

Beyond Mimesis: Boccaccio's Engagement with Wool Production in the *Decameron*

Boccaccio populates the *Decameron* with abundant references to textiles. By contextualizing a *novella* within the rich history of the fourteenth-century Florentine wool industry, I shall demonstrate how Boccaccio not only reflects the reality of contemporary dressing practices but also uses textile-related language to participate in a larger dialogue on changing social mores. Material objects are, and have always been, both indicative and constitutive of the world around them. Textiles occupy a unique position in *Trecento* Italy due to their central role in the economy, their impact on labor hierarchies, and their ability to stand as shorthand for delineating identity. In the text they become receptacles for meaning. Textiles in the *Decameron* function as shifting sites upon which values can be (re)inscribed and that cannot be fully understood without a robust understanding of the raw materials, tools, production processes and consumer behaviors associated with them.

Several scholars have explored textiles in the works of Dante and Boccaccio. In *Come vestivano gli uomini del Decameron*, Carlo Merkel catalogued male dressing practices. Elissa Weaver continued this line of inquiry while expanding the topic to include female dress in her article "Dietro il vestito: La semiotica del vestire nel *Decameron*" (1989). More importantly, she linked those practices to significance in the text and connected them to the theme of Fortune in her more recent article "Fashion and Fortune in the *Decameron*" (2015). Kristina Olsen has insightfully uncovered the political discourse embedded in the sartorial language found in Dante's *Commedia* in "Shoes, Gowns and Turncoats: Reconsidering Cacciaguida's History of Florentine Fashion and Politics" (2016). Recently, Ottavio Brigandi examined the use of colors in the *Commedia* and linked them to specific textile dyeing practices (2016). My aim is to continue this exploration of sartorial subjects with a particular focus on the historical practices of production to uncover additional meaning in the text. In this paper, I deconstruct the cloaks featured in the *novella* of Friar Rinaldo and Madonna Agnesa (7.3) by tracing a path from production to consumption. I argue that Boccaccio demonstrates a nuanced understanding of textile production practices and

deploys that knowledge to further his narrative. The cloaks in this *novella* inhabit a hybrid, liminal space that reveals tensions between the categories of clerical and lay. Using his knowledge of textile practices, Boccaccio is able to tap into contemporary debates about luxury and excess but also to push the concept of the boundaries of these and other categories.

The four primary raw materials used to produce textiles in Western European were wool, linen, silk and cotton.¹ The story of wool unfolds in the context of other textile industries, from the lower-quality cotton-linen blend known as fustian to the highest-quality, most expensive silks often embroidered with precious metals. Wool was a common material used for medieval clothing and Italy a primary supplier and producer of wool textiles in late medieval Europe.² The wool industry's vital importance to Florence, both economically and symbolically in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries cannot be overstated.³ Using data from David Herlihy and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Judith Brown asserts that from the 15th to 17th century "Florentines continued to produce a wide variety of luxury goods, for which they had become famous already in the early Renaissance, and the largest single group, over one-fifth of the population, continued to work in the textile sector."⁴ This massive level of participation in the textile industry altered the landscape and contributed to the changing character of the city. Sergio Tognetti notes how a "[rapid] and chaotic expansion of the city, which Florence was between the 13th and 14th centuries, couldn't help but produce phenomena of marked social mobility."⁵ Certainly issues of social mobility preoccupy Boccaccio and often find expression in the *Decameron* through textiles. Wool textiles in particular lend themselves to nuance because wool is not a singular product. Rather it is a category and the spectrum of products produced from wool varied enormously in quality, cost, processing and finishing techniques. There was both a qualitative peak and quantitative 'turn' in Florentine wool cloth production over the course of the 13th and 14th centuries as there was a move towards the production of higher

¹ For more on the history of the cotton cloth industry in Italy, see Mazzaoui.

² According to John Munro, "Italy was, in fact, one of the three most important regions that supplied good- to high-quality wool-based textiles to much of Christian Europe and to the Islamic world in the Mediterranean basin and the Near East during the medieval and early modern eras" (45).

³ According to Franco Franceschi, while Florentines gained early expertise in dyeing and fulling cloth circa early 12th century, by the 14th century the "wool industry was already one of the pillars of the Florentine economy" (43).

⁴ Brown 75.

⁵ Tognetti 40.

quality products.⁶ Franco Franceschi locates the source of this transformation both in a change in raw materials (from local, low to mid quality wools to higher quality English wools) and in more sophisticated production techniques (in both carding and dyeing).⁷ As I detail below, Boccaccio reveals an acute awareness of these gradations in *novella* 7.3.

Elissa begins the tale by introducing Rinaldo, the protagonist. After falling in love with Madonna Agnesa and being unable to seduce her, he becomes a friar and temporarily turns away from his vices. But then he returns to them: “senza lasciar l’abito” (“without abandoning his friar’s habit,” 7.3.7).⁸ The vices are described as taking pleasure in his appearance particularly in the way he dresses: “cominciò a dilettersi d’apparire e di vestir di buon panni e d’essere in tutte le sue cose leggiadretto e ornato” (“he began to take pleasure in the way he looked, in expensive material for his habits, in being gallant and elegant in everything he did,” 7.3.7). Rinaldo’s refusal to give up his *abito*, in terms of his practices or in terms of his clothing, becomes the essential hermeneutic key for this novella.⁹ Boccaccio sets up the apparent tension between retaining the habit and possessing a simultaneous desire for luxury textiles. Muzzarelli articulates one of the implicit functions of the *abito* when she writes “L’abito fratesco o monastico non era importante solo per connotare l’appartenenza a questo o quell’Ordine e Congregazione, ma doveva rappresentare la virtù di chi lo indossava e si riteneva anzi che in qualche misura ne partecipasse” (298). The habit itself inherently expresses a contradiction because its existence connotes a religious function while the raw material or *panni* of which it is made suggests a proclivity towards earthly pleasures and values. In fact, his interest in fine material is described in a list of compositional activities: “a fare delle canzoni e de’ sonetti e delle ballate e a cantare, e tutto pieno d’altre cose a queste simili” (“in composing songs, sonnets and ballads, in dancing, and in spending his time in all sorts of similar activities,” 7.3.7).

Countless scholars have noted the implicit connection between literary production and textiles. We often cannot escape the metaphors of spinning and weaving when discussing or writing about constructing a narrative. But associating literary production with Friar Rinaldo early in the *novella* is a red herring because it is instead Madonna Agnesa’s narrative production

⁶ Franceschi 2017, 44–45.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ All English translations unless otherwise noted are from the Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella translation of the *Decameron* (Boccaccio 2010).

⁹ My gratitude to Professor Teodolinda Barolini for bringing my attention to Boccaccio’s *abito* pun. Also see exploration of habit as behavior in Aristotle’s *Ethics* 2.2 (1984) and especially Aquinas’ *Summa theologiae* Ia 2ae, 49–54.

that ultimately saves them both. In the *proemio*, Boccaccio famously calls on ladies in love to pay attention to his stories and announces to the rest he leaves the tools of textile production “in soccorso e rifugio di quelle che amano, per ciò che all’altre è assai l’ago e ’l fuso e l’arcoliao” (“as support and diversion for those ladies in love to those others who are not I leave the needle, spindle, and wool winder,” 13). This proposed separation of literary and textile production is nothing more than an illusion. Boccaccio repeatedly engages in a discourse on the relationship between wit and dressing. In the case of *novella* 7.3, he focuses on the elaborate dressing practices of the male character and the wit and storytelling capabilities of the female protagonist. But in all cases clothing presents an opportunity to meditate on different categories from lay/clerical to masculine/feminine and extravagant/ascetic. An appreciation of fashion is precisely the earthly value prized in other lay protagonists; Bergamino of 1.7 and Maestro Simone of 8.9 come to mind.¹⁰ However this predilection signals a problem for Friar Rinaldo. Stuard notes, “A fourteenth-century man made a stark choice early in his life when he chose between taking vows in a mendicant order and forsaking riches, or remaining ‘in the world’ and adopting the badges and attire that reflected his wealth and standing” (106). Elissa inculcates the discrepancy between Rinaldo’s habit and his interest in his appearance by addressing the *brigata* directly, asking why this is even a matter of discussion: “Ma che dico io di frate Rinaldo nostro di cui parliamo?” (“Why do I go on this way about this Brother Rinaldo of ours?,” 7.3.8). Boccaccio’s use of hypophora bolsters Elissa’s ability to take the *brigata* and the reader on a narrative detour describing friars and their wicked ways, a popular topic found elsewhere in the *Decameron*.¹¹ Textiles materialize both prominently and discretely in *novella* 3.7’s diatribe against the greed and hypocrisy of the clergy.

¹⁰ In *novella* 1.7 Bergamino seems to take pride in his three nice suits and uses his wit and storytelling abilities by recounting story of Primas and the Abbot of Cluny to get his wardrobe reimbursed by Messer Can della Scala. In *novella* 8.9 Maestro Simone, in an attempt to become a member of an imagined, elite club boasts about his clothing, “le più belle robe che medico di Firenze” (“he has the most elegant wardrobe of any doctor in Florence,” 8.9.50). For more on protagonists in relation to the practices of male social clubs see Barolini 808–19.

¹¹ In fact, Vittore Branca draws our attention to a passage from 3.7 on the bad habits of clerics. Branca observes, “[I]l passo seguente è uno dei più caratteristici sfoghi del B. contro il malcostume del clero; ricorda specialmente quello nella novella III 7, 30–43” (*ad* 7.3.8). Janet Levarie Smarr also notes McWilliam’s query regarding the positional location of both diatribes within the *Decameron* (1/3 and 2/3 throughout the book), and Smarr goes further to suggest that the “neat reversal” of digits in 3.7 and 7.3 was intentional on Boccaccio’s part as a means of linking these two *novelle* (61). I agree with Smarr

Emilia suggests that the clergy's desire to preach one set of behaviors yet live by another is ludicrous: "l'averè risposto 'Fate quello che noi diciamo e non quello che noi facciamo' estimano che sia degno scaricamento d'ogni grave peso, quasi più alle pecore sia possibile l'esser constanti e di ferro che a' pastori" ("they say, 'Do as we say and not as we do,' thinking that this is a proper excuse for every serious offense, as if it were possible for sheep to be more constant and steadfast than their shepherds!," 3.7.39). This sheep reference does more than rehash the Biblical trope. Sheep can function as a gesture towards the vast framework of the wool industry and often appear in the text paired with textile appraisal. In this case it directly follows a critique of mendicant dressing practices. Tedaldo compares worthy friars of the past to contemporary friars in terms of their dressing practices and behaviors. While the worthy friars of the past wore a simple, rougher style "furono ordinate strette e misere e di grossi panni" ("ordered their habits to be tight-fitting, shabby, and made of coarse cloth," 3.7.34), the contemporary friars wear visually and tactilely appealing garments "le fanno larghe e doppie e lucide e di finissimi panni" ("have their habits cut wide, and they are lined, made with a smooth texture and the finest cloth," 3.7.34). The contemporary friars are accused of having a more pontifical style and of parading around "come con le lor robe i secolari fanno" ("the way the layman would show off his clothes," 3.7.34). Boccaccio selects categories such as pontiffs and laymen because of their respective expectations around appropriate clothing. Noting the distinction between monks and secular clergy, Muzzarelli reports: "Non solo i monaci, ma anche il clero secolare seguiva regole precise d'abbigliamento: la veste clericale non doveva essere tanto austere come quella indossata dai monaci (o per lo meno ad essi prescritta), ma nemmeno lussuosa" (301). There are stakes for violating those expectations. Furthermore Boccaccio directly links sartorial choices to bad behavior when Tedaldo describes how corrupt friars catch women in the drapes of their opulent garments "con le fimbrie ampissime avvolgendosi, molte pinzochere, molte vedove, molte altre sciocche femine e uomini d'avilupparvi sotto s'ingegnano, e è loro maggior sollecitudine che d'altro esercizio" ("wrapping themselves in the ample folds of their garments, try to take in many a sanctimonious lady, widow, and many another silly person, both men and women alike, and this concern of theirs they place above all other duties," 3.7.35).

In this context, textile scholar Elizabeth Crowfoot notes the important influence of finishing techniques on how a cloth performs including how it

and would add that the way textiles are treated in each of the diatribes further cements their connection.

could drape. She describes how finishing techniques could make certain techniques, such as double folded hems, unnecessary and could provide opportunities for further decorative embellishment.¹² It is the elaborate finishing techniques associated with higher quality woolens that would allow the fabrics to drape and make Boccaccio's humorous image possible. Improvements and refinements in production techniques made these elaborate garments possible and attainable. By linking garment attributes with moral weaknesses Boccaccio lays a foundation for an argument about clerical excess that he is able to revisit again on Day seven from a new perspective. But the ingredients, primarily the language, remain quite similar: from Day three to Day seven *leggiadra* becomes *leggiadretto* and *finissimi panni* becomes *panni fini*.

Returning to the passage in the *novella* 7.3, friars signal their wicked proclivities with their dressing, self-care, and eating/drinking habits. Elissa describes friars luxuriating in extravagant ointments, creams, and perfumes all items that suggest attention to and indulgence in the body. By labeling these dressing and bodily practices as delicate or refined Boccaccio broadcasts that this *novella* focuses not on female dress but on male, specifically ecclesiastical, dressing practices: “d'apparir morbidi ne' vestimenti e in tutte le cose loro” (“or so effeminate in their dress and all their affairs,” 7.3.9).¹³ The allegation that friars dress in this manner is not only a condemnation of clerics and an allusion to women's vanity, but also a nod to the gender reversal implicit in Day seven's theme, essentially tricks that wives play on their husbands. Earlier in the work Boccaccio began building an argument for the inverse relationship between women's wit and their attention to clothing. In *novella* 1.10, for example, Pampinea laments how few women understand witty remarks because they are overly focused on the body and its ornamentation often expressed through wearing bright colors and fancy patterns. On Day seven Boccaccio makes a few adjustments to the equation. He links a man's overzealous focus on clothing to what will turn out to be a lack of wit or skill on his part. Friar Rinaldo is saved only by Madonna Agnesa's quick thinking. There are no descriptions of her sartorial choices. In this case, Boccaccio complicates his discourse on gender by reversing the categories and examining the relationship between clothing and wit from multiple perspectives and identities.

¹² Crowfoot 5. For more on the elaborate decorations found on ecclesiastical cloaks see Levi-Pisetzky 2:201–09.

¹³ Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella translate *morbidi* in this instance as effeminate (in Boccaccio 2010, *ad loc.*). Branca glosses *morbidi* as “delicati, raffinati” (in Boccaccio 2009, *ad loc.*).

The maximum-impact textile moment in *novella* 7.3 occurs in the anthyphora portion of this periphrastic detour. Elissa compares presumable clothes-horse Rinaldo to Saints Dominic and Francis who were more ascetic in their sartorial expression: “e che né san Domenico né san Francesco, senza aver quatro cappe per uno” (“and that neither Saint Dominic nor Saint Francis ever owned four cloaks apiece,” 7.3.12). In contrast to the habit, these *cappe* are polysemous. The term *cappa* may signify a cloak, cape, mantle or gown but can also denote an ecclesiastic tunic or *tunicella*.¹⁴ Maureen Miller reports *cappa* originally referred to an ecclesiastical cloak or cape, but later developed into a closed cloak called the *cappa clausa*. Miller explains that eventually this *cappa clausa* came to be defined over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as the required clerical street attire: “that is what the clergy wore outside of church” (46).

Miller explains how two diverging styles emerged in clerical wear, one opulent and one simple, and how these styles reflected changing ideas about the appearance of power and holiness. Certainly, there is a vast history of criticism on ornate clerical dress. Miller shows how twelfth and thirteenth century ecclesiastical legislation limited the use of the highly ornate style to liturgical functions and relegated the simpler style for clerics to wear outside of official church functions. She posits a political motivation for this dichotomy; she notes many people may not have wanted “clerics looking like rulers” at time when the lines of power between monarchs and the Church were shifting (46). Stuard also investigates this bifurcation and notes that to medieval observers “any new, opulent, and fashionable attire ran the risk of diminishing a person’s spiritual standing by connoting crass worldliness, precisely the opposite message from that which a devout person intended. On the other hand, appropriately rich dress might convey proper messages about obligations and calling, even among the holy” (27). In this *novella*, Friar Rinaldo’s *cappe* dwell in a liminal space revealing tensions between the categories of clerical and lay, hypocritical and authentic, and masculine and feminine.

In 7.3 all of Rinaldo’s actions occur outside of the sanctuary, therefore his *cappe* are appropriate in the sense that they are the expected street wear for the clergy outside of their liturgical functions. For example, Muzzarelli notes, “Sappiamo che alla fine del Medioevo gli appartenenti al clero indossavano quotidianamente un mantello o tabarro nero di forme differenziate: più o meno largo, con maniche ora fluttuanti e ora corte, dotato di diversi tipi di allacciature. Sotto al mantello portavano una veste di drappo di lana

¹⁴ Miller 46.

aperta anteriormente e foderata con un tessuto sempre di lana, ma più sottile” (302). However, as a signifier of his clerical status they draw attention to his profane appetites. His *cappe* are also inappropriate because of the extravagance in both their quantity and quality. A deeper examination of the practices of making textiles helps illuminate their role in the text. The quantitative assessment “not four cloaks apiece” reflects the historical reality of the cost of clothing and participates in what Miller terms a medieval debate about the appearance of holiness. According to Carole Frick, in mid-fifteenth-century Florence it would have taken approximately eight *braccia* of cloth to construct a *capa* and *scapulare* for a friar.¹⁵ Because of the enormous resources needed to produce good quality cloth, the price could run from three to twenty florins per *braccio* depending on the raw materials and processes.¹⁶ To contextualize, Frick notes the estimated annual earnings for a weaver of wool in Quattrocento Florence to have been approximately forty-three florins per year.¹⁷ Textile historians Françoise Piponnier and Perrine Mane report that while difficult to ascertain the average working person may have owned one cloak.¹⁸ This puts Friar Rinaldo’s wardrobe acquisitions in direct opposition to the values of the individuals and groups who preached the renunciation of worldly goods.¹⁹

But what type of *cappe* might Friar Rinaldo have owned? Next Elissa begins qualitatively to describe the sorts of robes Saints Francis and Dominic did not wear in order to contrast their sartorial style with that of Rinaldo. The garments of Francis and Dominic were simpler in color (dye processing) and lower in quality: “non di tintillani né d’altri panni gentili ma di lana grossa fatti e di natural colore, a cacciare il freddo e non a apparere si vestissero” (“nor did they ever dress up in finely dyed, elegant garments but, rather, in coarse, woolen robes of natural colors made to keep out the cold

¹⁵ See Frick 231. Frick notes a *braccio* is approximately equivalent to a yard.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁸ Piponnier and Mane 44.

¹⁹ Particularly mendicants. On the implicit connection between Saint Francis and clothing, Maureen Miller situates the mendicant rejection or critique of ornate clerical clothing within the larger context of twelfth-century legislation against superfluity, a larger discussion about status and power between royal courts and the church: “Holy men and women renouncing wealth and dedicating themselves to the care of the poor and sick appear in the twelfth century, but the orders founded by Francis of Assisi and Dominic of Guzmán in the early thirteenth century gave this critique of a more affluent society new force and prominence. Implicitly or explicitly, the friars’ way of life was also a critique of the secular clergy. Clothing figured prominently in this critique” (139).

rather than to appear stylish,” 7.3.12). Noting the connections between particular processes and value systems, Muzzarelli explains: “Caratterizzavano l’abito dei monaci la semplicità del tessuto e l’assenza di colore, nel rispetto della teoria secondo la quale ogni tintura è menzogna” (299). In this densely packed section of text Boccaccio reveals an accomplished understanding of the raw materials and processes involved in textile production and directly links these characteristics to the motivations of the wearer and the garments’ functionality.

While Boccaccio’s portrayal of a degradation in values over time as expressed through excesses in clothing is a common trope, the increased availability of high quality cloth very much reflects the reality of the narrative arc of the history of the wool industry in Italy.²⁰ From the twelfth to the fourteenth century or roughly from the time of Saint Francis to the time of the writing of the *Decameron* there is a dramatic shift in the primary types of textiles circulating in the market place from low-quality, cheap, rough cloth to, first, the importation of and, then, the imitation and production of higher-quality English wools used to create expensive, opulent textiles.²¹ According to John Munro, in the twelfth through the early fourteenth century the most common material “was not a woollen, serge, or worsted fabric but a fustian: another lightweight hybrid, composed of a linen (flax) warp yarn and a cotton weft yarn” (62). It was light, cheap, and popular among the poorer sectors of society. Similar coarse, cheaper Italian wools marketed under various other names were widely circulating.²² Prior to the 14th century, according to Sergio Tognetti, “the artifacts [the Florentines] produced did not have those technical and qualitative features that would later make them attractive to many non-regional markets.”²³ Citing Hoshino Hidetoshi and Richard A. Goldthwaite, Munro notes that in the latter thirteenth century Italian merchants began importing *panni alla francesca*, high-quality woollen cloth from England and France constructed of English wool. Due to several factors, including increased taxes and a collapse in commercial networks, there was a decline in the production of cheaper fustians and worsted cloths for export and a simultaneous rise in the production of high-quality luxury cloth for the export market with a focus on imitating the *panni alla francesca*. Florentines were importing high-quality wool from England and

²⁰ For more on this theme in the Cacciaguida episode of Dante’s *Paradiso*, see Olson.

²¹ Munro 62.

²² Munro lists terms such as *stametto*, *trafilato*, *tritana*, *taccolino*, *saia* and *saia cotonata*. Munro 63.

²³ Tognetti 39.

applying sophisticated finishing techniques in imitation of the style of the cloths being produced in Flanders and Brabant.²⁴ Muzzarelli suggests that opulent Quattrocento sartorial trends had an influence on the attire of monks and clergy. She notes, “La forza d’attrazione del modello laico e signorile si fece sentire anche nell’abbigliamento dei monaci, se è vero che fini pellicce presero a far capolino dagli orli delle loro maniche o dei cappucci e che, specie nel corso del XIV secolo, non sempre essi seppero rinunciare a nastri, bottoni, e lacci” (301).

How does one differentiate among the numerous gradations of quality in these wool products? Munro sorts these into three main categories: high-quality woolens, lower-quality worsteds and hybrid serges.²⁵ He explains generally shorter fibers result in a tighter weave and stronger cloth. As such, short curly fibers were used for both the warp and the weft of higher quality woolens. These fibers were often imported from England and then greased with olive oil, but then were prepared differently. The warp yarn was combed and then spun on a drop spindle. This strengthened the fibers and allowed them to withstand the tension of being stretched out on a horizontal loom. In contrast the weft yarns were carded and then spun on a spinning wheel. This faster process resulted in a yarn that was too weak for a warp but strong enough for the weft. A strong warp and weaker weft were woven together with a shuttle to produce cloth with a desirable felting property.²⁶ Fulling and tenting would then strengthen and clean the cloth. The lower quality worsteds were made from long straight fibers that were neither greased nor oiled. The fibers were combed and not carded and the differences in the fibers and their preparation resulted in a lighter weight cloth, providing a different appearance and handfeel. Worsteds have a visible weave (twill) and without the fulling process there is no felting effect. The serge hybrids were made by weaving together a warp (composed of spindle spun long fibers) and a weft (composed of short greased fibers spun on a spinning wheel). Like the higher quality woolens, the serge hybrid cloths had to be partially fulling to remove the grease or butter used for the weft preparation. But similar to the lower quality worsteds the serge hybrids were not napped. The amalgam functionality and handfeel of these cloths

²⁴ Tognetti 39–40.

²⁵ I am indebted to John Munro’s excellent account of wool processing for the descriptions found here. See Munro 53–58.

²⁶ Scholar and textile conservator Elena Phipps defines felting as “a process to raise a napped surface on a woven fabric, usually with a combination of hot water, abrasion, and repeated physical agitation (beating)” (33).

led them to become a model for lighter weight textiles of the sixteenth century. Each combination of raw material and process resulted in different characteristics for the finished cloth and how it would appear, interact with, and move on the body of the wearer.

Therefore, when our narrator Elissa articulates terms such as the *panni gentili* and *tintillani* she is evoking specific materials and processes that resulted in expensive luxury cloth, most likely high-quality wool that was imported from England and then heavily finished in Italy. Franceschi cites a reference to *panno tintillano* in a statue by the Arte della Lana and asserts it refers to a specific dyeing process, specifically wool which is dyed before being spun.²⁷ With *lana grossa* Elissa is signaling the cheap, coarse worsted cloths that flooded the domestic Mediterranean market in the late thirteenth and fourteenth century. Much of the raw wool for these cloths came from Northern Europe, North Africa, and Italy, and was generally of lower quality than the English wools.

After a quantitative and qualitative assessment of cloaks, Elissa moves on to the topic of purpose. For Saints Francis and Dominic, functionality reigned supreme: “a cacciare il freddo e non apparere si vestissero” (“to keep out the cold rather than to appear stylish,” 7.3.12). This description vividly recalls the diatribe against friar hypocrisy from *novella* 3.7, examined above. Recall that from Day three to Day seven *leggiadra* became *leggiadretto* and *finissimi panni* transformed into *panni fini*. By explicitly articulating the functional aspects (keeping out the cold vs. looking good) of the sartorial choices, Elissa engages in an ethical indictment of Rinaldo’s character buttressed by the earlier diatribe and communicated to the reader through shared knowledge of the textile market and through the repetition of its lexicon.

As the story continues, Friar Rinaldo wears another important cloak. Boccaccio again uses the *cappa* to denote the liminal space between two aspects of Rinaldo’s identity: as a man and as member of the clergy. Rinaldo pronounces to Madonna Agnesa that in the instant he takes off his cloak she will see him distinctly differently as though a man and a friar were not overlapping categories: “qualora io avrò questa cappa fuor di dosso, che me la traggio molto agevolmente, io vi parrò uno uomo fatto come gli altri e non frate” (“the moment I remove this cloak, which I can remove quite easily, you will see me as a man made just like all the others and not as a friar,” 7.3.15). As he removes this *cappa*, Rinaldo hopes to shed the last vestige of holiness from his identity as friar, and thus use a change in clothing to jump

²⁷ Franceschi 47.

from one category to another.²⁸ He also of course wishes to drastically re-categorize and sexualize his relationship with her. Once the affair has commenced Elissa describes the moment in which they could potentially be discovered. Rinaldo's state of undress is the most direct signal of their culpability. Interestingly, she clarifies what she means by *spogliato*, which is not the literal sense of complete undress but the more relevant sense of partial divestiture of his clerical identity: "cioè senza cappa e senza scapolare, in tonicella" ("that is, no cloak and hood, standing there in just a vest," 7.3.26).

Thus, the cloak and hood form central components of his dress and their absence signals a state of undress. Yet the presence of the *tonicella* is not enough to consider him as being clothed. Miller defines the tunic between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries as a vestment quite similar to the dalmatic. She notes it was associated with subdeacons and acolytes (248). Despite the narrower sleeves and lacking *clavi*, the tunic, Miller explains, could be brightly colored and ornamented, which is very much in line with Friar Rinaldo's tastes.²⁹ Levi-Pisetsky includes tunics in her list of sumptuous ecclesiastical garments and describes particular examples from 1483 in Parma with intricate decoration.³⁰ The tunic provides yet another opportunity for Rinaldo to express and reveal his values sartorially. Much like the *cappa*, which was removed, the *tonicella* in this context maintains some clerical association yet its ecclesiastical status is perhaps even more diluted. Despite Rinaldo's efforts to shed his friar-ly identity during his amorous adventures he cannot completely dismantle them. The *tonicella* acts as a vestigial remnant of the identity he took on when he became a friar.

It also of course signals his nakedness. In the moment of potential discovery, Rinaldo realizes that if he were dressed he might be able to escape. But Madonna Agnesa more capably realizes that the solution lies not in Rinaldo transitioning from a state of naked to clothed, but rather going from a state of unclothed to re-vested in his liminally clerical garb and attaching a clerical significance to his visit to her home. By redressing him in his *cappa* she takes the first step in re-contextualizing him in his role as a friar, and by creating the story of the worm exorcism she narratively justifies his presence there. This act of redressing allows him to escape punishment but

²⁸ For more on the relationship between change of clothing and change of social status for characters in the *Decameron*, see Weaver 2015.

²⁹ Miller defines *clavi* as "stripes often woven into a dalmatic." She also notes "Surviving vestments and inventories indicate that the colorful silks and golden embroidery used for chasubles and dalmatics in the tenth and eleventh centuries were being deployed on tunics and albs in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries" (249).

³⁰ "[S]ono ornati di strisce auree con la figura della Madonna che adora il figlio nel presepe" (2:491).

more importantly it allows Madonna Agnesa to escape the consequences of her actions and fulfill the mandate of Day seven, to trick her husband. Textiles continue to form a link to narrative production and narrative production saves these protagonists just as the practice of storytelling saves the *brigata* in the frame.

Textiles and dressing-related terms abound in this novella and many others. By examining Friar Rinaldo's *cappe* in light of the production and consumption practices of the wool industry in Trecento Italy I hope to have shown the value of bringing this material approach to the text. In just a few words Boccaccio communicates quality differences in various types of wool, denotes a physical function (provision of warmth) and a social function (appearance and fashion) of clothing, signals an ethical debate regarding what friars should be wearing, points to potential discord between moral character and outward appearance, links clothing quantity directly to a measure of wealth, and catalogues two dye processes for wool textiles. The representation of these textile objects in the text is a reflection of the saturation of the textile industry in the late-medieval Florentine economy and culture. As such they carry multiple layers of meaning and association, which allow them to function as active tools in Boccaccio's discourse on wit and gender. The semiotics of clothing allows characters to straddle different identities; understanding the raw materials and processing can uncover additional valences. Just as there are a multitude of gradations of wool, there are gradations of identity and, much as Rinaldo continually shifts between multiple layers of identity, few of Boccaccio's protagonists remain fixed in only one category.

JULIANNA VAN VISCO

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

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