

STUDI SUL BOCCACCIO

FONDATI E DIRETTI DA VITTORE BRANCA
CONDIRETTORI: GIORGIO PADOAN e CARLO DELCORNO

Volume ventunesimo



*Edita sotto gli auspici
dell'Ente Nazionale Giovanni Boccaccio*

LE LETTERE - FIRENZE 1993

«LE PAROLE SON FEMMINE E I FATTI SONO MASCHI»:
TOWARD A SEXUAL POETICS OF THE *DECAMERON*
(*DECAMERON* II 10)

I will begin with a proverb, one which the *Dizionario comparato di proverbi e modi proverbiali* gives in Latin, French, Spanish, German, and English, as well as Italian¹. It is «Le parole son femmine e i fatti son maschi» (or, in Florio's 1598 translation from the Italian, «Wordes they are women, and deeds they are men»), and I will be using it as a rubric and point of departure for conceptualizing a pervasive Decameronian thematic regarding the relation of words to deeds and of both to gender. Indeed, the proverb is particularly apt for investigating such concerns since it addresses issues of gender both biologically and, at least in Italian, where words have genders, also grammatically, suggesting that the grammatical genders of *parola* and *fatto* are rooted in nature, in a kind of universal natural gendering that encompasses the sexes and their not asexual offspring, words. This intersection of the grammatical/poetical with the biological/sexual is especially suggestive with regard to an author whose commitment to linking the two is such that he reminds us that «Le Muse son donne» (IV Intr., 35) in a programmatic assertion of what I am calling his sexual poetics². «Le parole son femmine e i fatti son maschi» succinctly captures Boccaccio's sexual poetics by suggesting both a mutual exclusion between the sexes and their proper spheres, and an inevitable contamination between these same spheres, since *fatti* are masculine, but the word «fatti» is a *parola*, and thus feminine. In other words, the boundary that the proverb at first glance so emphatically delineates, between

¹ *Dizionario comparato di proverbi e modi proverbiali*, ed. Augusto Arthaber, Milano, Hoepli, 1972, p. 503.

² *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, Torino, Einaudi, 1980.

women and words on the one hand and men and deeds on the other, is much less rigid than it first appears. The proverb's ambiguity makes it all the more applicable to Boccaccio, who both invokes two separate and gendered domains, one connoted by words and one by deeds, and then effects a conflation that culminates in the ladies' return from the *Valle delle donne*, when Dioneo asks — using precisely the terms of the proverb — «cominciate voi prima a far de' fatti che a dir delle parole?» (VI Concl., 34).

The idea that the world of deeds belongs to men and the world of words to women is encountered immediately, in the *Decameron's* Proem. The pains of love are alleviated for men, who have access to a host of distracting activities, *fatti*: «per ciò che a loro, volendo essi, non manca l'andare a torno, udire e veder molte cose, uccellare, cacciare, pescare, cavalcare, giocare o mercatare» (Proemio, 12). Women who are in love have no such resources, and so Boccaccio offers them his *novelle*, his *parole*; men have deeds, women have words. And in fact Boccaccio's verbal offerings to the ladies — «cento novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie che dire le vogliamo» (Proemio, 13) — are listed in a series of nouns (*parole*, so to speak) that precisely parallels the previous listing of masculine pursuits in a series of verbs (*fatti*, so to speak): «l'andare a torno, udire e veder molte cose, uccellare, cacciare, pescare, cavalcare, giocare o mercatare».

Dioneo's resonant query, «cominciate voi prima a far de' fatti che a dir delle parole?», is found in the Conclusion to Day VI, more elaborate than most of the *Conclusioni* to the *Decameron's* *Giornate*. Once Dioneo has finished recounting the story of Frate Cipolla, Elissa puts the crown on his head, announcing that it is time for him to experience the burden of having ladies to govern and guide: «che carico sia l'aver donne a reggere e guidare» (VI Concl., 2). This remark grows in interest when we consider that the ladies are about to go, alone and unescorted, to a place that is identified only as theirs, «La Valle delle donne» (18), a place where presumably women are able to govern and guide themselves, where presumably no one would propose, as Filomena had at the outset of their journey, that women are «mobili, riottose, sospettose, pusillanime e paurose» (I Intr., 75), and that therefore they had better not leave Florence «senza la provedenza d'alcuno uomo» (74) or without the benefit of «alcuna altra guida... che la nostra» (75). Dioneo replies with one of

those sexual overtures that occur in words but never in deeds in the frame-story, remarking that if the ladies were to obey him as a real king should be obeyed he would procure for them that enjoyment without which no entertainment is ever completely happy: «io vi farei goder di quello senza il che per certo niuna festa compiutamente è lieta» (VI Concl., 3). But it is best to proceed from words that can only remain words («Ma lasciamo star queste parole» [3]) to the *novelle*, the words that are the «deeds» of this text, and so he broaches the topic of his Day — the *beffe* that women have played on their husbands — noting that he would have been hard pressed to come up with a theme were it not for the morning's outbreak of the servant Licisca. With this Dioneo does something new: he is the first ruler to propose a topic suggested someone else³. To heighten the anomaly, the person to whom he appeals as *auctoritas* for his topic is not a social equal but that intrusive member of the *volgo* who spoke so vulgarly of the sexual proclivities of her neighbors, the very Licisca who, in an event defined in the Introduction to Day VI as «cosa che ancora adivenuta non v'era» (4), had burst into the mannered and decorous world of the *cornice* — the world of *parole* — with two rude and indecorous *fatti*: first, that brides are rarely virgins and second that, once wed, women play all manner of tricks on their husbands⁴.

Dioneo discards the former of these two *fatti* as «opera fanciullesca» (VI Concl., 6) and puts the latter before the ladies as the topic for the following Day, at which point another anomaly occurs: for the first time some of the ladies object to the stated theme and ask that it be changed. Dioneo is therefore forced to defend himself (much as Boccaccio had done in the Introduction to Day IV), and his defense takes the form of a meditation on the dialectic between words and deeds, *ragionare* versus *operare*. He argues that the

³ Lauretta in Day VIII chooses a topic that explicitly plays off Dioneo's topic for Day VII: «Dioneo volle ieri che oggi si ragionasse delle beffe che le donne fanno a' mariti; e, se non fosse che io non voglio mostrare d'essere di schiatta di can botolo che incontanente si vuol vendicare, io direi che domane si dovesse ragionare delle beffe che gli uomini fanno alle lor mogli» (VII Concl., 3).

⁴ For the importance of this occurrence within the economy of the frame narrative, see TEODOLINDA BAROLINI, *The Wheel of the Decameron*, «Romance Philology», XXXVI, 1983, pp. 521-539.

desperate circumstances brought about by the plague have suspended normal mores, so that, as long as men and women refrain from «operar disonestamente, ogni ragionare è conceduto» (8). Moreover, whatever they may have said during their sojourn outside of the city, the *brigata* has not stained itself with any dishonorable action («non mi pare che in atto alcuno si sia maculata» [11]); the ladies of the *brigata* are widely known for an *onestà* that could not be swayed by the fear of death, let alone by «ragionamenti sollazzevoli» (12). In fact, says Dioneo, giving an extra twist to the logic whereby one can speak of what one cannot do, if the ladies were to refrain from speaking of such «ciance» (13) people would suspect that they harbored guilty consciences.

Dioneo's argument thus hinges on the notion that there is no limit to what the ladies can say — to the *parole* they can use — as long as they do not translate words into deeds, as long as they do not cross the bridge that separates the world of women from the world of men. To anticipate his later query, they can «dir delle parole» but not «far de' fatti». And yet, the *Decameron* does nothing if not effect the translation from words into deeds, from the sequestered world of women to the engaged world of men, and Dioneo is the chief instigator of this process. He defends the dangerous freedom of his topic by insisting that the liberty of which the ladies will speak will have no effect on their actions, and yet immediately after Dioneo has completed his self-defense and the ladies have accepted his topic, they act in a new way — with an unparalleled liberty and initiative. Going to the valley that is named for them alone, the ladies divest themselves of both clothes and social restraints, frolic in the water naked and unabashed; upon their return the connection between what they do and the stories they recount is underscored. Pampinea announces that, like the women of the forthcoming Day, they have deceived the men — «Oggi vi pure abbiam noi ingannati» (VI Concl., 33) — and Dioneo replies with the question «cominciate voi prima a far de' fatti che a dir delle parole?», which is to say «Have you begun to *do* the deceitful things that women do to men, the things we will recount in Day VII, before you have even recounted them?». In other words, have you «done a Day VII» before telling a Day VII? Licisca's intrusion and her insinuation into the *Decameron* of a *materia* that draws much of its rationale from the crucial if underap-

preciated Dionean story that precedes the Introduction to Day VI, namely V 10, a story to which we shall return, has brought about a contamination between the pure world of the frame and the less pure world, the stained or «maculato» world, of the *novelle*⁵. The *novelle* of Day VII — although made of words, *parole* — serve as vicarious *fatti* encouraging the *Decameron's* ladies to progress from *parole* to real *fatti* (and it is of course significant in this regard that these stories tell of *beffe* — deeds — rather than the verbal retorts of Day VI). Words can be liberating, words can lead to deeds, or, in the logic of our proverb, women can become men. For, according to our proverb, Dioneo's question can be construed: «Are you beginning to act like men rather than like women?».

This last reflection takes us back to our small quadrant in the *Decameron's* great map of human affairs, namely *novelle* II 9 and II 10. I link them because, as Dioneo makes clear in the opening of II 10, his story cannot be disjoined from its predecessor. If Bartolomea, the heroine of the first *novella* Dioneo narrates after being granted his special privilege in the Conclusion to Day I, is in many respects a woman who anticipates the women of Day VII, insisting on the right to sex as a fundamental right of life⁶, Zinevra is a woman who crosses the bridge from words to deeds, literally becoming a man in order to preserve her life and honor, «per salvamente di sé» in the language of the rubric of the Seventh Day. Zinevra, when the need arises, will effortlessly take on the attributes of maleness in a paragraph where she changes her clothes and her name while Boccaccio changes the gender of his participles, moving from one sentence's «Col quale *entrata* in parole» to the

⁵ The lewd suggestions that are occasionally proffered by a male member of the *brigata* constitute another intriguing contamination between the frame world and the world of the *novelle*. Significantly, these suggestions are expressed in metaphorical codes adopted from the *novelle*, as in Filostrato's remarks at the end of Day III: «Se mi fosse stato creduto, i lupi avrebbono alle pecore insegnato rimettere il diavolo in inferno non peggio che Rustico facesse a Alibech» (III Concl., 2). As we shall see, the metaphors function as literal «bridges» between *parola* and *fatto*, between the world of women and the world of men, between the world of the frame and the world of the *novelle*.

⁶ Emma Grimaldi reads II 10 as a subversive vindication of «l'eros, e l'eros femminile in particolare» and notes that the theme of the «malmaritata», first introduced with Bartolomea, will be fully considered in the stories of Day VII; see *Il privilegio di Dioneo: L'eccezione e la regola nel sistema Decameron*, Napoli, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1987, p. 41.

next sentence's «di miglior panni *rimesso* in arnese» (II 9, 43). Looking back, we realize that we are prepared for Zinevra's transformation by the terms of Bernabò's ill-fated praise of his wife: she is not only able to do anything «che a donna appartenesse, sì come di lavorare lavorii di seta e simili cose» (8), but she is also better able to «cavalcare un cavallo, tenere uno uccello, leggere e scrivere e fare una ragione che se un mercatante fosse» (10). This list of verbs — *fatti* — recalls the list of masculine pursuits in the Proem («l'andare a torno, udire e veder molte cose, uccellare, cacciare, pescare, cavalcare, giocare o mercatare»); we should note, moreover, that the list of Zinevra's male-coded accomplishments elaborates on the earlier list by specifying that the simple «mercatare» of the Proem includes an education in reading, writing and arithmetic: «leggere e scrivere e fare una ragione»⁷. Zinevra, unique among the *Decameron's* women in having such accomplishments, has already attained the ability to deal in *fatti* rather than *parole* and as a result is fully equipped to make the transition from woman to man.

Dioneo begins his story, II 10, with a stinging critique of the stupidity of Bernabò, «la bestialità di Bernabò» (3) as he puts it, in a phrase that anticipates the ultimate Dionean story and the «matta bestialità» (X 10, 3) of its anti-hero, Gualtieri. But Dioneo does not just react to the previous story; he essentially transforms it in an act of willful misprision that allows him to refocus the issues according to his own hermeneutical imperatives. We can better appreciate Dioneo's exegetical sleight of hand if we recall the key elements of II 9. A group of Italian merchants, «grandissimi mercatanti italiani» (II 9, 4), is sitting around in a Parisian inn one evening (we note the archetypal resonance of this setting for Boccaccio's own personal mythography) when the talk turns to the women they have left at home and the effects of physical separation on their marriages: aware of their own infidelities, the merchants agree that they could not expect anything less from their wives and come to the conclusion that «le donne lasciate da loro non volessero perder tempo» (7). Only one dissents, our friend Bernabò, who holds that his wife is so

⁷ There are interesting implications here of an autobiographical nature, since «leggere e scrivere» are Boccaccio's own occupations (we will have occasion to note, too, the Boccaccian resonance of the setting that opens II 9), as well as for the whole question of female education.

honest and chaste that she would never involve herself with another man, were he to be away from home ten years or indeed the rest of his life. In the company is a young merchant, Ambruogiuolo da Piagenza, who takes umbrage at Bernabò's claim, telling him that he has insufficiently considered the nature of things: «tu hai poco riguardato alla natura delle cose» (13). Given that men are the most perfect of mortal creatures and possessed of greater firmness of will than women, and given that men continually yield to their desires, it follows that women, who are «più mobili», will yield even more: «che spero tu che una donna, naturalmente mobile, possa fare a' prieghi, alle lusinghe, a' doni, a' mille altri modi che userà uno uom savio che l'ami» (16). Bernabò's wife, being a woman, and admittedly made of flesh and bones like other women («tu medesimo di' che la moglie tua è femina e ch'ella è di carne e d'ossa come son l'altre» [17]), is subject to the same irresistibile «naturali appetiti».

Ambruogiuolo's view of female inconstancy is not just condescending and unpleasant: he actively attempts to exploit this alleged weakness and when he encounters a woman who does not fit his model he tricks her husband into believing that she does, thus victimizing her despite her lack of frailty. The *novella* treats Ambruogiuolo's behaviour as criminal and metes out retribution: tied to a pole and smeared with honey, he is left to be devoured by insects, and the story concludes by noting that the deceiver ends up at the feet of the deceived, i.e. that Ambruogiuolo has gotten his comeuppance. But the lessons to be learned from Zinevra's story (which, we recall, is not her story according to the rubric, but Bernabò's) are not straightforward⁸. On the one hand, Zinevra, counters the notion that women are *mobili* in Ambruogiuolo's sense of the word, that is in the metaphorical sense of fickle, lacking in firmness of will and hence loyalty; thus, Boccaccio tells us that she is *ferma*, the opposite of *mobile*, having her look at Ambruogiuolo with a «fermo viso» (50) when she fears that he suspects her identity. It is significant that Zinevra saves herself and refutes the

⁸ It is worth keeping in mind that only male protagonists figure by name in the rubrics of II 9 and II 10: Bernabò and Ambruogiuolo are named, as are Riccardo (Ricciardo in the rubric) and Paganino. And yet Boccaccio's elaborations on the plots as outlined in the rubrics are such as to transform II 9 and II 10 into respectively Zinevra's story and Bartolomea's story.

charge of metaphorical *mobilità* by becoming literally *mobile*, that is by breaking out of the female confines of the Proem, where women are «racchiuse» (notice the negative connotations of this feminine antonym of «mobili», as compared to the positive connotations of the masculine «fermo»), and are denied the mobility of that list of male pursuits that begins precisely «l'andare a torno...». When she becomes a man, Zinevra takes on male mobility and travels about the world; the first thing she does as a man is to board a ship, whereupon she receives a man's name and identity: «Col quale entrata in parole, con lui s'acconciò per servidore e salissene sopra la nave faccendosi chiamare Sicuran da Finale» (43). On the other hand, Zinevra takes on male mobility in order to return to female immobility; she transforms herself into a man in order to be able to go back to being a woman, the loyal wife of the foolish and disloyal Bernabò.

This is the element of the story that provokes Dioneo; as we have already noted, he is interested in the «bestialità di Bernabò»⁹. But — and this is the exegetical sleight of hand to which I referred earlier — Dioneo completely alters the nature of Bernabò's stupidity. Within the context of II 9, Bernabò's stupidity consists in allowing himself to be deceived by Ambruogiuolo; he should not have allowed himself to be dissuaded from his original assessment of his wife, which is proved correct: Zinevra *is* chaste and loyal. Dioneo however rewrites II 9 in such a way that Ambruogiuolo rather than Zinevra is vindicated. Eliminating the unsavory aspects of Ambruogiuolo's discourse, Dioneo appropriates the sections that deal with women's «naturali appetiti». Further, while Filomena had never specified whether Bernabò slept with other women while away from Genova, Dioneo lumps Bernabò in with all the other unfaithful wandering husbands; he is incensed at the obtuseness, the «sciocchezza» (4), of those who believe that while they go about the world disporting themselves with one woman after another their wives remain at home inactive: «s'immaginan che le donne a casa rimase si tengan le mani a cintola, quasi noi non conosciamo,

⁹ Dioneo so desires to respond to Filomena's story and to illustrate Bernabò's stupidity that he alters his choice of *novella*: «una parte della novella della reina m'ha fatto mutar consiglio di dirne una, che all'animo m'era, a doverne un'altra dire: e questa è la bestialità di Bernabò...» (II 10, 3).

che tra esse nasciamo e cresciamo e stiamo, di che elle sien vaghe» (II 10, 3). Unlike Freud, Dioneo knows what women want, which is not to be left idly twiddling their thumbs, not to be rendered inactive or immobilized, and because he knows «di che elle sien vaghe», he considers Bernabò foolish for believing that a woman left at home alone will remain constant — or, better, immobile¹⁰.

So, Dioneo endorses Ambruogiuolo. He affirms categorically that a woman left at home alone will not be faithful. To make the point that Dioneo is endorsing Ambruogiuolo, Boccaccio has Dioneo echo the language used by that villain when he recounts his exploits to his erstwhile victim, the transvestite Zinevra. Bernabò's *sciocchezza* and *bestialità*, as well as the notion that one can know what all women do or want, were Ambruogiuolo's ideas before they were Dioneo's: «Ora risi io, per ciò che egli mi ricordò della *sciocchezza* di Bernabò, il qual fu di tanta follia, che mise cinquemilia fiorin d'oro contro a mille che io la sua donna non recherei a' miei piaceri: il che io feci e vinsi il pegno; e egli, che più tosto sé della sua *bestialità* punir dovea che lei d'aver fatto quello che *tutte le femine fanno*, da Parigi a Genova tornandosene, per quello che io abbia poi sentito, la fece uccidere» (II 9, 54). Dioneo is thus apparently aligned with the discredited and misogynist Ambruogiuolo. But Dioneo's reasoning is in fact completely different from Ambruogiuolo's: he does not arrive at female inconstancy by way of female inferiority; rather he seems to insist on women's right to sexuality as a way of instituting some parity between the sexes. Filomena tells a story of female constancy and female strength (this

¹⁰ In reading tracts on women, two overriding misogynist topoi stand out: women should be silent, and they should be kept occupied by means of the spindle (see, for instance, CONSTANCE JORDAN, *Renaissance Feminism: Literary Texts and Political Models*, Ithaca, Cornell U. Press, 1990). Putting these topoi into the context of Dioneo's comments, one could say that the spindle is the emblematic means for safeguarding a woman who is left home alone, almost an externalized chastity belt. It is significant in this regard that Boccaccio specifically excludes from his audience women who are content with their spindles, explaining that his *novelle* are written «in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano, per ciò che all'altre è assai l'ago e l'fuso e l'arcolaio» (Proemio, 13). Women's inferiority is connected to thier lowly domestic activities, and compared to the superior activities of scholars, by Fiammetta, who (in the atmosphere of growing repression that builds in the *Decameron's* later days, as though to counteract the freedom achieved by the *brigata's* ladies in the Valley of the Ladies), says of herself and her comrades that «appena alla rocca e al fuso bastiamo» (X 6, 3).

is interesting in itself, for Filomena was the first to apply the adjective *mobili* to women, when she called them «mobili, riottose, sospettose, pusillanime e paurose» in the Introduction to Day I; if such was Filomena's view of her sex then, does she now revise it by telling the story of Zinevra?), Ambruogiuolo tells a story of female inconstancy and female weakness, and Dioneo tells a story of what seems like female inconstancy but is in fact female strength. In other words he follows Ambruogiuolo in one key respect, insisting on female inconstancy or mobility, but he redefines mobility, viewing it positively as activity rather than negatively as frailty or moral failure. Dioneo's point is that a woman who is left home alone *should* assert herself by sleeping with other men.

The version of II 9 told by Ambruogiuolo, in which Zinevra slept with him and offered him tokens of her love («queste mi donò con alcuna altra cosa una gentil donna di Genova chiamata madonna Zinevra, moglie di Bernabò Lomellin, una notte che io giacqui con lei, e pregommi che per suo amore io le tenessi» [53])¹¹, including his suggestion that Bernabò should have been punished for his stupidity rather than Zinevra for merely doing what all women do, anticipates the *novelle* of Day VII. In Day VII women break out of the confines of their repressive marriages by taking lovers, usually adopting the stealth and deceit that the proleptic Ambruogiuolo had already imputed to unfaithful women in his discourse to the merchants of II 9¹². Escape from a repressive

¹¹ Ambruogiuolo here recounts his own *novella*, which — aside from the moral issue of its deceitfulness — is a different and legitimate story from the one recounted by Filomena. The *Decameron* offers other fascinating examples of alternative tales, which taken together fashion a commentary of sorts on the birth of the *novella*. This genesis, a development from «news» or transmitted information into story, as well as the arbitrariness of the process and the potential garbling of the lines of transmission, is particularly clear in the case of messer Torello in X 9. The mistaken news («novella») that messer Torello is dead becomes a full-fledged story («novella») when elaborated by «eyewitnesses» who claim to have been at his burial: «per la qual cosa, essendo messer Torel di Stra per la sua nobiltà per lo essercito conosciuto, chiunque udì dire 'Messer Torello è morto' credette di messer Torel di Stra e non di quel di Dignes; e il caso, che sopravvenne, della presura non lasciò sgannar gl'ingannati; per che molti italice tornarono con questa novella, tra' quali furon de' sì presuntuosi che ardiron di dire sé averlo veduto morto e essere stati alla sepoltura» (X 9, 61-62).

¹² «Veramente se per ogni volta che elle a queste così fatte novelle attendono nascesse loro un corno nella fronte, il quale desse testimonianza di ciò che fatto avessero, io mi credo che poche sarebber quelle che v'attendessero; ma, non che il corno

marriage is very much the topic of II 10 as well, although its heroine, Bartolomea, is nothing if not forthright and open about her intentions and her motivations. Her forthrightness finds voice in the great speech that she hurls at her former oppressor, a speech that — more than any event — functions as the climax of her story¹³. For the story of Bartolomea is in many respects the story of a metaphor, and this metaphor reaches a peak of expressiveness in her declaration of marital emancipation. But let us backtrack and review the preceding events.

Stimulated by the «bestialità di Bernabò», Dioneo chooses to tell a tale that will exemplify not only the foolishness of the Bernabòs, who create a void by their absence and do not realize that those left in the void are bound to take steps to fill it, but the even greater foolishness of those whose personalities are such that they create a void even when they are present, and yet try to force others to go against the grain of their natures by living within such pinched parameters. This is the case of one Riccardo di Chinzica, whose success as a judge prompts him to overestimate himself in other avenues of endeavor; using the leverage afforded him by his wealth, he seeks not a wife commensurate with his abilities as a lover but one of youth and particular beauty, thus establishing the instability in his marriage that will provide the catalyst for Bartolomea's rebellion as it will for that of later Decameronian heroines. (Despite Pampinea's tribute to the prowess of older men, compared in I 10 to leeks for their white heads and green tails, Dioneo's paradigm of the impotent yet possessive *senex* will find more favor

nasca, egli non se ne pare, a quelle che savie sono, né pedata né orma, e la vergogna e 'l guastamento dell'onore non consiste se non nelle cose palesi: per che, quando possono occultamente, il fanno, o per mattezza lasciano» (II 9, 19).

¹³ Nella Giannetto comments that Bartolomea «produces one of those eloquent defenses of female rights, of which Boccaccio offers more than one example in the *Decameron*»; her note indicates «the audacious discourse of Madonna Filippa, the 'feminist' of the *Decameron*» as a variant (*Parody in the Decameron: A 'Contented Captive' and Dioneo*, «The Italianist», I, 1981, pp. 7-23: p. 10 and n. 14). Pier Massimo Forni's connection of Bartolomea to the very different figure of Ghismonda («L'orazione con cui la gagliarda giovane risponde al marito che tenta di convincerla a ritornare, preannuncia quella che Ghismonda rivolgerà al padre») highlights the importance of this somewhat neglected story within the economy of the *Decameron*. See *Forme complesse nel Decameron*, Firenze, Olschki, 1992, p. 45.

in the text at large.) Having barely succeeded in consummating the marriage, and requiring restorative doses of *vernaccia* the next morning, Riccardo takes steps to defer the evil day when his powers will again be so tested. He instructs his wife as to the many saints' days when sexual intercourse should be avoided, with the result that she lives a life of almost perpetual abstinence:

Per ciò che, secondo che egli le mostrava, niun dì era che non solamente una festa ma molte non ne fossero, a reverenza delle quali per diverse cagioni mostrava l'uomo e la donna doversi astenere da così fatti congiugnimenti, sopra questi aggiugnendo digiuni e quatro tempora e vigilie d'apostoli e di mille altri santi e venerdì e sabati e la domenica del Signore e la quaresima tutta, e certi punti della luna e altre eccezion molte, avvisandosi forse che così feria far si convenisse con le donne nel letto, come egli faceva talvolta piatendo alle civili. E questa maniera, non senza grave malinconia della donna, a cui forse una volta ne toccava il mese e appena, lungamente tenne, sempre guardandola bene, non forse alcuno altro le 'nsegnasse conoscere li dì da lavorare, come egli l'aveva insegnate le feste. (II 10, 9-10)

In that concluding reference to «li dì da lavorare», we first encounter the metaphor that will structure Bartolomea's later speech: sex as work, as activity, as deed, as *fatto* — sexual intercourse, therefore, as one of the forms of human intercourse and engagement that lend dignity and meaning to life.

Taken by her husband to the sea during the hot weather, Bartolomea and Riccardo go fishing in separate boats, he with the fishermen, she with the ladies. They are spied by the pirate Paganin da Mare, who, «veggendo la bella donna, senza altro volerne, quella ... sopra la sua galeotta posta andò via» (13). There is a romantic flavor to this act of piracy, since Paganino chooses Bartolomea from among the group of ladies, «senza altro volerne», that is heightened by his most unpiratical reflections: «A Paganino, veggendola così bella, parve star bene; e non avendo moglie, si pensò di sempre tenersi costei» (15). Indeed, within the *Decameron*, these reflections are romantic not just by the standards of pirates but by those of most would-be husbands, for money never crosses his mind. The fact that Paganino does not have a wife and immediately views Bartolomea as taking the place of a wife is what distinguishes this story from its Day VII variants; the emphasis on marital contentment and on the fact that, even before they marry, Paganino «onoratamente come sua moglie la tenea» (16), makes this story an

interesting blend of Day V and Day VII motifs. Bartolomea seeks no great liberty, from a modern perspective; she seeks only to be a wife. Like Zinevra she desires only what she considers a woman's lot. But she desires a full woman's lot, non the pinched and repressed life offered her by Riccardo, a life whose impoverishments become even more severe — both affectively and societally — when we consider that she is not likely, as his wife, to ever bear children. So when mobility comes to Bartolomea — which again it does by way of the sea — she accepts the sexual consolations of Paganino, appropriately surnamed «da Mare», consolations that Boccaccio specifies are deeds, «fatti», rather than words, «parole», once more, as in the previous metaphor of «li dì da lavorare», associating sex with activity, with *fare*:

E venuta la notte, essendo a lui il calendario caduto da cintola e ogni festa o feria uscita di mente, *la cominciò a confortar co' fatti, parendogli che poco fossero il dì giovate le parole*; e per sì fatta maniera la racconsolò, che, prima che a Monaco giugnessero, e il giudice e le sue leggi le furono uscite di mente e cominciò a viver più lietamente del mondo con Paganino; il quale, a Monaco menatala, oltre alle consolazioni che di dì e di notte le dava, onoratamente come sua moglie la tenea. (II 10, 16)

Apprised that his wife is in Monaco, Riccardo goes in search, willing to spend on her the one commodity with which he is well endowed: «disposto a spendere per lo riscatto di lei ogni quantità di denari» (17). Somehow he sees Bartolomea, and she him, whereupon she alerts Paganino. Riccardo in short order ingratiates himself with Paganino, and then proposes to ransom Bartolomea; Paganino replies that he has a lady living with him who is free to go with Riccardo if she likes. If she does not, he says, it would be wrong of Riccardo to try to take her, for he is a young man and as able to keep a woman as anyone, especially this one who is the most pleasing he has ever seen: «io son giovane uomo e posso così come un altro tenere una femina, e spezialmente lei che è la più piacevole che io vidi mai» (20). Paganino's pointed reference to youth as a prime qualification for marriage sets up the confrontation between wife and unfit husband that constitutes the story's climax. Underterred by this allusion to his missing youth and vigor, and buoyed by the consciousness of the wealth at his disposal, Riccardo assures

the pirate that Bartolomea will throw her arms around his neck when she sees him, and so off they go to Paganino's house.

Bartolomea first pretends not to recognize Riccardo, thus thwarting the archetypal recognition scene he expected¹⁴. Thinking she is constrained by fear of the pirate, Riccardo asks to interview her in private; Paganino consents, on condition that he not try to kiss her against her will — no doubt Bartolomea's earlier briefings had indicated the minimal likelihood of this event. The scene that ensues is a kind of reversal of the courtship engineered by Zima in *Decameron* III 5. There Zima offers messer Francesco his palfrey on condition that he be allowed to speak with Francesco's wife in private. Francesco agrees but, when telling his wife about the arrangement, orders her to make no response, thinking thus to obtain Zima's palfrey without giving anything in return. Zima's courtly eloquence succeeds in moving the lady, who wishes she could reply. Faced with her silence, Zima cleverly turns Francesco's strategem to his advantage, giving voice to the response that he would have wished her to make, complete with directions as to the signal by which he will know she is free for a lover's tryst. Shortly thereafter, Francesco leaves for a six month stint as *podestà* of Milan and his wife finally speaks: «Che fo io?», she says to herself, «perché perdo io la mia giovinezza? Questi se ne è andato a Melano e non tornerà di questi sei mesi; e quando me gli ristorerà egli giammai? quando io sarò vecchia?» (III 5,30). Although her words are expressed only to herself («disse seco medesima»), their convertibility into deeds has already been assured by Zima's exceptionally dialogic monologue, and so the affair is successfully launched. The lady's concern with wasted youth recalls II 9, where the merchants had agreed that «le donne lasciate da loro non volessero perder tempo», and it anticipates V 10, where the old woman counselling the young wife with a homosexual husband provides the theoretical

¹⁴ Giannetto reads II 10 as a parodic reversal of the Greek novel, culminating in the «perfect reversal of the expected ending», i.e. failed recognition and failed reunion (*Parody in the Decameron*, p. 9). Alessandro Duranti adds to the roster of sexual metaphors in II 10, commenting with respect to «la commedia del non riconoscimento» that «di conoscenza biblica ovviamente si metaforeggia» (p. 12); see *Le novelle di Dioneo*, in *Studi di filologia e critica offerti dagli allievi a Lanfranco Caretti*, Roma, Salerno editrice, 1985, 1: 1-38.

foundation for a wife's infidelity, or indeed for any woman's sexual *mobilità*, noting with proto-Marxian clarity that youth is a woman's capital¹⁵.

When the old woman advises the wife of V 10 to take a lover, if only because she is young and should not waste time («sì 'l dovresti far tu e ciascuna giovane per non perdere il tempo della vostra giovinezza, per ciò che niun dolore è pari a quello, a chi conoscimento ha, che è a avere il tempo perduto» [15]), her message is not to be classified under an elegiac «Carpe diem» rubric but rather as part of a rigorous and brutal analysis of the different standings that biology and society have conspired to accord men and women within the social order. Men have many forms of leverage they can exert, many commodities they can exchange, while women have only one that is prized:

Degli uomini non avvien così: essi nascon buoni a mille cose, non pure a questa, e la maggior parte sono da molto più vecchi che giovani; ma le femine a niuna altra cosa che a fare questo e figliuoli ci nascono, e per questo son tenute care. E se tu non te ne avvedessi a altro, sì te ne dei tu avvedere a questo, che noi siam sempre apparecchiata a ciò, che degli uomini non avviene: e oltre a questo una femina stancherebbe molti uomini, dove molti uomini non possono una femina stancare. E per ciò che a questo siam nate, da capo ti dico che tu farai molto bene a rendere al marito tuo pan per focaccia, sì che l'anima tua non abbia in vecchiezza che rimproverare alle carni. Di questo mondo ha ciascun tanto quanto egli se ne toglie, e spezialmente le femine, alle quali si convien troppo più d'adoperare il tempo quando l'hanno che agli uomini... (V 10, 18-20)

Although interlarded with some standard misogynist fare (i.e. the notion that one woman cannot be satisfied except by many men), this discourse is in the main hard-headedly realistic and certainly not inaccurate with respect to the society it represents. And we have only to think of current marriage patterns, where it is not

¹⁵ This important *novella*, as mathematically central within a structure of 100 tales as the much more discussed tale of madonna Oretta (VI 1), has been critically undervalued, noted mainly for its Apuleian antecedent. To my knowledge, no one has seen the ideological significance of V 10; Grimaldi, for instance, focuses on the sodomy that functions as «il mezzo usato dal Boccaccio per circoscrivere in un sinistro alone di turpe bassezza un personaggio il cui originario corrispettivo 'bonus alioquin vir et adprime modestus' è invece considerato da Apuleio figura positiva osservata con umana simpatia» (*Il privilegio di Dioneo*, p. 170).

uncommon for a successful older man to marry a much younger woman, or remember the complaints of actresses and anchorwomen who are forced to retire sooner than their male counterparts, to realize that we have still not left behind the problem of men being more valued (if only because they are usually «worth more» financially — *tenuti cari* in the language of V 10) as they get older while women by contrast depreciate with the passing years.

Bringing the analysis of V 10 to bear on II 10, we find an old man whose biological age does not limit or diminish him in society's eyes; rather, his age works to his advantage because he is able to reap the fruits of his many studious years of juridical achievement¹⁶. We find a young woman who is exchanged in a transaction where her youth and beauty are the capital that offsets the judge's wealth. (As a Gualandi, she also has noble birth; interestingly, no mention is made of a dowry, suggesting that nobility and beauty are deemed sufficient assets to bring to a marriage with a wealthy but nonnoble professional. But even in material terms, we should note that Bartolomea makes a better deal for herself than her family had made for her, since Paganino, who also requires no dowry beyond her beauty, is from a noble family like her own.) But her capital then ceases to bear fruit prematurely, since it is not even fully exploited for the returns it should offer, access to sex and thereby to children («ma le femine a niuna altra cosa che a far questo e figliuoli ci nascono, e per questo son tenute care»): because she and Riccardo do not have sexual relations, Bartolomea can neither «far questo» nor [far] figliuoli». The only return she gets on her investment is her legal position as his wife. Legalistically attuned as he is, he does not fail to emphasize that he offers her legality and security, as well as honor and freedom from mortal sin, and that in Monaco she is a whore rather than a wife¹⁷. While Paganino is free to get rid

¹⁶ The stress on Riccardo's aptitude for study conjures up that other studious failure in love, the scholar of VIII 7, and situates II 10 at the center of a vast problematic (Boccaccio's «sexual poetics», stretching all the way to the *Corbaccio*) whose coordinates are scholars as lovers on the one hand and the status of women («le Muse son donne» versus «appena alla rocca e al fuso bastiamo»; see note 10 above) on the other.

¹⁷ Branca stresses Riccardo's juridical arguments in the Introduction to his edition, pp. xxviii-xxlix; *Boccaccio medievale*, Firenze, Sansoni, 1990⁷, pp. 365-368.

of her when he tires of her, Riccardo will always value her («io t'avrò sempre cara» [35]); moreover, as the judge points out with unflattering punctiliousness, the nature of the contract that binds her to Riccardo is such that he could not rid himself of her even if he wished: «ancora che io non volessi, sarai donna della casa mia» (36). But Bartolomea is inflexible: with respect to her honor, she wishes that her parents had cared for it enough not to give her to an old man, thus constraining her to choose between dishonor and happiness¹⁸. Reminding Riccardo that their union was based on his money, as compared to mutual feeling or attraction, Bartolomea tells him that here she feels like Paganino's wife, whereas in Pisa she felt like a whore: «qui mi pare esser moglie di Paganino e a Pisa mi pareva esser vostra bagascia, pensando che per punti di luna e per isquadri di geometria si convenieno tra voi e me congiugnere i pianeti, dove qui Paganino tutta la notte mi tiene in braccio e strignemi e mordemi, e come egli mi concì Dio vel dica per me» (38). And as for the notion that, now that he knows what she desires, he will force himself to have sex («io da quinci innanzi, poscia che io conosco il tuo disidero, mi sforzerò» [36]), she counters with «Andate, e sforzatevi di vivere» (39). Putting her final refusal into the fiscal terms that he will understand, she tells him that she would not go back to him even if Paganino were to leave her, since her life with him was all loss («con mio grandissimo danno e interesse vi stetti una volta» [40]); in the future, come what may, she will seek her profit («mia civanza») — in other words, she will insist on getting a better return on her investment.

Whereas in III 5 Zima does all the talking, in the decidedly noncourtly atmosphere of II 10 it is primarily Bartolomea who speaks. As in Zima's case, her words are her deeds. That her words are not «mere words» is evident from Riccardo's shocked reaction to her first fusillade, when he asks her «che parole son quelle che tu dì?» (35), and then moves to the legalistic consideration that we have just examined. If we look back at the *parole* that so wound the

¹⁸ The same point is made by the English princess in II 3, who pleads her case to the pope by noting that had she married «[il] re di Scozia vecchissimo signore, essendo io giovane come voi mi vedete» (37), as her father had intended, she would surely have been driven to dishonor.

judge, we see that they are nothing less than a manifesto of a woman's right to sexuality — «voi dovavate vedere che io era giovane e fresca e gagliarda, e per conseguente cognoscere quello che alle giovani donne, oltre al vestire e al mangiare, benché elle per vergogna nol dicano, si richiede» (31) — which right is climactically couched in the metaphoric language we have already encountered:

E dicovi che se voi aveste tante feste fatte fare a' lavoratori che le vostre possession lavorano, quante faciavate fare a colui che il mio piccol campicello aveva a lavorare, voi non avreste mai ricolto granel di grano. Sommi abbattuta a costui, che ha voluto Idio sì come pietoso raguardatore della mia giovanezza [we note that God himself looks after Bartolomea's sexual felicity], col quale io mi sto in questa camera, nella quale non si sa che cosa festa sia, dico di quelle feste che voi, più divoto a Dio che a' servigi delle donne, cotante celebravate; né mai dentro a quello uscio entrò né sabato né venerdì né vigilia né quatro tempora né quaresima, ch'è così lunga, anzi *di dì e di notte ci si lavora e battecisi la lana*; e poi che questa notte sonò mattutino, so bene come il fatto andò da una volta in sù. E però con lui intendo di starmi e *di lavorare mentre sarò giovane*, e le feste e le perdonanze e' digiuni serbarmi a far quando sarò vecchia; e voi colla buona ventura sì ve n'andate il più tosto che voi potete, e senza me fate feste quante vi piace. (II 10, 32-34).

To indicate sexual activity Bartolomea talks about work: in her *parole*, having sex is *lavorare*, a primordial *fare* («ma le femine a niuna altra cosa che a far questo e figliuoli ci nascono»). Let me now conclude by elaborating on the importance that I attach to these metaphorical expressions for sexual activity, not just in II 10 but throughout the *Decameron*. Our story — Dioneo's first tenth story — is also the first to be structured around a metaphor of this sort (the first actual occurrence of such a metaphor is in II 7, the not unrelated story of Alatiel)¹⁹. As in V 4, the nightingale story, the

¹⁹ It is most suggestive, in the context of my interpretation of II 10, that the *Decameron's* first use of sexually metaphoric language, «con che corno gli uomini cozzano» from the story of Alatiel (which also contains «santo cresci in man» [37] and «san Cresci in Valcava» [109]), should be immediately followed by a dichotomy between *parole* and *fatti*: «Il che poi che ella ebbe sentito, non avendo mai davanti saputo con che corno gli uomini cozzano, quasi pentuta del non avere alle lusinghe di Pericone assentito, senza attendere d'essere a così dolci notti invitata, spesse volte se stessa invitava non con le parole, ché non si sapea fare intendere, ma co' fatti» (II 7, 30). According to my reading, Boccaccio is here pointing to Alatiel not as a passive victim, an object, a «femmina», but as one who actively desires in her own right, and knows how to move from *parole* to *fatti* in the pursuit of her desires. The parallelism between II

plot of II 10 hangs on the scaffolding provided by the metaphor, whose presence is required to bring the *novella* to resolution²⁰: «per sua legittima moglie la sposò, e senza mai guardar festa o vigilia o far quaresima, quanto le gambe ne gli poteron portare lavorarono e buon tempo si diedono» (43)²¹. Bartolomea's words, her *parole*, both describe the *fatti* of her life with Paganino (we remember that Boccaccio specified that «la cominciò a confortar co' fatti») and constitute the determining *fatti* of her existence thus far, as she opts out of her repressed life with Riccardo for an engaged life with Paganino. It is true that the engagement she attains has its limitations; she is not embarking on a mercantile or professional career. But, within the context of the options available to her, Bartolomea has chosen life, as she makes clear in her retort to Riccardo: «Andate, e sforzatevi di vivere». Moreover, she has done so at considerable risk: Riccardo's point about the security she is forfeiting is not insignificant (nor is it even in our own day altogether

7 and II 10 includes the fact that Alatiel too ultimately uses words to secure the deeds/events that she wants. Giannetto notes that Alatiel is «in many respects, a 'sister' of Bartolomea», but with these differences: «Alatiel, in fact, who is saved from scandal, maintains appearances, whereas Bartolomea totally defies scandal. Indeed, if Alatiel succeeds, thanks to a deception which hides the transgression, thereby cancelling out all its social effects, Bartolomea succeeds by actually obtaining the legitimization of the transgression itself» (*Parody in the Decameron*, p. 18).

²⁰ Interesting comments on the procedure whereby Boccaccio builds a story around a metaphor, with specific references to II 10 and V 4, may be found in FRANCESCO BRUNI, *Boccaccio: L'invenzione della letteratura mezzana*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1990, pp. 363-367. Bruni suggests that Boccaccio's judge may be the carnal embodiment of a scholarly joke: «Non s'intende proporre la lettera di Guido Faba come fonte della novella del Boccaccio, ma avanzare semplicemente la possibilità che da un accostamento scherzoso degli studi di diritto all'attività erotica (circolante negli ambienti dell'*ars dictandi*), Boccaccio sia stato spinto a inventare un giudice in carne ed ossa, e a materializzare l'immagine scherzosa, trasformandola in azione novellistica» (p. 364). Bruni further suggests that at the basis of V 4 is «Il processo contrario, e cioè la metaforizzazione di una vicenda narrativa» (p. 364). Similarly, Forni comments that «Più d'una novella del *Decameron* si presenta come il frutto di un'immaginazione linguistica», and suggests Riccardo's closing proverb as a point of departure for the author's fantasy: «O non sarà invece da credere che il Boccaccio sia partito da quel detto, 'Il mal furo non vuol festa', e su di esso abbia fondato la costruzione narrativa?» (*Forme complesse nel Decameron*, p. 53). This suggestion is particularly intriguing in the light of Boccaccio's reprisal of «foro» in the Conclusiones dell'Autore; see below, note 25.

²¹ We note «*buon tempo* si diedono» as compared to the expression used by women without lovers, «*perder tempo*»: this is a matter of existential import.

outdated as a female concern), since she has no way of knowing that Paganino will make her his «legittima moglie» after Riccardo dies.

In the terms of Dioneo's question to the ladies at the end of Day VI, Bartolomea has chosen to *far de' fatti* rather than to *dir delle parole*; more precisely, in her case *dir delle parole* constitutes *far de' fatti*. We noted earlier that, although Dioneo expresses concern lest the ladies cross the bridge from the world of men to the world of women, translating their words into deeds, he is nonetheless the chief instigator of the process whereby this translation is effected. Under the rubric of Dioneo the instigator goes his insistent yoking of II 10 to II 9; he ends his story not with the happiness of Bartolomea and Paganino but by drawing the following moral from Bartolomea's story: «Per la qual cosa, donne mie care, mi pare che ser Bernabò disputando con Ambruogiuolo cavalcasse la capra inverso il chino» (43). Once more Dioneo subjects II 9 to a salutary misinterpretation. Moreover, his insistence on the wrongheadedness of Bernabò, as though II 9 had ended with Bernabò's disgrace rather than with Ambruogiuolo's, is picked up and institutionalized by the ladies in their reaction to Dioneo's story: they laugh so hard that their jaws ache (this in itself is significant; after Dioneo's first story, I 4, they permit themselves only a little covert *sogghignare*)²² and agree «che Dioneo diceva vero e che Bernabò era stato una bestia» (II Concl., 1). Boccaccio thus implicitly urges us to recall the nature of Bernabò's stupidity; he was a fool to expect women to stay home idle, with «le mani a cintola», while their men rove. He was a fool, in other words, to expect women to accept the enforced restraint and the enfeebling *ozio* that is their lot in the Proem: «ristrette da' voleri, da' piaceri, da' comandamenti de' padri, delle madri, de' fratelli e de' mariti, il più del tempo nel piccolo circuito delle loro camere *racchiuse* dimorano e quasi *oziose* sedendosi, volendo e non volendo in una medesima ora, seco rivolgendo diversi pensieri, li quali non è possibile che sempre sieno allegri» (Proemio, 10). The pathology of women, described so eloquently in the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, is brought on by forced inertia: as a result of being «ristrette», «racchiuse», and «oziose», women lose the will to

²² Alessandro Duranti tabulates all the reactions to Dioneo's stories in *Le novelle di Dioneo*, p. 9, n. 17.

act, as the disempowered will disempowers itself further, cancelling itself out, trapping itself in a spiral of self-negation («volendo e non volendo in una medesima ora»), incarcerating itself, immobilizing itself.

Dioneo's misinterpretation of II 9 is thus an act of female empowerment, as is his categorical statement that we all know what women want, «di che elle sien vaghe». Certainly his heroine knows what she wants; Bartolomea is not rendered impotent by a conflict within, «volendo e non volendo in una medesima ora». Rather than be a prisoner «nel piccolo circuito della sua camera», Bartolomea's *camera* is the one in which she works so hard with Paganino («col quale io mi so in questa camera, nella qual non si sa che cosa festa sia»). Dioneo frees women from debilitating *ozio* — from the many *feste* that Bartolomea rejects (since, as the deranged Riccardo puts it, more significantly than he realizes, «Il mal furo non vuol festa») ²³ — to the empowerment of work. And thus Bartolomea works. In fact, she has sex, while in words — metaphorical words — she works. And this is the key point about the *Decameron's* metaphors for sex: they are a verbal mechanism (rather than a plot mechanism; note again the dichotomy words/deeds with metaphor as *parola* and plot as *fatto*) for effecting the translation — the literal translation, since «metaphor» is the Greek for *trans-latio* or carrying over — of words into deeds ²⁴. In the case of II 10, *lavorare il campo*, one seminal human activity, takes the place of sexual intercourse, another seminal human activity, and widens the scope of the latter by metaphorical transference. Having sex, which is a fairly restrictive activity, thus opens up to include all sorts of other activities, including — for the *Decameron's* repertory of sexual metaphors is capacious — some of the very activities engaged in by men but off-limits to women in the Proem: «uccellare, cacciare,

²³ Branca takes «furo» as «foro» rendered with a Pisan accent and notes the way in which the phrase synthesizes the *novella*: «Il detto sentenzioso, quasi da codice, allude sinteticamente a tutta la vicenda matrimoniale del vecchio giudice: una sorta di paronomasia ('denominatio') complicata dalla pronuncia pisana» (*Decameron*, p. 314).

²⁴ Bruni notes the lexical richness afforded by the sexual metaphors, and the process whereby «l'eufemismo e il doppio senso attraggono termini estranei in prima istanza (e cioè per il loro significato di base) alla sfera sessuale» (*Boccaccio: l'invenzione della letteratura mezzana*, p. 361).

pescare, cavalcare, giocare o mercatare». We could view the sexual metaphors as bridges between two gendered activities that are accorded different status and worth along gender lines: the metaphors serve to transfer or carry over (again, this is what *meta-fero* tells us that metaphors do by definition, but here their essential function is put very consciously to an ideologically defined end) some of the worth accorded men's work to women's work. The *Decameron's* metaphors for sex inscribe women's work (sex) within the broader context of men's work, thus transferring to women some of the symbolic worth accorded to men and appropriating for women the larger frame of reference — the broader playing field — usually reserved for men. In the terms of our proverb, the metaphors allow women to become men, words to become deeds.

Men can do many things — «essi nascon buoni a mille cose», says the old woman of V 10, — while women can only do one thing. But the sexual metaphors of the *Decameron* are a way of allowing the one thing women do to take on the dimension of the many things men do, as the pointed use of the verb *fare* for sexual activity in both II 9 and V 10 underscores. His wife most likely does as he does, says one of the merchants of II 9, whether or not he wants to admit it: «E io fo il simigliante, per ciò che se io credo che la mia donna alcuna sua ventura procacci, ella il fa, e se io nol credo, si 'l fa; e per ciò a fare a far sia: quale asino dà in parete, tal riceve» (II 9, 6). This same language, with the verbatim repetition of the tit for tat proverb, is reprised by Dioneo at the end of V 10, as he rejects any double standard in matters of sexual satisfaction: «Per che così vi vo' dire, donne mie care, che chi te la fa, *fa gliele*; e se tu non puoi, tienloti a mente fin che tu possa, acciò che quale asino dà in parete tal riceva» (V 10, 64). *Fare*, the world of men, is thus appropriated for women.

In a larger sense, the poetics of the *Decameron* as a whole is reflected in its sexual metaphors, as their insistent presence in the Author's Conclusion indicates. I would go so far as to suggest — bearing in mind that key metaphoric terms of Bartolomea's story, including «foro», are prominently displayed in the Conclusion dell'Autore²⁵ — that the text's sexual metaphors carry (*meta-fero*

²⁵ Boccaccio's list of quotidian words whose scope he has enlarged through metaphor — «foro» e «caviglia» e «mortaio» e «pestello» e «salsiccia» e «mortadello»

again) the *Decameron's* basic genetic material, with which they imprint the entire organism. After all, the *Decameron's* most fundamental project is the restoration, through words, of the will to live, to do. The cleavage between words and deeds is profound and complex, marked by an abiding distrust for words that is expressed in the gender alignment of our original proverb (a distrust, by the way, that is rather poignantly expressed in our writerly reliance on expressions like «indeed» and «in fact», which try to make our *parole* stronger by casting them as *fatti*). The long list under the rubric «Fatti e parole» in the *Raccolta di proverbi toscani* gives us much to consider²⁶: «Chi molto profferisce, poco mantiene», «Chi sa favellare, impari a praticare», «Dove bisognan fatti, le parole non bastano», «Il bel del giuoco, è far de' fatti e parlar poco», «Lingua cheta, e fatti parlanti», «Dove son donne e gatti, son più parole che fatti», «Gran vantatore, piccol facitore», and this succinct summation of the tenets of figural allegory, «I detti son nostri e i fatti son di Dio». As a variant of «Le parole son femmine, e i fatti son maschi», the editor adds «Le parole non fanno fatti». But the whole point of the *Decameron*, whose *novelle* are both words («favole o parabole o istorie») and deeds — the very news or essence of life from which the *brigata* must be protected («niuna novella altra che lieta ci rechi di fuori» [I intr., 101]) — is that the proverb is wrong: *le parole fanno fatti*.

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(Concl. Aut., 5) — begins by echoing Riccardo's «Il mal furo non vuol festa» (II 10, 42). The terms «mortaio» and «pestello» recall II 10, 37. The importance of the Author's Conclusion for the topic I am treating is such as to require a further study.

²⁶ *Raccolta di proverbi toscani*, rev. ed. Gino Capponi, Livorno, Edizioni Medicee, 1971, p. 126.

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