CHAPTER II

The Wheel of the *Decameron*

From its first clause, indeed from its first word, the *Decameron* signals its nontranscendence: "Umana cosa è aver compassione degli afflitti" (To take pity on people in distress is a human quality), begins the author, locating us in a rigorously secular context and defining its parameters.[1] At this point, *compassione degli afflitti* belongs to an amorous register, referring to Boccaccio's past affliction as a lover for whom his friends felt pity; thus, he claims that he is writing the *Decameron* to repay their kindness, since "la gratitudine, secondo che io credo, trall'altre virtù è sommamente da commendare" (it is my conviction that gratitude, of all the virtues, is most highly to be commended) (Proemio, 7). Here again, the Proem continues to insist on a human set of values, for gratitude is technically not a virtue at all, but a social grace, a virtue only in that it makes life more livable. And, because he wants to make their lives more livable, Boccaccio writes for the ladies, shattering their enforced contemplation with *novelle*, news of life, life-surrogates.

Beginning as it does with the author's gratitude for the generosity of his friends, which encourages him in turn to show generosity to the ladies, the *Decameron* comes full circle by ending with the generosity—*liberalità*—of the characters of Day 10. Generosity, like gratitude, is a social virtue, one which palliates and civilizes the experience of living, and in fact the stories of the last Day are the final step in a process which has made the *brigata* fit to reenter society, to embark once more on the business of life.[2] Generosity is generated by compassion; this *compassione*, which motivates the author in his Proem at one end of the book and the characters of Day 10 at the other, is not only the social glue which holds together the fabric of human society,

which literally humanizes that society, but is also the textual glue linking the several levels of the *Decameron*. The transition from the courtly atmosphere of the Proem to the onslaught of the great plague is mediated by compassion, either present (in the Proem) or absent (in the Florentine society afflicted by the plague as described in the Introduction to Day 1), but always the irreducible standard by which human affairs are measured.

The Introduction to the First Day is the catalyst of the rest of the *Decameron* in that it defines the text's negative pole, the level of loss from which the *brigata* must recover. The reduction of Florentine society to grade zero is accomplished rhetorically through the Introduction's portrayal of two discrete stages of loss which together bring about total collapse; the narrator concentrates first on the loss of *ingegno* and secondly on the loss of *compassione*. The first part of the plague narrative emphasizes intellectual failure: "in quella [la peste] non valendo alcuno senno né umano provedimento" (in the face of the [plague's] onrush, all the wisdom and ingenuity of man were unavailing) (1.Intro.9). The qualification of "provedimento" with the adjective "umano" underscores the fact that the intellect is, with compassion, the essential ingredient of human society; but here, as society crumbles, the intellect is powerless, human ingenuity is unavailing. Failure in one quintessentially human sphere leads, predictably, to failure in the other; thus the narrator passes in linear fashion from depicting the loss of *ingegno* to depicting the loss of *compassione*; since *compassione* is the *umana cosa* par excellence, its disappearance signals the final breakdown. The process of decay, once initiated, is as inevitable as the disease itself, progressing from the incapacitation of the intellect to the denial of all ethical commitment; this chain effect is indicated by the narrative sequence, which moves from the symptoms of the plague, the horrid *gavoccioli* which the doctors are unable to treat (Boccaccio stresses the "ignoranza de' medicanti" [13]), to its powers of contamination. The fact that the disease is contagious leads to a widespread callousness toward the sufferings of others, a lack of compassion marked in narrative terms by the use of the adjective *crudele*: "e tutti quasi a un fine tiravano assai crudele, ciò era di schifare e di fuggire gli infermi e le lor cose" (And almost without exception, they took a single and very cruel precaution, namely to avoid or run away from the sick and their belongings) (19).

Crudele, the word contrasted with *compassione* throughout the plague description, signifies for Boccaccio a destructive autonomy, an inhuman desire to preserve the self at all costs. By abandoning the sick, many believe that they will save themselves: "e così faccendo, si credeva ciascuno a se medesimo salute acquistare" (by which means they all thought that their own health would be preserved) (19). The author outlines four types of popular reaction to the plague. There are the introverted extremists, who lock themselves in their houses; the extroverted extremists, who pursue a policy of "eat, drink, and be merry"; the moderates, who do not greatly alter their behavior; and last, the group Boccaccio labels, significantly, "di più crudel sentimento" (of more cruel feeling) (25). These are the ones who, caring for nothing but themselves, abandon "la propia città, le proprie case, i lor luoghi e i lor parenti e le lor cose" (their city, their homes, their relatives, their estates and their belongings) (25), the ones by whom the most sacrosanct bonds of human life (stressed by the repetition of the possessive adjective) are broken: "l'un fratello l'altro abbandonava e il zio il nepote e la sorella il fratello e spesse volte la donna il suo marito; e, che maggior cosa è e quasi non credibile, li padri e le madri i figliuoli, quasi loro non fossero, di visitare e di servire schifavano" (brothers abandoned brothers, uncles their nephews, sisters their brothers, and in many cases wives deserted their husbands. But even worse, and almost incredible, was the fact that fathers and mothers refused to nurse and assist their own children, as though they did not belong to them) (27). The dissolution of the parental bond is the last step in the society's achievement of a nonhuman, negative, status. The city's descent into noncivility is complete.[3]

It is in the wake of this analysis of its citizens' behavior that Boccaccio outlines the city's moral degeneracy: the women who allow themselves to be tended by male servants, the forming of a class of profiteers who for a sum will take bodies to burial, and so forth. Running throughout is the motif of indifference to others, the lack of compassion, a moral flaw with relentlessly practical consequences; as the narrator emphasizes, many were left to die unaided because they had previously set just this example: "avendo essi stessi, quando sani erano, essemplo dato a coloro che sani rimanevano, quasi abbandonati per tutto languieno" (having themselves, when they were fit and well, set an example to those who were as yet unaffected, they languished away with virtually no one to nurse them) (26). Their previous cruel behavior thus guarantees not their preservation but their ruin, since

there is no one who will care for them when they in turn fall victims to the scourge. The moral code implicit in this passage is practical, civic, social; far from promising rewards to the servants who tend the sick for a fee, the author does not hide the fact that such actions often bring about their deaths: "sé molte volte col guadagno perdeano" (they frequently lost their lives as well as their earnings) (28). Compassion is not so much a good as it is a necessity, a sine qua non of our identities, as stated in the text's opening sentence and repeatedly underscored by the narrator's animal analogies, his insistence that bestiality is the inevitable outcome of indifference: "non come uomini ma quasi come bestie morieno" (dying more like animals than human beings) (43).[4]

The Introduction to Day 1 is divisible into two distinct parts roughly equal in length. The first recounts the events surrounding the plague's arrival in Florence, detailing the loss of *ingegno* and *compassione* (through paragraph 48, or roughly ten and one half pages in the Mondadori edition); the second recounts the gathering of a group of young people in Santa Maria Novella and their decision to leave Florence for their salvation (through paragraph 115, or about twelve pages in the same edition). If the purpose of the first part is, in narrative terms, to create a tabula rasa on which the *brigata* and the text can build (in fact, before introducing the ladies, the narrator claims that the city is "quasi vota" [49]), the second part initiates the process of construction. The change in tone is signaled by Pampinea's speech on their inalienable right to life; the change in atmosphere is palpable as the moral turpitude of the pestilential city gives way to the "leggiadra onestà" (49) of the *brigata*.[5] We note, however, that the *brigata*'s behavior is rigidly premised on what came before; they must establish their difference precisely with respect to the prevailing norm. Therefore Pampinea stresses not only their right to survival, but also the fact that, in leaving the city, they will be abandoning no one, since all their kin is dead. It is paramount for Boccaccio to establish that the *onesta brigata* does not behave like any of the groups described in the first part of the Introduction; although their program shares features with some—like the introverts, they isolate themselves and refuse to entertain news from the outside; like the cruel ones, they leave the city—the crucial difference is that they do these things only now, when there is nothing else left to do.[6] As Pampinea declares: "noi non abbandoniam persona, anzi ne possiamo con verità dire molto più tosto abbandonate" (we shall not be abandoning anyone by going away from here;

on the contrary, we may fairly claim that we are the ones who have been abandoned) (69).

The rest of the *Decameron* constitutes the gradual re-creation, through recreation, of the *brigata*, whose chief characters represent not only facets of the author, but also basic aspects of human nature.[7] Pampinea, whose name means "vigorous," is the force of order; the instigator of their flight from the city, she takes immediate steps to organize their idyll, remarking that "le cose che sono senza modo non possono lungamente durare" (nothing will last very long unless it possesses a definite form) (95). She proposes a form of government, with rotating rulers, to regulate their otherwise potentially anarchic existences, and assigns specific tasks to the servants who have accompanied them. Her last words to these, her most significant commandment, is that, whatever they see or hear, they are to bring no unhappy news from the outside world: "niuna novella altra che lieta ci rechi di fuori" (bring us no tidings of the world outside these walls unless they are tidings of happiness) (101). Again, there is a deliberate echo of the introverts' program for survival, since they, too, refused all news of death or sickness, closing themselves inside: "senza lasciarsi parlare a alcuno o volere *di fuori*, di morte o d'infermi, *alcuna novella* sentire" ([they] refrained from speaking to outsiders and refused to receive news from outside of the dead or the sick) (20; my italics). The use in both instances of *novella* in the sense of "news," along with the fact that the isolationists are the only previous group to be called a "brigata" by the author, underscores their role as precursors of the *onesta brigata*.

In demanding complete protection from external events, Pampinea is acceding to Dioneo, who had stipulated, as the necessary condition determining his stay with the others, that there be a total severance of their ties to the city. Establishing two distinct spheres of existence, according to the binary opposition "in" versus "out," he states that he has left his cares in the city, "li miei [pensieri] lasciai io *dentro* dalla porta della città allora che io con voi poco fa me ne usci' *fuori*" (my own [troubles] I left inside the city gates when I came out from there a short while ago in your company) (93; my italics), and that they must either join with him in amusement, laughter, and singing, or give him leave to return to the "città tribolata."[8] We know Dioneo's hallmarks: his etymological sensuality (his name derives from Dione, Venus's mother); his defense of women's rights (a defense which goes beyond feminism in the narrow sense if we consider that,

in the Proem, the women seem tantamount to all those deprived of the opportunity to live their lives); his privileged status as the storyteller who always has the last word. Dioneo and Pampinea are the *brigata*'s ideologues: while she is in charge of the details of their daily existence, he is concerned with outlining the essential prerequisites for new life. Thus, it is he who delivers the ultimatum insisting on their quarantine from unhappiness and, essentially, from reality.

Although Pampinea, ruler of the First Day, leaves the subject of the Day nominally open, critics have long noted that the stories of Day 1 are characterized by the triumph of the intellect, which succeeds through a brilliant use of language in reversing a given situation, sometimes effecting a return to the status quo, otherwise simply improving conditions for the story's protagonist:[9] the Marchesana di Monferrato rids herself of the King of France's dangerous importunities by staging a clever joke (1.5); the courtier Bergamino embarrasses Cangrande della Scala into showing his accustomed generosity (1.7); the rebuke by a lady from Gascony transforms the King of Cyprus from a weak man into a brave one who will redress her wrongs (1.9). Day 2, dealing as it does with lucky resolutions to unlucky situations, introduces the problematic of Fortune into the *Decameron*; here Fortune has the upper hand. Nonetheless, most of the happy endings of Day 2 are achieved by dint of some cooperation on the part of the protagonist's intellect: in his final predicament, it occurs to Andreuccio to grab the priest by the leg (2.3); even Alatiel, the *Decameron*'s most buffeted heroine, has the wit required to convince her father that she has been in a nunnery, rather than the consort of eight different men (2.7). Day 3 alters the balance by adding our efforts, "industria," to the equation. Here man is no longer Fortune's plaything, but is able to overcome through use of intelligence: Ricciardo wins Catella by deceiving her, commenting in words that aptly represent Day 3, "quello che io semplicemente amando aver non potei, Amor con inganno m'ha insegnato avere" (what I was unable to achieve by mere wooing, Love has taught me to obtain by deception) (3.6.42); in the same way Giletta, with a display of deceptive wit surely intended to contrast with Griselda's brute patience, wins back her reluctant husband (3.9).

As Days 1–3 effect the *brigata*'s recovery of *ingegno*, so the tragic love of Day 4, offset by the happy love of Day 5, effects their recovery of *compassione*. Before beginning the first *novella* of Day 4, the tale of Tancredi and Ghismonda, Fiammetta comments on the nature of the king's assignment. She considers Filostrato's topic particularly cruel,

"Fiera materia di ragionare n'ha oggi il nostro re data" (Cruel indeed is the topic for discussion assigned to us today by our king), because they have come here to be cheered, "per rallegrarci venuti siamo" (having come here to fortify our spirits), and instead are forced to recount the sorrows of others: "ci convenga raccontar l'altrui lagrime, le quali dir non si possono che chi le dice e chi l'ode non abbia *compassione*" (we are obliged to recount people's woes, the telling of which cannot fail to arouse compassion in speaker and listener alike) (4.1.2; my italics). It is thus established from the outset of Day 4 that the effect of the Day's stories is to elicit the compassion of the storytellers, a notion stressed throughout the Day in the narrator's accounts of the *brigata*'s reactions: Filomena is "tutta piena di *compassione* del misero Gerbino e della sua donna" (quite overcome with compassion for the hapless Gerbino and his lady-love) (4.5.2); Neifile concludes her story of Girolamo's and Salvestra's thwarted love "non senza aver gran *compassion* messa in tutte le sue compagne" (having planted no small degree of compassion in the hearts of her companions) (4.9.21; my italics); Filostrato follows Neifile by assuring his audience that their reaction to his bloody tale "vi converrà non meno di *compassione* avere che alla passata" (must inevitably arouse as much pity among you as the previous one) (4.9.3; my italics). Only Pampinea refuses to obey Filostrato, insisting instead on the necessity of counteracting *compassione* with *ricreazione*. Thus, her story of Frate Alberto complies with the letter of Filostrato's order, but not with the spirit, for although the *novella*'s protagonist comes to a miserable end, the story itself is amusing. Her inclination is not to please the king but to restore her companions from the sorrow aroused in them by the previous *novella*; she is "disposta a dovere alquanto *recrear* loro" (more inclined to amuse them) (4.2.4; my italics). Precisely because she finds them "pieni di *compassione* per la morte di Ghismunda," she hopes that her story will have the effect of enlivening them: "forse con risa e con piacer rilevare" (perhaps I can restore your spirits a little by persuading you to laugh and be merry) (4.2.7).

Telling the tragic tales of Day 4 has moved the *brigata* to pity; as Filostrato remarks (with respect to himself, but the comment seems applicable to all), the effect of the stories is to allow the dew of compassion to put out the fire within (he praises Fiammetta's *novella*, and exhorts Pampinea to tell a similar one, because "senza dubbio alcuna rugiada cadere sopra il mio fuoco comincerò a sentire" [I shall doubtless begin to feel one or two dewdrops descend on the fire that rages

within me] [4.2.3]). We may assume that a story that so moves Filostrato will have an even greater impact on his comrades, since Filostrato is more immune to compassion than the others, assuming a "rigido viso" (stern visage) (4.2.2) at the end of the first *novella* while the ladies weep, and showing "nulla compassion" (no compassion) (4.7.2) to Andreuola. If the stories of Day 4 are intended to elicit compassion and thereby, as Fiammetta remarks, to temper the *brigata*'s gaiety ("Forse per temperare alquanto la letizia avuta li giorni passati l'ha fatto" [Perhaps he has done it in order to temper in some degree the gaiety of the previous days] [4.1.2]), Pampinea, as chief executrix of that gaiety, is concerned lest the cathartic effect of Day 4 be too pronounced. The words she uses to counteract Filostrato—*recreare, rilevare*—are references to the *brigata*'s primary mission. Dioneo's story, 4.10, picks up on Pampinea's concern and marks the shift from a "così dolorosa material" (so sorrowful topic) to one that is "alquanto più lieta e migliore" (a better and rather more agreeable theme) (4.10.3). The happier *materia* introduced by Dioneo, the only other member of the *brigata* who, like Pampinea, has the stature and authority to counter Filostrato, will be developed on the following Day, which, as the mirror image of Day 4, rewards lovers with a happy ending. While Day 4 elicits compassion from the members of the *brigata*, Day 5 takes compassion on them; this transition is underlined by the narrator himself, who remarks that, whereas the first stories of Day 4 had saddened the ladies, Dioneo's has made them laugh, and restored their spirits: "questa ultima di Dioneo le fece ben tanto ridere . . . che esse si poterono della *compassione* avuta dell'altre *ristorare*" (this last one of Dioneo's caused so much merriment . . . that it restored them from the compassion engendered by the others) (4.Concl.1; my italics). The role of the tragic tales as generators of compassion is thus underscored at the Day's end.

The recovery of *compassione* is a necessary step in the *brigata*'s journey back to their starting-point, but it is also a step which must be superseded, placed into proper perspective with respect to their ultimate goal as stated by the author above: *ristorare* (restoration). Renewed in the basic human faculties of *ingegno* and *compassione*, they must now be prepared more specifically for the return to Florence and reality. Day 6 marks the new beginning, and is not coincidentally therefore likened by the author to Day 1. Critics have noted similarities between the two Days, pointing to thematic parallels: Day 6, like Day 1, stresses reversal through repartee.[10] A marker of the link existing

between the two Days is Filomena's verbatim repetition, in the first story of Day 6, of Pampinea's words from the last story of Day 1:[11] both ladies agree that brief witticisms, "leggiadri motti," are to all pleasant discourse "come ne' lucidi sereni sono le stelle ornamento del cielo e nella primavera i fiori ne' verdi prati" (just as the sky . . . is bejewelled with stars on cloudless nights, and the verdant fields are embellished with flowers in the spring) (1.10.3 and 6.1.2). Nor can this repetition be considered a simple authorial lapse, since Filomena explicitly calls attention to the fact that she is treading on familiar textual territory: "Ma per ciò che già sopra questa materia assai da Pampinea fu detto, più oltre non intendo di dirne" (Since Pampinea has already spoken at some length on the subject, I do not propose to elaborate further upon it) (6.1.4). Filomena's prologue therefore constitutes a deliberate link between 1.10 and 6.1, implying that Day 6 picks up where Day 1 leaves off.[12] Even more important is the Introduction to Day 6, which exactly parallels in its function its counterpart in Day 1: as the Introduction to the First Day (which is not, technically, a general introduction, but the preface to a particular Day) starts the *brigata* moving away from Florence, so the Introduction to the Sixth Day starts them moving back again. The preface to Day 6 is therefore marked by an event which is, as the narrator takes care to point out, unique in the *Decameron*'s frame: "avvenne cosa che ancora adivenuta non v'era" (something happened which had never happened before) (6.Intro.4). He is referring to the quarrel among the servants, an outbreak that erupts into the staid world of the frame characters with profound consequences. Licisca, a maid, maintains that women do not go to their wedding-beds virgins; Dioneo not only supports her contention but will later decide to use her observation in formulating the topic of his Day, thus allowing the world of the servants to have direct repercussions on that of their masters.[13]

If Licisca operates as a kind of reality principle, whose function it is to introduce aperture where there was closure, reversing the *brigata*'s isolationism and turning them back toward Florence, her effect should be felt at once, even before her argument inspires the theme for the following Day. And, indeed, there are immediate indications of a significant shift. Whereas the stories of the previous five Days have ranged geographically from Babylon and Alexandria to London and Paris, those of Day 6 are situated in Tuscany, for the most part in Florence.[14] The only *novelle* not explicitly located in or around the Tuscan capital are story 7, which takes place in Prato; story 8, whose

location is unspecified; and—in the ultimate Boccaccesque figure for homecoming—story 10, which is located in Certaldo, Boccaccio's birthplace. But the most dramatic indication of a change is in 6.3, where Dioneo's rule is broken, and the plague is allowed to enter the world of the stories for the first time in the *Decameron*. In presenting the protagonist of her story, Lauretta inserts a subordinate clause of great importance, specifying that she was a young woman killed by the plague, "la quale questa pistolenzia presente ci ha tolta" (who this current plague took from us) (6.3.8). Because they are set in Florence, the stories of Day 6 involve characters whose lives and histories are known to the *brigata*, with the result that the plague—and reality—must finally intrude.[15] Nor is this insertion of an alien element into the narrative accomplished casually. The deliberateness of Boccaccio's reference to the "pistolenzia presente" in the third *novella* is evidenced by the Conclusion to this Day, where Dioneo himself, the original drafter of their isolationism, invokes the "perversità di questa stagione" (the perversity of the times we live in) (6.Concl.9) as an inducement to the ladies to comply with his risqué theme for Day 7.[16]

Ready now for immersion into life at its most real, a vicarious dip into the complete amorality of existence, the *brigata* tells the coarse, and at times brutal, stories of Days 7, 8, and 9. Dioneo, who as early as the Conclusion to Day 5 had foreshadowed the change in tone of the second half of the *Decameron*, attempting to sing bawdy popular songs instead of the courtly material favored by the ladies, rules Day 7. The Day's theme is provided by Licisca, who has helped to dispel the courtly atmosphere further by insisting that "messer Mazza" entered "Monte Nero" not "per forza e con ispargimento di sangue," but "paceficamente e con gran piacer di quei d'entro" (Sir Club entered Castle Dusk, not by force and with shedding of blood, but with the greatest of ease and to the general pleasure of the garrison) (6.Intro.8). Not surprisingly, therefore, on this Day the floodgates of sexuality are opened. One could trace a crescendo in sexual explicitness, beginning with Peronella in 7.2, continuing through the scholar's reaction to the widow's nudity (8.7), and culminating in Day 9's final *novella*, in which Father Gianni attempts to transform his neighbor's wife into a mare. Although (as Dioneo had foreseen while defending his topic) the *brigata*'s own behavior remains circumspect, a gradual relaxation overcomes them during these Days; the stories, not for nothing the *Decameron*'s most concentrated tribute to the *fabliaux*, mark the high point of the *brigata*'s verbal indecency. Another factor

stressing the turn toward reality is the continued insistence on Florence. In the opening story of Day 7, Santa Maria Novella is mentioned for the first time since the *brigata* met there in the Introduction to Day 1. The church, originally the scene of their departure, thereafter appears only in the half of the *Decameron* devoted to their return: after serving as headquarters for the cuckolded laud-singer Gianni Lotteringhi (7.1.4), it is mentioned twice as a rendezvous in the Rabelaisian course of Maestro Simone's induction into Florentine life (8.9.81 and 93). Finally, Santa Maria Novella figures in the final sentence of the Conclusion to the last Day, to mark the end of the cycle that was initiated within it:[17]

> E come il nuovo giorno apparve, levati, avendo già il siniscalco via ogni lor cosa mandata, dietro alla guida del discrete re *verso Firenze si ritornarono*; e i tre giovani, lasciate le sette donne *in Santa Maria Novella, donde con loro partiti s'erano*, da esse accommiatatosi, a' loro altri piaceri attesero, e esse, quando tempo lor parve, se ne tornarono alle lor case. (10.Concl.16; my italics)
>
> *Next morning they arose at the crack of dawn, by which time all their baggage had been sent on ahead by the steward, and with their wise king leading the way they returned to Florence. Having taken their leave of the seven young ladies in Santa Maria Novella, whence they had all set out together, the three young men went off in search of other diversions; and in due course the ladies returned to their homes.*

Another marker of the turn toward reality/Florentinity is the emergence of a local folk hero, Calandrino, and of a group of characters, all Florentines, who recur from story to story. Kinship and friendship bonds begin to dominate the *novelle*: Nello, who in 9.3 is presented as a friend of Bruno and Buffalmacco, in 9.5 turns out to be related to Calandrino's wife, Tessa. The incidence of characters who appear in more than one story is high: besides Bruno, Buffalmacco, Calandrino, and Tessa, there are also Nello, Maestro Simone, and Maso del Saggio, who like Calandrino becomes the center of his own cycle of *novelle*. These developments are reflected in an overt intratextuality: the *brigata* becomes extremely concerned with referring one story to another, making links between the *novelle*, and between characters in the *novelle*, explicit. One story thus leads to another, as Filomena explains: "come Filostrato fu dal nome di Maso tirato a dover dire la novella la quale da lui udita avete, così né più né men son tirata io da quello di Calandrino e de' compagni suoi a dirne un'altra di

loro" (just as Filostrato was prompted to tell you the previous tale by hearing the name of Maso, in precisely the same way I, too, have been prompted by hearing the names of Calandrino and his companions to tell you another) (8.6.3). Because of their common urban setting, these *novelle* are particularly interchangeable: Filostrato announces, in the beginning of 8.5, that he is discarding the story he had intended to tell in order to tell one about Maso del Saggio, prompted by Elissa's previous tale about Maso (8.3); when Filostrato later decides, on Day 9, to return to the *novella* he had discarded on Day 8, it turns out to be a Calandrino story (9.3). Not only are the members of the *brigata* preoccupied with establishing relations between their stories, but the *novelle* themselves develop a memory, articulated by the characters within them: in the second Calandrino story, 8.6, Bruno and Buffalmacco bludgeon their friend into surrendering his capons, recalling that he had already fooled them once, on the occasion of their search for the heliotrope in the first Calandrino story, 8.3; in 9.5 Nello stirs up Tessa against her husband by reminding her, too, of the events recounted in 8.3, which for her took the form of an undeserved beating.

All of these narrative devices underscore the basic fact that the *brigata* is now, in narrative terms, on home ground. "Io non so se voi vi conosceste Talano d'Imolese" (I don't know whether you were ever acquainted with Talano d'Imolese), says Pampinea in her preface to 9.7, thus underlining the possibility and likelihood that her companions might personally know her neighbor, the protagonist of her story. This sense of a shared social identity pervading Days 7–9 is further evidenced by the stories which refer to Florentines known not only to contemporaries, like Calandrino, but also to posterity. Here, too, Day 6 initiates the trend: 6.2, where Cisti is introduced as "nostro cittadino" (our citizen) (3), contains Geri Spina, one of the leaders of the Black Guelphs in Florence circa 1300; Giotto is present in 6.5, returning from his property in the Mugello region to Florence; Guido Cavalcanti is the hero of 6.9. The other stories replete with famous Tuscans are both in Day 9, which—although technically an open Day—is in fact a continuation, thematically, of Days 7 and 8. *Novella* 9.4 contains the Sienese poet Cecco Angiolieri, while 9.8 is perhaps the most quintessentially municipal story of the *Decameron*, crowded with figures from the *Comedy*, the text which more than any other has immortalized Florentines, albeit often negatively: it contains the glutton Ciacco, the wrathful Filippo Argenti, as well as the leaders of both the White

and the Black factions, respectively Vieri de' Cerchi and Corso Donati.[18] Ciacco's existence, unlike Calandrino's, is thus confirmed by an extra layer of textuality, provided by Dante.

Moreover, the narrative employs various techniques to embed these real people into the flux of real—municipal—life. Although 9.4 recounts the deception played by Cecco Fortarrigo on Cecco Angiolieri, the story ends by preparing us for another story, not presently forthcoming, that of Angiolieri's later reprisals. This teasing conclusion has the effect of opening up the text to the "real life" of the characters: "E così la malizia del Fortarrigo turbò il buono avviso dell'Angiulieri, quantunque da lui non fosse a luogo e a tempo lasciata impunita" (Although Fortarrigo's cunning upset the well-laid plans of Angiulieri on this occasion, he did not go unpunished . . . when a suitable time and place presented themselves) (25). Likewise, 9.8 ends by letting us know that Biondello took care never to trick Ciacco again, thereby inserting the story into a chain of events operating outside of, and independently of, the text. All of these developments, by creating an atmosphere of dense municipality in which the *brigata* is seen to participate, belong to the thematics of the return.

For all that the stories of Days 7, 8, and 9 are remembered primarily as amusing *beffe*, there is a serious theme as well, best stated by the topic of Day 7, where the wives are motivated to trick their husbands "per salvamento di loro" (for self-preservation). Self-preservation is the name of the game, first through the *pronta risposta*—the word—in Day 6, and then through the practical joke or *beffa*—the deed—in Days 7–9. Only when the *brigata* is fully coached in the lessons of survival does it complete its turn toward Florence, with Day 10, which shows men and women practicing generosity and renunciation, the very social virtues required for the *brigata*'s reintegration into society. The amoral vagaries of Days 7, 8, and 9—summed up in the ultimate Dionean story, 9.10—come to an abrupt halt when Panfilo announces the topic for Day 10.

Panfilo proposes the subject of Day 10 with an explicitly exemplary goal. In the Conclusion to Day 9, Panfilo announces that the discussion of munificent and liberal deeds will kindle in the members of the *brigata* a desire to emulate such behavior in their own actions: "Queste cose e dicendo e faccendo senza alcun dubbio gli animi vostri ben disposti a valorosamente adoperare accenderà" (The telling and hearing of such things will assuredly fill you with a burning desire, well disposed as you already are in spirit, to comport yourselves valorously)

(9.Concl.5). And what must the *brigata* seek to incorporate into their lives? From the fourth *novella*, in which Messer Gentile returns the lady he has raised from the dead to her husband, to the eighth, in which Gisippo gives Sofronia to Tito, all the stories of Day 10 are concerned with sexual renunciation; thus, the central portion of the Day presents generosity in a particularly aggravated form. Within this kernel of *novelle*, moreover, the key stories are numbers 6 and 7, in which we witness the renunciation not of commoners but of kings, that is, of those responsible for the well-being of the social order. Especially important is the story of King Charles the Old, who forgoes the delightful Ghibelline sisters, Ginevra and Isotta. In setting the king on the right path, his friend advises him that true glory lies less in the ability to overcome one's enemies than in the ability to overcome oneself, especially when one is in the position of setting an example for others: "Io vi ricordo, re, che grandissima gloria v'è aver vinto Manfredi, ma molto maggiore è *se medesimo vincere*; e per ciò voi, che avete gli altri a correggere, *vincete voi medesimo e questo appetito raffrenate*" (Let me remind you, my lord, that you covered yourself with glory by conquering Manfred . . . but it is far more glorious to conquer oneself. And therefore, as you have to govern others, conquer these feelings of yours, curb this wanton desire) (10.6.32; my italics). This principle is echoed verbatim by the narrator, Fiammetta, who, in the *novella*'s conclusion, reemphasizes the connection between self-discipline and social responsibility: "Così adunque il magnifico re operò, il nobile cavaliere altamente premiando, l'amate giovinette laudevolmente onorando e *se medesmo fortemente vincendo*" (Thus then did this magnificent king comport himself, richly rewarding the noble knight, commendably honouring the girls he loved, and firmly conquering his own feelings) (10.6.36; my italics). The following story, 10.7, reconfirms the principle by reversing the plot structure: Lisa, the apothecary's daughter, falls in love with King Peter of Aragon, who responds not by taking advantage of her but by arranging her marriage to a young nobleman.

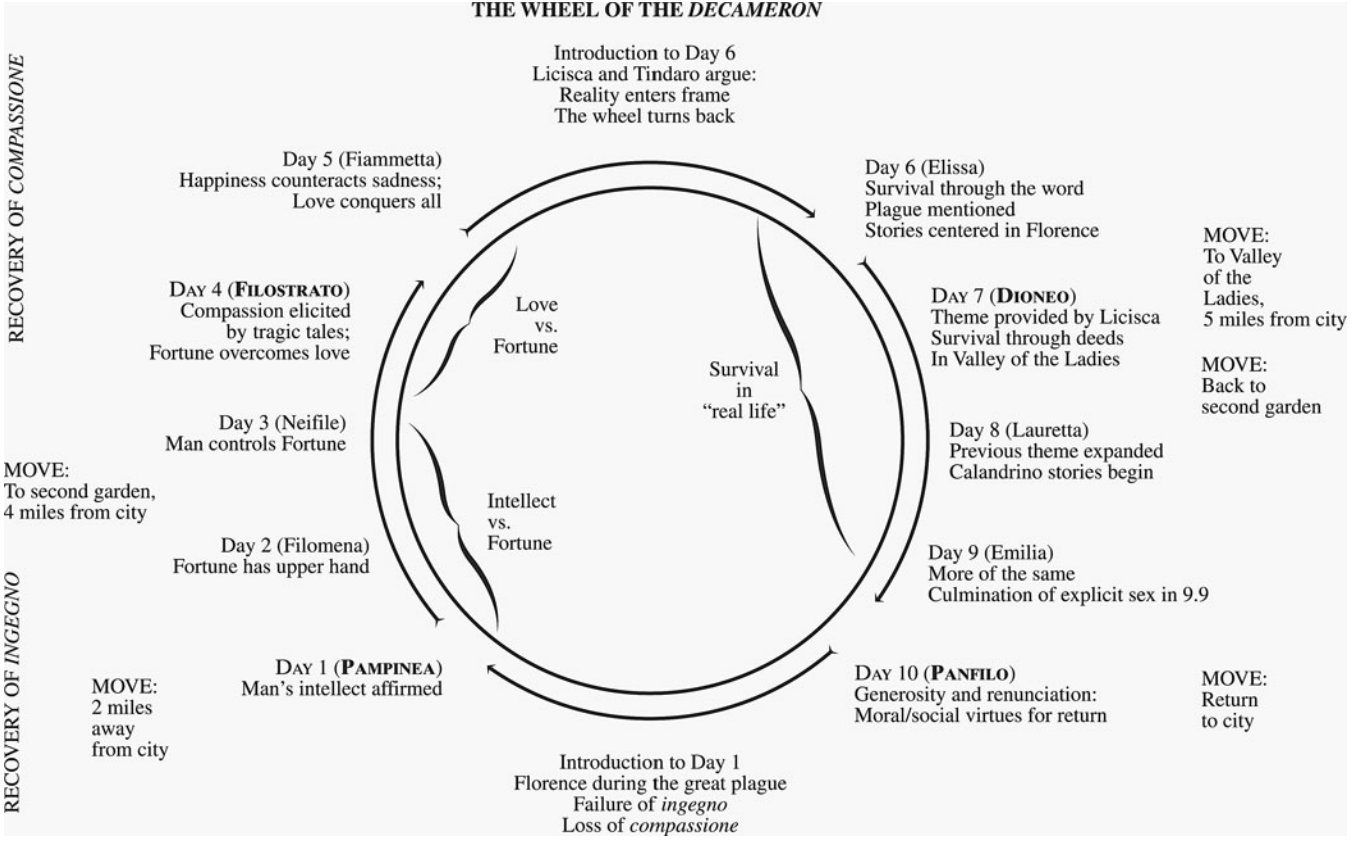
Day 10 not only advocates self-discipline for the characters in its stories, but the Day constitutes as well a form of self-discipline for the *brigata* telling the stories. In justifying his return to a defined theme for Day 10, Panfilo comments on the invigorating effect of the narrative freedom allowed by his predecessor: "la discrezion d'Emilia, nostra reina stata questo giorno, per dare *alcun riposo* alle vostre forze arbitrio vi diè di ragionare *ciò che più vi piacesse*" (our queen of today,

Emilia, prudently left you at liberty to speak on whatever subject you most liked, so that you might rest your faculties) (9.Concl.4; my italics). The result of the open Day is that now, rested and refreshed, they are able to return to the "accustomed law": "per che, *già riposati essendo*, giudico che sia bene *il ritornare alla legge usata*" (now that you are refreshed, I consider that we should revert to our customary rule) (9.Concl.4; my italics). Indeed, the very act of telling stories is itself presented as a form of discipline from the beginning of the *Decameron*; although amusing, *novellare* is nonetheless a restraint, a limitation imposed on the total self-indulgence that would otherwise engulf the *brigata*. Thus, Pampinea tells her companions that, if they do not care for her suggestion, they should amuse themselves however they please, "e dove non vi piacesse, ciascuno infino all'ora del vespro quello faccia che più gli piace" (if you disagree with my suggestion, let us all go and occupy our time in whatever way we please until the hour of vespers) (1.Intro.112), using a variant of the expression later adopted for the theme of the two free Days (where they discuss "quello che più aggrada a ciascheduno" in Day 1 and "secondo che gli piace e di quello che più gli agrada" in Day 9), an expression which recurs throughout the *Decameron*: whenever the *brigata* is not telling stories, they are doing "whatever they please."

Within this context—whereby the ordered telling of a story, its form, imposes a "law" which justifies its content, whatever it may be—Day 10 can be viewed as exacting a more contentually rigorous application. In fact, Day 10 imposes a law with respect to *all* the rest of the *Decameron*, and not only, as Panfilo says, with respect to Day 9; or rather, Day 9, described by Emilia as affording the opportunity "di vagare alquanto e vagando riprender forze a rientrar sotto il giogo" (to wander at large for a while, and in so doing recover the strength for returning once again beneath the yoke) (8.Concl.4), stands paradigmatically for all the previous Days. While usually the *novelle* have encouraged the following of one's instincts and have exposed the pathology of repression—as, for instance, in Tancredi's incestuous relationship with his daughter in 4.1—in Day 10 the positive aspects of repression are stressed. While sexual renunciation has previously been viewed negatively—as, for instance, in 8.7 where the scholar deflects his carnal desires to exasperate his appetite for vengeance—Day 10 presents renunciation as a socializing force, required for the preservation of a civilized society. In a larger sense, then, the *riposo* has been all the *Decameron*, and the *legge usata* is civilization, society, Florence.

The *Decameron* could be pictured as a wheel—Fortune's wheel, the wheel of life—on which the *brigata* turns, coming back transformed to the point of departure. In Days 1 through 5 they move steadily away from the city as they are renewed in *ingegno* and *compassione*, that is, intellectually and ethically. The outward turn of the wheel is completed with their arrival at the Valley of the Ladies in the Conclusion to Day 6. Geographically, they are now at their farthest remove from the city. Here the ladies relax to an unparalleled degree, taking off their clothes for a swim (an action anticipated at the end of Day 1, where, however, they merely step barefoot and with naked arms into the water): "tutte e sette si spogliarono e entrarono in esso, il quale non altramenti li lor corpi candidi nascondeva che farebbe una vermiglia rosa un sottil vetro" (all seven of them undressed and took to the water, which concealed their chaste, white bodies no better than a thin sheet of glass would conceal a pink rose) (6.Concl.30). The *Valle delle Donne* is the *Decameron*'s *locus amoenus* par excellence, an even more perfect conflation of the natural with the artificial than the garden they reach at the beginning of the Day 3.[19] Here, where the ladies finally unveil their "corpi candidi," the *brigata* convenes to tell the sensual stories of Day 7.[20] However, just as they locate the epitome of the ideal, the place most distanced from reality, the wheel reaches its zenith and begins its inevitable descent, back toward Florence and back toward reality. Diagramming this wheel, one notes that there are four Days which are equidistant from and parallel to each other: Days 1, 4, 7, and 10 are all separated by two intervening Days (see chart).

In other words, these Days seem to initiate precisely marked legs of the *brigata*'s spiritual journey, a hypothesis which is supported by the fact that the rulers of these Days are the four characters whose physiognomies are most clearly delineated: Pampinea, Filostrato, Dioneo, and Panfilo. The *Decameron* depicts human beings in a moment of crisis; the *brigata*'s handling of this crisis can serve as a model for human deportment, and for the sage deployment of the various facets of our natures. First, Pampinea takes over, and there is an attempt to impose unity where there was fragmentation: the structure of the frame, the order of art. The second stage is marked by the governance of Filostrato, the despairing defeatist, under whose aegis the *brigata* is forced to dwell again on the tragic aspect of existence, to readmit the possibility of death (a very imminent possibility, we recall, since there is no indication that the *brigata*'s return to Florence coincides with the end of the plague). Dioneo, the life-affirmer, initiates the third



major stage and it is on this leg of their journey that the plague is reintegrated into the *brigata*'s lives and their cure is pronounced complete. Death holds no more power over them; were anyone to witness their morning walk through the forest, comments the author in the Introduction to Day 9, he would be forced to say "O costor non saranno dalla morte vinti o ella gli ucciderà lieti" (Either these people will not be vanquished by death, or they will welcome it with joy) (9.Intro.4).[21] They bend their thoughts now for the first time to the future, as Panfilo exhorts them to perpetuate their lives in laudable deeds: "che la vita nostra, che altro che brieve esser non può nel mortal corpo, si perpetuerà nella laudevole fama" (thus our lives, which cannot be other than brief in these our mortal bodies, will be preserved by the fame of our achievements) (9.Concl.5). In the opening to Day 10 we find them "molte cose della loro *futura vita* insieme parlando e dicendo e rispondendo" (talking about the lives they intended to lead in the future, and answering each other's questions) (10.Intro.3; my italics). As Dioneo balances Filostrato and life balances death (Day 7 paralleling Day 4), so Panfilo—the only one of the male frame characters never to make even verbal assaults on the propriety of the ladies—completes Pampinea (Day 10 paralleling Day 1), ensuring that the order she institutes will be grounded in a clearly defined secular morality.

Some conclusions may be drawn also regarding the alliances of the lesser frame characters. Fiammetta, the only member of the *brigata* to be "physically" described, is depicted in strict accordance with the prevailing literary and amatory codes, and seems to represent a courtly and artistic ideal. She is the one of the company best able, says Filostrato, to restore the spirits of the ladies after the bitterness of Day 4, the "aspra giornata d'oggi" (4.Concl.3; immediately after being thus distinguished from her peers, Fiammetta is further isolated by means of the unique *descriptio*). Dioneo, who is "life" to Filostrato's "death," is also the "real" to Fiammetta's "ideal"; the two play music together before the storytelling of Day 1 begins, thus prefiguring the contamination of reality with ideality throughout the *Decameron*, and they sing a courtly song derived from the thirteenth-century French poem *La Chastelaine de Vergi* in the Conclusion to Day 3. It is therefore interesting that in the Introduction to Day 6, a moment whose importance to the text cannot be stressed enough, Dioneo should sing not with Fiammetta but with Lauretta. Their material is still courtly and literary; in fact, they sing of Troilus and Criseida (one wonders if the

location of such tragic material immediately before Licisca's comic entrance is not a means of further defusing Filostrato, whose name is the doomed Troilo's sobriquet in Boccaccio's early text, Filostrato). Dioneo's shift in companions is further emphasized by the fact that Fiammetta sings alone in the Conclusion to Day 6. Dioneo will not sing with her again until after the crucial moment has passed, in the Conclusion to Day 7, where the parallel between the couples Dioneo-Lauretta and Dioneo-Fiammetta is made explicit by the fact that the subject is again drawn from one of the author's own earlier works, in this case the *Teseida*. Why, then, does Dioneo choose Lauretta in the Introduction to Day 6? Lauretta, it turns out, is associated with Dioneo and reality in a number of ways: she anticipates his reference to the plague in the Conclusion to Day 6 by being the first to mention it, in 6.3; she is chosen by him as the queen of Day 8, an opportunity she uses to confirm Dioneo's approach to storytelling, enlarging his topic from the tricks played by wives on their husbands to the tricks which "tutto il giorno o donna a uomo o uomo a donna o l'uno uomo all'altro si fanno" (people in general, men and women alike, are forever playing upon one another)—that is, her topic is, as her language itself makes clear, the open-ended bedlam and chaos of unexpurgated life.[22]

If Lauretta is associated with Dioneo, Elissa is linked with Filostrato. She, too, is connected by her name to tragic love and to death: as Filostrato is related to Troilus, so is Elissa to Dido, whose alternate name she bears. Elissa's song, like Filostrato's, tells of unhappy, indeed cruel, love; she is the only other one of the frame characters to be asked, like Filostrato, to sing her song on the Day she rules (Fiammetta asks Filostrato to sing on his own Day so as to disable him from extending his morbid influence beyond it, "acciò che più giorni che questo non sien turbati de' tuoi infortunii" [so that no day other than this will be blighted by your woes] [4.Concl.9]). Most importantly, Elissa is at odds with Dioneo, as a number of critics have noticed.[23] She is the queen whose composure he upsets by attempting to introduce vulgar and plebeian material into the *brigata*'s courtly repertoire. Her rebuke in the Conclusion to Day 5 constitutes the severest confrontation between members of the *brigata* in the course of the frame story. She is "un poco turbata," and warns him to desist lest he discover "come io mi so adirare" (what it means to provoke my anger)

(5.Concl.14); she also threatens Licisca with a whipping in the Introduction to Day 6. Finally, in the Conclusion to that Day, after Licisca's presence has been registered and Dioneo has announced that the maid has inspired him with a new topic (in what is surely the *Decameron*'s most explicit application of the author's dictum from the Introduction to Day 4, that "le Muse son donne" [35]), and after the ladies have surreptitiously sneaked away to the *Valle delle Donne*, prompting Dioneo to ask them if they are doing first in their deeds what they will later recount in words, thus associating the ladies of the *brigata* with the independent adulteresses of Day 7—after all this has happened to change the tone of the *Decameron*, Elissa sings her unhappy song, which she follows with "un sospiro assai pietoso" (a most pathetic sigh) (6.Concl.47). But the tide has definitively turned, a fact marked by the adversative "Ma" and Dioneo's peremptory reaction: "Ma il re, *che in buona tempera era*, fatto chiamar Tindaro, gli comandò che fuori traesse la sua cornamusa, al suono della quale *esso fece fare molte danze*" (The king, however, who was in good mettle, sent for Tindaro and ordered him to bring out his cornemuse, to the strains of which he caused several reels to be danced) (6.Concl.48; my italics). Dioneo, who is in a good mood, refuses to allow the company's spirits to be dampened by Elissa's song, and so he calls out Tindaro, the same servant who had that morning with Licisca disrupted their peace, and whose bagpipes will entertain them again under Lauretta's auspices, in the Conclusion to Day 7.

We remember that the *brigata*'s key rule for their new life was that no news, "niuna novella," may penetrate to them from outside, "di fuori." But, although they take refuge in an ideal world, the *brigata* passes its time telling stories that are for the most part taken from the real world. In other words, the *novelle*—or news—from the real world of Florence are replaced by the *novelle*—or stories—of the *Decameron*. Thus, the *Decameron*'s most perfected *locus amoenus*, the Valley of the Ladies, is the scene for the telling of some of its least perfect tales; thus, the Proem's lovesick ladies are offered not an opportunity to withdraw from love, but the chance to engage in it vicariously. Connected to this insistence on engagement is the author's disapproval, also registered in the Introduction to Day 1, of living each day with the fear of death. Boccaccio sees indifference to death not as wise and stoic resignation but, ultimately, as indifference to life:

> anzi tutti, quasi quel giorno nel quale si vedevano esser venuti la morte aspettassero, non d'aiutare i futuri frutti delle bestie e delle terre e delle loro passate fatiche ma di consumare quegli che si trovavano presenti si sforzavano con ogni ingegno. (1.Intro.44)
>
> *Moreover they all behaved as though each day was to be their last, and far from making provision for the future by tilling their lands, tending their flocks, and adding to their previous labours, they tried in every way they could think of to squander the assets already in their possession.*

Here we see the psychological ills brought about by the plague, which has succeeded in making the feeblest minds accept death in a way previously not attained by the wise, and has therefore forced an entire populace to become "scorti e non curanti" (aware and not caring) (41), more knowledgeable than is good for them. These ills—characterized by a nonchalance toward the "futuri frutti" and a mad consumption of the "presenti"—result in a kind of spiritual sickness, from which the *brigata* is cured: hence their talk of the future, their freedom from indifference and from the paralysis of the *non curanti*. They are freed, however, by precisely what they initially reject, by the *novelle*, which become increasingly less fabulous and increasingly more newsworthy as the arc of the *brigata*'s journey declines toward its end, until in Day 10 the two threads are interwoven and the magical is incorporated into the real, which is revealed to possess a luster the plague had all but obliterated: Messer Gentile rescues his beloved, a new Eurydice, in Bologna; a spring garden blossoms in the dead of winter, in the province of Friuli; Messer Torello is whisked home on Saladin's bed, to Pavia; Griselda's extraordinary trials take place in ordinary Saluzzo. The point of the *novelle*, which are not "stories" but "news," carriers of the real, is what the ladies of the Proem knew all along—that life is the only antidote for life.