IN HIS essay “From controversia to novella” Paolo Cherchi describes the last day of the Decameron as “a protracted courtly controversy where the debate revolves around levels of courtliness rather than around opposite systems of values or contradictory laws” (129). Cherchi’s association of the tenth day with the controversia form turns out to be more apposite than he may have intended, for few days of the Decameron have provoked such widely divergent readings as this one has. On the one hand there are those who follow the lead set by Vittore Branca, for whom “lo splendido crescendo dell’ultima Giornata sembra voler fissare in una solenne atmosfera encomiastica i più alti motivi, le più grandi idee-forza che avevano regolato lo svolgersi della grandiosa ed eterna commedia umana” (14). Critics of this bent include Cherchi, Victoria Kirkham (in The Sign of Reason), Marga Cottino-Jones (in Order from Chaos), and Teodolinda Barolini (“The Wheel of the Decameron”). Dissenters include Robert Hollander and Courtney Cahill, who in their essay “Day Ten of the Decameron: The Myth of Order” undertake to dismantle the happy-ending scenario; Luciano Rossi, who entitles his reading of the day “La maschera della magnificenza amorosa”; and Stefano Giovannuzi (“La novella di Gualtieri”), for whom the tenth day is a minefield of conflict.

In addition to disagreements about the overall thrust of the day, energetic debates have centered on specific stories, most notably the last one. Indeed, the last tale stands sui generis in the Decameron as perhaps the most enigmatic in the collection, and its relationship to the others has roiled the
interpretive waters. So meticulously does Boccaccio elaborate his rhetorical crescendo that many readers, seemingly bereft after Dioneo has pushed the *Decameron* overboard, have pursued a teleological reading that makes Griselda the sum of all its parts. Such a reading originates in Branca, who identifies in Griselda “espressioni altissime delle tre grandi forze,” fortune, love, and ingenuity, which he sees as structuring the entire collection and more specifically as recapitulated with precise order in the tenth day. Informing this logic is a conviction that Boccaccio must have followed the path laid by Dante: for Branca, the *Decameron* is indeed “un’opera cioè architetttata e svolta secondo lo schema fissato per la ‘comedia’ dalla più autorevole tradizione medievale: da Uguccione da Pisa e da Giovanni da Garlandia a Dante” (14). Griselda, for all intents and purposes, substitutes for the *Primo mobile*: she is the organizing principle to which the entire work tends. In other words, any anxiety of influence Boccaccio may have felt with regard to Dante has given way to a critical anxiety of influence that turns the *Decameron* into a shadow *Comedy*, as if the only way to make a statement in the Trecento is to follow Dante’s trajectory.

What follows, then, is informed by a conscious resistance to a deterministic fallacy according to which the *Decameron*, in imitation of the *Commedia*, reaches for its own Empyrean. If anything, the tenth day can be read as a joke played on readers who want, indeed expect, ascendancy; and indeed Dioneo’s own tendency to upend themes should prepare us for that eventuality. Dioneo’s intervention is ingenious because it exposes the dependence of hermeneutics on desire rather than empiricism. That said, I would not deny all continuity between the first nine stories of Day X and its famous tenth story; rather, I would locate it elsewhere than in Griselda’s own bizarre magnanimity. The day finds its unity instead, I would argue, in the triumph of the homosocial. Its orderly progression begins by describing a world practically devoid of women (tales 1, 2, and 3), in which men must negotiate directly to remove conflicts that threaten amity. It then moves to a set of stories (4 through 9) in which women enter the mix but are, to borrow Gayle Rubin’s term, essentially trafficked, each in her turn

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1. Richard Kuhns associates this tendency with the fact that Boccaccio provides themes for eight of the days: “Since there are ten days of storytelling, eight with specific themes and two of free-for-all, readers seek to uncover a developmental sequence: say, from unawareness to increasing awareness, from primitive morality to sophisticated moral judgments, from immaturity to social and political maturity, and so on” (17).
2. For a similar argument see Hollander and Cahill 112–13.
3. For Rubin women function as barter: “The ‘exchange of women’ is a seductive and powerful concept. It is attractive in that it places the oppression of women within social systems, rather than in biology. Moreover, it suggests that we look for the ultimate locus of
a *mediatrix* facilitating the realization of a social harmony between men. Griselda crystallizes this tendency by presenting the paradoxical case of a woman whose centrality signals not agency but contingency. To the extent that she synthesizes the mythic and the real, she does so to point out the negotiations that women must undertake to survive in a world run by men.

As Day X represents the triumph of the homosocial, so too does it provide a consistent means by which male friendship is realized: the gift. As Marcel Mauss points out in his classic study on this topic, the gift serves to affirm social bonds: “there is a succession of rights and duties to consume and reciprocate, corresponding to rights and duties to offer and accept. Yet this intricate mingling of symmetrical and contrary rights and duties ceases to appear contradictory if, above all, one grasps the mixture of spiritual ties between things that to some degree appertain to the soul, and individuals, and groups that to some extent treat one another as things” (14). Describing what he calls a “constant exchange of a spiritual matter,” Mauss describes the variety of objects and services that may be subject to exchange: “food, women, children, property, talismans, land, labour services, priestly functions, and ranks—[are] there for passing on, and for balancing accounts” (14). The tenth day bears witness to a similar variety of exchange objects. In the early stories, absent women, the gift is material (X.1), service-oriented (X.2), or personal (X.3). In the later stories women themselves can be the gift, as in the fourth, fifth, and eighth stories, or material, as in the sixth, seventh, and ninth. The tenth story too involves specific though rather more complicated gifts, which I shall discuss later. In their own study of Day X, Hollander and Cahill have illuminated the contractual aspect that subtends so many of the stories. Friendship becomes a contract in Day X, and gifts seal the deal.

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women’s oppression within the traffic in women, rather than within the traffic in merchandise. It is certainly not difficult to find ethnographic and historical examples of trafficking in women. Women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favors, sent as tribute, traded, bought, and sold. Far from being confined to the ‘primitive’ world, these practices seem only to become more pronounced and commercialized in more ‘civilized’ societies” (175).

The Sign of Paradox

From the moment of his inevitable appointment all signs point to a felicitous reign for Panfilo. In crowning him, Emilia envisions his rule as offering an opportunity to correct all the errors of the previous rulers: “Signor mio, gran carico ti resta, sì come è l’avere il mio difetto e degli altri che il luogo hanno tenuto che tu tieni, essendo tu l’ultimo, a emendare” (IX. Conc.2). He replies with praise for Emilia, who had released her companions from themed storytelling, but he also reinstates the rule of the theme: “giudico che sia bene il ritornare alla legge usata” (IV.Conc.4). He explains the theme, “chi liberalmente o vero magnificamente alcuna cosa operasse intorno à’ fatti d’amore o d’altra cosa” (IX.Conc.4), as one that will enable the group to transcend death: “Queste cose e dicendo e faccendo senza alcun dubbio gli animi vostri ben disposti a valorosamente adoperare accenderà: ché la vita nostra, che altro che breve esser non può nel mortal corpo, si perpetuerà nella laudevole fama . . .” (IX.Conc.5). Panfilo’s vision here is consistent with interests expressed as far back as the tale of Ser Ciappelletto. It also has the—perhaps inadvertent—effect of relocating the group under the shadow of the plague. Anticipating a return home, Panfilo seems to understand that he and his friends will also reenter real time, a temporality marked by mortality, which necessitates a different way of thinking.

With this gesture Panfilo establishes both the type of friendship and the family model that will inform his governance. If for Filostrato friendship was grounded in utility and for Dioneo it lay in pleasure, for Panfilo the friendship model is one of goodness, of concern for a bene that transcends the material. The family model of his governance will likewise reference fraternity rather than paternity, Filostrato’s model, or marriage, Dioneo’s. Neither sexual tension nor the demands of an irascible parent structure the group’s relations this time; indeed, unlike the previous two kingships, this one sounds an initial note of amity: “La tema piacque alla lieta brigata” (IX. Conc.6). And yet, as is often the case, intentions and effects differ. Readers of the tenth day have repeatedly commented on how the group gets caught up in a competition over who can narrate the greatest example of

5. I therefore agree with Thomas Greene, for whom “the queen’s allusion to ‘amendment’ seems . . . something more than a formula of courtesy” (308).

6. Panfilo’s judgment here comes as no surprise. Emilia had anticipated that Day X would return to a theme when announcing that Day IX would be free of one: “io estimo, avendo riguardo quanti giorni sotto certa legge ristretti ragionato abbiamo, che, si come a bisognosi, di vagare alquanto e vagando riprender forze a rientrar sotto il giogo non solamente sia utile ma oportuno” (VIII.Conc.4).
magnificence, attaching to it a number of interpretations. Cherchi is rather nonjudgmental: “Every story teller aims at excelling over the previous one by retelling a story of magnanimity or liberality or any other courtly virtue which operates at a level slightly higher than the one attained in the previous narration” (“From controversia to novella” 129). Hollander and Cahill see it instead as a sign of a disturbing disharmony among the assembled, characterizing the competition as a rivalry that associates the tenth day with the previous four, which had marked a darkening of the Decameron (152). For Marcus, “Such a competitive mode subverts the very theme of magnificence, for this virtue suggests the disinterested outpouring of wealth in Dante’s sense of celestial economics, where giving increases rather than decreases the donor’s assets” (An Allegory of Form 96). The dynamic, in which the choice theme provokes tensions within the group, in fact mimics the pattern established under the other two kings, suggesting that no matter how hard a king tries to be conciliatory he cannot help but stir up trouble. The reconciliation that Thomas Greene describes as an extension of his notion of accommodation is rather more an ideal that the day projects than one it enacts.7

Boccaccio thus launches the tenth day under the sign of paradox. It is a fitting choice, because in the end, the author has tossed too much up in the air for it all to land neatly, and perhaps we as readers have been naïve to expect the grand synthesis we so much desired. Indeed, rather than grant readers satisfaction by representing unadulterated social harmony, Day X makes clear that harmony is selective, and that sacrifice often accompanies the resolution of conflict. In this way it recalls Day V, in which the happy endings sometimes accrued only to men. The inverted models that characterized the sojourn in the country, and that principally involved granting extraordinary agency to women, are about to be flipped back over.

The day also exposes another fundamental paradox, this one about gift giving. Many of the stories, and the very act of sharing them among the members of the brigata, involve an implicit rivalry between the parties of exchange that can trump altruistic intent. The gifting of stories in the tenth day bears out Mauss’s claim that “We must always return more than we receive; the return is always bigger and more costly” (63). Gift giving thus synthesizes rivalry and generosity, simultaneously exposing social harmonies and social tensions; it is as if by their very choice of generosity the

7. Speaking of the tenth day, Greene writes: “these nine stories of magnanimity, in their juncture of a finer creativity and a higher self-denial, reach out to extend the formula of accommodation to a profounder principle of success. This firmer equilibrium, this wiser and more tender healing, deserves rather the term ‘reconciliation,’ because it transcends the ad hoc extemporization of the typical ending” (310).
members of the *brigata* are caught between serving their own interests and serving those of their companions.

As if to second Panfilo’s vision of fraternal order, many stories feature the sacrifice of sexual desire, which Teodolinda Barolini characterizes as “generosity in a particularly aggravated form” (“The Wheel of the *Decameron*” 237). In the fourth story, after gaining the assent of his peers that he has every right to take possession of his beloved Catalina, Gentile de’ Carisendi remains good to his word to treat her as a sister, restoring her and her newborn infant to her husband with the declaration that she is his *comare*, a relation that here implies a respect for the same sexual boundaries that had been abrogated in Dioneo’s story at the end of Day VII, and that Gentile himself had crossed by fondling her in her tomb. The conversion of the beloved into a sister also marks the following story, when Ansaldo, who again by all rights may take carnal possession of his beloved Dianora, decides rather to treat her “non altramenti che se mia sorella fosse” (X.5.22). In the next story, a chastened and elderly Re Carlo renounces his desire for Ginevra, finding a husband both for her and for her sister “non come figliuole di messer Neri ma come sue” (X.6.35). These stories reflect the day’s predominant conservative impulse, according to which the pursuit of erotic desire must cede to a duty to maintain order.

That order involves an element that heretofore has enjoyed little attention: the ability of men to get along, to preserve their relations as foundational to a functional society.

The stories themselves complicate the bliss. As they focus on the homosocial, they provide precious few models of magnanimous women, with the exception of the daunting Griselda. The tales idealize a world in which men get along, one where women, if they enter the picture at all, do so as vehicles to the perfection of male friendships. One is reminded, in this context, of Heidi Hartmann’s definition of patriarchy: “relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women” (14). To the extent that the last day of the *Decameron* lays the groundwork for a return to Florence, it does so in part by reminding women that they will soon return to the same margins of experience, organized by men, that men have often occupied during their two-week sojourn in the country.

8. Hollander and Cahill likewise see the theme of order as informing much of the Day X narrative, and they trace it through legal issues, specifically involving contracts, that structure many of the stories. They express doubts about the nature of the order represented in these pages, however, subtitling their essay “The Myth of Order” and demonstrating ways in which Boccaccio subverts any appearance of order in the tenth day. While I will take exception to some of their claims, my own reading aligns with theirs in that we all see the theme of munificence as promising more than it delivers.
The Return of the Eavesdropper

Throughout this book I have highlighted the role played by patriarchal figures in relation to other characters, principally but not exclusively female. As I suggested in chapter I, this theme first appears in the author’s Proem and gains particular resonance in the Introduction to Day I, as well as in the author’s self-defense which opens Day IV. In the two days I have examined up until now, the patriarchal figures—fathers, brothers, and husbands—stand outside of the tales’ significant relationships, which typically couple women with lovers to whom they are not married. What distinguishes Day IV from Day VII, as I have argued, is the degree of success with which the female character negotiates this triangle. In the triangular stories of Day IV the woman, along with her lover, falls victim to the retributive impulse of the authority figure, while in Day VII she manages to escape punishment by concealing her illicit relationship from her husband. Day X begins by reinventing the model of the outsider male, but with a new twist. Here a situation of estrangement between two male characters finds resolution thanks to espionage, either in the form of a subordinate spy or when one of the two disguises himself in order to effect his own snooping. If Day IV addressed the consequences of inadvertent discovery, and Day VII the avoidance of same, Day X features the secret agent, whose espionage leads not to disaster but to reconciliation.

The day’s first three tales constitute something of a trilogy of espionage. In the first story, Messer Ruggieri, who has traveled to Spain drawn by the fame of Re Alfonso, leaves in pique after observing that the king directs his largesse at everyone but Ruggieri himself. The king orders one of his servants to spy for him: “Appresso questo, commise il re a un suo discreto famigliare che, per quella maniera che miglior gli paresse, s’ingegnasse di cavalcare con messer Ruggieri in guisa che egli non paresse dal re mandato e ogni cosa che egli dicesse di lui raccogliesse sì che ridire gliele sapesse; e l’altra mattina appresso gli comandasse che egli indietro al re tornasse” (X.1.8). The second and third stories feature a creative variant of this procedure, in which disguise enables the protagonist to carry out his own espionage. In the second story the reprobate Ghino di Tacco plays host to the infirm Cluny abbot, establishing a direct relationship with the abbot while claiming to be one of Ghino’s servants in order to reinvent himself outside of his reputation. In the third story, a young Mitridanes, frustrated in his efforts to gain fame as the most generous man in the world, resolves to murder his archrival in generosity, Natan. Arriving at Natan’s castle he encounters his enemy, who identifies himself as one of Natan’s servants and offers Mitridanes instructions on how to kill him.
In all three cases the espionage leads to a resolution of the conflict, which in turn involves gift giving. Re Alfonso, learning of the cause of Ruggieri’s upset, demonstrates that fortune, not the king, had failed him, then stands up to fortune by bestowing his jewels on Ruggieri. In the second story, Ghino di Tacco gives the gift of his medical skill to cure the Cluny abbot of his stomach upset, then reveals himself to the abbot, explaining that his nefarious nature extends not from “malvagità d’animo” but from being a “gentile uomo e cacciato di casa sua e povero e avere molti e possenti nimici” (X.2.21). The combination of his careful treatment of the abbot and the restitution of all of the abbot’s possessions serves to prove his point. In the third tale, Mitridanes discovers that Natan’s generosity extends to offering up his very life to the young man, and so shamed he abandons his plan. In addition to resolving the immediate crisis, these generous acts also serve to seal a friendship. Ruggieri returns happily to Tuscany with the evidence of his own worth that he had sought. The Cluny abbot befriends Ghino and demonstrates his friendship by effecting the reconciliation of Ghino and his archenemy, Boniface VIII. Mitridanes calls Natan his carissimo padre (X.3.28), with Natan calling him Figliuol mio and assuring him that “niuno altro uom vive il quale te quant’io ami” (X.3.30–31).  

These stories share another common element: the almost complete absence of women. With the exception of the anonymous feminella who visits Mitridanes in the third story and points out that Natan had shown her greater generosity, these tales describe a world devoid of women. Instead we have men of great power—Re Alfonso, the pope, the Cluny abbot—or great wealth—the aforementioned three, plus Ruggieri, Natan, and Mitridanes—many of whom seem lonely, and who seek to overcome that loneliness not with women but by the company and affirmation of other men. Ruggieri’s quest for recognition, while consistent with chivalric values, also involves solitary travel to a faraway land, and his disappointment after receiving no gifts from the king has nothing to do with his need for wealth, because he is already ricco upon departing for Spain. Ghino di Tacco seems similarly isolated, exiled from Siena and living in Radicofani, rejected by nearby powerful men, including the pope, because of his habit of violence and thievery. His estrangement seems particularly painful

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9. Hollander and Cahill point out the Christological evocations in these forms of address, suggesting this subtext as the reason for the brigata’s subsequent return to amorous themes: “It is as though none of the members of the brigata desired to contribute another intrinsic challenge to Christ’s unsurpassed munificence” (125). For their argument that the story actually parodies the theme of munificence, and the old lady’s role in exposing that parody, see 127–28.

10. For valuable details about the historical Ghino di Tacco, see Chiappelli’s essay.
because he knows he has something socially valuable to offer, his medical
talent, but no opportunity to show it. The pope recognizes his role in curing
the sick abbot, who has described Ghino as mio medico (X.2.28), by mak-
ing him a knight of the Order of the Hospitallers. The third story records
no friends for Mitridanes, who appears to seek fame for his liberality as a
substitute for love. He finds true happiness only upon receiving the selfless
love of a Natan whose generous nature includes a willingness to die that
Mitridanes might be happy.

The first three stories thus forthrightly establish that the tenth day is
about men; they all seem to radiate in one way or another from Melisso’s
predicament of friendlessness and King Solomon’s enigmatic instruction
to him, “Ama,” in Emilia’s Day IX story. Panfilo has carefully constructed
his theme in order to allow women into the picture—“chi liberalmente o
vero magnificamente alcuna cosa operasse intorno a’ fatti d’amore o d’altra
cosa” (IX.Conc.4)—but women enter the narrative stream in earnest only
in the fourth story. Not surprisingly, it is Filostrato who tells the third
story, which includes a female character whose presence serves only to
underline just how marginalized women have become: she arrives almost
spectrally to make a point and then disappears so quickly that the story
records no redress of her complaint. Perhaps awakened by this, Lauretta
opens the fourth story by announcing that it is high time to introduce
an amorous element: “Giovani donne, magnifice cose e belle sono state le
raccontate, né mi pare che alcuna cosa restata sia a noi che abbiamo a dire,
per la qual novellando vagar possiamo, si son tutte dall’altezza delle mag-
nificenze raccontate occupate, se noi ne’ fatti d’amore già non mettessimo
mano, li quali a ogni materia prestano abondantissima copia di ragionare”
(X.4.3). In essence, Lauretta points out that the narrative line pursued up
till now has reached a dead end: nothing can surpass what has already been
said. So the time has come to change course, specifically by adding the ele-
ment of love to the mix. Strikingly, however, this new element does not
cancel out the already prevalent feature of male friendship. Love enters the
picture, but the homosocial does not leave, and women, rather than assume
center stage, become pawns in negotiations between men.

The Amorous Sequence: Male Friendship
and the Status of Women

The amorous sequence presents four stories that link male friendship to
the status of women, either because the negotiation over a woman’s status
leads to friendship (stories 4 and 5) or because the friendship is central to
the outcome of a question involving a woman (stories 8 and 9). The seed of this development lies in the second tale, which records that Ghino di Tacco became “amico e servidore di santa Chiesa e dello abate di Clignì” (X.2.31). In the other two tales the protagonists make a magnanimous gesture, but there is no suggestion that friendship results. Ruggieri returns to Tuscany from Spain with the king’s gifts, and we have no idea whether the two ever meet again. Mitridanes and Natan likewise take leave of one another after a companionable interlude, with Mitridanes learning only that he could never surpass Natan in liberality. The failure of such generous acts to cement a friendship suggests that friendship requires more than simple generosity in order to blossom. Certainly it demands proximity or, to borrow again from Mauss, membership in a local social network; one has the sense that the relationships between Ruggieri and the king, and Natan and Mitridanes, wither in part due to separation. Ghino di Tacco, while out of direct contact with both the pope and the Cluny abbot, nevertheless remains a friend of both because their respective orbits overlap, thanks to Ghino’s new service with the Hospitallers.

The tales involving women clarify the question. Men find a way to be friends when they successfully relegate women to a position where they no longer threaten to disorder male society. If in the fourth day women tried to seize the initiative for their erotic lives and suffered a bad outcome, and if in the seventh they succeeded, in the tenth day men remain singularly in charge. It should come as no surprise then that all four of these stories, in one way or another, involve a claim regarding a woman and the resolution of same. In the new mercantile society that Boccaccio highlights, nothing avoids commodification.

The first two stories in this sequence reelaborate tales told as part of the quistioni d’amore episode in Boccaccio’s early romance, the Filocolo. Understanding the significance of Boccaccio’s choice of these tales for reelaboration in the Decameron requires a brief excursus about the Filocolo’s quistioni themselves. These constitute a debate about love, led by Fiammetta and carried out by an assembled group of thirteen travelers in a Neapolitan garden. As Victoria Kirkham points out in Fabulous Vernacular, her study of the Filocolo, the group is arranged symmetrically in a circle, with Fiammetta and her lover, Caleon, sitting opposite one another. When

11. This is Gayle Rubin’s key point in her essay: “If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it. . . . If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation” (174).
Caleon, the central narrator of the thirteen, takes his turn, rather than tell a tale he asks Fiammetta what becomes the central question of the discussion: “Graziosa reina, io disidero di sapere se a ciascuno uomo, a bene essere di se medesimo, si dee innamorare o no. E questo a dimandare mi muovono diverse cose vedute e udite e tenute dalla varie opinioni degli uomini” (Fil. IV.43). In her response Fiammetta recapitulates Aristotelian friendship theory in a Christian idiom, here applying it to erotic circumstances: “amore è di tre maniere, per le quali tre, tutte le cose sono amate; alcuna per la virtù dell’uno, alcuna per la potenza dell’altro, secondo che la cosa amata è, e similmente l’amante” (Fil. IV.44). The three types are amore onesto, amore per diletto, and amore per utilità, corresponding to Aristotle’s friendship based on the good and on pleasure and utility. Fiammetta lauds the first type as “buono e diritto e il leale amore, il quale da tutti abitualmente dee esser preso” (Fil. IV.44): in other words, yes, all men should love, for their own good, but they should fall into the correct kind of love, the ennobling kind. Fiammetta condemns the other two types, even against Caleon’s defense of erotic love, and in so doing she appears to direct lovers toward one of the other two options, presumably that of amore onesto.

That the two tales Boccaccio extracts from the quistioni come from a philosophical context rooted in the comparison of amore onesto to amore per diletto and amore per utilità is not without significance, because both tales record the transcending of an initial amore per diletto of the basest type, unvarnished sexual desire, in a friendship that permanently reorders the relation between the three parties involved, lover, wife, and husband. That reordering removes the woman as an object of contention, allowing the two men to form a social compact that is a social good because it removes a disordering rivalry that could lead to graver conflicts.

Boccaccio significantly rewrites both tales in their transfer from the Filocolo to the Decameron, the changes suggesting new thematic emphases that are consistent with the overall messages of the tenth day. 12 In the Filocolo version of X.4, the dramatic scene in which Gentile de’ Carisendi asks Niccoluccio Caccianimico to respond to his hypothetical question about servants and property, in order to establish that Niccoluccio’s wife now belongs to Gentile, is wholly absent. In X.5 Boccaccio eliminates much of the earlier narrative devoted to developing the relationship between the putative lover Tarolfo and Tebano, the magus who delivers the May garden in January. He also sharpens the development of the friendship between the putative lover, now named Ansaldo, and Gilberto, Madonna Dianora’s husband. In both cases the changes shift the focus onto the way in which a

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question about a woman’s status leads to friendship between the two men who contend for her, suggesting that friendship is possible only once the rivalry over a woman has been removed. In both cases too, the means to eliminating the rivalry involves the offer of the woman as a gift.

The fourth story finds Gentile de’ Carisendi, in the midst of an act of necrophilia, discovering that his beloved Catalina has not in fact died, then restoring her to health and eventually to her husband and earning enduring friendship with the latter. The process of restitution involves a scene in which Gentile asks the woman’s husband, Niccoluccio, to reflect on the circumstances by which Catalina fell into his, Gentile’s, hands, and to deliberate over the question of who may now claim title to her. Women are commonly property of their husbands in the Decameron, though they are not always loved; and Decameron women are often loved by men who cannot commodify them through marriage. Gentile’s situation is unique: he loves a woman who is not his wife, yet for a time she becomes his property.

In the story’s central scene Gentile reintroduces Niccoluccio to his wife at a dinner-party ritual construed under the banner of friendship. While there is no record that their friendship predates the dinner, Gentile is something of a public man, having served as podestà in Modena, so the staging is not wholly implausible. He invites Niccoluccio and other gentili uomini of Bologna to his banquet, then announces to the assembled group his intention to honor a Persian custom by which one may “sommamente onorare il suo amico”: “egli lo invita a casa sua e quivi gli mostra quella cosa, o moglie o amica o figliuola o che che si sia, la quale egli ha più cara, affermando che, se egli potesse, così come questo gli mostra, molto più volentieri gli mostrerò il cuor suo” (X.4.24). The additional element of the banquet, which is not part of the original ritual as Gentile concocts it, treads the well-worn path of Decameron meals, which generally involve an element of affective exchange.¹³ In the present case the story turns not on the restitution of Catalina to her husband, but rather on how that restitution binds Gentile and Niccoluccio in friendship.

By Gentile’s account of the Persian tradition, the most prized possession is usually a female member of the household, though he leaves open the possibility of the exchange of something else, something inanimate, thus suggesting that the value we attach to objects may combine sentiment and economic appraisal. By specifying the element of a prized wife or female friend or daughter he prepares his guests for what they are about

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¹³. As a rule, the meal or banquet setting involves the exchange of an object that somehow stirs up the feelings of the two participants. Federigo’s falcon seals the deal with Giovanna; serving her lover’s heart at dinner destroys the relationship between Rossignione and his wife; Pietro di Vinciolo and his wife share dinner with her guest, then a bed with him.
The rule of Panfilo

Whatever he trots out, according to Gentile, has both intrinsic value—its owner loves it best—and symbolic value in representing the owner’s affection for his guest. The latter value transcends the former, as the custom seeks not simply to show off what the host loves the most but to cement the friendship. If one accepts this premise, then bringing out Catalina will allow Gentile to accomplish two goals: first, he will show his audience what he loves best, and second, he will demonstrate his affection for his guests, particularly Niccoluccio. This latter gesture can only be a sham, as Gentile appears to have organized this party in part to embarrass Niccoluccio before his peers, before returning Catalina to him.

Before introducing Catalina, Gentile asks his assembled guests the critical question on which the whole story turns: “Egli è alcuna persona la quale ha in casa un suo buono e fedelissimo servidore, il quale inferma grave mente; questo cotele, senza attendere il fine del servo infermo, il fa portare nel mezzo della strada né più ha cura di lui; viene uno strano e mosso a compassione dello ‘nfermo e’ sel reca a casa e con gran sollicitudine e con ispesa il torna nella prima sanità. Vorrei io ora sapere se, tenendosi e usando i suoi servigi, il suo signore si può a buona equità dolere o ramaricare del secondo, se egli raddomandandolo rendere non volesse” (X.4.26–27). The inquiry, absent in the Filocolo, goes to the heart of determining a woman’s status, legal or otherwise. The key element complicating the question of ownership appears to be that of ispesa, expense, specifically understood as an investment that entitles one to some sort of return. That Gentile understands the financial question to raise thorny legal issues becomes clear in the language of his question, when he wonders whether the first signore can demand restitution of the servant a buona equità, justly or fairly.

My translation does not grasp the legal complexity of the question Gentile raises, for Boccaccio’s invocation of equità returns us to the matter, previously explored in the case of Madonna Filippa, of epieikeia, or reasonableness. While elsewhere in the Summa Aquinas borrows the Greek term from Aristotle, he does at one point provide a Latin translation for it: “apud nos dicitur æquitas” (ST 2a2æ. 120, 1). In addressing the question of whether equity is a part of justice, Aquinas describes it as “a part of justice taken in the widest sense... epieikeia is a norm over and above legal justice. Epieikeia thus stands as a kind of higher rule for human actions” (ST 2a2æ. 120, 2). The formulation of that higher rule comes in locating the space between legislative intent and legislative language, particularly when following the latter as opposed to the former harms the public good, the commune bonum. In the present case Gentile appears to be asking whether Niccoluccio may reasonably ask for restitution of his wife, even if she now

to see, which only affirms the notion of women as transferable property.
legally belongs to someone else: in other words, whether a broadly con-
ceived notion of intent, linked to the common good, trumps the narrow
confines of the law. Tumbling into Gentile’s trap, Niccoluccio answers no,
denying that a *buona equità* predicate justifies restitution. While on the
one hand this is the response that Gentile had hoped for, on the other it is
also a response with which he does not agree.

Gentile’s guests appear to think that their host is playing a game, not
asking a question with serious implications. They entrust their reply to
Niccoluccio “per ciò che bello e ornato favellatore era” (X.4.28): for them
the situation requires verbal dexterity rather than reasoned legal thinking.
Niccoluccio proves his own limitations when affirming that the servant
would remain the property of the person who had picked him up off the
street. He offers an important rationale: since the first owner had in effect
thrown the servant away, “niuna noia, niuna forza, niuna ingiuria [il sec-
ondo] faceva al primiero” (X.4.29). In other words, one cannot suffer a loss
when one has willingly disposed of something. The reply betrays the sort
of economic rationalism that has infected Niccoluccio’s thinking: he reasons
that the servant becomes the property of his new owner by default, “per li
benifici del secondo usati.” This sort of analysis stands in direct contrast to
the language Lauretta employs to describe Gentile and the values he comes
to embody. She consistently refers to him as a *cavaliere*, and the language
of his question, focusing on a “buono e fedelissimo servidore,” which he
echoes later in referring to the wife as a “leale e fedel servo” (X.4.38), sug-
gests subscription to a courtly ethos that predates the sort of pragmatic
profit-based thinking of Niccoluccio.

Indeed, Gentile’s progress from necrophiliac to steward of courtly val-
ues is so complete by the end of this scene that he frames Catalina’s res-
titution as the gesture of gift giving that he had originally invoked. His
scorn for Niccoluccio and his way of thinking is patent: “io non ti rendo tua
mogliere, la quale i tuoi e suoi parenti gittarono via, ma io ti voglio donare
questa donna mia comare con questo suo figliolotto” (X.4.42). The impor-
tance of Gentile’s question regarding status now becomes clear, as he can
offer Catalina as a gift only if everyone agrees that she belongs to him. In

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14. This curious detail, absent in the *Filocolo* version where the wife reportedly dies in
childbirth, may owe itself to a desire on Boccaccio’s part to create a moral space within which
Gentile may return Catalina to her husband. The hypothetical in fact elides this detail, sug-
gesting that Niccoluccio was directly responsible for the disposal of Catalina; the fact that he
was not makes him a less vile person than if he had presided at the entombment of his still-
living wife.

15. One may fairly argue, however, that in asking whether Niccoluccio may reasonably
ask for his wife back, Gentile actually cedes the point that by all measures she has remained
his wife. His own words throughout the story suggest as much: he refers to Niccoluccio as
asking for nothing in return, Gentile makes a gesture at once magnanimous and humiliating, because he gives up something of great value while denying its recipient the right of reciprocation: he may not be quite as gentile as his name suggests. Still, the gesture suggests that he has transcended his initial amore per diletto in favor of amore onesto, and Lauretta’s language echoes the shift. She has Gentile affirm to Niccoluccio that Catalina “mai o col padre o colla madre o con teco più onestamente non visse” (X.4.43), and in her peroration she affirms that Gentile “giovane e ardente, e giusto titolo parendogli avere in ciò che la tracutaggine altrui aveva gittato via e egli per la sua buona fortuna aveva ricolto, non solo temperò onestamente il suo fuoco, ma liberalmente quello che egli soleva con tutto il pensier disiderare e cercare di rubare, avendolo, restituì” (X.4.48). Gentile’s onestà extends, as a public man, to his recomposition of a sundered family, which arguably contributes to the common good, inasmuch as it repairs the disorder created when Catalina was erroneously buried.

Gentile’s gesture secures for him both public praise and an enduring relationship with Niccoluccio, the only form of reciprocation available to him. Lauretta records both in the story’s penultimate paragraph: Gentile’s guests “il commendaron molto, e commendato fu da chiunque l’udì,” and Gentile “sempre amico visse di Niccoluccio e de’ suoi parenti e di quei della donna” (X.4.45–46). To some degree the latter is mandated by Gentile’s self-declaration as compare to Catalina: he undertakes to create an acceptable permanent relationship with her. While reviling Catalina and Niccoluccio’s relatives for their role in her premature burial, he ends up metaphorically marrying into the whole family, becoming amico of the entire clan—except of course for Catalina, who appears to fall into another category. Lauretta offers these gestures as signs of good character, establishing Gentile as the type of person whom Niccoluccio would want as a friend. She further argues that his gift surpasses that of the other protagonists of the earlier tales. The king of Spain, she states, merely gave away his scepter and crown, and the Cluny abbot at no personal cost reconciled Ghino and the pope, while Natan offered his neck to his enemy: presumably he represents less of a gift than Catalina because, as Lauretta puts it, he is un vostro marito, though in handing her over to Niccoluccio he describes her as “non . . . tua mogliere . . . ma . . . questa donna mia comare con questo suo figliolotto” (X.4.42).

16. In the Filocolo version of this tale (IV.67) the protagonist has no name. Boccaccio’s decision to name him Gentile is clearly not without thematic implications.

17. Given Gentile’s status as a public man, I believe his onestà constitutes a form of Ciceroonian honestum as featured in the De officiis and commonly translated in English as honorableleness. Cherchi, who argues that Boccaccian onestà involves a far more complex semiosis (Lonestade e l’onesto raccontare del Decameron), summarizes the honestum as “non . . . una virtù particolare, ma l’insieme delle virtù o la virtù stessa” (26).
vecchio, and she is a desirable young woman. Whether the constellation of relationships that the tale records at the end has a solid basis on which to endure is a question that the tale does not answer.

Two final points do emerge, however. First, Lauretta’s invocation of fatti d’amore as an appropriate topic for storytelling at this point comes to enjoy an expansive definition through the tale, as she sets out to demonstrate how erotic love can be subsumed under a greater social purpose. What is key here is not the one or the other—amore per diletto versus amore onesto, leaving aside the question of amore per utilità—but rather how the two interact to create an order in which two men with potentially conflicting interests over a woman can find accommodation rather than resort to disruptive violence. In this way the tale revisits others, such as IV.9, reinventing a solution to the triangular conflicts that courtly love engenders in order to privilege homosocial amity. Second, and perhaps more important for the overall direction of the Decameron, the tale reinvents the Galeotto as woman. It is after all Catalina who, albeit passively, unites Gentile and Niccoluccio in friendship. While nothing so crude as pander or pimp, she functions nonetheless as a go-between, and in this sense reinvents womanhood as a means by which men solidify their relation to one another. That function will play itself out in the stories that follow.

While the fifth story conjures a more altruistic picture of friendship, it also delineates more sharply the status of the woman. In a tale that is all about exchange value, Madonna Dianora emerges as the ultimate commodity, and the two male protagonists cement their friendship by removing her as an object of barter. The story presents a similar love triangle, except that in this case the object of affection, Dianora, is alive and well. She understands herself in terms of exchange value and first introduces this element, offering herself in trade to Messer Ansaldo, who is courting her, if he can produce a May garden in January. The nature of her request marks the first significant difference between the tale’s earlier iteration in the Filocolo and Boccaccio’s revision of it for the Decameron. In the former the wife’s character is somewhat shadier; we learn only that she is a donna nobile and bellissima. The putative lover, Tebano, pesters her, “seguendo d’Ovidio gli ammaestramenti, il quale dice l’uomo non lasciare per durezza della donna di non perseverare, però che per continuanza la molle acqua fora la dura pietra” (Fil. IV.31). She worries that her husband may hear about his efforts and think that she is somehow implicated in them, so she conceives una sottile malizia to unburden herself. Boccaccio’s use of the word malizia connotes fraud: the wife is striking a bargain she has no intention of honoring. When the wife, now named Dianora, reappears in the Decameron, she is again “una bella e nobile donna” who now “meritò . . . per lo suo
valore d’essere amata sommamente da un nobile e gran barone” (X.5.4). Her valore corresponds to her lover’s status as “uomo d’alto affare” (X.5.4), nudging both of them into the mercantile sector despite their noble lineage. The lover, now named Ansaldo, no longer takes a page from Ovid’s book but rather pursues her doggedly and fruitlessly. Dianora’s request of the May garden rouses less ethical suspicion, thanks to Boccaccio’s suppression of the word malizia; he describes her instead as frustrated: “essendo alla donna gravi le sollicitazioni del cavaliere” (X.5.5). Mostly she wants to be rid of him, and appropriately she has no real interest in the garden, typical locus of love: “con una nuova e al suo giudizio impossibil domanda si pensò di volerlosi torre di dosso” (X.5.5).

Dianora’s request unleashes a series of maneuvers that lead to crisis. Ansaldo negotiates a high price in order to accommodate her request, “per grandissima quantità di moneta convenutosi” (X.5.10), to a necromancer in exchange for the required garden. News of the necromancer’s involvement alerts Gilberto to potential danger, prompting him to encourage his wife to keep her promise: “inducendomi ancora la paura del nigromante, al qual forse messer Ansaldo, se tu il beffassi, far ci farebbe dolente” (X.5.15). While recognizing that her motives were good, he also upbraids her for marketing her chastity: “egli non è atto di savia né d’onesta donna d’ascoltare alcuna ambasciata delle così fatte, né di pattovire sotto alcuna condizione con alcuno la sua castità” (X.5.14). She must correct her dishonorable behavior by either fulfilling the promise or by finding some other way to be exonerated from it: “Voglio io che tu a lui vada e, se per modo alcun puoi, t’ingegni di far che, servata la tua onestà, tu sii da questa promessa disciolta: dove altramenti non si potesse, per questa volta il corpo ma non l’animo gli concede” (X.5.16). Gilberto requires, in other words, that she come up with a solution, even at the expense of her own chastity: if necessary, she must make a gift of herself.

While Branca finds in Gilberto’s words an allusion to Livy’s story of Lucretia, for whom “It was the mind . . . that sinned, not the body; without intention there could never be guilt” (I.59), one cannot help but recall as well the words of the devil who carries off Guido da Montefeltro: “né pentére e volere insieme puossi / per la contradizion che nol consente” (Inf. XXVII.119–20). Gilberto’s advice casts him among the fraudulent counselors, for he suggests that it is possible to commit the act of sex with Ansaldo without willing it, precisely the sort of reasoning that Lucretia had sought to obviate with her suicide. At the same time, he is not wholly at fault, for it was Dianora herself who initially interpreted Ansaldo’s love in an erotic key: “E se io potessi esser certa che egli cotanto m’amasse quanto tu di’, senza fallo io mi recherei a amar lui e a far quello che egli volesse” (X.5.6).
She promises servitude in exchange for Ansaldo’s service; she does not appear to understand at this point that there are many ways to love.

By the time she meets with Ansaldo, however, she appears to have gained a greater understanding of love: “Messere, né amor che io vi porti né promessa fede mi menan qui ma il comandamento del mio marito, il quale, avuto più rispetto alle fatiche del vostro disordinato amore che al suo e mio onore, mi ci ha fatta venire; e per comandamento di lui disposta sono per questa volta a ogni vostro piacere” (X.5.20). She accurately describes the situation: she has not come out of love or to keep a promise. Rather, because her husband understands that Ansaldo’s efforts, specifically inasmuch as they involve a dangerous necromancer, outweigh any concern for her or Gilberto’s honor, he has decided to make a gift of her to Ansaldo. She also captures the essence of the situation in characterizing Ansaldo’s feelings as disordinato amore, a love that seeks fulfillment in sex rather than in higher forms of expression. In identifying Ansaldo’s condition in this way she shows herself to have the same intellletto d’amore as the women who, in the Vita nuova, point out to Dante his own disordinato amore, inasmuch as he claims that his blessedness lies in words of praise of Beatrice though he fails to praise her. The speech has the effect of changing Ansaldo’s mind, but not because he recognizes his love as disordered. Rather, looking right past her, he finds that her husband’s generosity moves him: “dalla liberalità di Gilberto commosso il suo fervore in compassione cominciò a cambiare” (X.5.21). He explains that he does not want to be “guastatore dello onore di chi ha compassione al mio onore” (X.5.22), in other words Gilberto, and he asks that she thank her husband “di tanta cortesia” (X.5.22). With her speech Dianora thus accomplishes two goals, one intended and the other not. She fulfills Gilberto’s instruction that she get out of her commitment while conserving her onestà, and she mediates the creation of a bond between the two men, rooted in their mutual appreciation of onore. Indeed, news of Ansaldo’s generosity “strettissima e leale amistà lui e messer Ansaldo congiunse” (X.5.23).

The solution to her crisis also has the side effect of neutralizing the most serious threat, that of the necromancer. Impressed by Gilberto’s generosity in honor and Ansaldo’s in love, the necromancer decides to be generous in his recompense, absolving Ansaldo of his payment for the garden, which ran to a “grandissima quantità di moneta” (X.5.10). If the necromancer’s decision to write off his costs strikes readers as inverisimilar, they are likely reading accurately, as this is but one in a series of suggestions that the day is shedding its mimetic skin. A series of relations that improperly derive from Dianora’s dangerous ethics thus finds a new ethical order founded on a liberalità that ablates fundamental economic principles of exchange. In her conclusion too, Emilia insists on Ansaldo’s generosity, apparently see-
The final trio: women, friendship, and justice

As Day X nears its end, it suffers particular harm because of the charisma of Griselda. So wholly does she dominate the day that the tenth story seems to supplant the ninth, even though the ninth story, here narrated by Panfilo, ideally realizes the monarch’s intentions in assigning the theme. Moreover, Griselda’s attraction has led readers to overlook the unity of the last three stories, a unity that mirrors the trinity of the first three tales of the Decameron. Whereas the first trio addressed questions of transcendence, here the issues addressed are immanent and introduce a new theme to the women/friendship dynamic that courses through the day. That element is justice, by no means new to the day—one need think only of the first story and Alfonso’s righting of the wrong done to Ruggieri—but which here assumes new dimensions thanks to the association of the mediatrix with allegory. In what follows, then, rather than read Griselda as a case apart, I shall read her as the culmination of a carefully prepared process that begins with the eighth story and which revisits the topos of the apotheosis of woman in order to demonstrate how it, and women’s status and safety in general, is wholly contingent on men.

With the eighth story, featuring the friendship of Tito and Gisippo, the question of a woman’s status begins its ascent, thanks to a number of alle-
gories that assign transcendent value to womanhood. Whereas in the earlier stories a friendship results from a woman’s mediation, here the friendship predates the entry of the woman, Sofronia, onto the scene: the Roman Tito has come to Athens to study philosophy, whereupon he befriends Gisippo and then falls in love with Sofronia, promised in marriage to his friend. Upon learning of Tito’s feelings, Gisippo gives Sofronia to him, and later, when their maneuver is discovered, they defend themselves and their friendship against members of her family who claim Gisippo had no right to consign her to Tito. A later series of peregrinations leads all three to Rome, where they reunite under Tito’s roof after Gisippo marries Tito’s sister, Fulvia. The tale thus concludes with two intersecting triangles of desire, both involving Gisippo and Tito and each mediated by a different woman, Gisippo’s sposa turned Tito’s wife, and Tito’s sister turned Gisippo’s sposa. There thus emerges a complicated international kinship involving a Greek and a Roman man and a Greek and a Roman woman.

From the onset of the action, Tito and Gisippo remain inseparable, so much so that one wonders how there could be room for a third party in a relationship that already mimics marriage. Filomena describes their friendship as “una fratellanza e una amicizia si grande . . . che mai poi da altro caso che da morte non fu separato: niun di loro aveva né ben né riposo se non tanto quanto erano insieme” (X.8.7). Tito, moreover, clearly understands his desire for Sofronia as conflicting with his love for Gisippo: “tu il dovresti fuggire, se quello riguardassi che la vera amistà richiede e che tu dei” (X.8.15). He sees his desire as violating the rules of friendship: “or non conosci tu, sì per li ricevuti onori da Cremete e dalla sua famiglia e sì per la intera amicizia la quale è tra te e Gisippo, di cui costei è sposa, questa giovane conveniri avere in quella reverenza che sorella?” (X.8.13). His impulse to convert his erotic desire for Sofronia into a sibling affection is of a piece with his sense that the desire is somehow incestuous: “Quante volte ha già il padre la figliuola amata, il fratello la sorella, la matrigna il figliastro?” (X.8.16). There is of course no real incest here; rather, the sentence accurately reflects Tito’s scrambled psychology: he senses that his love for Sofronia somehow violates an established order, the order of his

18. In her essay on this story (The Sign of Reason 237–48), Kirkham argues that Boccaccio intends this pair of friends to enter a pantheon of classical friendships that includes Damon and Pythias, Theseus and Pirithous, Nisus and Euryalus. Kirkham locates the principles of friendship and the moral issues at work in this tale in Cicero’s De amicitia and De officiis. Reaching different conclusions, Mazzotta also relies on Ciceronian texts in his reading of the tale (The World at Play 254–60), which undertakes to reconstruct the thought of the Greek philosopher Aristippus, whose name Boccaccio borrows for this tale.
relationship with Gisippo. He is correct, but not for the reasons he thinks. When he reveals the truth to Gisippo, the latter upbraids him not for loving Sofronia but for hiding his feelings from his friend: “Tito, se tu non fossi di conforto bisognoso come tu se’, io di te a te medesimo mi dorrei, sì come d’uomo il quale hai la nostra amicizia violata, tenendomi sì lungamente la tua gravissima passione nascosa” (X.8.25). More clear-headed than Tito, he reaffirms the order of their friendship by privileging his friend’s interests over his own: “senza indugio deliberò la vita dello amico più che Sofronia dovergli esser cara” (X.8.24). In his reflexive subordination of his own conjugal desires to Tito’s, Gisippo also mimics the subordinate political status of Athens vis-à-vis Rome, a relation that will be made explicit later on.

At the core of Tito’s confusion over his desire for Sofronia is her status as Gisippo’s sposa. By sposa Tito of course means promessa sposa, but the elision of the semantic—and legal—distinction suggests that simply by entering into this contract Sofronia’s parents have transferred authority over her to Gisippo. Gisippo appears to understand the situation similarly, because when Tito confesses his love for Sofronia, he refers to her as “a me sposata” (X.8.26). He continues: “Egli è il vero che Sofronia è mia sposa e che io l’amava molto e con gran festa le sue nozze aspettava; ma per ciò che tu, sì come molto più intendente di me, con più fervor disideri così cara cosa come ella è, vivi sicuro che non mia ma tua moglie verrà nella mia camera” (X.8.30). The sentence divides the marriage ritual into three events: first, betrothal (sposa), then the wedding ceremony itself (nozze), and finally consummation of the marriage (moglie . . . nella mia camera). The question of Sofronia’s status, that is, to whom she is in fact married, hangs on the issue of when her marriage to Gisippo becomes official.

This issue is by no means settled in the Middle Ages. Yalom describes betrothal as “almost as binding as marriage” (51), citing the English case of Christina of Markyate, who delayed her marriage for several years and eventually won the freedom to enter the religious life. Before her case was adjudicated, however, her family had a priest pressure her to complete the marriage, arguing that betrothal was the equivalent of marriage. The institution of public banns, on the other hand, suggests that betrothal did not equal marriage, because one or another party could annul the betrothal should evidence surface during the three weeks of the banns that would invalidate the contract. Possible causes, according to Yalom, included a prior marriage of one or the other party, a prior engagement of one or the other party, or prohibited degrees of consanguinity (53). Nor did a public marriage ceremony suffice to affirm the marriage, as consummation came to be a key feature of the ceremonies surrounding marriage, even to the extent
that it required a witness in order to ensure that the marriage was binding.

Gisippo’s actions suggest that he believes that while he has legal control over Sofronia’s fate, he is also not legally married to her and can thus consign her to Tito. At the same time, he and Tito both appear to sense that they are on weak legal footing, because they do not publicize the new arrangement, keeping it even from Sofronia. The wedding itself is murky at best. Tito marries Sofronia in Gisippo’s bedroom, “ogni lume avendo spento” (X.8.47), and with no witnesses. She fully expects to receive Gisippo, and without revealing his identity to her Tito asks her whether she will marry him; she agrees. He pretends to be kidding around with her, “quasi come sollazzando chetamente la domandò se sua moglie esser voleva” (X.8.48), so that she will think the question is a lead-up to the consummation of her marriage. She plays along, agreeing to marry him, and he places a ring upon her finger, announcing, “È io voglio esser tuo marito” (X.8.49); they then have sex without her ever learning that he is Tito. Sofronia is thus tricked into marrying a man to whom she was not promised; the two young men apparently have no intention ever of revealing the truth to Sofronia, but must when Tito’s father dies and he has to return to Rome.

When the private matter, known exclusively to Tito and Gisippo, becomes public, the question of Sofronia’s status also comes out in the open. Upon learning the truth of her marriage Sofronia first responds by looking at the two “un poco sdegnosetta,” then bursts into tears and runs home to her parents, where she tells them of “lo ’nganno il quale ella e egli da Gisippo ricevuto avevano, affermando sé esser moglie di Tito e non di Gisippo come essi credevano” (X.8.52). She too believes that events have made her Tito’s wife. The news provokes a scandal, and Gisippo finds himself caught in the middle, shunned by his own family and hers as well. In a show of loyalty Tito steps forward to defend Gisippo and the marriage. Capitalizing on the craven nature of the Greeks—Filomena explains that their bark is worse than their bite—he summons his “animo romano e senno ateniese” (X.8.55) to argue for the legitimacy of the union. His claim rests on two foundations, both of which skirt the question of when a marriage becomes final. He first asserts that the marriage itself is proof of divine will: “mia moglie Sofronia è divenuta dove lei a Gisippo avavate dato, non riguardando che ab eterno disposto fosse che ella non di Gisippo divenisse ma mia, sì come per effetto si conosce al presente” (X.8.58). This clever rhetorical ploy effectively divests both Gisippo and Tito of any responsibility for their conspiracy: they were merely pawns of the gods with no free will of their own.

Tito’s second argument appears already in the first one, when he says that “lei a Gisippo avavate dato.” He will soon elaborate on this point,
explaining that her family criticizes Gisippo “per ciò che colei m’ha data per moglie col suo consiglio, che voi a lui col vostro avavate data” (X.8.61). The parents, having assigned Sofronia to Gisippo, in Tito’s mind have made her Gisippo’s property, marriage ceremony or no. According to Tito Gisippo has behaved wisely, respecting “le santi leggi della amicizia,” and he notes that “il legame dell’amistà troppo più stringe che quel del sangue o del parentado” (X.8.62). One is reminded here of Guiscardo’s reply to Tancred, once the father has discovered his affair with Ghismonda: “Amor può troppo più che né voi né io possiamo” (IV.1.23; italics mine). The use of this construction, again in a marked statement, exposes the nature of what is at stake here, as a theory of friendship between men comes to substitute for a theory of love between a man and a woman.

Tito’s arguments convince, though not only for their logic. He also includes some saber rattling of his own, reminding his audience that he is after all a Roman, and a Roman of high birth, and that if they choose to pursue the matter further they will have to answer to the power of Rome. With his statement about friendship Tito effectively enunciates the law that rules his and Gisippo’s actions, and with his threat about Roman power he identifies the means by which he will enforce that law. After he leaves his interlocutors consult and concur: “Quegli che là entro rimasono, in parte dalle ragioni di Tito al parentado e alla sua amistà indotti e in parte spaventati dall’ultime sue parole, di pari concordia deliberarono essere il migliore d’aver Tito per parente, poi che Gisippo non aveva esser voluto, che aver Gisippo per parente perduto e Tito per nemico acquistato” (X.8.88). Some combination of Tito’s arguments convinces his audience, and they make a practical decision that recalls other decisions made under coercion, such as the Traversari girl’s accession to marry Nastagio degli Onesti, another eighth-day story narrated by Filomena. Indeed, Sofronia’s redirection of her love for Gisippo sounds very much like the Traversari girl’s sudden reversal on the question of Nastagio: “sì come savia, fatta della necessità virtù, l’amore il quale aveva a Gisippo prestamente rivolse a Tito” (X.8.89). Like all things, love is a commodity, and a woman should invest it prudently.19

In its bare bones the story has significant allegorical dimensions. The name Sofronia’s means “wise,” so the Roman Tito’s coming to Athens to...
study philosophy and falling in love with a wise woman figures nothing more than the boy’s liking his major. More to the point of the story, however, Sofronia’s actions suggest that a wise woman knows better than to stand in the way of men’s friendship. Her accommodation of that friendship and her family’s acceptance of her marriage to Tito represent singular affirmations of a woman’s place, subordinate to the wishes of men.

In the lengthy paean to friendship with which Filomena concludes, she introduces a new and surprising dimension that further exalts women. She identifies friendship as praiseworthy “si come discretissima madre di magnificenza e d’onestà, sorella di gratitudine e di carità, e d’odio e d’avarizia nemica” (X.8.111). The statement effectively recapitulates the day, identifying the relationship—friendship—that motivates the acts of magnificenza narrated therein, acts that often counterbalance hatred or avarice. She reiterates these personifications when, in the series of rhetorical questions that follow, she identifies friendship as costei, the agent of all the good that happened in the story. One may say, with apologies to Machiavelli, that friendship is a woman, and a woman with agency. In other words, it is something female that creates the bonds of affection between men that are foundational to society. Thus do all the women who figure in the development of male friendship in this story and the earlier ones, thanks to Filomena’s troping, assume their rightful dimension as allegories of friendship itself, and specifically of friendship between men. That these female characters have no apparent agency should no longer disturb us for, as it turns out, they are agency itself, put to the service of male comity. They should well rejoice in their instrumental roles, for they are furthering a cause that transcends their own interests, the cause of friendship that, as Aristotle reminds us, is foundational to society. At the same time, in their reconfiguration as allegories they assume an evanescent quality. In the moment at which they bring men together, they vanish.

The ironic apotheosis of womanhood realized in this tale not only anticipates its almost absurd extension in Griselda but also suggests a different type of transcendence for women than we see in Dante (the divine woman), as well as a resistance to the sort of demystification of women that one sees in Petrarch. Here woman transcends herself in another way, as an allegory of the social compact between men that, as Aristotle points out, begins on the personal level but leads to the construction of entire societies. Boccaccio’s point here is moreover entirely consistent with the initial thrust of the book, specifically his own recitation of how another woman, the object of his unrequited passion, strengthened the bonds of friendship in his own life: “Nella qual noia tanto rifrigerio già mi porsero i piacevoli ragionamenti d’alcuno amico e le sue laudevoli consolazioni, che io porto fermissima
opinione per quelle essere avenuto che io non sia morto” (Proem.4). That he then turns his back on these very friends and dedicates the book instead to women is not the act of an ingrate, but rather the start of a long process of exploration of the meaning of womanhood that culminates here, where women find their proper place in a world of men.

It may appear at first glance that such an important argument comes at a strangely unmarked place in the Decameron. After all, Boccaccio appears to privilege other loci in his book, such as the first and tenth tale, or the ninth, normally told by a monarch, or the fifth, the central tale of a day. And yet, as Victoria Kirkham points out (The Sign of Reason 159), the Middle Ages subscribed to the Pythagorean association of the number eight with Justice, which is of course a central aim of law. Boccaccio’s association of women with justice here assumes an ironic dimension, the understanding of which is essential as the Decameron moves toward its conclusion. Justice here is revealed not as the enforcement of law, assuming that Gisippo had no legal right to transfer Sofronia to Tito, but as the result of a series of negotiations between men, the determining factor of which is the superior power of one man, here the Roman, over the other, the Greek. One cannot separate Tito’s final accommodation of Gisippo from the fact that Tito ends up with what he wants, Sofronia, and it is impossible to know whether he would have extended similar generosity had he been the loser in their conflict over the woman. Gisippo arguably emerges as the better friend because of his willingness to make great sacrifices in order to preserve the friendship. Boccaccio’s warning here about the subordination of justice to power, while adumbrating the action of the two remaining stories, also stands as a sobering reminder to those who would hope for an earthly justice in imitation of the moral axis that defines divine justice.

Questions of justice hang over the ninth story as well, here applied to international relations. Indeed, the allusions to international law issues found in the eighth story—Tito’s threat of Roman war against Greece—become explicit in the ninth, where the action develops against the background of the Third Crusade. By invoking war Boccaccio simply amplifies the legal questions already present in the Decameron, moving them across borders. Kelsen compares war to the sanction in domestic law, as response to a delict: “International law exhibits the same character as the law of individual states. Like the latter, it is a coercive system. And in the reconstructed legal norm of international law, as in the reconstructed legal norm of the state legal system, a material fact (regarded as harmful to the community) is linked with a coercive act, as condition with consequence. In international law, the specific consequences of an unlawful act are reprisal and war” (Introduction 108). In the case of the ninth story, Panfilo, the narrator,
describes a specific condition of injury that has led to war: “al tempo dello ’imperador Federigo primo a racquistar la Terra Santa si fece per li cristiani un general passaggio” (X.9.5). The verb racquistar here suggests the injury, the loss of territory claimed by Christians. For all of its religious overtones, the Crusade is here reduced to a territorial dispute in which the Christian party, believing it has suffered harm, undertakes a reprisal on the party that it contends illegally exercises sovereignty, expressed as the application of domestic law, over territory it has not ceded to the Saracens. While the reasons for the international contact at a personal level thus differ—in the eighth story it is philosophical education that sends Tito to Athens, while in the ninth it is espionage about the Christian preparations for war that sends Saladin to Pavia as a spy—both stories dramatize a test of a friendship whose international and ideological stresses ultimately challenge it. While the eighth story presents a rather cynical example of the endurance of friendship, the ninth reaches for a more altruistic model, facilitated in no small part by a woman: Torello’s wife Adalieta.

The reader gets a first whiff of Adalieta even before she steps out onto the story’s main stage. Torello sends her advance warning that he plans to bring guests home—the message is almost so trite today as to bring laughter at the very thought—and she organizes a banquet for them, “non con feminile animo ma con reale” (X.9.20). Already she transcends her own womanhood, a sign that she has some ulterior value, one associated with neither her class—her husband is un gentile uomo and not royalty—not her gender. She first appears to Saladin in a highly artificial, almost ceremonial way. Summoned by her husband, she comes to meet his guests: “. . . essendo bellissima e grande della persona e di ricchi vestimenti ornata, in mezzo di due suoi figliioletti, che parevan due agnoli, se ne venne davanti a costoro e piacevolmente gli salutò” (X.9.28). Each element of the description rings with allegorical tones. We already know of her animo reale, which implies authority. Superficially her imposing size and beauty further suggest authority, while her beautiful clothing associates her with rhetoric, and the angelic nature of her two sons suggests the relationship between human and divine.

On a deeper level, the arrangement of the group, with the mother appearing between her two young sons, bears a striking resemblance to medieval iconography of justice. Boccaccio would have been well familiar with this iconography, seeing it, for example, in the Lorenzetti Allegory of Good Government in the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena, where Justice, as a woman, holds a scale, in which an angel kneels, in each hand. Giotto’s grisaille fresco of Justice in Padua’s Scrovegni Chapel likewise shows justice,
again female, holding two small dishes containing angels. Given the association of justice with angels the detail of Boccaccio’s description, according to which Adalieta’s sons “parevan due agnoli,” becomes anything but casual. Torello does not simply present his wife to Saladin, he presents Christian justice, figured as a capacity to reward and punish. Adalieta’s presence is thus cautionary, a reminder to Saladin that while in Pavia he is subject to Christian law. The men welcome her: “Essi vedendola si levarono in piè e con reverenzia la ricevettero, e fattala seder tra loro gran festa fecero de’ due belli suoi figliuolletti” (X.9.28). By receiving her so warmly, Saladin and his companions effectively agree to live by the terms of Christian law while in a Christian land, secure in the implicit guarantee that despite its local authority Christian law will not ignore their interests.

The allegory does not end there. Adalieta also confers gifts upon her guests, a gesture that by her own account is her idea: “Allora la donna con lieto viso disse: ‘Adunque veggo io che il mio feminile aviso sarà utile, e per ciò vi priego che di spezial grazia mi faciate di non rifiutare né avere a vile quel piccioletto dono il quale io vi farò venire, ma considerando che le donne secondo il lor picciol cuore piccole cose danno, più al buono animo di chi dà riguardando che alla quantità del don, riguardiate’” (X.9.30).

The speech is eloquently disingenuous, because for all her rhetorical gestures of self-diminution, encapsulated in the repetition of the adjective picciolo, Adalieta essentially acts in her husband’s stead during his absence: she rules de facto, conferring symbolic gifts. She even goes so far as to suggest that she surpasses her husband in wisdom, for she represents the very idea of the gift as the product of an albeit “inferior” feminile aviso, and she describes it as reflecting the “buono animo di chi dà,” in other words, her buono animo, not her husband’s. She then shows the gifts, “due paia di robe, l’un foderato di drappo e l’altro di vaio, non miga cittadine né da mercatanti ma da signore, e tre giubbe di zendado e pannilini” (X.9.31). Ostensibly wifely gifts, offered because “voi siete alle vostre donne lontani,” there can be little doubt that they also convey symbolic value. This is particularly true for the two robe, as they are each lined, suggesting an inner value that their external appearance conceals. Their respective linings, as Branca suggests, make them suitable for summer (drappo) and winter (vaio). With their similar outward appearance and different linings, the two cloaks also serve as a reminder that whatever specificities, ethnic, religious, and so forth, may distinguish their wearers, we are all generally the same. The tre giubbe work a similarly homogenizing effect, here specifically as Chris-

20. My warm thanks to my colleague Cathleen Fleck for leading me to these images.
tianizing the foreigner. As Adalieta puts it, “io ho delle robe il mio signore vestito con voi” (X.9.31): in other words, they are the same clothes that her husband wears. The logic of her gesture now becomes transparent: after first appearing as a sign of justice, she makes a first claim about the essential sameness of men only finally to complete a symbolic act of conversion of her presumably non-Christian guests, essentially performing the Crusade at home. Her guests accept the gifts, suspecting that Torello has intuited that they are something more than merchants, thus misunderstanding slightly the import of her gesture. Still they acknowledge the gravity of the exchange: “Queste son, madonna, grandissime cose e da non dover di leggier pigliare, se i vostri prieghi a ciò non ci stringessero, alli quali dir di non non si puote” (X.9.32). Whatever they think they are getting, in accepting it they embrace it.

Adalieta’s role as giver of gifts does not end there, for she bestows another important gift that will play a similar role in the story. Upon Torello’s departure she gives him a ring of hers, explaining: “Se egli avviene che io muoia prima che io vi rivega, ricordivi di me quando il vedrete” (X.9.47). Now, we know from the story of Saladin and Melchisedech, which lurks beneath the surface of this one, that a ring is a symbol of law; in bestowing this ring upon her husband as he leaves the Christian world, Adalieta reminds him that even though she may be far away, even dead, he is still subject to the Christian law that in some way emanates from her. Her gesture mandates his return to Pavia, not simply because he loves his wife, but because no friendship can undermine his duty to submit to her. When in Alessandria, in fact, he is known as “il cristiano di Saladino” (X.9.51), and even before Saladin facilitates his repatriation he repeatedly tries to escape. Adalieta’s choices, born of her feminile aviso, turn out to be crucial in bringing the tale to its happy ending. When in Alessandria and working as Saladin’s falconer, the sultan recognizes Torello thanks to his unique smile. The clothing Adalieta had given the sultan furnishes material proof of Torello’s identity, and Saladin reveals his own, making recourse to a pun: “Voi siete messer Torel di Stra e io son l’uno de’ tre mercatanti a’ quali la donna vostra donò queste robe; e ora è venuto il tempo di far certa la vostra credenza qual sia la mia mercanzia, come nel partirmi da voi dissi che potrebbe avvenire” (X.9.57). The mercantile pun, which picks up on the exchange between Torello and Saladin when the two parted ways outside Pavia, associates friendship with the notion of exchange, eliding the distinction between the exchange of an Aristotelian good, bene, and the exchange of goods, beni. Indeed, Saladin then bestows his own gift upon Torello: “di reali vestimenti il fé vestire” (X.9.59), clothing of a quality similar to that which Adalieta had earlier given him. This gesture, which again points to
the centrality of Adalieta’s role in the story, also has the effect of bestowing Saracen identity upon Torello. Each friend now enjoys dual identity: his own and that of his friend. Indeed, Saladin tells Torello, “pensate che non io oramai, ma voi qui siate il signore” (X.9.58): in essence, the Christian merchant has become the sultan.

These rituals make a point about international law. Each set of clothing serves to remind its wearer, symbolically, that while he lives in a foreign land he is also subject to a law not his own. In accepting the clothing, each protagonist affirms the territorial sovereignty of the state in which he finds himself when the gift is offered. Such recognition of borders effectively obviates the need for war. By accepting Saladin’s jurisdiction over a land claimed by Christians, Torello denies the claim. Just as Saladin had ceded Melchisedech’s point about the equality of the three religions back in I.3, so too here does a Christian make a similar concession. This recognition further squares with the supernatural signs that undermine the Christian invasion. Upon arriving at Acri Torello and the Christian army find themselves beset by “una grandissima infermeria e mortalità” (X.9.49), not unlike the plague that drives the brigata into the countryside, “per opera zion de’ corpi superiori o per le nostre inique opera da giusta ira di Dio a nostra correzione mandata sopra i mortali” (I.Intro.8). According to this predicate one may apply a similar argument to the epidemic that strikes Acri, suggesting that God was not on the side of the Christian army that day, not necessarily because God had become an enemy of the Christians, but because He wanted the religions to coexist peacefully.

It should come as little surprise, then, that the other object that serves to prove identity, beyond the clothing Adalieta had given Saladin, turns out to be the ring she gives her husband when he leaves Pavia. Beyond reminding us of the tale of the three rings, it also functions within the story as a symbol of Adalieta herself. As she tells him, “Se egli avviene che io muoia prima che io vi rivega, ricordivi di me quando il vedrete” (X.9.47). She is asking him to be faithful to her memory, and in doing so she associates faith with justice. Returning to Pavia with the ring, Torello reaffirms his loyalty not just to his wife but to the justice she represents. What remains unclear is whether, after the changes he has undergone, she is prepared to recognize him. In his absence she has come under pressure from her family to remarry, and she has resisted for the year, month, and day that Torello had requested of her.21 Wondering about her enduring loyalty to him, Torello

21. A year, a month, and a day total 396 days, a number divisible not only by 3, thus reinforcing the Trinitarian allusions in the story (Saladin travels with two companions and three servants; Adalieta appears with two of her sons; she gives the men three giubbe), but also by 9, appropriate since this is the ninth story of the day.
subjects her to a test. He arrives at her wedding banquet wearing the Saracen clothes in which he had returned to Pavia and claiming to be sent by Saladin as an ambassador to the King of France. He concocts a native custom as bogus as the one used earlier by Gentile de’ Carisendi, according to which an outsider attending a wedding banquet shares a cup of wine with the bride. Adalieta’s agreement to the ritual implies that under certain circumstances foreign law may be applied where it enjoys no sovereignty.

When Adalieta recognizes the ring she and her husband are reunited in a scene that is among the most vividly described of the entire Decameron: “preso [the ring] e fiso guardato colui il qual forestier credeva e già conoscedolo, quasi furiosa divenuta fosse gittata in terra la tavola che davanti aveva, gridò: ‘Questi è il mio signore, questi veramente è messer Torello!’ E corsa alla tavola alla quale esso sedeva, senza avere riguardo a’ suoi drappi o a cosa che sopra la tavola fosse, gittatisi oltre quanto poté, l’abbracciò strettamente, né mai dal suo collo fu potuto, per detto o per fatto d’alcuno che quivi fosse, levare infino a tanto che per messer Torello non le fu detto che alquanto sopra sé stesse, per ciò che tempo da abbracciarlo le sarebbe ancora prestato assai” (X.9.107–8). This scene too resonates with allegory. In recognizing Torello Adalieta figures the capacity of justice to discern the truth. The clothing, Saracen clothing, functions as a blindfold; nevertheless, she sees, for in the end clothing does not alter identity, despite the story’s repeated suggestion that it does. Her other actions appear to have another source: the reaction of Moses to his discovery of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. Angry that the Israelites are worshiping a false god, an angry Moses smashes the tablets of the law just as Adalieta, quasi furiosa, upends her table, identifying her true lord. The table at which she sits represents her submission to a new lord, her new husband; by upending it she denies his authority over her, reaffirming Torello’s.

If Torello is her lord, the source of her law, then Adalieta emerges definitively as an allegory of justice. She embodies justice because she begins the cycle of reciprocity that characterizes the story, fulfilling Aquinas’s definition of justice as the application of the Golden Rule. The story’s perambulations, in which gifts bestowed establish patterns of reciprocity, facilitate a return in the end to the status quo, arguably a desired outcome of acts of justice. That status quo includes not merely the reunification of the spouses but the territorial claims that had led to the initial contact between Christian and Saracen. Adalieta has facilitated not merely a friendship but an international accord as well. The story does not simply demonstrate that

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22. See ST 2a2ae. 58, where Aquinas explicitly defines justice as the application of the Golden Rule.
the two peoples can get along, thus obviating the need for warfare; it also suggests that while the two cultures may mix each finally has a legitimate claim to its own territory under international law.

As is the case with most of the day’s stories, this one comes with an explicit link to its predecessor, here furnished by Panfilo in his introduction. He begins by affirming Filomena’s claim that friendship enjoys scant respect nowadays, then continues by explicitly denying any practical purpose to the group’s storytelling: “E se noi qui per dover correggere i difetti mondani o pur per riprendergli fossimo, io seguiterei con diffuso sermone le sue parole; ma per ciò che altro è il nostro fine, a me è caduto nell’animo di dimostrarvi . . . una delle magnificenze del Saladino . . .” (X.9.4). This remarkable statement about the purpose of storytelling, coming as it does from the king at the end of the day’s themed stories, deserves attention. It alludes to what Paolo Cherchi has identified as the principle of onesto raccontare that informs the brigata’s storytelling: “raccontare per il raccontare, senza altro utile” (89). The notion of storytelling without utility, of which Cherchi finds the tenth day to be particularly representative, also helps explain the increasing inverisimilitude of the day’s stories, beginning with the King Alfonso’s gift of his treasures to Ruggieri and recurring in such narrative details as the necromancer’s cancellation of Ansalo’s debt in the fifth story, the Roman murderer’s confession in the eighth, Torello’s magic carpet ride, and finally Griselda herself. Only a storytelling that is explicitly detached from a will to correct by example can accommodate such startling and distracting details.

Panfilo’s remark also allows us to measure the distance he has traveled from the first day, when he attempted to lead by imitating the preacher, to now, when he leads by crystallizing, in negative terms, what the group’s purpose has been all along.23 He now recognizes the limits on human perfection: “accio che per le cose che nella mia novella udirete, se pienamente l’amicizia d’alcuno non si può per li nostri vizii acquistare, almeno diletto prendiamo del servire, sperando che quando che sia di ciò merito ci debba servire” (X.9.4). In other words, because we can never hope to enjoy the perfect friendship depicted in the story, rooted in the Aristotelian good, we

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23. On this point Cherchi and I differ. He takes Panfilo’s renunciation of the sermone as of a piece with the “campo dell’onesto” (97) in which the stories situate themselves, as opposed to that of the exemplum or sermon: “il ruolo di predicare o di sermoneggiare e di educare spetta ai predicatoer e ai maestri, cioè a persone che hanno finalità pratiche e utilitaristiche” (100). Cherchi’s largely synthetic reading of the Decameron leads him to overlook exceptions to his rule, even though he concedes, following Giorgio Padoan’s lead (in “Mondo aristocratico e mondo comunale”), that the Ciappelletto story is exceptional. I should add that he misidentifies Panfilo here as the “narratrice che prende la parola per narrarre la nona novella” (100; italics mine).
can at least enjoy the *servire* that it exemplifies, hoping that our own service may some day find similar reward: in other words, justice by Aquinas’s definition. Panfilo is making a distinction here between the affection that informs perfect friendship and the behaviors that demonstrate it, arguing that we can perform friendship even if we do not fully experience it spiritually. At tale’s end he returns to these themes, sounding a note of disillusionment in the face of what he has just narrated: “Cotale adunque fu il fine delle noie di messer Torello e di quelle della sua cara donna e il guiderdone delle lor liete e preste cortesie; le quali molti si sforzan di fare che, bencché abbian di che, si mal far le vagliono, che fatte l’abbiano: per che, se loro merito non ne segue, né essi né altri maravigliar se ne dee” (X.9.113). In other words, it is wrong to demand return for services rendered, for true justice, as Aquinas points out echoing the Aristotle of the *Ethics*, is voluntary. Altruism is not about contractual exchange, and those who lament the lack of *merito* have no one but themselves to blame.

The themes of fraternity and altruism that unite the tenth day find their ironic recasting in the last story. In his introduction Dioneo goes out of his way to deny continuity: “Mansuete mie donne, per quel che mi paia, questo dì d’oggi è stato dato a re e a soldani e a così fatta gente: e per ciò, acciò che io troppo da voi non mi scosti, vo’ ragionare d’un marchese, non cosa magnifica ma una matta bestialità, come che ben ne gli seguisse alla fine; la quale io non consiglio alcun che seguia, per ciò che gran peccato fu che a costui ben n’avenisse” (X.10.3). Dioneo plays on similarities and differences: like the others, his story will focus on the powerful, but unlike the others, he will recount a *matta bestialità*: Boccaccio borrows here from Dante’s terminology to associate Gualtieri’s behavior with violence.24 This initial focus on Gualtieri has not deterred critics from studying Griselda, a far more appealing and intriguing figure. Gualtieri is so unappealingly vile—he bears none of the perverse charm of the great sinners of the *Inferno*—that readers understandably gravitate toward her. Even Dioneo himself appears to experience this effect, introducing the tale as about Gualtieri but concluding it with words about Griselda. The very earliest readers follow his lead; Petrarch entitles his Latin translation *De insigni*

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24. The phrase is first used in *Inferno* XI as Virgil describes the structure of hell: “Non ti rimembra di quelle parole / con le quali la tua Etica petratta / le tre disposizion che ‘l ciel non vole, / incontinenza, malizia e la matta / bestialitate?” (79–82). In the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia* Boccaccio glosses the phrase as follows: “Questo adgettivo ‘matta’ pose qui l’autore più in servigio della rima che per bisogno che n’avesse la bestialità, per ciò che bestialità e mat- 

teza si posson dire essere una medesima cosa. È adunque questa bestialità similmente vizio dell’anima opposto, secondo che piace ad Aristotile nel VII dell’*Etica*, alla divina sapienza . . .” (551). For a fine reading of Boccaccio’s use of Dante’s terminology and its relationship to Aquinas see Mazzotta 126–29.
obedientia ed fide uxoria, shifting the attention entirely onto her.\textsuperscript{25} Even critics who try to focus on Gualtieri do not always succeed; Giovannuzzi, who entitles his compelling essay “La novella di Gualtieri,” in the end has relatively little to say about the marquis and shifts his attention elsewhere. To the extent that the evolution of the critical tradition follows Dioneo’s lead, we should first observe that with this story Boccaccio has succeeded in instilling in virtually all readers of the Decameron a sympathy for women who are victimized by tyrannical men. The story thus comes as a final reply to his male critics, whom Boccaccio first records as objecting that he likes them too much. It exposes the hypocrisy of this critique by showing that everyone can find a woman to like.

The question of Griselda’s transcendence lies at the heart of the critical tradition, and by extension of a reading of the Decameron that has it transcending itself. The story itself abounds with signs of her transcendence, duly recorded by critics. Such a reading, however, risks removing Griselda from the story’s immediate context, in a sense accounting for her behavior as a sign of her own sense of detachment from earthly matters rather than as a reaction to the torturous situation in which she unexpectedly finds herself. If we accept that Griselda floats above the story, then Dioneo’s lesson for his female audience is that they abjure earthly things and understand their own future suffering as part of a process that will bring them reward later.

My own reading, which I now offer, resists the allegorization of Griselda, for a simple reason. It seems to me the key to any allegorical reading lies in Dioneo’s own suggestion that Griselda transcends her humanity: “Che si potrà dir qui? Se non che anche nelle povere case piovono dal cielo de’ divini spiriti, come nelle reali di quegli che sarien più digni di guardar porci che d’avere sopra uomini signoria. Chi avrebbe, altri che Griselda, potuto col viso non solamente asciutto ma lieto sofferir le rigide e mai più non udite pruove da Gualtier fatte?” (X.10.68). The rhetorical question should clue us in to the fact that something is amiss: even Dioneo is not sure what to make of his story. He recovers quickly, offering two contradictory possibilities. Everything here is up for grabs and wholly dependent on Dioneo’s inflection.\textsuperscript{26} He could be asking his first question with a sincere

\textsuperscript{25} Segre argues (“Perché Gualtier di Saluzzo odiava le donne?” 289) that Petrarch’s reading “ha fatto scuola,” generating hundreds of transcriptions and translations into a number of European languages, effectively supplanting Boccaccio’s original. On Petrarch’s translation see also Marcus, An Allegory of Form 99–100.

\textsuperscript{26} To my knowledge few readers have considered this possibility. Rossi notes the tono scanzonato of Dioneo’s comment (“Ironicia e parodia nel Decameron” 404), while Segre remarks on the “enfasi volutamente affettata” of Dioneo’s second question (“Perché Gualtieri di Saluzzo odiava le donne?” 288).
tone or an exasperated one; he could deliver his first reply with a serious or an ironic voice; and he could ask his second question, arguably the most crucial one, similarly in either of two ways. Critics who exalt Griselda do so because they accept Dioneo’s words as sincere. According to such a reading Griselda’s face would be lieto because she enters the story having already transcended her humanity and seeing the course of her life as serving a divine purpose. The counterargument is that Griselda’s happy face denotes the sort of joy in suffering that in a religious context denotes sanctity, but that in a secular one denotes masochism. I would advance a third path that restores Griselda to her relationship with Gualtieri, namely that she enters the marquis’s life aware that she is a construct, and that she accepts his treatment of her because she understands that it is the only way to preserve her figuration, which has become more important to her than any sense of self that predated her marriage. She willingly puts herself at the service of a cause, the institution and preservation of harmony between Gualtieri and his subjects, and in so doing serves to indicate to Boccaccio’s female readers that their own survival is wholly contingent on their willingness to subordinate their own desire to the demands of male comity.

The homosocial here finds its expression in the relationship between Gualtieri and his vassals. At the outset that relationship is tense, as the two parties have different visions of friendship. His subjects express a utilitarian view, urging Gualtieri to marry, while the marquis prefers to pursue pleasure: “in niuna altra cosa il suo tempo spendeva che in uccellare e in cacciare, né di prender moglie né d’aver figliuoli alcun pensier avea; di che egli era da reputar molto savio. La qual cosa a’ suoi uomini non piacciono, più volte il pregaron che moglie prendesse, acciò che egli senza erede né essi senza signor rimanessero, offerendosi di trovargliel tale e di sì fatto padre e madre discesa, che buona speranza se ne potrebbe avere e esso conten-tarsene molto” (X.10.4–5). His subjects urge marriage not because they see it as a good thing for Gualtieri, but because they see it as a good thing for themselves. They correctly understand that the marquis, by virtue of his public role, transcends himself, and in urging him to marry they imply as much. As monarch not only does he embody the law; he must also ensure its preservation by producing offspring who will embody it after his death. Dioneo’s exposition also includes an important comment about Gualtieri’s reluctance to marry and father children: “da che egli era da reputar molto savio.” What is not clear here is what precisely makes Gualtieri savio, perhaps his (misogynistic) recalcitrance to marriage, or his recognition, of

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27. Baratto (Realtà e stile 342–45) insists on the importance of the feudal setting for a full understanding of the novella.
which Dioneo has prior knowledge, that he is not cut out for family life, in which case he demonstrates wise self-knowledge. Either way, as Dioneo endorses Gualtieri’s initial position he also exposes flaws in Gualtieri that threaten order in Saluzzo.

In response to the pressure exerted by his subjects, Gualtieri pushes back, and the tension over who will determine his future threatens to overwhelm the story. In agreeing finally to marry, he points out that they are pressuring him, “voi mi stringete a quello che io del tutto aveva disposto di non far mai” (X.10.6): something is clearly amiss, the hierarchy of power inverted. In attaching terms to his acquiescence Gualtieri seeks to restore order by exerting control over his marital situation: “Ma poi che pure in queste catene vi piace d’annodarmi, e io voglio esser contento; e acciò che io non abbia da dolermi d’altrui che di me, se mal venisse fatto, io stesso ne voglio essere il trovatore, affermandovi che, cui che io mi tolga, se da voi non fia come donna onorata, voi proverete con gran vostro danno quanto grave mi sia l’aver contra mia voglia presa mogliere a’ vostri prieghi” (X.10.8). Suddenly he embodies a Petrarchan oxymoron, hoping to arrange a happy enchainment. Moreover, in announcing his decision to take a wife, Gualtieri elevates her to a symbol of his power, threatening his subjects with dire consequences if they fail to honor her as he demands, particularly since they have put him in this place to begin with. He makes clear that she will be his invention, both as discovery and as creation. He claims the right to be her trovatore, the troubadour, he who both seeks the woman and sings her praises, turning her into a poetic fiction.28 He renews his emphasis on honor when announcing that he has found a bride: “pensate come la festa delle nozze sia bella e come voi onorevolmente ricever la possiate” (X.10.12), and they agree: “I buoni uomini lieti tutti risposero ciò piacer loro e che, fosse chi volesse, essi l’avrebber per donna e onorebbonla in tutte cose sì come donna” (X.10.13). The subjects’ universal happiness, lieti tutti, reflects their affirmation that Gualtieri has fulfilled his social contract with them; as part of the terms they accede to his demand (“come donna onorata”) to honor Griselda as donna, not merely as a woman but as his female counterpart. The agreement replicates not just the feudal model of service but the courtly love ethos as well. It also makes explicit that whatever transcendent power Griselda represents descends from Gualtieri and nowhere else.

The scene in which Gualtieri publicly dresses Griselda bears further

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28. Cavallini’s exclusion of this possibility—“Qui il nomen agentis (formato col suffisso—tore) letteralmente significa: colui che trova” (177n.14)—frankly baffles me. The use of trovatore to mean troubadour is attested already in the thirteenth century, appearing, for example in story 21 of the Novellino: “A lui [emperor Federigo] venieno sonatori, trovatori e belli favellatori. . . .”
signs that he is the source of her power: “in presenza di tutta la sua compagnia e d’ogn’altra persona la fece spogliare ignuda: e fattisi quegli vestimenti che fatti aveva fare, prestamente la fece vestire e calzare e sopra i suoi capelli, così scarmigliati come erano, la fece mettere una corona . . .” (X.10.19).

Not only does her groom dress her; he also covers the most disordered part of her, her capelli scarmigliati, with a symbol of his order, the crown. Indeed, as Dioneo records, her new clothes suggest a more profound transformation: “La giovane sposa parve che co’ vestimenti insieme l’animo e’ costumi mutasse. Ella era, come già dicemmo, di persona e di viso bella: e così come bella era, divenne tanto avvenevole, tanto piacevole e tanto costumata, che non figliuola di Giannucole e guardiana di pecore pareva stata ma d’alcun nobile signore . . .” (X.10.24). Dioneo describes the metamorphosis as one of class: she no longer looks like the daughter of a shepherd but rather like the daughter of a nobleman. By giving her new clothes, Gualtieri thus finesses the exogamy of his marriage with a patina of endogamy: Griselda needs to appear noble in order to project the authority Gualtieri has invested in her. At the same time, however, Dioneo carefully underscores that this is all a game of appearances, for in fact Griselda remains what she always was, the shepherd’s daughter. She acquires a sort of rhetorical gloss because she is Gualtieri’s construct.

The redressing ceremony thus symbolically enacts his reply to the social disorder, embodied in his subjects’ effrontery, that Gualtieri’s refusal to marry has provoked. Indeed, just before leading his men to Griselda, he makes a speech whose theme is reciprocity. He reminds them that he is marrying “più per compiacere a voi che per disiderio che io di moglie avessi” and that in return they had promised “d’esser contenti e d’onorar come donna qualunque quella fosse che io togliessi,” and he describes the

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29. The issue of dressing and redressing has earned considerable critical attention about this tale. For Cottino-Jones (“Fabula vs. Figura” 46) “the undressing corresponds to the ritual or renunciation of her previous condition of existence and the dressing represents her outfitting for the new life to come.” Lanza sees in it a particularly resonant example of Gualtieri’s sadism (26). For Mazzotta “in formal terms the language of clothing and nakedness, traditionally charged with allegorical resonances, heightens the allegorical thrust of the events narrated” (123). In his essay “Ironia e parodia nel Decameron,” which offers a probing analysis of Boccaccio’s parody of Dante, Luciano Rossi explains the scene in metaliterary terms: “qui Boccaccio mette a nudo il procedimento di tanti racconti ‘comici,’ in cui gli ‘ingannatori’ (Ciappelletto, Frate Alberto, Alatiel, ecc.) ricorrevano al travestimento e alla maschera per disorientare gli antagonisti. I ‘travestimenti’ di Griselda non alterano, invece, la natura dell’eroina, che resterà in ogni senso Donna” (402). For a general review of clothing in the Decameron see Weaver, who discusses Griselda on pages 705–6. It is noteworthy, finally, that for her final redressing Griselda and her ladies in waiting repair to her room, out of view of the public. This is the only action of the tale that takes place in a private setting, a recognition that her naked body is no longer fit for public viewing.
marriage as the fulfillment of their contract: “venuto è il tempo che io sono per servare a voi la promessa e che io voglio che voi a me la serviate.” He instructs them to consider how they can receive her honorably, “accio che io mi possa della vostra promession chiamar contento come voi della mia vi potrete chiamare” (X.10.10–12). Griselda’s status in all of this could not be clearer: she is the mediatrix needed to ensure the harmonious friendship between Gualtieri and his subjects.

In other words, Griselda assumes the dimensions of a gift. Just as Gualtieri had received Griselda from her father, so too does he then bestow her on his people, and in each case the exchange entails obligation. It is little wonder then that, once he chases her from the house, his subjects, whose objections to his behavior he had successfully repressed, return as a sort of snarky Greek chorus. They implore him to clothe her in exchange for her service: “Quanti dintorno v’erano il pregavano che egli una roba le donasse, ché non fosse veduta colei che sua moglie tredici anni o più era stata di casa sua così poveramente e così vituperosamente uscire, come era uscirne in camiscia . . .” (X.10.47; italics mine). The subjects rightly understand these relationships to be about exchange, and they are concerned that their marquis not behave dishonorably by failing to recognize the exchange value in Griselda’s thirteen years of service. Her departure moreover equates with a return of the disorder that had threatened Saluzzo years before, when Gualtieri was too busy hunting to think about marriage. Having disposed of his children—for all anyone knows, they are dead—he has apparently terminated the succession.

Griselda accepts the requirements of her role set forth by Gualtieri: “era tanto obediente al marito e tanto servente, che egli si teneva il più contento e il più appagato uomo del mondo” (X.10.24). The adjective contento here recalls Gualtieri’s desire to esser contento in marital chains: she is a dream come true. Discovering her extraordinary nature, his subjects likewise revise their opinion about him: “dove dir soleano Gualtieri aver fatto come poco savio d’averla per moglie presa, che egli era il più savio e il più avveduto uomo che al mondo fosse, per ciò che niuno altro che egli avrebbe mai potuto conoscere l’alta vertù di costei nascosa sotto i poveri panni e sotto l’abito vilesco” (X.10.25). The clothes, in other words, now fit the lady. As she serves her husband she also becomes instrumental in his rehabilita-

30. Dioneo does not disclose the terms of the agreement with Giannucole, limiting himself to saying that Gualtieri, “con lui, che poverissimo era, si convenne di torlare per moglie” (X.10.9). Given the reference to Gualtieri’s poverty one may infer that the contract involved some exchange of money to compensate him for the loss of her labor. When Gualtieri arrives to marry her, he finds her “che con acqua tornava dalla fonte” (X.10.16): clearly, she helps her father around the house.
tion: each rises and falls on the back of the other. Once Dioneo has set this pattern, he offers no indication that it breaks off. She needs him as much as he needs her, which suggests that her behavior, which has led critics to see in her a *figura Cristi* (Cottino-Jones, “Fabula vs. Figura”), or the personification of humility (Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason*), or of Job (Smarr 191–92; Mazzotta 123–24; Bessi), or of Stoic *apatia* (Baratto 343; Cherchi, *L’onestade e l’onesto raccontare* 101), does not so much signal an otherworldly virtue as it does partake of a perverse but mutually efficacious compact that Griselda signed early on with her words of acquiescence, “Signor mio, sì” (X.10.21). As Lanza details (25–26), her masochism perfectly complements his sadism; together they play a public game the end of which is to show their audience the raw truth of absolutism.

Indeed, Griselda’s restoration after enduring years of Gualtieri’s breathtaking cruelty makes precisely the point that all agency in the end depends on the grace of the absolute monarch. It is here that the double value of her identifying noun, *donna* as both woman and *domina*, the female lord, reaches fruition. In fact she models obedience rather ineffectually. His subjects recoil at Gualtieri’s behavior and repeatedly denounce him: “credendo che egli uccidere avesse fatti i figliuoli, il biasimavan forte e reputavanlo crudele uomo e alla donna avevan grandissima compassione” (X.10.39); when he announces his intention to remarry “da assai buoni uomini fu molto ripreso” (X.10.40); and so forth. Even her former ladies-in-waiting, while accepting their new *donna*, Griselda’s daughter, implore Gualtieri to restore some of his former wife’s dignity by clothing her properly for the occasion of his new marriage; they simply cannot wholeheartedly accept that he has done the right thing. These complaints come despite Griselda’s earlier public avowals of loyalty to him. Her speech to Gualtieri upon her divorce is a masterpiece of submission: “io conobbi sempre la mia bassa condizione alla vostra nobilità in alcun modo non convenirsi, e quello che io stata son con voi da Dio e da voi il riconoscea. . . .” She describes her rise in status as a loan, not a gift, and describes herself as happy—“a me dee piacere e piace di renderlovi”—to return her ring to him. She even predicates her request for a simple shift in exchange for her virginity on his judgment of whether her body is *onesto* or not (X.10.44–45). Later, when asked to return to help prepare for Gualtieri’s “wedding,” she replies, “Signor mio, io son presta e apparecchiata” (X.10.51), a reelaboration of her earlier “Signor mio, sì.” Her recognition of Gualtieri’s power identifies her as expertly attuned not only to her husband but to her situation, something Gualtieri’s subjects never understand or fully recognize. In objecting to his treatment of her, they in fact violate their agreement to honor her, because
by acquiescing to him she is telegraphing that the correct way to honor her is to accept that she knows what she is doing.

To summarize what we have so far: Griselda emerges as Gualtieri’s willing object of manipulation, and she rightly understands that her figuration as donna depends entirely on him. When she returns home Dioneo comments that she went back to work with her father, “con forte animo sostenendo il fiero assalto della nemica fortuna” (X.10.48), which may refer to Gualtieri’s cruelty, but it may just as well reference the loss of status that she rather enjoyed. When he announces his intentions to remarry, Dioneo narrates her deep hurt because she had not been able to shed the love she felt for him, an astonishing fact, as he himself will suggest in his comments at the end. When Gualtieri asks her opinion of his new bride, she replies: “A me ne par molto bene; e se così è savia come ella è bella, che ’l credo, io non dubito punto che voi non dobbiate con lei vivere il più consolato signor del mondo; ma quanto posso vi priego che quelle puncture, le quali all’altra, che vostra fu, già deste, non diate a questa, ché appena che io creda che ella le potesse sostenere, sì perché più giovane è e sì ancora perché in dilicatezze è allevata, ove colei in continue fatiche da picciolina era stata” (X.10.59). By referring to herself in the third person she suggests that the woman she was as Gualtieri’s wife was somehow other, alienated from herself. The puncture are as much a metaphor for the pain she suffered as his wife as they are an allusion to the stitching together of her new clothes, and by extension the new her. While Griselda may indeed fear that her replacement could not sustain the role, there is another way to read her plea: that she not be replaced, that no one supplant her as the model of obedience that Gualtieri had made of her. The danger of substitution is not new, as Boccaccio knows full well. One only need think of the accusation Beatrice hurls at Dante in the earthly paradise—“Sí tosto come in su la soglia fui / di mia seconda etade e mutai vita, / questi si tolse a me, e diessi altrui” (Pur. XXX.124–26)—or, somewhat anachronistically, of Petrarch’s effort to replace Laura with the Virgin at the end of the Rime sparse, to understand where this is leading. With an almost Pirandellian awareness of her own fictitiousness, Griselda struggles to preserve her status: she wants to be Gualtieri’s unique object of punishment, because it is her only means to survive.

Dioneo thus uses this tale, appropriately the last story in the Decameron, to expose the mechanisms that lead to the creation of poetic fictions. He reduces that work to a discourse on power, specifically the power of the word, the deployment of which relies wholly on the will of the author. When it comes to women, he appears to argue, transcendence is an artifact:
to the extent that the figure of woman points beyond herself, it is not to
God but to the man who constructed her. It is Dante who brings the dead
Beatrice back to life, conferring on her a literary immortality to which he
alludes at the end of the Vita nuova but which he had somewhat delayed
and could very well have cancelled. Petrarch does as much by allowing
Laura to remain dead; if anything by this act he demonstrates, much more
cynically than Dante, the power that poets hold over the women they claim
to love. Small wonder, then, that he liked this novella of the Decameron best
of all, for it conforms wholly to a writerly ethos by which exploitation mas-
querades as exaltation. That Griselda achieves her longed-for immortality
in no way cancels her contingency: it is but for the power of her creative
agent, Gualtieri, that she survives.

The dynamic that Griselda and Gualtieri play out on the stage of the
Decameron does finally transcend itself, but only to the extent that Gual-
tieri transcends himself, as indeed he does. The significance of his being a
marchese, a monarch, intersects with the discourse of power that has run
through many of the hundred tales. Monarchs lay rhetorical claim to
their authority as coming from God, with the earthly kingdom replicat-
ing its divine model. Gualtieri’s creative impulse, expressed in his decision
to marry outside of his circle and transform his bride into a marchesana,
essentially replicates that same impulse in God the Father; as Mazzotta
puts it, he “arrogates to himself literally what is God’s unique lordship over
human events” (125). So too as God is a source of divine law, Gualtieri is
the source of human law. His treatment of Griselda, which amounts to the
imposition of a set of arbitrary rules that require her obedience, serves to
make two points. First, because the monarch enjoys absolute power, he is
free to impose any laws he wishes, whether they conform to natural law
or not: in effect by imposing them, he dictates their conformity. Second,
the survival of those who are subject to absolute law, in this case women,
depends entirely on their conformity to the rules as set. Griselda’s greatest
strength is her willingness to play along; had she been unwilling, her story
would have ended much sooner.

Finally, Gualtieri’s expression of power tells us something about justice,
a topic that had already been percolating in the two prior stories. With his
tale Dioneo effectively denies that women can embody justice, because jus-
tice lies wholly in the hands of men who deploy power. Justice turns out to
rely on a play between the moral category, what Kelsen calls justice as social
happiness, “a social ordering that is absolutely right, that fully achieves its
objective by satisfying everyone,” and the purely functional alternative,
conformity to positive law (Introduction to the Problems of Legal Theory
16). The end of the story would appear to validate the former definition, for
after all everyone is happy, not just Gualtieri and Griselda but the people of Saluzzo who had been so worried about succession and who celebrate Griselda’s restoration, presumably because their concerns about succession are once again allayed. That notion of justice comes, however, only by means of the second definition, for Gualtieri’s sense of justice is wholly and solipsistically rooted in his demand that others obey him. If anything Dioneo, particularly with his final remarks, exposes the irony of any claims that equate justice with morality, for Gualtieri’s path to justice makes a hash of moral notions.

Dioneo thus brings the storytelling of the Decameron to a close by answering an epistemological question with which it began, way back in the Ciappelletto story: how can one be certain of anything beyond the senses? The startlingly banal answer—one cannot—makes recourse to yet another form of the donna-angelo that had so transfixed an earlier generation of Italian poets. And yet the tale’s insistence on how her observers, beginning with Gualtieri, perceive Griselda, of how they all participate in constructing her, makes rather a different point than does the earlier ethos of the donna-angelo. Dioneo does not simply affirm Griselda’s divinity; rather, he posits her divinity as a product of the human imagination. In this way he confirms what the Decameron has long suggested about natural law: it is a human invention, not a divine one. Dioneo installs a sort of metatrope; he tropes the earlier troping of women and in so doing exposes the troping for what it is. He also reminds his audience of mansuete donne—and the adjective associates them with Griselda—that while they will be the objects of male exaltation they will also be subject, like Griselda, to male control, and specifically to an order that puts women at the service of relations between men. In this way he manages finally to transcend his own pleasure-based attitude toward women, demonstrating his true friendship for them, rooted in a concern for their well-being.

Any reading of the tenth day that follows Panfilo’s lead, focusing exclusively on the question of magnanimity, thus subjects it to a flattening that denies its integrity with the rest of the text. The problems posed by the tenth day in no way exist in a vacuum; instead, they capitalize on and continue a dynamic that has haunted much of the Decameron. In offering a final meditation on the nature of friendship and the status of women, a word that manages to interweave the two themes, the day also manages to bring to a conclusion the Decameron’s lengthy consideration of the function of law in human relations. That all of this happens under the guidance of Panfilo, “all love,” suggests that the day runs on an altruistic impulse in its treatment of the seven ladies. And yet the message communicated under the rubric of altruism, a message that at once exalts women and effaces
them, suggests that women will never enjoy the sort of true friendship that the male characters of Day X realize; the notion of a reconciliation of the sexes remains a dream unfulfilled. Women are simply too overdetermined, their meaning too contingent on men, to enjoy the simple loyalty and affection that men can feel for one another. Perhaps such opportunities lie in a world outside of men, but for now such a dream cannot be realized. The seven ladies themselves affirmed as much when they invited the men to join them, thus setting up the initial tension between the sexes that endures to the end of Day X. This is perhaps the most sobering message of the last day, its final enactment of male retribution against the marginalizing female. For in the tenth day it is the men who occupy the center and the women who stand at the margins. They may be powerful women, capable of embodying and accomplishing great things on behalf of men, but their power is forever contingent, because it is subject to the limits imposed by men.