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The Thread of Memory in the *Decameron*: From the Pleasures and Dangers of Narration to Lessons for the Future

1. Introduction

Memory permeated many aspects of medieval culture from rhetoric to philosophy and from ethics to literature[1]. An intellectual such as Giovanni Boccaccio would have encountered the Classical understanding of memory in Cicero and Quintilian, and in the Aristotelian theory of knowledge[2]. Starting from these premises, this article explores the importance of memory for storytelling in the *Decameron*[3]. I analyze the references to memory both in the frame narrative and inside the tales of the *Decameron* showing how Boccaccio creates a thread of memory that organically connects the tales, while at the same time providing the basis for a didactic narrative[4]. The mentions of the semantic field of remembrance in the *Decameron* indicate the continuity and development of Boccaccio's own intertextual connections. I argue that through these references Boccaccio creates a connection between ethics, memory and

[1] For the role of memory in medieval culture see the seminal work of F.A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1966 and M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990.

[2] On rhetoric in the *Decameron* see P.M. Forni, *Adventures in Speech: Rhetoric and Narration in Boccaccio's* Decameron, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia 1996; M. Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the* Decameron, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2003 and M. Paasche Grudin, R. Grudin, *Boccaccio's* Decameron *and the Ciceronian Renaissance.* Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2012. On Boccaccio and the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, see F. Andrei, *Boccaccio the Philosopher: An Epistemology of the* Decameron, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2017.

[3] On the interplay between time, love and memory in the frame narrative of the *Decameron* see T. Kircher, *Eros and Evanescence in the* Decameron*: The Weave of Love, Time, and Memory,* in "Quaderni d'Italianistica", vol. 38, n. 2, 2017, pp. 113-127. On literary memory in the *Decameron*, see G. Velli, *Memoria*, in R. Brigantini, P. M. Forni (a cura di), *Lessico Critico Decameroniano*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 1995, pp. 222-248.

[4] On memory as a mechanism to jog the narrators' memory, see P.M. Forni, *Adventures in Speech*, cit., pp. 16-17.

storytelling in the *Decameron*, by weaving a net which begins from the ethical aim of the proem and arrives at the author's conclusion.

Authorial memory is strictly connected to narration, as the writer cannot retell what he cannot remember and through telling stories he can bring pleasure and solace to those in pain[5]. Moreover, the memory of each character is also at play, as any time when we remember, we can decide how to employ the data we recovered from the senses.

Boccaccio considers memory as a liminal faculty, since in an Aristotelian theory of knowledge it occupies a different yet connected place from the imagination. Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, commenting on Aristotle's *De memoria et reminiscientia*, explained how both memory and recollection are part of the cognitive process, and how memory deals with images in a manner akin to the imagination, but with a different intentionality[6]. The intentional character of memory is further elucidated by connecting these philosophical ideas with Augustine's considerations in *Confessions*, which reflect on what happens when we remember past feelings. In addition, the rhetorical understanding of memory found in commentaries to Cicero's *De Inventione* emphasized how memory is an essential part of prudence, since to avoid future errors, one should remember past mistakes[7]. This layered concept of memory within the novelle offered a perfect platform on which Boccaccio could build an ethical system of cases that the reader could recall when needed[8].

This article highlights that memory for Boccaccio is placed at the intersection of literature and philosophy, as it is essential for storytelling, and memory's ethical repercussions illustrate the moral and practical lessons that can be gained from literature. First, I touch on some of the sources in philosophy, theology and rhetoric that shaped Boccaccio's multifaceted understanding of memory. Secondly, I trace the allusions to memory

[5] On the consolation of storytelling see S. Nobili, *La consolazione della letteratura: un itinerario fra Dante e Boccaccio*, Longo, Ravenna 2018; and G. Zak "*Il senno di consolazion sia cagione*": *The* Decameron *and the Consolation of Storytelling*, a cura di G. Zak, *Boccaccio and the Consolation of Literature*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto 2022, pp. 88-132.

[6] See V. Decaix, *Mémoire et mouvement: Pour une approche intentionnelle de la mémoire animale à la fin du XIIIe siècle,* in "Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques", vol. 106, 2022, pp. 421-442; and A. Oezle, *Animal Rationality. Later Medieval Theories 1250-1350,* Brill, Leiden 2018.

[7] On the concept of rhetorical memory see M. Carruthers, *Rhetorical* Memoria *in Commentary and Practice*, a cura di V. Cox, J.O. Ward, *The Rhetoric of Cicero in its Medieval and Early Renaissance Commentary Tradition*, Brill, Leiden and Boston 2006, pp. 209-237.

[8] On exemplarity in the *Decameron* see O. Holmes, *Boccaccio and Exemplary Literature: Ethics and Mischief in the* Decameron, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2023. On ethics in the *Decameron*, see M. Migiel, *The Ethical Dimension of* The Decameron, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2015.

in the novelle, in order to show how Boccaccio brings the reader to see the moral import of the narration. The stories depict positive and negative outcomes of using memory: from cautionary tales of disastrous endings when remembrance is employed selfishly, to memory functioning, through recognition, as a *deus ex machina* stratagem within many tales that allows the felicitous conclusion of the story. Finally, the article concludes by examining the role that remembrance plays in the frame narrative of the *Decameron*, as a *fil rouge* connecting the narrators' process of invention.

2. Memory from the Proem to the Conclusion of the *Decameron*

From the very beginning of the *Decameron* Boccaccio establishes a strong connection between memory and ethics. In the proem he states that it is the memory of his love pains and even more the memory of his friends' help that urged him to write his own collection of stories to comfort those still laboring under the pains of love. Specifically, he thanks "i piacevoli ragionamenti d'alcuno amico", [the agreeable conversation] which provided some reprieve in times of hardship before his love lost its intensity and "sol di sé nella mente m'ha al presente lasciato quel piacere che egli è usato di porgere a chi troppo non si mette ne' suoi piú cupi pelaghi navigando; per che, dove faticoso esser solea, ogni affanno togliendo via, dilettevole il sento esser rimaso". [So that now, all that is left of it in my mind is the delectable feeling which Love habitually reserves for those who refrain from venturing too far upon its deepest waters][9].

The moment in which pain leaves the mind of the writer is described as a sort of pleasure, the kind that remains after a hardship. This pleasure is therefore part of the joys of memory, even of the memory of pain, and it constitutes an integral part of the power of narration, as it is inherently tied to that exchange of pleasant reasonings, which provided the initial consolation for the author[10].

It is a duty of gratitude that pushes Boccaccio to write the *Decameron*, specifically an input that comes from "la memoria de' benefici già ricevuti"[11]: the memory of the assistance received by the author in his moment of sorrow has not faded together with his pain. In this sense the didactic value of

[9] For the text of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, all the citations come from the Vittore Branca's edition: G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Vittore Branca ed., Utet, Torino 1956, p. 1. For the English text, the citations come from G.H. McWilliams' translation: G. Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, tr. by G.H. McWilliam, Penguin Books, London 1995, p. 1.
[10] On the "pleasure of memory" as a motif in the frame of the *Decameron*, see L. Marino, *The* Decameron *'Cornice': Allusion, Allegory, and Iconology*, Longo, Ravenna 1979.
[11] G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 2.

the *Decameron* – its utility – is closely connected to its origin in memory, as the *Decameron* can fulfil Boccaccio's debt of gratitude only inasmuch as it is useful, because it brings solace and instruction to its readers.

This necessity of memory for learning comes back also in the author's introduction to the first day of the *Decameron*, when Boccaccio justifies the need for a "grave e noioso principio" [an irksome and ponderous opening] such as the sorrowful memory of the plague "la dolorosa ricordazione della pestifera mortalità trapassata" [the painful memory of the deadly havoc wrought by the recent plague]: it was necessary to have the "orrido cominciamento" [grim beginning] in order to frame this journey as a journey from "una montagna aspra e erta" [a steep and rugged hill] to "un bellissimo piano e dilettevole" [a beautiful and delectable plain][12]. The journey through the stories of the *Decameron* is described almost as a purgatorial journey of ascent, and the memory of the past pain in this perspective is fundamental to the didactic aim of the book. Boccaccio notes how remembrance is a prerequisite for the narration:

> se io potuto avessi onestamente per altra parte menarvi a quello che io disidero che per cosí aspro sentiero come fia questo, io l'avrei volentier fatto: ma […] non si poteva senza questa rammemorazion dimostrare, quasi da necessità costretto a scriverle mi conduco.
>
> [If I could decently have taken you whither I desire by some other route, rather than along a path so difficult as this, I would gladly have done so. But since it is impossible without this memoir […] I really have no alternative but to address myself to its composition][13].

It is mandatory to pass through the bitter path – and the adjective "aspro" calls to mind the beginning of Dante's *Commedia* – yet Boccaccio's didactic aim takes the central spot as he needs it to bring the readers where he desires[14]. The author wants to instruct his readers, and to do so, he must recall a painful memory, as if to set the stage for a scholastic demonstration, by using the verb "dimostrare" and the philosophically charged noun "necessità". Boccaccio though does not make a philosophical argument, rather, he has ten narrators create a system of storytelling articulated in ten days.

Boccaccio theorizes the benefits of reading, and the pleasure it creates, in his famous defense of poetry, Book XIV of the *Genealogiae Deorum*

[12] Ivi, p. 4; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 4.
[13] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 4; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 4.
[14] See G. Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's* Decameron*,* Princeton, 1986, pp. 16-17 and M. Fiorilla, *La figura e le opere di Dante nel progetto intellettuale di Giovanni Boccaccio*, in "Ellisse: studi storici di letteratura italiana" vol. 17, n.1/2, 2022, pp. 18-30.

Gentilium. When citing Petrarch's *Contra Medicum,* he states that the rhymes: "are designed to enhance the reader's pleasure and support his memory"[15]. This understanding of rhetorical artifices can be useful in analyzing the *Decameron*, and how reading its tales can lead to both entertainment and edification.

Boccaccio reiterates the ethical import of memory at the end of the book when in the Conclusion he comes full circle, as he too wishes to be remembered[16]. The author hopes that women will hold in their mind a fond memory of him if they have benefitted in any way from the stories they read in his book: "e voi, piacevoli donne, con la sua grazia in pace vi rimanete, di me ricordandovi, se ad alcuna forse alcuna cosa giova l'averle lette." [May His grace and peace, sweet ladies, remain with you always, and if perchance these stories should bring you any profit, remember me.][17] If the book was helpful for the women, they will then remember Boccaccio fondly. The *Decameron* was a way to repay the author's debt, kept in his memory. Hopefully, if the readers have benefitted from the tales of the *Decameron* they will in turn tell these stories to their family and friends, thus continuing this virtuous circle of memory, storytelling, and emotional help.

3. Philosophical Basis for Boccaccio's use of Memory

We find the philosophical and theological basis for this relationship between memory and ethics in Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine[18]. Albert the Great's commentary on *De memoria et reminiscientia,* following Averroes, distinguished between "the imagination (a power of conservation of images) and memory (a power of conservation

[15] See G. Cardillo, *The Tale of Cisti the Baker (VI.2)*, in D. Lummus (a cura di), *The* Decameron *Sixth Day in Perspective*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 2021, pp. 48-49. On the role of memory in the *Genealogiae* see J. Kriesel, *Boccaccio's* Corpus: *Allegory, Ethics, and Vernacularity*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 2019, pp. 69-71.

[16] See T. Kircher, *Eros and Evanescence,* cit., pp. 130-132.

[17] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 888; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 802.

[18] On Boccaccio use of Aquinas see V. Kirkham, *The Sign of Reason in Boccaccio's Fiction*, Olschki, Firenze 1993; F. Bausi, *Gli spiriti magni. Filigrane aristoteliche e tomistiche nella decima giornata del* Decameron, in "Studi sul Boccaccio", vol. 27, 1999, pp. 205-253, and also S. Barsella, *I marginalia di Boccaccio all'Etica Nicomachea (Ms Milano, Ambrosiana, A 204 inf.),* in E. Filosa, M. Papio (a cura di), *Boccaccio in America*, Longo, Ravenna 2012, pp. 143-155. On Augustine and Boccaccio, see M. Papio, *Boccaccio: Mythographer, Philosopher, Teologian*, in *Boccaccio in America*, cit., pp. 123-142 and C. Del Corno, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, in G. Claessens, F. Della Schiava (a cura di), *Augustine and the Humanists*. LYSA, Ghent 2021, pp. 73-97.

of intentions)"[19]. Hence memory adds to the conservation of images the uniquely human trait of conserving the intentions behind the images that are connected to the emotions evoked by those images.

Aquinas, also commenting on Aristotle's *De memoria et reminiscentia*, emphasizes the division of memory into two parts: *memoria* (memory) as the passive storage place for the data acquired from the senses, and *reminiscentia* (recollection), as the active moment which allows to call to mind the acquired knowledge. Augustine shares this concept of memory as a place when, in *Confessions* Book X, devoted to memory, he describes it as follows: "I enter the fields and spacious halls of memory, where are stored as treasures the countless images that have been brought into them from all manner of things by the senses"[20]. Aristotle specified that "memory […] belongs to the same part as imagination"[21], while "recollecting is like a sort of deduction;" hence it requires rationality, because it "belongs naturally only to those who also possess the faculty of deliberation"[22].

In his *Commentary to On Memory and Recollection,* Aquinas specifies that the connection between memory and the imagination is "why we are less able to remember things that have subtle and spiritual aspect"[23], and he refers his readers to the teaching of Cicero's *Rhetoric* – by which he meant the Pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* – for the methods to "tie down intelligible natures with certain other images"[24], which are the methods of artificial memory. Regarding recollection, he adds that it "bears a likeness to a sort of syllogism", as it is a sort of search for the middle term in syllogistic, and that "it belongs to human beings alone"[25], as it is a part of deliberation. The link between recollection and deliberation explains why memory and ethics are closely tied. They share a double connection, since recollection needs rational thought, deliberation, to initiate, and ethics needs the data from memory to avoid repeating mistakes.

Memoria was directly tied to *prudentia* by Cicero himself, when in the *De Inventione* he divided it in three parts: *memoria*, *intelligentia*

[19] See V. Decaix, *What Is Memory of? Albert the Great on the Proper Object of Memory*, in V. Decaix, C. Thomsen Thörnqvist, (a cura di) *Memory and Recollection in the Aristotelian Tradition: Essays on the Reception of Aristotle's* De memoria et reminiscentia, Brepols, Turnhout 2021, pp. 153-167; 159.
[20] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions and Enchiridion*, ed. by A. Cook Outler, The Westminster Press 1955, p. 208.
[21] D. Bloch (ed. by), *Aristotle on Memory and Recollection*, Brill, Leiden-Boston 2007, p. 29.
[22] Ivi, p. 49.
[23] T. Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's On Memory and Recollection*, ed. by E. M. Macierowski, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington (DC) 2005, p. 195.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] Ivi, p. 230.

and *providentia*. Mary Carruthers notes that Cicero does not linger on the implications of this subdivision, which were later amplified by commentators such as Marius Victorinus who believed that "the work of *memoria* is in support of the virtue of prudence"[26]. The conflation between Cicero as author of the *De Inventione* and of the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium* allowed medieval teachers to stress the importance of rhetorical memory also for ethics. Albert the Great stressed the necessity of memory for foresight also when explaining the difference between human cognition and animal cognition, as animals cannot have *prudentia* since they lack memory[27].

The memory of feelings is further examined by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*. In *Prima Secundae*, *Quaestio* 35, while discussing the nature of pain, he touches upon the problem posed by pleasurable pain, especially in connection with remembrance. Aquinas concludes that "pain itself can be pleasurable accidentally […] in so far as it recalls a beloved object to one's memory, and makes one feel one's love for the thing, whose absence gives us pain. Consequently, since love is pleasant, both pain and whatever else results from love, for as much as they remind us of our love, are pleasant"[28]. One can feel a mixture of pleasure and pain when remembering something dearly beloved that is now lost.

Aquinas later clarifies the nexus of memory and pain in *Quaestio* 38. He explains that when the memory of something that used to be pleasant is made sorrowful by the absence of the person that we used to enjoy it with, there is a conflict between two causes, one that leads a person to sorrow and one to happiness. Yet in this case the causes of a present happiness prevail over past sorrows "since the perception of the present moves more strongly than the memory of the past […]; hence it is that, in the end, the pleasure drives out the sorrow"[29]. Aquinas cites Augustine when in *Confessions* IV, 8, he says that remembrances came to his mind, and his sorrow yielded to "earlier kinds of pleasure"[30].

Furthermore, Augustine in *Confessions* Book X explored the link between memory and suffering, and the peculiar powers of memory to evoke a feeling when it does not exist anymore:

[26] M. Carruthers, *Rhetorical* Memoria *in Commentary and Practice*, cit., p. 212, which refers to Cicero, *De Inventione* 2.53.159-60.
[27] See A. Oezle, *Animal Minds in Medieval Latin Philosophy*, Springer, Leipzig 2021, especially chapter 7, *Memory, Learning, and Prudence (Albert the Great, Metaphysica, Book I, Treatise 1, Chapter 6)*, pp. 67- 75; as well as A. Oezle, *Animal Rationality. Later Medieval Theories 1250-1350*, cit., pp. 168-174 and pp. 178-182.
[28] T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Second Edition, London 1920, *Prima Secundae*, *Quaestio* 35, reply to objection 2.
[29] Ivi, *Prima Secundae*, *Quaestio* 38, reply to objection 3.
[30] Augustine, *Confessions,* cit., p. 83.

> This same memory also contains the feelings of my mind; not in the manner in which the mind itself experienced them, but very differently according to a power peculiar to memory. For without being joyous now, I can remember myself that I once was joyous, and without being sad, I can recall my past sadness. I can remember past fears without fear; and former desires without desire. Again, the contrary happens. Sometimes when I am joyous I remember my past sadness, and when sad I remember past joy.[31]

Thus, it is possible to remember a past feeling without renewing it again, which is a fundamental component of how we can learn from our experiences. One can remember a joyful or frightful occasion, and what it meant to feel joy or fear without feeling that joy again or without being afraid again. This cognitive distance between the moment of the actual feeling and its memory, allows both for the instructional value of *exempla* and for the entertaining power of storytelling in the *Decameron*. On the one hand, it works to move a story towards their end and their moral message (or lack thereof). On the other hand, it forms a thread that connects the narrators while they choose the topic of their stories, acting as a kind of heuristic method for sparking recollection.

4. Allusions to Memory in the *Novelle*

We find references to the semantic area of remembrance in many tales of the *Decameron*. These mentions occur both as narrative devices and as examples of the positive and negative effects of using memory. We have positive mentions when a sudden moment of recognition allows for the resolution of a conflict or hard situation. We also have cautionary tales, which provide an illustration of what happens when a character uses the power of memory, and specifically of an artificially empowered memory, for selfish reasons, without a moral intention.

The first reference to memory as a mechanism that facilitates the narration of the novelle can be found already inside the first story of the *Decameron*, that of Ser Cepparello – San Ciappelletto[32]. Panfilo mentions Musciatto Franzesi, who is the narrative device through which we are in-

[31] Augustine, *Confessions,* cit., p. 213.
[32] On *Decameron* I, 1, I see F. Fido, *The Tale of Ser Ciappelletto (I, I)*, in E. Weaver (a cura di) *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, University of Toronto Press, 2004, pp. 59-76; M. Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, cit., pp. 11-26; F. Ciabattoni, *Boccaccio's miraculous art of storytelling: Dec. I. 1, II. 1 and VI. 10*, in "Italica", vol. 87, n. 2, 2010, pp. 167-178 and S. Barsella, *The Merchant and the Sacred: Artifice and Realism in Decameron I.1*, in "Quaderni d'Italianistica", vol. 38, n. 2, 2021, pp. 11-40.

troduced to the main character Cepparello Da Prato[33]. The backstory for this novella brings us to France, where Musciatto, following his knighthood, needs to find an apt substitute to care for his affairs and especially to recover loans from bad men from Burgundy. This endeavor is so hard that initially Musciatto cannot call to mind any person that would be so evil as to be evenly matched with such people: in his words, "a lui non andava per la memoria chi tanto malvagio uom fosse, in cui egli potesse alcuna fidanza avere, che opporre alla loro malvagitá si potesse." [He was quite unable to think of anyone he could trust, who was at the same time sufficiently villainous to match the villainy of the Burgundians][34]. This inability makes the subsequent recollection stand out even more. Eventually Musciatto finds in his memory just the right thug for this job, Ser Cepparello Da Prato: "sopra questa esaminazione pensando lungamente stato, gli venne a memoria un ser Cepparello da Prato il quale molto alla sua casa in Parigi si riparava". [After devoting much thought to this problem, he suddenly recalled a man known as Ser Cepperello, of Prato, who had been a frequent visitor to his house in Paris][35]. The starting point for the first novella is a spark of memory, the moment of recollection that prompted Musciatto to engage Cepperello in his service, and thus begins the series of events that will create the legend of San Ciappelletto, as well as began the first story of the *Decameron*.

The allusions to memory continue in Day I, 3, the novella about Melchisedech the Jew. In the set-up of this story, Filomena, the narrator, explains that it all started when Saladin, in dire need of money, tried to devise a way to get what he needed in a fast and easy manner[36]. In this occasion, Saladin's memory serves him well, as the king recalls a rich Jewish usurer, Melchisedech. "Bisognandogli una buona quantitá di denari, […] gli venne a memoria un ricco giudeo il cui nome era Melchisedech, il quale prestava ad usura in Alessandria." [He required a vast sum of money. […] He happened to recall a rich Jew, Melchizedek by name, who ran a money-lending business in Alexandria][37]. Saladin's recollection is at once effective, as it provides him with an apt subject for his trick, and ineffective, as Melchisedech will extricate himself from Saladin's trap through his own narration from memory. In fact, Melchisedech tells a story within the story, the archetypal tale of the three rings, and prefaces it with an allusion to his ability to remem-

[33] Musciatto Franzesi went to France as part of Philip the Fair's entourage, ca. 1288. See DBI.
[34] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 26; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 25.
[35] *Ibid*.
[36] On Filomena's introduction see P. M. Forni, *Adventures in Speech*, cit., p. 17. See also P.D. Stewart, *The Tale of the Three Rings (1.3),* in E. Weaver (a cura di), *The Decameron First Day in Perspective*, cit., pp. 89-113, pp. 99-102.
[37] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 45; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 42.

ber[38]. He says: "Se io non erro, io mi ricordo aver molte volte udito dire che un grande uomo e ricco fu giá, il quale, intra l'altre gioie piú care che nel suo tesoro avesse, era uno anello bellissimo". [Unless I am mistaken, I recall having frequently heard that there was once a great and wealthy man who, apart from the other fine jewels contained in his treasury, possessed a most precious and beautiful ring][39]. He then tells a diplomatic allegory of the origins of the three monotheistic religions, so that Saladin cannot in good conscience take offense. This novella illustrates the interplay between memory as a tool to endanger and to deliver from evil; first Saladin's memory puts Melchisedech in danger, and afterwards Melchisedech's ability to recollect helps him get out of this trap unscathed[40].

Memory is also used as a specific plot device in the seventh tale of Day II, when Panfilo tells the story of Alatiel's troubles[41]. The protagonist finally manages to get the help she needs thanks to a lucky moment of recognition. Memory is crucial in securing Antigono's support for Alatiel, as it initiates recognition. First, Alatiel remembers having seen Antigono in Alessandria. Secondly, Antigono has a vague feeling of knowing her, but not a clear memory. He says: "Madonna a me par voi riconoscere, ma per niuna cosa mi posso ricordar dove, per che io vi priego, […] che a memoria mi riduciate chi voi siete". ["I have an idea, ma'am, that I have seen you before, but I cannot for the life of me remember where. Pray be good enough, therefore, […] to remind me who you are"][42]. It is the initial appearance that acts a catalyst for memory, but it is not enough to trigger a full recollection. Recognition occurs only when Alatiel talks and explains their connection in Alessandria[43]: "riconobbe costei essere Alatiel, figliola del Soldano"[44]. After Antigono realizes the identity of the girl as the daughter of the sultan, he proffers his services to her, and sees to her safe delivery to her intended destination.

[38] On the story of the three rings see M. Penna, *La parabola dei tre anelli e la tolleranza nel Medio evo*, Rosenberg & Sellier, Torino 1953.
[39] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 46; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 43.
[40] There are other allusions to memory in Day I, but I cannot here examine all of them. See Day I, 6: Ivi, p. 59.
[41]For an interpretation of Alatiel's tale that highlights the role of memory, see M. Petriccione, *Il fantasma di Alatiel: desiderio, parola e memoria in Decameron II 7,* in Giovanna Frosini (a cura di), *Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni 2019*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2020, pp. 37-51.
[42] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 159; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 143.
[43] For the importance of language for memory in this tale see M. Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the* Decameron. Anma Libri, Saratoga 1979, pp. 41-42.
[44] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 159.

Memory is a tool, and its use depends on the moral character of each person. The second day also offers an example of memory used for evil purposes: in the ninth story, narrated by queen Filomena, the antagonist uses stratagems to create a false memory, as proof of an inexistent affair. Boccaccio evokes a rhetorical understanding of memory by portraying the evil Ambrogiuolo as able to use an artificial memory, based on *loca et imagines*, to create the illusion of having slept with Monna Zinevra[45]. In the story, Ambrogiuolo uses his memory of places and images to set a stage: "per la qual cosa egli il sito della camera, le dipinture e ogni altra cosa notabile che in quella era cominciò a ragguardare e a fermare nella sua memoria"[46]. He observes and fixes in his memory the details of her room. Later he will use this almost photographic mental image he created in his mind to trick the jealous Bernabò da Genova into believing that his wife had cheated on him. Boccaccio makes Ambrogiuolo combine a rhetorical artificial memory with an Aristotelian theory of knowledge when he describes the mental recollection of Zinevra's bedroom[47]. The proof lies in the philosophical understanding that only data acquired from the senses and stored in memory can create this mental image: "E che ciò fosse vero, primieramente disegnò la forma della camera e le dipinture di quella". [By way of proof, he began by describing the shape of the bedroom and the pictures it contained][48]. He then further proves his imaginary liaison by providing intimate details:

> "Dicoti che madonna Zinevra tua mogliere ha sotto la sinistra poppa un neo ben grandicello, dintorno al quale son forse sei peluzzi biondi come oro". [I will tell you that just below her left breast, your wife Zinevra has a sizeable little mole surrounded by about half-a dozen fine golden hairs].[49]

Ambrogiuolo describes even the placement of a mole on her breast as confirmation that he was able to lie with her.

Artificial memory empowers Ambrogiuolo to substantiate a narrative of betrayal, which he uses as a weapon to wound Bernabò: "Parve che gli fosse dato un coltello al cuore […] diede manifesto segnale ciò esser vero che Ambrogiuolo diceva"[50]. Bernabò suffers as if stabbed through the heart when he believes what he interprets as clear signs of the truth of Ambrogiuolo's account. There are two intellectual fail-

[45] For a similar use of memory and images in Boccaccio's works, see J. Kriesel, *Boccaccio's* Corpus, cit., pp. 60-71.
[46] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 188.
[47] On the epistemology of this tale see F. Andrei, *Boccaccio the Philosopher*, cit., pp. 127-131.
[48] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 189; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 170.
[49] Ivi, p. 189; ivi, p. 171.
[50] *Ibid.*

ures here: Bernabò's pain stems from a failure to distinguish between truth and machinations, while Ambrogiuolo's intellect fails to apply artificial memory ethically. Ambrogiuolo's intent was to deceive, and he achieves it. Recognition also brings about Ambrogiulo's demise, as Zinevra, cross-dressed and transformed into the Catalan Sicurano, recognizes her belongings amongst his things, realizing how she and her husband have been tricked by this man. And again later, Bernabò's recognition of Zinevra triggers in him shame for his actions and the desire to beg forgiveness, which, together with Zinevra's choice to forget her husband's wrongdoings, allows for the tale's happy ending[51].

In the third day of the *Decameron* two tales further illustrate the consequences of unethical uses of the power of memory[52]. The fourth narrator, Panfilo, tells the tale of don Felice who takes advantage of Frate Puccio's desire to go to heaven to find his own personal heaven on earth with Puccio's wife, monna Isabetta[53]. Don Felice's selfish intention colors the ways in which he employs his intelligence to gain the woman's trust and lie with her. Felice also preys on Puccio's ignorance of theology and rhetoric when explaining how to pray for immediate salvation.

> "E, se tu fossi letterato, ti converrebbe in questo mezzo dire certe orazioni che io ti darei; ma, perché non sé, ti converrà dire trecento paternostri con trecento avemarie a reverenzia della Trinità, e riguardando il cielo, sempre aver nella memoria Iddio essere stato creatore del cielo e della terra, e la passioni di Cristo, stando in quella maniera che stette egli in su la croce".

[51] On Zinevra's as a wronged wife, see M. Migiel, *The Ethical Dimension*, cit., pp. 96-100. Zinevra here chooses to forget how Bernabò wronged her, probably due to a desire to reconstruct her marital happiness. This shows how sometimes it is also more prudent to forget than to remember. Further analysis of forgetfulness as a complementary notion to memory could be fruitful to highlight Boccaccio's connection between memory and ethics.

[52] An expanded version of this mini-sequence, including also III, 8 has been analyzed as an inversion of Dante's *Commedia*, see J. Todorovic, *The Tale of Fra Puccio (III.4)*, in F. Ciabattoni, P.M. Forni (a cura di), *The Decameron Third Day in Perspective*, University of Toronto Press, 2014, pp. 68-89 as well as M. Eisner, *The Tale of Ferondo's Purgatory (III.8)*, in F. Ciabattoni, P.M. Forni (a cura di) *The Decameron Third Day in Perspective*, cit., pp. 150-169, who refer also to R. Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante*, in "Italica", vol. 63, n. 3, 1986, pp. 278-289; V. Kirkham, *Love's Labors Rewarded and Paradise Lost (*Decameron *III, 10)*, in "The Romanic Review", vol. 72, n. 1, 1981, pp. 79-93; F. Fido, *Dante personaggio mancato del libro Galeotto,* in Id. *Il regime delle simmetrie imperfette*, Franco Angeli, Milano 1988, pp. 111-123.

[53] On Dom Felice and Monna Isabetta's "earthly paradise" see J. Todorovic, *Frate Puccio*, cit., p. 73.

> ["If you happened to be a scholar, you would, during the course of the night, be obliged to recite certain special prayers which I would give you to learn; but since you are not, you will have to say three hundred paternosters and three hundred Hail Marys in honour of the Trinity. As you gaze towards Heaven, you must constantly bear in mind that God created Heaven and earth. And at the same time, you must concentrate on the Passion of Christ, for you will be re-enacting His own condition on the cross"][54].

Don Felice capitalizes on Puccio's illiteracy, as he can only pray using the conventional prayers he has memorized. The cleric employs a well-known connection between memory and prayer, which inscribes the truth of the Christian faith in the mind of the person praying, as attested in Hugh of Saint Victor's *Didascalicon*[55]. This link evokes prayer's power of intercession, which can reduce the time of penance and hasten a sinner's arrival in Paradise. Yet in the story, the connection between memory and prayer is all a trick to grant the monk a space to lie safely with Isabetta, thus opening the gates of a very earthly Paradise for him[56]. The time that Frate Puccio spends praying and remembering Christ's passion allows Felice and Isabetta to have undisturbed intercourse. There is no otherworldly reward for the pious, rather the reward goes to the subtle cleric, as he enjoys the pleasure of sex in the here and now[57]. Through a clever use of rhetoric, memory and prayer can be exploited to achieve paradise on earth. Yet Frate Puccio is not unhappy in this arrangement, which does not hurt anyone.

A similar thrust can be found in the last tale of the day, which features the poignant inversion of Heaven and Hell. While telling the story of the naive Alibech and her fervent desire to serve God, Dioneo explores the mental state of Rustico, the pious hermit with whom she apprentices[58]. Rustico briefly battles his own desires before declaring himself defeated by his urges and the closeness of a beautiful woman. Here Boccaccio points the reader towards the importance of directing one's memory towards the right objects. Dioneo explains what happened to Rustico as a failure in recognizing the correct object of desire. "Lasciati stare dall'una delle parti i pensier santi e l'orazioni e le discipline, a recarsi per la me-

[54] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 241; *The Decameron*, cit., pp. 218-219.
[55] On Boccaccio's use of Hugh of Saint Victor see G. Mazzotta, *Boccaccio: The Mythographer of the City*, in J. Whitman (a cura di), *Interpretation and Allegory*, Brill, Boston 2000, pp. 349-364, as well as A. Cassell, *The Tale of Giletta di Narbona (III, 9)*, in *The Decameron Third Day in Perspective*, cit., pp. 170-217.
[56] For this tale as an inversion of penitential literature, see R. Ferreri, *La novella di frate Puccio*, in "Studi sul Boccaccio", vol. 20, 1991, pp. 73-83.
[57] See P. Valesio, *Sacro*, in *Lessico Critico Decameroniano*, cit., pp. 372-418.
[58] On Alibech's story see the analysis and the bibliography by S. Grossvogel, *The Tale of Alibech (III.10)*, in *The Decameron Third Day in Perspective*, cit., pp. 218-234.

moria la giovinezza e la bellezza di costei 'ncominciò". [Casting aside pious thoughts, prayers, and penitential exercises, he began to concentrate his mental faculties upon the youth and beauty of the girl][59]. The error begins when the hermit forgoes prayer and discipline, and then continues when memory lingers on the girl's beauty.

Misdirected remembering can lead to improper thoughts and selfish decisions, as when the hermit decides to trick the young girl into considering having sexual intercourse with him as part of her service to God. In this tale, the physical embodiment of the metaphor "putting the devil back into hell", and the pleasure that ensues, are the direct consequences of a selfish use of memory, exactly as in the Frate Puccio's tale[60]. Both Don Felice and Rustico misdirect memory and are rewarded with sexual satisfaction. In both cases, though, the tricked person does not experience lasting consequences. From these tales emerges a cautionary message about using memory without an ethical purpose, to satisfy a personal urge: it might not be terrible, but it is still not advisable.

Tragedy can also ensue from a misuse of memory. The first story of Day IV showcases the dangers of memory and love. Fiammetta, the narrator, highlights the emotional import of memory as she tells the sad story of Ghismonda, widowed daughter of Tancredi, the jealous prince of Salerno, and of her secret lover Guiscardo[61]. The process of falling in love is described in a similar way to acquiring knowledge. "Il giovane, il quale ancora non era poco avveduto, essendosi di lei accorto, l'aveva per sì fatta maniera nel cuore ricevuta, che da ogni altra cosa quasi che da amare lei aveva la mente rimossa". [As for the young man himself, not being slow to take a hint, from the moment he perceived her interest in him he lost his heart to her so completely that he could think of virtually nothing else][62]. First, she qualifies Guiscardo as not little shrewd or knowledgeable of the world, and secondly, she points out his error. Once he realizes the woman's attraction to him, he wholeheartedly reciprocates it, accepting her into his heart, and focuses his mind solely on her. Boccaccio makes a double allusion: he builds on the medieval medical tradition that saw the heart as the venue of love and of memory, and on the theory of knowledge that

[59] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 304; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 276.
[60] On the use of figurative speech in Alibech's tale see, M. Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, cit., p. 127.
[61] On the tale of Tancredi and Ghismonda, see P.M. Forni, *Forme complesse nel Decameron*, Olschki, Firenze 1992; M. Marcus, *An Allegory of Form,* cit., pp. 44-63; T. Foster Gittes, *"A questa tanto picciola vigilia de' vostri sensi": Senile Recidivism, Incest, and Egotism in* Decameron *IV.1*, in M. Sherberg (a cura di), *The* Decameron *Fourth Day in Perspective*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2020, pp. 22-44.
[62] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 322; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 292.

saw the mind as the seat of thought and memory[63]. Falling in love then means simultaneously allowing the woman to enter his heart and to concentrate his thoughts on her.

Ghismonda also showcases the connection between love and memory. Trying to find a way to see him, she remembers a forgotten stairway. Boccaccio emphasizes how Love, personified, brought the old stairwell to the woman's memory: "Ed era sì fuori dalle menti di tutti questa scala, […] che quasi niuno che ella vi fosse si ricordava; ma Amore, […], l'aveva nella memoria tornata alla innamorata donna". [Hardly anybody remembered it [i.e., the staircase] was still there; but Love, […], had reminded the enamoured lady of its existence][64]. Thus love triggered the process of recollection which allowed the lovers to consummate their relationship. This leads to a tragic end when the father discovers their affair. Tancredi's disappointment is also framed in terms of remembrance: "di che io in questo poco di rimanente di vita che la vecchiezza mi serba sempre sarò dolente, di ciò ricordandomi"[65]. The memory of his daughter's betrayal will be a cause of sadness for the rest of his life. Tancredi's sufferings stem from the pain of remembering, and Ghismonda, defending her actions, qualifies her father's shortcomings as a failure of memory. "Esser ti dovea, Tancredi, manifesto, essendo tu di carne, aver generata figliuola di carne e non di pietra o di ferro; e ricordarti dovevi e dei, […], chenti e quali e con che forza vengano le leggi della giovanezza." [You are made of flesh and blood, Tancredi, and it should have been obvious to you that the daughter you fathered was also made of flesh and blood, […] you should have remembered, indeed you should still remember, the nature and power of the laws of youth][66]. In her apology, she points out how Tancredi's logic is fallacious, and his memory is deficient: he has forgotten that since he is made of flesh, his daughter is also made of flesh and has fleshly needs[67].

When Ghismonda is served her lover's heart in a golden cup, she refers to her feelings for him, juxtaposing love and memory. She curses her father's cruelty, which forces her to see with her physical eyes ("gli occhi della fronte") what she used to have always in front of the eyes

[63] On the heart as the seat of both love and memory, see E. Jager, *The Book of the Heart: Reading and Writing the Medieval Subject*, in "Speculum", vol. 71, n. 1, 1996, pp. 1-26; M. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, cit., p. 81 and pp. 230-233. See also H. Webb, *The Medieval Hearth*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2010, pp. 164-171.
[64] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 323; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 293.
[65] Ivi, p. 325.
[66] Ivi, pp. 326-327; ivi, pp. 296-297.
[67] On Ghismonda's speech see M. Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel Decameron*, Editori Riuniti, Roma 1984, pp. 192-195; and P.M. Forni, *Forme complesse*, cit. p. 46.

of her mind, and thus in her memory[68]. This contraposition between the physical eyes and the mind's eye leads the heroine to strengthen her resolve and join her lover in death. When memory is devoid from a connection to discernment, it fails to consider all the repercussions of an action, and when remembering is used for selfish purposes, it can lead to a tragic end.

Conversely, memory has a positive function in Day V novella 7, as it enables the recognition scene that leads to the story's positive outcome. Lauretta narrates a tale that follows the lines of a Greek romance or of a Classical comedy in the style of Menander, Plautus and Terence[69]. A conflict due to the poor status of a character gets resolved when they are recognized as the child of a rich or noble man, as occurs in Menander's *Andria* and Plautus' *Captivi* or *Poenulus*. In this vein, Pietro grows up as a servant and he is delivered from certain death by a sudden recognition revealing him to be noble. Pietro has had an illegitimate child with Violante, daughter of Amerigo. When the father discovers the betrayal of his trust, he demands a terrible price for his honor, the death of all three people involved: Pietro, Violante and their child.

The agnition scene allows this tale to end in an opposite direction than that of Tancredi and Ghismonda[70]. The mechanism of *anagnorisis* works only due to the power of memory to reveal similarities and recall features.

> "[… Fineo] gli vide nel petto una gran macchia di vermiglio […] La qual veduta, subitamente nella memoria gli corse un suo figliuolo". [[Phineas] perceived that on his chest there was a large red spot […] On seeing this, he was at once reminded of ason of his who had been abducted by pirates].[71]

Memory is crucial for recognition, and a birthmark provides the trigger for the mechanism of recollection, as it allows Fineo to identify in

[68] On the metaphor of the eyes of the mind as part of the process of cognition, see F. Andrei, *Boccaccio the Philosopher*, cit., 15-17.

[69] On Boccaccio's use of Greek romance see D. Porciatti, *Boccaccio e il romanzo greco. La fortuna delle "favole greche ornate di molte bugie",* in G. Frosini, S. Zamponi (a cura di)*, Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2015, pp. 127-37. On Boccaccio and classical comedies see, C.F. Heffernan, *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio*, Boydell & Brewer, Martlesham 2009, pp. 20-37, and S. Finazzi, *Le postille di Boccaccio a Terenzio (tavv. I-IV)*, in "Italia medioevale e umanistica" vol. LIV, 2013, pp. 81-133.

[70] See M. Bosisio, *La voce delle donne: sulla V, 7 del* Decameron*,* in "Giornale storico della letteratura italiana", vol. 200, n. 671, 2023, pp. 400-413. On agnition, Bosisio (f. 21 p. 404) references G. Nencioni, *Agnizioni di Lettura*, in "Strumenti Critici", vol. II, 1967, pp. 191-198.

[71] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 460; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 416.

Pietro, the grown-up man standing before him, Teodoro, the child stolen from him 15 years earlier by pirates[72]. Recognized as the son of the Armenian ambassador, Pietro can then marry Violante and tragedy is averted. This highlights how in the *Decameron* the inner workings of memory can have a positive impact in the tales, allowing for a happy ending.[73]

5. The Thread of Memory in the Frame Narrative of the *Decameron*

Boccaccio's use of memory as a mechanism to establish connections between the tales becomes apparent when we analyze the frame of the book, and specifically how the narrators link their tales. Already in Day I, when Filomena takes over after Neifile's narration, she links her own novella to the previous one by evoking an invisible thread of memory. "La novella da Neifile detta mi ritorna a memoria il dubbioso caso già avvenuto ad un giudeo"[74]. Her process of recollection is jogged by the similarities in the protagonists of the stories, both sage Jewish men, Abraham and Melchisedech[75]. Another meaningful instance in which a narrator forms a sequence between stories through memory appears in Day II. In frame-narrative story 5, Fiammetta refers to Lauretta's tale, pointing out how an element in that novella jogged her memory.

> Le pietre da Landolfo trovate – cominciò la Fiammetta, […]– m'hanno alla memoria tornata una novella non guari meno di pericoli in sé contenente che la narrata dalla Lauretta, ma in tanto differente da essa, in quanto quegli forse in più anni e questi nello spazio d'una sola notte addivennero, come udirete.
>
> [The stones found by Landolfo – began Fiammetta, […] – have put me in mind of a tale almost as full of perils as the one narrated by Lauretta. But it differs from hers in that its dangers arose in the space of a single night, as you shall hear, whereas in Lauretta's story they were perhaps spread over several years].[76]

This time it is a parallel in the genre of the stories, tales of adventures, that serves as the trigger for Fiammetta's recollection and thus allows for

[72] On the "shock of recognition" see M. Paasche Grudin, R. Grudin, *Boccaccio's* Decameron, cit., pp. 67-78.
[73] There are more cases in which memory appears in the second part of Day X: X, 6, X, 8 and especially X, 9.
[74] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 45.
[75] On this jogging of memory see P.M. Forni, *Adventures in Speech*, cit., pp. 16-17.
[76] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 110; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 97.

the next didactic tale to be told. The new tale yokes together this similarity with a difference in the time of denouement: a story that takes place in only one night as opposed to a narrative over many years. In accordance with this didactic thrust, this story will be a sort of coming-of-age narrative, the adventures of Andreuccio da Perugia, a naive young merchant tricked by the shrewd courtesan Fiordaliso and saved by Fortune, who learns through his own misfortunes to be less trusting[77].

Fiammetta introduces another of her stories, the ninth story of Day V, with an implicit reference to memory. She is the queen of the day, and the theme revolves around happy endings for previously unhappy lovers[78]. Analyzing the beginning of her speech, Fiammetta connects the similarities between her tale and the previous one to the didactic aim of the narration. The queen takes her cue from the preceding novella by Filomena. She states:

> A me omai appartiene di ragionare: ed io, carissime donne, d'una novella simile in parte alla precedente il farò volentieri, non acciò solamente che conosciate quanto la vostra vaghezza possa ne' cuor gentili, ma perché apprendiate d'essere voi medesime, dove si conviene, donatrici de' vostri guiderdoni senza lasciarne sempre esser la fortuna guidatrice.
>
> [It is now my own turn to address you, and I shall gladly do so, dearest ladies, with a story similar in some respects to the one we have just heard. This I have chosen, not only to acquaint you with the power of your beauty over men of noble spirit, but so that you may learn to choose for yourselves, whenever necessary, the persons on whom to bestow your largesse, instead of always leaving these matters to be decided for you by Fortune].[79]

Fiammetta creates a thread of memory just by claiming a nexus of similarity with Filomena's tale. Moreover, her aim in telling the story is openly educational: she wants to teach the other women to take a more active role in the distribution of their favors, so that it is worth and not mere fortune that determines whether a lover is successful.

[77] On fortune in Day II and the tale of Andreuccio da Perugia see M. Marcus, *An Allegory of Form*, cit., pp. 27-43; T. Barolini, *The Wheel of the Decameron*, in "Romance Philology", vol. 36, 1983, pp. 521-539; F. Ciabattoni, *Decameron 2: Filomena's Rule between Fortune and Human Agency*, in "Annali d'italianistica" vol. 31, 2013, pp. 173-198.
[78] On Fiammetta's rule in Day V see J. Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover.* University of Illinois Press, Chicago 1986, pp. 194-195; M. Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the Decameron*, cit., pp. 54-55; B. Essary, *Between Two Sad Love Songs: The Trials and Tribulations of Marriage in Decameron 5*, in "Annali d'italianistica", vol. 31, 2013, pp. 258-286 and V. Ferme, *Fiammetta's revolution: Honor, Love and Marriage in Day V*, in Id., *Women, Enjoyment, and the Defense of Virtue in Boccaccio's* Decameron, Palgrave McMillan, New York 2015, pp. 161-189.
[79] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 470; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 425.

In the set up for her narration, Fiammetta builds a story within a story, as she first introduces Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, a gentleman of respected authority and fame, known for his ability to tell stories, and he qualifies his skill saying: "la qual cosa egli meglio e con piú ordine e con maggior memoria ed ornato parlare che altro uom seppe fare". [He excelled all others, for he was more coherent, possessed a superior memory, and spoke with greater eloquence][80]. Coppo was an expert orator because he was adept at two of the five parts of rhetoric in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* and in the *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, namely memory and the ability to craft words[81]. The tale that Coppo will tell is that of Federigo Degli Alberighi, a noble and courteous man, who tried to woo his beloved Monna Giovanna through all the arts of courtly love yet failed and remained penniless. Federigo sacrificed for Giovanna even the last vestige of his nobility, his falcon, although in a totally unconventional manner, serving it as a meal. In the end his *magnanimitas*, literally the greatness of his soul, will not be forgotten, as Giovanna remembers it when selecting a second husband – "ricordatasi del valore di Federigo"[82] – refusing to marry anyone else but him. Hence Federigo is rewarded and has the chance to become a better administrator, a "miglior massaio"[83]. Learning from memory allows us to navigate love and marriage as crucial experiences in human life, as the data from our observations provide guidelines to avoid unnecessary suffering and to increase the possibility of pleasure.

The power of rhetoric to save people from danger constitutes a common theme for the stories in Day VI[84], and thus it is fitting that memory, intended here as in Quintilian as a constitutive element of rhetoric, emerges as a conceptual thread connecting four tales[85]. After the first story by Filomena, the famous tale of Madonna Oretta, Pampinea begins to speak, preparing the audience for her narration, which will center on Oretta's husband Messer Geri Spina and the witty Cisti, the baker[86].

[80] Ivi, p. 470; ivi, p. 426.
[81] On Boccaccio and Quintilian see C. Coulter, *Boccaccio's knowledge of Quintilian*, in "Speculum", vol. 33, 1958, pp. 490-496 and S. Marchesi, *Stratigrafie decameroniane*, Olschki, Firenze 2004, pp. 16-27.
[82] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 476.
[83] *Ibid*.
[84] On the rhetorical and metaliterary qualities of Day VI, see F. Fido, *L'ars narrandi di Boccaccio nella sesta giornata*, in Id., *Il regime delle simmetrie,* cit. pp. 73-89; D. Lummus, *Introduction*, in Id., *The* Decameron *Sixth Day in Perspective*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2021, pp. 3-18.
[85] Quintilian, *The Orator's Education, Volume V: Books 11-12*., a cura di D. A. Russell, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2002. Book XI section 2 deals with memory, pp. 58-84.
[86] On this novella see G. Cardillo, *The Tale of Cisti*, cit. pp. 35-55.

This transition is framed in terms of recollection. "Il che quanto in poca cosa Cisti fornaio il dichiarasse, gli occhi dello intelletto rimettendo a messer Geri Spina, il quale la novella di madonna Oretta contata, che sua moglie fu, m'ha tornata nella memoria, mi piace in una novelletta assai piccola dimostrarvi". [This is amply borne out by a brief anecdote I should now like to relate, concerning an episode, in itself of no great importance, in which Cisti the Baker opened the eyes of Messer Geri Spina to the truth, and of which I was reminded by the tale we have just heard about Madonna Oretta, who was Messer Geri's wife][87]. The tale of Madonna Oretta has brought forth in Pampinea's memory the interaction between Geri and Cisti[88]. Madonna Oretta functions as the agent that triggers the recollection, due to her lateral connection to Geri Spina as her spouse. This links the two stories, which can be also likened since both are brief and both deal with people who open their interlocutor's eyes with a witty remark.

A similar connection emerges between the fifth story, narrated by Panfilo and the sixth, delivered by Fiammetta[89]. In the *cornice*, Fiammetta claims that the mention of the noble yet ugly Baronci family within Panfilo's tale about Giotto inspired her to come up with her own story about old noble families[90]. In her address to the brigata, she specifies: "Giovani donne, l'esser stati ricordati i Baronci da Panfilo, […], m'ha nella memoria tornata una novella, nella quale quanta sia la loro nobiltà si dimostra". [Young ladies, Panfilo's mention of the Baronci, […], has reminded me of a story demonstrating their great nobility.][91] There are two mentions of the semantic field of memory: Fiammetta first states that Panfilo's story recalls the Baronci – literally in Italian "ricordati" – and secondly, she points out how this reference brought to the forefront of her memory another story involving the same family. This is another way to activate the mechanism of recollection, namely by allowing the data stored in the memory to become available material for the intellect to use, or in this case for the narrator to create a story.

The thread of memory re-emerges in the frame narrative to Day VII, under Dioneo's kingship, which is devoted to the jokes that men and

[87] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 495; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 448.
[88] On the interaction between Geri and Cisti, see K. Olson, *Courtesy Lost: Dante, Boccaccio, and the Literature of History*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2014, pp. 86-93.
[89] On Decameron VI, 6 see the analysis by P. Carravetta, *The Tale of Michele Scalza (VI.6)* in *The* Decameron *Sixth Day in Perspective*, cit., pp. 150-168, who points out Scalza's syllogistic reasoning.
[90] See M. Baratto, *Realtà e Stile*, cit., p. 335; and R. Martinez, Scienze della cittade*: Rhetoric and Politics in the Sixth Day of the* Decameron, in "Mediaevalia", vol. 34, 2013, pp. 57-86.
[91] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 508; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 459.

women play on each other[92]. At the end of the second story, narrated by Filostrato, Ellissa begins to speak by coupling her story with the first one of the day, on "enchanting a ghost" ("l'incantar della fantasima"), narrated by Emilia. The connection is kindled by memory, since one enchantment calls to mind another, as Ellissa says: "m'ha fatto tornare nella memoria una novella d'un'altra incantagione"[93]. Rhetoric also plays a central role in this story, which takes place in Siena. After a long invective against secular friars, the tale narrates the love affair between Frate Rinaldo and Monna Agnesa. Rinaldo convinces the woman to lie with him using a rhetorical strategy, and the woman agrees with him, as Ellissa comments, either because she does not know logic ("che loica non sapeva") or because she did not need much convincing ("e di piccola levatura aveva bisogno"[94]). Later, Monna Agnesa seems perfectly able to use rhetoric to defend her affair, and to trick her husband, hence the reader is led to believe that she was more than happy to start the affair. After the story, the next narrator, Lauretta, begins with an apostrophe to the power of love, who is the true philosopher, and uses this strategy to introduce her own tale of the trick that Monna Ghita plays on her husband Tofano[95].

Memory returns in the frame to the last story of the day when king Dioneo justifies using his privilege of avoiding following the day's theme due to a failure in his recollection process[96]. He claims that he cannot remember any story connected to the day's matter. "Quantunque la memoria ricerchi, rammentar non mi posso né conoscere che io intorno a sì fatta materia dir potessi cosa che alle dette s'appareggiasse". [However much I cudgel my brains, I cannot think of anything to say on this topic that will stand comparison with the things already said][97]. His memory, the storehouse for his senses, is devoid of equally beautiful stories on this topic, and thus the process

[92] See "Valley of Ingegno: Day VII" in M. Paasche Grudin, R. Grudin, *Boccaccio's* Decameron, cit., pp. 93-103; and "The Comedy of Love" in G. Mazzotta, *The World at Play,* cit., pp. 159-185; see also A. Conte, *Nell'officina del* Decameron*: genealogia e struttura della settima giornata*, in "Strumenti critici", vol. XXX, n. 3, 2015, pp. 429-448.

[93] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 548. On Ellissa's beginning as a jogging of memory, see P.M. Forni, *Adventures in Speech*, cit., p. 16; see also A. Conte, *Nell'officina del* Decameron, cit., p. 437.

[94] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 551. On Frate Rinaldo's rhetoric see S. Grossvogel, *Frate Rinaldo's Paternoster to Saint Ambrose (*Decameron *VII.3)*, in "Studi sul Boccaccio", vol. 13, 1981-1982, pp. 161-167.

[95] On Lauretta's apostrophe to love see D. Radcliff-Umstead, *Boccaccio's Adaptation of Some Latin Sources for the* Decameron, in "Italica", vol. 45, n. 2, 1968, pp. 171-194, and specifically p. 178.

[96] On Dioneo's privilege and the possibility to not take advantage of it see E. Grimaldi, *Il privilegio di Dioneo: l'eccezione e la regola nel sistema* Decameron, Ed. scientifiche italiane, Napoli 1987.

[97] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 602; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 544.

of recollecting needs to take a sidestep. He then tells a story connected to the previous one through a similarity of place. Recalling Ellissa's story about the stupidity of the Sienese men, he narrates the tale of two friends from Siena curious to find out what happens after death. The link between the two stories is thus provided by an identity of space, the city of Siena, as well as by a similar naiveté in the men[98]. Memory is mentioned again in the tale, when Tingoccio, one of the two friends, dies, and comes back to tell Meuccio about the afterlife. After asking for prayers of suffrage to reduce his suffering, he explains how there was an entity who knew by heart all his sins ("il quale pareva che tutti i miei peccati sapesse a mente"[99]). It appears that Tingoccio arrived in Purgatory, since he is in a place where one expiates sin. While in this place of purgation, he remembers what he did with his comare: "ricordandomi di ciò che già fatto avea con la comare"[100]. He is afraid of adding more penance, yet when he confesses, he discovers that it will not be held against him. In a circular structure, Dioneo ends by referring again to Frate Rinaldo, commenting that he did not have to worry so much about his syllogisms ("d'andare sillogizzando"), since his pleasures would not count against them in Purgatory[101]. The value of remembrance here is more practical than strictly moral, yet the pleasures shared by Rinaldo and Menuccio and their ladies did not hurt anyone else. Boccaccio seems to point to a re-evaluation of the ethical value of our actions: if they did not cause any harm, they are not sinful.

Finally, *memoria* appears once in the *cornice* of Day IX, when Panfilo takes the floor to tell the sixth tale[102]. He connects his story to the Calandrino mini-sequence, remarking that the previous story was part of a series devoted to the naive painter (with VIII.3, VIII.6, IX.3 and IX.5). Panfilo says: "Laudevoli donne, il nome della Niccolosa amata da Calandrino, m'ha nella memoria tornata una novella d'un'altra Niccolosa"[103]. Memory provides the link, this time triggered by a communality of name: Nic-

[98] See B. Porcelli, *Abbinamenti di novelle nel* Decameron, in "Italianistica: Rivista Di Letteratura Italiana" vol. 29, n. 2, 2000, pp. 205-208.
[99] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 605.
[100] *Ibid*.
[101] On knowledge in this tale, see M. Paasche Grudin, R. Grudin, *Boccaccio's* Decameron, cit., p. 101-102.
[102] We find an important occurrence of *memoria* within Day VIII, 7 when it is the scholar Rinieri that brings back something to his memory, see Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 661. This tale, and the importance of Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy and rhetoric in it, has recently been studied by M. Pascale, *Ira e compassione. Fonti aristotelico-tomiste di Decameron VIII 7*, in Giovanna Frosini (a cura di), "Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni 2019." Firenze University Press, Firenze 2020, pp. 115-128.
[103] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 749.

colosa. Calandrino's would-be lover calls to Panfilo's mind the story of another woman named Niccolosa[104]. Once more, the thread of memory functions through recollection, which retrieves data from what is stored in the warehouse of memory.

7. Conclusion

In the frame narrative to the final day of the *Decameron* we find memory mentioned while introducing the theme of liberality[105]. Neifile prefaces her tale, the first of the day, by remarking on the connection between memory and utility. In her words, she will tell: "una novelletta […], la quale rammemorarsi per certo non potrà esser se non utile." [A little story, […], which surely cannot be other than profitable to recall.][106] As she points out, remembering the valuable lessons contained in the narration will surely prove useful.

The ethical value of storytelling and its connection to memory also allows the transition between the sixth and the seventh tale of Day X[107]. When Fiammetta ends her story about the magnificence of King Charles, Pampinea begins her narration by creating a connection from opposition. She declares that the previous story brought to her mind an equally commendable deed performed by an enemy of the king: "ma per ciò che a me va per la memoria una cosa non meno commendevole forse che questa fatta da un suo avversario…" [But since his deed has now reminded me of another, perhaps equally commendable, that was performed by an adversary of his…][108]. After jogging her memory through the mention of a non-dissimilarly worthy deed, she then proceeds to tell an anecdote about the virtue of Peter of Aragon, who becomes the knight of a poor Florentine girl, Lisa[109].

[104] On *Decameron* IX.6 see S. Lorenzini, *The Tale of Pinuccio and Niccolosa:* Decameron *IX.6.* in S. Barsella, S. Marchesi (a cura di), *The* Decameron *Ninth Day in Perspective*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 2022, pp. 133-157, especially p. 137.
[105] On *Decameron* Day X see P.G. Pizzorno, *Dopo la peste Desiderio e Ragione nella Decima Giornata del* Decameron, Olschki, Firenze 2021; and G. Cavallini, *La decima giornata del* Decameron. Bulzoni, Roma 1980.
[106] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 778; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 703.
[107] On the philosophical sources of this day see F. Bausi, *Gli spiriti magni. Filigrane aristoteliche e tomistiche nella decima giornata del* Decameron, in "Studi sul Boccaccio", vol. 27, 1999, pp. 205-253; M.P. Ellero, *Libertà e necessità nel* Decameron*. Lisa, Ghismonda e le papere di Filippo Balducci*, in "Giornale storico della letteratura italiana", vol. 192, 2015, pp. 390-413.
[108] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, cit., p. 818; *The Decameron*, cit., p. 738.
[109] For the importance of memory for love, see M.P. Ellero, *Lisa e l'*aegritudo amoris*: desiderio, virtù e fortuna in* Decameron*, II 8 e X 7*, in Ciabattoni, F., Filosa, E., Olson, K. M. (A cura di) *Boccaccio 1313-2013*, Longo, Ravenna 2015, pp. 187-201.

To conclude, the references to remembrance throughout the *Decameron*, both in the cornice and within the novelle, create a web of allusions suggesting that memory works as a thread to connect the frame narrative. Such a pattern points to the didactic character of the collection and of the specific story in which each appears. Memory functions as a narrative device to conclude many stories, either as a warning or as a positive mechanism to solve complex situations. The danger comes when memory, and especially artificial memory, is used for selfish reasons disjointed from an ethical purpose, while the benefits tend to be manifested when memory is used only to cause pleasure, without any intent to harm another person. Through the allusions to memory, Boccaccio highlights that we should consider rhetoric and storytelling's main aim as an ethical one: of offering educational examples of different sorts of human behavior, while at the same time providing entertainment. Sweetened by the pleasure of narrative, the tales stored in the narrators' memory offer a lesson for the readers' future.

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