

## Intertextuality and Romance in the Novella of Bernabò and Zinevra (*Decameron* 2.9)

### *Boccaccio's Ars combinatoria and Narrative Intertextuality*

The study of intertextuality in the *novelle* of the *Decameron* tends to fall into two distinct operations. One of these examines how discrete, local elements — motifs, phrases, etc. — have been taken from various sources and recombined in the new text. In this manner, Giuseppe Velli, to name just one scholar, has shown how Boccaccio's "propensity, both in Latin and in the vernacular, for reprising models to the letter, for inserting into his own work clips, segments of greater or lesser length deriving from the most varied sources (medieval Latin poetry, the classics, the new Tuscan poetic tradition, Dante) is of absolutely paramount importance."<sup>1</sup> A favoured metaphor for this aspect of Boccaccio's compositional technique, understood as an *ars combinatoria* or as a process of *contaminatio*, is that of a mosaic made out of *tesserae* from different provenances.

The second operation examines how Boccaccio structures any individual *novella* in light of a larger narrative model. From this perspective, the aim is not to pinpoint sources of individual *tesserae* so much as to identify antecedents for the pattern of the mosaic as a whole. Because this kind of narrative intertextuality operates at an abstract structural level, it is usually not possible to determine which, if any, concrete texts have served as models. Costanzo Di Girolamo and Charmaine Lee have described how, in the absence of precise source-texts (*testi-fonte*), studies of Boccaccio's narrative intertextuality must attend instead to source tales (*racconti-fonte*), source themes (*temi-fonte*), and source genres (*generi-fonte*).<sup>2</sup> Taking this approach, many significant studies show how Boccaccio's *novelle* transformatively deflect or parodically subvert genres such as the *exemplum*, *fabliau*, romance, hagiography, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Velli 1995, 224.

<sup>2</sup> Di Girolamo and Lee 1995, 143–44.

<sup>3</sup> See: Picone 1983 and 1997; Segre 1974 and 1989; Delcorno 1988 and 1989.

Examining Boccaccio's *ars combinatoria* (the recombination of elements from various sources) and examining his re-appropriation of narrative models (the designing of an overarching structure) entail different levels of scale (local details/overarching structure), different degrees of intertextual determinacy (identifiable source-texts/aleatory generic resemblances) and different distributions of intertextual pressure (multiple source passages/a single dominant model). The two operations have been fruitfully combined in many studies of the *Decameron*, yet they pull in different directions. As Velli puts it:

discussion of the narrative patterns of the *Decameron*, where lexical signifiers are not obviously and directly in play, is difficult: it carries the risk of confusing imaginative modes common to an entire age (or to a genre, or to a series of works, that is to say, to traditional models) with promptings that have precise and clearly identifiable origins.<sup>4</sup>

This essay claims that Boccaccio's *novella* of Bernabò of Genoa and Madonna Zinevra (*Dec.* 2.9) calls for a new synthesis of these two approaches. As the following paragraphs show, Boccaccio arrives at the narrative structure of *Decameron* 2.9 by fusing together narrative patterns taken from three distinct sources. These three sources lie behind some specific episodes in Boccaccio's text, yet they also guide the tale's overarching narrative structure. They exert pressure on Boccaccio's *novella* through determinate moments of textual borrowing as well as through looser resemblances of character, setting, and plot. While they differ slightly from each other in their narrative logic and chronotopic specificity, nevertheless they all refract a basic "romance" mode of narrative representation. The tale of Bernabò and Zinevra serves as a laboratory where Boccaccio splices together patterns derived from three forms of romance as he produces his new brand of novelistic fiction.

Filomena proposes that the stories told during the second day of the *Decameron* should follow a distinctive mode of narrative representation:

La quale, quando questo vi piaccia, sia questa: che, con ciò sia cosa che dal principio del mondo gli uomini sieno stati da diversi casi della fortuna menati, e saranno infino al fine, ciascun debba dire sopra questo: chi, da diverse cose infestato, sia oltre alla sua speranza riuscito a lieto fine.<sup>5</sup>

Ever since the world began, men have been subject to various tricks of Fortune, and it will ever be thus until the end. Let each of us, then, if you have no objection, make it our purpose to take as our theme *those who after*

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<sup>4</sup> Velli 1995, 235.

<sup>5</sup> *Dec.* 1.concl.10–11: Boccaccio 1992, 124; 1995, 67–68. Italics in the original. In-text citations of the *Decameron* refer to this edition and translation.

*suffering a series of misfortunes are brought to a state of unexpected happiness.*

In tales in this mode, the story-world is governed by the contingency of Fortune: events arise from unanticipated quarters, as if unpredictable chance is the primary agent. The plot is one of “fall and rise,” consisting of a series of setbacks until a final reversal brings about a happy ending. The protagonists have little control over events: they are brought close to despair by the afflictions they passively endure, and they are just as startled to have their despair converted into joy. Filomena’s proposed mode of narrative correlates closely with what modern literary theorists speak of as “romance,” that is, a mode of narrative characterized by a structural core of “descent and ascent,”<sup>6</sup> by a plot that “simultaneously quests for and postpones” a wished-for ending,<sup>7</sup> and by a chance-driven chronotope of “adventure time.”<sup>8</sup>

The stories told by the members of the *brigata*, as well as the metanarrative comments with which they introduce their tales, demonstrate not only that innumerable stories display this configuration of story-world, plot and characterology, but also that this romance mode can be modulated according to different parameters, giving rise to different genres and sub-genres.<sup>9</sup> By the time Filomena herself comes to tell a tale, the romance mode, which she initially proposed, has been the topic of considerable metanarrative reflection. Yet Filomena introduces her tale by attending also to a different narrative exigency:

Suolsi tra' volgari spesse volte dire un cotal proverbio: che lo 'ngannatore rimane a piè dello 'ngannato [...] E per ciò, seguendo la proposta, questo insiememente, carissime donne, esser vero come si dice m'è venuto in talento di dimostrarvi.

There is a certain proverb, frequently to be heard on the lips of the people, to the effect that a dupe will outwit his deceiver [...] And therefore, dearest ladies, I would like, without overstepping the limits of our theme, to show you that the proverb indeed is true. (*Dec.* 2.9.3)

Filomena’s tale will follow the mode of romance she has proposed (“la proposta”), yet it will also present a counterpoint trajectory, the plot of a villain’s downfall, where a strict chain of poetic justice can satisfy a popular (“tra’ volgari”) thirst for tales of moral revenge. Within a folkloric schema

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<sup>6</sup> Frye 1976, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Parker 1979, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Bakhtin 1981, 87.

<sup>9</sup> Fido 1988; Bardi 1989; Sipala 1994.

in which a wicked deceiver, Ambruogiuolo, is found out and punished, there opens out the romance tale of Zinevra's fall and rise.<sup>10</sup>

*Folkloric Romance: The Chastity Wager*

Existing source studies identify the narrative model of *Decameron* 2.9 with a widely attested tale type known to folkloric taxonomists as "The Wager on the Wife's Chastity."<sup>11</sup> The basic scheme runs thus: a husband wagers that his wife is so upright she cannot be seduced; the opponent who accepts the bet tries unsuccessfully to seduce the wife, then stealthily obtains private objects or information with which he substantiates his false claim to have actually seduced her; the husband loses the bet and, shamed and angry, banishes his wife (often after threatening to kill her); when the truth of the situation is eventually revealed, the wife's chastity is vindicated, the seducer is punished, and the married couple is reunited. This scheme of the Chastity Wager condenses many psychosocial preoccupations about marriage and gender, working through anxieties about the dangers of *eros*, the disruptive power of evil, and the traumatic effects of misprision. In its more folkloric forms, the Chastity Wager's plot of danger-and-escape unfolds with the inexorability of a ritual casting out of evil: the false accusation and wrongful judgment at the beginning of the tale demand narrative remedies in which the woman's chastity is publicly vindicated and the seducer's treachery punished. The apparently happy ending in fact enables the graphic representation of the preceding situations of danger and violation.

This tense plotline, however, does offer opportunities for narrative dilation, most notably during the interval after the calumniated wife is cast out but before her innocence is publicly vindicated. Instantiations of the tale type differ in how they treat this narrative "middle." Most of the extant medieval versions spin out this part of the story, adding narrative elaborations and deferrals that align the tale with the mode of romance. Boccaccio would have encountered the Chastity Wager in a form that already combined the symbolic density and narrative inexorability of a folktale with the more sentimentalized representation of personhood and the more dilated narrative rhythm of romance.

We do not know precisely in what form Boccaccio encountered this "folkloric romance." The closest analogues are three works from thirteenth-century France (these are, in fact, the only extant versions that pre-date the

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<sup>10</sup> Interpretations of *Decameron* 2.9 include: Almansì 1973 and 1976; Barolini 1993; and Bendinelli Predelli 1995.

<sup>11</sup> Paris 1903, 500–15; Lee 1909, 42–57; Branca 1992, 283 n. 2; Uther 2004, type 882.

*Decameron*). Two of these are poetic romances that handle the Chastity Wager schema in roughly similar ways: both the *Roman du Comte de Poitiers* (early thirteenth century) and Gerbert de Montreuil's *Roman de la Violette* (late 1220s) expand the basic scheme by tracing how the husband learns that his wife is innocent and how he goes on a quest to find her. Of these two, the *Comte de Poitiers* presents a more condensed version of this quest, whereas the *Violette*, in which the protagonists are unmarried lovers, expands the quest portion of the story to an extraordinary length.<sup>12</sup> By contrast, a prose romance — the second half of the *Roman dou roi Flore et de la Belle Jehanne* (second half of the thirteenth century) — focuses on the plight of the female heroine, who cross-dresses to search out and take care of her husband, and who plays an instrumental role in righting her wrongs.<sup>13</sup>

When composing *Decameron* 2.9 Boccaccio most likely made use of a no-longer-extant romance intermediate between the *Comte de Poitiers* and *Belle Jehanne*. In its first half, *Decameron* 2.9 shares with the *Comte de Poitiers* many features not found in *Belle Jehanne*: the opening scene of the wager is set in Paris; the bet arises because of the husband's boastfulness; the seducer travels to the husband's home, obtains intimate objects, returns to Paris, and shows the objects as proof of his false claim; the husband is irate; he prepares to kill his wife in the forest, but by a change of fortune she is abandoned instead. By contrast, the second half of Boccaccio's story is strongly aligned with *Belle Jehanne*: abandoned by her husband, the wife cross-dresses as a man, becomes a servant (Jehanne becomes the squire of her own husband, who does not recognize her), and manages business affairs in a foreign city (at an inn in Marseilles); by coincidence she and the seducer cross paths and, not recognizing her, the seducer tells the truth of his deception, upon which the wife does not take immediate action; finally, after a public spectacle at the court of the king (trial by combat), the seducer publicly admits his wrong, and the wife reveals her identity. It is conceivable that Boccaccio knew two versions of the story and combined their details, yet students of the French tradition accept that there must have been many intermediate versions in circulation, such that it seems likely that one such version, now lost, provided Boccaccio with his main point of entry into the Chastity Wager tale type.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For the *Comte de Poitiers*, see the edition and introduction in Malmberg 1940. For the *Violette*, see Montreuil 1928 and 1992; Keller 1990; Krause 1996; Baldwin 2000.

<sup>13</sup> For the *Belle Jehanne*, see Monmerqué and Michel 1885, 417–30.

<sup>14</sup> Malmberg 1940, 27–28; Bendinelli Predelli 1995.

The scene from the *Comte de Poitiers* where the husband is about to kill his wife shows how one of these French texts combines symbolically laden events and sentimental narration. Riding into a forest valley, the Count cruelly berates his wife. When he raises his sword to strike, she pleads for mercy and prays:

“Mere Dieu et virge pucele,  
 M’ounor, mon cors, m’ame et ma vie  
 Mech hui en vostre avoerie.  
 S’onques amastes casteé  
 Tensés moi viers mon avoé  
 Qui la tient nue cele espee  
 Que jou ne soie desmenbree.”  
 Dist li quens: “Trop ai attendu  
 Que ne vous ai le cief tolu.  
 Molt m’avés porcachié grant honte.”  
 Si l’ahiert par la trece blonde,  
 Hauce l’espee et le nu blanc.  
 E vous un lion acorant  
 Par mi le bos, geule bae.

“O mother of God, virgin maiden, take into your protection my honor, my body, my soul, and my life: if ever you loved chastity, protect me from my husband who is holding that naked sword, so that I will not be dismembered.” The Count said, “I will not wait any longer to cut off your head. You have brought great shame upon me.” So he grabs her by her blonde locks, and he lifts up the sword with its naked blade. But behold! A lion running through the forest, his mouth gaping!<sup>15</sup>

The Countess warns her husband of the approaching beast; after he vanquishes the lion he decides not to kill her but to abandon her in the woods. (In *Violette*, the symbolic animal is a dragon, and the knight’s reason for changing his mind — because she saved his life with her warning — is made explicit.) The same golden sword with which the Count defeats the Lion is used at the end of the tale to defeat the evil duke in single combat, after which the punishment of reprisal is swift, both for the duke and for the old woman who abetted him:

Devant Pepin ens el sablon  
 Le fist li frans quens recreant,  
 Voiant le siècle, gehisant  
 C’ausi eüst Diex part de s’ame  
 Que la contesse est loiaus dame.  
 La fu pendus et trainés,  
 Et la vielle ot trencié le nés

<sup>15</sup> Vv. 544–57, in Malmberg 1940, 119–20.

Et les orelles ambedeus.  
 Se li fist on crever les ex.  
 Par amender sa laide vie  
 Fu mise en une ostelerie.  
 Or est la contesse joians,  
 Car ele est dame des Normans.

There on the field before King Pippin the brave Count called him a recreant coward. Looking at everyone, he confessed that, as God might take his soul, the Countess was a faithful lady. Right there he was hanged and drawn. And the old woman had her nose and both ears cut off, and her eyes were gouged out; to reform her wretched life she was sent to a hospice. Now the Countess is happy, for she is the lady of all Normandy.<sup>16</sup>

Boccaccio's representational realism differs considerably from the stagey symbolic narrative strategy of these French Chastity Wager romances. Nevertheless, the tale of Madonna Zinevra retains much of the strange urgency of this chivalric form of folkloric romance, with its symbolic condensation of psychosocial preoccupations with gender, family, knowledge, and power, and with its mix of romance deferral and folkloric reprisal. These intertextual coordinates help explain why Filomena describes her tale as structured as much around the punishment of the evil villain as the happy ending of the protagonists.

#### *Ancient Romance: The Story of Apollonius of Tyre*

In *Decameron* 2.9 the pivotal scene of Zinevra's attempted murder differs significantly from the equivalent scene in the *Comte de Poitiers* referred to above. I quote it at length:

tratto fuori il coltello e presa la donna per lo braccio, disse: "Madonna, raccomandate l'anima vostra a Dio, ché a voi, senza passar più avanti, convien morire."

La donna, vedendo il coltello e udendo le parole, tutta spaventata disse: "Mercé per Dio! anzi che tu m'uccida dimmi di che io t'ho offeso, che tu uccider mi debbi."

"Madonna," disse il familiare "me non avete offeso d'alcuna cosa: ma di che voi offeso abbiate il vostro marito io nol so, se non che egli mi comandò che senza alcuna misericordia aver di voi io in questo cammin v'uccidessi; e se io nol facessi mi minacciò di farmi impiccar per la gola. Voi sapete bene quanto io gli son tenuto e come io di cosa che egli m'imponga possa dir di no: sallo Idio che di voi m'incresce ma io non posso altro."

A cui la donna piagnendo disse: "Ahi! mercé per Dio! non volere divenire micidiale di chi mai non t'offese, per servire altrui. Idio, che tutto conosce, sa che io non feci mai cosa per la quale io dal mio marito debbia così

<sup>16</sup> Vv. 1215–27, in Malmberg 1940, 137–38.



fatto merito ricevere. Ma lasciamo ora star questo; tu puoi, quando tu vogli, a un'ora piacere a Dio e al tuo signore e a me in questa maniera: che tu prenda questi miei panni e donimi solamente il tuo farsetto e un cappuccio, e con essi torni al mio e tuo signore e dichi che tu m'abbi uccisa; e io ti giuro, per quella salute la quale tu donata m'avrai, che io mi dileguerò e andronne in parte che mai né a lui né a te né in queste contrade di me perverrà alcuna novella.”

Il famigliare, che malvolentieri l'uccidea, leggiermente divenne pietoso.

He therefore drew his dagger and seized the lady's arm, saying:

“Commend your soul to God, my lady, for this is the place where you must die.”

On seeing the dagger and hearing these words, the lady was completely terror-stricken.

“For God's sake, have mercy!” she cried. “Before putting me to death, tell me what I ever did to you, that you should want to kill me.”

“My lady,” he replied. “To me you have never done anything; but you must have done something or other to your husband, for he ordered me to kill you without mercy in the course of our journey. And if I fail to carry out his instructions, he has threatened to have me hanged by the neck. You know very well how much I depend upon him, and how impossible it would be for me to disobey him. God knows I feel sorry for you, but I have no alternative.”

The lady began to weep.

“Oh, for the love of God, have mercy!” she said. “Don't allow yourself to murder someone who never did you any harm, just for the sake of obeying an order. As God is my witness, I have never given my husband the slightest cause for taking my life. But leaving that aside, you have it within your power to satisfy your master without offending God or laying a finger upon me. All you have to do is take these outer garments I am wearing and leave me a cloak and doublet. You can then return to our lord and master with the clothes and tell him you have killed me. And I swear to you, upon the life you will have granted me, that I will disappear and go away somewhere so that neither he nor you nor the people of these parts will ever hear of me again.”

The retainer was by no means eager to kill her, and was easily moved to compassion. (*Dec. 2.9.36–41*)

Boccaccio's treatment differs from the French romances in three main ways. The crime is not attempted by the husband, but is assigned to a servant. The heroine only now learns about her plight, for which she asks the reason. And the heroine's life is spared not because some wild animal interrupts the scene, but rather because her words move the servant to pity. These changes reflect Boccaccio's reliance upon another narrative source, namely the late-antique Latin *Historia Apollonii regis Tyri*. In the pertinent episode, Prince Apollonius has left his infant daughter Tarsia in the care of step-parents in the city of Tarsus while he travels to Egypt as a merchant;



after fourteen years pass and he still has not returned, the jealous, greedy stepmother orders a servant to kill the girl. The servant accosts Tarsia along the shoreline and pulls out a dagger; the girl begs for time to pray, which the servant grants her; while she prays pirates arrive and take her on board, setting in motion a sequence of trials.

Et iussit venire villicum de suburbano. Cui ait: "Theophile, si cupis libertatem, Tharsiam tolle de medio." Villicus ait: "Quid enim peccavit innocens virgo?" Scelerata dixit: "Negare mihi non potes; fac, quod iubeo. Sin alias, sentias me iratam. Interfice eam, mitte corpus eius in mare. Et cum nuntiaveris factum, praemium libertatis accipies." Villicus licet spe libertatis seductus tamen cum dolore discessit. Et pugionem acutissimum praeperavit et abiit post nutricis Tharsiae monumentum. Et puella rediens de studiis solito more tollit ampullam vini et coronam. Venit ad monumentum casus suos exponere. Villicus impetu facto aversae puellae crines apprehendit et traxit ad litus. Et dum vellet interficere eam, puella ait: "Theophile, quid peccavi, ut tua manu moriar?" Villicus ait: "Tu nihil peccasti, sed pater tuus Apollonius, qui te cum magna pecunia et ornamenta dereliquit." Puella cum lacrimis ait: "Peto, domine, ut, si iam nulla spes est vitae meae, deum mihi testari permittas." Villicus ait: "Testare. Et deus scit coactum me hoc facturum scelus." Et cum puella deum deprecaretur, subito piratae apparuerunt.<sup>17</sup>

She summoned the overseer of their suburban estate, to whom she said, "Theophilus, if you want your freedom, do away with Tarsia." The overseer said: "What wrong has the innocent maiden done?" The wicked woman said: "You cannot refuse me. Do what I say. If not, you'll see how angry I get. Kill her and put her body in the sea. When you tell me this has been done, you'll have your freedom as reward." While the overseer was seduced by the thought of freedom, nevertheless he departed with grief. He sharpened a dagger and went behind the tomb of Tarsia's nurse. When the girl was returning from school she carried, as usual, a vial of oil and a crown, and came to the tomb to lament her situation. The overseer rushed out, seized the girl's hair from behind, and dragged her to the shore. As he was about to kill her, the girl said: "Theophilus, what wrong have I done, that I should die by your hand?" The overseer said: "You haven't done anything wrong. Rather your father did, who abandoned you with so much money and jewellery." Then the girl in tears said to him: "Please, sir, if there is no hope for my life, allow me to worship and pray to God." The overseer said: "Worship. God knows I have been forced to do this crime." And while the girl was praying to God, suddenly pirates appeared.

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<sup>17</sup> *Historia Apollonii*, RB 31–32 in Kortekaas 2004, 177–81. Further citations are to this edition of the RB text; translations are mine. The textual history of the *Historia Apollonii* is complex, and it is not clear which version Boccaccio used. For the *Historia Apollonii* see Archibald 1991; Garbuigno 2004; Konstan 1994; Schmeling 1996; and Panayotakis 2013. For the text's reception in Italy see: Beggiato and Marinetti 2002; and Sacchi 2009.

Boccaccio's use of a servant to perform this murderous deed matches the situation in the *Historia Apollonii*. The dialogue between Tarsia and Theophilus clearly informs that between Zinevra and Bernabò's servant: "quid peccavi, ut tua manu moriar?" becomes "dimmi di che io t'ho offeso, che tu uccidermi debbi," while "Tu nihil peccasti, sed pater tuus Apollonius" becomes "me non avete offeso d'alcuna cosa; ma di che voi offeso abbiate il vostro marito." The stepmother's commands to Theophilus are echoed in the way Bernabò's servant describes his master's orders: "Negare mihi non potes; fac, quod iubeo" becomes "come io di cosa che egli m'imponga posa dir di no," and "Sin alias, sentias me iratam" becomes "s'io nol facessi, mi minacciò di farmi impiccar per la gola." While Boccaccio locates this scene in the forest, following the precedent of the Chastity Wager, it takes place close enough to the shore that Zinevra almost immediately finds herself there and is taken on board a trading ship, much as Tarsia, on the shore, is seized by pirates.

Boccaccio had already borrowed directly from the *Historia Apollonii* when composing his *Filocolo*, in which one of the *questioni d'amore* of Book Four is based on an episode where Tarsia's mother is resuscitated from presumed death.<sup>18</sup> As that story from the *Filocolo* is retold as the fourth tale of Day Ten, the *Historia Apollonii* demonstrably contributes to the intertextual dynamics of the later parts of the *Decameron*, so it is not surprising that Boccaccio also reverts to this source when writing the story of Zinevra. In *Decameron* 2.9 Boccaccio does not limit himself to rewriting a single scene from the ancient text; rather, he aligns the entire account of Zinevra's wanderings with the pattern of Tarsia's adventures. Zinevra, after escaping from the attempt on her life, is taken aboard the ship of a Catalan trader and transported across the Mediterranean to Alexandria, events that are patterned on the way Tarsia is rescued from attempted murder by being taken aboard a passing pirate ship and transported to the port of Mytilene.<sup>19</sup> Tarsia's experience in a brothel at Mytilene, where she maintains her virginity despite the threat of violation, resonates with Zinevra's innocence in the face of accusations of sexual looseness, even if the polluting experiences occur at different moments in each of the respective plots (for Zinevra, before her exile; for Tarsia, after). Tarsia endures her misfortunes, maintains her virtue, and survives in a foreign land largely because of her persuasive skill

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<sup>18</sup> Boccaccio borrowed from chapters 26–27 of the *Historia Apollonii* for the thirteenth question of love in the *Filocolo* (4.67–70), subsequently retold as *Dec.* 10.4 (Mazzoni 1950, Forni 1996, 80–81).

<sup>19</sup> In a fifteenth-century retelling of Boccaccio's tale, the Catalan traders are identified as pirates, *corsali* (Zambrini 1859, 10).

with words, a trait she shares with Zinevra (in persuading the servant to let her escape, Zinevra exhibits an even greater degree of agency).

Finally, the conclusions of the two tales also map onto each other. At the end of the *Historia Apollonii*, Apollonius summons Tarsia's step-parents to a tribunal, asking them what happened to his daughter; when the step-mother claims the girl is dead, Apollonius pretends to call up the ghost of Tarsia to the wonder of the stepmother and the onlookers; Tarsia rebukes her stepmother, then commands the servant Theophilus to reveal the truth; the step-parents are taken outside the city and stoned, while Theophilus is mercifully pardoned by Tarsia.<sup>20</sup> This highly staged tribunal scene has many similarities with the concluding tribunal scene of *Decameron* 2.9, where we find the same sequence of trial-revelation-punishment-pardon, and where the crucial prosecutorial role is played by the injured woman. Where the French Chastity Wager romances all end with trial by combat, Boccaccio, following the ending of the *Historia Apollonii*, opts instead for a tribunal where the heroine vindicates and reveals herself.

In the Chastity Wager romances, an escape from attempted murder sets in motion the adventures of the heroine, which conclude only with the heroine's public vindication and the punishment of the villain. This same pattern is discernible in the story of Tarsia, and then again in the story of Zinevra. Insofar as Zinevra survives by cross-dressing, and in so far as she encounters her evil accuser by coincidence, her adventures map onto those of Jehanne in the French *Belle Jehanne*. Insofar as Zinevra is transported by ship across the Mediterranean and survives her misfortunes because of a combination of intellect and purity, her trials resemble Tarsia's.

The alignment of Zinevra with Tarsia reinforces the theme of Fortune. The *Historia Apollonii* is a Latin outcrop of the genre of Hellenistic Greek romance, a literary form that grants unprecedented control over events to the apparently random contingency of τύχη, Fortune, described well by Bakhtin: "Moments of adventuristic time occur at those points when the normal course of life's events is interrupted. These points provide an opening for the intrusion of nonhuman forces — fate, gods, villains — and it is precisely these forces, and not the heroes, who in adventure time take all

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<sup>20</sup> *Historia Apollonii*, RB 50 in Kortekaas 2004, 243–45. The RA version does not include the ruse of pretending that Tarsia has risen from the dead. The brutality of RA's description of the step-parents' death can be compared to the *Decameron's* account of Ambrugiolo's corpse: "lapidus eos occiderunt et ad bestias terrae et volucres caeli in campo iactaverunt, ut etiam copora eorum terrae sepulturae negarentur" (RA 50, in Kortekaas 2004, 244).

the initiative.”<sup>21</sup> In the *Historia Apollonii*, as Elizabeth Archibald notes, “there seems to be no reason for the suffering of Apollonius and his family; the real manipulator of events is not a jealous goddess or a God who wishes to test their faith, but Fortune, that powerful overseer of medieval destinies.”<sup>22</sup> Even though she is stripped of her social identity and put in intolerable situations, Tarsia survives the slings and arrows of Fortune because she maintains a core identity of being chaste and clever. By overlaying this model of ancient romance upon the pattern of folkloric romance, Boccaccio heightens even more the sense that his own heroine, Zinevra, is subjected to the whims of Fortune.<sup>23</sup>

### *Biblical Romance: The Story of Joseph*

Not content with establishing a narrative paradigm that is indebted to both the Chastity Wager romances and the *Historia Apollonii*, Boccaccio overlays these with a third intertextual model, namely the family romance of Joseph recounted in *Genesis* 37–45. Joseph, the darling of his father Jacob, is about to be killed by his jealous brothers; but because of Reuben’s misgivings about shedding blood, they spare him, abandoning him in a pit then selling him to Midianite traders passing by. (Compare how Zinevra, threatened from within her family, is barely spared from having her blood shed, and is then taken off by a Catalan merchant). The traders lead him to Egypt, where he learns the language and assumes an Egyptian name — “vocavit eum lingua aegyptiaca Salvatorem Mundi” ‘and called him in the Egyptian tongue, The saviour of the world’ (*Gen.* 41:45, Douay-Rheims translation) — eventually becoming the favourite of Pharaoh and put in charge of the distribution of grain. (Zinevra arrives in Egypt under the assumed name of Sicurano da Finale, where she becomes a favourite of the Sultan, learns the language fluently, and becomes an administrator of commercial activities.) In his capacity as an administrator, Joseph recognizes his brothers and overhears them talking about how they abandoned him years ago (Zinevra meets Ambruogiuolo who has come to a fair at Acre; she learns from him

<sup>21</sup> Bakhtin 1981, 94–95.

<sup>22</sup> Archibald 1991, 102. Cf. Frye 1976, 46–52. On the Greek romances, see Bakhtin 1981, Billaut 1991, Fusillo 1989. On the *Decameron* stories that show resemblances to the schemas of ancient Hellenistic romance, see Sklovskij 1969.

<sup>23</sup> Intertextual relationships between the *Decameron* and the Greek romances are explored by Segre 1974 and Picone 1997. It should be pointed out that, compared to the Greek romances, the *Historia Apollonii* is much closer to folktale, especially in its concern with incest; it thus already accommodates the narrative contingency of ancient romance with other psychosocial drives, creating what Wilson calls a “purification plot” (Wilson 1988, 29–46). See: Deyermond 1968–69; Frye 1976, 49; Chiarini 1983; and Robins 1995.

his version of the story, but bides her time). Having summoned his younger brother, Benjamin, to Egypt, Joseph stages a scene of reunion, revealing himself to his frightened brothers, stressing the role of providence in preserving him, forgiving his brothers, and reuniting with his family. (Zinevra summons Bernabò to Egypt, stages a tribunal before the Sultan where she reveals herself, vindicating herself against her accuser but pardoning Bernabò and reuniting with him as his wife.) Zinevra is a female Joseph.

Within the romance of Joseph there is the subplot of the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife, which replicates in miniature the pattern of fall and rise that characterizes the larger Joseph story, transposing the key from family hatred to erotic intrigue: her false accusation of rape leads to his imprisonment, from which he eventually escapes after his ability to interpret dreams comes to Pharaoh's attention. When Boccaccio shapes Zinevra's trials so that they mimic Joseph's, he collapses these two threads of the Joseph story: Zinevra's tribulations result not only from being driven from her family and home, but also from a false accusation of sexual transgression. Critics have begun to discern the influence of *Genesis* 37–45 in several details of *Decameron* 2.9. Monica Bardi has noted that the ruse the brothers adopt of presenting Joseph's bloody cloak to Jacob, from which Jacob infers that Joseph has been eaten by wild beasts (*Gen.* 37:31–33), is echoed when Zinevra pleads with Bernabò's servant to present her clothes to Bernabò and claim he has left the body for wolves to devour, which he does.<sup>24</sup> Marilyn Migiel has suggested that Potiphar's wife's display of Joseph's clothing as "proof" for her claim of Joseph's sexual misconduct (*Gen.* 39:16) informs the way that Ambruogiuolo presents items of clothing to substantiate his claim of having seduced Zinevra.<sup>25</sup> And Francesco Ciabattoni notes the stories of both Joseph and Zinevra turn upon the motif of concealing one's identity, after which, "despite the momentary loss of their high social status, they ultimately prevail when their outstanding qualities shine through in the moment of ruin."<sup>26</sup> I would put the case even more strongly: these isolated echoes register an extensive intertextual control exercised by the story of Joseph over *Decameron* 2.9 at the level of an overarching narrative paradigm.

In Gaston Paris's assessment, one of the most significant features distinguishing Boccaccio's version from other Chastity Wager plots is that the false seducer makes his confession at the court of a foreign king.<sup>27</sup> In the

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<sup>24</sup> Bardi 1989, 27.

<sup>25</sup> Migiel 2003, 184–85 n. 9.

<sup>26</sup> Ciabattoni 2013, 192.

<sup>27</sup> Paris 1903, 500.

French versions, the same king who presides over the judgment of the original wager also presides over the concluding trial by combat and the ensuing judgments, bringing the story full circle. Boccaccio's shift of the setting to a foreign country, which motivates an account of how the protagonist rises to a position of prominence under a beneficent foreign ruler, is occasioned by adopting the Joseph story as a narrative source. The final tribunal scene (which, as has been shown, presents some similarities with the *Historia Apolloniū*) is shaped by the biblical intertext, as Zinevra summons her husband from far away, publicly tests her tormentors, reveals her true identity, and mercifully forgives and reunites with her dumbfounded husband.

The Joseph story is the part of the Bible most closely allied with novelistic narration and romance plotting.<sup>28</sup> Its literary features invited numerous narrative retellings and amplifications in antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup> Joseph's ability to escape from his troubles is in part due to his own initiative, or at least to actions that are in keeping with his moral character: "Joseph adapts to the changing circumstances in which he finds himself. He takes on the roles of slave, overseer, dream interpreter, and economic adviser willingly and with ease. In each of these positions, he impresses his superiors with his skills and his wisdom."<sup>30</sup> Yet his successes are equally ascribable to the operations of divine providence, as Joseph is often at pains to point out. God protects him, not directly, since God does not really factor as a character, but providentially, working in secret fashion through the actions of the human characters. The Joseph story artfully presents both of these factors as fully present, defining Joseph both by the virtues he exercises and by the special alignment with providence he exhibits. Zinevra's role as a modern, female Joseph helps explain much of the tone of *Decameron* 2.9, where Zinevra, surviving by her own wits as a resourceful and tactful and respectful servant, seems to be rewarded for her innocence and conscientiousness by a moral logic that is akin to providence. By modelling Zinevra in part on the biblical Joseph, Boccaccio inflects his *novella* in the direction of what we can call "biblical romance," a version of romance narrative where characterological initiative and providential guidance are subtly intermingled.

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<sup>28</sup> For the literary aspects of the Joseph story, see: Redford 1970; Coats 1976; McGuire 1981; Alter 1981, 159–77; Ackerman 1982; Berlin 1983, 48–51; Humphreys 1988; Dorsey 1999; Brodie 2001; and Freedman 2005, 33–41 and 153–67.

<sup>29</sup> For the reception of the Joseph story, see Derpmann 1974; Kugel 1990; Wills 1995, 158–84; and Dornringer 2000. Of special relevance is the vernacular Italian retelling from ca. 1400; see Neri 1867.

<sup>30</sup> Freedman 2005, 158.



### Conclusions

*Decameron 2.9* orients itself intertextually around three models of romance narrative: the “folkloric romance” on offer in the French tradition of the Chastity Wager; the “ancient romance” as exemplified by the Latin *Historia Apollonii*; and the “biblical romance” of the story of Joseph in the book of *Genesis*. These three intertexts differ somewhat in the grounds of agency for the characters, as well as in the kinds of poetic justice they revolve around. The folkloric romance presents a greater degree of magic inevitability, in which events seem inexorably destined to occur (the appearance of the symbolically over-determined lion, or the final proof by trial, for example), although already in the French romances this scheme is being opened up to narrative dilation. The ancient romance of Apollonius of Tyre is built around the idea that human beings are subject to the contingent changes of Fortune, where the most one can do is to be true to one’s core virtues, using one’s wit and purity to see one through, and wait for final restoration. The Joseph story presents this as a dialectical interaction of moral uprightness on the one hand and providential favour on the other. These differences are not particularly emphatic, but they may help to explain what Boccaccio hoped to achieve by stitching together three different subspecies of romance. The actions of Bernabò, Ambruogiuolo, and Zinevra play out according to a subtle narrative logic that combines aspects of reprisal, of fortune, and of providence.

Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term chronotope to designate “the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed” in a form of literature, a concept that includes the issues of narrative logic just discussed as well as the coordinates of time and space.<sup>31</sup> Boccaccio constructs the chronotope of *Decameron 2.9* in light of the romance chronotopes present in his sources, and as he does so he makes an especially striking move: he acknowledges his three narrative intertexts by means of geographical correlates. The first part of the *Decameron 2.9*, which is the section most indebted to the French tradition of the Chastity Wager, takes place in France and northern Italy. The part of the story most infused with the spirit of ancient romance takes place on the Mediterranean Sea, as Zinevra travels by ship from port to port. The final stretch, where the biblical model is most palpably felt, is set in the lands of Egypt and Canaan. Boccaccio’s settings correlate with the settings of his three narrative intertexts, while also evoking the cultural provenance of the sources in France, the

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<sup>31</sup> Bakhtin 1981, 84.



Greco-Roman world, and the ancient near East. (Acre does double duty here, situated close to Apollonius's Tyre and within Joseph's Canaan.)

The tripartite arrangement through which Boccaccio explores the contours of romance narration calls to mind the moment in Day Two when Filostrato, before telling the tale of Rinaldo d'Asti, acknowledges that his story will mix three distinct themes: "[...] a raccontarsi mi tira una novella di cose catoliche e di sciagure e d'amore in parte mescolata" ["the story that takes my fancy is one that contains a judicious mixture of piety, calamity, and love"] (*Dec.* 2.2.3). Filostrato's tripartite scheme for the triple thematics of *Decameron* 2.2 applies equally to the triple intertexts of *Decameron* 2.9, a tale which weaves together three source narratives characterized by religious matter (Joseph), by a sequence of calamities (the *Historia Apollonii*), and by erotic intrigue (the Chastity Wager romances). The weaving together of material from these three sources is a species of Boccaccio's combinatorial art. Yet what is distinctive about the intertextual relationship here is that these sources provide models not only for specific scenes (*tessereae* of the *novella's* mosaic) but also for the *novella's* overall narrative shape (the design of the mosaic itself). These three precursor texts all display a "romance" narrative pattern of fall and rise: an attempted murder sends the protagonist into exile, then in a final recognition scene the protagonist confronts the traitor, reversing the earlier wrong. The three sources all combine fraught family dynamics on the one hand (the separation and reunion of a husband and a wife, or a father and a daughter, or a brother and his family) with the tensions of sexualized power on the other (the erotic intrigue that sets in motion the plot of the Chastity Wager, or sexual predicaments that come later in the tales of Tarsia and Joseph). All three construct characterological identities around issues of truth and falsehood, innocence and evil, individual initiative and extra-human forces. Boccaccio's narrative model for the story of Zinevra is not any one of these tales, but all three of them woven together.

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