The Governance of Friendship

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WITH THIS book I repay a debt to the author who first inspired me to study Italian literature. I begin therefore by thanking several Galeotti who arranged trysts with the Decameron over the course of my education. Elissa Weaver set my future course when she assigned the tale of Madonna Oretta in my first-year Italian course. In my struggles to understand the novella, I received generous assistance one night from Margery Schneider, then a graduate student at the University of Chicago; her patient instruction in Boccaccio’s syntax awakened a pleasure in me I had not before known. One tale led to the entire book, first with Elissa and then with Marga Cottino-Jones, with whom I studied Boccaccio at UCLA, and whose socially grounded readings continue to inform much of my thinking about the text. Finally, the late Fredi Chiappelli could have had no idea that a single lesson on the forensic nature of Boccaccio’s text would be so inspiring, or so fondly remembered.

At Washington University and beyond I have also enjoyed the piacevoli ragionamenti d’alcuno amico. Stanley Paulson unintentionally abetted my interest in constitutionalism when he introduced me to the work of Hans Kelsen. Eric Brown, Cathleen Fleck, and Julie Singer supplied some missing links on other topics. Harriet Stone read two of the chapters in draft form and helped me remember what good style is all about, and my undergraduate research assistant, Andrew Hiltzik, did a great deal of proofreading. Lynne Tatlock listened as I talked through my ideas, and Joe Loewenstein cheered from the sidelines. Across the country Ted Cachey, Victoria
Kirkham, Dennis Looney, Christian Moevs, Lucia Re, and Jon Snyder have all been fast friends. In Italy, Roberto Fedi and Sergio Zatti have also shown unfailing generosity.

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My editor at The Ohio State University Press, Malcolm Litchfield, read my prospectus and contacted me in what had to be record time, and throughout this process he has been peerless in his support and good humor. He also secured readings from Albert Ascoli at Berkeley and Teodolinda Barolini at Columbia. One could not ask for better readers, who gently but firmly exposed weaknesses in my argument. I consider myself fortunate to have had their input, and I can only hope to have equaled the challenge they set for me.

The present study finds its origins in some earlier published work of mine: first, an essay I published in Romance Quarterly in 1991, “The Patriarch’s Pleasure and the Frametale Crisis: Decameron IV–V.” The arguments I first advanced there find themselves, significantly revised, in chapter III. Another essay, “The Sodomitic Center of the Decameron,” which appeared in Essays in Honor of Marga Cottino-Jones, formed the basis for some of my arguments about the novella of Pietro di Vinciolo, in chapter III as well.

Finally, my three wonderful boys, Adam, Eric, and Eli, don’t entirely understand why I have spent so much time staring at a computer screen, but for the most part they have let me. Through it all I have enjoyed the extraordinary patience and support of my beloved Simeon, a true friend in every way. In the end this book can only be for him.