to the ship, "carrying their spoils before them," and then they sail to a joyous welcome from friends and relatives in Crete. They marry their ladies in a splendid ceremony, and after a period of exile, each returns home to live "happily ever after."

This tale, while celebrating the ennobling force of love, also graphically depicts the affinity between love and violence. Ultimately, neither man is punished or held accountable for what amounts to premeditated, cold-blooded murder because it was done in the name of love. Yet the desires of Iphigenia and Cassandra still remain beyond the knowledge of the audience, emphasizing their role as prizes for male possession rather than their humanity.

DAY 5: SECOND TALE

Emilia is much more pleased to tell her story today since it is proper for true love to be rewarded—rather than punished as it was in yesterday's tales. In Lipari, a noble girl named Gostanza loves Martuccio Gomito, but her father refuses to allow their marriage because Martuccio—although "handsome and well-mannered"—is poor. He turns to a life of piracy, intent on returning to Lipari a rich man. He's blessed by **fortune**, but when he becomes greedy, she punishes him, and he is captured by Saracens (a medieval European term for Muslims), who take him to Tunis and throw him into a prison cell to languish. On Lipari, everyone believes that he drowned.

Emilia's tale features another noble-bourgeoise couple; there's a class difference between the two, but it's not too big to be bridged. The audience is primed to expect a happy ending on Day 5, and Martuccio's good character is mentioned in his introduction, so the refusal of Gostanza's family to allow a marriage foreshadows not tragedy, but an adventure that will allow Martuccio to show off his noble temperament and prove his worth. It also points towards control over female sexuality: despite his worth and their mutual affection, Martuccio and Gostanza are still reliant on her father's permission to marry. Although it may seem that "piracy" isn't a career path for a "well-mannered" young man, other tales have shown that the line that separates trade and piracy is thin (see the Genoese pirate-traders in II, 6, for example) and have demonstrated that even pirates can be decent men (like Paganino in III, 10). Fortune only turns against Martuccio when his ambition makes him greedy, and his capture sharply rebukes this example of excess.

Gostanza is heartbroken at the news of Martuccio Gomito's death. She wants to die, too, but lacks the courage to take her own life directly. She steals a small fishing ship and goes to sea, throwing the oars and rudder overboard and casting herself on the mercy of the waves. She expects to quickly die in a shipwreck, but while she lies weeping in the bottom of the boat, she is gently carried to Susa.

Gostanza demonstrates cleverness when she strikes on a suicide plan that works around her fear of harming herself. Because she has no way to control it, the rudderless boat puts her at the mercy of fortune—which quickly takes her to North Africa to set the stage for her reunion with Martuccio. The rudderless boat is often used this way in medieval romances, as a vehicle for fortune or Divine will to carry people where they need to be. But because it's also a means for bloodlessly executing or exiling noblewomen, it also symbolizes Gostanza's vulnerability to the dictates of the men around her, like her father.

In Susa, a poor woman (later identified as Carapresa) discovers Gostanza. Carapresa speaks Italian, and she coaxes Gostanza into coming home with her and eating. She explains that she's from Sicily, and she works for some Christian fishermen in Tunisia. Because Carapresa's name means "precious gain," Gostanza takes her rescue as a positive omen. After a while, Carapresa brings her to a kindly Saracen Lady, who bursts into tears at Gostanza's sad tale and then takes her home, where she treats her kindly and teaches her the language.

By this point, it's clear that fortune is on the lovers' side, even if they can't yet see it. Not only is Gostanza carried to Tunisia (where she can be reunited with Martuccio), but she's delivered into the care of a kind woman who also happens to be a Sicilian expatriate. Although Gostanza could have ended up like Alatiel, cast away in a country where she didn't speak the language and where she was vulnerable to violence and rape (II, 7), she is protected. This points towards the racism at play in the book (and in late medieval society generally): because Alatiel wasn't a Christian woman, her vulnerability and loss of virtue could be deployed for humor, but because Gostanza is a virtuous, noble, Christian maiden, she's protected from shame and dishonor. However, this tale also shows some upright and noble Muslim characters, notably the kind Saracen lady who protects Gostanza and teaches her the language. Although they start from a place of cultural separation, the woman's tears and mercy on the castaway girl speak the universal language of compassion and pity, which had strong, gendered associations with women in medieval culture.

Meanwhile, Mulay Abd Allah, the King of Tunis, is at war against Granada. Martuccio Gomito, also having learned the Tunisians' language, hears about the war and offers military advice. The king humors him and likes his suggestion of making special bows and arrows with thinner strings and notches, meaning that the Tunisians can reuse the Grenadians' arrows, but the Grenadians won't be able to use the Tunisians'. When the Tunisians win the war, the king frees Martuccio and gives him an elevated government role.

Medieval society was separated into three groups: the clergy, or those who pray; the nobility, or those who fight; and the peasantry, or those who work. Thus, Martuccio's clever military plan not only shows him to be intelligent, but also associates his character and bearing with Gostanza's social group. In this way—especially when his plan works—both demonstrate his personal worth. And when Mulay Abd Allah gives him a government job, he acknowledges and confirms it.


Time had been cooling the flames of Gostanza's love, but when she hears that Martuccio Gomito is alive and a rich man in Tunis, her passion is rekindled. She begs the Saracen Lady to help her get to him. The woman and her relatives convey Gostanza to Tunis where they secure her an interview with Martuccio. Gostanza rushes to embrace him, bursting into tears. Martuccio marvels to find her alive, and after they tell each other their misadventures, they bring their story to the king. Mulay Abd Allah declares that they've earned the right to marry, gives them splendid **gifts**, and sends them home, where they marry and spend the rest of their lives in peace and tranquility.

If she thought Martuccio were still alive, Gostanza's cooling passion would be a mark against her character. But in the context of a lover's death, the slow reduction of her affection comes across as a realistic example of time healing old wounds. And, as soon as she learns he's alive, the flames of her love rekindle, demonstrating her constancy. As a mark of his respect, the gifts that Mulay Abd Allah gives to the couple confirm their social standing. But they also give Martuccio the riches he initially lacked to be respected by Gostanza's family.

DAY 5: THIRD TALE

Elissa, eager to obey Fiammetta's orders, begins her tale next. In Rome—lately turned from the head to the rump of the civilized world—a young gentleman named Pietro Boccamazza falls in love with Agnolella, the daughter of a common but well-respected man. Pietro wants to marry Agnolella, but his family refuses her because of her lowly status, so Pietro decides to defy them and elope with Agnolella.

The snarky comment about Rome being turned from the head of the world to its rump points towards the "Babylonian Captivity," or the many decades where the Roman Catholic popes kept their court in Avignon (in France) rather than in Rome. Because the Roman Catholic Church was both a religious and a political power in the Middle Ages, the vacuum it left in Rome led to political and social upheaval. For Giovanni Boccaccio's initial readers, the rough figures and danger encountered by Pietro and Agnolella in this tale would likely have felt like a realistic description of the contemporary situation. Pietro and Agnolella, like the protagonists of the preceding tale, are separated by a class barrier, although the respect that people seem to hold for Agnolella's family indicates that the barrier can be breached.

On the appointed day, the pair ride towards Anagni, where they hope to find shelter with friends. But when Pietro Boccamazza accidently choses the wrong fork of the road, they are quickly accosted by soldiers from a nearby castle. Agnolella spurs her horse in time to escape, but the soldiers capture Pietro. Since they belong to the political faction of his enemies, they decide to take his horse and hang him from a nearby tree.

Pietro's choice of the wrong road seems to be the caprice of fortune, and the interruption of their plan to elope (at least on Day 5, when the audience knows to expect a happy ending) foreshadows an even happier ending, like their families agreeing to the marriage. In separating the lovers, though, fortune seems to have the assistance of love: Pietro is so smitten with Agnolella that he stops paying attention to where he's going.

But suddenly the soldiers' enemies burst from the woods and Pietro Boccamazza seizes the opportunity to mount his horse and escape. Safe from the soldiers, he is nevertheless completely lost in the forest, and although he shouts and weeps, he cannot find Agnolella or anyone else. As night falls, he ties his horse to a tree, then climbs up into the branches to be safe from wild beasts. Heartbroken by the loss of Agnolella and afraid of falling, Pietro spends the night "groaning and cursing his misfortune."

In this tale, fortune's wheel spins very quickly, and over the course of mere minutes, Pietro's luck goes from bad to good to worse. He's right to bemoan his misfortune while sitting in the tree, since things do look especially bleak for him at this moment.

Meanwhile, Agnolella is likewise lost. But as darkness falls, she happens upon a cottage where an Ancient Man and Ancient Woman live. They kindly offer to shelter her for the night. But while they can protect her from the elements, they can't escape the lawless political situation, and they tell Agnolella she's still at risk of being attacked by the bands of cut-throats that wander the forest.

In contrast to her lover, Agnolella finds a safe harbor in the woods (or at least a harbor that's as safe as possible in the context of the political instability of the region). The threat of brigands in the woods emphasizes her female vulnerability—she's even less safe than Pietro in his tree.

In the small hours of the night, Agnolella hears brigands approaching. Just as she hides herself in a pile of hay, they force their way into the cottage, asking questions about her horse. Thinking quickly, the Ancient Man claims that it appeared, riderless, the previous evening. The thieves decide to take it, but they make and eat a meal before leaving. One thrusts his spear into the hay pile, where it grazes Agnolella's chest, tearing her clothes. When the thieves have gone, the Ancient Man and Ancient Woman are relieved to see her emerge from the hay, and they take her to a nearby castle owned by Liello di Campo di Fiore and occupied by Liello's Wife, who recognizes and welcomes Agnolella.

The fears of the ancient couple appear to be prophetic when brigands do indeed surprise them in the night. But because they'd warned Agnolella about the possibility, she thinks quickly and conceals herself. As when she and Pietro are first surprised on the road, her quick thinking saves her. Yet, the threat of rape and violence still hangs over the encounter, reminding the audience that Agnolella, by virtue of being a woman, is vulnerable to both.

Pietro Boccamazza sits overnight in the tree. His despair deepens around midnight when he watches wolves devour his only companion, his horse. Just before dawn, he sees a fire in the distance, and when day breaks, he climbs from the tree and heads in its direction. A group of shepherds eating breakfast offer him food and a chance to warm himself at the fire, and then they take him to Liello di Campo di Fiore's castle.

Although Pietro's situation seems to parallel that of his unfortunate horse—surrounded by enemies and at risk of being devoured—fortune intervenes in the morning by leading him to a group of shepherds. Their kindness and generosity—like that of the ancient man and woman who shelter Agnolella—sharply contrast with the violence between the political factions in the area.

Pietro Boccamazza is organizing a search party when Liello's Wife summons him; in her room, he's overjoyed to see Agnolella. He longs to embrace her but holds himself back out of a sense of propriety. At first, Liello's Wife chastises him for trying to defy the wishes of his family, but when she sees the strength of his love, she decides that they deserve to be married since they both have noble characters and God miraculously preserved them for each other. She offers to throw their wedding celebration immediately and to make peace between their families over their marriage, after which Pietro and Agnolella live in peace and happiness.

Pietro demonstrates his steadfast love in trying to organize a search party, since going back into the woods to search for Agnolella would come at great personal risk with his family's enemies at large in the forest. At first, Liello's wife wants to interpret the couple's misadventures as a punishment for trying to elope. But in her change of heart, she recognizes that they have equally honorable characters, despite their ostensible class difference. Her declaration for their marriage confirms the importance of personal character over wealth and status for which the tales, broadly speaking, argue.

DAY 5: FOURTH TALE

Filostrato begins his tale with a laugh, acknowledging the mockery he's received from his companions for his sour attitude towards love—especially when he was sovereign on the previous day. To make amends, he promises to tell a happy tale today.

Panfilo and Emilia both began their tales by gently chastising Filostrato for the previous day's theme. His response to their mockery is good natured and generous, as befits an aristocratic young man and a member of the brigata, *which exemplifies moderation and order.*

In Romagna, Messer Lizio da Valbona and his wife Madonna Giacomina cherish their daughter (later identified as Caterina), determined to marry her to no one less than a great nobleman. The couple is friendly with a youth named Ricciardo de' Manardi da Brettinoro, who spends so much time in their home that they think of him as a son. When he and Caterina fall in love, he hatches a plan for them to be together.

Caterina's noble parents have high aspirations for their daughter's marriage, which will not only ensure her own wealth and status, but which has the potential to tie them to a "great" nobleman through ties of kinship. The way that daughters created alliances between families through their marriages contributes to the protective attitude towards their sexuality. Although Ricciardio and Caterina are raised more like siblings than neighbors, love asserts its power over them, and (like other childhood playmates in the tales) they fall in love.



Ricciardo de' Manardi da Brettinoro suggests that Caterina ask for permission to sleep on a balcony overlooking the **garden**, where he can climb up and join her after dark. Complaining that the late May weather has been too hot for sleeping indoors, Caterina presents the idea to her parents, but her cranky father says no. She spends the next night complaining so loudly that her mother (with whom she shares a room) can't sleep, and in the morning, Madonna Giacomina insists that Lizio da Valbona allow his daughter to sleep on the balcony so she can hear the nightingales singing in the cool air.

Since gardens are sites of love and happiness in The Decameron *and in medieval literature generally, it's fitting that Ricciardo and Caterina try to arrange their tryst overlooking one. Their plan is foiled by her parents' initial refusal to let her sleep outdoors, requiring Caterina to annoy her mother into submission. Remembering that the theme of this day is lovers who survive calamities and misfortunes to attain happiness, the slight annoyance and delay that Ricciardo and Caterina face only qualifies through a generous stretch of the imagination. This gives the impression that Filostrato is either mocking happy lovers out of jealousy or that he, like Pampinea on Day 4, is willing to fit only the literal demands of the theme, not its spirit.*

Caterina's bed, with curtains hanging around it, is placed on the balcony. That night, she signals Ricciardo de' Manardi da Brettinoro, and he climbs up—with some difficulty and danger—to her. Together, they make the nightingales "sing at frequent intervals," and when they're tired from their exertions, they fall asleep naked and entwined in each other's arms. Caterina's right arm is under Ricciardo's neck and her left hand cradles "that part of his person which…you ladies are too embarrassed to mention." They are discovered in this position by Lizio da Valbona just after dawn.

The "trials" Caterina faced in getting her parents to let her sleep outside are matched by the "danger" Ricciardo faces in climbing up the wall. Again, Filostrato seems to be mocking the lovers in his tale. The sexual innuendo of the singing nightingales is based on a strong medieval association between nightingales—since these birds tend to sing during the night—with romance and lovers.

Lizio da Valbona summons Madonna Giacomina to see how Caterina has "succeeded in waylaying" the nightingale and "is holding it in her hand." Because of the deceitful way that Ricciardo de' Manardi da Brettinoro has behaved, Madonna Giacomina is about to scream bloody murder, but Lizio restrains her. Brettinoro is a rich young nobleman, and they could find a worse husband for their daughter. When the pair wake up, they're given an ultimatum: marry immediately or die. Less to save their lives than on account of their love, they happily agree to wed with her parents as witnesses. And after a larger, public wedding celebration, they spend the rest of their lives "caging nightingales by the score."

The excuse that Caterina gave her parents—her desire to listen to the nightingales singing—is revealed to be a double entendre when her parents discover her in bed with Ricciardo. Giacomina's initial reaction responds to the loss of honor incurred by Caterina's act of premarital sex, but her husband wisely keeps his head and looks at the situation rationally. Since it wasn't until the mid-16th century that the Roman Catholic Church declared that both priest and witnesses were necessary for weddings, the couple's exchange of vows in the presence of her parents is sufficient to make a binding marriage. And the tale's final lines, which reference the nightingale again but also point to a mutually satisfying sex life for the pair, emphasize the power and importance of sex in well-matched relationships.

DAY 5: FIFTH TALE

It takes a long time after Filostrato's tale ends for the laughter to die down, and Fiammetta declares that he's atoned for yesterday's sorrows before asking Neifile to tell the next story.

The temporary imbalance and sadness introduced by Filostrato's theme on Day 4 (lovers whose affairs ended in tragedy or misfortune) is balanced on a large scale by the theme of Day 5 (lovers who overcome difficulties and bad luck to find a happy ending). It's also balanced on a small scale when Filostrato repents for his excessively tragic story on Day 4 (IV, 9, Roussillon's wife eating her lover's heart) with an exceptionally hilarious one.

In Fano, aged Lombard knight Guidotto da Cremona bequeaths his wealth (which includes a generous dowry for the girl's eventual marriage) and his adopted daughter (later identified as Agnesa) to his friend Giacomino da Pavia. Giacomino takes Agnesa to Faenza. He lived there until it was torn apart by war, and now that peace has returned, he does too. He loves Agnesa and treats her as a daughter while she grows into a lovely and virtuous young woman.

As in Elissa's recent story (V, 3), real political upheavals from the decades around when Giovanni Boccaccio composed The Decameron *(in this case, the capture and plunder of Faenza by enemy forces) provide realistic details to create the backdrop to the tales.*

Agnesa attracts the romantic attention of two young men, Giannole di Severino and Minghino di Mingole. Neither family will consent to a marriage, however, given the girl's unknown parentage. Both young men resolve independently to "seize possession of her" by any means. Giannole cultivates Giacomino da Pavia's servant Crivello, who can tell him when the master is out and Agnesa is at home undefended. Minghino secures the help of a maid, who carries his messages to Agnesa and encourages her to return the young man's affections. One night when they both know that Giacomino will be out, they each make plans to allow their respective gentleman to see Agnesa. On the appointed evening, Giannole, Minghino, and their friends approach the house.

Because Agnesa is a foundling (a child found after being abandoned by its parents), her class status is unknown. Thus, although she's raised by a wealthy knight who has saved enough money for a generous dowry, her marriage prospects are limited, since no one in the nobility wants to marry their sons to a girl of uncertain class (this is like Jeannette's situation in II, 8). This doesn't seem to bother either of her two suitors, although their desire to seize her by any means points to her vulnerability to rape and violence. Of the two, Minghino distinguishes himself slightly. While Giannole ingratiates himself with a servant who can give him access to the home (acting more like a burglar), Minghino sends messages through the maid to Agnesa (acting like a lover). This foreshadows which of the two will ultimately be successful.

Crivello lets Giannole di Severino in first and he immediately seizes Agnesa. But when she struggles and screams, Minghino di Mingole hears the commotion from the street and rushes in. Minghino's men attack Giannole's, and the chaos draws the attention of the whole neighborhood. Minghino manages to snatch Agnesa from Giannole and put her back in the house before the young men are arrested. When Giacomino da Pavia returns home, all is quiet, but he nevertheless plans to marry Agnesa off as soon as possible to prevent a reprise of the night's events.

Minghino demonstrates his superiority as a lover when he not only rescues Agnesa from Giannole's clutches but puts her back in the house for safekeeping instead of carrying her off for himself. She's vulnerable to their violence and she becomes an object over which they fight, but Minghino's humane treatment of her foreshadows a happy love to come.

In the morning, the families of the young men visit Giacomino da Pavia hoping to soften his desire for retribution against their sons. Giacomino responds that they haven't wronged him, but rather one of their own, since his friend rescued Agnesa from Faenza. When the worthy men ask how Agnesa came to be in his care, he tells them that his friend, Guidotto da Cremona, found a two-year-old child while plundering houses in the city during the last war. Taking pity on the abandoned girl, he rescued her and brought her to Fano—along with the plunder, which he planned to use as her dowry. In the crowd, Guiglielmino da Medicina (who was with Guidotto at the time) asks another listener, Bernabuccio, if the story sounds familiar, since Bernabuccio lost a daughter around that time, who might be Agnesa.

Agnesa's personal class status may be unclear, but she is under the protection of a powerful man, so the violent and predatory actions of Giannole and Minghino expose them to legal risk. This also provides an opportunity for him to finally share Agnesa's backstory, which lays the groundwork for her identity to be revealed. The image of the kindly knight rescuing the abandoned child from her plundered home also contrasts with the previous night's scene, where at least one man (Giannole) attempted to take her from her home for dishonorable reasons.

Guiglielmino da Medicina asks Bernabuccio if his daughter had any distinguishing birthmarks or scars; she had a cross-shaped scar above her left ear. Giacomino da Pavia gives him permission to examine Agnesa for this scar, which he finds. He tenderly embraces the surprised girl and then reveals that Agnesa is the daughter he thought had died in the earlier violent period. It turns out that Giannole di Severino is Agnesa's brother. The magistrate frees him and brokers a peace between him and Minghino di Mingole. Soon afterwards, Agnesa and Minghino are married, subsequently living comfortable and peaceful lives.

The discovery that Agnesa is Guiglielmino's long-lost daughter settles both the issue of her class (she's a noble!) and her husband—since Giannole is her brother and thus can't marry her, she goes to Minghino. While the tale set up his superiority as a suitor earlier, it is notable that the audience has no insight into Agnesa's thoughts or desires in this tale. Thus, although the ending is ostensibly a happy one, she never rises above a quasi-human, objectified status. In other words, she's more important as the possession over which two young men fight than as a human being in her own right.

DAY 5: SIXTH TALE

Pampinea, noting the power of love to induce people to face risks and endure great hardships, begins her tale next. On Ischia, Restituta—daughter of Marin Bòlgaro—and Gianni are in love. Gianni frequently swims the channel between his island and hers at night just to catch a glimpse of the walls of her home.

Restituta's name literally means "something stolen or lost having been returned to its rightful owner," so even before the story truly begins, readers are primed to expect that she will be lost, then recovered, by Gianni. His swimming across the channel at night recalls the Greek myth of Hero (a virginal priestess of Aphrodite, the goddess of love) and Leander, who would swim across the river to woo her. Their love ended tragically, but on Day 5 of The Decameron, *the audience can expect a better fate for Restituta and Gianni.*

One day, Restituta is surprised and kidnapped by a band of Sicilian pirates. When they argue about who gets to keep her, they decide to present her as a **gift** to King Frederick of Sicily, a man "much addicted to pretty things of that sort." He likes this gift, but as he's currently feeling somewhat unwell, he puts her in a villa inside his **garden** for safekeeping until he can enjoy her. Learning about the abduction, Gianni hires a frigate and sets off to find Restituta. When he learns that she was given to King Frederick in Sicily, the power of his love narrowly keeps him from despair.

Although Restituta's abduction is bad luck, her fortunes improve somewhat when the pirates' argument prevents them from raping her themselves and when King Frederick's illness prevents her from immediately becoming his concubine. The pirates and the king, all men, consider Restituta not as a human being but as a pretty "thing," which highlights her vulnerability and reduces her to an object rather than a human being. The pirates attempt to leverage the power of gifts when they offer something so pretty to King Frederick, which can only enhance their reputation in the eyes of their sovereign. And until he can enjoy his new toy, the king stores Restituta in a walled garden. This both forms her prison and suggests the amorous plans he has for her in the future, since gardens are places for love in The Decameron. *Gianni proves his worthiness as a lover when he immediately sets out after Restituta, and when the strength of his love keeps him from losing all hope.*

In Sicily, Gianni catches sight of Restituta when he's walking past the **garden** one day. She shows him how he can enter the garden and climb through her window. In the past, she had "treated him rather cruelly" because she wanted to preserve her chastity. But now, knowing what to expect from King Frederick, she feels that it's lost anyway. Between this and her gratitude towards Gianni for coming after her, she decides to "gratify his every desire." But in the middle of the night, a recovered King Frederick remembers her existence. When he enters the room preceded by a "blazing torch," he discovers her entangled in Gianni's arms.

In the paradigm of fin'amors *(refined loving), there are very few reasons to say "no" to a worthy lover, so Restituta's earlier refusal to have sex with Gianni is interpreted in this tale as "cruelty," or inhumane behavior. Yet, the tale clearly states that Restituta's refusal was based in her desire to preserve her virginity, an important consideration in a patriarchal culture that valued women according to their sexual chastity. This moment shows the conflict between cultural and social pressures that constrained women's sexual freedom and codes of love that governed ideally consensual, well-matched amorous partners. It points to double standards between men and women, since Gianni would face few consequences (if any) for the loss of his virginity. And, since Restituta's reasonable self-interest is interpreted through a male perspective, it is seen as selfish cruelty. But all considerations of female chastity and the lover's claims fall aside, of course, when Restituta finds herself in a position where King Frederick is about to irredeemably ruin the value of her virginity. The king's entrance, with a "blazing torch" in his hands, recalls the way King Agilulf visited his wife in an earlier tale (III, 2).*

Speechless with horror and rage, King Frederick nearly kills Restituta and Gianni right then. But feeling that killing sleeping victims is a coward's act, he decides to burn them at the stake publicly instead. The lovers are arrested and tied back-to-back (still naked) to a stake to await their execution. Everyone in the city hurries to gawk at them. While they hang their heads in shame and curse their misfortune, the public admires her beauty and his good figure. Among the crowd is Ruggieri de Loria, who recognizes Gianni. Gianni explains that he's there because of his love for Restituta and the wrath of the King. He asks Ruggieri to beg one last favor for him: that he and Restituta be allowed to face each other as they die.

King Frederick's rage and thirst for vengeance are based in his sense that Restituta belongs rightfully to him, and an understanding that a woman's value lies in her sexuality. Now that Restituta isn't a virgin, she is much less valuable. His sense of ownership is complicated by the fact that she was kidnapped (stolen) and given to him by pirates, not to mention the fact that she is an autonomous human individual and that she and Gianni were in love, but this episode still speaks to the vulnerable status of women, who were dependent on the protection of men and whose value was judged by their sexuality above all else. Whatever King Frederick's stated reasons for declining to murder the lovers privately, his public punishment also suits his vengeful mood. Displaying Restituta naked in public underscores his feeling that he has more of a right to control her body than she does; since she didn't keep her body virginal for him, he now denies her the right to keep it private at all.

Ruggieri de Loria, at that time Admiral of the Royal Fleet, uses his clout to stay the execution while he talks to King Frederick. Acknowledging the wrong that the King has endured, Ruggieri nevertheless urges clemency towards Restituta and Gianni, since their families are politically important to the King. Moreover, they "sinned" under the power of love, not out of disrespect. Horrified, King Frederick repents the sentence and orders the immediate release of the lovers. Dressing them in fine clothes, he holds their wedding in Sicily and gives them magnificent **gifts** before sending them home to live happily.

While Ruggieri de Loria can talk King Frederick into clemency towards the lovers, he must do so in constrained terms. Pointing to the lovers' families and their political importance implies that they wouldn't have been freed for the sake of their love alone. Nevertheless, this tale does demonstrate the overwhelming power of love, which far exceeds the constraint of earthly powers, such as royal property rights and even fear of death. It's also far more humiliating for nobles to have been publicly exposed than common folk, and the king makes up for this by dressing them in clothes that not only cover their nakedness but reassert their high class status. The gifts King Frederick gives the lovers also neatly turn the tables on the tale's beginning; at first, Restituta was an illegitimate gift, but now that her fortunes have improved, she receives impressive gifts herself.

DAY 5: SEVENTH TALE

The ladies of the company, "on tenterhooks" while waiting to hear the lovers' fate, rejoiced and thanked God for their release. The queen commands Lauretta to tell the next tale, and she cheerfully begins. In Sicily during the reign of King William the Second, a nobleman named Amerigo Abate lives in Trapani with his many children.

The ladies' reaction to the suspense of the story—even though the day's theme means it had to have a happy ending—is a description of "narrative catharsis," the purification or purgation of negative emotions through experiencing a work of art, specifically a play or a story. The brigata *left Florence to escape the horrors of the plague, and they tell stories to pass the time and as a pleasant form of entertainment. Thus, their reaction to the preceding story in this moment allows Giovanni Boccaccio to dramatize (in a story) the very work of emotional rebalancing that (good, emotionally powerful) stories can accomplish in their audiences.*

Needing servants to care for his estate and family, Amerigo Abate buys some children, "believing them to be Turkish," who were captured by Genoese pirates along the Armenian Coast. One, named Teodoro, stands out from the rest of the "rustic … stock" due to his good looks and well-bred manners. He grows up more under the direction of his "innate good breeding" than the "accident of his menial status," becoming so poised and agreeable that Amerigo grants his freedom, sponsors his conversion, and baptizes him as "Pietro."

Medieval Christian social norms and laws disallowed owning other Christians as slaves (although they could be servants). Thus Amerigo purchases "Turkish," or Muslim children. However, the fact that they were captured along the Armenian coast should have made him cautious; the Kingdom of Armenia practiced Christianity and had become a strong ally of European kingdoms in the Crusades. Teodoro's differences from the other children, in both looks and manners, strongly suggest that he is a Christian Armenian at the very least, and likely a member of the nobility as well—all factors that should protect him from being enslaved. And he earns Amerigo's trust through the power of his innate good character, despite the accidents of fortune that have led to his enslavement (like Guisfredi and the Outcast in III, 6).

Teodoro (Pietro) and Violante (one of Amerigo Abate's daughters) fall in love. Given his menial status, they cannot express their feelings publicly. One hot day, Amerigo's Wife and a company of ladies and servants (including Violante and Teodoro) are in the country when a storm approaches. As they hurry home, Violante and Teodoro find themselves separated from the group, and when hail starts to fall, they shelter in a crumbling farm cottage. Huddled together under the insufficient scrap of roof, they move from declaring their love to hand-holding to kissing to sex.

Teodoro and Violante's love recognizes Teodoro's inherent character as more important than the menial social status he has as a servant and former slave. Their apparent social mismatch also demonstrates the power of love, which will bring together whoever it wishes without regard for social considerations like class status. The shenanigans Teodoro and Violante get up to while sheltering from the storm show why young women weren't generally allowed out without chaperones, since their virtue needed strenuous protections. The other women in the party, especially the mother, are supervising the young woman, although fortune brings the storm at just the right moment to give the lovers the privacy they need to declare and act on their feelings. The storm also alludes to the story of Dido and Aeneas in Virgil's Iliad, *who are also trapped by a storm in a cave, with similar consequences to Violante and Teodoro.*

After that day, they meet at the cottage regularly until Violante becomes pregnant. When she's unable to abort the pregnancy, Teodoro (Pietro) plans to flee, sure that she will be forgiven but that he will be executed for taking advantage of Amerigo Abate's daughter. Violante convinces him to stay by promising to keep his name out of her scandal. When she confesses to Amerigo's Wife, she's taken to the country to have the baby secretly. But Amerigo happens to be passing by when Violante is in labor. Hearing the commotion, he bursts into the room and threatens to kill Violante until she confesses that Teodoro fathered her son.

The discussion between Violante and Teodoro about how to handle the pregnancy illustrates the unequal risks they face, based on their distinct gender and class identities. The damage to Violante's reputation is inevitable since her pregnancy will soon visibly declare her lost virtue to the world. The damage to Teodoro is less inevitable, since he will only come to harm if he is revealed to be the baby's father. Yet, both assume that Teodoro would be more vulnerable to punishment for the affair than Violante, who is a noblewoman and Amerigo's daughter. Still, this plan hinges on Violante's ability to hold her tongue, even in the face of the murderous rage her father expresses when he learns about the illegitimate pregnancy.

Amerigo Abate has Teodoro (Pietro) arrested, and the local magistrate, Messer Currado, sentences him to be publicly whipped, then hanged. This isn't enough to quench Amerigo's rage, and on the day of the execution, he orders Violante to kill herself by poison or dagger, after which a servant will kill her baby. But going to the gallows, Teodoro passes some Armenian noblemen, passing through town on their way to Rome. One of them, Phineas, notices Teodoro's strawberry birthmark and is reminded of his son, who was kidnapped years before by pirates.

Unfortunately for the lovers, Amerigo falls victim to excessive rage over their transgressions, which recalls the overreactions of other fathers and lovers in Day 4's tales, specifically Tancredi (IV, 1) and Guillaume de Roussillon (IV, 9). It also emphasizes the vulnerability of Violante, as a woman, to both his rage and his parental authority. And the audience's sense that his rage is somehow inappropriate is increased with the sudden suggestion that Teodoro may not be a lowly servant after all, but an eligible nobleman who could honorably marry Violante (as Ricciardo Manardi and Catrina quickly married in V, 4). The recognition also reminds readers of the power of fortune, which evidently allowed Teodoro to be kidnapped in his childhood, but which intervenes now to save his life and reunite him with his father.

In the Armenian language, Phineas asks Teodoro about his past and Teodoro answers that his Armenian father's name was Phineas. Phineas pushes through the crowd, tearfully embraces Teodoro, and drapes his silk cloak over the young man. He then hurries to Messer Currado, informing him that Teodoro is not a slave but a freeborn man willing to make his relationship with Violante right by marrying her. Cursing the waywardness of **fortune**, Currado stays the execution and calls for Amerigo Abate who, having stopped Violante's forced suicide (which was held up by her indecision between the poison and the dagger), apologizes profusely for everything and declares his delight at the prospect of having Teodoro as a son-in-law.

Teodoro has consistently demonstrated his noble character despite the caprices of fortune. Now, when Phineas wraps him in a fine cloak, it is a visual confirmation of his noble class status. It's also a touching moment that makes literal and visible a father's love and protection for his child—in contrast to Amerigo, who enslaved other men's children illegitimately and now is trying to get his own daughter to kill herself rather than protecting her. Currado may curse fortune, but it's also thanks to fortune that Teodoro's identity was recovered by a father that happened to be passing through town at the right minute and that Amerigo's attempt to erase all evidence of the couple's transgressions from existence was foiled by Violante's indecision.

On hearing that Violante will marry him if he wishes, Teodoro (Pietro) has "the sensation of passing from Hell into Heaven at a single bound." She is likewise relieved to learn that Teodoro is alive and ready to marry her. Their engagement is announced, Violante puts her son out to a wetnurse and recovers from her delivery, and after her confinement she presents herself to Phineas. After their wedding, Teodoro and Violante take their son and go to Armenia.

Teodoro feels his change in fortunes as a literal rise from heaven into hell, providing a nice emotional description of fortune's wheel. And, while Teodoro and Violante do get their "happily ever after" moment, it doesn't happen until the tale has described the necessary arrangements. Giovanni Boccaccio demonstrates his mastery of realistic detail in describing a delay for Violante to recover from childbirth and to find a wetnurse before the wedding. A wetnurse is a lactating woman who feeds another woman's baby for her; until the 20th-century invention of infant formula, wealthy and aristocratic women frequently employed wetnurses (often low-class or common women, frequently slaves) to spare them the time and effort of feeding their own children.

DAY 5: EIGHTH TALE

Filomena begins her tale with its intended lesson: just as women's pity is praised, so too will their cruelty be subject to divine punishment. To illustrate this, she tells the story of Nastagio degli Onesti, an incredibly wealthy young gentleman from Ravenna. He falls in love with the daughter of Paolo Traversari, whose lineage is more noble than his own. Nastagio woos Paolo's Daughter with "considerable, and splendid, and laudable" deeds, but she is "persistently cruel, harsh, and unfriendly towards him." Nastagio's friends and relatives, concerned about his fruitless and expensive courtship, beg him to leave Ravenna. Pretending to agree, Nastagio makes a great show of leaving, only to camp out in the woods about three miles away.

Filomena's tale revisits the misogynistic idea of female "cruelty," which is the way a woman's refusal to have sex with a particular man (for whatever reason) is characterized in the tales. (Compare this to Restituta's initial treatment of Gianni in the day's sixth tale.) The dictates of fin'amors *(refined loving), which emphasize lovers demonstrating their personal worth and valor, in combination with gendered expectations of female subjection to male authority and rule intersect here. The idea of feminine cruelty illustrates the dilemma posed to women in a patriarchal culture that also idealized* fin'amors*: extramarital sex was generally condemned, and women caught in the act were liable to punishment at the hands of either husbands and male relatives or civil authorities. Yet, the tales also condemn "cruel" women, occasionally punishing or tricking them for their refusal (for example, Catella, who in III, 6 was tricked and then blackmailed into sex with Ricciardo Minutolo). In this context, Nastagio participates in a common antifeminist line of thought in assuming that his love and valorous deeds require Paolo's daughter to love him in return. In terms of the narrators, this sentiment is particularly rich coming from Filomena, who is generally understood to be Filostrato's "cruel" love interest.*

One May morning, Nastagio degli Onesti wanders the woods, lost in thought about Paolo's Daughter's cruelty. Suddenly, he hears screams; soon he sees a naked woman running through the woods, pursued by a pair of fierce dogs and a wrathful knight on a black horse. She begs for mercy while the knight threatens to kill her. To protect her, Nastagio grabs the only available weapon—a tree branch—but the knight addresses him by name and tells him to mind his own business. As the dogs seize the woman and the knight dismounts, Nastagio expresses outrage over hunting a woman like an animal.

In medieval literature, May is strongly associated with both lovers and with visions, making the time doubly appropriate for Nastagio's otherworldly experience in the woods. What he sees is a vision on the theme of the cruel woman's punishment, which is a common theme in antifeminist writings but which can also be found in fin'amors *literature and theory. In the vision, begging for mercy, is the mirror image of Nastagio, who wanted Paolo's daughter to take pity on his love-longing. But just as she cruelly rejected him, so too the angry knight ignores the woman's pleas. Nastagio's initial outrage seems to stem from the knight's excessive violence, and his willingness to protect her even though he hasn't got an appropriate weapon demonstrates his personal courage and courteousness.*

The knight identifies himself as Guido degli Anastagi, a fellow man from Ravenna who fell in love with his lady when Nastagio degli Onesti was just a child. The pride and cruelty of Guido's lady ultimately led him to suicide, for which he was sent to Hell. Later, when she died, his lady was also damned because of her pride, cruelty, and the pleasure she felt in his death. In Hell, their punishments are intertwined: she flees, he must catch and kill her, cut her open, tear her cold, hard heart from her breast, and throw it to the dogs. They repeat this drama daily, at various locations where she was cruel towards him in thought and deed; on Fridays they are always in this wood.

The literature of fin'amors *treats love as a secular religion. In this context, the lady's refusal to acknowledge or return Guido's love is understood as a sin, so she is punished by the Christian God for her role in Guido's suicide. Suicide, in the medieval church, was a sin that automatically damned a person's soul to hell, since one's life is a gift from God that one is supposed to protect and cherish, not destroy. But, although Guido committed the mortal sin, and his lady only "caused" it second hand, his punishment in the afterlife seems much less horrific than hers. Although he suggests that it's hard to kill someone you love, it's notable that the lady's punishment is both frightening and painful, and involves the mutilation of her body. The line between extreme love and extreme hate seems to be particularly thin in this tale. The vision's misogyny is rendered even more stark when we learn that the lady is punished not only for her cruelty in deed—those times she actively repudiated Guido to his face—but in thought as well.*

This account horrifies Nastagio degli Onesti, as does watching Guido degli Anastagi butcher the woman. But after a few minutes, she gets to her feet and runs away again, pursued by the hounds. After a while, he realizes how useful this apparition can be. He has friends invite Paolo Traversari and his family—including Paolo's Daughter—to breakfast in the woods with him on the following Friday. The tables are arranged around the clearing where he witnessed the drama, and the food is splendid. As the meal is ending, the guests begin to hear agonized screams and soon the lady, dogs, and knight burst into the clearing.

Nastagio initially felt compassion for the lady, who seemed so vulnerable to the knight's anger. But by the end of the vision, he's solidly on the knight's side and has realized how he can use this vision to scare Paolo's daughter into returning his love. Like the rest of the women in The Decameron, *she is vulnerable to male authority and occasional violence. The tale's strong implication is that, if earning a lady's love fails, it's perfectly acceptable to blackmail and force her into capitulation.*

Guido degli Anastagi repeats his story to the guests. Many are related to him or to the lady, and most remember his great love and pitiable death. But Paolo's Daughter is the most alarmed of all, since she realizes that the show was for her; she can already feel dogs nipping at her heels. Out of fear, she quickly "convert[s] her enmity into love," and that same day she sends Nastagio degli Onesti a message telling him that she's "ready to do anything he desire[s]." He offers to combine his pleasure with the "preservation of her good name" by proposing a marriage to which she consents, to the great joy of Nastagio and her own parents.

Paolo's daughter takes the vision as it is intended: as a direct warning to her that if she doesn't return Nastagio's love, she faces a dire fate. Through her quick change of heart, the tale suggests that her reasons for denying Nastagio were illegitimate—if she'd had a real reason to dislike him, she may not have been able to turn her hate into love within a few hours. But the example of gruesome violence she's just witnessed suggests that her response may have been out of fear more than an unacknowledged love. Although Nastagio's offer of honorable marriage rather than a simple affair is offered to show his good character, it also emphasizes her vulnerability: her choices have been reduced to risking her reputation in the here and now or risking gruesome punishment in the afterlife. In choosing the lesser of two evils, she seems to illustrate female vulnerability more than the ennobling and overpowering force of true love.

Nor is this marriage the only happy result of the "horrible apparition": the ladies in the town are so terrified by it that, in general, they become far more cooperative with men than they ever had been before.

The fact that the vision not only has its intended effect on Paolo's daughter but on other ladies in the town suggests that its power comes from emotional blackmail, preying on the vulnerability of women to coercion and violence.

DAY 5: NINTH TALE

Fiammetta's story, like Filomena's, shows women the danger of allowing love to fall into the hands of **fortune** and her arbitrary whims. Her story comes from the repertoire of Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, a well-respected Florentine gentleman who was particularly gifted at telling stories of the past to his friends and neighbors.

The introduction to Fiammetta's fifth tale, coming at almost the midway point of the book's tales (it's number 49), takes a moment to reemphasize the value of telling a good story well, which is Giovanni Boccaccio's aim in The Decameron. *It also engages with the idea of fortune and its complicated situation in human affairs; although we have already seen plenty of examples where fortune intervenes from the outside, as Filomena explicitly states here, at other times a person's character and choices intersect with random chance to improve or impair a person's fortune.*

In Florence, nobleman Filippo Alberighi's son Federigo is well-regarded for his chivalrous deeds and refined manners. Federigo loves Monna Giovanna, one of the city's loveliest and most charming women. But because she's as chaste as she is lovely, his bravery and generosity get him nowhere with her. He fritters away his entire fortune trying to win her love, retreating to live a humble life of poverty in the country on a small farm. A beautiful falcon is the only reminder of his noble past.

Monna Giovanni is married ("Monna" is the equivalent of the modern English "Mrs."), so Federigo's suit carries some danger for her. If she's caught in adultery, she could face repudiation or violence from her husband or other male relatives who are heavily invested in protecting her "honor" (in other words, her sexual chastity). This speaks to the vulnerable and often precarious position of women in a patriarchal society, but it also highlights the contradictions between social expectations of female fidelity and the codes of fin'amors *(refined loving), in which chastity can be a bad thing when it denies a man sexual access to a woman he loves. This tale also engages with* The Decameron*'s ongoing argument about the value of nobility of spirit over nobility by name or wealth. Federigo's nobility isn't diminished—indeed, it demonstrates strength and resilience—in his poverty.*

Monna Giovanna's husband dies, leaving her a widow with a young son. Every summer, they go to a country estate near Federigo's farm, and he befriends the boy based on a shared love of birds and dogs. The boy greatly admires Federigo's falcon, and when he falls ill, he tells his mother that it's his heart's desire. Giovanna is torn between guilt over her coldness towards Federigo—worrying that depriving him of his one remaining treasure would be "heartless"—and the knowledge that he will give her anything she asks for. Her maternal instincts ultimately overpower her guilt, and she decides to ask for the bird as a **gift**.

The death of Monna Giovanna's husband doesn't immediately free her to remarry Federigo (or anyone else). Because her son is her husband's heir, she has a responsibility to keep his inheritance as intact as possible until he becomes an adult. In agonizing over asking Federigo for his one last fine possession, Giovanna shows that she has a conscience and a heart to feel pity. What she doesn't yet understand is that, for a true lover, she herself is Federigo's remaining treasure!

Federigo is astonished the following morning to find Giovanna at his gate. She says that she's come to make amends for his suffering on her account, but he swears that her visit now makes up for any past cruelty. He invites her in and then searches desperately for anything refined enough to feed such a great lady. The only thing he can find is his plump falcon, which he has the housekeeper dress and cook. When Giovanna humbly asks Federigo for the falcon on her son's behalf, appealing to his noble heart, he bursts into tears because he cannot give her what she wants, since she's already eaten it.

Giovanna savvily plays on Federigo's devotion to try to get what she wants, and her offer of "amends" carries a hint of misogynistic assumptions about women's willingness to lie and manipulate others. But because the tale celebrates Federigo's enduring love, it stops short of criticizing Giovanna or casting her as in any way unworthy of his devotion. In killing his prize falcon to provide Giovanna a suitable breakfast, Federigo proves himself to be an exemplary steadfast lover and demonstrates his generosity, a key trait of truly noble persons. At first, it looks like fortune has intervened to his detriment, and his attempt to offer her a gift as a sign of his devotion—a suitable meal—backfires when it deprives her of the thing she most wants. The moment in which she eats the bird is similar in emotional intensity to the scene in IV, 9, where Roussillon feeds his wife a dish made of her lover's heart.

Monna Giovanna initially reproaches Federigo for killing the bird but realizes the generosity of spirit he showed in sacrificing it for her pleasure. She sees that poverty hasn't destroyed his "magnanimity of spirit." Sadly, her son dies, and when (after the appropriate period of mourning) her brothers urge her to remarry, she insists she will have only Federigo. His poverty doesn't bother her. She tells her brothers, "I would sooner have a gentleman without riches, than riches without a gentleman." Finally married to his love and with his wealth restored, Federigo lives in happiness for the rest of his life.

The nobility of Federigo's spirit is impossible to ignore, and as the recipient of his most generous act, Giovanna finally realizes that he offers her unlimited, unselfconscious love. Her statement to her brothers about Federigo's worth despite his poverty is The Decameron*'s clearest argument for the value of a generous, noble character over wealth or social status. It is a little painful to realize that Federigo's good fortune is dependent on the death of Giovanna's son, but this also allows the tale to foreclose any means by which Giovanna could be criticized for returning Federigo's love: she's not cheating on her husband or depriving her son of his rightful inheritance.*

DAY 5: TENTH TALE

Dioneo prefaces his tale with a warning. People are more likely to laugh at scandal than at virtuous deeds, and his goal is to make everyone laugh, so his tale is going to be a bit unseemly.

At the halfway mark of The Decameron*'s 100 tales, Dioneo has already demonstrated his sense of humor and his willingness to tell obscene tales. The fact that he attaches a warning to this one hints that it will portray behavior that is even more vulgar than his usual, graphically sexual fare.*

In Perugia, Pietro di Vinciolo is a man whose heart is "anywhere but the right place," and to disguise this fact, he marries a buxom young woman. Unfortunately, Pietro's Wife is a passionate redhead whom two husbands would have a hard time pleasing, much less one uninterested one. Realizing that he isn't "fond of the kind of thing that other men like," and that he finds women "repugnant," she decides to take a lover to fill her own needs.

Dioneo's comment about Pietro's misplaced heart suggests that Pietro is gay. Medieval culture (both in terms of sacred and secular codes) had no tolerance for same-sex sexual activity (and didn't really have a category for sexual orientation or identity). In modern terms, Pietro's wife is frankly his beard (a heterosexual partner meant to deflect suspicions about a person's sexual orientation). Unfortunately, he's chosen the worst kind of woman for the role, since his wife is young, pretty, and lustful (drawing on a longstanding association between redheads and passion that persists into the 21st century). Like many a fabliaux *wife (and many other women in* The Decameron*), she decides to take matters into her own hands after she realizes that her husband can't stand the thought of having sex with her.*

Refusing to waste her youth, Pietro's Wife secures the services of a Beldam with a saintly reputation, who agrees that the Good Lord wouldn't want her to waste her youth in celibacy. She points out that women exist for two reasons: having sex with men and having babies. This is evident because, while men must be in the mood to perform, a woman is always available for sex. Moreover, women are much more lustful than men. And, because women's sexual desirability is so fleeting, it's even more important that they take advantage of their youths.

The Beldam, or "goodwife," has a holy reputation that covers her sinful behavior. Her rationale for helping Pietro's wife find a lover is, however, deeply rooted in antifeminist sentiments rather than any sense of sexual liberation. Women, in this misogynistic view, are good only for making love with men and having babies, and their worth is directly dependent on their sexual attractiveness and beauty, which fade as their youth ends. This is one of many moments in The Decameron *that contradicts Boccaccio's claims that the work is intended for women and that he has deep love and respect for ladies. Yet, Pietro's wife takes her sexual satisfaction into her own hands and isn't punished or criticized for it, pointing to the complicated nexus of beliefs nested in the tales.*

Pietro's Wife enjoys many young men behind her husband's back. One night, when Pietro plans to eat with his friend Ercolano, she arranges for a lover to visit. When Pietro comes home early, she hides the man under a chicken-coop in the yard. Pietro's dinner ended early because Ercolano's wife had a lover over, whom she hid in a closet where she was fumigating her veils with sulfur. The sulfur made her lover sneeze, allowing Ercolano to find him. Pietro prevented Ercolano from killing the man, who escaped. Perceiving how similar her own situation is, Pietro's Wife protests her own innocence by heaping abuse on the other woman. Then, remembering that her own lover is still hiding, she tries to coax Pietro to go to sleep.

Pietro's wife was driven to her secret sex life because of her husband's own sexual appetites; yet an antifeminist double standard applies to their relationship. While she has relatively little power in the face of his affairs, hiding her lover is a sign that she recognizes the potential consequences (violence, repudiation and divorce, loss of reputation) if he finds out about hers. Her critical stance towards Ercolano's wife (when she finds herself in the same situation) draws on misogynistic beliefs that regard women as hypocritical and deceitful.

Unfortunately, before she succeeds, a donkey that's loose in the yard steps on the lover's hand, and when he screams, Pietro quickly finds him. He criticizes his wife for indicting other women for her same sins, but she hits back with an attack on his unwillingness to attend to her sexual needs. Pietro, tired of listening, silences her and asks her to prepare some food for the three of them, none of whom have eaten yet. Afterwards, they arrange matters "to the mutual satisfaction of the three parties," although the next day the dazed young lover can't say if he spent more time with the husband or the wife.

Both Pietro and his wife have legitimate complaints in this moment. Pietro is bothered to discover that his wife has been cheating, and he's rightfully annoyed that she criticized another woman for doing the same thing she herself has done. But medieval conceptions of marriage held that husbands and wives were responsible to care for each other's sexual needs, so Pietro's wife is also correct to point out that he has failed to hold up his end of the bargain. Pietro acknowledges this impasse when he backs down. But his wife's ability to get away with her affairs without punishment draws both on a cultural antipathy for Pietro's homosexuality and on the fabliaux *tradition, where clever wives are never punished for pulling one over on husbands who deserve it for failing to meet their wives' sexual needs.*

DAY 5: CONCLUSION

With Dioneo's story at an end, Fiammetta crowns Elissa as the next day's sovereign. She decrees that the next day's theme will be people who have returned tit for tat or who have been saved from danger or ridicule by way of a quick reply.

Since the first day, many of The Decameron*'s tales have turned on a clever answer or timely reply. Thus, many threads previously introduced to the larger work will be woven through the tales of Day 6, based on Elissa's theme of wisecrack and retort.*

After dinner, as Emilia begins to dance, Elissa asks Dioneo to sing. He tries a bunch of bawdy songs, which are all rejected by the ladies, until finally agreeing on a "pleasant" song that describes how the light from a lady's eyes kindles love in a man's heart and subjects him to Cupid's sovereignty.

Dioneo seems unwilling to move beyond the smutty ending to his tale in his suggestion of dirty songs. But the idea of balance that the brigata *exemplifies means that when Elissa chastises him for his disrespect, he bites his tongue and sings the kind of song he's been asked to. He thus demonstrates both respect for the sovereign's authority as well as self-mastery and control.*

DAY 6: INTRODUCTION

In the morning, the members of the brigata wander the **gardens** and fields, talking about previous days' tales. After breakfast, some nap, others play games, and Dioneo and Lauretta sing about Troilus and Criseyde. As they gather for the day's stories, a commotion arises in the kitchen. The steward (Parmeno) explains that Liscia and Tindaro are arguing. Elissa commands them to appear and explain themselves.

The fact that members of the brigata *are still discussing previous days' tales suggests the power of storytelling generally, and the value of Giovanni Boccaccio's stories, including both* The Decameron *and his version of the Troilus and Criseyde story, titled* Il Filostrato, *which he wrote in the 1330s. The quarrel between Liscia and Parmeno is the only time that anything infringes on the country pleasures enjoyed by the* brigata. *Elissa was able to get Dioneo to restrain his excessive naughtiness the day before (V, Concl.), and this argument offers Elissa another opportunity to show her ability to maintain the* brigata*'s sense of moderation and balance.*

Tindaro is about to speak when Liscia, spoiling for a fight and considering him an "ignorant lout," interrupts. She tells Elissa that Tindaro thinks he knows Sicofante's Wife better than Liscia herself. Tindaro tried to tell her that Sicofante had to "force an entry" into her "Castle Dusk" on their wedding night because she was a virgin. In fact, he found easy entry. Tindaro credulously believes that girls squander their youths waiting for their husbands and fathers to arrange their marriages. She doesn't know one woman who went to her husband a virgin, and most of the wives she knows get up to tricks behind their husbands' backs.

This argument points directly back to some of the claims made by the Beldam in Dioneo's fifth tale (the last tale told before the argument). Both claim that women who wait for husbands to fulfill their sexual needs are foolish and wasting their precious time and youthful beauty. Both are rooted in deeply misogynistic views of women as lustful, dishonest creatures. In addition, Liscia herself embodies antifeminist stereotypes about women's love of argument and gossip. The metaphor, in which Sicofante had to force his entry into his wife's "Castle Dusk," describes a common medieval understanding that equated female virginity with the integrity of the hymen (a membrane partially covering the vagina). Sicofante's easy entry means that someone before him cleared the way to his wife's "castle." And the very use of "castle" to discuss sexual access subtly reinforces the idea that a woman's sexual integrity (virginity) was considered a valuable possession.

Elissa can't silence Liscia during this speech, but when it ends, she asks Dioneo to pronounce a verdict. He agrees with Liscia. Elissa must command her to hold her tongue when she begins to taunt Tindaro, then commands them to return to the kitchen before Liscia takes over the entire day with her "prattle." She then asks Filomena to begin.

Liscia's excessive talking and disrespect for authority—Elissa can't get a word in edgewise—make her an embodiment of more antifeminist stereotypes. By posing the case to the rest of the brigata, *Elissa suggests a common feature of* fin'amors *(refined loving) literature: the so-called "court of love," in which ladies and gentlemen would debate the merits of a particular scenario according to the codes of* fin'amors. *In this case, however, there is no debate: Dioneo asserts that Liscia is right and that women are, by nature, lustful.*

DAY 6: FIRST TALE

Filomena prefaces her story with Pampinea's words from the first day about wit being the best way to improve polite conversation. Unfortunately, she continues, it is exceptionally rare in modern ladies.

In introducing her sixth tale, Filomena quotes something Pampinea said in the introduction to her first (I, 10) almost word for word. In painting the witty woman as the rare ideal, her statement simultaneously points to the antifeminism that contextualizes most of the tales, and contributes to the book's celebration of intelligence generally.

Most of the company probably knows—personally or by reputation—their fellow Florentine, Madonna Oretta. The wife of Geri Spina has a "silver tongue," and the excellent character that comes from "gentle breeding." While walking with her in the country one day, a knight offers to make her journey as pleasant as if she was riding a horse by telling a story.

The knight offers a clever metaphor for a journey when he compares his story to the comfort of riding on a horse. But because Filomena warns readers that Madonna Oretta is an excellent example of womanhood, nobility, and wit, it's clear that the knight must do an excellent job to make good on his promise.

His theme is excellent, but he bungles the story with redundant phrasing, repeated plot points, and asides about his lack of skill. His terrible performance makes Madonna Oretta feel physically ill. She interrupts him, noting that his "horse" trots very jerkily, and she would like to dismount. The knight accepts her witty criticism cheerfully and turns to tales he can tell more skillfully.

The idea of the badly-told story making Madonna Oretta physically ill recalls the horse metaphor—her reaction is like an aural motion sickness from trying to follow the knight's convoluted narration. In a self-consciously constructed literary project that offers as many tales entertaining tales as The Decameron *does, it also suggests how difficult the task is that Giovanni Boccaccio has pulled off with such elegance. Aristocratic Oretta's retort, witty and funny enough to avoid coming across as rude, contrasts with the abuse that Liscia (a common servant) heaped on Tindaro during the argument that immediately preceded the tale, because she was able to disarm the knight without making him feel belittled, angry, or hurt.*

DAY 6: SECOND TALE

Filomena's tale has reminded Pampinea of another one about Geri Spina. It shows that, while nature sometimes gives bad characters to noble people, **fortune** often gives noble characters to lowly people. One example is Cisti, a common baker but still a "man of exceedingly lofty spirit." After some remarks about why fortune might put noble spirits in bourgeoise men—because burying treasures often protects them from theft—Pampinea begins.

The Decameron*'s ongoing argument about the inherent nature of worth—saying that a person's merit is based on their character rather than external factors—intersects with fortune like this frequently. Class and wealth are accidents of fortune, and it's just as possible for a commoner like Cisti to act nobly as it is for a nobleman to act distastefully, Pampinea's comments about the rivalry between nature and fortune intersect with the tale of Cimon (V, 1), whose nobility, granted to him by nature, was for a time constrained and hidden by fortune.*

When the Pope sends a delegation of emissaries to Florence to make peace between warring factions, Geri Spina is their host. Each day, they pass Cisti's bakery while conducting their business. Cisti is of humble origins, but his bakery has made him rich, and he has an excellent wine cellar. He wants to offer hospitality to Geri and his eminent guests, without directly inviting them to his humble home.

Although he's not a nobleman, and therefore wouldn't be an appropriate host for these important diplomats, Cimon's wealth and good taste mean that he has what it would take to properly entertain them: good wine and a hospitable attitude. But because it would be rude to cross class lines in this way, he must resort to tempting the men into asking to join him rather than just directly inviting them.

Instead, Cisti sits outside when they pass, drinking wine from a sparkling glass with evident delight. On the third morning of this show, Geri Spina asks if the wine is good, and Cisti offers him a taste. Seating his guests on a bench, he washes four glasses and serves his best vintage. The emissaries and Geri say it's the best they've ever tasted, and they begin to stop by daily.

Cisti demonstrates wit and cleverness in setting up such a tempting display with which to lure Geri Spina and the delegates to join him. Their approval, both of his wine and of his qualities as a host, cements a rapport between them, even if their class prevents them from being friends, which would imply equality.

Before the emissaries leave, Geri Spina hosts a final banquet. He invites Cisti, who declines. Wanting to impress his guests, Geri sends a servant to ask for some of Cisti's wine. Because the servant takes a giant flask, Cisti tells him to get his wine from the Arno River instead. This retort shows Geri how greedy the servant seems, so he scolds the servant and sends him back with a smaller vessel.

Geri Spina is so impressed with Cisti that he is willing to cross class lines to invite the baker to his party—and doing so demonstrates his noble generosity of spirit. But because Cisti is unfailingly virtuous, he declines to play the part of a social climber. Cisti's retort, which implies that the nature of Cisti's request is excessive, offers gentle correction without implicating Geri, his social superior, with greediness. Fortunately, the mismatch arises from the servant's rudeness and greed rather than any deficiency of character in Geri Spina himself.

Cisti happily sends wine to the banquet and brings the last of the vintage to Geri Spina later that day. Impressed by Cisti's generosity and noble spirit, Geri holds him in esteem as a friend for the rest of his life.

Cisti's generosity shows him to be a gentleman by character, if not by birth, since unstinting generosity is an idealized characteristic of the nobility.

DAY 6: THIRD TALE

Lauretta agrees with Filomena and Pampinea about the importance of wit as a skill for ladies, noting that it must stay gentle enough to avoid being considered abuse. However, when someone has been "bitten by a dog" (so to speak), an in-kind answer is appropriate.

While the examples of wit in the first two tales were gentle and genteel, Lauretta's tale suggests that sometimes more caustic replies are appropriate. This is aligned with The Decameron*'s emphasis on balance and moderation: sharpness can avoid being characterized as meanness or excess in some circumstances.*

When Antonio d'Orso is bishop of Florence, a Catalan nobleman named Dego della Ratta visits the city. A ladies' man, he desires a woman who is related to Antonio. Her notoriously greedy husband agrees to let Dego sleep with her—despite her protests—in exchange for 500 gold florins, but he cheats by paying with small change painted gold. This story eventually becomes common knowledge.

In this example, the bishop's relative is presented as a literal piece of property, the rights to which her husband sells for the right price. In response to this debasing and dehumanizing treatment, her powerful relative looks away, and even cultivates a friendship with her abuser. This is also a denunciation of excess, since her sad fate is at the confluence of Dego's excessive lust and dishonesty and her husband's excessive greed.

Later, when Antonio d'Orso and Dego della Ratta ride through the streets during St. John's festival, Antonio points out Nonna de' Pulci, a new bride living in the neighborhood (who's since sadly died in the recent plague), to Dego. Calling to her, Antonio asks if she could "make a conquest" of Dego herself.

The moment where Lauretta reminds members of the brigata that they may have known Nonna de' Pulci in her old age is the only direct reference to the plague in The Decameron *after the group leaves Florence. It's hard to emphasize just how inappropriate the Bishop's off-the-cuff comment to Nonna is: not only is a leader of the local church suggesting that one of the Christian souls in his care commit herself to sin, he's doing it publicly, in a context where the mere hint of impropriety could compromise her honor.*

Nonna de' Pulci, worried about her reputation in the face of Antonio d'Orso's public words, swiftly retorts: "In the unlikely event" that she would, she would want Dego della Ratta to pay her "in good coin." Her reply stings Dego for its indictment of his dishonesty, and Antonio for its implication about his relative. They ride away ashamed. And, because they bit first, Lauretta believes her "equally biting retort" wasn't wrong.

Nonna recognizes that this is a moment in which her reputation—dependent as it is on the opinion of her friends and neighbors—could be permanently damaged by a powerful man's offhand remark to his friend. These are the stakes that license a retort that would, in other circumstances, be considered excessive. In pointing to the story of the other unlucky woman whose husband became her pimp, she demonstrates a biting wit and shames both men: Dego for cheating on the payment, and the bishop for turning the other way.

DAY 6: FOURTH TALE

Neifile's tale will illustrate how **fortune** sometimes gives people a prompt retort in a moment of need. Noble Florentine gentleman Currado Gianfigliazzi loves hunting. One day, he catches a fine crane and asks his Venetian cook, Chichibio, to prepare it for his dinner guests. While Chichibio is roasting it, his girlfriend Brunetta begs him to give her one of its legs. She harasses him until he gives in.

Thanks to a trade rivalry between the cities of Florence and Venice, The Decameron *characterizes the few Venetians who appear in the tales as overly gullible, vain, shallow, and mendacious (see IV, 2). In addition to being a Venetian, Chichibio is also rather spineless before his girlfriend, who ultimately bullies him into stealing from his master's fine banquet.*

Currado Gianfigliazzi is surprised to be served a one-legged roasted crane for dinner. He asks Chichibio what happened, and Chichibio (since he's Venetian) quickly lies, saying everyone knows cranes have one leg. Currado demands proof and warns that if Chichibio is wrong, he will earn a severe whipping.

Again, Chichibio's answer draws on stereotypes painting the Venetians as uncouth and sinful people that would have appealed to The Decameron*'s original, Florentine audience.*

The next morning, Currado Gianfigliazzi and Chichibio go to the river, where Chichibio points to cranes sleeping on one leg along the riverbank as proof. But when Currado shouts "Oho!" they put down their second legs and fly off. An answer suddenly comes to Chichibio, who points out that Currado didn't shout "Oho!" at dinner. If he had, the roasted crane would have shoved out its second leg, too. This amusing answer turns Currado's rage into laughter, allowing Chichibio to avoid being whipped.

Everyone knows that cranes really have two legs, even if they tend to tuck one up at rest. But Chichibio comes up with an answer funny enough to diffuse Currado's anger at the last second. While in other tales this might be taken as a marker of his ingenuity and cleverness, since he's a Venetian (and Venetians are inferior to Florentines), the tale's Florentine narrator ascribes his success to the whim of fortune instead.

DAY 6: FIFTH TALE

In his tale, Filostrato proposes to expand on Pampinea's claim that **fortune** sometimes hides wit in humble men with proof that it also hides it in ugly people. In Florence, Forese da Rabatta is a brilliant lawyer despite an appearance so "deformed" it would make the Baronci look beautiful. Giotto is an artist of such "outstanding genius" that his realistic works make a "shining monument to the glory of Florence," but who is at least as ugly as Forese.

In addition to providing narratives of retort and response, the narrators also use their tales to talk to and debate with each other as Filostrato expands on Pampinea's earlier claims. Both of the men named in his tale were important and well-regarded Florentines. Although Giotto died while Giovanni Boccaccio was still a child, Filostrato isn't exaggerating his importance to Italian art—and European art in general—so it's unsurprising that Giovanni Boccaccio would know of and respect him deeply. In addition to being a lawyer, Forese was a powerful figure in Florentine politics throughout Boccaccio's lifetime. Their physical ugliness contrasts sharply with their intellectual and artistic achievements in the tale, and offers a pointed reminder that internal rectitude and character are better indicators of a person's worth than their physical appearance (or wealth, or class status).

Both Forese da Rabatta and Giotto own property just outside Florence, and one day they meet each other riding back to the city. Each is on an old, slow, and ugly horse. It starts to rain, so the venerable men take shelter, but when it shows no sign of letting up, they borrow some shabby old capes and hats from a peasant for protection and resume their ride. Within a few miles, these are soaked and mud-spattered.

The tale emphasizes the ugliness of Forese and Giotto by drenching them with rainwater and clothing them in ratty clothing. By the end of their ride, they both look totally ridiculous and bedraggled.

Forese da Rabatta and Giotto strike up a conversation, and after a while, Forese turns towards his companion. Giotto's "unkempt and disreputable" appearance makes him laugh, and he says that, if they meet a stranger who doesn't already know him, the stranger will never believe that Giotto is a famous painter. Giotto replies that the stranger would believe this if he could give Forese credit for knowing the alphabet. Thus, Giotto strikes Forese with his own weapon.

Forese offers the first barb in this tale, but he's met with an exactly equal retort from Giotto. Rather than the insults diminishing either man, their mutual wittiness is a credit to their character.

DAY 6: SIXTH TALE

Panfilo's story mentioned the Baronci, which inspires Fiammetta's tale. In Florence, Michele Scalza is visiting some friends who argue about who is the most ancient and noble Florentine family. Michele declares that no one knows what they're talking about and that the most ancient and noble family—not just in Florence, but in the whole world—is the Baronci, and he's willing to wager supper for six on his ability to prove it.

The young men at the heart of this tale match wits on many topics, and Michele uses this as an opportunity to show off his special skills of wit and repartee—fitting in with the day's theme. And, because it invokes the idea of well-established families and nobility, it seems that the tale will provide further commentary on the relationship between class and nobility of spirit.

Neri Mannini takes the bet, with their host, Pietro di Fiorentino, acting as judge. Pietro listens first to Neri's, then to Michele Scalza's argument. Michele starts with the common understanding that a family is more noble the older it is. And he can easily prove that the Baronci line is the most ancient of all. When God made them, he was still "learning the rudiments of his craft," so they came out ill-formed and ugly. Asking everyone to picture their excessive ugliness as proof, he rests his case. Everyone agrees, declaring Michele the winner. This is why Panfilo compared Forese da Rabatta's appearance to the Baronci.

In making his joke at the expense of the Baronci (a historical family of Florentine merchants), Michele's argument mocks the idea that physical appearance, wealth, and social status prove a person's merit. The Baronci are ugly because their line is ancient, and neither their looks nor their well-established family name say anything, in this tale, about their virtue or character as a family. Michele's joke about the Baronci can therefore be interpreted as an exaggeration that mocks standard measures of a person's worth such as wealth, name, or appearance. Nevertheless, while his clever argument fits with the day's theme, it is also startling in its unkindness towards a family who had living members in Florence in Giovanni Boccaccio's day. It's also blasphemous in its suggestion that God (who is understood to be all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfect in Christian theology) had to practice to figure out how to make beautiful human forms, and for this reason, it was frequently skipped or heavily edited by The Decameron*'s early editors and translators.*

DAY 6: SEVENTH TALE

Filostrato notes that while being able to say the right thing is generally good, it's even more impressive under duress, as the heroine of his story will prove.

Filostrato's introductory comments suggest the spirit of good-natured competition among the members of the brigata *that occasionally rises during a day's storytelling (it is particularly notable on Day 10). And indeed, his tale switches from the largely humorous and harmless examples offered thus far to focus on a far more serious scenario.*

In Prato, the law says that any woman caught by her husband in adultery—whether she's being paid for it or not—will be burned at the stake. When Rinaldo de' Pugliesi discovers his wife Madonna Filippa in the arms of Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri, he invokes this statute. Love makes Madonna Filippa fearless; despite being advised to flee, she resolves to answer the summons and defend herself in court.

The law which sentences women to death for adulterous sex dramatically points to the vulnerability of women under a patriarchal system (controlled by men) that considers personal and familial honor to be closely tied to female sexuality. It also points to a sexual double standard, since the punishment applies only to the woman, not to her sexual partner in adultery. To add insult to injury, Rinaldo's wife has taken her lover from a rival family. Madonna Filippa's courage suggests that her feelings for her lover are not only steadfast and refined (following the outlines of fin'amors*, or refined loving) but that, somehow, her love is right and good, despite flying in the face of religious and cultural standards.*


The magistrate is impressed with Madonna Filippa's beauty, breeding, and fortitude. He hopes she won't confess so he can avoid sentencing her to death, but he still asks if her husband's accusation is true. Filippa admits that Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri is her lover and that they've slept together many times. But, she maintains, laws should apply to everyone equally and should have the consent of those whom they govern. The present statute applies only to women, and they didn't consent when it was written.

In Madonna Filippa, Filostrato offers the portrait of an exemplary woman, whose merit and dignity are evident to everyone around her. She also avoids stereotypical displays of overwrought feminine emotion, approaching her court case with the focus and steely determination of a lawyer. Although her argument is logical, neither of its two components characterized law in the Middle Ages, which often distinguished between people based on their gender, creed, or social status. Moreover, laws were not generally subject to popular consent—much less the opinions of women. So, while her arguments might strike modern readers favorably, they are academic rather than applicable.

If the court insists on prosecuting her by this unfair law, Madonna Filippa wants it to ask her husband if she ever denied him when he asked for sex. Rinaldo de' Pugliesi says that she hasn't. If her husband is satisfied, Filippa demands to know, what should she do with the excess? Isn't it better to give it to a man who values it than to waste it? Everyone is charmed by her speech, declaring in unison that she is correct. The magistrate frees her and changes the statute so that only women who accept money for adultery will be punished in the future.

The more convincing part of Filippa's argument follows her general dismissal. Medieval theology considered sexual satisfaction an important part of marriage and held both a husband and wife responsible to fulfill each other's sexual needs within the bounds of reason and respect for social conventions. This concept is called the marital debt. Frequently in the tales, the combination of sexuality and commercial language indicates an objectification or commodification of women, but in the case of the marital debt, responsibility extends to both partners. In this context, Filippa claims that she would be cheating on her husband only if she deprived him of something she owed him, and since she meets his sexual needs, she hasn't wronged him in this way. While her argument is connected to misogynistic ideas about excessive female sex drives (since she has enough to satisfy her husband and *her lover), this tale avoids engaging in those fears. Instead of punishing Filippa, it rewards her for her cleverness and bravery in the face of an unjust law. In contrast, Rinaldo is punished for making their private quarrel public. This makes him more like Roussillon (IV, 9) or Arriguccio Berlinghieri (VII, 8) who bring scorn on themselves for their attempts to punish their wives' infidelity, than like the wise King Agilulf (III, 2). Finally, it's notable that the changed statute retains the death penalty for women engaged in prostitution (trading money for sex). While this generally aligns with fears about prostitution expressed in other tales (see, for example, VIII, 1 and 2), it's also a class-based distinction, since well-off noble and middle-class women were less likely to be engaged in prostitution than common, low-class women.*

DAY 6: EIGHTH TALE

At first the ladies of the company are a little embarrassed by Filostrato's tale, but by the end, they're laughing merrily. Emilia, as if rousing herself from a pleasant daydream, begins her story next.

Filostrato seems to like making the ladies uncomfortable. As usual, when the men of the brigata *push the bounds of propriety, the women show embarrassment or complain, but because the group represents moderation and balance, their discomfort is always momentary, and the sins and debauchery they describe never go beyond the boundaries of the tales themselves.*

A gentleman named Fresco da Celatico has a niece called Cesca. She's pretty enough, but she has a high opinion of herself and criticizes everything and everyone she encounters rather than thinking of her own defects. She is "disagreeable, petulant, insipid," impossible to please, and very vain.

The portrait Emilia paints of Cesca is extremely unflattering and draws on misogynistic stereotypes that paint women as vain, shallow, argumentative, and unintelligent. On top of this, Cesca is rude and disrespectful towards her distinguished uncle.

One day, Cesca returns from a walk "fretting and fuming." When Fresco da Celatico asks her why she's come home so early, she says that everyone on the street was awful, and since she is "more upset by the sight of horrid people" than anyone else in the world, she came home early so she didn't have to look at any. Annoyed, Fresco says that if she doesn't like horrid people, she'd better not look in the mirror, but the empty-headed child doesn't understand the insult.

In medieval literature and art, mirrors are an important symbol of truth and revelation. Thus, when Fresco suggests she would find a truly disagreeable person in her mirror, he subtly airs his own opinion of her (even though she isn't clever enough to understand that she has been insulted). And he also suggests that he's a better observer of her character than she herself is.

DAY 6: NINTH TALE

Leaving Dioneo the final tale, Elissa begins next, recalling Florence's glorious past, when people displayed their generosity in fraternities dedicated to noble entertainments.

Giovanni Boccaccio's pride in his hometown of Florence is evident throughout the tales, many of which are set in his fair city. The invocation of a glorious past in the introduction to Elissa's sixth tale hints at the downturn in Florence's status and wealth in the early part of the 14th century, due to political shifts and changes in trade routes. The young men's fraternities are characterized both by wit and by generosity, which was an important value to the medieval aristocracy.

Betto Brunelleschi leads one of these fraternities, and he wants to add Guido Cavalcante to his coterie. Guido is a charming, sophisticated, extremely intelligent conversationalist. Also, he's rich and can entertain lavishly. Betto believes his inability to win Guido's friendship is due to Guido's intellectual aloofness. People think that Guido is an Epicurean whose intellectual pursuits are concerned with proving the nonexistence of God.

Guido Cavalcanti was a near contemporary of Giovanni Boccaccio (dying shortly before Boccaccio's birth) and a beloved friend and fellow poet of Dante Alighieri. In addition, Cavalcanti was a foundational figure of the stilnovisti *poetry that influences* The Decameron*'s particular flavor of ennobling* fin'amors *(refined loving). The charge of Epicurianism is a veiled way of suggesting that Guido was an atheist; his intellectual triumph over the other young men thus champions the humanistic ideology on display in* The Decameron, *which has human efforts and achievements, rather than religious doctrines, as its focus.*

One day, as Guido wanders in a cemetery, Betto Brunelleschi and his friends decide to taunt him. They charge at him with horses, asking what good it will do to prove that God doesn't exist. Guido says that they have every right to criticize him in their own home, and then he vaults over a crypt and goes on his way. The companions are confused, since the cemetery is public ground, but Betto understands Guido's implication that they belong in the cemetery because common men might as well be dead to "other men of learning" like Guido. Betto's ashamed friends are impressed by his insight and never taunt Guido again.

In his retort, Guido both disarms the young men's criticism of his alleged atheism and demonstrates his superior intellect and wit. His answer is thus a near-perfect example of the day's theme. In this context, Betto's understanding allows the tale to explain the true meaning of Guido's tease for any members of the audience who might not have understood it themselves. This emphasizes Guido's superiority not only over his immediate detractors but over the vast majority of people, including the tale's audience.

DAY 6: TENTH TALE

Dioneo declares his intention to tell a story on the day's theme, about how a friar of St. Anthony neatly avoided a trap set by two youths. Each year, Friar Cipolla visits Certaldo to collect alms. He's warmly welcomed, maybe because his name sounds like "onion" and the region is known for growing onions. Friar Cipolla is short, with red hair and a merry face, and although he's illiterate, he talks up such a storm that people think he's a rhetorical master—at least at first. During one visit, Friar Cipolla, after reminding everyone to make generous donations so that St. Anthony will watch over their livestock, says he has brought a special relic this year: a feather dropped by the Archangel Gabriel during the Annunciation.

The humor in Dioneo's tale runs on two axes: one is class, and he pokes good-natured fun at the gullible and sheltered locals of the village (where Giovanni Boccaccio himself spent the final years of his life and where he was possibly born) and at the smooth-talking but illiterate monk. The book's argument that nobility of spirit can be found among the good men and women of any class rarely applies in practice to its commoner characters (Simona and Pasquino, the doomed lovers of IV, 7, are a notable exception to this rule). The other axis of this tale's humor is its anticlerical satire, which is aimed partly at undereducated huckster Friar Cipolla and partly at the booming late-medieval business of relic peddling. St. Anthony the Great, patron saint of Friar Cipolla's order of monks, was known for leaving civilization and living an isolated life of extreme hardship and devotion in the desert (see Dioneo's earlier tale of Alibech and Rustico in in III, 10 for other desert monks). The contrast between St. Anthony's devotion and the modern monks, nuns, and priests who are satirized throughout The Decameron *couldn't be much bigger. Relics (remnants of the bodies or belongings of saints or Biblical figures, reputed to have miraculous, often healing properties) were a big business in the Middle Ages, and from the earliest decades of the Christian Church, people had been counterfeiting them. The idea that a humble, itinerant monk like Friar Cipolla would have such an important relic as an archangel's feather with him on the road should make the citizens of Certaldo more suspicious than they are.*

Giovanni del Bragoniera and Biagio Pizzini hear this and decide to play a prank on Friar Cipolla. While he dines with friends, they go to his inn with the intention of distracting his servant, Guccio Porco, and stealing the feather. They can't wait to hear how he'll explain away its absence.

Friar Cipolla claims to be in possession of powerful relics, yet Giovanni and Biagio decide to prank him by stealing one. This suggests that they are either not worried about offending God by stealing from a holy man, or that they suspect that the "relics" aren't quite what Friar Cipolla claims they are.

Friar Cipolla frequently denigrates Guccio Imbratta (Guccio the Pig), listing his fatal flaws in a song: Porco is "untruthful, distasteful, and slothful; negligent, disobedient, and truculent; careless, witless, and graceless." Cipolla mocks his desire to find a wife and his belief that his "greasy beard" is handsome. He also loves gossip. When Giovanni del Bragoniera and Biagio Pizzini arrive, Guccio is busy seducing an unattractive kitchen maid named Nuta, despite his stained, greasy, and torn clothes and ragged shoes.

Guccio Imbratta ("filthy Guccio") appears in a bit role in the earlier tale of Simona and Pasquino (IV, 7). But unlike the unlucky lovers, he has no dignity or redeeming traits. The extremely long and detailed description Friar Cipolla has for his servant gives the audience a foretaste of his rhetorical style (which will be on brilliant display later in the tale). But it is also an extremely unflattering portrait of the sins and character flaws of the common or lowest classes of society. Friar Cipolla's characterization of Guccio mixes a list of sins (lying, slothful, disobedient) with character flaws (witless, graceless), implying that the rude behavior of this rustic servant is as serious as sin.

Giovanni del Bragoniera and Biagio Pizzini head to the friar's room and root though his luggage, where they find a small box wrapped in cloth, in which is a parrot's tail-feather. Doubtless, Friar Cipolla would have gotten away with this "relic," since the townsfolk are simple and not well-traveled. The young men remove it and put some coals in the box.

If there were any doubt that Friar Cipolla might be carrying false relics at the tale's outset, they are put to rest now: the "angel" feather came from a parrot. The rustic, simple citizens of Certaldo would likely have believed Friar Cipolla's story about it, but now he will have to explain how it's been transformed into lumps of coal.

That afternoon, when the entire populace has gathered in front of the church, Friar Cipolla begins his sermon. But at the climactic moment when he opens the box, he finds coal instead of a feather. Without skipping a beat, he charges on, telling the audience how he traveled all over the world in his youth. He lists the places he visited, which include "Bordello," "Bedlam," and "Liarland" (where many friars live); places like Abruzzi where everyone loves to go clogging; and the Basque mountains, where water flows down.

Friar Cipolla's speech is studded with malapropisms (the humorous misuse or distortion of a word) and false wonders. His ornate style informs The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire, calling into question how readily anyone should believe a religious authority, no matter how impressive they sound. And, since the citizens of the village hang on his every word, it also carries a class-based criticism of commoners' lack of education and judgment. Friar Cipolla's itinerary passes through a mix of nonsensical, made-up places like Liarland, Bordello (a brothel), and Bedlam (a madhouse), and real places described as supposedly marvelous, including Abruzzi (where, following medieval implications of "clogging," everyone is homosexual) and the Basque mountains where water flows downwards (as it does everywhere, thanks to gravity).*


Eventually, in the Holy Land, Father Cipolla saw the vast relic collections of Father Besokindas Tocursemenot. These included the finger of the Holy Ghost and a phial of angel's sweat. Tocursemenot gave Friar Cipolla "holes from the Holy Cross," "sound … from Solomon's Temple," and Gabriel's feather, among other things. He later traded one for coals over which "St. Lawrence was roasted." And they may lack official paperwork, but his relics have already worked some miracles.

The high point of Friar Cipolla's rhetorical style comes when he describes meeting Father Be-so-kind-as To-curse-me-not, a holy man he met in the Holy Land (areas of present-day Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria). This man's relics are obviously ridiculous: ghosts can't have fingers, sounds can't be preserved in bottles, and holes can't be carried about. The holes of the cross likely mock the proliferation of fragments of the true cross (on which Christ was crucified) across the Middle Ages. By the 14th century, good relics would have an origin story, a traceable history back to their original saint or Biblical character, and paperwork certifying their authenticity. Friar Cipolla's relics have an absurd origin story and no paperwork, but the simple, gullible commoners in the village are willing to take him at his word. Friar Cipolla associates the lumps of coal left in his relic-box with St. Lawrence, a 3rd-century bishop who was martyred, according to legend, by being roasted over an open fire.


Friar Cipolla has the coals with him now because their box is identical to the feather's box, and he sometimes grabs the wrong one. But anyone whom he marks with the coals can rest assured that for at least a year, they won't be able to touch fire *without* being burned. The people press forward so Friar Cipolla can draw crosses on them. And this is how he turned the tables on Giovanni del Bragoniera and Biagio Pizzini, who tried to prank him, and who very much enjoyed his extemporaneous sermon.

Again, while Friar Cipolla's language suggests something miraculous, he's describing the way the world works: anyone who touches fire would, in the normal course of things, be burned—the miracle would be touching fire unharmed. In this way, although he's a huckster, he is at least avoiding the serious sin of lying.

DAY 6: CONCLUSION

As the laughter over Friar Cipolla's relics dies down, Elissa places the crown on Dioneo's head. Claiming that the kings on a chessboard are worthier than he is, he promises to do his best. Recalling Liscia's claims about women's tricks, he proposes that the next day's tales will focus on the tricks women play on their husbands, whether they get away with it or not. The ladies protest that it is an inappropriate subject, but Dioneo replies that the chaos of the current age—during the Plague—gives people more license. And anyway, refusal to talk about women's "little peccadilloes" suggests that they have guilty consciences. After this, they agree.

Dioneo's self-deprecating remarks (suggesting his inability to exercise authority over the brigata*) stand in contrast to the easy self-assurance he usually displays in telling humorous, often vulgar stories. The theme he suggests connects to the argument among the servants in the morning, but it also immediately suggests the* fabliaux *genre, which tells humorous and often vulgar stories about women pulling one over on their husbands. The conversation about whether this is an appropriate theme raises the idea of excess and moderation that runs throughout the book, and Dioneo's retort echoes its larger argument that moral rectitude (such as that shown by the* brigata*) tames nearly all kinds of excess.*

Because the sun is still high in the sky, the men fall into a game of dice while Elissa takes the ladies to the nearby Valley of the Ladies. It can only be entered by a narrow path. Its floor is a perfect circle surrounded by six hills, each topped with a castle. The hillsides flow down in terraces to the valley floor; the south-facing ones are covered by fruit trees, and the north-facing ones by hardwoods. The valley floor is filled with cypress, bay-trees, firs, and pines, which shade the soft grass floor and the little flowers that dot it.

Of all the loci amoeni *("pleasant places") which Giovanni Boccaccio provides for his narrators to tell their tales, the Valley of the Ladies receives the greatest attention. This valley immediately suggests the peace and safety that the* brigata *seek in the countryside, since it's only accessible through one well-hidden pathway. Moreover, it is a vision of a beautiful natural setting on which human ingenuity has imposed a sense of moderation, balance, and order. In this way, more than any of the other gardens, it symbolizes the power and goodness of moderation as a force in society, and as a personal virtue.*

A stream cascades down between two of the hills, filling the valley with its soothing sound. It flows through a channel to a central lake. This lake is also perfectly circular, and not very deep; its waters are crystal clear, and it's filled with fish. Since they're alone and it is hot, the ladies undress to swim, and the water doesn't obscure their lovely bodies. They try to catch the fish by hand. After they exit the water, dress, and return to the men, Pampinea describes the Valley to Dioneo, Panfilo, and Filostrato.

Although the men of the brigata *are safely behind in the old garden, and the ladies are in the valley alone, the hints about their lovely nude bodies make the book's audience into leering voyeurs. The contrast between their supposed privacy and their actual vulnerability to the readers' gaze suggests the vulnerability of women to objectification and control by men and their society that is on display throughout* The Decameron. *And it's another moment where Boccaccio's claims to love and respect the ladies in theory seem to fall apart in practice—although he doesn't describe their lovely bodies in detail, he clearly states that he could see them in full through the clear water.*

After supper, Dioneo, Panfilo, and Filostrato travel to see the Valley of the Ladies for themselves. They return to find the ladies dancing, and after discussing the Valley's beauty, they all decide to hold their storytelling there the next day. Panfilo begins the first dance at Dioneo's request, and Elissa sings.

The men are just as charmed by the Valley of the Ladies' marriage of nature and rational order as the women were, so they decide to spend the following day there. Thus will the most chaotic theme (suggesting the subversion of gender norms that place men in authority over women and the subversion of the marital vows that bind people together) be tamed somewhat by taking place in the most moderate and balanced setting.

Elissa's song causes some puzzlement. In it, a young woman who thought love was peaceful discovers that it's vicious and violent. She feels ambushed and abused. Love took her prisoner and has made her suffer and pine so much that her beauty has faded. She prays either for death or restoration.

Elissa's song engages in the themes and metaphors of fin'amors *(refined loving). Ahead of Day 7, which will focus on tales of lust and trickery, she describes being tricked by Love, which tempted her with sweet affections but then turned around and imprisoned her in the painful suffering of unrequited love. The song's narrator has lost her beauty, which both suggests the power of love and also hints at the fleeting nature of love and youth.*

DAY 7: INTRODUCTION

Only Venus is still visible in the sky when the steward (Parmeno) takes the day's supplies to the Valley of the Ladies. The sun is still rising and the nightingales are still singing when the company sets out behind him. The Valley seems even more beautiful in the morning. After they sing, eat breakfast, and amuse themselves (or rest in canopied beds tucked between the trees), they gather for the day's tales.

On the dawn of a day that will feature bawdy and explicit stories, all signs point to sex: the planet Venus (named after the Roman goddess of love) is shining in the sky; nightingales (patron birds of lovers, which are a central feature in tale V, 4) are signing; and the Valley of the Ladies is even more luscious in the morning than it was the previous night.

DAY 7: FIRST TALE

Emilia, noting that women are often scared of werewolves, plans to tell a tale with a good prayer to exorcise them. In Florence, successful merchant and devout Christian Gianni Lotteringhi lives with his wife, Monna Tessa. Quick, intelligent Monna Tessa (daughter of Mannuccio dalla Cuculia) takes Federigo di Neri Pegolotti as her lover.

The premise of Emilia's tale raises assumptions about female vulnerability and fearfulness in order to subvert them. Monna Tessa's family name, Cuculia, means "cuckoo" and its sound recalls "cuckold" (the word for a husband whose wife cheated on him). It later becomes clear that the meaning of "werewolf" in this context is less like the specific, modern idea of a wolf-man hybrid and more like a generalized "bogeyman."

In the summer, Monna Tessa stays at her husband's country villa which Gianni Lotteringhi visits only occasionally. She lets Federigo di Neri Pegolotti know when it's safe to visit by turning a donkey skull that's mounted on a stake in the vineyard: toward Florence for come, toward Fiesole for stay away. When Federigo comes to the villa after dark, he knocks three times to be let in.

The donkey-skull sign is both a demonstration of Monna Tessa's cleverness—which will be important later in the story—and part of The Decameron*'s commitment to specific descriptions, even in stories with crazy premises; Giovanni Boccaccio describes the mechanism in loving detail.*

One day when Federigo di Neri Pegolotti is due to visit and Monna Tessa has prepared a nice meal, Gianni Lotteringhi turns up unexpectedly. She has a maid leave the meal in the **garden** but forgets to leave an explanation for Federigo, so he comes to the door. The knocking wakes Gianni, and Monna Tessa says it's a werewolf that terrifies her every night.

After her husband ruins her plans, Monna Tessa tries to divert Federigo to the garden—less pleasant than sharing her bed, perhaps, but a place of safety and diversion where he can at least enjoy the good meal she prepared for him. Yet, her plan is undermined by simple human forgetfulness.

Gianni Lotteringhi assures Monna Tessa that he's already said some efficacious prayers for safety. Inspired, she explains that an anchoress recently taught her a prayer to exorcise werewolves and she's feeling brave enough to try it with Gianni there. At the door, she loudly recites a prayer telling the "werewolf" with its erect tail that it should leave her and her husband alone but could find food in the **garden**. Federigo di Neri Pegolotti understands, and he and Monna Tessa laugh about their close call later.

Gianni, since he is a pious and faithful man, doesn't fear anything that comes in the night, but Monna Tessa must still come up with a way to secretly communicate with her lover and warn him off. Her clever plan hinges on having received secret religious knowledge from an anchoress (holy women who lived out their lives enclosed in small rooms attached to churches). Her prayer includes enough detail (such as the erect tail and her husband's presence) to be unmistakable to her lover, and thus she successfully tricks her husband without getting caught.

Emilia notes that some people say that Monna Tessa had set the skull for "stay away" but a farmhand unknowingly spun it around; in this version Federigo di Neri Pegolotti lost his lady's bed and didn't get supper. An old neighbor of Emilia says both versions are true, but one refers to a different Gianni. She leaves it to her audience to pick their favorite version.

But, in another nod to realism that makes it feel like this story is based on true events, Emilia offers an alternative ending of the kind that arises when a true story has passed through enough tellers to have gained legendary status.

DAY 7: SECOND TALE

Filostrato goes next, noting the value in sharing wives' tricks, since displays of their cleverness will caution husbands against trying to deceive women like Peronella. She is a poor spinner, living in Naples with Peronella's Husband, who is a bricklayer. Her lover, Giannello Scrignario, daily waits near their home until her husband leaves, then goes to her.

Filostrato, ever bitter about his own frustrated love and prone to betraying his low opinion of women, prefaces his tale by noting the commonness of women's deceits—an idea that comes directly from antifeminist literature and sentiment. While the previous wife and husband were both aristocrats, Filostrato's story also engages in some class commentary since it features two very poor commoners as its central couple.

But one day, as soon as Giannello Scrignario comes in and Peronella locks the door, Peronella's Husband returns. Thinking that she's locked the door to keep other men out, he praises her chastity while she hides her lover in a tub. Peronella heaps verbal abuse on him for coming home instead of earning a day's wages, and she threatens to take lovers if he is unwilling to work. He protests that it's a holiday; no one is working today. And he sold their tub for five ducats to the man he's at the door with.

As in the previous tale, Peronella's husband is foolish for believing in his wife's virtue: the locked door means the exact opposite of what he thinks (or hopes) it means. Peronella's quick-witted plan to hide her love affair draws on antifeminist stereotypes: she plays the role of the nagging wife to distract her husband and catch him off balance to cover up her own faults.

Peronella replies that she's just sold the tub for seven ducats, pending her buyer's inspection of it. Dismissing his buyer, Peronella's Husband goes inside to settle with Giannello Scrignario. Giannello complains that although the tub is sound, it's coated with something, and he wants it clean. Peronella's husband hops in and begins to clean it immediately. She leans over its mouth to give instructions, while Giannello comes up from behind and mounts her like a horse. Just as he finishes, Peronella's husband completes his work and climbs out of the tub. Giannello pays for it and has Peronella's husband carry it to his home.

The tricks Peronella and Giannello play on her husband pile up in this hilarious scene: not only does she hide her affair, but she forces her husband to perform the hard work of cleaning the tub and then her lover has sex with her in the same room as her unwitting husband. To add insult to injury, Peronella's husband carries the tub to Giannello's home, really driving home the idea that he's been outdone and abused by his wife and her lover.

DAY 7: THIRD TALE

Elissa's tale is set in Siena. Young, handsome Rinaldo (soon to become Friar Rinaldo) has fallen in love with his neighbor's wife, Madonna Agnesa. He befriends Madonna Agnesa's Husband and becomes their child's godfather. After later becoming a monk, he initially repudiates his love. But he eventually resumes his vices and begins to behave like a young nobleman again. In this way, he's like most friars, who wear beautiful clothes, develop gout from their indulgent appetites for food and wine, and think that laypeople won't notice their poor example.

According to the medieval standards of consanguinity (the measure of how closely related people were) that determined which relationships were allowable and which were incestuous, godparents were considered blood relatives of a child; for a godparent to have sex with a parent's child was tantamount to incest. Therefore, while Friar Rinaldo's plan to get closer to Madonna Agnesa is a good one, it's also seriously complicated from a romantic standpoint. The unflattering description of his worldliness and sinful inclinations is part of The Decameron*'s anticlerical satire. This example goes so far as to claim that the friars' diets are so rich as to give them gout, a type of arthritis exacerbated or caused by excessive indulgence in alcohol and rich, salty foods.*

Friar Rinaldo resumes his pursuit of Madonna Agnesa, and although she is "itching" to give in, she worries about the special wickedness of having sex with her child's godfather. Friar Rinaldo points out that she also has sex with the child's father; since child and father are more closely related than child and godfather, he reasons that it can't be more sinful for her to sleep with her child's godfather than her child's father. Not being a strong logician, she accepts this argument, and they become frequent lovers.

Friar Rinaldo's argument is ridiculous on its face since it neatly avoids dealing with the fact that husbands and wives (in other words, a legitimate child's parents) were the only people who should *be having sex according to medieval law. His attempt to circumvent the legal and ethical standards by appealing to a false argument, and his skill in doing so, contributes to the anticlerical satire in* The Decameron, *since he's using his knowledge of church law and his rhetorical skill to seduce a woman who is already married, rather than to save her soul. And if Rinaldo is an unflattering example of clerical greed, so too is Madonna Agnesa an unflattering example of several misogynistic fears about women. Although she knows it's wrong to sleep with anyone who isn't her husband, much less a monk who is her child's godfather, in "itching" to be convinced that what she wants to do is okay, she demonstrates excessive female lust. In falling prey to Rinaldo's impressive-sounding but false arguments, she demonstrates her lack of intelligence.*

One day, while Friar Rinaldo visits Madonna Agnesa (having sent his fellow friar off to "teach prayers" to her pretty maid), Madonna Agnesa's Husband returns home unexpectedly. To explain the compromising situation, Agnesa tells him that their son fell ill from worms. Fortunately, Rinaldo was there with some efficacious prayers. Unable to find the child's father, he sent his companion to the highest point in the house to recite some, while he and she locked themselves in the bedroom to avoid being disturbed so he could pray for the child's healing.

Despite allowing herself to be convinced that her affair with Friar Rinaldo isn't too sinful, Madonna Agnesa shows her capacity for cleverness in coming up with the lie that prevents her husband from learning about their affair. Her explanation fits the day's theme—she plays a trick on her husband and she gets away with it. Her lie is made convincing by Friar Rinaldo's status as a monk, thus pointing towards the hypocrisy of the clergy, who look holy but act sinfully.

While Madonna Agnesa talks, Friar Rinaldo puts his habit back on, picks up the boy, and innocently invites Madonna Agnesa's Husband to come in. He capitalizes on the father's relief to find his son alive by suggesting a generous donation to the church. Meanwhile, the other friar returns to report that he has taught the pretty maid not just one "Our Father," but as many as four. Admiring the friar's stamina, Friar Rinaldo admits that he only managed two prayers. Madonna Agnesa's husband offers them refreshments, then bids them farewell.

Madonna Agnesa's lie also capitalizes on her husband's love and concern for their child, which Rinaldo (like any good hypocritical, greedy monk) capitalizes on to get a generous donation that will ultimately support the friars' lavish lifestyles. The return of the second monk dispels any discomfort over this manipulation, which injects blasphemous humor into the tale with its example of medieval locker-room talk, in which the two friars compare their sexual exploits disguised as prayers. In explicitly tying the sinful act of fornication with the holy act of prayer, the tale contributes a memorable example to the book's ongoing anticlerical satire.

DAY 7: FOURTH TALE

Lauretta begins her tale by praising Love, whose mighty powers regularly save his disciples. In Arezzo, a wealthy man named Tofano is unreasonably jealous of his beautiful wife, Monna Ghita. Frustrated by his baseless suspicions, she resolves to give him a reason to feel jealous, cultivates the affections of a young man, and becomes his lover. She takes advantage of Tofano's "fondness for drink" by getting him "blind drunk" and putting him to bed before going to visit her lover.

Tofano, like others before and after him (for example, Ricciardo di Chinzica in II, 10; Ferondo in III, 8; Folco in IV, 3; the Jealous Merchant in VII, 5; and Arriguccio Berlinghieri in VII, 8), performs the stereotypical role of the jealous husband: he fears that his wife will stray sexually, and he keeps a close watch on her to prevent it. Unfortunately, it's the jealousy itself that causes Ghita to stray. Tofano displays two forms of immoderation and excess for which he will be punished in the tale: excessive jealousy over a faithful wife (or, at least, faithful until he became jealous) and excessive drinking.

But eventually, Tofano notices that Monna Ghita never drinks with him, and becomes suspicious. One night he pretends to be drunk, locking her out of the house when she leaves to visit her lover, and refusing to let her in when she comes home again. When pleading doesn't work, Monna Ghita swears she will make him sorry and threatens to throw herself into a well. This way, she would avoid disgrace and make it look like he murdered her. Tofano refuses to give in, and she throws a rock into the well instead. When he rushes out to save her, she runs into the house and locks him out.

Initially, Ghita's plan backfires on her and Tofano catches her in sneaking around. But Ghita has many more weapons in her arsenal, thanks to antifeminist stereotypes of the lying, cheating, shrewish (ill-natured) wife: when wheedling and pleading fail, she becomes angry and abusive and comes up with a second clever trick. Just as Tofano's jealousy and drunkenness signaled his excessive personality and made him susceptible to his wife's tricks, rushing headlong into Ghita's trap demonstrates his devotion to his wife, despite her faults. It is also in character for a man who looks before he leaps and doesn't consider the consequences of his actions moderately and rationally.

Monna Ghita now heaps abuse on Tofano for his drunkenness, at such a loud volume that she draws the attention of the neighbors. She casts herself as the victim of his drunkenness; when he protests that she's been sneaking out to visit her lover, she convinces the crowd of onlookers that *he* went out partying and then threatened to throw himself in the well if she didn't let him in. Siding with her, the crowd maligns Tofano.

Ghita continues to play the part of the shrew-wife, heaping verbal abuse on her husband. And Tofano continues to demonstrate his excessive nature in shouting at her until they wake the neighbors. His inability to control himself means that he advertises his cuckolding to the neighborhood. And the reputation he's developed for drunkenness (another form of excess) plays into Ghita's hands and makes her accusations against him believable.

Eventually, the commotion reaches Monna Ghita's family, who come to their home, beat Tofano "black and blue," then take her back with them. But because he loves her, Tofano eventually succeeds in arranging her return. He promises to never be jealous again and allows her to "amuse herself to her heart's content" if she does it discreetly.

Ghita's family retrieve her, which ends the standoff with Tofano. But it also demonstrates the position of women in a patriarchal society: if Ghita is not (and cannot safely be) under the authority of her husband, she must revert to the authority and protection of her family. She isn't free to act outside of these protections, even if she finds clever ways to subvert them. And while the day's theme didn't specify that the women needed to get away with their tricks, in the end, Ghita does, thanks to her quick thinking. Not only does Tofano forgive her and take her back, but he allows her to do what she will in the future as long as she doesn't bring shame on him—even though he draws attention to her nighttime wanderings himself. This story has thematic and narrative details that closely mirror the tale of Arriguccio Berlinghieri and his wife Sismonda in VII, 8.

DAY 7: FIFTH TALE

Fiammetta picks up on Lauretta's theme and offers another example of marital jealousy. In Rimini a Jealous Merchant loves the Jealous Merchant's Wife so much that he imagines everyone else must love her, too. And because she tries to please him, he worries she wants to please other men as well. He is so protective that he won't even let her stand near a window. To amuse herself and pay her husband back, she wants to give him a "just and proper motive" for his jealousy.

The Jealous Merchant illustrates the dangers of excess and demonstrates the paradox of jealousy in husbands (especially of honorable wives): perversely, he becomes suspicious that his wife will cheat on him because she is initially such a loving and obedient wife to him. His wife is trapped by gendered expectations and is driven to make good on his irrational fears only after she is punished for her obedience by being completely trapped inside her home.

Fortune favors the Jealous Merchant's Wife, who finds and enlarges a crack that communicates between her house and the bedroom of their neighbor, a young man named Filippo. They can talk and touch each other's hands through the crack, but nothing else. As Christmas approaches, she seeks permission from the Jealous Merchant to go to confession and attend mass. He wants to know what sins she's confessing, but she refuses to confess to anyone but a priest.

The medieval church required all Christians to attend confession at least once a year, so the merchant's wife is only asking to be able to meet the minimum requirements of her faith. Her need to ask for permission reminds readers that she is subject to her husband's authority and doesn't have full autonomy over her life, even in matters as private as her faith and her conscience. In answer to her extremely modest request, her husband's immediate desire to know her sins (suggesting that he fears they are sexual in nature) betrays the excessive nature of his jealousy. Like the story of Tofano (VII, 4), the tale sets up a scenario where the jealous husband's excessive behavior will provide the means of his downfall.

Because his wife's desire to go to confession has made the Jealous Merchant suspicious, he disguises himself as a priest and waits for her in the chapel. The Jealous Merchant's Wife recognizes him and vows to let him "get what he's looking for." She "confesses" that she is in love with a priest who can unlock every door in her house and who sleeps beside her every night. These words hit the Jealous Merchant like a stab through the heart, and he tries to get the name of the "priest." She refuses, and, saying he will offer prayers to soften her unrepentant heart, he warns that he will send a seminarian to check on her soon.

Until the point where she recognizes her husband in his priestly disguise, there is no indication that the wife's request to go to confession was a ploy to meet with her lover. Thus, the merchant's excessive jealousy creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, and his increasingly ridiculous actions allow it to come true. Moreover, it's a sign of female vulnerability and subjection to male authority that the priests allow her husband to stand in as her confessor, even though this means that she won't be properly fulfilling her duty; since her husband isn't a priest, he's not qualified to hear her confession, assign penance, or absolve her (release her from responsibility) of her sins. And, although she is clearly describing her husband's behavior, his excessive jealousy (which has already blinded him to the truth of her fidelity) blinds him to the implication of her confession: she recognizes his disguise and is intent on frustrating his attempts to keep her from other men.

Fuming with rage, the Jealous Merchant returns home and tries (unsuccessfully) to conceal his feelings from the Jealous Merchant's Wife. Telling her he is going out for supper and reminding her to lock the doors, he plans to lie in wait for her alleged lover that night. But because she is certain that he will be watching the front door, she tells Filippo to access her house via the roof. After dark, while the Jealous Merchant hides near the front door, Filippo climbs over the roof and enjoys his night with the Jealous Merchant's Wife. In the morning, the Jealous Merchant sends his servant, poorly disguised as a seminarian, to ask about his wife's lover, and she reports that he failed to come the previous night.

While the merchant succumbs to his immoderate jealousy—which only became founded after *his behavior drove his wife to retribution—her happy night with Filippo demonstrates that love will almost always be able to find a way to achieve its ends. And it's also notable that, as with her confession, the wife speaks nothing but the truth; her husband can't understand her words because his mind is clouded by his excessive jealousy.*

The Jealous Merchant lies in wait (while the Jealous Merchant's Wife and Filippo enjoy themselves) night after night until he can't contain himself any longer. When she once again refuses to say what she confessed at Christmastime, he tells her that he knows about her lover and demands the priest's name. Noting that his jealousy has overpowered his intelligence, she says that she recognized him through his disguise; the priest she said she loved was, in fact, him. Who else can unlock all the doors in the house? Only someone blinded by jealousy would have been "witless enough not to understand."

The merchant's excessive jealousy doesn't just overpower his intelligence and common sense, but it also generates other unrestrained behavior, like the excessive rage he feels when his attempts to catch his wife in the act fail. This tale reverses the stereotypically gendered expectations of men and women: it is the husband who is overpowered by his excessive emotions and the wife who remains rational, calm, and collected. While her words are no longer true in spirit—she has indeed found a way to be with her lover—she scrupulously avoids saying anything that isn't true, and her commitment to the truth puts her husband in his place.

The Jealous Merchant begins to understand that his jealousy made him act ridiculously, and he starts to look at the Jealous Merchant's Wife as the model of virtue and intelligence, coming to trust her implicitly. So, although she continued to be discreet, she now had a much easier time of it, letting Filippo in, as it were, through the front door.

The jealous merchant accepts correction for his excessive jealousy, but his trust in his wife's character is equally ill-founded, offering a warning against excesses in all their forms. While fulfilling the day's theme—a wife tricking her husband—this tale also plays on antifeminist stereotypes that consider all women dishonest. In this vein, the jealous husband is rightly punished for his jealousy, but is just as much at fault for his excess trust in the end as his excess distrust at the beginning.

DAY 7: SIXTH TALE

Pampinea picks up on the idea that jealousy impairs the intellect with a story demonstrating how love can inspire creative thinking. A young Florentine noblewoman (later identified as Madonna Isabella) grows tired of her husband and takes the humbly-born but accomplished Leonetto as her lover. Meanwhile, a nobleman called Lambertuccio falls in love with her and forces her to become his lover by threatening to destroy her reputation should she refuse.

It's not surprising that Pampinea offers a tale here about wit and resourcefulness, since almost all of her previous tales (I, 10; II, 3; III, 2; IV, 2; and VI, 2) have dealt with the theme. Isabella's position demonstrates the vulnerability of women, since she's tied sexually to two men she doesn't want: her boring husband and a noble lover who blackmails her into a relationship. The contrast between the two lovers further demonstrates that nobility of character is more important than nobility in title, since the lower-class Leonetto earns Isabella's love while upper-class Lambertuccio extorts it.

One summer day, while she's staying alone in her country villa, Madonna Isabella invites Leonetto to visit. But while they're together, Lambertuccio (knowing that her husband is out) shows up, too. Madonna Isabella hides Leonetto in her room, afraid to put Lambertuccio off. But while he "bend[s] her to his pleasure," her husband returns.

The language of the tale makes it clear that Lambertuccio's time with Isabella is tantamount to rape, pointing to her inferior position as a woman in the relationship.

With "extraordinary presence of mind," Madonna Isabella convinces Lambertuccio to take out a dagger and run downstairs waving it like a madman while shouting about catching a certain villain. He follows her directions exactly, running past her husband, mounting his horse, and riding away. She then tells her confused husband that a few minutes before, a stranger being pursued by Lambertuccio had run into the house, and she hid him to prevent his murder. She calls for Leonetto to come out. He says that he has no business with Lambertuccio; the other man must be confused or out of his mind. Madonna Isabella's husband takes Leonetto home safely, privately speaks to Lambertuccio about his behavior, and is never any the wiser about the trick his wife played on him.

The husband's appearance radically equalizes the previously lopsided power dynamic between Isabella and Lambertuccio: they are both vulnerable to censure and possibly even violence at her husband's hands if he discovers their illicit affair. In seizing the moment to her advantage, Madonna Isabella demonstrates both intelligence and bravery and shows that women are just as capable of self-determination as men, even if their opportunities for it are limited in the tales' culture and setting. This tale also offers a delicious bonus for the audience: while Isabella certainly plays a trick on her husband (and gets away with it!), she also plays a trick that deprives her of her undesired lover at the same time.

DAY 7: SEVENTH TALE

Filomena tells the next tale. In Paris, Lodovico (primarily called by his assumed name, Anichino), the son of a Florentine nobleman-turned-merchant, grows up in the French royal household. As a young man, he hears stories about Madonna Beatrice, the incredibly beautiful wife of Bolognese nobleman Egano de' Galluzzi. Based on her reputation alone, he falls in love. Eventually, he gets permission from his father to go on pilgrimage as an excuse to see her.

Filomena's tale is heavily invested in (and drawn from) medieval romances and the ideas and codes of fin'amors *(refined loving). These include the noble status of both Anichino and his beloved, Madonna Beatrice; the idea of falling in love with her by reputation, from afar ("amor du lonh"); and the suggestion of religious imagery in the pilgrimage. Although Anichino isn't going on a true pilgrimage (a trip to a holy site for purposes of religious devotion), his trip to see (and worship) the woman he's fallen in love with is a secular, amorous pilgrimage. The overpowering nature of Anichino's desire for a woman he's never seen with his own eyes points to the irresistible power of love over human behavior.*

Taking the name Anichino, he travels to Bologna, where he finds Madonna Beatrice to be even lovelier than reported. He insinuates himself into her household as a servant to Egano de' Galluzzi. Anichino serves his master diligently and soon becomes his favorite. One day, while Egano is out, Beatrice invites Anichino to play chess, which he lets her win. And as her attendants drift away, he tells her who he really is, how he heard of her reputation, and how much he loves her. He begs her to pity him and grant his desires. While many men have wooed Beatrice, none have moved her before Anichino, whose love she immediately reciprocates. She tells Anichino to sneak into her room and wake her around midnight.

One of the primary metaphors of fin'amors *casts the woman as a goddess-like figure of worship, while the man who loves her casts himself as her humble servant, reversing the normal gender hierarchy. In this tale, Anichino literalizes this metaphor by taking on the role of a servant to get close enough to Beatrice to tell her about his feelings. The depth of his love and his genuine devotion move Beatrice in a way that other men haven't; this both suggests the power of love and implies that Anichino's devotion is superior to what her other suitors felt. The artificially reversed gender hierarchy of* fin'amors *is also on display when Anichino lets Madonna Beatrice win the chess game, both literalizing her conquest of his heart and putting her in the superior position.*

When Anichino steals into Madonna Beatrice's room and places his hand on her bosom, she takes hold of it and tosses and turns in the bed until she wakes Egano de' Galluzzi. She then asks him which of their servants is most loyal, and when he answers that it's Anichino, she tells him that Anichino had asked her to "minister to his pleasures" that day. Thinking that Beatrice has tricked him, a terrified Anichino tries to free himself from her grasp. But then she tells her husband that she promised to meet Anichino in the **garden** after midnight; if he puts on her clothes and waits there, he can see the proof himself. Egano struggles into her skirt and leaves the lovers alone.

The scene in Madonna Beatrice's bedroom injects danger into the tale, once again replicating the outlines of a courtly romance (where a knight loves a lady and does brave deeds according to the dictates of fin'amors*) more than a* fabliau *(a story where a woman cheats on her husband). The day's theme means that the story will replicate the latter more closely, so the contrast between these two genres also generates humor, as does Anichino's alternating terror and relief. To trick her husband—and fulfill the day's theme—Beatrice basically describes the situation accurately…until she portrays herself as the virtuous wife joining forces with her husband to punish Anichino for his adulterous lust and his attempt to cross class boundaries to sleep with his mistress.*

As frightened as Anichino was previously, he is equally overjoyed to get into bed with Madonna Beatrice now. After a while, she tells him to dress and go to the **garden**, where he can entertain them both by beating the gullible Egano de' Galluzzi with a stick. Seeing Anichino approaching, Egano (in character as his wife) prepares to embrace him. But Anichino curses "Beatrice" for her willingness to cheat on her husband and proceeds to beat "her." Battered and bruised, Egano returns to his bedroom, pleased to think that his wife is virtuous, and his servant is so loyal. He frequently laughs over the night's events, while Madonna Beatrice and Anichino find it much easier to be together whenever they want, at least as long as he stays in Bologna.

The wife and her lover not only duping the husband but inflicting physical violence on him is a standard plot point in fabliaux. *It displaces the punishment for the guilty sex from the lover (the truly responsible party) to the husband, suggesting that stupidity is a bigger sin than adulterous sex. In this way,* fabliaux *perfectly demonstrate the book's thesis that the irresistible power of love drives human behavior. And, like other husbands in this day's tales, Egano repays the trick played on him with undeserved respect and trust for the wife who's cheating on him and the servant who just beat him black and blue.*

DAY 7: EIGHTH TALE

The next storyteller is Neifile, whose tale concerns Arriguccio Berlinghieri, a wealthy merchant who tries to climb the social ladder through his marriage to a nobleman's daughter named Monna Sismonda. His business frequently takes him away from home, so she takes a young man named Ruberto as her lover. When rumors about the affair reach Arriguccio, he becomes jealous and begins to keep a close eye on his wife.

The earlier tales of Tofano and Ghita (VII, 4) and the jealous merchant and his wife (VII, 5) have dealt with examples of excessive jealousy. In contrast, Arriguccio's jealousy seems to be reasonable since it arises only after he's heard rumors of his wife's affair. However, since in each of the preceding tales, the husband was punished for his jealousy, the audience is primed to expect that things aren't going to go well for Arriguccio if he tries to interfere with the overwhelming power of love. The opening comments about Arriguccio's class climbing (which are reminiscent of the wool merchant's marriage to the Florentine noblewoman in III, 3) foreshadow a class conflict in the tale between the newly rich Arriguccio and the established family of his noble wife.

Monna Sismonda comes up with a system to communicate with Ruberto: she ties a string around her toe at night and drops it out the window. If, when Ruberto tugs on it, she lets it drop, the coast is clear and he can come to the door; if Arriguccio Berlinghieri is home, she pulls the string back in, warning Ruberto to leave. This system works flawlessly until one night when Arriguccio happens to get tangled in the string. Curious, he attaches it to his own toe. When Ruberto tugs on the string, it comes untied and falls out the window, so he waits by the door, while Arriguccio arms himself and rushes to see who pulled the string.

Like Monna Tessa and Federigo in an earlier tale (V, 2), Sismonda and Ruberto's clever system of communication works until it doesn't. Unlike the earlier lovers, Sismonda doesn't realize that her lover is about to fall into a trap. Sismonda's plan further demonstrates her intelligence—even though she's using it towards the questionable end of cheating on her husband.

Hearing him coming, Ruberto runs off with Arriguccio Berlinghieri in hot pursuit. Eventually, Ruberto turns to face Arriguccio, and the two begin to fight. Monna Sismonda wakes up alone in her bed and guesses what has happened. She persuades her maid to take her place, promising to repay her for any suffering she undergoes, then hides herself elsewhere in the house. With the fight beginning to draw attention, Arriguccio breaks off and goes home, where he mercilessly beats the maid and cuts her hair, thinking she is his wife. He swears and warns her that he's going to get her family to take her away and punish her for besmirching her honor, and his.

Sismonda again demonstrates her quick thinking when she grasps the implications of the missing string and empty bed. Nor does her intelligence betray her now as she comes up with a plan to divert her husband's attention and give the appearance of her innocence (although she is, in fact, guilty of cheating on her husband). She is vulnerable to Arriguccio's violence thanks to a patriarchal assumption that a man's honor (or lack thereof) depends on his wife's sexual chastity above almost everything else. She protects herself from this violence by exploiting her maid, who is doubly vulnerable to violence and to the authority of her social superiors. If Arriguccio's jealousy seemed reasonable before, his anger and violence towards the woman he believes to be his wife is now excessive, suggesting that something will happen soon to punish him for his lack of self-control. The audience is thus primed to expect that his desire to see Sismonda publicly punished or humiliated will backfire on him.

After Arriguccio Berlinghieri storms off, Monna Sismonda moves the maid (arranging for her medical care), makes the bed, dresses herself, and sits on the landing with her sewing. She's there when Arriguccio returns with her brothers and Sismonda's mother, to whom he told the entire story, including that he'd beaten Sismonda and cut her hair. Her brothers are enraged over the accusations, but Sismonda's mother worries that Arriguccio may have trumped up charges to cover his own indiscretions or beaten her for another offense. They are all surprised to find her, unharmed, sitting calmly on the landing.

Sismonda positions herself as the picture of innocence on the top of the stairs, preparing to pull off her trick on her husband. Her vulnerability to the men in her life is highlighted by her brothers' anger over her alleged affair, which burns as fiercely as her husband's. The only voice moderating this emotional excess comes from another woman, her mother, who points out alternative theories. Yet, the men, burning with antifeminist anger and concern over the implications of Sismonda's actions on their own honor, can't be soothed until they find her unharmed in her home.

To make a long story short, Monna Sismonda's brothers tell her Arriguccio Berlinghieri's allegations. She claims that this is the first time he's set foot in the house that night; when he protests that he *was* there and that he beat her and cut her hair, she offers her own self as contrary proof. Realizing that he can't prove his claims, Arriguccio falls silent, allowing Sismonda to claim that he's an intemperate drinker and womanizer. She suggests that he did everything he said—but thinks he was doing it to a prostitute in a drunken stupor.

This story closely parallels that of Tofano and Ghita (VII, 4), including the way in which the wife turns her husband's immoderate actions (in this case, Arriguccio's savage physical violence) against him. Sismonda's unharmed body undermines Arriguccio's claims and allows her to paint herself as the victim. Thus, using her feminine wiles (and inadvertently proving antifeminist fears about women's dishonesty and wives' inevitable infidelity), she escapes harm.

Sismonda's mother attacks "yokels" (like Arriguccio Berlinghieri) who think that they can make it as noblemen just because they're rich. Warning him that there will be hell to pay if he insults their sister again, Sismonda's brothers leave. Confused by how the tables were turned on him, Arriguccio wonders if he dreamed the night's events, and—in any case—leaves Sismonda to her own devices from then on.

While Arriguccio, as a man and husband, may be at the top of his marital hierarchy, it's clear from his mother-in-law's takedown that he's inferior to his wife and her family in the social hierarchy. In a work that considers character more important in demonstrating a person's merit than wealth or status, Arriguccio has failed on both counts: his wealth hasn't ensured that he has any class, and his jealous accusations against his wife—according to all appearances, false ones—have shown that he doesn't have the character of a nobleman either.

DAY 7: NINTH TALE

Panfilo's tale is about a woman who played the biggest trick of all, with the aid of **fortune**. In Argos, the most ancient city in Greece, an old nobleman named Nicostratos lives with his much younger wife, Lydia. Nicostratos is fond of hunting and owns many hawks and hounds for the purpose. Among his servants, he loves and trusts Pyrrhus the most. Because her husband is old and Pyrrhus is both handsome and accomplished, Lydia falls so desperately in love with him that she can't think of anything else, day or night. She's sure she will die if he doesn't reciprocate her love. She asks her maid Lusca to carry her love messages to Pyrrhus.

The setup of Panfilo's tale, with the January-May marriage between Nicostratos and Lydia, calls to mind the "senex amans" or "old lover" stereotype that pops up throughout medieval literature. The senex amans *is a figure of mockery, since his age and lack of stamina mean that he is unable to fulfill the sexual needs of his much younger, beautiful wife. In this tale, Nicostratos's fondness for hunting suggests a certain amount of neglect towards his wife that might help to explain why her attention wanders to the handsome and young Pyrrhus. While her attraction crosses class lines, the tale carefully protects her from too much censure by pointing out Pyrrhus's manners and accomplishments, suggesting that he is a noble in character, if not in title. This tale also gender-swaps the traditional* fin'amors *(refined love) roles, where the man pines away and becomes ill from unreciprocated love, since it's Lydia who falls in love with Pyrrhus first.*

But Pyrrhus suspects that Lydia is testing his loyalty. Swearing that he'd never dishonor Nicostratos, he sends Lusca back to her mistress. His repudiation makes Lydia want to die, but after a few days, she tries again. Lusca tries to talk some sense into Pyrrhus, in addition to chastising him for his cruelty. She points out that Lydia offers him a chance at riches as well as love, and if **fortune** offers blessings like this, he should take them. Also, he shows greater loyalty toward Nicostratos than his master would show him if the tables were turned. If he doesn't keep Lydia from dying of love, the guilt he feels will be unbearable.

Continuing with the gender-swapped roles, it's Pyrrhus who is criticized for his "cruelty" towards Lydia. This charge is based in the idea that the affection of a desired partner can be earned through a lover's devotion alone. In this paradigm, if Lydia loves Pyrrhus nobly and there's no reason why she's not herself worthy of love, he owes her affection. Refusing thus constitutes cruelty or excessive and inhumane treatment. In other stories, this paradigm has been used to coerce lovers, and in this one Lusca makes the extortion clear: if Pyrrhus doesn't return her love, Lydia will die, and it will be his fault. However, Pyrrhus's actions are based in a wily sense of self-preservation, because if his mistress and master were testing him, showing any interest in sleeping with Lydia could be very dangerous for him.

Pyrrhus had already decided to accept Lydia's love—as long as he can be sure that she's not testing him. He wants her to prove her motives by completing three tasks: kill Nicostratos's favorite bird before his eyes, send him a tuft of Nicostratos's beard, and then give him one of Nicostratos's best teeth. Although these tasks seem almost impossible, Lydia draws inspiration from her love, and she informs Pyrrhus that she'll do these and contrive to have sex with him in front of her husband Nicostratos.

The tasks Pyrrhus sets Lydia aren't just hard, they are designed to make her demonstrate greater loyalty to him than her husband. They are also increasingly intimate and painful. But, since love's power over human behavior is irresistible in The Decameron, *Lydia not only promises to fulfil the conditions but to top them by betraying her husband to his face.*

A few days later, while Nicostratos is hosting a dinner party, Lydia dresses up, saunters into the hall, and smashes his favorite bird against the wall. When asked why, she claims that it deprived her of her husband's attention. She's longed to kill it for some time, only waiting for a chance to take her revenge in the presence of his guests, who would impartially judge her actions. Pyrrhus, having watched, is pleased to see her working on his tasks.

Lydia ironically plays the role of jealous wife while laying the groundwork for her own infidelity. But in suggesting that he's incapable of fulfilling her sexual needs—since he pays more attention to his hobbies than to her—she's also subtly disparaging their sex life in front of her husband's friends.

One day, when Lydia and Nicostratos are together, she starts to caress and tease him. When he gently pulls her hair, she gives his beard such a tug that she pulls out a tuft. She prevents him from getting too upset by continuing to jest and play, and then she sends the tuft to Pyrrhus. The tooth is harder, but eventually Lydia convinces Nicostratos's serving-boys that they have bad breath and must turn their faces away when serving him. She then tells Nicostratos that *he* has bad breath. Examining his teeth, she swears that he has a rotten one, and—promising to take much better care of him than any brutal old surgeon—she and Lusca extract it and send it to Pyrrhus, who declares himself convinced of her love.

Lydia's increasingly painful assaults on Nicostratos foreshadow her willingness to hurt him by her affair with Pyrrhus. They also assert a position of dominance (in contrast to the usual gender hierarchy of female submission) in the relationship, since she's doing things to his body. Her strategy with the tooth-pulling is both clever and humorous and it ratchets up the tension in the tale: Nicostratos's willingness to believe her in the face of contrary evidence (if his tooth was indeed rotten, he would have felt pain) suggest that she can, indeed, get away with her incredible promise to have sex with her lover—without consequences!—in front of her husband's very eyes.

But Lydia won't be content until she's fulfilled her own condition. Pretending to be ill, she asks Nicostratos and Pyrrhus to take her to the **garden**, where she sits at the foot of a pear-tree and asks Pyrrhus to climb up and get her a pear. While he's in the tree—having previously learned what to say from her—he begins to complain about having to watch Nicostratos make love to his wife under the tree, although Nicostratos swears that he's just sitting next to his wife. When Pyrrhus comes down, he continues to swear that he saw them making love. Nicostratos becomes so astonished that he decides to climb up in the tree to see what's going on.

Lydia plans to play her final trick in a garden, and in The Decameron, *gardens are often places where the normal rules of the world are suspended. Pyrrhus pretends that it looks like Nicostratos and Lydia are having sex when Nicostratos knows that he's just sitting next to his wife, thus priming him to distrust what he sees when he himself climbs up into the tree.*

As soon as Nicostratos is in the tree, Pyrrhus and Lydia start to make love, but as soon as he starts to climb down, they resume sitting side-by-side. Pyrrhus apologizes for arguing with his master, since the tree gave each a "similar illusion" of Lydia making love with the other. If Nicostratos doubts that it was an illusion, he must only consider common sense, which would prevent him from making love to his master's wife literally under his nose.

While the power of love has made Lydia and Pyrrhus bold beyond all reasonable explanation (thus demonstrating its power over human behavior), their trick also depends on the irrational love Nicostratos has for a wife who keeps hurting him and the trust he holds for his handsome young servant. Thus, despite appeals to his common sense, Nicostratos is shown to be foolish for believing what he's told instead of what he can see with his own eyes.

Lydia interrupts Pyrrhus to express her annoyance that Nicostratos would really believe she'd cheat on him in this way. Nicostratos, still amazed, can only mumble about the strange visions the tree causes. Lydia has Pyrrhus fetch an axe and cut the tree down, although she thinks Nicostratos deserves to be punished instead for believing his eyes instead of his reason. With the tree felled, Lydia forgives him for his distrust. And, having earned his trust, it's much easier for Pyrrhus and Lydia to get away with meeting each other from that day forth.

Having the tree cut down suggests that Lydia has metaphorically castrated Nicostratos, and indeed her romp with Pyrrhus has completely inverted all the normal social hierarches, in which a servant must respect his master and a wife must be faithful to her husband. While Panfilo suggests that Lydia is able to pull off her trick thanks to the aid of fortune, it seems to have little role in the tale other than bringing Pyrrhus to her attention. The trick is entirely of her own creation, and it demonstrates something that could generously be called cleverness, which also demonstrates the deviousness of women.

DAY 7: TENTH TALE

It would seem natural for Dioneo to tell a tale about a wife's trick on her husband, since he picked the theme and because it fits with his previous stories. But he claims his special privilege again, telling a tale on his own theme, because someone else already told the one he planned on. Anyway, the theme of wives' tricks has been admirably covered. He will tell a tale about the incredible simplicity and gullibility of the Sienese, already mentioned in Elissa's tale.

Although Dioneo doesn't tell a tale about a wife's trick, his tale is tied to the day's theme through its relationship with Elissa's earlier story of Friar Rinaldo and his godchild's mother.

In Siena, Tingoccio Mini and Meuccio di Tura are inseparable friends. From attending mass and hearing sermons, they become afraid of the life to come, so they make a pact that whoever dies first will come back and share as much information about the afterlife as possible. Not long afterward, Tingoccio becomes godfather to the son of Ambruogio Anselmini and Monna Mita. Soon, he has fallen secretly in love with Monna Mita, as has Meuccio, although neither admits their feelings to the other.

The apparently honest piety of Tingoccio and Meuccio is contrasted with the hypocrisy and legalism of the church. When Tingoccio falls in love with Monna Mita, his desires are not only adulterous (because she is married) but they are technically incestuous (since godparents were treated as blood relatives to a child's family by medieval standards of relationship). Thus, between the two, Meuccio is in a better position to act on his love from a moral standpoint, while Tingoccio has more access to the lovely Mita. The fact that either is in love with her demonstrates the overpowering nature of love over human moral codes and behavior.

Because Tingoccio Mini has more reason to be in Monna Mita's house, he successfully woos her, much to Meuccio di Tura's dismay. But Tingoccio digs so much in Monna Mita's rich **garden** that he falls ill and dies. And after a few days, as agreed, he appears to Meuccio in a dream with news of the afterlife.

Tingoccio's love for Mita exceeds the bounds of propriety—since it is technically incestuous—and of health, since he has so much sex with her that he depletes his vital energy and dies. This tale uses the garden as a euphemism for Mita's lady bits and equates sex with other forms of productive labor—which also appeared in Dioneo's earlier tale of Ricciardo di Chinzica and Bartolomea (II, 10).

Meuccio di Tura tactfully tries to ask whether Tingoccio Mini is in Hell and learns that he's in Purgatory. He gives Meuccio detailed information about what punishments various sins earn and confirms that, as they've been taught, giving alms and arranging for masses and prayers to be recited aids the souls of the dead. At the last minute, Meuccio remembers Monna Mita and asks about the punishment for making love to his godchild's mother.

The idea of Purgatory—a place where those who are safe from the eternal torments of hell but who have sins left to atone for after death before they can get into heaven—developed across the 13th century and was still relatively new at the time that Giovanni Boccaccio composed The Decameron. *Thus, some confusion and questions about sins and punishments is understandable, but Meuccio's questions also display a distrust in the institution of the Roman Catholic Church and its laws. This tale aligns with the book's larger argument about the primacy of faith over legalistic observance in its endorsement of charitable behavior, even while it gleefully disregards the church's more legalistic stance on extramarital and incestuous sex.*

Tingoccio Mini answers that he found himself among a large company of sinners, and when he remembered that specific sin, he was afraid that he would suffer much worse for it. Noticing his trembling, a fellow sinner asked what he was afraid of, then declared, "There's nothing special down here about the mother of a godchild." Meuccio di Tura hears this with relief, laughing at his stupidity for avoiding the mothers of his own godchildren in the past. And, Dioneo declares, if Friar Rinaldo only knew this much, he wouldn't have had to work so hard to convince Madonna Agnesa to sleep with him.

The ending of this tale clearly disdains the narrow legalistic prohibitions of the medieval church. In this view, the church is no better able to know which sins are mortal (deserving eternal damnation) or not than a normal person. Similarly, by excusing a relationship both adulterous and incestuous in the eyes of the conventional church, it doesn't just describe the irresistible power of love over human behavior, it celebrates it. This attitude of sexual free-for-all, where anything short of homosexual behavior (condemned in other tales) goes, demonstrates the work's blossoming humanism, which centers human beings rather than legalistic moral codes.

DAY 7: CONCLUSION

As the day's stories end and the sun sets, Dioneo places the crown on Lauretta's head. She wants to hear more stories about the tricks that both men and women play on each other in general. The members of the company pass the time before dinner as they please; Dioneo and Fiammetta sing about Palamon and Arcite. They return to the palace before dark for refreshments and dancing.

The song that Dioneo and Fiammetta sing draws from the plot of Giovanni Boccaccio's Teseida, *which was composed about a decade before* The Decameron. *This isn't the first time that the author has snuck a reference to his other works into this book: another example can be found in the introduction to Day VI, when Dioneo and Lauretta sing about Troilus and Criseyde.*

Filomena sings a song in which a lover is separated from her beloved. She describes how this causes her to feel both sleeplessness and great physical desire, and wonders when she will "kiss those eyes that have so murdered" her. She longs for her lover to return and ease her pain, and she swears that if she holds him again, she will never let him go. Because some of the lines suggest that she has "gone beyond the mere exchange of amorous glances," some of Filomena's companions are envious of her experience.

As usual, the songs at the end of each day, no matter what the day's theme has been, bring the story back to the traditional setting and themes of fin'amors *(refined loving). These songs thus emphasize the power of love over the actions of individuals while also demonstrating the central position of love to the organization and themes of the book. This is also one of a very few moments that suggest that the members of the* brigata *may have enjoyed the illicit pleasures their stories describe. This subtly contradicts, or at least calls into question, Dioneo's declaration at the end of Day 10 that none of them have engaged in any untoward behavior, since they, too, are human and subject to the power of love.*


When Filomena is done singing, Lauretta reminds the company that the next day is Friday and suggests that they observe the weekend in the same way they did before (as described at the end of the second day). Everyone commends her devout intention, and they part for the evening.

Not only does the brigata *form in a church after prayers, but they twice interrupt their storytelling so that they can observe the religious practices surrounding Sunday church services. They thus exhibit the piety and faithfulness that's praised in* The Decameron, *without engaging in the hypocritical posturing and legalism that it generally criticizes.*

DAY 8: INTRODUCTION

On Sunday morning, the company attends mass at a nearby chapel, then pass the rest of the morning in various amusements. In the afternoon, they gather for the day's tales, and Lauretta asks Neifile to begin.

The trip to the chapel is the only time in The Decameron *that the* brigata*'s complete isolation is explicitly broken, since this brings them into contact with a priest (at minimum) and possibly other worshippers.*

DAY 8: FIRST TALE

Neifile's tale is about a man playing a trick on a woman, although it's more aptly called a "reprisal" since the victim behaved reprehensibly by offering to have sex in exchange for money. Women who yield to the forces of Love—rather than seeking material gain—deserve leniency for their sexual indiscretions, as illustrated in Filostrato's tale of Madonna Filippa.

Although Neifile's tale claims that it will turn the tables on the previous day's tales (in which women tricked men), it draws on many of the same antifeminist stereotypes on display on Day 7, including excessive female lust and women's tendency to lie and cheat. But this tale adds love of money when it raises the specter of women who take money for sex—an offense that a previous tale has claimed deserves the death penalty (VI, 7). The Decameron *generally depicts love as an overwhelming force in people's lives, but the idea of trading sex for money implies self-control and scheming. In the book's worldview, the exchange of money is incompatible with real love and therefore to be condemned rather than praised.*


In Milan, a German mercenary named Gulfardo has a reputation for loyalty and scrupulously repaying loans. He loves Madonna Ambruogia, the wife of Guasparruolo Cagastraccio, a wealthy merchant. When Gulfardo asks for Ambruogia's "sweet reward," she agrees on two conditions: absolute secrecy, and payment of two hundred gold florins. Her greed reduces Gulfardo's opinion of her and turns his love into hate. He resolves to teach her a lesson.

It's notable that Ambruogia doesn't lose any honor by her willingness to have an extramarital affair, only by her insistence on receiving payment for it. While moral and legal codes considered sexual relationships outside of marriage illicit, as the stories in The Decameron *show, extramarital sex (at least in literature!) wasn't such a big deal. Where this affair goes awry, however, is when Ambruogia asks for money in exchange. While this makes sense in the context of the book's celebration of the overpowering force of romantic love, it also highlights a gendered double standard: throughout the tales, many women have been objectified and traded between male relatives and husbands. But when a woman places a monetary value on her own sexuality, she is condemned for it. Because it turns honorable Gulfardo's love into hate, the tale implies that this greed is worthy of the punishment she will receive at his hands.*

Gulfardo accepts Madonna Ambruogia's conditions, excepting a friend who will help conduct the business, and she tells him the dates of Guasparruolo Cagastraccio's next trading voyage. Gulfardo asks Guasparruolo for a loan of two hundred florins. He subsequently takes these to Ambruogia and asks her to "give it to your husband when he returns" in the presence of his friend. Thinking that the "repayment" is a ploy to cover up the real purpose of the money in his friend's presence, she promises to do so.

While the friend initially seems like a throwaway detail, it's important to note that Gulfardo has brought a witness to confirm that he's handed over the money to Ambruogia. His action hints at a larger plan that has yet to be revealed in full. Borrowing the necessary money from her husband, of all people, further suggests that she is another one of his possessions, rather than belonging to herself.

While Guasparruolo Cagastraccio is away, Madonna Ambruogia frequently puts herself "at [Gulfardo's] disposal." When Guasparruolo returns, Gulfardo and his companion call on him to explain that he returned the loaned money to Ambruogia right away. She's forced to agree, since Gulfardo's friend witnessed the transaction. Thus, Gulfardo enjoyed the pleasures of Ambruogia's bed for free.

The lesson that Gulfardo teaches Ambruogia is that love should be free. In the context of The Decameron*'s themes, this lesson aligns with the belief in love's overwhelming power. But because it's cast as a special victory for Gulfardo, the voided payment suggests that she is being punished for trying to leverage her sexual attractions out of greed.*

DAY 8: SECOND TALE

Panfilo's "tale of country love" will teach the useful moral that one shouldn't believe everything a priest says. In Varlungo, a barely literate Worthy Priest entertains his parishioners with "holy aphorisms" on Sundays. In their husbands' absence, he "blesses" the parish wives. He especially likes Monna Belcolore, the wife of Bentivegna del Mazzo, a "seductive-looking" and "buxom" woman "better versed in the grinder's art than any other girl" in the hamlet. When she dances and plays her tambourine, she drives everyone wild.

As soon as Panfilo invokes "country love," he's put readers on notice that his tale's humor will arise from mockery of lower-class characters. The priest who isn't very good at his job (thanks to his incomplete education) and who seduces his parishioners between Sundays is a figure of anticlerical satire, since Roman Catholic priests take vows of celibacy. Belcolore and her husband have literal names: hers means "well-colored," indicating her beauty, while his means "may you have joy of the rod," crudely reminding the audience that this tale isn't going to be about refined, aristocratic love, but plain old sex.

The Worthy Priest tries to attract Monna Belcolore's attentions, singing in church to impress her (he sounds like a donkey) and giving her tokens of his affection like garlic and onions. When he meets Bentivegna del Mazzo on his way to Florence to answer a court summons, he sends the man off with his blessing and runs to Belcolore's home. Monna Belcolore expresses surprise that priests "do that sort of thing" which the Priest claims to do particularly well. He offers her a small **gift**, but she wants money to retrieve some pawned items.

The portrait of the Worthy Priest is as unflattering as it is humorous, and in the context of The Decameron*'s larger anticlerical satire, the Priest's braying songs certainly suggest an affinity between hypocritical clergy and asses generally. His gifts suggest that rustic peasants are undiscerning, smelly, or both. Not only are his onions and garlic the kind of common crops grown everywhere, but he also doesn't seem to be bothered by the fact that they will make Belcolore herself stinky. While he offers her a gift—an object whose exchange creates a bond between giver and recipient—she would prefer money. Money is less romantic, but far more practical in a small rural economy, where she has already had to pawn some of her nicer belonging for cash.*

The Worthy Priest promises to pay Monna Belcolore within a week, but she refuses "to do his bidding without a *quid pro quo*," especially because he has ruined other girls' reputations already. Desperate and "rearing to get on with the job," he offers her his fine woolen cloak as a surety, so she allows him to give her kisses and more in the barn. Only afterwards does he consider the difficulty of coming up with the five pounds he promised her.

The inclusion of Latin legal language both suggests Belcolore's mercenary attitude towards sex (treating it as a business transaction instead of as an overpowering, almost religious force) and injects humor into the tale by its contrast with the simple lives and needs of the characters, none of whom would probably have understood what "quid pro quo" meant. The "worthy" priest not only seduces the girls, but he's got a reputation for ruining theirs, adding to the anticlericalism in his description. His impatience to get down to business suggests a tendency towards excess in his character that it seems he will be punished for since he knows he won't be able scrounge up the money to get his cloak back from her later.

But being a "crafty [...] fellow," the Worthy Priest comes up with a plan to retrieve his cloak for free. The next day, he borrows Monna Belcolore's mortar and pestle to make a sauce. Then, just as she and Bentivegna del Mazzo are sitting down to breakfast, he sends his sacristan to return it and ask her to return the cloak he had given her against its loan. On hearing that she'd asked the Priest for a surety, Bentivegna angrily tells her that the priest should have what he wants without charge or surety required.

By sending the sacristan (the church officer in charge of the tools and robes used in services) to retrieve his cloak in Bentivegna's presence, the priest prevents Belcolore from implicating him in her sins. The double entendre in Bentivegna's command that his wife give the priest what he wants serves to retroactively excuse her dalliance with the priest as well as to emphasize her role as the subject of male authority and desire. It's also funny, since the audience knows what Bentivegna doesn't—that the priest wants things Bentivegna might not be so happy to give.

Monna Belcolore sends the cloak back to the Worthy Priest with her own message: he "won't be grinding any more of [his] sauces in her mortar." She refuses to talk to him for the rest of the summer, but eventually he wears through her resistance with the threat of hellfire. Eventually, she makes peace with him, allowing him to repay her in other ways.

The household implement that the priest borrowed—a mortar and pestle, used to prepare ingredients for sauces—underwrites her message, since the mortar (bowl to hold ingredients) and pestle (the club-shaped implement to grind them) have visual associations with male and female sex organs. And, while Belcolore briefly asserted ownership over her body and her sexual partnerships—first by charging the priest for sex, then by refusing to see him after he cheats her of the payment—in the end she succumbs to his masculine authority. Because she is afraid of going to hell, the priest is able to blackmail her into having sex with him again.


DAY 8: THIRD TALE

Elissa's story has as its protagonist Calandrino, a Florentine painter and "simple, unconventional sort of fellow." His friends include Bruno and Buffalmacco, other Florentine painters who are as "shrewd" and quick-witted as he is simple.

The Decameron *wrings as much as it possibly can out of hapless, simple-minded Calandrino and his impish friends Bruno and Buffalmacco. Calandrino and Buffalmacco are both based on artists who were contemporaries (or near-contemporaries) of Giovanni Boccaccio.*

Thanks to Calandrino's reputation for gullibility, notorious trickster Maso del Saggio decides to play a prank on him. Finding him in a local church, Maso del Saggio places himself in earshot and loudly describes the properties of magical stones until he's tempted Calandrino to join the conversation. Maso tells him that most magical stones can be found in Nomansland, where the mountains are made of Parmesan cheese and the streams flow with wine. Because Maso keeps a straight face, Calandrino believes everything he says. He asks if Florence has any magical stones, and Maso explains that there are two kinds: sandstone millwheels (which are costlier than emeralds in Nomansland) and heliotropes.

Unlike the first two tales of the day (and all of those on the previous day), the trick Maso del Saggio (also based on a well-known Florentine citizen and prankster) plays on Calandrino has no sexual motive. Instead, the trick (and the tale's humor) are based in intelligence—or in Calandrino's case, lack of both sophistication and common sense. The magical places Maso lists, like those in Friar Cipolla's sermon in an earlier tale (VI, 10), only sound impressive. Calandrino's inability to realize that they are nonsense names shows the depth of his ignorance and gullibility.

Maso del Saggio tells Calandrino that heliotropes, which are nearly black stones with the magical property of making someone invisible when he is out of sight, can be found near Florence. Calandrino searches all over the city to tell Buffalmacco and Bruno about the heliotropes, remembering hours later that they're painting a nunnery. Finding them there, he explains the stones' magical properties and his plan to make himself invisible to take coins from moneychangers. Bruno and Buffalmacco pretend to be impressed and suggest that they go rock hunting on Sunday morning. It will be easier to find black stones in the morning, before all the rocks are sun-dried and whitish. And fewer people will witness them on the weekend.

Maso del Saggio dangles what sounds like an enticing prospect in front of Calandrino, but the "magic" he describes is unprovable: if someone is only invisible when out of sight, how will he ever know? Calandrino's difficulty in locating his friends (even though they are committed to be at the nunnery) is very funny, since it calls into question his ability to find a hidden, magical stone if he can't even find his un-hidden friends.

The delay gives Bruno and Buffalmacco enough time to plan their own prank. On Sunday morning, they go with Calandrino to search just beyond the city walls. Calandrino picks up every black stone he sees, stuffing them into his clothes until he is "fully laden." At this point, Bruno and Buffalmacco pretend that they can't see him. They complain that he's gone home without them while Calandrino, concluding that one of his many stones is magical, skips ahead of them. They throw stones which hit him, but he swallows his cries. Having previously bribed the customs guards to let Calandrino pass unremarked, they maintain the illusion that he's invisible when they reenter Florence.

Calandrino's friends encourage him to look even more the fool when they let him load up his clothes to bursting with rocks before they pretend that he's found the magical heliotrope and become invisible. Their trick begins to seem more mean-spirited when they start to "randomly" hit him with rocks, but he demonstrates his commitment (if not intelligence) by holding his tongue.

But as Calandrino enters his house, Calandrino's wife, Tessa, chides him for missing breakfast. Stunned that she can see him, he cries that she "ruined everything" and begins to mercilessly beat her. Bruno and Buffalmacco arrive shortly afterward to find Tessa cowering in the corner of a room strewn with black stones. When they chide him for allegedly abandoning them at the river, Calandrino protests that he found the heliotrope and turned invisible, returning to the city with neither they nor the customs guards noticing him. But then his "blasted devil" wife met him at the door and, because everything loses "virtue in the presence of a woman," she broke the spell.

If the trick seemed harmless (if a bit mean-spirited) before, when Calandrino gets home, it has violent consequences. Although the trick was played on her husband, it's Tessa who pays for it in the form of a violent beating, emphasizing the vulnerability of even innocent women to male violence. Calandrino's assumption that his wife has ruined his magic stones is based in antifeminist fears that women were so sinful and corrupt that they ruined everything else around them by their very presence. His proverbial wisdom also carries a double entendre, suggesting that everyone is at risk of losing his virtue (sexual control) in the presence of a woman, because they are so very lustful.

Calandrino jumps up to resume beating Tessa, but Bruno and Buffalmacco restrain him. They say it's his own fault for not telling her to stay away from him on the day he knew he was looking for the magic stone. They even suggest that, since he abandoned them at the river without sharing his discovery, God rewarded his treachery by allowing Tessa to ruin the magic. After reconciling him with his wife, they leave him brooding over his pile of useless stones.

Bruno and Buffalmacco neither own up to their trick nor express regret for the harm that Tessa has endured because of it, confirming her secondary and vulnerable position as a woman in a patriarchal culture (controlled by men). However, they do intervene enough to stop Calandrino from continuing. They suggest that his ill fortune ruined the spell (without fully absolving Tessa for being a woman and women for ruining things). Because he is gullible and prone to believe in magical or otherworldly explanations, he accepts their hypothesis.

DAY 8: FOURTH TALE

Emilia's story, like Panfilo's, describes a lustful cleric. Monna Piccarda, a young widow of noble birth, lives near Fiesole's main church with her two brothers. There she catches the eye of the church's Provost, who falls in love with her. Despite his mature age, he acts like a spoiled child, and everybody dislikes his pompous and tedious attitude; Piccarda "positively loath[es] him."

Emilia invites direct comparison between her tale and Panfilo's, in which a "worthy" priest started an affair with Belcolore in exchange for the gift of a fine cloak. In this tale, then, the audience should pay attention to how sexuality is valued in relationship to class. As a widow, Monna Piccarda is marginally in control of herself rather than under the authority of a husband, although she still lives with her brothers. The provost's love is doubly inappropriate because he is a priest (in other words, he has taken a vow of chastity) and because he is old; as multiple stories have demonstrated, old men are mostly incapable of the physical performance necessary for pleasing a woman. Moreover, he is personally objectionable; the audience is primed to expect, on a day of tricks, that Piccarda will gain the upper hand and upset the provost's plans.

Monna Piccarda very politely tries to appeal to his sense of virtue rather than reject his advances outright, but when the Provost refuses virtue and continues to pressure her, she resolves to teach him a lesson (with her brothers' permission and participation). She tells the Provost that he has worn her down to the point of surrender, and she's now willing to entertain him. But, in her small home, they will have to be completely silent and remain in the dark to avoid her brothers' notice. The impatient Provost agrees to meet at her house, at least until he can think of a better place, starting that very night.

In addition to demonstrating her noble birth and polite upbringing, Piccarda's gentle refusals illustrate the delicate position of women in a patriarchal society: she tries to indicate her disinterest obliquely rather than risk confronting him directly. Other tales in The Decameron *have shown that women who directly reject a man's advances are vulnerable to violence or sexual extortion, so her initial politeness seems to be warranted for her safety. Nevertheless, the provost operates under the assumption that, as a woman, she will give him what he wants. While Piccarda reverted to the authority of her brothers after her husband's death, she is nevertheless able to demonstrate her own intelligence by hatching a plan in which they play a supporting role.*

Monna Piccarda has an old, unattractive maid called Cuitazza. Offering to give her the **gift** of a new smock for her troubles, Piccarda asks her to sleep with the Provost and Cuitazza readily agrees. When the Provost steals into the room after dark, he takes Cuitazza into his arms and possesses the "prize he had so long been coveting." But while he's in bed with the maid, Piccarda's brothers happen to find the bishop in the piazza. They invite him to their home to enjoy some wine.

The tale considers Piccarda's sexual virtue valuable, but neither the tale nor Piccarda herself extend the same consideration to the sexual virtue of Cuitazza. Because she is a servant and of lower class (and, the tale seems to suggest, also because she is physically repulsive), her virtue is cheap and unimportant. The gift implies that it's not worth more than a servant's apron. The language that communicates the provost's excitement over his tryst not only uses objectifying language—reducing Piccarda from an autonomous human being in her own right to a "prize"— but it implicates him in two deadly sins: lust and covetousness (wanting something that belongs to someone else).

After the bishop has had some wine, the brothers say they want to show him something. They take him to Monna Piccarda's room, where the light from their torches reveals the Provost, so spent from his furious riding that he's fallen asleep, in Cuitazza's arms. The unfortunate Provost, deceived and disgraced, is sent to the church for penance. After hearing the whole story, the bishop commends Piccarda and her brothers for giving the Provost his just deserts without staining their own honor.

The unfortunate provost wakes from his bliss to find that fortune's wheel has turned on him and that he has been disgraced in front of his boss. The bishop commends the trick played by Piccarda and her brothers—which also fulfills the day's theme—because it maintained their honor as a family. But he, too, doesn't value Cuitazza's honor or sexual virtue as important. The tale also suggests how vulnerable women were to sexual advances and dishonor; there was no real way for Piccarda to refuse him since he wouldn't accept no for an answer, so her only option was to trick him.

DAY 8: FIFTH TALE

Elissa's tale reminded Filostrato of another anecdote about Maso del Saggio. Florence's chief magistrates are often "mean-hearted men" who live "frugal and beggarly" lives and act as if they are penniless. Their "inborn miserliness and avarice" inclines them to picking judges and notaries of low character. Niccola da San Lepidio, a man who looks more like a coppersmith than a man of law, is one of these low-quality judges.

This tale takes direct aim at the men involved in governing Florence: the chief magistrates and the judges who helped them enforce the law. They are, this description implies, neither noble in position nor generous in character. The cheapness of the magistrates in turn leads to the appointment of sub-par judges (presumably because they don't need to be paid as much as good ones). Class consciousness is also on display in the implication that it's possible to know a person's status by their physical appearance, and that some men look like tradespeople instead of educated lawyers.

One day, Maso del Saggio is hanging around the courts just to watch (as people often do) when he catches sight of Niccola da San Lepidio's "curious and witless appearance." His judge's cap is dirty, his gown hangs down beneath his robe, and the crotch of his breeches hangs down around his knees. He shows this sight to his equally puckish friends Ribi and Matteuzzo.

The portrait of Niccola da San Lepidio is one of a stereotypical, poor bumpkin. His clothes look so ridiculous it's hard to believe that he is an educated man, and his greasy filth recalls the description of uncouth servant Guccio Imbratta (IV, 10).

Realizing that someone could easily conceal himself under Niccola da San Lepidio's platform and that there's a hole big enough for a man's hand beneath his feet, Maso del Saggio suggests that they pull the judge's pants down. The next day they return to the court, where Matteuzzo crawls under the platform. Maso and Ribi approach the judge from the right and left and grab his robe. They pretend to present him with a civil case in which Maso claims that Ribi stole his boots, and Ribi complains that Maso stole his saddlebag. When the judge stands up, Matteuzzo grabs the seat of his pants and pulls them off—easily due to the judge's scrawny frame.

Maso del Saggio's plan, to pants the judge, is calculated to humiliate him, and provide irrefutable proof that he is a fool. He plays into their hands—suggesting that, perhaps, their assessment is correct—when he is easily overwhelmed and confused by the legal "case" Maso and Ribi present to him.

Confused, Niccola da San Lepidio tries to cover himself with his robe, but Maso del Saggio and Ribi hold on to it. Eventually, Matteuzzo releases the judge's pants, and the three pranksters exit the court. Realizing that he's been tricked, the judge demands to know where they've gone, but they are nowhere to be found. The incident angers the chief magistrate until people point out that it was the Florentines' way to show that they knew his judges were fools.

In the end, this tale suggests that class and intelligence are linked: the poor (or at least poorly dressed) judge is a foolish judge. This aligns with the overall thrust of the tales that a person's character earns merit rather than their status or wealth. While Niccola looks poor and dingy, he is nevertheless in a position of power—at least until his foolishness is put on display, demonstrating that he doesn't have the character appropriate for a judge.

DAY 8: SIXTH TALE

Filomena's tale, inspired by Elissa's, also concerns Calandrino, Bruno, and Buffalmacco. A small country farm made up part of the dowry of Calandrino's wife (Tessa). Every year they're entitled to a pig, which they slaughter and preserve. One year, when Tessa remains in Florence due to bad health, Bruno and Buffalmacco go to the farm after Calandrino. Meeting his friends as if by chance, Calandrino shows off his fine pig to them.

In pre-modern marriages, women from families with any wealth would bring a "dowry" or bride-price into their marriages from their families. The farm at the center of this tale thus technically belongs to Tessa, although its goods are shared between the couple. This implies that the hapless and gullible painter is supported by his wife's wealth, subtly underlining his foolishness.

Calandrino plans to have the pig salted, then bring it back to his family in Florence. Bruno suggests that they should instead sell it and use the money to party, then tell Tessa it was stolen. Calandrino refuses, since he doesn't want to provoke his wife's wrath. Bruno suggests to Buffalmacco that they get Calandrino drunk, then steal it.

Bruno and Buffalmacco, in this tale, show themselves to be mooches who enrich themselves or at least underwrite their fun lifestyles by taking advantage of their gullible friends, like Calandrino. While this fits the day's theme of pranks and trickery, and while it seems to point to the importance of intelligence and common sense (which would keep Calandrino from a lot of suffering), the tale doesn't resolve the tension created by their belief that they deserve to share in Calandrino's fortune.

When his friends take him out and pay for drinks, Calandrino gets very drunk, forgetting to close the door when he stumbles home. This allows Buffalmacco and Bruno to walk in and take the pig. Calandrino is upset to discover the theft in the morning. He complains, and his friends wink at him as if believing that he followed their plan (sell the pig and pretend it was stolen). They offer to help him find the perpetrator by using the folk-magic "bread and cheese test," substituting ginger candies and Vernacia wine to avoid raising the perpetrator's suspicions.

In addition to his gullibility, Calandrino also illustrates the dangers of immoderation when he gets blind drunk, allowing his friends to easily steal his valuable pig. The bread and cheese test reflects a popular medieval folk belief that a liar would find him- or herself unable to swallow a piece of bread and cheese over which a magical formula had been recited.

Calandrino gives Bruno money for the supplies. In Florence, he buys a pound of regular ginger candies from an apothecary, along with two specially marked candies made from bitter dog ginger. He and Buffalmacco offer to say the spell over the candies and help Calandrino hand them out to his neighbors.

The suggested substitutions of ginger candy and wine—which, according to Bruno and Buffalmacco, would disguise the fact that Calandrino is implicitly accusing his neighbors of theft—actually allow Bruno and Buffalmacco to disguise the fact that they're tricking Calandrino.

The next morning, Bruno and Buffalmacco bring the wine and candies to Calandrino and his neighbors. Explaining that Calandrino's pig was stolen and that they are going to find the perpetrator, Bruno explains the test: everyone will take an enchanted candy, and while the innocent will enjoy them, the guilty party will find his too bitter to swallow. They offer the perpetrator a final chance to confess before the trial, and when no one does, Bruno hands out the candies.

Bruno and Buffalmacco, by instigating the bread and cheese test, are getting out ahead of Calandrino, who was accusing his neighbors of the theft. If they can "prove" that Calandrino is himself guilty, they'll be able to get away with their crime.

As Bruno hands out the sweets, he gives the marked dog ginger one to Calandrino, who immediately spits it out. Suggesting that he may have spit it out accidentally, Bruno makes a great show of offering him another—which is also bitter, of course. To avoid embarrassment, Calandrino tries to keep this one in his mouth, but it is too bitter, and he eventually spits it out. Bruno and Buffalmacco declare that he must have stolen his own pig, while neighbors scold him.

Bruno sells the trick by bringing everyone's full attention onto Calandrino before offering him the second spiked candy.

Calandrino protests his innocence to his companions, but Bruno claims that he's heard that Calandrino has a country mistress to whom he sent the pig. He recalls the heliotrope incident and declares that Calandrino can't fool them anymore. He threatens to tell Tessa, unless Calandrino gives them some chickens. Hoping to avoid further trouble, Calandrino gives in, and after they've had the pig salted, Bruno and Buffalmacco carry it and the chickens home.

Bruno and Buffalmacco demonstrate their superior intelligence by tricking Calandrino into giving them some fat chickens in addition to the pig they've already stolen. Their threat to tell Tessa about a made-up affair gets Calandrino to shut up because he doesn't want to get in trouble with his wife. But their willingness to cause her emotional distress indicates a callous disregard for Tessa, a woman, even after she was the collateral victim of their earlier heliotrope prank.


DAY 8: SEVENTH TALE

The company appreciates the pig prank but feels that the chickens go too far, and they pity Calandrino. Pampinea says that her tale will offer a warning about deceiving others. Sometimes the victim of a deception manages to get "just retribution" for it.

The brigata*'s reaction to the extortion of the chickens, which takes the theft of the pig too far, points to an ongoing exploration of moderation and excess in this section of tales: which tricks are funny, and which are mean? Which are licensed and which are excessive? Pampinea claims that her tale will illustrate "just retribution," or an exact repayment of a harm. Whether her tale will illustrate such moderation or not remains to be seen.*

Just a little while before the company came together, a very beautiful, proud, and gently bred widow named Elena lives in Florence. Swearing to never remarry, she has taken a "charming young man" of her choice as her lover. Around the same time, Rinieri, a young Florentine nobleman, returns from his studies in Paris. He falls desperately in love with Elena when he sees her at a banquet. In her vanity, Elena notices and toys with his attentions, thinking Rinieri is a "simpleton" she can lead "by the nose."

The similarities between this tale (which also happens to be the longest one in The Decameron*) and a later, semi-autobiographical work of Giovanni Boccaccio called the* Corbaccio*, have led many scholars to interpret Rinieri as a thinly veiled avatar of Boccaccio himself. In this way, the tale might be interpreted as playing out an emotional fantasy the book's author has about Elena—whose real-life identity remains a mystery. Like Piccarda (VIII, 4), Elena's widowhood gives her a modicum of freedom within the patriarchal (controlled by men) system, and by delaying or avoiding remarriage entirely and taking a lover, she prevents herself from falling back under the control of male authority. Even though the tale's narrator is a woman, Pampinea, and despite Elena's claim of sexual freedom, this tale is deeply rooted in antifeminist, misogynistic stereotypes about women, beginning with their vanity. Elena leads Rinieri on because she's vain and because she has an inflated sense of her own intelligence.*

Believing Elena to be interested, Rinieri cultivates her maid as a go-between, and when the maid carries messages to her mistress, Elena wonders if Rinieri has left his wisdom in Paris. She toys with Rinieri, suggesting that his affections are returned but that she must be careful to protect her honor. While he sends **gifts** and she offers vague replies, she ridicules Rinieri to her lover. But her lover eventually becomes jealous of the scholar, which inspires Elena to play a particularly involved trick on Rinieri.

Rinieri is acting like a good lover according to the codes and expectations of fin'amors *(refined loving). He sends messages and gifts to show his affection and intent. Yet, Elena hasn't been operating in good faith, and has only allowed him to pay her attention because it suits her vanity and makes him look foolish. She is in violation of the cultural codes around love, which dictate that an honorable person only gives signs of interest when he or she is truly interested. In this way, Elena contrasts sharply with Piccarda from an earlier tale (VIII, 4), who found herself in a similar situation of receiving unwanted attention but who extricated herself honorably.*

Elena invites Rinieri to visit her after dark on the day after Christmas, and the maid admits him to a courtyard where he is locked in to wait. He quickly becomes cold due to the thick blanket of snow on the ground. But he suffers in patience, believing that his lady will soon reward him. Meanwhile, Elena has also invited her lover, and they watch from a window as the maid explains to Rinieri that Elena's brother visited unexpectedly and is delaying her. He accepts this and says he'll wait until she can come to him.

The codes of fin'amors *(refined loving) require a man to patiently suffer whatever his mistress (or fortune) throws at him. Rinieri, then, is operating in good faith as a potential lover. Elena, however, is the nightmare version of the "cruel" lady. Gendered expectations of women's submission to men frequently allow any woman who rejects a man's advances—for whatever reason, including preserving her chastity, fidelity to a spouse, or simple distaste—to be labeled as "cruel," or inhumane in their treatment of their potential lovers (for example, Restituta's refusal of Gianni in V, 6 or Madonna Giovanna's refusal of Federigo in V, 9). In this tale, full reign is given to the misogynistic portrayal of the cruel lady's excessive meanness as Elena toys with Rinieri's affections explicitly for her own enjoyment.*

Seeing Rinieri left outside to freeze to death nearly convinces Elena's lover that she doesn't care for the scholar at all. While they're having sex all through the night, they mock the scholar. Meanwhile, Rinieri waits, becoming colder all the time. By the early morning hours, Elena's cold treatment towards Rinieri has dispelled the chill of jealousy in her lover's heart. They creep to the courtyard door to mock him further.

Although Elena initiated the trick to soothe her lover's jealousy and show him that she has no amorous feelings for Rinieri, she doesn't drop the trick once she's accomplished this. Her excessive pleasure in treating Rinieri cruelly subverts normal gender hierarchies (since she's in power over him) and contradicts the rules of fin'amors, *according to which she should reward him for his patience rather than continue to punish him. It also contributes to the antifeminist feeling of the tale, which holds her in great contempt for her cruel behavior.*

Elena calls Rinieri through a crack in the door. He gratefully expects to be allowed in so he can warm up. But Elena says he should be used to the snow from his time in cold Paris. She answers his pleas to warm up inside with a claim that opening the door would alert her brother, who she says is still there. Rinieri asks her to prepare a nice big fire so he can warm up, but she retorts that she doesn't understand how he can be cold now, since his love letters always claimed that he was burning up with passion. She returns to having sex and mocking Rinieri with her lover.

The reasons Elena gives Rinieri for keeping him in the courtyard are mixed: the claim that letting him in risks discovery by her brother sounds legitimate, but the rest of her reasons betray the truth, that this is an inhumane trick and that she's making a mockery of him for his love. If any doubt remained, it's gone by the time she mockingly says that his burning passion should be keeping him warm in the snow. As the story pushes Elena's malicious behavior to the limit, it paints a starkly antifeminist portrait of the cruelty women can inflict on men when they deny them their love.

Finally understanding that he's been tricked, Rinieri tries to escape, but every door is locked. During the cold night, his "longstanding love [is] transformed into savage and bitter hatred" and he indulges in elaborate revenge fantasies. At dawn, the maid allows him to leave, maintaining the story about the brother's visit. Rinieri hides his seething anger while he stumbles home, nearly paralyzed with cold. He nearly succumbs, but milder weather and the ministrations of physicians restore his strength.

Romantic love and hate, both strong emotional states, are closely linked in the fin'amors *tradition, and other lovers in* The Decameron *have undergone similar transitions (for example, Guillaume de Roussillon in IV, 9 or Ninetta in IV, 3). Rinieri's hatred is magnified, however, by the truly horrific treatment Elena subjected him to. When he's locked in the courtyard, his physical state is a metaphorical representation of his internal state: trapped by his affection for a woman who is icy cold towards him.*

After some time, **fortune** gives Rinieri a chance to enact his revenge. Elena's lover leaves her for another woman, and she's heartbroken. Her maid thinks Rinieri may know some magic spells (thanks to his Parisian education) that would help her regain his affection. Without pausing to consider that if he *did* know any spells, Rinieri would have used them before, Elena asks for his help. Praising God that he now has a chance to "punish the wicked hussy," Rinieri agrees to meet with her.

Fortune, in this tale, allies itself with Rinieri, almost as if in apology for the harsh treatment he received from Elena. When Elena loses her lover, it suggests the limits of her freedom: by choosing a lover instead of a husband (in other words, by choosing to retain her freedom rather than submit herself to male authority), Elena has chosen autonomy but sacrificed security. She has also become, in Rinieri's words, a "wicked hussy," although presumably if she had returned his affection, he would not have considered her extramarital sexuality deviant. Because of the misogynistic character of the tale, losing her lover is cast as punishment for claiming a widow's freedom. But it also illustrates the narrow range of options available for women in a patriarchal society (controlled by men). When she appeals to Rinieri's help, Elena continues to conform to misogynistic stereotypes of women as stupid and gullible.

Elena, forgetting how badly she mistreated him, pours out her troubles to Rinieri. Although magic displeases God and Rinieri vowed to avoid it, he pretends that his love for her outweighs his concern for sin. But he warns that she will have to be brave and secretive for the charm to work. "More a slave to love than a model of common sense," Elena is willing to do anything.

Elena's belief that Rinieri will help her emphasizes her vanity and shallowness (allegedly female qualities often emphasized in antifeminist literature) and her inability to perceive how her actions affect those around her. It's worth noting that Rinieri's earlier, lovestruck behavior also classified him as a slave to love, willing to do anything (even freeze nearly to death) for the chance to see his mistress. Yet, his servitude is presented as noble while hers is excessive, pointing to the misogynistic framing of the tale, which belittles and punishes Elena on Rinieri's behalf.

Rinieri describes the ritual. He will make a tin figure of her lover. Elena must wait for a dark night, then hold the figure in her hand while she undresses and immerses herself seven times in a flowing stream. Still naked, she must climb to a high, deserted place, then repeat a magic spell that he will give her. Two ladies will appear, and after she tells them her wish, she can descend, dress, and go home. By the next night, her lover will have returned. Elena plans to do the ritual at a remote farm she owns where there is a flowing stream and an abandoned tower. Although he claims ignorance, Rinieri recognizes the farm she describes.

The ritual Rinieri describes sounds just legitimate enough to be believable. It also isolates and makes Elena vulnerable, since it must be performed in a remote place in the middle of the night, and she must be naked. In a religiously-oriented society, magic and the devil's work need to be done in secret, so the idea of esoteric, possibly dark knowledge lends itself to tricks and pranks (for example, the secret penance Dom Felice describes to Friar Puccio in III, 4 or the trick Bruno and Buffalmacco will play in VIII, 9).

Delighted at the thought of his impending revenge, Rinieri makes the tin figure and writes out some nonsense spell words, sending both to Elena. Then he takes a servant with him to a friend's house near Elena's farm. Elena also takes her maid to the country. Without telling the maid her plans, she steals out of her house at midnight. She undresses, dips into the stream, and walks to the tower. Hidden nearby, Rinieri is nearly overcome by the allure of her naked body when she passes by. Feeling pity and arousal, he wants to "seize her in his arms and take his pleasure of her, " but he strengthens his resolve by recalling her cruel treatment of him.

Rinieri's revenge plot involves isolating Elena and making her vulnerable, and he takes advantage of this by hiding in the bushes to leer at her naked body. The power of feminine beauty over male willpower is a frequent concern in misogynistic literature; and at the sight of Elena, Rinieri is overcome with desire to the point that he nearly forgives her and abandons his revenge. Yet, even this moving "power" of her beauty is based in vulnerability, because what he wants to do is rape her, even though she is still in love with the man who abandoned her. But then he remembers how she objectified him and made him the butt of her mockery.

Elena climbs to the top of the tower and recites the spell while Rinieri silently dismantles the ladder. After the magical maidens fail to appear, she begins to suspect that he wants "to give [her] a night like the one [she] provided for him," and she discovers that she is trapped when she prepares to descend, and the ladder is gone. Weeping and wailing, she repents of the trick she played on Rinieri and curses her fate. When people learn that she was found naked on the tower, they'll reconsider her reputation. If she makes an excuse, she fears that Rinieri will expose her affair.

Rinieri's revenge illustrates the concept of "contrapasso" which Dante (whom Boccaccio admired and emulated) employed in the Divine Comedy. *It is when the punishment is exactly correlated with the sin, but enacted with excessive force. In this case, Elena trapped Rinieri in a cold courtyard, behind the walls of the house and where only she (and her lover) could witness his humiliation. He, in turn, has trapped her in a high, exposed place where anyone might see her nakedness exposed. Her repentance can't save her because it comes too late and because it's not the result of genuine remorse, but rather of fear for her own impending dishonor. Moreover, the bind in which she finds herself illustrates the vulnerability and constriction of women, because Rinieri has blackmailed her into accepting her punishment without blaming him: if she tries, he can expose her earlier affair.*

By the time the sun rises, Elena is so desperate she's nearly suicidal. While searching around for help, she sees Rinieri. Lying down on the roof and putting her head through the trapdoor so he can't see her nakedness, she chastises him for his trick, says that she's learned her lesson, and appeals to his gentlemanly nature to end her sufferings. She took from him something that she can now return (her affections), but if he takes away her good name, he won't be able to restore that to her. Her tears inspire sorrow in Rinieri, but he also feels pleasure in his revenge, and since "his passion [is] unequal…to his craving for revenge," he refuses to help her.

Elena's desperate attempts to negotiate with Rinieri illustrate the helplessness of her position and show how little bargaining power she has in their relationship, which is unbalanced by a patriarchal gender hierarchy. But her offers are based in antifeminist stereotypes, too, since she tries to leverage her body and sexual access to it to gain the upper hand against Rinieri. Thus, when he refuses to cave into his pity and abandon his revenge, his choice can be interpreted as a victory for masculine willpower in the face of feminine manipulation and sex appeal. But on the other hand, he also demonstrates excessiveness when he refuses to relent, even after Elena points out the essential imbalance in their positions: at no point was his public reputation at risk in her trick, although his revenge hinges entirely on making his punishment of her public in some way.

Rinieri tells Elena that she could have expected some compassion from him now if she had shown him any on that winter night. He mocks her concern for her good name now, since she didn't care enough to avoid taking her lover before. Maybe, he suggests, she should ask the man in whose hands she's already placed her reputation (her lover) to rescue her. Rinieri himself no longer wants the sexual favors she offers. And if he did, he would take them by force before she could offer them freely.

As the tale progresses, it becomes increasingly unclear what Rinieri is punishing Elena for, and in this passage he cites three related but competing reasons: her lack of compassion, the lack of sexual self-restraint she demonstrated in taking a lover, and, by implication, sleeping with another man while rejecting Rinieri himself. This adds to the antifeminist mood of the tale: Rinieri's anger extends beyond Elena's trick on him to anger that she had another man as her lover and anger that she felt free to pick and choose her sexual encounters. His frequent reminders of his power over her also highlight the vulnerability of women. She is powerless and has nothing to offer him, because he can take whatever he wants from her.

Rinieri resents Elena's attempt to avoid punishment "for [her] wickedness" by appealing to his "better nature." Even if he were a charitable man, she isn't the kind of woman who deserves it. And he disagrees that his trick is revenge (which exceeds the original wrong). He thinks that it is punishment for her attempt to murder him; taking her life or the lives of another hundred "foul and wicked" women wouldn't be as bad as that. Although she's pretty, she's nothing more than a "miserable little whore" and her life is worth much less than his, since he's a "gentleman…who can bring more benefit to humanity in a single day" than she could in thousands of years.

Elena appeals to Rinieri's better nature and to ideas like compassion and nobility. This is nearly successful, but it also pushes him to even more extreme positions. To continue with what he feels is fair punishment, he has to thoroughly dehumanize her. In doing so, he draws on and repeats the kind of virulent and violent language that characterizes antifeminist literature. He even puts exact numbers on the relative value of men and women: his life is worth as much as the lives of a hundred women.

If Elena is so anxious to descend the tower, Rinieri suggests that she make him happy by committing suicide. She tries to argue that putting aside her initial hatred and confiding in him should have earned her some mercy. She tries to thank him for teaching her the error of her ways. She begs for his forgiveness, promises to forsake her lover, and submits herself to him as her "lord" even if he no longer wants her love. She also chastises him for criticizing her beauty, since "beauty…brings sweetness, joy, and solace to a man's youth."

Elena, who formerly abused the power she had over Rinieri, now tries to demonstrate that she's willing to take her "proper" place under his authority. However, she demonstrates lingering vanity when she defends beauty as that which has its own value.

Rinieri retorts that Elena confided in him out of desperation, not respect. He brags that he could have punished her in a thousand other ways, although he's glad she fell into this trap, because her shame and suffering are enhancing his pleasure. If she eluded all his traps, he could have punished her by publicly writing about her sins. He tells her that he doesn't want her love since he has a better lady now, and he criticizes women generally for preferring young and handsome men to older, wiser, and more experienced ones. This is to their detriment—her lover left her because young men are never content with one woman. He implies that her lover hasn't kept quiet about their affair, so her reputation is already lost.

Not content with her submission, Rinieri continues to debase and condemn Elena. He even admits the excessive, masochistic pleasure of punishing her in this way, which he gets to witness firsthand. And he describes his predatory role: although she could have escaped this specific punishment, there was no way for her to avoid any punishment at his hands. As soon as she tricked him, she placed herself in his power, because from that moment he held the power to expose her sins publicly through writing if nothing else. Furthermore, he repeats gender-based critiques of women as shallow, since they prefer handsome young men to more experienced lovers.

Seizing on his new love, Elena asks Rinieri to pity her for the sake of his lady, and he pretends to go off to find her clothes. But, leaving his servant to guard the tower, he goes back to his friend's house for a siesta. Elena tries to hide from the blazing sun in the insufficient shelter of the parapet wall. The sun burns her until her skin splits into "tiny cracks and fissures" and she can't move without great pain. To make things worse, flies swarm around her bleeding flesh, further tormenting her. No one is around to help her since the day is so hot and no one is in the fields. Helpless, Elena turns into "the ugliest thing in the world" while she waits on the tower.

Rinieri's disregard for Elena's appeal to his new lady suggests not so subtly that this other woman is a lie invented to make Elena feel jealous or to keep her in a vulnerable spot by preventing her from trying to use her sex appeal to soften Rinieri's heart. He demonstrates callous cruelty when he abandons her in the heat of the day to take a nap. And while her physical discomfort in the burning sun mirrors his in the snowy courtyard, the tale describes her pain in exquisite detail, making it feel more excessive than his. Moreover, the vanity that caused her to lead Rinieri on is punished when her extreme sunburn turns her from extremely pretty to incredibly ugly and deformed.

Late in the afternoon, Rinieri returns. A weakening Elena bursts into tears and begs him in God's name to end his unreasonably severe revenge, either with rescue or by killing her. At the very least she asks for some water. Rinieri feels a "modicum of pity" but doggedly sticks to his revenge, telling the "vile strumpet" that he will give her as much water to restore her from the heat as she gave him fire to restore him from the cold. He complains that fragrant waters cure burns while his hypothermia required being packed in animal manure. Elena wonders what punishment he could have imagined for even greater sins, like murdering his family and all his friends.

In comparison to Rinieri's night in the courtyard, which is covered in a few paragraphs, pages are lavished on describing Elena's punishment. This contributes to the antifeminist feeling of the tale, since the level of detail suggests that the tale's pleasure is to be found in the example of a scornful and cruel women being punished with a painful and humiliating torture. Rinieri's frequent pangs of pity point to his humanity and to an awareness that this punishment is somehow excessive, yet his feelings of rage over having been tricked and sexually humiliated by a woman are not yet quieted. At this point in the tale, it's hard to imagine what will please him, and it has begun to feel like Rinieri plans to leave Elena up there to die.

Finally, as evening approaches, Rinieri feels that his revenge is complete—although he would like to punish her maid, too. He brings Elena's clothes to her maid and has his servant take her to Elena. The maid arrives just as a swineherd has finally heard Elena's cries. He reassembles the ladder, and after the maid brings Elena her clothes and the welcome news that no one knows about her trials, he carries Elena down. The maid unluckily misses the ladder and falls from the tower, breaking her leg. When Elena returns to Florence, she "[weaves] a completely fictious account" of the affair and successfully claims that her injuries and her maid's are the work of evil spirits.

The tale's antifeminist bent is confirmed when the maid—who helped Elena pull her earlier prank on Rinieri—gets her own painful punishment, even though it's in fortune's hands instead of Rinieri's when she happens to fall from the tower and break her leg. There is also misogyny inherent in the suggestion that, despite Rinieri's best efforts, Elena is able to manipulate her friends and family in such a way that she saves her reputation, despite deserving to be known to the world as a vile strumpet.

Elena undergoes a lengthy and painful recuperation from her burns, shedding her skin several times over because it keeps sticking to her sheets. She doesn't miss her lover, play tricks, or fall in love again. Rinieri, hearing that the maid broke her leg, considers his revenge complete and goes "happily about his business." Thus, ladies should know to think twice before playing tricks, especially on scholars.

Yet despite escaping the dishonor of having her affair revealed, Elena is still punished severely for crossing Rinieri, and the tale's final moments detail the ongoing torment of the treatment for her extreme sunburns. In the end, she is chastised and takes her rightful place as a virtuous and submissive woman.

DAY 8: EIGHTH TALE

While the ladies consider Elena's punishment grievous, their compassion is restrained by "the knowledge that she had partially brought [it] upon herself," even if Rinieri was "excessively severe and relentless, not to say downright cruel." Fiammetta's tale will show how lesser actions can avenge a wrong equally, rather than "out of all proportion to the original offense."

The brigata *acknowledges that Rinieri's punishment of Elena was not, as he claimed, exactly equal to her crime. Yet, their distress over his cruelty is tempered by a feeling that Elena was to some extent to blame. This undercuts the ongoing claims that* The Decameron *is meant for the ladies' delight, and the tale feels like a warning to the* brigata*'s women and to its female audience that they should be careful to stick to their assigned gender niche. To restore balance to the world of the* brigata*, the next tale will show a pure example of tit-for-tat, where the punishment and the crime are exactly equal.*

In Siena, Spinelloccio Tavena and Zeppa di Mino are best friends who live next door to each other. Spinelloccio is often at Zeppa's house, allowing him and Zeppa's Wife to become lovers. One day, when Zeppa is at home (unbeknownst to his wife), he watches them lock themselves into his bedroom. Despite his horror, he understands that making their affair public in any way will harm his reputation. He decides to take revenge that will satisfy his pride without scandal.

Zeppa's decision to hold his tongue is based in part in the complex ties between female honor and the honor of the men around her: to publicly denounce his wife's affair is to publicly declare himself to be a cuckold. So, he demonstrates moderation and self-control, wisely holding his tongue and using wit and intelligence to come up with a more appropriate—and private—response.

After Spinelloccio Tavena leaves, Zeppa di Mino confronts Zeppa's Wife, who confesses the affair. Promising to forgive her and not to harm Spinelloccio if she helps him with his plan, he asks her to invite him over the following day, then hide him in a chest in the bedroom. The next morning, when Zeppa and Spinelloccio are out and about, Spinelloccio invents a reason to excuse himself and goes to Zeppa's wife. No sooner has he arrived than Zeppa himself returns, and Spinelloccio hides in the chest.

In confessing the affair, Zeppa's wife not only does what's right but also rehabilitates herself as a wife. Her former disobedience (sleeping around) can be corrected and forgiven if she helps her husband settle the score.

Zeppa di Mino asks Zeppa's Wife to invite Spinelloccio's Wife to breakfast. Upon her arrival, he sends his own wife to the kitchen, then takes her to the bedroom. He tells Zeppa's wife that he discovered her husband with his wife the day before. Because he loves his friend, the only revenge he wants is exact justice: "he…possessed my wife, and I intend to possess you." She declares herself willing to "bear the brunt of [his] revenge" if he preserves her relationship with Zeppa's wife. After he agrees, they have sex on the chest where Spinelloccio Tavena is hiding. At first, he is enraged and wishes to scold his wife. But by the time they're done, he feels that Zeppa's justified revenge has been "civil and comradely."

Spinelloccio's wife shows remarkably little resistance to participating in Zeppa's revenge plot—although his intent to possess her carries a latent threat that he will do so either with her cooperation (in which case, she also gets to pay her husband back for his infidelity) or by force—demonstrating her limited capacity for action in the context of the plans of the men around her. Another way in which the vulnerability of women—whose sexual chastity is a proxy for their husbands' honor—is in play here is the fact that the original sin was committed by her husband and her friend, yet she is the one paying a price for it now. The wives, in this "revenge" tale, become objects of civil and friendly exchange between their husbands.

When Zeppa di Mino and Spinelloccio's Wife are done, Zeppa's Wife comes into the bedroom and acknowledges that her husband has paid her back in her own coin. Zeppa asks her to open the chest, and Spinelloccio Tavena climbs out. Now that he and Zeppa are even, he proposes that they share their wives between them, just as they have "always shared everything [else] in common." All four live in perfect friendship, without arguments or disputes over this arrangement, from that day forth.

Now that the score is settled, in a scrupulously even way, the four members of this little interpersonal drama all formally declare that the upheaval is past. In this way, the tale comments on the excessive punishment enacted by Rinieri on Elena in the preceding tale (VIII, 7). It also opens the door for a non-traditional sexual arrangement that suggests the interchangeability of women.

DAY 8: NINTH TALE

Before beginning her tale, Lauretta notes that some people's ignorance means that they're practically begging to be pranked. Tricksters who return tit for tat or who prank gullible people shouldn't be judged too harshly. Master Simone da Villa is one of those gullible people. After studying medicine at Bologna, he moves to Florence grandly dressed but not very wise. Among his eccentricities, he shows a great deal of curiosity about his neighbors and is always asking questions about everyone, especially Bruno and Buffalmacco.

Lauretta's tale critiques an educated—yet still unwise—man. It thus participates in The Decameron*'s argument about merit, proving that personal characteristics (like intelligence and common sense) are stronger indicators of a person's worth than markers of their status, like titles (such as "Doctor") or wealth. As soon as she introduces the names of Bruno and Buffalmacco (in this, their third appearance in the tales), the audience is primed to expect hijinks and trickery.*

Noting that Bruno and Buffalmacco are always happy and carefree, despite being poor painters, Simone da Villa concludes that they must have a secret source of money. He cultivates Bruno's friendship, and Bruno is delighted by the doctor's evident gullibility. After hosting Bruno for breakfast a few times, Simone asks how he and his friend support themselves, and Bruno reveals that they, unable to live on their work alone, obtain the "pleasures and necessities of life" by "go[ing] the course."

Simone cannot see the irony of the situation when, in trying to figure out how Bruno and Buffalmacco always seem to be happy despite their lack of income, he becomes their frequent host. In contrast, the clever and wily Bruno makes a quick mark of Simone and creates a trick designed to bilk him of as many of the pleasures and necessities of life—money, food, and wine—as he can. His suggestion of secret knowledge, as in other tales, provides cover for his trick, since it suggests something a person would want or need to keep quiet to avoid the attention of the church or secular authorities.

Simone da Villa begs to know what "going the course" means. Bruno is reluctant to share the secret for fear of being punished. But he so respects the physician's "ineptitude" that he will risk it if Simone promises absolute secrecy. He tells the doctor that he and Buffalmacco are members of a secret society, formed some years ago when a group of Florentine nobles persuaded the great Scottish necromancer Michael Scott to leave behind two of his disciples to minister to their needs. The company, made of men "rich or poor, patrician or plebian," meets twice a month to grant the wishes of its members.

Much of the humor in this tale derives from Simone's evident inability to understand the words that Bruno uses when talking with him. Thus, instead of praising the doctor's "aptitude," he cites his "ineptitude"—but Simone can't tell the difference. Michael Scott was a famous Scottish philosopher who lived at the court of King Frederick of Sicily during the 13th century. His connection with occult magic was legendary in the later Middle Ages, and in Dante's Divine Comedy*, he's consigned to hell as a sorcerer. The makeup of the secret society is a clear comment on class and merit: anyone and everyone can be a member, despite their social status. But just as the society can elevate a humble man, the tale also implies the reverse: even an educated and wealthy doctor can be gullible and act foolishly.*

The secret society has banquets in beautiful rooms served by handsome servants; the plates, silverware, and cups are made of silver and gold; the food and wine are rich, delicious, and never-ending; and everyone wears fine and rich clothing. But the highlight is the beautiful women who are magically provided for the members from the four corners of the world. Many of them are powerful queens, who cavort with society members in splendid beds after dinner. Buffalmacco prefers the Queen of France, while Bruno likes the Queen of England. These rich ladies are happy to give the painters a few thousand florins now and then.

The vision of the secret society that Bruno paints is suspiciously tempting. In part, it draws on descriptions of noble entertainments that filled medieval literature (especially romances). But even in the context of a secret society, the idea that the fine queens of the world willingly come to Florence to have sex with lowly painters strains credibility. The queens also show that no woman is free from patriarchal (controlled by men) desires: even the highest and most powerful women in the world become tokens to be collected by men.

Although Simone da Villa's medical wisdom is great (or great enough to treat a baby's thrush, at least) he is stunned to learn about "going the course," and he wants to join the secret society himself. But he decides to first curry Bruno's favor with more hospitality. He invites Bruno for breakfast and supper regularly and displays "boundless affection" for him. In gratitude, Bruno paints several murals—including a chamber-pot over the front door—for Simone.

Thrush is a fungal infection common in babies; the implication is that Simone's medical knowledge extends about as far as that of any medieval mother, who would have treated her baby's thrush with home remedies. Even as he's giving them free meals, Simone still can't see that he's solved the mystery of how the painters live so well: they are constantly feeding themselves at the expense of wealthier men. The chamber pot is both a sign foreshadowing the filthy ending of the tale and a legitimate advertisement for Doctor Simone's services. Because an important diagnostic tool in medieval medicine was urinalysis, or diagnosis by examining a patient's urine, chamber pots were often used on doctors' signs.

Every so often, Bruno describes a society meeting, stringing Simone da Villa along with tidbits about the women he calls for. When Simone feels that Bruno is "sufficiently in his debt," he asks to be initiated. He plans to wish for "the comeliest serving wench you've seen," whom he met a year ago in "Cacavincigli." Although he offered her money at the time, she turned him down. He also has a lot to offer the company: not only is he a doctor, but he's handsome, and an excellent singer. He bursts into song to prove it, and Bruno compliments his "cacophonous voice." The doctor goes on to point out that he's a nobleman (although his parents both came from the country), with a fine collection of books and nice clothes.

If further indications of Simone's poor taste were necessary, he has set his romantic sights comically low, on a commoner who may even be a prostitute (since he offered her money for sex). And while his wealth and education qualify him as a solidly middle-class medieval gentleman, the tale continues to mock his ineptitude. It suggests that a gentleman in the country is the same as a rube in the city.

Bruno would comply with Simone da Villa's request—both because he loves him "as a brother" and because his words are "seasoned with so much wisdom"—if he could. If he gives his word "as a gentleman and a moron" to keep it secret, Bruno will tell him how to get in. Simone must befriend Buffalmacco, since he is the next captain, and his opinion on new members will hold greater weight. Buffalmacco is already "dying to meet [Simone]." In his ridiculous eagerness, Simone loses no time in meeting Buffalmacco, and the painters stuff themselves "like princes" at his table.

Yet again Bruno's speech mocks the doctor who can't hear or understand the hidden insults in it. Simone's assent to the pledge confirms that he is, as Bruno says, an airheaded gentleman. Bruno also extends the con to benefit his friend Buffalmacco. And still, Simone cannot see that the painters are dining in the exact way they describe as "going the course" (like princes) at his own table and expense.

When Simone da Villa asks Buffalmacco for admittance into the secret society, he offers so many "pearls of wisdom" that Buffalmacco tells him that it seems more like he studied how to "capture men's minds…with [his] wisdom and…singular ways" than medicine in Bologna. Simone replies that he was very popular in Bologna where he "made everybody laugh because [he] was very popular" every time he opened his mouth. Eventually, Buffalmacco offers Simone his "equivocal promise" to enroll him in the company.

Obviously, Simone's "pearls of wisdom" aren't particularly wise. But by pretending to have been swayed by the doctor, the painters draw him further into the con by gaining his trust. Simone also continues to demonstrate his total lack of self-awareness when he describes his popularity in Bologna: his comments (in conjunction with what he's already said to Bruno and Buffalmacco) suggest that people were more likely to have been laughing at *him than with him. And Buffalmacco also teases the silly physician with his intentional malapropisms, asking for an "equivocal" (uncertain or confusing) rather than an "unequivocal" (clear and certain) promise.*

Buffalmacco also promises Simone da Villa the "Countess of Cesspool" as his mistress; she will help him forget his serving wench. He explains that she is a great lady who makes her presence known everywhere in the world; even monks honor her with their "big bass drum." Her symbols are the rod and bucket, and her vassals include "Baron Ffouljakes, Lord Dung, Viscount Broomhandle…and the Earl of Loosefart." Simone doesn't catch exactly what he's saying because he was raised in Bologna.

The tale takes a definite turn toward the scatological (drawing its humor from excrement) when Buffalmacco describes the mistress the alleged secret society has found for Simone; this also foreshadows the tale's dirty ending. Again, Simone isn't clever enough to be suspicious at being paired with a woman whose name is, essentially, "Lady Toilet," and whose coat of arms is decorated with the tools of an outhouse. And the drums announcing her presence and the names of her courtiers evoke the sounds of farts. Only at this point does the tale suggest that part of Simone's difficulty understanding the painter arises from the differences in dialect between different areas of Italy. By waiting until now, the story suggests that Simone's stupidity is more to blame for his misunderstandings than his lack of Florentine slang vocabulary.

Within a few days, Bruno and Buffalmacco explain to Simone da Villa how he will be inducted. That night, after dark, he must put on his best clothes—because the Countess of Cesspool wants to make him into a Knight of the Bath—and wait on Santa Maria Novella's crypts. A black, horned creature will come to fetch him. He must not let it frighten him, though it will try. When it comes to him, he will climb on its back, but he must not hold on with his hands or call on God or the saints. Breaking any of these rules will land him "in a stinking mess." Simone recounts two anecdotes to demonstrate his bravery: once he carried a girl to bed despite her protests, and once he passed a fresh grave without fear.

The church where Simone is to wait, Santa Maria Novella, is the same church where the brigata *gathered at the beginning of* The Decameron. *The alarming description of the demonic creature that comes to convey him to the secret society's meeting both sets up the parameters for the prank and stresses the occult, even satanic atmosphere of the society. And although the pair's warning that failure to observe the rules will land the doctor in a stinking mess sounds like a general caution, their intensifying potty humor foreshadows a rather more specific mess.*

As darkness falls, Simone da Villa gives his wife an excuse for going out. Tall, sturdy Buffalmacco disguises himself as the demonic creature and goes to the church square where he leaps about and hisses in an alarming way. When he approaches Simone, the doctor is "terrified out of his wits," but he manages to climb onto Buffalmacco's back, whispering "God preserve me."

When Buffalmacco dresses himself as the beast, readers understand why Simone can't touch him with his hands—too much contact might betray the trick. Despite his big talk of bravery, Simone is alarmed by the appearance of a demonic creature. And when he predictably whispers a short prayer, he gives the painters all the excuse they need to dump him in a stinking mess.

Buffalmacco carries Simone da Villa through the city and along ditches where "farmers…pour the offerings of the Countess of Cesspool" to fertilize their fields. He suddenly seizes one of Simone's feet and throws him into the ditch, snarling and leaping around before running back to Bruno, who is hidden nearby. Simone climbs out of the ditch with great difficulty, scrapes off as much ooze as he can, and goes home, where Bruno and Buffalmacco eavesdrop on his wife's reception. While Simone tries to clean up, she says he deserved it for going to see another woman.

When the tale describes the sewage ditches along the road as the offerings to Simone's alleged mistress, the audience knows to expect what happens next: Simone is dumped into the raw sewage as repayment for his kindness and hospitality to the two painters and his gullibility. Nor does poor Simone's trial end when he climbs out of the muck, since his wife immediately suspects him of cheating on her (which, in fairness, was his initial intent).

The next morning, Bruno and Buffalmacco paint bruises on their chests and visit Simone da Villa, who still reeks. They complain that they were mercilessly beaten after their nominated member failed the initiation. Their informant told them that Simone trembled like a leaf when he climbed on the beast and that he invoked God's name. He apologizes profusely and (to keep his misadventure quiet) he entertains them more lavishly than before.

In a day dedicated to tricks, it's not surprising that Bruno and Buffalmacco get away with this one without being punished. And, because Simone's greediness for secret knowledge and an exclusive lover went before his downfall, the trick seems relatively harmless. Yet, it doubles down on punishing Simone for his stupidity, since Bruno and Buffalmacco are able to continue to swindle him of hospitality on the implicit threat of blackmail.

DAY 8: TENTH TALE

Dioneo's tale diverges from Lauretta's by telling about a cunning revenge taken on a cunning, not foolish, victim.

This tale has a very similar setup, setting, and cast of characters to Fiammetta's second tale (II, 5).

In the seaports of all maritime countries, incoming merchants must have the value of their goods assessed at the customs-house, where they are stored until he pays the appropriate customs fees. Local brokers consult the customs-house's register to identify potential business deals. In Palermo, where the women are as lovely as they are prone to criminality, this register offers a chance for those who would fleece—or rather, completely skin—naive merchants to select their marks. Then, they charm these men into falling in love and entice them to hand over their money or goods.

The opening to this tale is important because it is the earliest recorded description in western literature of a bonded customs house; given his father's business and the overall importance of trade to Florentine society, it is likely that Giovanni Boccaccio was describing it from his personal knowledge. However, this customs house is in Sicily, which has already been shown to be a hotbed for attractive and effective conwomen (see II, 5) who use their feminine wiles to manipulate and defraud merchants of their hard-earned goods.

Niccolò da Cignano, better known as Salabaetto, goes to Palermo with five hundred florins' worth of woolens. He is slow to sell them since he's eager to see what the city has to offer. Before long, a Sicilian con-woman, who calls herself Madonna Jancofiore, learns about his goods and begins to cast glances at him. He thinks she is a fine lady who has fallen in love with his good looks. He is thus an easy mark when Jancofiore sends an invitation to meet secretly at a local bathhouse.

Madonna Jancofiore shows how easy it is for a woman to gain control over a man by using her charms, especially a naive young man like Salabaetto who, the tale implies, hasn't yet had enough experience to learn about feminine trickery. It also speaks to a certain youthful arrogance in the young man, who can't imagine any other reason for her attention than his enormous charm having caused her to fall hopelessly in love with him.

At the appointed hour, Salabaetto goes to the bathhouse, where he watches slave-girls prepare a fine bed and scrub the bath. When Madonna Jancofiore arrives, she washes him with fragrant soap, and the slave-girls anoint them both with fragrant waters. After some light refreshments, Jancofiore dismisses them and falls into Salabaetto's arms. At the end of their time, she invites him to her home that evening. Her bedroom, filled with rich gowns and adorned with "mechanical songbirds" and other "paraphernalia," convinces Salabaetto that she must be a great lady, despite some rumors he has heard to the contrary.

The description of the bath is oriental, exotic, and sensual. The intensely detailed description gives readers a taste of how overwhelming and impressive the experience is to Salabaetto. But in allowing himself to fall under the sway of such feminized ministrations, Salabaetto also makes himself vulnerable to the power of Madonna Jancofiore, inverting normal gender hierarchies that associate men with reason and rationality and women with sensuality and excess. In conjunction with the decorations in her house, which are also exotic and precious (such as wind-up, moving replicas of birds), Salabaetto is given the understanding that Madonna Jancofiore is very wealthy and well-connected.

Salabaetto becomes more enamored as he regularly meets with Madonna Jancofiore during his stay in Palermo. When he has sold his merchandise, she finds out. The next night, one of her slave-girls calls her from the room where she entertains Salabaetto. Jancofiore returns in tears because she's just received a letter from her brother. He has been imprisoned and needs a thousand florins within a week to escape execution. She worries that she can't sell her property or call in her debts fast enough to raise that amount in that time. Salabaetto, whose passion has caused him to misplace "a substantial portion of his wits," offers to loan her his five hundred florins, to be repaid in two weeks.

The scam Madonna Jancofiore pulls on Salabaetto is calculated to take advantage of medieval gender stereotypes that cast women as fragile and in need of protection. She subverts the role of feminine victim by using it to manipulate and defraud Salabaetto. It works, in part, because of the overwhelming power of love over human actions—which can be for good or ill. Salabaetto is so smitten that he doesn't rationally consider the situation. It's also notable that Jancofiore's scam is so similar to the 21st century's so-called "Nigerian Prince" scams, showing how little some things have changed since the Middle Ages.

Proclaiming her undying gratitude to Salabaetto and protesting that she'd never have thought to ask for what he freely offered, Madonna Jancofiore throws herself into his arms. When he brings her the money, he takes her promise to repay as soon as she can as her surety. Having gotten the money, Jancofiore avoids him and frequently breaks their plans. Two weeks go by, then two months, before he realizes that she won't be repaying his money. He's too ashamed of his naiveté to report her to the authorities. Instead, he runs away from his creditors to Naples.

By the time he has realized that he's been tricked (which admittedly takes a while), Salabaetto feels too guilty to behave appropriately. He demonstrates both excessive shame and excessive inexperience by trying to run away from his problems.

In Naples, Salabaetto goes to a family friend, Pietro dello Canigiano, who is treasurer to the Empress of Constantinople. He wants Pietro to help him find a livelihood in Naples, but Pietro promises to help him recover his money from Madonna Jancofiore instead. They prepare a shipment of merchandise and barrels of oil, which Salabaetto takes to Palermo and leaves at the customs-house. Learning that he has returned with more than two thousand florins' worth of goods, Madonna Jancofiore quickly resumes their relationship. She claims her repayment was delayed due to difficulties raising the money and asks forgiveness. Salabaetto tells her that he is moving to Palermo to be with her, and that he's expecting another valuable shipment of goods soon.

Fortunately, a wiser person is at hand to help Salabaetto restore balance and reclaim his money from Jancofiore. To pay her back in her own coin, they will manipulate her through her excessive greed just as she manipulated Salabaetto through his extreme youthful inexperience and lustfulness.

Madonna Jancofiore repays Salabaetto's five hundred florins. To pay her back in her own coin, he goes to her home one evening looking sad and forlorn. He claims that pirates have captured his expected shipment, and he must contribute a thousand florins towards its ransom. Because he invested the money she returned in another shipment, he has no cash on hand. Madonna Jancofiore promises to ask a moneylender (by which she means herself) for help, and Salabaetto offers the goods in the customs-house as a guarantee against the loan.

The trick that Salabaetto plays on Jancofiore is exactly like the one she played on him, suggesting that her greed is so excessive that it prevents her from seeing the similarities. It also plays on catastrophes that seem to be commonplace in the medieval Mediterranean trade routes that fill the tales; this is only one of many references to pirates throughout The Decameron.

The next morning, Madonna Jancofiore gives a friend one thousand florins of her own money to "lend" to Salabaetto. Salabaetto happily signs over his goods as collateral, then returns to Naples with his fifteen hundred florins to repay his creditors. Two months later, suspecting a trick, Jancofiore seizes his goods in the warehouse. She discovers casks filled mostly with seawater and a thin layer of oil on the top. All but two of the bales of "woolens" are filled with straw. The whole shipment is worth only two hundred florins. She repents her losses as she realizes the truth of the old saying, "honesty's the better line, when dealing with a Florentine."

Like Salabaetto earlier, Madonna Jancofiore is slow to suspect the trick. Also like Salabaetto, she learns a lesson from the experience: although other men might be gullible enough to make good marks in the future, she shouldn't mess with Florentines. Thus, the tale ends on some home-town pride for Florence—and it suggests the stature of the brigata, *all of whom are, themselves, honest Florentines.*

DAY 8: CONCLUSION

Lauretta, commending Pietro dello Canigiano's wisdom, elects Emilia the next day's sovereign. Emilia notes that times of rest are necessary for productivity, so she proposes that the next day's tales address the topics that please their tellers. After supper, she asks Panfilo to sing a song.

Emilia releases the brigata *from a specific theme for the second-to-last day of storytelling, allowing Giovanni Boccaccio a place in the carefully orchestrated structure of* The Decameron *to find homes for tales which build on, complicate, and compete with tales previously told.*

Panfilo's song speaks of love's joyful suffering; it is in the voice of a lover who is "happy burning in [love's] flame." The closer the singer is to his love, the more he burns, although he cannot reveal her identity. All he can divulge is that he found "salvation and sweet grace" and that he conceals "a rapture I may not reveal." The rest of the company attends very closely to his words, trying to guess what they conceal, but no one guesses correctly.

Panfilo's song, like all the rest, draws on the traditions of fin'amors *(refined loving), including the common image of unrequited love as a burning fire and describing fulfilled love in spiritual terms. It contributes to the book's exploration of the irresistible force of love over human actions. His song is highly suggestive of consummation since the singer experienced a "rapture" that he can't explicitly share. This, like Fiammetta's song earlier, subtly complicates Dioneo's later claim that all the members of the* brigata *have always maintained the strictest self-control and moral rectitude.*

DAY 9: INTRODUCTION

In the morning, the company amuses themselves in a nearby woods by chasing the nearly tame "roebucks, stags, and other wild creatures" that live there. Their youth and vitality shine as they adorn themselves with leaves, herbs, and flowers; anyone looking at them would think they "will not be vanquished by death, or […] will welcome it with joy." After their customary activities, they sit down to tell tales.

Day 9, the second-to-last day, emphasizes the balance and moderation inherent in the brigata*: although the choice of tales is free, they all choose to tell stories that speak to each other and continue to operate within the boundaries of entertainment and education. The Edenic, other-worldly description of the garden mirrors this theme. The animals are wild and free, yet they live willingly within the garden's confines. The picture of the* brigata *as eternally young and perfect, unable to be harmed by anything, including death, confirms their position as the ideal examples of young people, with an idealized relationship between the sexes. This day's tales also emphasize the primacy of conscientious freedom over excessive decadence on the one hand (represented in the introduction by the people who lost all respect for the rules in the aftermath of the plague) and narrow legalism (represented by overly strict religious and social expectations in the tales) on the other.*

DAY 9: FIRST TALE

Filomena speaks first, choosing Love as her topic, since the company couldn't exhaust the subject if they talked about it every day for a whole year. Her tale will show how love can inspire lovers to feats as strange as entering tombs and dressing up as corpses. In Pistoia, a beautiful young widow named Francesca de' Lazzari is courted by two refugees from Florence, Alessandro Chiarmontesi and Rinuccio Palermini. Because she incautiously humored each man in the past, she can't easily extricate herself from their pursuits until she develops a plan to reject their advances on "plausible and legitimate grounds."

Although Filomena claims that her tale illustrates the overwhelming power of love to cause lovers to do strange things, it also provides an example of a clever woman ridding herself of her unwanted lovers. It thus connects with tales of other women who find themselves in the same situation, whether they successfully extricate themselves, like Monna Isabella (VII, 6) and Monna Piccarda (VIII, 4), or not, like Elena (VIII, 7). The tale assigns at least some blame to Francesca for her situation: listening to or "humoring" each man's suit in the past has generated an expectation that their courtship will continue until it is successful, unless there is a compelling reason for her to decline. This suggests that, as a woman, she doesn't have full autonomy over decisions of love, but is beholden to the expectations of her suitors. The fact that both suitors are political refugees from Florence points to the political upheavals of the 13th and 14th centuries.


On the day of Francesca de' Lazzari's inspiration, a recently deceased man called "Scannadio" has been buried nearby. He was a notorious rogue and ugly enough to "frighten the bravest man in the land." Francesca sends a message to Alessandro Chiarmontesi with a somewhat plausible scheme for sneaking him into her home: one of her kinsmen is planning (for unstated reasons) to take Scannadio's body from his tomb and hide it in her house. She wants Alessandro to break into the tomb, put on Scannadio's clothes, and impersonate his corpse. Then, she tells Rinuccio Palermini that if he steals Scannadio's body (for reasons she'll explain later) and carries it to her house, she will give him what he desires.

The situation Francesca engineers flirts with excess. Scannadio's name literally means "slit God's throat," suggesting that he's not just a bad guy but that he's the worst of the worst. Emphasizing his evilness and his ugliness serves to increase the terror Alessandro must overcome to enter his tomb at night and take his place, and the fear and distaste that Rinuccio might feel over stealing his corpse. She's clever enough to pick things that are just horrific enough to be off-putting but not so ridiculous that it will be clear that she's trying to rid herself of either man. And she sweetens the deal with her sex appeal, implying that Alessandro will find himself in a position to visit her private quarters once he's been carried into her house in disguise and frankly promising to sleep with Rinuccio in exchange for doing such a strange (not to mention illegal and immoral) task for her.

Alessandro Chiarmontesi and Rinuccio Palermini each say they're ready to go into Hell itself for Francesca de' Lazzari, who waits to see what will happen. Heading to Scannadio's tomb, Alessandro is scared that Francesca's relatives have discovered his love and concocted this strange scheme to murder him. If, on the other hand, they do want the corpse, he can only imagine they want to abuse it, so he fears he'll be beaten up either way. But his love makes "counter-arguments […] so persuasive" that he enters the tomb, dresses in the dead man's clothes, and lays down despite his fear that Scannadio's corpse will reanimate and slit his throat.

It turns out that Alessandro doesn't fear the dead or divine judgement as much as he fears Francesca's relatives. Nevertheless, he proves himself to be a faithful and brave lover by following through on Francesca's request regardless of his worry. The fact that the tale doesn't detail what counterarguments could possibly overcome the fear of being murdered or savagely beaten suggests the force of love, which can overpower common sense.

Likewise, as Rinuccio Palermini sets out to retrieve Scannadio's corpse, he worries that he'll be caught and punished either by the law or the man's family. But he's determined to honor this first request from Francesca de' Lazzari, even if it means his death. At the tomb, he hoists Alessandro Chiarmontesi over his shoulders and sets off toward Francesca's house, banging Alessandro into things in the dark. But before he can knock on her door, two night-watchmen intercept him. He drops Alessandro, and both lovers take off running.

Like his counterpart, Rinuccio worries over the legal and ethical implications of stealing a corpse, but his love for Francesca is so overwhelming that he ignores his fears and follows through on her request. In doing so, he represents the ability of love to overpower common sense and proves Rinuccio to be a faithful and true suitor.

Watching from a window, Francesca de' Lazzari is somewhat impressed by each man's bravery, but she also laughs when they run away from the guards. After escaping, Rinuccio Palermini tries to retrieve the "corpse" so he can complete his assignment, but it's gone. Rinuccio and Alessandro Chiarmontesi return to their homes, heartbroken by their failures. In the morning, each tells Francesca how hard he tried, apologizes for his failure, and asks for "forgiveness [...] and love." But since they both failed, she cleanly rids herself of each.

Alessandro and Rinuccio proved themselves to be faithful and brave lovers, and according to the logic of many of the other tales, Francesca would owe them both her love for having proved themselves worthy. Yet, she had the foresight to concoct an impossible mission for each, and so she was able to rid herself of them both. But it's important to remember that the ability of a woman to get away with turning down a man in The Decameron *is very much dependent on the storyteller and the woman's other circumstances: in other tales, women are punished or raped for denying a man. The feminine empowerment at the heart of this tale isn't a foregone conclusion, because of the misogynistic and antifeminist gender stereotypes that inform the tales generally.*

DAY 9: SECOND TALE

Elissa's story concerns **fortune**, which sometimes brings comeuppance to those who blame others for sins that they share. Sister Isabetta, a young Lombard nun, has fallen in love with a young man. He has contrived a way to allow them to spend nights together in her cell. One night, when other nuns see him leaving, they decide to lie in wait and catch Isabetta in the act rather than telling the Abbess, Abbess Usimbalda, right away.

Elissa uses her free-choice tale to continue the theme of trickster wives from Day 7 but also to offer a counterpoint to the amorous young monk of Dioneo's first tale (I, 4). In featuring sexually uninhibited nuns, the tale also recalls the nuns who become Masetto's personal harem in III, 1. The other nuns' eagerness not just to tell on Isabetta, but to get her into trouble by catching her in the act, suggests jealousy and spitefulness unbecoming of nuns—but characteristic of anticlerical satire.

The nuns keep a careful watch, and the next time Sister Isabetta is with her lover, they run to Abbess Usimbalda's room. But she is with her own lover, and dressing quickly in the dark, she accidentally puts his undergarments on her head instead of her veil. The other nuns don't notice at first, because they are so focused on catching Isabetta in the act. When they do find Isabetta with her lover, the nuns carry her to the chapter-house, where the Abbess scolds her sharply.

Usimbalda and her priest-lover embody clerical hypocrisy that is much worse than Isabetta's youthful dalliances. Putting her lover's underwear on instead of her own headdress makes her sins impossible to ignore and makes her look foolish in front of the nuns for whom she's supposed to set a good example. The other nuns' impatience again suggests eagerness to witness Isabetta's punishment rather than a legitimate concern for her spiritual or moral wellbeing.

Sister Isabetta silently endures Abbess Usimbalda's abuse for a while, until she notices her odd headwear. Then she daringly suggests that Usimbalda "tie up [her] bonnet" before chastising others. A somewhat confused Usimbalda continues scolding, but when Isabetta repeats herself, the Abbess and the other nuns finally realize that she's wearing breeches as a veil. The Abbess changes her tune, now "arguing that it [is] impossible to defend oneself against the goadings of the flesh." Sister Isabetta and Abbess Usimbalda continue to see their lovers, despite the envy of the other nuns who, single, must "[console] themselves in secret as best they [can]."

Isabetta gets away with having a lover of her own, because her abbess is guilty of the same sin. This parallels the earlier stories where the young Tuscan monk and his abbot share the country girl (I, 4) and where Masetto finds himself in bed with all the nuns and the abbess (III, 1). It also emphasizes the themes of clerical and feminine hypocrisy. In the first case, as soon as she realizes she's caught, Usimbalda disingenuously changes her tune; in the second, like Pietro's wife (V, 10), she chastises someone else for the same sins of which she herself is guilty.

DAY 9: THIRD TALE

Filostrato will tell the Calandrino story he almost used on Day 8. When Calandrino's aunt dies, she leaves him a two-hundred-pound inheritance with which he plans to buy a farm—at least until he realizes how expensive they are. Bruno and Buffalmacco can't convince him to spend it on partying, but they and their friend Nello think they can at least "stuff themselves" at his expense.

The connection between Filostrato's tale and earlier stories is, obviously, through the characters of Calandrino, Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Simone da Villa, all of whom appear in previous tales (VIII, 3; VIII, 6; and VIII, 9). The issue of the inheritance—in addition to providing the narrative impetus for the trick Bruno and Buffalmacco play to either relieve Calandrino of his new money or to benefit from it—also raises the issue of class: trying (and failing) to buy a farm suggests a pretentious attempt to live like a country gentleman on Calandrino's part.

The next morning, Nello, Buffalmacco, and Bruno place themselves in Calandrino's path, and when they say good morning, they each comment on how ill Calandrino looks. Calandrino is "quite certain he [is] ill," and ready to accept when Bruno recommends that he see a physician. Calandrino takes to his bed and sends a urine sample to Simone da Villa. Bruno offers to fetch the doctor himself—which allows him to explain the prank to Simone.

The friends' prank on Calandrino takes advantage of his suggestibility. He lacks intelligence and has already shown himself ready and eager to believe what others say about him. Thus it's not a surprise that his friends' reactions quickly convince him that he is ill. Diagnosis by urinalysis was common enough in the Middle Ages that chamber pots were a frequent symbol of physicians on signage and in medieval paintings and book illustrations.

Simone da Villa arrives at Calandrino's bedside, takes his pulse, and declares that he is pregnant. Howling with dismay, Calandrino complains it's Tessa's fault, since she likes to be on top during sex. She leaves, embarrassed by this public disclosure of private behavior, while he continues to complain about her "insatiable lust." If he felt better, he would beat her for it. Nello, Buffalmacco, and Bruno can barely contain their laughter.

The joke of this tale—that Calandrino can believe himself to be pregnant—rests on two foundations. The first is Calandrino's lack of intelligence and common sense. Life experience should prove to him that it is impossible for men to get pregnant. Second, it relies on profoundly entrenched gender roles. According to the medieval church, acceptable sex was heterosexual, between married spouses, and with the husband on top, since women were naturally inferior and subject to men. Any deviation from this ideal was, to varying degrees, sinful. Calandrino believes that, by taking the feminine position, he has made himself subject to being treated as a woman by nature and impregnated. It's also worth noting here that, once again, Calandrino's wife Tessa suffers ancillary consequences to the prank; in this case it's the humiliation of having her privacy lost and her (allegedly deviant) sexual desires aired publicly. Further, she's the butt of antifeminist blame when Calandrino claims that it's her *insatiable lust that has gotten him in trouble.*

Simone da Villa tells Calandrino that the pregnancy can be cured, although the treatment is pricy. Terrified at the prospect of a painful childbirth, Calandrino offers every cent of his inheritance. Simone says he will need some succulent chickens and other ingredients that Bruno will buy with five pounds. Bruno instead buys the chickens and "various other essential delicacies" for the pranksters' supper while Simone da Villa mixes up a placebo.

Of course, the prank is just Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello's plan to fleece Calandrino of his newfound inheritance to fund their impish lifestyles. And the "cure" doesn't make sense even by medieval standards of medicine, as can be seen when the shopping list includes both chickens and medicinal ingredients. Calandrino, if he had any intelligence at all, should have been suspicious of the so-called cure.

Calandrino takes the medicine as directed, and after three days, Simone da Villa declares him restored. Calandrino tells everyone about his miraculously fast and painless miscarriage-inducing treatment; Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello congratulate themselves on getting around his avarice; and Tessa, not deceived by the whole affair, complains about it for a long time afterward.

Calandrino's cure—and his subsequent willingness to brag about it publicly—illustrate his lack of sense and propriety. Tessa isn't taken in; her more advanced understanding of human anatomy, especially regarding pregnancy, miscarriage, and childbirth, is made possible by a society in which much of women's healthcare was attended to by other women. Nevertheless, she receives collateral harm from the prank in the form of her sexual proclivities being made public and having her husband display his ignorance to the world. Yet she can do nothing other than complain, illustrating the narrow bounds within which women (even intelligent, sensible ones) were allowed to operate.

DAY 9: FOURTH TALE

Neifile's tale will show how sometimes a bad man's cunning can defeat a good man's wisdom. In Siena, Cecco Angiulieri and Cecco Fortarrigo, although very different in character, bond over their mutual hatred of their fathers. When Angiulieri tires of living on his meager allowance, he hopes to live more grandly on the generosity of a certain cardinal. He arranges to receive six months' allowance in advance to buy new clothes and a good horse so that he can present himself looking "reasonably respectable."

Neifile's tale of the two Ceccos illustrates the dangers of immoderation and offers a continuation of Day 8's theme of tricks and pranks. As a nobleman, Angiulieri has the option of throwing himself on the generosity of the cardinal, since courtiers could expect generous gifts from their patrons (tale I, 7 illustrates this dynamic). But he must first look the part, which requires begging extra money from his father. The tale's language emphasizes his moderation: he asks for as much money as necessary to look respectable, but not excessively fine or wealthy.

Cecco Fortarrigo wants to go with Cecco Angiulieri and offers to serve as his valet in exchange for room and board. Because Fortarrigo is an immoderate gambler, Angiulieri initially refuses, but Fortarrigo promises, begs, and pleads until he gives in. The first time they stop, however, while Angiulieri has a siesta, Fortarrigo visits a tavern, gets drunk, and starts gambling. After he loses all his money and his clothes, he steals Angiulieri's money from his purse. When Angiulieri wakes up and discovers Fortarrigo missing, he guesses correctly that he's drinking and gambling and decides to leave him behind.

In contrast, Fortarrigo's primary traits seem to be impatience and excess: when he doesn't initially get what he wants, he presses and presses until Angiulieri gives in. This foreshadows trouble to come, especially when it's revealed that Fortarrigo has a problem with excessive drinking and excessive gambling. And true to form, he rapidly manages to lose not only his own money but also his friend's.

But discovering that his money is missing, Cecco Angiulieri is delayed and is still at the inn when Cecco Fortarrigo, in just his undergarments, comes back with the intention of gambling Angiulieri's clothes as well. He begs Angiulieri to stay and retrieve a doublet that Fortarrigo pawned for 35 shillings. When a passerby helpfully informs Fortarrigo exactly how much he lost, Angiulieri realizes that he took the money. Fortarrigo ignores Angiulieri's anger, focused entirely on trying to redeem his doublet.

Fortarrigo's gambling is so excessive that he's lost not only his and Angiulieri's money but also his clothes. His begging for the money to get his coat back is an almost parodic repetition of Angiulieri's requests to his father for the money to get a suitable outfit to present himself to the cardinal. And he continues with the tactic that has been successful for him in the past: a refusal to back down, instead repeating his requests until he gets what he wants.

Eventually, Cecco Angiulieri becomes so distraught that he rides out of the town. Cecco Fortarrigo jogs behind him, continuing to ask for help retrieving his doublet. After a few miles, Fortarrigo sees some farmers and begins to yell for help. The farmers, assuming that the well-dressed rider robbed the naked man, instead of the other way around, detain Angiulieri. They won't accept his version of the story, and they help Fortarrigo take his horse and clothing. Fortarrigo returns to Siena, claiming that he won Angiulieri's belongings in a wager.

Although Angiulieri has done everything right (except take on Fortarrigo, a known gambler and drinker, as his valet), he is still vulnerable to Fortarrigo. Fortarrigo demonstrates cleverness—in the service of lies and cheating—when he realizes that he can use the optics of the situation to his advantage. And furthermore, he brags about his exploits on returning home, since his excessive nature renders him incapable of moderation or empathy.

So, instead of presenting himself as a rich gentleman to the cardinal, Cecco Angiulieri slinks away in his undershirt and stays with relatives until his father comes to his financial assistance. Although Cecco Fortarrigo wasn't punished immediately, Angiulieri eventually got revenge, although that is another story.

Neifile's story inverts the pranks and tricks from Day 8, almost all of which were justified by the behavior of a prank's target. Although she asserts that Fortarrigo eventually got what was coming to him, she doesn't share that part of the story, leaving the audience stuck with the unfairness of this tale, in which his malicious actions seem to be rewarded. In connection with Fortarrigo's excessive nature, leaving the wrong he did to Angiulieri un-righted suggests that the idealized, moderate society represented by the brigata *is perilously subject to failure in real life. But* The Decameron *won't allow this view of the world as destabilized to stand, and several tales over the rest of the day will push back on it with examples of imbalances and excesses being corrected and evened out.*

DAY 9: FIFTH TALE

Fiammetta returns to the consistently entertaining subject of Calandrino for her next tale. When Niccolò Cornacchini builds a mansion in the country, he commissions Bruno and Buffalmacco to paint its frescoes, and they recruit Nello and Calandrino to help. The only other people in the mansion are an old housekeeper and Niccolò's son, Bachelor Filippo, who occasionally comes out to entertain a lady.

Fiammetta's free-choice tale connects with those of her peers in two ways: it centers on Calandrino, Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Nello yet again (these men appear in tales VIII, 3; VIII, 6; VIII, 9; and IX, 3), and it is a tale about the power of love to direct people's actions.

One of Bachelor Filippo's companions is Niccolosa. Although she is a prostitute employed by a Florentine pimp, she is pretty, polite, and well-spoken. One day, Calandrino encounters her at the well. While she stares at his strange appearance, he mistakes attention for attraction. Staring intently back, he notices her beauty, and after she playfully heaves a few sighs, he falls hopelessly in love. When Calandrino tells Bruno, he claims that Niccolosa is Filippo's wife and offers to act as a go-between for Calandrino. Calandrino wants the affair kept from Nello; as a relative of his wife (Tessa), he worries Nello would snitch.

This tale's prank revolves around getting Calandrino to believe that Niccolosa loves him—and part of the humor comes from the fact that it's very clear that she's a prostitute. Although the tale describes her as generally classy, the idea that Calandrino thinks that a well-spoken prostitute is a fine lady underlines his ignorance and lack of social refinement. The scene in which Calandrino falls in love with her is a parody of fin'amors *(refined loving) as it is portrayed in medieval romances: love invades Calandrino's consciousness through his eyes as he looks on Niccolosa's beauty; her sighs make him think that she loves him (since all lovers in romances sigh), and the moment he feels that the attraction is mutual, it is cemented in his mind and consummating it is his only goal.*

When Calandrino wanders off in search of Niccolosa, Bruno tells Buffalmacco and Nello about his crush and they plan a prank to play on him. Bruno explains the prank to Bachelor Filippo and Niccolosa, who participate so they can have a "merry time at Calandrino's expense." Thus, when Calandrino performs "a whole series of curious antics" to impress Niccolosa, she gives him "every encouragement." When she and Filippo return to the city, Bruno suggests that Calandrino play her love-songs on his rebeck (a stringed instrument). Calandrino, believing her to be a nobleman's wife, boasts about his magnetism, since she has fallen in love with him so quickly.

Normally, when Bruno and Buffalmacco want to have a merry time at someone's expense, they mean it literally, as they bilk their marks out of food, wine, and patronage (see VIII, 6; VIII, 9; and IX, 3). In this tale, however, they just mock his extreme ignorance, drawing their wealthy patron's son into the joke as well. And it works: Calandrino believes Niccolosa loves him. Because in medieval romances, a worthy woman's attention confers worth on her lover and can even ennoble a rude and uneducated one (see the tale of Cimon in V, 1), Calandrino believes that Niccolosa's love proves him to be a worthy man, even as his inane actions show him to be a buffoon.

To make a long story short, Calandrino neglects his work in favor of wooing Niccolosa, Niccolosa encourages him, and Bruno acts as go-between. Occasionally, Bruno and Buffalmacco claim that Niccolosa wants a small present, and in this way, they defraud him of things like daggers and combs. As the work draws to a close, Calandrino becomes desperate. In the final phase of the prank, Bruno offers to make a magic scroll with which Calandrino can control Niccolosa. Calandrino collects the necessary items, although the live bat gives him some difficulty.

As in other stories in The Decameron, *Calandrino's acceptance of magic and the occult makes him susceptible to claims that his friends can work a magic trick on his behalf. Even after they tricked him with another piece of magic meant to expose his pig thief (VIII, 6), he still falls prey to their stories. In general, however, collecting small tokens from him and watching him try to obtain the necessary magic ingredients provide more entertainment for the pranksters than any material gain.*

Bruno, having made the scroll, tells Calandrino that if he touches Niccolosa with it, she will do whatever he wants. Bruno suggests Calandrino take her to the barn for privacy, where Bachelor Filippo and Buffalmacco are already hiding. Meanwhile, Nello entices Tessa to the estate with the chance to pay Calandrino back for beating her over the magic stones. Tessa rushes to confront her husband. Just before she arrives, Calandrino touches Niccolosa with the scroll, and she immediately follows him to the barn.

The tale leaves an open question about the magic scroll: since Calandrino believes that Niccolosa is in love with him, it's not entirely clear why he feels he needs magic to seduce her. In any case, the magic scroll appears to turn her into an ultimately obedient and pliable woman who is ready to fulfil his every desire. Meanwhile, Calandrino's wife Tessa—who has shown herself to be far less pliant towards her husband and who is, in fact, out to revenge herself for a beating he gave her (VIII, 3)—arrives on the scene.

In the barn, Niccolosa pushes Calandrino to the ground and then sits astride him, pinning his arms, while Bruno, Buffalmacco, and Bachelor Filippo watch from their secret spot. Just as Calandrino frees his arms and is about to kiss Niccolosa, Tessa forces her way into the barn and attacks her prostrate husband, clawing his face and screaming that someone else is busy "getting him with child this time." Bruno and Buffalmacco, pretending to stumble on the scene, send Calandrino home with Tessa, who heaps a "torrent of strictures and abuse" on him.

Tessa finds Calandrino and Niccolosa in the same sexual position—woman on top—that he berated her for liking in a previous tale, since he believed the inversion had caused him to get pregnant (IX, 3). She recalls this incident and mocks him when she bursts onto the scene. And while Calandrino, exposed as a fool in love with another woman (a prostitute, in fact), does seem to get his comeuppance, the tale also traffics in antifeminist stereotypes, painting Tessa as a shrewish, abusive wife, whose reaction—while justified in essence—is excessive in nature.

DAY 9: SIXTH TALE

The Niccolosa in Fiammetta's tale has reminded Panfilo of a story about another woman by the same name. North of Florence in the Mugnone valley, a poor man makes his living selling food and drink to travelers. This Host lives with the Host's Wife, their infant, and their teenage daughter, Miss Niccolosa.

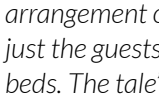
Panfilo's tale connects to the previous story through the similarly named Niccolosas, but it also recalls the theme of trickster wives and celebration of sexual conquest from Day 7. This tale is Giovanni Boccaccio's adaptation of a classic French fabliau, *from which Geoffrey Chaucer derived one of his* Canterbury Tales *as well (The Reeve's Tale).*

Miss Niccolosa and a Florentine gentleman named Pinuccio have fallen in love but have not yet found a way to sleep together. Sometimes, the Host will offer overnight shelter to travelers he trusts. So Pinuccio and his friend Adriano load horses with fake merchandise and stop at the host's home as if they're returning from a trip. When they claim they can't make it back by dark, the host invites them to stay. Pinuccio and Adriano provide the ingredients for a hearty supper that they share with the host and his family.

For Niccolosa, with her poor parents, Pinuccio is an upwardly mobile catch. The lengths to which Pinuccio goes to bed Niccolosa illustrates the power of love and enables him to prove his worth as a lover, since he has to overcome the challenge of getting through her father's surveillance.

The Host has one bedroom which holds three beds and a crib. He settles Pinuccio and Adriano in the "least uncomfortable" bed first. After he thinks they're asleep, he puts Miss Niccolosa into the second. Then he and the Host's Wife settle in the third, with the baby's crib right next to it. When everyone else is asleep, Pinuccio sneaks into Niccolosa's bed. While they're having sex, both the host's wife and Adriano get up: she to investigate a noise and he to pee. He trips on the crib and moves it alongside his own bed to get it out of the way. So, when the host's wife returns, she climbs into his bed, where she receives his "cordial reception" with "delight and satisfaction."

The poverty and simple lives of the host and his family are underlined by their offer of the least uncomfortable bed to their guests. But Giovanni Boccaccio is also very explicit about the arrangement of the beds and the crib, because in his version, it's not just the guests, but also the host's wife that makes the rounds of the beds. The tale's humor comes from the manic bed-switching and adds in a bonus trick when the host's wife has sex with her guest thinking it's her husband.



When Pinuccio finishes with Miss Niccolosa, he climbs back into the bed without the cradle, accidentally joining the Host, whom he thinks is Adriano. He boasts about going to the "bower of bliss" half a dozen times with the delicious Niccolosa, and the host protests at this dirty trick. This allows the Host's Wife to realize that she's in bed with Adriano. She gets up, sets the cradle beside her daughter's bed, and climbs in there. Pretending that the shouting woke her, she says she's been sleeping beside Niccolosa all night, and that too much drinking gave Pinuccio dreams about his sexual prowess. Adriano chimes in to claim that he often sleepwalks, and Pinuccio pretends to wake up, surprised, in the wrong bed.

By the end of the tale, everyone has enjoyed a nice romp in bed (except the host) and the host's wife—thanks to her quick grasp of the situation and clever story—has soothed any ruffled feathers on her husband's part. The tale emphasizes the mutual satisfaction of all parties involved (recalling the unconventional arrangements made by Pietro and his wife in V, 10 and the Tavena and di Mino couples in VIII, 8).

The next morning, the Host mocks Pinuccio's dreams. And, after somehow convincing the Host's Wife that he was indeed just dreaming that night, Pinuccio finds easier ways of visiting Miss Niccolosa. Remembering the good time she had with Adriano, the host's wife comes to believe that she was the only person awake that night.

It's hard to know what the host's wife knows and believes at the tale's end. She knows that she had sex (by process of elimination) with Adriano, and she claims not to suspect that Pinuccio slept with Niccolosa, although her story the previous night was designed to cover Pinuccio's boasts of having sex with Niccolosa. In performing unawareness, however, the host's wife reinforces the cultural preference for sexually chaste women—Niccolosa's honor would be harmed if it were made clear that she'd slept with Pinuccio—and points to an idea raised in other tales as well: that keeping a sin secret keeps it from being harmful.

DAY 9: SEVENTH TALE

Pampinea picks up on the nighttime theme by telling a tale featuring a dream which comes true. Talano d'Imolese is a respectable gentleman who lives with a terribly shrewish wife called Margarita. She is beautiful, but also an "argumentative, disagreeable, and self-willed" person who refuses to heed anyone's advice. One night, while they are at their country estate, Talano dreams that a ferocious wolf came out of the woods and grabbed Margarita by the throat, mauling her. She escaped but her throat was "torn to ribbons." Although she is the bane of his existence, he recommends that she stay inside to avoid harm.

On the previous day, Pampinea told a decidedly misogynistic tale in which scholar Rinieri brutally punished Elena for repudiating and mocking him (VIII, 7). This tale returns to the stock characters and morals of antifeminist literature, picking up on the traits of vanity, peevishness, and disobedience she criticized in Elena. The portrait of Margarita is extremely unflattering. It is a parody of wifely disobedience in that she doesn't just fail to obey her husband, she actively works to contradict his wishes. In contrast, her husband is presented as a gentle soul who still has tenderness for his prickly wife.

Margarita asks why, and Talano d'Imolese tells her his dream. She "toss[es] her head in the air" and declares that the dream expresses his wish that harm would come to her rather than offering a warning about the future. When he tries to suggest that she at least stay away from the woods, she suspects that he plans to meet a lover there. Instead of avoiding them, she goes directly to the woods to wait for him and his imagined lover.

As an embodiment of an antifeminist stereotype, Margarita is perversely opposed to anything Talano says to her. She also exhibits suspicion and jealousy when she misconstrues his warnings as a ploy to allow him to meet a lover. In disregarding her husband's words, she commits the sin for which she will be punished, and she places herself within the wolf's reach.

After a while, a wolf comes along and attacks Margarita. The force of its grip on her throat keeps her from screaming as it drags her away. Luckily, some shepherds see her and scare it off, rescuing her from its grasp. They take her home, where she eventually recovers. But she's "ashamed to show herself in public" because her face and neck are permanently scarred. Thus, she regrets her refusal to heed Talano d'Imolese's warning.

In the antifeminist context of this tale, Margarita's disfigurement is clearly intended as punishment for her earlier disobedience. Her only redeeming quality was her beauty, and now she has lost even that: her external ugliness mirrors the malice that characterized her relationship towards her husband.

DAY 9: EIGHTH TALE

Just as the rest of the day's tales have almost all recalled something said on an earlier occasion, Lauretta's tale will answer Pampinea's from Day 7 by describing a much less brutal vendetta where the revenge outweighed the initial harm.

This tale looks back to VII, 8—the story of Elena's punishment for repudiating and mocking the lovesick scholar Rinieri—but in its critique of excessive revenge, it also engages with the imbalance and excess typified by Cecco Fortarrigo in IX, 4.

In Florence, there is a glutton called Ciacco. His humble means are unequal to his appetite, but he's cultured and witty enough to impose himself on the wealthy for meals. His rival in professional mooching is Biondello, an elegantly dressed, dapper little man.

Thanks to an episode in Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy *in which a glutton named "Ciacco" speaks to Dante in hell, by Giovanni Boccaccio's day, the name had become a shorthand for those with excessive tastes for food and wine. Ciacco's rival, Biondello, combines the sins of gluttony and vanity in his dapper appearance, although the two otherwise seem evenly matched.*

One morning during Lent, Ciacco finds Biondello buying fish at the market. Although he's buying for Vieri de' Cherchi, Biondello tells Ciacco the fish is for a meal at Corso Donati's home, which he suggests Ciacco attend. At what seems like an appropriate hour, Ciacco presents himself at Corso Donati's home and is welcomed to breakfast. But he is surprised when the meal ends without a hint of the fine fish. Indignant at Biondello's prank, Ciacco vows to repay him.

During Lent (the 40 days leading up to the Christian holiday of Easter), Christians were expected to fast (abstain from certain types of food) and practice penance. Eating meat was not permissible during Lent, although fish was permitted on certain days. Thus, Biondello's trick involves convincing Ciacco that a particularly spectacular meal is about to happen at Corso Donati's home during a period in which spectacular meals are hard to come by. Rather than taking this as an opportunity to reconsider his excessive appetites, Ciacco instead bends his mind towards revenge.


A few days later, Ciacco hires a man to take a wine bottle to Messer Filippo Argenti—a wealthy and ill-tempered man—with a request from Biondello to "rubify [it] … with some of [his] excellent red wine." Filippo, quick to take offense, is enraged by what he believes to be Biondello's mockery. So when Ciacco tells Biondello that Messer Filippo wants to see him, and Biondello approaches the gentleman, Filippo punches him in the face, tears his clothes, musses his hair, and dumps him in the mud. A group of onlookers eventually disentangle Biondello and explain about the request for wine. Impotently protesting his innocence, Biondello slinks home.

The prank that Ciacco settles on—which involves making it seem like Biondello is greedily asking a famously wealthy (and wrathful) man for a handout—recalls the tale of Geri Spina's servant greedily asking Cisti the Baker for an excessive amount of his fine wine in VI, 2. The punishment Biondello receives at Filippo Argenti's hands is greater than the harm Ciacco received (especially since he still got a free meal, just not one as nice as he was expecting), but it still falls short of the grievous bodily harm Rinieri visits on Elena in VIII, 7.

After his bruises heal, Biondello meets Ciacco in the street. Ciacco asks how Filippo Argenti's wine tasted, and Biondello replies he thought it was as good as Ciacco must have found Corso Donati's fish. Warning him that another invitation to breakfast like that will earn Biondello another one of these drinks, Ciacco warns Biondello that it's better to silently dislike him than to try to pay him back.

With Ciacco revenged on Biondello, balance is restored, and the two men enter a stable, if antagonistic, peace.

DAY 9: NINTH TALE

Emilia's tale begins with an explanation of women's place in the world. By custom and law, women are subservient to and governed by men, so a woman who wants a happy life should be "humble, patient [...] obedient, [and] virtuous." Nature, in making women "fragile...timid, and fearful," and "compassionate and benign of disposition," also proves their secondary status. The female body and temperament demonstrate a need to be governed by others; the governed ought to be obedient and deferential to their rulers. Disobedient women deserve not just censure but harsh punishment, as her disfigurement punished Margarita in Pampinea's tale. The proverb that says spurs are necessary for good and bad horses and "the rod" is necessary for good and bad women is true, and not just in the frivolous interpretation. Women who exceed "permitted bounds" should be punished.

If the preceding tale rebuked the excessive punishment the scholar Rinieri took on Elena in one of The Decameron*'s most virulently antifeminist tales (VIII, 7), Emilia's tale in turn argues that women are subject to male authority, guidance, and punishment. Her tale also goes back over some of the ground Pampinea covered in her tale illustrating the dangers of disobedience in wives (IX, 7). The introductory comments invoke antifeminist tropes and recall other statements made about feminine excesses, weakness, and sinfulness: in addition to the two tales already mentioned, Lauretta claimed that women were prone to outbursts of excessive rage (IV, 3). The language of female subjugation in this (and other antifeminist) tales is grounded in medieval ideas of physiology, which held that women were incomplete specimens of humanity compared to perfected men. But nature alone isn't responsible for women's inferior position, which is also confirmed by law and custom: in other words, Emilia describes a patriarchal system (controlled and organized by men). When Emilia invokes the proverb that "rods" are good for women and horses, she means sticks used for corporal punishment. But since "rods" can also indicate penises, the proverb is a double entendre that also indicts women for their excessive lustfulness in its suggestion that women would like the proverb to mean they should have lots of sex instead of deserving punishment for their disobedience.*

In Solomon's day, two people seeking his wisdom meet on the road to Jerusalem. Melissus, a rich nobleman who entertains others lavishly but has no friends, wants to know what he must do to be loved. Joseph wants to know what to do with his "most perverse and stubborn" wife, since his "entreaties, endearments, and everything else" have failed to improve her. Solomon gives Melissus one word: "Love," and Joseph three: "Go to Goosebridge." Puzzling over these answers, the two men turn homewards, feeling more than a little foolish.

This tale invokes Solomon as the arbiter of truth since the Biblical king was famous for his wisdom. Joseph's wife (like Margarita in IX, 7) conforms exactly to the antifeminist stereotype of the shrewish or disobedient wife. And, in a nod to the necessity of rods, the tale is careful to point out that Joseph has already tried gentler forms of correction that haven't worked.

After some travel, they reach a bridge, where they must wait for a train of mules and horses to cross. One of the last mules, frightened, refuses to go forward. The driver begins to beat it "quite unmercifully," and when Joseph and Melissus ask why he can't lead it gently, he retorts "I know my mule…Just you leave him to me." And, indeed, the mule eventually crosses the bridge. On the far side, Melissus and Joseph learn that the bridge is called "Goosebridge," and Joseph understands the meaning of Solomon's advice: he has "never known how to beat his wife properly," but the mule driver has shown him the way.

The tale portrays the mule driver's vicious beating of his animal as necessary, if uncomfortable. Joseph betrays his inability to "properly" discipline his wife (through beatings) when his initial response to the sight is to beg for mercy on the animal's behalf. If mercy worked, the mule driver implies, he would have used it. This is the lesson Joseph needs to learn, according to Solomon: the mule driver uses the correct tool, and the distress and discomfort caused to the animal pale in comparison to the good results of the punishment (the mule finishes crossing the bridge for its own good and the good of its owner).

Joseph invites Melissus to stay with him for a few days on his way home, and they get an icy reception from Joseph's Wife, who not only ignores their requests for dinner but seems to do the exact opposite of what she's asked. She even tells Joseph "I shall do as I think fit, not as I am told." Asking Melissus to observe him putting Solomon's advice to use, Joseph takes a stout stick to the bedroom, where he beats his wife—despite her cries and pleas for mercy—until every bone and muscle in her body is "rent asunder."

Joseph's wife describes autonomy—doing things according to her own decisions, rather than according to his orders. But according to the patriarchal and antifeminist logic of the story, her claim to autonomy is bad. As a woman, she is meant to be subject to her husband's authority and desires. When she refuses to conform willingly, Joseph abandons his former mercy and beats her savagely to show her that he is in charge.

The next morning, when Joseph's Wife asks what Joseph would like for breakfast, she follows his and Melissus's instructions exactly. Now that they understand it, the men praise Solomon's wise advice. Once Melissus has returned home, a wise man shows him how he has dispensed favors and hospitality out of pride; as he learns to love others, others will love him.

Joseph's wife has taken the threat of the beating seriously and now is as obedient as she was previously perverse. If she began as the misogynistic vision of a bad wife, she is now performing the role of a good one. Yet, other tales in The Decameron *trouble the easy assertion that physical violence is always salutary or necessary for women: in an earlier tale, Calandrino beat his wife, Tessa, for allegedly ruining his magic stone, even though she was not at fault (VIII, 3). This complicates attempts to read the tales as empowering women generally—despite Boccaccio's claims of love for the fairer sex and the number of female narrators and protagonists.*

DAY 9: TENTH TALE

Dioneo begins his tale with an excuse for his off-color stories. Just as a black crow enhances the beauty of a flock of white doves by the contrast, his foolish tales augment the other narrators' excellence. Today's offering will highlight the contrast between his tales and theirs, so he begs more than the usual indulgence.

The fact that Dioneo is excusing his story before it begins suggests that it will be even more off-color than his previous offerings. However, he also makes a case for moderation and balance, claiming, in essence, that all things are acceptable in moderation. Since the rest of the tales are mostly sober, excellent, and within the bounds of moral propriety, Dioneo's tales can't threaten the balance of The Decameron *generally. In addition, he claims that a little bit of nonsense and obscenity throws the virtues of the other tales into even starker relief.*

In Barletta, a priest named Father Gianni di Barolo supplements his meager church income by small-time trading, carrying his wares to local fairs on his mare. He befriends another poor trader—whom he familiarly calls Neighbor Pietro—who carries his goods on a donkey. Whenever either man is in the other's town, they stay together. But Pietro and his wife Gemmata have one little bed, so in Barletta, Gianni must sleep on a heap of straw in the stable.

The relationship between Father Gianni and Pietro is as even and reciprocal as possible. But Father Gianni is relatively better off since he has two revenue streams (trading and his church income), and he doesn't have a wife to support. The slight imbalance in the hospitality the two men can show each other means that the priest must sleep in the stable instead of in the home.

When Father Gianni visits, Gemmata offers to stay with a friend so that he can share the bed with Neighbor Pietro. Father Gianni politely declines, saying that he's comfortable in the stable. There, he has a magic ritual to turn his mare into a woman to sleep with. Gemmata is astonished at this thought, and she wants Pietro to learn the magic to turn her into a horse. That way, she can help him carry goods and make more money. Eventually, Father Gianni promises to show Pietro how it's done—especially the hardest part, which is fastening on the tail. They will start before dawn the next day.

All the magic rituals invoked by the tales (with one notable exception in X, 9) are shams—Maso del Saggio's magic stone made the gullible Calandrino look foolish (VIII, 3); Rinieri manipulated Elena into a vulnerable spot with a magic ritual (VIII, 7); and the magic scroll that helped Calandrino bring Niccolosa under his command was also just part of a larger prank (IX, 5). Thus, the idea of a magic ritual here foreshadows a trick about to be played. Given The Decameron*'s heavy investment in anticlerical satire and critique of the clergy's sexual hypocrisy, the audience is primed for something to happen between the priest and Gemmata. Gemmata's investment in the magic ritual highlights the precarious state of poverty in which she and her husband live. Her insistence implies that her participation is an act of desperation.*


Just before dawn, Neighbor Pietro and Gemmata summon Father Gianni—still in his nightshirt—to teach them. Extracting a promise that they will follow his instructions and never utter a word, no matter what they see or hear, he has Gemmata undress and pose on hands and knees, like a horse. Fondling her face, he says "This be a fine mare's head;" then he does the same to the rest of her body parts. When he strokes her breasts, he gets an erection. He goes on to stroke her back, belly, rump, and legs. And when it's time for the tail, he lifts his shirt, grabs his rod, and sticks it in "the place made for it," saying "And this be a fine mare's tail."

With the priest in his underwear and Gemmata totally naked, the situation is getting sketchier by the minute, but Pietro and Gemmata's investment in the magical ritual is unruffled, even as the event seems to be an excuse for the priest to fondle the woman's naked body. In his ritual, Father Gianni does indeed seem to work a kind of magic in his ability to trade his usual sleeping companion (his horse) for the sexy Gemmata, with whom he has sex in front of her husband. In attaching the "tail," Father Gianni places himself in the tradition of fabliaux *priests who dupe gullible husbands into witnessing their own cuckolding.*


Neighbor Pietro, who had been silent, exclaims that he doesn't want the tail. Father Gianni finishes his business, then tells Pietro that this interruption ruined the magic and there's no way to fix it. Pietro doesn't mind, since he didn't like the part about the tail, which the priest stuck on too low, and which he himself could have added. Father Gianni retorts that Pietro wouldn't have known how to do it as well as he himself did. At this point, Gemmata interrupts, angry with her husband for ruining the spell and their chances of making more money. And Neighbor Pietro doesn't ask Father Gianni for favors ever again.

While the men squabble about whose "tail" would have been more appropriate for Gemmata, she still has not understood that she has been duped. She seems more worried about the failure of the ritual than about having been raped by the priest, suggesting both an open-minded attitude towards sex (which aligns with the tales' general disinclination to overly moralize sexual activity) but also an objectification of female sexuality, which is treated here as merely a token of exchange in payment for a magic spell.


DAY 9: CONCLUSION

How the ladies took Dioneo's tale—which they perfectly understood—may be gauged by how much readers are laughing at it now. As the heat of the day diminishes, Emilia crowns Panfilo the company's next sovereign, and he takes the theme of generous deeds performed either for love or for other reasons.

The Decameron *deflects responsibility for Dioneo's tale by refusing to show the* brigata*'s reactions to it. This suggests, in part, that the tale itself is too excessive to be brought under the moderate, moral sway of the* brigata*. It is also the last* fabliau *of* The Decameron*; while the tales of the final day will celebrate several forms of love, none of them will feature sex again. As the* brigata *turns towards the final day, Panfilo proposes the theme of generosity. In the prologue, Boccaccio claims the motivation for the book is to offer solace and pleasure to suffering ladies—essentially, to be generous with the wisdom he earned through his own painful love affair. The aristocracy of the Middle Ages was also heavily invested in the idea of "noblesse oblige"—that the wealthy and powerful owed generosity to those in their social circles and those who were less well off. Thus, the final day's theme is fitting both in terms of the book's aim and its focus on aristocratic narrators and characters.*

And at the end of the meal, Neifile sings a song. The song's persona celebrates its youth, which delights in early spring's abundant flowers and the power of love. In the blossoms, she sees her lover's face, so she kisses the flowers and weaves them into a garland for her hair. In this way, she can nearly conjure up the vision of her beloved before her eyes. But in his absence, she can only send him sighs, which she hopes will draw him to her so that she need not despair of his love.

Neifile's song contains heavy references to the poetry of Dante Alighieri and Guido Cavalcanti and to the themes of the dolce stil novo *school of poetry generally. It thus draws on and expresses one of Giovanni Boccaccio's most important sources for* The Decameron*'s value system. The poem evokes the exuberance of youth and spring, both of which are associated with love. But, it ties the love between a man and a woman into the larger beauty and organization of nature, represented by the flower garlands that stand in for the beloved himself.*

DAY 10: INTRODUCTION

On the morning of the tenth day, the members of the company amuse themselves under Panfilo's direction, talking about "the lives they [intend] to lead in the future" until the day becomes too hot. After their customary rest, they begin the day's tales.

The brigata*, for the first time in* The Decameron*, look towards their lives after they leave the countryside. This is a reminder that their idyll outside of plague-ridden Florence is coming to an end and that they will have to return to their society. But it's also a hopeful message about the potential for moderation and graciousness to fill the vacuum left by the plague's horrors, since the lives these youth look forward to extend beyond the current crisis.*

DAY 10: FIRST TALE

Neifile, the day's first narrator, hopes she can successfully introduce the theme of munificence (generosity). In Florence, after Messer Ruggieri de' Figiovanni realizes that he can't show off his bravery at home, he decides to serve King Alphonso of Spain. With an impressive collection of armor and horses and a large group of attendants, he moves to Spain, where he makes a reputation for valor and noble generosity.

The final day's first tale situates itself at the nexus of social class and personal worth. The Decameron *has argued that a person's character is more important than their social class. Here, Neifile extends this argument even to the aristocracy: although he's already a nobleman by title, Ruggieri wants to prove his merit through honorable actions, brave deeds, and generosity.*

Ruggieri de' Figiovanni watches as King Alphonso confers land and titles on other knights with what he considers "very little discretion." Eventually, feeling slighted that the king hasn't confirmed his own status with such **gifts**, he asks for permission to go home. King Alphonso gives him a mule and allows him to leave, secretly dispatching a servant to join him for a day, hear what he has to say, and then bring him back.

The leader of a group, like King Alphonso, used gifts to reward his followers and to cement the bonds of affection and partnership between them. And while Ruggieri feels that he has deserved recognition, he hasn't been given any meaningful gifts from his adopted sovereign. The one gift he does receive, a mule, suggests that Alphonso doesn't particularly respect him, since it's a relatively worthless pack animal. It's a practical gift, but not something elegant or special.

After joining Ruggieri de' Figiovanni, the servant engages him in conversation. They take a break, and all the animals relieve themselves, except for Ruggieri's donkey, which waits until they're watering the animals later in a river. Ruggieri grouches that "[it's] just like the gentleman who presented [it]" to him, the only negative words about King Alphonso that pass his lips.

However, despite his disappointment, Ruggieri proves himself the consummate gentleman and someone worthy of recognition. He refuses to complain about the king, even when given the opportunity by an apparent stranger. The closest he comes is a cryptic remark when his donkey chooses an inopportune moment to answer the call of nature.

The next morning, the servant delivers King Alphonso's order to Ruggieri de' Figiovanni, and he returns to court. To explain his comment about the donkey, he accuses the king of withholding **gifts** from the deserving and dispersing them in inappropriate places. King Alphonso replies that he recognizes Ruggieri's worth, and that **fortune** prevents his reward. To prove it, he fills one chest with his crown, orb, scepter, and precious jewels and another identical chest with dirt. Ruggieri is commanded to pick one, and he takes the dirt-filled one, showing his ill fortune. But, because he merits better treatment than fortune affords, King Alphonso presents him with the treasure chest to take home to Florence with him.

King Alphonso blames fortune, and his experiment allegedly proves that Ruggieri is merely unlucky. Yet, his decision to contradict fortune's assessment of the knight and give him generous gifts to take back to Italy suggests that fortune isn't always all-powerful. However, in the tale's exploration of merit and class, fortune provides the necessary opportunity for Ruggieri to show that his service was inspired by genuine personal honor, rather than just by a desire for material advancement.

DAY 10: SECOND TALE

Elissa, not to be outdone by Neifile, proposes to tell a tale of generosity done by a clergyman who was less powerful and wealthy than a king, and who could have considered his recipient an enemy rather than a friend. Besides, despite sermonizing on generosity and turning the other cheek, everyone knows that priests are even more tight-fisted than women who "fight tooth and nail against every charitable instinct."

The tales of the final day are characterized by a rising sense of competition amongst the brigata *to outdo and top each other's stories, which begins as soon as Elissa begins the second tale. This recalls the friendly competition on Day 2, where the narrators increasingly emphasized the stark contrast of fortune's reversals (from bad to good) for their characters. But before she begins, she offers general comments about generosity, which draw on both antifeminist stereotypes about women's stinginess and greed and the stock complaints of anticlerical satire that neither charity nor forgiveness come easily to the clergy who preach the values of generosity and mercy.*

After Ghino di Tacco is banished from Siena, he rebels against the Church of Rome and begins to rob anyone who passes near his stronghold at Radicofani. During this time, the Abbot of Cluny—the richest monk in the world—visits the pope at Rome, "ruin[s] his stomach," and is advised to visit the baths at Siena for treatment. Ignoring the danger that Ghino poses, he sets out in style with servants, horses, and luggage.

The situation this tale describes is based in events surrounding the historical figure of Ghino di Tacco. In rebelling against papal authority, Ghino places himself and his followers under interdict, meaning that the normal rites of the church couldn't be celebrated in their territory. This places them outside of the practice of their faith, at least according to the worldly authority of the pope. The Abbot of Cluny appeared in an early story (I, 7), which emphasized his great wealth. This tale also suggests that he hasn't been moderate in his lifestyle: he's ruined his stomach after a visit to the pope, suggesting that he overindulged on rich foods and wines while at Rome to the point of making himself ill.

Ghino di Tacco has his men ambush the Abbot of Cluny and his entire retinue, then escort them to the fortress as Ghino's guests. The Abbot tries to refuse the dubious hospitality of a highwayman, but since theirs is a place where "except for the power of God, we fear nothing, and where excommunications and interdicts are entirely ineffectual," the Abbot has no choice but to comply.

Ghino and his men demonstrate faith in God even while they reject the authority claimed by the Roman Catholic Church over its believers. Interdicts were the primary political tool the church had to influence secular politics, and Ghino represents a resistance to this imposition of authority, especially by a hypocritical and indulgent clergy.

Ghino di Tacco has the Abbot of Cluny deposited in a "dark and uncomfortable" room. Then, posing as a servant, he speaks with the Abbot and learns that he was going to Siena for medical treatment, which Ghino decides to try to provide. In the morning, he brings the Abbot two slices of toast and a glass of wine for breakfast. While issuing cranky comments and advice (which Ghino tactfully ignores), the hungry Abbot eats the food. Ghino keeps the Abbot on this diet for a few days before treating him to a lavish banquet. Reunited with his company, the Abbot learns that they have received excellent hospitality, although they haven't met their host.

Ghino and his men may be operating outside of the sanction of the Roman Catholic Church—a position which usually suggests, in the Middle Ages, the total rejection of all social boundaries—but he proves himself to be a morally upright man. He demonstrates kindness and patience towards the Abbot. He's also a capable physician: having correctly guessed that excessive indulgence is to blame for the Abbot's illness, he prescribes an austere diet meant to rebalance the Abbot's system. Once the Abbot has sufficiently recovered, Ghino goes on to demonstrate his noble generosity with an excellent banquet. In hiding his identity for so long, Ghino ensures that he will be judged on his actions rather than on his reputation.

Only after the Abbot of Cluny has fully recovered does Ghino di Tacco reveal his identity and explain that he turned to highway robbery because his exile and impoverishment prevented him from living a life befitting his noble rank. He declines to rob the Abbot, instead asking for a donation in recognition of his hospitality and medical care. Because he's come to see the highwayman as a friend, the Abbot embraces him while cursing his bad **fortune**. He leaves everything but his bare necessities behind. Once he's returned to Rome, the Abbot convinces the Pope to forgive Ghino and give him the means to live in a manner befitting his rank. The pope makes Ghino a Knight Hospitaller, then places him in charge of a priory, keeping him a friend and servant of the church for the rest of his days.

In contrast to his bad reputation, Ghino has treated the Abbot with kindness, generosity, and Christian charity. He thus proves that a person's inherent character is more important in determining their worth than external appearances and titles, whether they are "nobleman" or "highwayman." Nevertheless, this tale betrays its deep investment in traditional ideas about class when it allows Ghino to justify his crimes because they are the only way he can live the life appropriate to a man of his rank. Here, he clearly means his social status, rather than the merit he deserves because of his character. But by invoking fortune for his state, the tale absolves both the highwayman and the church hierarchy of any responsibility for the situation. The Abbot's act of extreme generosity, leaving behind all the extra luxuries he brought with him, is meant to be the tale's supreme example of munificence. But the tale obliquely uses even this to criticize the clergy, since entertaining the Abbot and his retinue during their stay required a larger commitment of goods from Ghino. The Abbot also orchestrates the rehabilitation of Ghino's reputation (at no cost to himself, given his stature in the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy). And—given that he cured the Abbot's illness—it's appropriate that he become a Knight Hospitaller. This was a Christian military order founded initially to care for and protect sick pilgrims in the Holy Land.

DAY 10: THIRD TALE

The company is so surprised by the clerical generosity in Elissa's tale that Panfilo must interrupt their conversation so Filostrato can tell his tale. He proposes to outdo Elissa with the story of a man's generosity towards someone who actually wanted to kill him.

The brigata*'s astonishment to hear a story about a generous clergyman contributes to the book's anticlerical satire, since the habitual greediness of clerics is legendary. To compete with this wonder, Filostrato must up the ante considerably by invoking murder.*

In Cathay (according to the Genoese), there is an extremely noble and extremely wealthy man named Nathan. Because his property lies along a major East-West route, he builds and furnishes a splendid palace to host passing travelers "in a most festive and agreeable manner." When he is already old, another wealthy noble named Mithridanes resolves to "nullify or darken" Nathan's reputation by making a "display of greater liberality." He builds his own palace and hosts travelers as well.

This tale has an unusual, word-of-mouth origin because it probably comes indirectly from Marco Polo's description of Kublai Khan. But since Polo was a Venetian (and thus a rival in terms of Florentine hometown pride), Giovanni Boccaccio worked to obscure the source. Nathan epitomizes the idea of "noblesse oblige" because he shelters and protects vulnerable travelers out of the goodness of his heart. But while Nathan is generous, Mithridanes performs acts of generosity, but is not *generous, because he is only trying to enhance his own reputation. In this way, he is like Melissus, who sought advice from Solomon on how to be loved and was told that he had to love others himself in IX, 9.*

One day, a woman enters the palace several times, through different gates, begging for alms each time. After her twelfth entry, Mithridanes comments on her persistence as he gives her alms. She compares his stinginess to Nathan's generosity: she entered all 32 gates to beg, and no one ever called her out for it. Mithridanes, taking this as a comment on the limits of his own generosity, flies into a rage and decides that if he can't compete with Nathan, he will have to kill him.

The beggar woman tests the limits of Mithridanes's generosity and shows its opportunism. Nathan, a truly generous man, doesn't care how his money is being used as long as he is giving it away. In contrast, because he cares about performing acts of generosity to enhance his own reputation for nobility (but because he isn't yet motivated by true generosity), Mithridanes cares that the woman seems to be taking advantage of him. It's a further indication of his immaturity that he decides the best way to enhance his own reputation is to take out the competition, rather than to reorient his giving to be truly generous.

Mithridanes travels to Nathan's palace. When he encounters his rival, he doesn't recognize him. Nathan is plainly dressed and all alone. He offers to take Mithridanes to the palace and tells him entertaining tales on the way. When they arrive, Nathan secretly tells his servants not to reveal his identity. Then he himself installs Mithridanes in a fine room, and they spend a pleasant evening talking together. When Mithridanes asks who he is, Nathan replies that he's a servant. And when Mithridanes reveals himself and his plan to kill Nathan, he maintains his facade.

Mithridanes's inability to recognize Nathan illustrates his own disordered approach to generosity. Mithridanes expects Nathan to be grand since he himself engages in generosity for the sake of increasing his reputation. But Nathan looks like a humble (or even poor) man. And Nathan's generous nature means that helping and talking with the younger man comes naturally to him. But Nathan isn't just generous, he's also self-possessed, able to maintain his composure even after discovering Mithridanes's murderous plan. If Mithridanes's jealousy and anger represent excess, they are about to be brought back into balance by the power of Nathan's equanimity and restraint.


Although Mithridanes's murderous intentions unsettle Nathan, he is courageous and appreciative of the younger man's envy, since it inspires generosity. He tells Mithridanes that Nathan can be found every morning alone in a wood a little way off. Mithridanes will be able to find and kill him there easily. He even explains the escape route Mithridanes should take.

Nathan's generosity allows him to turn even Mithridanes's excessive jealousy and competitiveness into a good thing. This tale is beginning to push seriously on the boundaries of believability, but thanks to the competition among the brigata, *this is only the beginning. It also displays Giovanni Boccaccio's mastery of his craft as he expertly ratchets up the dramatic tension and leaves unanswered the question of what Nathan is planning to do to save himself.*


In the morning, while Nathan walks in the wood, Mithridanes rushes on him. When he exclaims that the hour of his death has come, Nathan answers that he has only himself to blame. Hearing his voice and drawing close enough to see his face, Mithridanes recognizes him as his companion from the previous evening. He drops his sword, and he throws himself at Nathan's feet in tears, acknowledging the older man's unsurpassable generosity, since it extends to giving up his very life freely. His eyes have been opened to the vileness of his murderous intent.

Nathan's equanimity and calm in the moment that Mithridanes attacks him is super-human. In a book that considers moderation one of the highest social virtues, Nathan is an outstanding example. And while in the confines of the tale, his moderation tames Mithridanes's chaos and rage, the very extremity of the situation also suggests that moderation is more difficult to achieve within the chaos of real life than in the artificial world the tales reproduce.

Nathan embraces Mithridanes and says that he loves him for spending his wealth generously. He even forgives the planned murder since it's common—kings and emperors often kill thousands just to enhance their fame or extend their territory. Although Mithridanes is still surprised that Nathan would sacrifice his life willingly, Nathan had reasons for that, too. His aim in living a life of generosity was to give whatever he could to his guests. When Mithridanes asked for his life, Nathan didn't want him to be the first guest he had failed. He's also very old. The remaining years of his life don't have much value, and the longer he lives, the more their value decreases.

Nathan's willingness to forgive Mithridanes for his murderous plot—and even to die willingly in the name of generosity—is a munificent deed according to the day's theme. But it is also excessive and must be brought back within the bounds of the moderation and balance that allow for a well-running society. Thus, Nathan's apparently suicidal behavior is tempered by his age and nearness to death anyway. And Mithridanes is already starting to learn the tale's lesson and turn towards true generosity.

But instead of murdering him, Mithridanes now wishes he could add years to Nathan's life. Nathan, always the giver, would refuse this **gift**. Instead, he suggests that Mithridanes could assume his identity, and he, Nathan, could become Mithridanes. But Mithridanes refuses, certain that his imperfect generosity could only tarnish Nathan's reputation. Mithridanes returns home a few days later, understanding that Nathan's generosity can never be outdone.

Mithridanes's newfound concern to protect the reputation of his former rival—a reputation he initially set out to tarnish—proves that he is a changed man. The gift that Nathan offered his young guest was much better than money or reputation: it was the understanding of true generosity and the taming of the young man's intemperate and excessive emotions.

DAY 10: FOURTH TALE

Everyone agrees that Nathan was certainly more generous than King Alphonso and the Abbot of Cluny. Since the ground of basic generosity has been amply covered, Lauretta turns to tales of love to open new areas. She feels that her protagonist's actions are all the more striking since love will make men do anything to possess the objects of their affection.

Because it's hard to top a story in which one character is willing to lay down his life for another's pleasure, Lauretta shifts the trajectory of the day's tales towards love, an enduring theme of The Decameron. *Earlier stories have amply demonstrated the power of love to drive men to excessive actions; in contrast, this tale suggests that generosity's power can compete. By extension, this tale thus contributes to the book's overall argument about the importance of moderation and behaving with temperance rather than excess.*

A noble gentleman named Gentile de' Carisendi lives in Bologna. Because his love for Madonna Catalina, Niccoluccio Caccianimico's wife, is unrequited, he finds a position in Moderna. Catalina is pregnant when she unexpectedly falls into a coma so deep that even the physicians think she is dead. Because her ladies affirm that the baby isn't yet viable, they make no attempt to deliver it. Gentile is heartbroken at this news, but after some consideration, he realizes that in death she can't reject his advances. He resolves to break into her tomb to steal a kiss from her.

This setup—the happily married couple and the unrequited admirer—is standard in stories of excessive love and it recalls earlier tales, such as Federigo's love for Monna Giovanna in V, 9. The tale's happy ending depends on Monna Catalina being buried unharmed. But the question of whether her baby was yet viable points to the use of caesarean section deliveries in the Middle Ages in cases where it was thought that a child's life might be saved even after a mother died in childbirth (or, as in this case, of other natural causes). Gentile's plan, on the one hand, indicates the overpowering nature of love, which pushes him to breach social taboos against disturbing the dead (but which recall the willingness of Francesca's suitors to engage in tomb robbing in IX, 1). On the other hand, it also suggests how vulnerable women were to men's desires. Gentile will have what he wants from Catalina, even if he must steal it from her cold, dead body.

That night, Gentile de' Carisendi rides to Bologna, enters Madonna Catalina's tomb, and kisses her many times. But kissing isn't enough, and after a while he desires to touch her breasts. When he does, he thinks he feels a faint heartbeat, and on more careful inspection, he realizes that she's still alive. He carries her to the home of his resourceful mother, who restores Catalina with a warm bath and fire.

Although Catalina is actually alive, no one yet knows that, so Gentile's actions here under the overwhelming power of love are nothing short of necrophilia—inappropriate sexual contact with dead bodies. Her vulnerability to his desires, especially after she is unable to assert her own choice by saying yes or no, makes this scene uncomfortable, and it grows even more so as Gentile moves from a chaste kiss to groping her body. Nevertheless, the tale rewards his faithful love with a revived Catalina.

When she recovers consciousness, Madonna Catalina is confused to find herself in a strange home. Gentile de' Carisendi explains what has happened, and she begs him—out of his love for her—not to dishonor her in his home. Gentile promises to treat her like a sister, asking only that she stay with his mother until he has prepared a suitable celebration to reveal her apparent resurrection. Although she longs to go home, Catalina considers her debt to Gentile great enough to agree. And as soon as she does, she goes into labor and delivers a baby boy.

Although the tale seems to have rewarded Gentile's undying love with a recovered Catalina, her first fear on waking up in his mother's home is that he will rape her, emphasizing her vulnerability despite her formerly chaste and upright behavior in her marriage and even her pregnancy. And although he honors her request, he nevertheless asserts control over her by requesting—in terms she feels she can't refuse—that she stay with his mother until he can publicize her miraculous recovery himself.

Gentile de' Carisendi returns to Moderna to complete his appointment, which takes three months. In Bologna, he arranges a great feast and promises to show his guests (including Niccoluccio Caccianimico) his greatest treasure. But before he does, he presents an interesting dilemma: if a man had a loyal servant and threw him out of the house when he fell ill, but a stranger found him and nursed him back to life, would the man or the stranger have a better claim to keep the servant? After much debate, Niccoluccio speaks for the crowd when he declares that the first man abandoned and cast away his entitlement to the servant when he put him in the street; the stranger has the greater claim.

The size of Gentile's request that Catalina delay her reunion with her husband becomes evident only slowly, as his absence extends over the course of months. Conveniently, however, this also gives her time to recover from childbirth. Gentile advertises her as his greatest treasure in part to conceal her identity until his big reveal. But his language also reduces her to his possession rather than a person in her own right. And his theoretical example, by focusing on the case of a servant turned out by one master and adopted by another, suggests that he has a sense of ownership over her in a society that considers both servants and women to be the property of their male masters.

Gentile de' Carisendi sends for his greatest treasure, Madonna Catalina, who enters the hall beautifully dressed and carrying her baby. She looks familiar to most of the guests, especially Niccoluccio Caccianimico, although they understand Catalina to be dead. He and several others ask her questions, which she refuses to answer (on Gentile's instructions). Finally, Gentile promises to explain everything if everyone will remain in their seats until he's done.

Gentile has secured the general agreement of the assembled guests that he has a greater claim to Catalina than her own husband, who buried her instead of healing her—even though his example differed markedly from the facts, since a wife isn't a servant and Catalina's illness was much graver than the one described in Gentile's example. And he continues to exert his control over her by requiring her silence until he can explain the situation.

Gentile de' Carisendi explains that Madonna Catalina is the loyal servant in his scenario. Because of Gentile's love, God turned her from an entombed and "fearsome corpse" into the "lovely object" his guests see before them. In contrast, her family threw her into the gutter like worthless trash before she was truly dead. Unless Niccoluccio Caccianimico has suddenly changed his mind, everyone has agreed that she belongs to Gentile. Niccoluccio and Catalina begin to cry, but Gentile takes her by the hand and restores both her and her child to Niccoluccio.

Gentile claims outright that the force of his enduring love is what cured Catalina of her mysterious ailment. He also implies that God recognizes and supports the claim of his affections over her, since it was on account of his eternal devotion that she was apparently resurrected. But the tale doesn't fully engage with the strain in his argument since Catalina's family—and her doctors—all believed her to be dead. Nor does anyone in the crowd raise the objection that wives and servants occupy different categories, suggesting that their shared submission to male authority renders them both objects of their masters' control. Gentile is only generous in restoring Catalina to Niccoluccio insofar as she is his object to give, rather than a person in her own right or Niccoluccio's rightful wife.

Niccoluccio Caccianimico joyfully greets Madonna Catalina and his son, while the guests marvel at her miraculous return and the generosity shown by Gentile de' Carisendi. He remains friendly with her and her husband for the rest of his life. In closing, Lauretta asks the company if he isn't the most generous example thus far since he was driven to possess Catalina by the power of love and believed himself to be legally entitled to her.

Lauretta's assertion that her tale shows the most extreme example of generosity thus far is based on a view of women as objects of male authority and trade. The only legal rights asserted in the tale are Gentile's rights of ownership over that which he "rescued" from the tomb; Catalina's own evident and stated desire to return to her husband is ignored.

DAY 10: FIFTH TALE

While Emilia agrees that Gentile de' Carisendi's generosity was great, her story will show that it is possible for a man to be even more generous with a lady. Gilberto and his wife Madonna Dianora live in Udine, in the cold northern mountains of Italy. Ansaldo Gradense has fallen in love with Dianora but hasn't won her heart despite his noble manners and martial prowess.

Emilia suggests that Gentile, in giving up something that never truly belonged to him, was not as generous as Lauretta claimed. Thus, when readers are introduced to Gilberto, his wife Dianora, and Dianora's admirer, they are primed to expect that the men's control or ownership over Dianora's sexuality will be in play.

Madonna Dianora, tired of Ansaldo Gradense's attention, decides to rid herself of him with an impossible task. She tells his messenger that she will "love him and do his bidding" if he proves his love by making her a **garden** in the middle of January. If he can't, and he continues to provoke her, she will tell her husband and relatives and they will make him stop. Although Ansaldo realizes that she's trying to frustrate his desire, he persists until he finds a Magician who can create the garden—for a large fee.

Dianora, like several other ladies in the tale, simply isn't interested in Ansaldo. Her rejection threatens the assumption that a man's love and honor alone were supposed to be sufficient to earn (or demand) a woman's affections. Because of these assumptions, women in her position must be careful and clever to successfully dismiss such unwanted lovers, and Dianora attempts, like Monna Piccarda (VIII, 4) and Francesca de' Lazzari (IX, 1), to impose an impossible task on him. It's fitting that she asks for a garden, both because gardens are symbolically places of love, but also because they are places where reality is suspended. Thus, Dianora is suggesting that she'll have sex with Ansaldo when January turns into May—in other words, never. Yet, Ansaldo is willing to cheat. On the one hand, this suggests his steadfast love and the power of love to dictate his actions. But on the other, it calls into question whether he is truly as honorable as he asserts himself to be.

In the exact middle of January, the Magician conjures a beautiful **garden**, and Ansaldo Gradense presents its fruits and flowers to Madonna Dianora, both to show her how deeply he loves her and to remind her of her promise. Dianora can't hide her anguish from Gilberto, and she explains the rash promise she made to Ansaldo. Gilberto chides her foolishness, first for listening to Ansaldo, then for bartering with him. But, because it was an honest mistake on her part and because he's afraid that Ansaldo will have the Magician harm them if she breaks her word, he commands her to go to Ansaldo. If she can't convince him to release her from her promise, without "loss of honor," she should "give him her body."

Gilberto's motivations for forcing Dianora to make good on her rash promise are mixed. His worry that Ansaldo might have the magician harm them suggests that Ansaldo's deed, supposedly done as Dianora's faithful servant, is actually a piece of sexual blackmail; chiding his wife for listening to Ansaldo suggests that she is responsible for leading Ansaldo on, despite the contrary evidence of her dislike for him; and his concern for her keeping her word suggests the extent to which his own honor is bound up in his wife's virtue. In the logic of the tale, which means to showcase generosity (the day's theme), Gilberto sending his wife to his rival is meant to show his own generosity, since he's willing to share her with another man. But in effect, this merely emphasizes the chattel position of women, who can be shared among men at will. In this way, it recalls the husband in VI, 3, who pimped out his wife to a Spanish diplomat to make some quick money.

Madonna Dianora doesn't want to do this, but she ultimately obeys Gilberto's command. She catches Ansaldo Gradense by surprise when she knocks on his door the next day. He calls the Magician to witness the fruits of his charm, then asks Dianora why she's come to him alone. She says her Gilberto sent her because he pays "more regard to the labors of your unruly love than to his own or his wife's reputation." Only by her husband's command is she willing to submit to her admirer's pleasures.

Unfortunately for Dianora, no matter how much she wishes to resist, she must ultimately obey her husband. The tales have already demonstrated the harms that come to disobedient wives and obstinate women: they are exposed and burned (VIII, 7), mauled by wild animals (IX, 7) or beaten mercilessly by their husbands (IX, 9). So at first, she is the object of exchange between the two men and Ansaldo receives her as the precious object he's bought through the magician's expensive services. Yet, Dianora is correct when she criticizes his unruly (therefore excessive) love, since he cheated to fulfil her request by resorting to magic.

Deeply moved by "Gilberto's liberality," Ansaldo Gradense's desire turns to compassion. He promises to treat Madonna Dianora as a sister if she takes his thanks for the "immense courtesy he has shown me" to Gilberto. After the delighted Dianora tells her husband what happened, he and Ansaldo become best friends. Inspired by Gilberto's offer of his wife's sexual favors to Ansaldo and Ansaldo's generous release of Dianora, the Magician waives his fee.

Unmoved by Dianora's complaints (because she is treated as an object to possess, not a person to respect), Ansaldo is, however, deeply moved by the generosity Gilberto showed by willingly giving up his sexual claim over his wife. It is his fellow man, rather than the woman he allegedly loved, on whom Ansaldo ultimately has compassion. Madonna Dianora has become, in effect, the gift that Gilberto and Ansaldo exchange to confirm their friendship.

Emilia, like Lauretta, challenges her audience to decide who is the more generous lover: Gentile de' Carisendi, for returning a lover he found nearly dead, or Ansaldo Gradense, for giving up a lady who was ready to throw herself into his very arms? In her opinion, Ansaldo is the clear winner.

Emilia's closing comments confirm Dianora's position as an object for trade between men. She is the token of Gilberto's generosity towards Ansaldo when he makes her keep her foolish promise, and she is the token of Ansaldo's generosity when he renounces his claim and sends her back to her husband unsullied.

DAY 10: SIXTH TALE

Claiming that she wants to focus on entertainment and avoid debates like the ones her predecessors have been engaging in, Fiammetta abandons her initial story for a less ambiguous one. After King Charles has defeated King Manfred and his allies (including the Ghibelline political faction), one of the Ghibelline lords, Neri degli Uberti, leaves Florence with his family and settles near the resort town of Castellammare di Stabia. He buys a home amid the olive and nut-trees and sets about constructing a splendid **garden**, with a well-stocked fishpond at its center.

Despite Fiammetta's stated desire to avoid conflict, this story has political undertones—which references the heated political factionalism between Guelphs and Ghibellines that roiled Florence during the late 13th century and led to the exile of Dante Alighieri, one of Giovanni Boccaccio's important literary influences. Neri's beautiful garden is key to the tale; as sites of aristocratic entertainment and display—as well as places conducive to love—gardens appear in The Decameron*'s final tales with increasing frequency.*

The lovely **garden** attracts King Charles's attention when he vacations in Castellammare. He decides to visit informally because he and Neri degli Uberti are political rivals. Neri entertains the king (and four companions including Guy de Montfort) as lavishly as he can. After a tour of the garden, he serves them "dainty dishes" and excellent wines. During supper, two very beautiful teenaged girls (later identified as Neri's daughters Ginevra and Isotta), scantily clad in sheer white linen dresses and carrying fishing nets and cooking implements, enter the garden. They curtsey to the king, then wade into the pool and catch many fish, which are immediately cooked and served as delicacies.

Neri's garden is his remaining link to his former wealth and status. It is a place somewhat removed from the day-to-day affairs of life, so the king can set aside political factionalism for a time. Visiting informally protects the king from appearing soft on his enemies and allows Neri to cultivate some favor through generous entertaining despite his reduced status as an exile. The tale initially seems to focus on Neri's generosity, but the entrance of the alluring and scantily clad Ginevra and Isotta pulls the tale's center toward the power of love (and sex) over men's actions.


After King Charles has eaten the fish, Ginevra and Isotta exit the pool, their wet dresses revealing their shapely forms. This makes a strong impression on the king, who admires their loveliness with rapt attention and develops "a burning desire to pleasure them." Neri degli Uberti introduces his twin daughters to the king, and King Charles encourages him to marry them off soon and well. However, exile and lowered political clout mean Neri can't do so. After dessert, the girls sing sweet songs, further enamoring the king.

Like many another lover in the tales and beyond (for just one example, recall Calandrino's experience with Niccolosa in IX, 5), love invades King Charles's consciousness through his eyes. The alluring vision of the scantily clad girls impresses itself on his mind in such a way that it begins to generate obsession and lust. Unfortunately, the girls' sexual potential is likely to remain untapped, since their father's low political fortunes mean that they have neither the connections to make good matches nor the dowries they would need to bring to their husbands.

After leaving Neri degli Uberti's **garden**, King Charles can think of almost nothing except Ginevra and her sister. He becomes so enflamed by passion that he wants to kidnap them. But when he shares his plan with Guy de Montfort, Guy chides him. Such unrestrained love is the folly of a youth, not a mature king. And, as a recent conqueror, he should focus on consolidating his new political power. Finally, kidnapping the daughters of such a gracious host (despite his impoverished state) better suits a "werewolf" than a king. As glorious as King Charles's martial victories have been, Guy maintains that conquering his own desires would be far more glorious.

The power of love asserts itself over King Charles, burning Ginevra's image into his mind despite his age. And, like other lovers in the tales, he becomes prone to risky ideas, such as kidnapping the girls for his own pleasure. Guy de Montfort plays the role of his conscience, pointing out all the reasons why he should reign in his excessive love and behave moderately. Yet, love hasn't yet appeared to listen to reason very much. At this point, the tale begins to depart somewhat from the day's theme of generosity to pick up on questions of moderation and self-control in affairs of the heart that have been raised by the preceding three tales.

Chastened by Guy de Montfort's words, King Charles resolves to conquer his own desires in a soldierly manner, despite the pain and effort it will cost. To keep himself on this virtuous path, he immediately arranges marriages for Ginevra (to Maffeo da Palizzi) and Isotta (to Guiglielmo dell Magna), generously providing their dowries as wedding **gifts**. By "constant effort" he turns to "mortif[ying] his ardent longings" and finally shatters the chains of Love. And so, Fiammetta points out, though the provision of dowries and husbands is a trifle for a king, a king *in love*, who kept himself from enjoying any "leaf, flower, or fruit" of his passion, is generous indeed.

King Charles is the only example in The Decameron *of a lover successfully resisting love's power. And he only does this through extreme effort on his own part, suggesting that it's only the rarest of men who can assert this level of self-control. His generosity includes monetary contributions to the girls' dowries, but this is easy for a wealthy king. What's more impressive is his renunciation of any claim on them by arranging their marriages to other men. In this way, he demonstrates generosity of a kind with Gentile de' Carisendi's return of Catalina to her husband in X, 4 and Ansaldo's disavowal of Dianora in X, 5.*

DAY 10: SEVENTH TALE

Everyone—except one Ghibelline lady—commends King Charles's generosity; to balance the political scales, Pampinea offers a tale about a king on the Ghibelline side. A wealthy but bourgeois Florentine apothecary named Bernardo Puccini lives in Palermo at the time the French are driven from Sicily, with his wife and his daughter, Lisa. King Peter of Aragon, having conquered the island, holds a tournament. When she watches him joust, Lisa falls in love with him. Her feelings are "lofty and splendid," but the situation is hopeless; her low status guarantees he will never notice her. She hides her love until it makes her melancholy, then ill with a wasting sickness.

As on Day 4, when she balanced out the excessively traumatic story of Ghismonda and Guiscardo with Friar Alberto's humorous impersonation of an angel, Pampinea reads the room and restores balance and peace to the brigata *by telling a story weighted towards the Ghibellines. This story also reverses the typical love scenario in the tales, for in this case it is a woman who falls into hopelessly unrequited love. Her love is good in that it participates in the ennobling nature of* fin'amors *(refined loving). But her impossible desires also cause her to fall into a classic case of lovesickness (similar to that of Jacques Lamiens in II, 8).*


Lisa's parents, greatly distressed, nurse her and call physicians, but no one can cure her. Before she dies of despair, Lisa wants to tell King Peter her lofty feelings. So, she asks for renowned musician Minuccio d'Arezzo. His songs, offered to comfort her, instead add fuel to the fire of her passion. But when he's done, she speaks with him privately and tells him all about her unfortunate situation. She asks him to tell the king of her love and her intention to die of it. Minuccio, amazed by her noble sentiments and resolve, promises to carry her message to King Peter.

The physicians are powerless to help Lisa, of course, because the only cure for her ailment is King Peter's attentions. Lisa's clever strategy to tell the king how she feels demonstrates the strength of her affection as well as her social skills, since she broaches the subject in an appropriately circumspect way that doesn't dishonor either party. For a long time, it was thought that Giovanni Boccaccio invented the character of Minuccio the musician, but a singer by that name has been discovered in the historical record. This points to the level of detail and realism Boccaccio sought to inject into The Decameron.


Minuccio d'Arezzo leaves Lisa and asks Mico da Siena to compose a song about her love, which he sings to King Peter and his court. Then, in private, he tells the king Lisa's story. Her fortitude and nobility of spirit impress King Peter, and his compassion inspires him to relieve her suffering. He plans to visit her that very night, and when Minuccio tells this to Lisa, her health begins to improve. That evening, the king calls (as if unexpectedly) on Bernardo Puccini in his **garden**. When he mentions the apothecary's daughter, Bernardo says she's not yet betrothed to anyone, in part because she has been ill.

Love has power over everyone, including mighty kings—the previous story has already made this claim. But in this case, it's the nobility of Lisa's soul that truly moves King Peter, more than her affection. Although he can't return her love, he is moved with compassion and generosity to try to save her life. In another parallel to the previous story, he visits her family unannounced and is entertained in the garden. And once again, the garden suggests a magical space between the realm of stories and the harsh realities of the world, where the king can find a way to cure Lisa honorably.

In her bedroom, King Peter holds Lisa's hand as he asks her to "cheer up, for our sake, so that you may quickly recover." Being touched by the object of her affections feels to Lisa like being in Paradise. She circumspectly replies that her sadness comes from trying to carry a burden that is too heavy for her. Her lovesickness and prudence raise her in his esteem, and King Peter curses **fortune** for condemning such a noble character to a bourgeoise life.

King Peter can't return Lisa's love, but since her love renders her pliant to his commands, his order to recover and cheer up has the intended effect. Like many other (usually male) lovers earlier in the book, Lisa's extremely noble spirit belies her middle-class status. Her love contributes to the book's argument that merit is earned through disposition rather than external factors like wealth and title. The depth of her devotion to the king and her elegant way of expressing herself show her merit, even if her father is just an apothecary (a merchant selling medicines and medicinal ingredients).

As Lisa's health improves, King Peter consults with his queen about appropriately rewarding her love. They return with a great retinue to Bernardo Puccini's **garden**, where they summon Lisa. To honor her noble behavior, King Peter offers to give her a suitable husband and to consider himself her knight; all he asks in return is one kiss. Speaking quietly so only he can hear, Lisa thanks him for his attention despite her lowly status. Her great love for him means that she is prepared to do his bidding, and she will love the husband he chooses for his sake. She only worries that she is unworthy of the kiss.

King Peter completes Lisa's healing when he satisfies her love, even in the smallest way, by offering her a chaste kiss and declaring himself to be her knight—taking the fin'amors *(refined loving) lover's subservient position relative to his lady. This takes place in the garden, which represents both an arena for talk of love and the space where reality can be suspended or modified. Lisa's obedience to King Peter models the proper behavior of a citizen, of a lover, and of a woman. It feels less dehumanizing because King Peter treats her so courteously. But her reliance on his good will and graciousness is nevertheless a result of gendered constraints on women's freedom and autonomy.*

Lisa's answer pleases both King Peter and the queen because it demonstrates her wisdom. With Bernardo Puccini's permission, King Peter elects a noble but poor young nobleman to be Lisa's husband, then presides over their immediate wedding. Among the many **gifts** he lavishes on the newlyweds, he includes two lucrative estates to serve as Lisa's dowry. Finally, holding her head in his hands, he kisses Lisa's forehead. For the rest of his life, he rides as her knight, always wearing her favor in tournaments.

By happy coincidence, Lisa has wealth but lacks status, and King Peter marries her to a man who lacks wealth but has status. Now, because of her nobility of soul and the extremely classy way she handled her infatuation with the king, Lisa's station in life conforms with her personal merit, proving that character is a better sign of a person's worth than wealth or title. The royal gifts further confirm and enhance her status. But, in closing on the kiss and King Peter's choice to call himself Lisa's knight, the story emphasizes the primacy of love as the director of human behavior.

DAY 10: EIGHTH TALE

Filomena, while extolling the virtue of the day's various munificent kings, uses her story to turn back to "people like ourselves" who are nevertheless capable of "laudable generosity." During the Roman triumvirate, Publius Quintus Fulvius sends his son, Titus Quintus Fulvius, to study at Athens with a philosopher named Aristippus. Titus lives with his father's friend, Chemes, and Chemes's son, Gisippus. Titus Quintus Fulvius and Gisippus develop a strong "mutual friendship and brotherliness." They are only relaxed when they're together, and Chemes considers Titus a second son. When Chemes dies, both youths are heartbroken.

When Filomena turns back to "people like us" she still means wealthy and noble persons, not bourgeoise merchants. Her claim, however limited it is, is still democratizing, suggesting that generosity can cover other kinds of deeds than just the exchange of money and gifts. The tale's setting is pointedly ancient and removed from the concerns of the brigata *and recent history. And it takes great care to establish the intense bond of friendship between Gisippus and Titus, which is in turn founded on their fathers' friendship.*

A few months after Chemes's death, Gisippus's family helps arrange his betrothal to lovely, impeccably noble Sophronia. Shortly before the wedding, Titus asks to meet her, and when Gisippus takes him to her home, while trying to take the measure of her beauty, Titus falls under its spell and begins to burn "with a passion more ardent than any ever kindled by a woman in her lover's breast."

When Titus looks at Sophronia he is overcome by her beauty—and as other tales have already demonstrated, the route of obsessive love is through the eyes (in particular, the recent example of King Charles proves this point in X, 6). Love is strong enough here—stronger, in fact, than has been felt by any other lover ever—to overpower a previously impervious and perfectly balanced friendship.

Titus locks himself in his bedroom to meditate on Sophronia's beauty, but the more he broods, the more he burns with passion. On the one hand, he chastises himself for being unable to treat Gisippus's fiancée as a sister and tries to "bridle [his] lascivious desires." He feels that his true duty lies with his best friend. Still, Love's laws are more powerful than the rest, including friendship and even taboos against incest. At least, he thinks, his love is less awful than incest. And it's natural since he's a youth and thus subject to Love's laws. The blame, he feels, lies with **fortune**, which gave Sophronia to his friend instead of someone else. But then again, he reasons, won't her great beauty attract some lover eventually? And wouldn't it be better for it to be a friend than a stranger?

Thinking about Sophronia adds fuel to the flames of Titus's passion. King Charles showed that it's possible for the chains of love to be broken through willpower, but he was an old man and a wise king; Titus's youth and fervor help to tip the scales in love's favor. And because love is more powerful than human reason—it cannot be bridled and broken, like a horse—his attempts to talk himself out of his feelings fail. Indeed, they backfire, as he blames fortune for failing to follow love in giving Sophronia to him and puts his reason to use justifying his feelings for his best friend's fiancée.

Titus spends several exhausting days wrestling with his desires. Gisippus, distressed to discover that Titus has taken to his bed, ties to discover what's wrong so he can comfort his friend. After giving a few implausible answers, Titus finally comes clean and confesses his love for Sophronia. He tells Gisippus about his internal debate, complains that he has failed **fortune**'s test of his virtue, and resolves to die as penance. Gisippus isn't immune to Sophronia's charms, but he is far less affected by them than Titus. Quickly deciding that "his friend's life mean[s] more to him than Sophronia," he assures Titus that his only sin was hiding his pain for days. Friends should share all their thoughts: the proper ones for edification and the improper ones to receive help.

Titus's love is so forceful that it begins to make him ill. Gisippus can understand the attraction, for he also recognizes Sophronia's beauty, but he doesn't feel so passionately about her as his friend does. As the two men continue to discuss the predicament, it becomes increasingly hard to ignore the fact that their conversation about who has a better claim to Sophronia excludes her potential desires. She thus becomes an object to be traded or haggled over between the two. And this objectification—in addition to a gender hierarchy that considers men more important and valuable than women anyway—contributes to Gisippus's quick assurance that his friend's life is more important to him than the woman he's supposed to marry.

Gisippus understands Titus's love: Sophronia's beauty and his noble spirit—highly susceptible to passionate feelings—virtually guaranteed it. Additionally, Titus should be blessing **fortune** for giving Sophronia to Gisippus instead of another man. Gisippus can't recall a single thing he didn't share equally with Titus, and his wife wouldn't have been an exception. But, since they're not yet married, he can do better than share and give her to Titus as a **gift**. Titus is delighted at the prospect but ashamed to need such incredible generosity from his friend.

Gisippus's analysis of the situation connects love and class: people of noble temperament (and, in this case, of aristocratic class status) are both particularly susceptible to falling in love and worthy of being loved. And while Titus cursed fortune, Gisippus reminds him of how fast fortune's wheel can turn and bring good things to those who suffer. If the conversation begins to strike modern readers as increasingly academic as it goes on, this is because the tale is less a narrative than it is an example of a rhetorical exercise on the theme of friendship. And as the friends discuss what to do, they neither imagine nor consider Sophronia's needs and desires. When Gisippus offers her to his friend as a gift, it's clear that they think of her more as an object to be possessed (or shared) than as another person.

Titus, inspired by Gisippus's generous offer, reiterates that his duty lies with his friend. Since God didn't give him Sophronia directly, He must have chosen Gisippus for his "superior worth." Since God finds Titus "unworthy of such bounty," he will conquer his grief or die trying. Gisippus leans on the power of their friendship to make Titus accept his offer: Gisippus would die of grief if he lost Titus, and Sophronia is Titus's only hope for a cure. Wives aren't nearly as hard to find as friends; Sophronia is more easily replaced than Titus. And, in giving her to Titus, Gisippus both gives her to his second self, and he improves her lot, since Titus is far nobler than he is.

Titus's attempt to rebut his friend's offer is belied by the force of love, which will kill him if he doesn't have Sophronia. His claims that he is inferior to his friend also ring hollow, since the tale has so carefully established the similarities between the two. Gisippus's rationale for preferring to lose Sophronia to Titus is steeped in misogyny, since he claims that women are indistinguishable and replaceable, in contrast to friends. The friends' tendency to view her as an object to be shared rather than a person is confirmed in these comments.

Titus finally accepts Gisippus's offer, in part because of his feelings for Sophronia and in part to please his friend by accepting. It must be managed carefully to avoid the scandal that would ensue if he were to propose it openly, after his family and Sophronia's have finished marriage negotiations. So, he will fetch Sophronia, but Titus will take his place as her husband and consummate the marriage. Once it's too late to change things, they'll come clean, and everyone can either accept it or "lump it."

The trade of Sophronia from one friend to another isn't just a personal affair, and although they're still not considering how this turn of events might strike her, they are aware that it could cause scandal by suggesting that Gisippus has changed his mind about the carefully negotiated marriage. Moreover, if Gisippus publicly renounces his claim, there's no guarantee that Sophronia's relatives will readily accept Titus in Gisippus's place. Yet, the necessary subterfuge doesn't bother either man, given their single-minded focus on the issue of securing and confirming their friendship through this act of extreme generosity. They even seem to expect that, once revealed, any reasonable person will agree with them, and the opinions of the rest can be utterly disregarded.

Titus slips from his bedroom into Gisippus's adjoining bridal chamber on the wedding night. Taking Sophronia in his arms, he asks her if she wants to be his wife. Assuming that her husband has come to bed playing a lover's game, she says "yes." Titus puts his ring on her finger, declaring his desire to be her husband before consummating the marriage. Titus remains Sophronia's secret, nighttime husband until he learns of his father's death. He must reveal the truth if he wants to take Sophronia home with him. He and Gisippus first tell Sophronia; she complains bitterly about the trick and flees to her parents' home. They're also displeased, and they complain loudly enough for everyone—including his family—to censure Gisippus.

For all his willingness to trick Sophronia into marrying him, Titus is nevertheless anxious to make his marriage to her legal. According to medieval legal standards, the exchange of vows and rings followed by consummation counts as a legitimate, legally binding marriage (similar to the marriage contracted by Alessandro and the Abbot in White in II, 3). Nevertheless, an increasing emphasis on the consent of both parties (usually cited to prevent parents from forcing their children into unhappy marriages for political or material reasons) means that even medieval audiences would have been aware of and possibly uncomfortable over Titus's evident deception, since Sophronia thinks she's getting into bed with Gisippus. And, when the men are forced to reveal the truth, she doesn't take the deception or the trade kindly, suggesting that she does have opinions about their plan, even if she wasn't consulted.


Eventually, Titus loses patience with the gossip and anger. Believing that these Greeks need to be humbled so they will stop complaining, he gathers the families at a temple, where he gives them all a lecture. His first theme is fate and the role of the gods. People who complain about things that can't be changed are second-guessing the gods, and this is blasphemy. The very fact that Sophronia is his wife *now*, he says, proves that the gods destined it. But since there are also mundane arguments for the marriage, he use "the logic of the mortals" for the rest of his case.

Just like the conversation between Titus and Gisippus earlier, Titus's harangue of Gisippus's and Sophronia's relatives is a rhetorical exercise focused on philosophical ideas and rhetorical flourish. The argument he makes is syncretic (or a fusion of ancient Roman and medieval Christian ideas about religion) and wordy, but it basically boils down to the idea that whatever has happened was meant to have happened (or else it wouldn't have happened). However, since this argument doesn't address specific concerns about the trick the pair played on Sophronia and her family, he will offer further rebuttals as necessary.

The families are attacking Gisippus's character for giving her to Titus. Instead, Titus maintains, they should praise his selfless friendship and great wisdom. For friendship, Titus simply reminds the crowd that its voluntary nature gives it a higher claim than family, which is controlled by **fortune**. As for wisdom, Gisippus demonstrated his by giving Sophronia to a better husband than himself. Although in some ways they are equal—Titus and Gisippus are both young philosophers—Titus is superior in others. He is Roman (Rome is superior to Athens), more noble (his family is ancient and powerful), and richer.

Titus articulates a very narrow concept of nobility here, which takes personal character into account but also considers wealth, title, and ancestry. While this suits his argument in this tale, it also contradicts The Decameron*'s main argument that one's character and choices are more important than the accidents of fortune such as one's family of origin or current wealth. His comments also force a tiny wedge between the friends, who up to this point have been portrayed and have considered themselves to be exactly equal. Now, Titus exploits the differences between himself and Gisippus to claim that he's the more worthy man.*

Moreover, Titus claims, there is nothing inappropriate about the way his marriage happened. It did happen "secretly, by stealth," but since that isn't uncommon, no one should be upset. People who think that Gisippus had no right to dispose of Sophronia forget that **fortune** often works in "strange and wonderful" ways. For example, does anyone care how the cobbler fixes shoes as long as he does a good job? Since Sophronia's marriage is desirable, it's foolish to complain about how it happened. Finally, Titus explains that the marriage is honorable and legal: he didn't rape Sophronia or make her his mistress. If she didn't ask who she was consenting to as her husband in the dark, that's her fault. Titus can hardly imagine more wrath being directed at Gisippus if he did something truly awful, like giving her to a serf.

Titus's arguments about the legality and moral rightness of his marriage all depend on a conception of women as things to be disposed of and traded between men. Gisippus, because he was Sophronia's fiancé, was set to become her master anyway, and this gave him the right to give her to his friend. The extended metaphor of the cobbler, furthermore, suggests that women are little more important than shoes. And he blames the victim for not ensuring that she was making promises to the correct man in the dark. These arguments collectively underline Sophronia's secondary status—and the disenfranchisement of women generally throughout the tales.

Titus concludes that the families will "cheerfully accept" the situation "if [they] are wise." It could be worse: instead of coming clean, he could have disowned Sophronia. He also threatens that any attempts to keep his wife from him or to treat Gisippus badly will end with him taking them both with him to Rome, by force if necessary, and becoming a life-long enemy of Athens. Taking Gisippus by the arm, Titus storms out "looking daggers" to show that he's not intimidated. Persuaded both by his arguments and his threats, Sophronia's family decides he makes a better in-law than enemy. They confirm their friendship and send Sophronia with Titus to Rome, where, making a virtue of necessity, she transfers her love to him from Gisippus.

At the conclusion of his carefully constructed and elegantly executed arguments, Titus backs himself up with threats and extortion; it seems his anticipation that the Greek families will accept the situation is based not so much in a feeling that they're reasonable, but rather in a sense of his own superiority as a Roman. He reminds everyone that Sophronia is still vulnerable and that he has the power and the right to deprive her family of her or to disown and abandon her. Her family decides not to provoke Titus further, and sends Sophronia with him to Rome, where the tale assures readers that she came to love her new husband.


Left behind in Athens, Gisippus eventually loses the esteem of his fellow citizens. Following factional strife, he's exiled in extreme poverty. He makes his way to Rome, in hopes of finding help with Titus. But when Titus fails to recognize him in his beggar's rags, he believes that his friend no longer loves him, and he resolves to die. While sheltering in a cave overnight, he overhears two thieves stashing their loot and the bigger thief killing the smaller. He decides to avoid direct suicide by confessing to the murder and earning execution. After being arrested, he confesses to Marcus Varro, the praetor, and is sentenced to death.

However, while the first half of the tale featured Titus's ascent from the bottom of bad fortune to the top, the second half of the tale sees Gisippus himself falling from the heights of fortune's favor. He once confirmed his friendship with Titus by generously offering him Sophronia, and now he hopes that his friend will be even a little bit as generous with him. Yet, if fortune causes Titus to misrecognize Gisippus, it's only to allow him to prove that his own love is as selfless and generous as his friend's.

Coincidentally, Titus passes court at that moment, and he recognizes Gisippus by face and voice. Desperate to save his friend's life, he also confesses to the crime. Marcus Varro is confused and upset, since these evidently phony confessions both demand punishment. Gisippus and Titus continue to make competing claims until Publius Ambustus, a notorious thug (and the real culprit) overhears. Inspired by their willingness to sacrifice themselves for each other, *he* confesses. After rumors of the strange case reach the emperor, he releases all three after learning about their true motives.

When Gisippus gave Sophronia to Titus, both friends described it as giving her to a second self. Titus acts out of this same logic when he tries to interpose his own body between his friend's and the justice of the court. Their example is so moving that even hardened criminals respond to it, demonstrating the strength of true friendship among men.


Titus takes Gisippus home to Sophronia. After restoring his spirits, giving him nice clothes, and making him co-owner of all his own possessions, Titus arranges a marriage between his sister Fulvia and his friend Gisippus. Gisippus becomes a Roman citizen, and the two couples live in perfect harmony and friendship.

Now that Titus and Gisippus have been reunited, Titus has the opportunity to cement their friendship by offering his friend a wife in the same way that Gisippus once offered Sophronia to him. And again, Fulvia's wishes aren't considered; much like her sister-in-law, she is traded like an object between the friends. With harmony, balance, and exact equality between the friends restored, they live happily ever after.

Filomena ends her tale with a reflection on the nature of friendship, that sacred mother of generosity, sister of gratitude, enemy of hatred and greed, and inspiration of virtue. Sadly, it's increasingly rare in a world directed by greed and self-interest. Only friendship could have inspired Gisippus to give Sophronia to Titus, prevented him from sleeping with her after she became his friend's wife, and made him so unconcerned about losing the love of his relatives and becoming the target of slander. And only friendship could have inspired Titus to risk his life to save his friend, share his wealth, and give destitute, homeless Gisippus his own sister. So, while most people want large families and many servants, no one will be as faithful and selfless as a friend.

Filomena's final comments, like so much of the tale, bear the hallmarks of a rhetorical exercise. But, coming as close to the end of The Decameron *as they do, they also reflect the friendship that characterized the* brigata. *Importantly, she claims that friendship is a powerful force for moderation, encouraging virtue and discouraging vice. In the disordered and chaotic world, this order is rare, but the* brigata *itself represents the possibility for a just and well-moderated society.*

DAY 10: NINTH TALE

Panfilo praises Filomena's description of friendship, then turns to his own story, which shows another eminently worthy and generous friendship—the friendship of Saladin and Messer Torello of Strà. Before the Third Crusade begins, Saladin disguises himself as a merchant and takes two counselors and a few servants on a secret tour of Europe to gather intelligence so that he can better defend himself. On the road between Mila and Pavia, they encounter Torello, who is on the way to his country estate. Torello deduces that the men are "foreigners of gentle birth," and he wants to "do them honor." He tricks them by saying they can't reach Pavia that night and offers to have a servant take them to a place (his) to stay.

Saladin, 12th century sultan of Egypt and Syria, was renowned in medieval Europe for his military skill, wisdom, and generosity, even though he was a Muslim and an adversary of European interests in the Near East. Many other stories in the collection have shown that a poor or low-born person can still possess a noble spirit; Saladin shows that a non-Christian can be worthy of honor and friendship as well (at least in the confines of a story). In this context, it's notable that Torello sees through Saladin's disguise—not to his true identity, but at least to intuit his class status, which is well above the bourgeoise merchant class. The Third Crusade was organized to recapture Jerusalem from Saladin. In this tale, Saladin and Torello engage in a game of cleverness and generosity, where each one tries to outdo the other.

Torello rushes to his estate, sets tables for a feast in the **garden**, and is ready to welcome Saladin's group when the servant brings them to the gates. Saladin realizes that the reason for Torello's trick was to keep him from refusing the invitation. He complains that it's unfair to be offered hospitality that they can't return, and Torello replies that he won't be able to entertain them as well as they deserve. Because they all speak excellent Italian, Saladin and his men have no trouble talking with Torello over his fine wines.

Even in disguise, Saladin's personal merit is evident to Torello, who honors him according to his worth. Torello makes a big to-do over Saladin as a mark of respect for his merit (even though he doesn't realize that his guest is, in fact, royalty). But because Saladin is in disguise—not to mention on the opposing side of the coming war—he doesn't expect to be able to return the favor and honor Torello, so it makes him uncomfortable to be in the honorable man's debt.

Saladin and his men find Torello to be the "most agreeable, civilized, and affable gentleman" they've ever met. And although they claim to be simple merchants from Cyprus, Torello (correctly) concludes that they are more distinguished than that and deserve a better feast. He sends a message to his wife (later identified as Adalieta), asking her to invite the Pavian nobles to a great banquet the following morning. With a princely spirit (instead of a womanly one), she pulls together the necessities for a "sumptuous banquet."

The tale continues to emphasize Saladin's evident nobility; he can obscure his identity but not hide his true merit. Additionally, in the context of the brigata*'s friendly competition to showcase the most stunning example of generosity, Torello's desire to provide a second feast is also an excuse for him to perform almost unbelievable generosity. In this, his wife Adalieta is a full partner to him. Much of her value comes from her so-called "princely spirit;" like Roussillon's wife (III, 9), Ghismonda (IV, 1), and Filippa (VI, 7), she is presented as more valuable the closer she hews to masculine ideals of self-possession instead of excessive feminine emotionality.*

The next day, Torello invites Saladin to hunt, after which Saladin asks for directions to the comfortable inn in Pavia. Torello, offering to lead the way, takes Saladin and his men to his own home, where a crowd of gentlemen wait for them. They protest that Torello entertained them splendidly enough the previous night, but he claims that **fortune** prevented him from doing them justice by sending them to him too late in the day to make a proper feast. Now, he will breakfast them with the appropriate "pomp and ceremony." Saladin, used to kingly treatment, marvels at the quality of this banquet.

The generosity and expense are starting to get ridiculous here; this story is a huge catalogue of noble generosity that far exceeds the others covered on this day. Somehow, a mere nobleman like Torello can entertain a king in the style he's used to. And while this is his response to Saladin's inherent nobility, it also demonstrates his own noble spirit and generous nature. Torello's claim that fortune stopped him rings hollow—it sounds more like an excuse he can make to justify a second (and better) feast.

After breakfast, Torello introduces Saladin to his greatest treasures: Adalieta and their two angelically beautiful children. Adalieta gives Saladin fur-lined silk robes and silk jackets as **gifts**—things much nicer than a merchant would usually warrant. Saladin briefly worries that his identity has been discovered, but still graciously accepts them. Before he leaves the next day, Torello replaces his road-weary mounts with fine horses, proving himself the most courteous, considerate, and perfect gentleman ever born. Saladin thinks that if all Christian princes were this noble, his forces would never be able to resist them. He's sad to leave Torello and—although still intent on winning the war—resolves to return his hospitality if he ever can.

The generosity displayed by Torello walks a fine line between being altruistic (focused on honoring his guest) and ostentatious (showing off what he himself has). In this way, noble generosity confirms the worthiness (and class) of both the giver and recipient. There is also a disconnect between Saladin's appreciation of the generosity and the reminder that he and Torello are still on opposing sides of a coming war: the rules of generosity, evidently, can interrupt but not overrule political and religious conflicts.

As the Crusade begins, Torello, moved but undeterred by Adalieta's tears and entreaties, prepares to leave. His only request is that, if he dies, she will not remarry sooner than one year plus a month and a day from his departure. Adalieta protests that she will be faithful to him, even in his death, and while he doesn't doubt her words, he knows that her family will eventually force her to remarry. In that case, she promises to honor his instructions, and she gives him one of her rings as a **gift** when she bids him farewell.

Adalieta and Torello show what the "happily ever after" of Day V's fortunate lovers might look like: well matched in nobility of spirit and generosity, they are also devoted to each other as spouses. Yet, Adalieta's position without her husband is precarious, and Torello fully expects that if he dies, she will be forced to remarry by her family. The gifts she gives serve as a reminder of the promise that Adalieta has made, and a reminder to Torello of the worthy wife he's leaving behind.


Torello travels to Acre, where the Crusader army falls prey to a plague. Because so many die, Saladin easily surrounds and captures the survivors. Torello, sent to Alexandria as a prisoner, is assigned to train hawks. He excels at his task, so Saladin frees him and appoints him falconer. Neither man recognizes the other. Torello, homesick, tries to escape; he also tries to send word of his imprisonment by giving a letter addressed to his uncle, the Abbot of San Pietro, to a Genoese emissary.

Torello's involvement in the Crusades is disastrous, although he luckily escapes the plague. Thus, fortune has provided Saladin the opportunity to repay the hospitality he earlier received from his Italian host. Just as Torello recognized Saladin's worth through his disguise, so too does Saladin recognize the nobility of his prisoner (even if he doesn't yet recognize Torello). Torello's personal accomplishment of gentlemanly skills like falconry earns him better treatment from his captors.

One day, Saladin notices the way Torello smiles and recognizes his old host. Taking him to the royal wardrobe, he asks Torello if he recognizes anything, and Torello picks out the robes and jackets his wife gave to his onetime guests. When he realizes that this was Saladin himself, he is both delighted to have entertained such a guest and ashamed for his frugality. Saladin welcomes him warmly, dresses him in regal robes, and presents him to the Alexandrian nobility.

There is no way that the style with which Torello hosted Saladin could be described as "frugal," and the tale earlier made a point of describing Saladin's appreciation of such a royal welcome, even though he was disguised as a merchant. Torello's fears are thus a humble-brag that serve to draw attention to actions he claims to downplay. But this moment also shows the individualistic nature of generosity, at least as it is described in Day 10's tales: Torello's previous generosity towards Saladin ensures that he is well treated now, but it does nothing to help the other prisoners of war languishing in the sultan's power.

Meanwhile, Adalieta believes that Torello has died, because on the day he was captured, another knight named Torello was buried, and camp gossip conflated the two men. After several months of mourning, her family begins to pressure her to remarry. They eventually wear her down (despite her tears), although she insists on waiting the agreed-upon period from Torello's departure. About a week before it runs out, in Alexandria, Torello sees the man to whom he'd entrusted his letter. Learning that the voyage ended in disaster, he realizes that no one has heard from him in over a year. He falls into a deep despair on the suspicion that Adalieta must be about to remarry. When Saladin discovers the reason for this distress, he offers to get him home before the wedding.

True to Torello's prediction, Adalieta doesn't find autonomy in widowhood but is instead pressured by her family to remarry. However, she demonstrates both her love and her strength of will by refusing to do so until she's fulfilled her promise to her husband to wait for a year. Despite her faithfulness, misfortune continues to plague Torello and threaten their reunion, as a shipwreck has prevented his letter from reaching home. This sets the stage for Saladin's ultimate act of generosity—one which neither Torello nor anyone else can match, since it involves magic.

In one night, Saladin's magician can send Torello, sleeping peacefully in a bed, back to Pavia. Although he understands Torello's desire to return to Adalieta, Saladin mourns the loss of a friend with whom he would have shared his very kingdom. After dressing Torello in "Saracen"-style clothes and preparing a splendid bed—decorated with pearls and jewels in the opulent Eastern style—he tearfully says goodbye and begs Torello to come back to Alexandria if he ever can. Torello, also in tears, replies that he won't ever forget Saladin's "courteous deeds and sterling worth." The magician gives Torello a sleeping potion and Saladin fills the bed with **gifts** of jewels, doubloons, and treasure.

"Saracen" is the medieval word for a person from Syria or the Arabian Peninsula, or, more broadly, a Muslim. By dressing Torello in Saracen-style clothing and placing him in a bed so opulently and expensively decorated that it strains belief, Saladin effectively makes it impossible for anyone to overtake him in generosity. Again, the friendship between the two men, built on their shared sense of nobility and personal worth, contrasts with the enmity between their peoples in the Crusade. Thus, personal worth is stronger than even political or religious alliances.

Torello and his bed are deposited magically in the church of San Pietro just before matins. Its sudden appearance surprises the sexton, who rushes to fetch the Abbot of San Pietro. As Torello stirs and wakes up, they are all frightened, especially when Torello calls his uncle by name—they think he's a ghost. Eventually, the Abbot finds the courage to approach the bed, where he finds his living nephew. He tells Torello that, since everyone believes he's dead, Adalieta's wedding is happening this very day.

Notably, it's only in the tales of the final day where magic isn't treated with suspicion in the tales. The suspension of some of the tales' normal "rules" is underwritten by the competition among members of the brigata *to outdo each other's stories, and sometimes (as here and in X, 5), magic is the only way to show more generosity than the previous tale. Fortunately, Torello has arrived just in time to save his wife from her forced second marriage.*


After securing the treasure, Torello asks the Abbot of San Pietro to take him to the wedding feast as a guest so that he can observe Adalieta's feelings. There, disguised in his eastern clothing, Torello sits across from her and observes her "troubled look." He tells a servant that it's customary in his country for the bride to welcome an honored guest like himself by sending him her own wine cup. The guest drinks what he wants, then sends it back with compliments, and she drinks the rest. With "her wonted tact and courtesy," Adalieta sends her cup to him. He drinks almost all the wine and secretly drops in her ring. On seeing it in the cup, Adalieta recognizes the guest as Torello.

The wedding feast, unlike a modern-day reception, would have taken place prior to the celebration of the marriage. Because both celebration and consummation are necessary to make a marriage legally binding in the Middle Ages, Adalieta isn't yet tied to her new husband. The clothing that Saladin gave Torello makes a convenient costume, allowing him to conceal his identity and test Adalieta's fidelity in his absence. Despite signs that she's distressed instead of happy on her wedding day, Adalieta's noble spirit won't allow her to be rude to a guest.

Adalieta stands up so quickly she overturns the table, runs across the room pell-mell, flings herself on Torello and clings to him for dear life. Torello, promising to give her as many embraces as she wants later, convinces her to disentangle herself, and then narrates the story of his captivity and return. The embarrassed bridegroom gallantly relinquishes his claim on Adalieta. After celebrating, Torello sends news of his safe return to Saladin, and he lives happily with his lady for many more years.

Adalieta proves herself to be a faithful lover in this moment; her joy at the reappearance of Torello dispels any doubt that she might have entered her second marriage willingly. It's also a nice reversal that on a day where men trade women between themselves, the second-to-last tale features a husband being miraculously returned to his faithful wife.

DAY 10: TENTH TALE

Dioneo, noting that Adalieta's almost-second husband wouldn't agree with the company's praise of Torello, prepares to finish the day's storytelling with a marquis whose actions were remarkably cruel, not generous.

Dioneo doesn't just get the last tale of the day, but he gets to tell the last tale of the collection. And in his usual fashion, he deviates from the day's theme. Instead of a tale of great generosity, he proposes a tale of great cruelty. Rather than balancing out the excessive generosity in the previous tales, his tale of excessive cruelty throws them into even greater relief.

In Saluzzo, Marquis Gualtieri is a childless bachelor. His citizens, concerned by his lack of heirs, offer to find him a noble wife who will make him happy. Gualtieri has always been disinclined to marry, because it's so hard to find a wife who will adapt to a man's way of life. His citizens can't just investigate a woman's heart well enough to know if she would make him happy or not. He agrees to marry but insists on choosing the woman. His citizens will either love her or learn how badly they've erred in "urg[ing him] to marry against [his] will."

Gualtieri approaches marriage as his personal prerogative, but his subjects worry that he won't have an heir to lead them because, for the ruling class, personal and political priorities intersect. Gualtieri's response to his citizens' reasonable request, however, is to antagonize them by picking a questionable wife. He has avoided marriage because it's hard to find an obedient woman, and his subjects' uppity demands mirror the things he fears in a wife. His attitude towards them foreshadows the adversarial and demeaning role he will assume in his marriage.

Gualtieri already has his eye on a very beautiful but very poor girl in the local village. After making arrangements with her father, he gathers his friends and citizens and says that he's ready to marry a local "girl after [his] own heart" in order to gratify their wishes. While they make wedding preparations, he orders rich robes, rings, ornamental belts, crowns, and everything else his bride could need. On the appointed day, Gualtieri takes his company to the village, where they find Griselda returning from the well. In the presence of her father, Giannùcole, Griselda promises to always try to please and obey Gualtieri and to never be upset by anything he says or does.

What Gualtieri wants in a wife, evidently, is complete obedience. While law and custom in the Middle Ages already decreed that a husband was placed in authority over his wife, Gualtieri's choice of a poor girl whom he enriches with gifts and elevates to a higher rung on the social ladder emphasizes his superiority and her inferior position. Gualtieri interrogates Griselda in her father's presence because she is under her father's authority until her marriage; like other women in the tales, she is never truly a free agent.

Gualtieri leads Griselda outside, where he has her stripped naked in front of everyone. Dressing her in rich robes and placing a crown on her disheveled hair, he marries her immediately, then takes her home, where their wedding is celebrated as grandly as if she were a French princess. In her marriage, Griselda blooms: a graceful and noble manner add to her natural beauty, and no one would guess that she came from a humble background. She so perfectly obeys and complies with Gualtieri that he considers himself the happiest man on earth. People who thought the marriage ill-advised change their minds. And in due time, Griselda gives birth to a daughter.

In case there were any doubts about exactly what Griselda owes Gualtieri (or how much authority he expects to wield over her), he has her stripped naked in front of the assembled crowd. This allows him to dress her in the expensive clothes he commissioned, visually representing her elevation in class from poor peasant to the aristocracy. It also offers her an early chance to show her obedience, since she accepts her humiliating exposure without comment. But if Gualtieri has chosen a poor woman, he hasn't chosen an ignoble one, and Griselda quickly shows herself to be in possession of the fine manners and grace that usually typify members of the aristocracy.


After the birth of their daughter, a "strange desire to test Griselda's patience" seizes Gualtieri. At first, he subjects her to extensive verbal abuse, claiming that his citizens are unhappy about his lowly wife and daughter. Griselda answers that she understands her inferiority and wants him to do what's best for himself and his reputation; she will acquiesce to his wishes. Her humble attitude pleases Gualtieri, but he continues to suggest that his subjects dislike the baby. When he sends a servant to take the baby away, Griselda understands that he wants it murdered. Still, she hands her over her daughter "without any trace of emotion" even though "she felt that her heart was about to break." The only thing she asks for is a proper burial, and only if Gualtieri will allow it. Her obedience amazes Gualtieri, who sends the baby to Bologna to be raised by his relative.

Even though he insisted on picking a humbly born woman for his wife (possibly to spite his subjects for demanding that he marry and produce an heir), Griselda's ancestry allows Gualtieri to center much of his abuse around class issues. While her character and temperament are sufficiently noble, without her husband's protection, she is still vulnerable to being treated as a low-class person. Gualtieri's desire to test Griselda is never explained, especially since she doesn't seem to have given him any reason to doubt her total obedience. Thus, when Gualtieri pushes things as far as pretending to murder their child, the tale takes pains to describe her grief so that readers won't think that she is insufficiently maternal or loving. Griselda, it is clear, feels pain and suffering, but through extreme self-control, she ignores her instincts in order to obey as she promised to do.


Griselda becomes pregnant again and gives birth to a boy. Again, despite his pleasure, Gualtieri cannot stop abusing her. Now, he claims, the people grumble that Giannùcole's grandson will one day rule them. To avoid being deposed, Gualtieri says he will have to dispose of this child, too, and then marry someone else. Griselda tells him to "look to [his] own comfort" and not worry about her since "nothing brings [her] pleasure unless it pleases [him]." When he has their son taken away (and secretly sends him to Bologna), Griselda is as patient as before. Her judicious actions stun Gualtieri, who would think her heartless if he didn't know how much she loved her children. Although his subjects think him cruel and heartless, Griselda never complains about him or his wishes.

Gualtieri's testing of Griselda is excessive, which highlights her self-possession and the strict moderation of her responses—she betrays no intense emotions at all, no matter what she feels. When he took their daughter away, Gualtieri sent a servant to do his dirty work; this time he confronts Griselda with his plan in person. Nevertheless, she refuses to show emotion and demonstrates nothing short of perfect obedience. For the second time, the tale must explain that Griselda does, indeed, have a heart and loves her children. Yet, even as it tries to assure readers that Griselda isn't a heartless monster, it doesn't worry about explaining why Gualtieri cruelly continues to test her: his privilege as the man and the husband cannot be questioned.

Many years later, Gualtieri decides "to put Griselda's patience to the final test." Telling everyone that his marriage was a youthful error, he pretends to ask the pope for dispensation to divorce her and remarry. While his men chide him, Griselda is "secretly filled with despair," but she prepares to "endure this final blow as stoically as she had borne **fortune**'s earlier assaults." After leading everyone to believe he's received dispensation, Gualtieri publicly renounces Griselda, since his ancestors were "great noblemen" and hers were "peasants." She will return to her father's house with her dowry and he will marry someone "far better suited."

Divorcing Griselda will deprive her of her social status (dependent on Gualtieri's wealth and her legitimate marriage) and her remaining dignity—the only "dowry" she brought to the marriage was her own, completely naked body. Gualtieri's subjects and advisors chide him, betraying the horror that the audience is likely to be feeling at this point, but also displaying the disobedience he finds so utterly distasteful. In contrast, although Griselda isn't happy about the turn of events, she obeys without complaint. She even refuses to place the blame on Gualtieri, choosing to place it on impersonal fortune instead. And yet again, although she has proven herself to have a noble spirit in addition to fulfilling Gualtieri's expectations of total obedience, Gualtieri excuses his actions based on class, suggesting that personal worth (at least for women) is less powerful than wealth and status.


With superhuman effort, Griselda holds back her tears as she tells Gualtieri how aware she is that her wealth and status were **gifts** from him. She cherishes them, but since she does not own them, she will return them "with good grace." Remembering how he took her from her father's house "naked as on the day [she] was born," she offers to return her dowry (just herself), if he thinks it's appropriate for his subjects to see the body that bore his children. But she asks for a shift to cover herself, in exchange for the virginity she gave him and which he cannot return. Restraining his own tears and ignoring his subjects' request to give his wife of thirteen years a dress, Gualtieri holds firm and offers her a shift. She leaves his house a pauper.

Griselda valiantly holds back her emotions to perform the perfect obedience she promised Gualtieri. The closest she comes to defiance is her request to be returned to her father's house clothed. But even in this, she avoids direct noncompliance by appealing to Gualtieri's honor, and reminding him that she didn't come to the marriage with nothing: because she has given him her obedience and her virginity, which cannot be recovered, it's not possible for him to reset the scale of obligation between them to zero.

Griselda returns to Giannùcole, puts on peasant clothes, and "bravely endur[es] the cruel assault of hostile **fortune**." Gualtieri gives the impression he's betrothed to a nobleman's daughter, and as the wedding preparations commence, asks Griselda to come back and host his second wedding, since she alone understands perfectly how he likes things. Unable to lay aside her love as easily as her wealth and status, this request strikes Griselda to the quick. But she obeys. In coarse clothing, as if she were a "petty serving wench," Griselda prepares for her replacement's wedding.

Even after Griselda believes herself to have been divorced, she continues to obey Gualtieri as she did when he was her husband. And the tale's insistence that she still loves Gualtieri even after years of emotional abuse suggests the limits of The Decameron*'s understanding of women's interior lives and desires. Although she is the heroine of this story and Gualtieri is the villain, even her thoughts are forced to conform with his desires and worldview. And, although she was allowed to leave Gualtieri's home clothed, she hasn't escaped further indignities: she's made to return to the home where she was formerly mistress as a lowly servant, suggesting the general impermeability of class boundaries.*

Meanwhile, Gualtieri retrieves his children (now twelve and six years old) from Bologna as if the girl is his fiancée. When the girl arrives, Griselda graciously welcomes her, despite the pleas of Gualtieri's subjects that Griselda be excused from this duty. Gualtieri, convinced that nothing will shake Griselda's obedient demeanor (even though he knows she has feelings), tries to provoke the anger he thinks must be simmering inside her. He asks what she thinks about his new bride. Griselda thinks well of her and hopes she will make Gualtieri happy. But she asks that he treat her more kindly, since her tender age and refined upbringing can't have prepared her to endure hardship as gracefully as Griselda herself.

Gualtieri has ample evidence of Griselda's obedience in practice, since she has never complained or contradicted his wishes, no matter how horrific they have been. Yet, his final test suggests that even her obedience in act would be insufficient to please him if he discovered insubordination in her spirit, so he tries to provoke her. Showing superhuman (or possibly inhuman) patience and selflessness, Griselda wishes Gualtieri and his bride well. Gualtieri (and the tale) take the desire for feminine obedience (laid out in detail in IX, 7 and IX, 9) and push it to its extreme—although it's unclear to what degree Griselda's patience is a satire of gendered expectations of wives.

When he realizes that Griselda truly believes his ruse and still betrays no sign of resentment, Gualtieri tells her that she is about to reap the reward of her patience. He says that he tested her to show her how to be a good wife, to teach his subjects how to choose and keep their wives, and to ensure that he himself would live with his wife peacefully and quietly forever. Her refusal to oppose his wishes, no matter what, has persuaded him that she can provide this peace and happiness. So, in an instant, he will restore what he took: their daughter, their son, and her husband who "loves [her] above all else."

In revealing the truth of his behavior to Griselda—admitting that he was testing her—Gualtieri offers several rationales for his inhumane behavior. Yet, they are questionable. Griselda didn't need to be taught obedience since she demonstrated it from the moment she met Gualtieri. Some of the harshest tests, such as taking the children away, happened outside of his subjects' view, and anyway, their general sympathy towards Griselda suggests that they wouldn't be eager to adopt Gualtieri's methods of choosing and testing wives. The only explanation that makes sense is the last: that he subjected Griselda to intense emotional manipulation and abuse to settle his own fears that his wife would be disobedient or opinionated. The lesson seems to imply not that obedient wives will be rewarded, but that even obedient wives are vulnerable to the whims of their husbands.

Gualtieri embraces and kisses Griselda, who is weeping for joy, and then they embrace the children. Gualtieri unravels the mystery to everyone. In an echo of her wedding, the ladies take Griselda to a room where they undress her and clothe her in a fine dress, even though she acted as graciously as their mistress in rags as in robes. Returning to the hall, Griselda celebrates with the guests, who condemn Gualtieri's "harsh and intolerable" tests, although they acknowledge his wisdom. Still, the obedient Griselda is considered "the wisest of all." Gualtieri also welcomes Giannùcole as an honored father-in-law. Gualtieri and Griselda live out their lives contentedly, and he never fails to honor her to the best of his ability.

Since Griselda, after 13 years of marriage to Gualtieri, has finally proven herself to be the kind of wife he wants, he embraces her and restores her to her position. And while the general excess of Gualtieri's tests is condemned by his subjects and guests, the tale still implies that his concerns over wifely obedience were well founded and that his tests were wrong in degree, not necessarily in intent.

There's nothing else for Dioneo to say, except that sometimes "celestial spirits" inhabit the poor, while the most royal men might make better swineherds than rulers. He also acknowledges that no one but Griselda could have endured these "cruel and unheard of trials" so cheerfully. And it would have served Gualtieri right to have married a wife who, after being turned out in her shift, found someone else to "shake her skin-coat for her."

The tale ends with Griselda being rewarded for her patience and obedience, yet the moral the brigata*—or* The Decameron*'s readers—should take from this tale is unclear. Dioneo offers a class-based possibility: Griselda's tale shows that wealth and status don't guarantee nobility. Griselda made an excellent aristocrat despite her humble birth, while the wealthy and powerful Gualtieri used his position to terrorize his subjects and his wife. Yet, the fact remains that Gualtieri's expectations and fears were deeply steeped in misogynistic stereotypes about women, and his tests were founded on gendered expectations that women were to be ruled by their husbands. Dioneo gestures towards the discomfort in the tale when he suggests that Griselda's superhuman patience can exist only in a story rather than in reality, where a scorned woman would be more likely to just find a better man.*

DAY 10: CONCLUSION

The company discusses Dioneo's tale until sunset. Panfilo, noting that wisdom includes remembering the past, understanding the present, and thinking about the future, asks what they should do next. They have achieved their goals in leaving Florence two weeks ago, having relaxed, stayed healthy, and had a break from the plague's anguish. And they've done this with decorum: some of the tales have been racy, the food and wine have been plentiful, and they've danced (all things that could encourage "unseemly behavior" in those with weak character); everyone has behaved honorably. He recommends they return to Florence to avoid discord, gossip, or uninvited guests. But if they want to stay, he will crown the next day's sovereign. After some debate, the company unanimously decides that Panfilo's recommendation is "sensible and just," and plans are made to depart in the morning.

The difficulty modern readers have understanding how to interpret Dioneo's tale about Griselda seems to be mirrored in the brigata*, which discusses it at length. However, as the day draws to an end, they turn their attention back towards the real world. Panfilo's argument is based in the idea that everything should be done in moderation—the virtue which the* brigata *exemplifies above all else. Thus far, they have modeled the possibility of a balanced society, but in a nod towards the chaos inherent in the real world (and not the gardens of the country estates around Florence), Panfilo suggests that their artificially perfect order can't be maintained permanently. Returning to the city—resigning themselves to the chaos and upheaval of the world after their diverting vacation—suggests that turning away from chaos and pain becomes excessive itself, at a certain point.*

After dinner, they sing and dance, and Fiammetta offers a song about love and jealousy. The joy of someone who could love without feeling jealousy would be complete. But since the song's persona has a wise, brave, and well-spoken lover, and other women can doubtless see these charms, she worries that one of them will try to steal his heart, just as he has stolen hers. She frets that men are vulnerable to feminine wiles, and the possibility of losing his love makes her "heartsick." Finally, she warns anyone who might try to steal him that she will make the thief weep bitterly for her crime.

Fiammetta's final song closes out the tales on the theme of love. But this love is mixed with jealousy, paralleling the way that the moderation and order represented by the brigata *is tempered by the chaos and disorder inherent in human life. Having the perfect lover isn't sufficient to guarantee happiness because anything once possessed can be lost.*


Dioneo quips that if Fiammetta would name her lover, she'd prevent anyone taking him by accident. At midnight, the company retires to bed, and at the crack of dawn they return to Florence. The ladies go first to Santa Maria Novella and then to their homes, while the men go off in search of "other diversions."

When the brigata *returns to Florence, the women go home, and the men go find other things to do. This parallels the difference in the genders outlined by Boccaccio in his justification for the project:* The Decameron *is dedicated to women who need diversion since they can't go out and do things to distract themselves from their pain when they're feeling unrequited love.*

AUTHOR'S EPILOGUE

Boccaccio addresses the "noble young ladies" for whom he labored to write this book. With God's help, he believes that he's met his goal, and the time has come for him to rest his "pen and weary hand." But before signing off, he will answer "certain trifling objections" that might be in his readers' minds.

Boccaccio's justifications and rebuttals for his work in the Epilogue parallel those he offered in the Introduction to Day 4.


First, some might say that Boccaccio has made the company's ladies hear and say less-than-virtuous things. However, he claims, nothing told in polite language can be improper. And, even if some stories were inappropriate, redacting them would have changed their character. But, back to language, he says that plain words like "hole, and rod, and mortar, and pestle, and crumpet, and stuffing" are used every day without anyone getting upset. Artists show saints' swords and lances in action, and Christ is pierced by one nail—or two!—when he's depicted on the cross. Nor were the stories told in a church, which would require chastity and purity (although there's a lot of scandal in church chronicles, too!), or in a school. They were told by respectable and level-headed young people in **gardens**, places designed for pleasure.

Boccaccio's basic argument is that his tales, meant to entertain as well as teach, haven't exceeded the bounds of propriety. However, this depends on how one defines propriety, and so he accordingly takes the narrowest definition possible. He explores a string of double entendres to claim that all the words he's used in the book are themselves polite and proper—never mind that they can all be used to suggest various impolite actions and unmentionable body parts. Boccaccio has a tongue-in-cheek attitude that borders on blasphemous when he describes the way Christ is pierced by nails in artwork. He references a shift in depictions of the crucified Christ that happened in the 13th century from one nail in each foot to both feet being pierced by one nail. More importantly, however, a dirty mind could read the nails as symbolic in their penis-like shape, and Boccaccio's comments here are clearly meant to suggest such a blasphemous idea to his readers. As in the example of Christ's nails, the meaning of the polite words he claims to have scrupulously used has always been clear from their context. Finally, Boccaccio invokes the gardens in which the tales were told. Throughout The Decameron *(as in medieval literature generally), gardens are not just places where love is at home, but they are outside of the normal boundaries of society. They are thus fitting settings for tales that flirt with excess (although they always rebalance themselves) and push on the boundaries of social, religious, and political boundaries.*

The help or harm of stories, like everything else in the world, depends on the context. Wine is good for the healthy but harmful to the feverish; fire provides warmth, but sometimes destroys homes or cities. Corrupt minds will corrupt pure words, but unseemly language cannot contaminate a well-ordered mind. If even the Bible can be wrongly interpreted, anyone who wants to get "evil counsel" from Boccaccio's tales will succeed—but only by twisting and distorting them. On the other hand, if read by the proper audience, they will render no evil. And anyway, the stories can't force themselves on anyone; whoever reads them reads at his or her own risk.

Boccaccio's argument leans on the idea of balance and excess. He claims that almost nothing is good or bad in itself. A warm hearth is differentiated from a blazing housefire by the amount of the fire, not by some essential difference in the flames themselves. By implication, he claims that his tales are essentially balanced, and that any imbalance lies in the eyes of the beholder. Thus he places responsibility for finding good or bad advice in the tales on the reader's choices.

Boccaccio answers those who think he should have omitted some of the stories with the conceit that he merely transcribed the company's tales as they were told. And if they have imperfections, so does everything else, since no one but God can make things perfectly. Whenever many things are collected, their quality will vary, and his stories aren't an exception. The reader can read what they like and skip the rest. Likewise, anyone who thinks tales are too long shouldn't be wasting time reading tales at all. The collection was specifically designed for ladies with time on their hands; brevity may be good for students but not noble ladies.

Boccaccio also maintains the fiction that these aren't his stories but rather the tales told by the members of the brigata *(even though he never places himself in the group or explains how he was able to overhear them). But this serves to further distance him from any criticism, since it in effect claims that the tales aren't really his. Designing the work for ladies with leisure time has both gender and class implications: as he mentioned in the Prologue, women suffer more from the pain of unrequited love because they don't have the ability to go out and engage in distracting activities. And the women with leisure to read a book like* The Decameron*—Boccaccio's target audience—are aristocratic ladies who don't need to earn their own living.*

Some people might think the tales too quippy and humorous. Maybe a man of "weight and gravity" should attend to more serious matters, but Boccaccio has no gravity. And when even priests add quips and jokes to their sermons, there doesn't seem to be any harm in humorous stories. Speaking of the clergy, rather than having an "evil and venomous tongue," Boccaccio notes that he's only told "the truth about friars," those decent fellows who forsake lives of "discomfort," grind when the mill-pond is full, and maybe smell a bit like billy-goats.

As at the beginning of Day 4, Boccaccio disregards critics who accuse him of frivolity. Writing in Italian (instead of in Latin) and including humorous stories as well as serious ones are both political statements about the power and importance of entertainment that is accessible to a broader audience (even though Boccaccio still clearly imagines that aristocratic ladies are his primary readers). And he offers a defense of his anticlerical satire, even though much of it was standard medieval fare.


Granting that things in this world are unstable and liable to change, Boccaccio affirms that he was recently told by a lady that he had the "finest and sweetest tongue in the world," and since he was almost done with the tales at that point, he concludes that he must have written them quite well indeed. So, he will take her opinion and ignore those of people who want to spite him. Leaving each reader to believe about his skill what they please, Boccaccio offers humble thanks to God for the strength to complete his task and commends his readers to God.

In the final lines of The Decameron, *Boccaccio can't help but sneak in one final double entendre: when his neighbor lady compliments his sweet tongue, it's almost certainly meant in a sexual context, but he also presents her words as confirmation that he has a special gift for telling stories (in other words, a golden tongue or a gift for language). With such praise, Boccaccio can blithely ignore any of his critics.*

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Duprey, Annalese. "*The Decameron*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 29 Jul 2022. Web. 1 Aug 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Duprey, Annalese. "*The Decameron*." LitCharts LLC, July 29, 2022. Retrieved August 1, 2022. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-decameron.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Decameron* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. Penguin. 2003.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Boccaccio, Giovanni. The Decameron. London: Penguin. 2003.