THE MARVELOUS BETWEEN DANTE AND BOCCACCIO

By JAMES C. KRIESEL

In the late Middle Ages, authors of fiction, historical texts, and travel narratives discussed issues related to the places and spaces of marvels. Writers debated whether local, western occurrences could be as wondrous — and thus worthy of being recorded in writing — as foreign, eastern phenomena. This article explores how Boccaccio's engagement with Dante was intertwined with evolving views of the marvelous. It proposes that Boccaccio, following Dante, likened his writings to natural marvels to defend the status of literature, a mode of discourse sometimes considered unnatural or fraudulent. In addition, this research examines how Boccaccio drew on marvels to highlight differences between the properties and ethics of Dante's Comedy *and these aspects of his* Decameron. *In addressing these topics, Boccaccio was inspired by late medieval Latin historians, who foregrounded the novelty of their texts by self-consciously writing about western marvels. In the* Decameron, *Boccaccio recalled ideas about local marvels to champion the dignity of his erotic, mundane stories in comparison to Dante's otherworldly, divine poem. Boccaccio thus also reminded readers not only to wonder about future, eternal matters, but to cherish the experiences of this our present life.*

1. The Literatures of Marvels

In late medieval Italy, the marvelous was of great interest to authors. By definition, the marvelous concerned that which caused someone "to gaze with wonder," "to be awestruck," "to admire" (Latin *admirari*).[1] Peculiar elements

Research conducted by my wife, Caroline Wilky, informed several notions about the marvelous described in this article. This essay is thus appreciatively and lovingly dedicated to her. Her doctoral thesis, "Chronicling Creation: Nature and History Writing, c. 1150–1240" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2015), traces how evolving views about nature in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries influenced late medieval historiography. She discusses how Gerald of Wales, Gervase of Tilbury, and Jacques de Vitry in the early thirteenth century created new genres of history writing by describing European rather than eastern wonders. I am also grateful to my friends and colleagues Zyg Barański and David Lummus, who commented on an earlier draft of this essay. Finally, I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who gave suggestions for revising this study and express my gratitude to the editorial board of *Traditio* for publishing it.

[1] Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996), 40, s.v. *admiror.* The following are particularly useful overviews of the most important writers, texts, and ideas related to marvels and wonder in medieval culture: Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* (New York, 1998); Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *American Historical Review* 102 (1997): 1–26; Bynum, "Miracles and Marvels: The Limits of Alterity," in *Vita Religiosa im Mittelatler: Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Franz

Traditio 73 (2018), 213–254
© Fordham University 2018
doi:10.1017/tdo.2018.7

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of nature, exceptional human actions, divine miracles, and demonic events often engendered wonder. Though all species of the marvelous were conceptually related, late medieval writers sharply distinguished one type from another. Marvels (*mirabilia* in Latin; *maraviglie* in Italian; *merveilles* in French) were conventionally understood to be something that appeared to — but crucially did not — violate the laws of nature, thus stupefying human comprehension.[2] They encompassed elements of the natural world, such as plants, stones, and animals with peculiar properties as well as exceptional geographical and astronomical phenomena. Human-initiated events, displays of magic, and creations such as self-moving machines were also classified as *mirabilia*.[3] These varieties of marvelous phenomena were defined by their naturalness insofar as they were contrasted to unnatural (potentially demonic) occurrences and supernatural miracles (*miracula*).[4] Medieval authors sometimes drew on the interconnected notions of *mirabilia* and marveling while theorizing the properties and utility of their literary texts. In fact, it was commonly believed that the first poets wondered at the marvels of nature and then composed verses to engender a sense of awe in an audience.[5] Vernacular authors, who were writing in a relatively new

J. Felten and Nikolas Jaspert (Berlin, 1999), 799–817; Robert Bartlett, *The Natural and Supernatural in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2008); and Michelle Karnes, "Marvels in the Medieval Imagination," *Speculum* 90 (2015): 327–65.

[2] See Michelle Karnes, "Wonder, Marvels, and Metaphor in the Squire's Tale," *English Literary History* 82 (2015): 461–90, at 461–63; Karnes, "Marvels," 327–28; and Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 21–25.

[3] See nn. 2 and 4.

[4] For these distinctions, see Bynum, "Wonder," 3–4, 6–10, 13–14, 21–22, and 24; and Bynum, "Miracles and Marvels," 802–7. As will become evident, it was precisely this broad, fluid, and at times ambiguous understanding of "naturally" marvelous phenomena that was exploited by medieval authors. Writers did occasionally, but not always, make a further distinction between the marvels of nature (*naturalia*) and human-initiated marvels (*voluntaria* or *artificalia*). Both categories comprised natural phenomena in two crucial senses: a) the occurrences of each subcategory did not break the laws of nature; and b) they were not of supernatural origin. Moreover, though miracles also engendered wonder, marvelous occurrences (*mirabilia*) were clearly distinguished from supernatural miracles (*miracula*) in the late Middle Ages. The fact that the medieval concept of the marvelous can seem tautological or all-encompassing to modern readers is partially the result of the fact that the notion was not merely an ontological category. What might strike one as marvelous largely depended on the perspective of each individual person. See again the remarks by Bynum, and the discussion of this issue in section 2 below.

[5] On the role of marvels in accounts of the birth of poetry, see David Lummus, "Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*," *Speculum* 87 (2012): 724–65, at 732–34 and 738–41; and Giorgio Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche sulla poesia* (Rome, 1976), 21–22, 30–33, 35–36, and 42–43. These views about the first poets are largely inspired by Aristotelian concepts. See Karnes, "Wonder, Marvels," 462–63.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

language, often recalled ideas about the marvelous to affirm the dignity of their creations.[6]

The *Livre des Merveilles du Monde* (or *Devisement du Monde*), one of the first vernacular texts in prose, foregrounds its utility by reference to marvels.[7] Originally written (c. 1289) in a Franco-Venetian hybrid, the text was soon translated into other vernaculars including Tuscan.[8] This was the primary language of the less-educated Florentine merchants, bankers, and artisans who were seeking information for their professions and entertainment for their leisure.[9] In the Tuscan version called *Il Milione*, proemial remarks state that the work will stoke curiosity about the east and thus provide knowledge "without any lie" (sanza niuna menzogna).[10] The text promotes its objectives by describing the natural occurrences, human customs, and urban landscapes that caused Marco Polo to marvel during his travels in Asia. Dante also recalled ideas about marvels and wonder to justify the writing of the *Comedy* (c. 1306–21). He drew on ideas about marvels because literature was sometimes considered a fraudulent mode of discourse that was unnatural (*contra naturam*), namely contrary to God's signifying in history.[11] Dante countered such perceptions by swearing on the verses of the *Comedy* that he saw the "marvelous … figure" (figura … maravigliosa) of Geryon, the guardian

[6] For issues related to perceptions of the vernacular in Dante's and Boccaccio's Italy, see Alison Cornish, *Vernacular Translation in Dante's Italy: Illiterate Literature* (Cambridge, 2010), 4–5 and 10–11, as well as 16–43; and Tobias Foster Gittes, *Boccaccio's Naked Muse: Eros, Culture, and the Mythopoetic Imagination* (Toronto, 2008), 157–80. Writers often debated whether the vernacular was, like Latin, a suitable medium for communicating serious intellectual content and sacred metaphysical concepts.

[7] For an introduction to the content, textual history, and cultural import of the work, see Simon Gaunt, *Marco Polo's* Le Devisement du Monde*: Narrative Voice, Language and Diversity* (Cambridge, 2013), 1–35; and Suzanne Conklin Akbari, Amilcare A. Iannucci, and John Tulk, eds., *Marco Polo and the Encounter of East and West* (Toronto, 2008).

[8] On the dates of the various versions of the text, see Gaunt, *Marco Polo's* Le Devisement, 5 and 11–28.

[9] On the didactic and recreational dimensions of early vernacular culture, see Claudio Marazzini, *La lingua italiana: Profilo storico* (Bologna, 1994), 182–89; Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* (Milan, 1987, repr. 2001), 141–45, 167–76, and 181–90; Jonathan Usher, "Boccaccio on Readers and Reading," *Heliotropia* 1 (2003): 63–85, at 64–69; Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 36–43; and Gittes, *Boccaccio's Naked Muse*, 162–66 and 175–80.

[10] Marco Polo, *Il Milione* Pr., in *Il libro di Marco Polo detto Milione nella versione trecentesca dell' ottimo*, ed. Daniele Ponchiroli (Turin, 1974), 3. Translations are my own unless otherwise noted. The translations cited have occasionally been modified to draw out the meaning of the original more accurately.

[11] For medieval perceptions of literature as a fraudulent mode of discourse in comparison to God's historical signifying, see Robert Hollander, "Dante 'Theologus-Poeta,'" *Dante Studies* 94 (1976): 91–136, at 95–99; Alastair J. Minnis, A. Brian Scott, and David Wallace, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100–c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford, 1988), 113–26; and Christian Moevs, *The Metaphysics of the* Comedy (Oxford, 2005), 176–80.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of fraud in hell.[12] The monster is a hybrid beast: it has the face of a man, serpentine and reptilian elements for a body, and the tail of a scorpion. In affirming the truthfulness of the *Comedy* by reference to Geryon, Dante implied that the monster is an analogue of the poem. He thereby suggested that the *Comedy* — with its various styles, linguistic registers, and narrative types — was, like Geryon, a *naturally* wondrous part of God's creation. These vernacular texts were inspired by debates concerning what marvels reveal about the nature of the world, and discussions of whether they should inspire feelings of curiosity, fear, or delight.[13] In other words, discourses related to the marvelous were bound up with existential questions regarding how one should engage reality.

The research presented here explores how Boccaccio recalled ideas about marvels while reflecting on the dignity of vernacular writing and existential issues. The article proposes that Boccaccio drew on concepts related to the marvelous, especially in the *Decameron*, to distinguish his views from Dante's ideas about these topics. Boccaccio (1313–1375) wrote about marvels throughout his life and usually did so in texts that engage with Dante's works. In his youthful *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* (1341), the shepherd Ameto repeatedly marvels at seven nymphs. Their stories teach him to interpret their sensuous presence as representations of the divine-human "effigy" (effigie) glimpsed by Dante in the Empyrean.[14] In the *Decameron* (c. 1348–60), forms of the word *maraviglia* appear repeatedly with meanings ranging from the wonder engendered by novel

[12] Dante, *Inferno* 16.131–32. I rely throughout on the text printed in *La Commedia secondo l'antica vulgata*, ed. Giorgio Petrocchi, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (Florence, 1994), here at 2:275. For the metapoetic relevance of the marvelous Geryon, see Zygmunt G. Barański, "The Marvellous and the Comic: Toward a Reading of *Inferno* XVI," *Lectura Dantis* 7 (1990): 72–95, at 75–86; Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine "Comedy": Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, 1992), 58–64; and Theodore Cachey, Jr., "Dante's Journey between Fiction and Truth: Geryon Revisited," in *Dante: Da Firenze all'aldilà; Atti del terzo Seminario dantesco internazionale, Firenze 9–11 giugno, 2000*, ed. Michelangelo Picone (Florence, 2001), 75–92.

[13] For epistemological issues related to marvels and for ideas about how they might impact those who encounter them, see Bynum, "Wonder" (n. 1 above), 15–17; Bynum, "Miracles and Marvels" (n. 1 above), 802–3, 808, and 811–15; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (n. 1 above), 25–39; and Karnes, "Medieval Imagination" (n. 1 above), 327–31.

[14] Boccaccio, *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* 3.9–11, 12.2–16, 15.5–8, and 42.5. Throughout this article, for Boccacio's texts other than the *Decameron* I rely on the editions in Vittore Branca, ed., *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, 10 vols. (Milan, 1964–98), here at 2:685, 706–8, 716–17, and 824. Compare Dante, *Paradiso* 33.131 (*La Commedia*, 4:556). For the chronology of Boccaccio's writings, see Giuliano Tanturli and Stefano Zamponi, "Biografia e cronologia delle opere," in *Boccaccio autore e copista: Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 11 ottobre 2013–11 gennaio 2014*, ed. Teresa De Robertis et al. (Florence, 2013), 61–64; and "Chronology," in *Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio*, ed. Guyda Armstrong, Rhiannon Daniels, and Stephen J. Milner (Cambridge, 2015), xxix–xxxv.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

phenomena to mystifying natural occurrences.[15] The *Decameron*, a collection of one hundred stories full of erotic content and historical detail, recalls the *Comedy* by having the same number of formal divisions as Dante's poem (one hundred). The narrator also prompts readers to think of the *Comedy* by specifying that the *Decameron* has the thematic trajectory, from wretchedness to happiness, typical of comedy.[16] In his later years, Boccaccio also commented upon marvels and Dante in his scholarly works. In his compendium of classical myths, *Genealogie deorum gentilium* (c. 1359–75), Boccaccio evoked ideas about marvels to defend the truthfulness of ancient writers and the vernacular Dante, who wrote with "wonderful demonstration" (mira demonstratione).[17] Finally, in the *Esposizioni sopra la* Comedia *di Dante*, Boccaccio discussed ideas about marvels in relation to literature and fraudulence, for example, in the poet's encounter with Geryon.[18]

Though marvels interested many medieval authors, scholars of the Middle Ages have rarely discussed Boccaccio's engagement with the subjects related to them. The lack of scholarship on Boccaccio and these topics might be due to various factors. The fact that the word *maraviglia* appears over one hundred times in the *Decameron* may have engendered the superficial impression that Boccaccio misunderstood theoretical ideas about marvels and used the term indiscriminately.[19] Dante instead referred to marvels only thirty-nine times in the *Comedy*, and he foregrounded the import of the concept in one of the poem's key metaliterary passages (*Inferno* 16).[20] Moreover, when scholars have studied marvels in

[15] See the entries related to *maraviglia* under "Maladetta-Messegli," in *The Online Concordance to the* Decameron, ed. Michael Papio, *Decameron Web*, accessed 4 May 2017, www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/dweb/texts/concordance/maladetta-messegli.pdf, 35–42.

[16] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.*, 2–7. Throughout, I use the text printed in *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca, 2 vols. (Turin, 1980, repr. 1992), here at 13–14. The issue of the *Decameron*'s comedic thematics is addressed in section 2.

[17] Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium* 1 *Pr.* 1, 45; 14.10.3; 14.7.2; and 14.8.4–7 (*Tutte le opere*, 7:60, 8:1420–21, 8:1398–1401, and 8:1404–9, respectively). Like his peers, Boccaccio defended the fictions of ancient poets by arguing they were not fraudulent. He too explained that the poets marveled at nature and then depicted ideas about the natural world to make readers wonder. On Boccaccio's ideas about marvels and ancient literature, see Lummus, "Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology," 732–34 and 738–41.

[18] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la* Comedia *di Dante* 15.92–100 and 82–93 (ed. Giorgio Padoan, *Tutte le opere*, 6:684–86 and 704–7, respectively). The passages will be discussed in sections 2 and 3 below.

[19] See n. 15.

[20] The search for *maraviglia* in the poem was conducted through the Dartmouth Dante Project (accessed 4 May 2017, dante.dartmouth.edu). For an introduction to marvels and wonder in the *Comedy*, see the bibliography of n. 12 as well as Patrick Boyde, *Dante Philomythes and Philosopher* (Cambridge, 1981), 43–56; Douglas Biow, *Mirabile dictu: Representations of the Marvelous in Medieval and Renaissance Epic* (Ann Arbor, 1996), 37–64; Peter Armour, "I 'monstra' e 'mirabilia' del mondo ai tempi di Dante," in *I monstra nell'Inferno*

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Boccaccio's works, they have not done so in relation to contemporary literary or theoretical discourses.[21] This ahistorical assessment may stem from the fact that for years Boccaccio was heralded as a protomodernist — who eschewed tradition — in contrast to the theological poet Dante. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century readers have often characterized Boccaccio as a protodeconstructionist, who questioned whether Dante successfully conveyed ethical or spiritual truths in the *Comedy*.[22] Other readers have suggested that Boccaccio was a protorealist,

---

dantesco: Tradizione e simbologie; Atti del XXXIII convegno storico internazionale Todi, 13–16 ottobre 1996, ed. Patrick Boyde (Spoleto, 1997), 141–59; Brenda Deen Schildgen, *Dante and the Orient* (Urbana, 2002), 110–34; Valentina Atturo, "'Così la mente mia, tutta sospesa, / mirava fissa, immobile e attenta': Genesi e articolazioni della '*ad-miratio*' dantesca (*Pd*. 33, 94–99)," *Critica del testo* 13 (2010): 59–107; and Atturo, "Contemplating Wonder: '*Ad-miratio*' in Richard of St. Victor and Dante," *Dante Studies* 129 (2011): 99–124. In the *Paradiso*, Dante-poet drew on marvels to highlight the properties of the "sacred poem" (poema sacro) (*Par.* 25.1) (*La Commedia* 4:409). Dante-pilgrim generally goes from marveling at the perversions of humanity and divinity in hell and purgatory (which are often associated with pagan culture) to contemplating the ineffable wonders of paradise. In the *Comedy*, wonder typically has an epistemological role: the marvels observed by the pilgrim prompt him to inquire into unfamiliar realities or subjects (see the studies of Boyde, Biow, and Schildgen just cited). Monsters, one category of marvels in medieval culture, have received significant scholarly attention. See, for example, Andy Orchard, "The Sources and Meaning of the *Liber monstrorum*," in *I monstra*, 73–105; Christopher Livanos, "Dante's Monsters: Nature and Evil in the *Commedia*," *Dante Studies* 127 (2009): 81–92; Eugenio Ragni, "Mostri e diavoli nell'*Inferno* dantesco," in *Inferno: Le tre fiere, Virgilio, Mostri e diavoli, Guido Cavalcanti, Brunetto Latini, Frate Alberigo e Branca Doria*, ed. Giancarlo Rati (Rome, 2010), 67–111; Giuseppe Izzi, "*Variarum monstra ferarum*: Dal Minotauro ai Centauri," in *Dante e il mondo animale*, ed. Giuseppi Crimi and Luca Marcozzi (Rome, 2013), 79–91; and George Dameron, "Angels, Monsters, and Hybridity in the *Divine Comedy*: Ancient Greek Cultural Legacies and Dante's Critique of the Church," in *Dante and the Greeks*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski (Washington, DC, 2014), 247–64.

[21] On topics related to marvels in Boccaccio's works, see Marga Cottino-Jones, "Magic and Superstition in Boccaccio's *Decameron*," *Italian Quarterly* 18 (1975): 5–32; Mario Baratto, *Realtà e stile nel* Decameron (Rome, 1984), at 36, 42, 44, 56, 94, and 109; Marga Cottino-Jones, "Desire and the Fantastic in the *Decameron*: The Third Day," *Italica* 70 (1993): 1–18; Biow, *Mirabile dictu*, 65–93; Michelangelo Picone, "Il 'miracolo' di Ghino (X.2)," in *Boccaccio e la codificazione della novella: Letture del* Decameron, ed. Nicole Coderey et al. (Ravenna, 2008), 311–20; Francesco Ciabattoni, "Boccaccio's Miraculous Art of Storytelling: *Dec.* I.1, II.1 and VI.10," *Italica* 87 (2010): 167–78; and Elisabetti Menetti, "Boccaccio e la fantasia," *Revista de Italianística* 29 (2015): 86–108, at 101–4. Scholars have suggested in general terms that the *Decameron* features a combination of historical and marvelous (understood as fantastic) material. The relationship of marvels to miracles and magic will be addressed in sections 2 and 3 below.

[22] For a detailed account of scholarship on Boccaccio's writings and on his relationship to Dante, see Kriesel, "Introduction," in *Boccaccio's Corpus: Allegory, Ethics, and Vernacularity* (Notre Dame, IN, 2018). This note and nn. 23–24 synthesize critical issues addressed in *Boccaccio's Corpus*. For a discussion of the protodeconstructionist dimensions of Boccaccio's vernacular writings, see Ronald L. Martinez, "Also Known as 'Principe Galetto' (*Decameron*)," in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, ed. Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg,

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

who depicted mundane reality without the symbolism supposedly typical of medieval allegory and Dante's otherworldly poem.[23] Subsequent scholars have refined these historiographical notions by assessing Boccaccio's engagement with Dante in relation to medieval ideas about material culture, allegory, hermeneutics, social class, vernacularity, and ethics.[24] However, his ideas about marvels and wonder have not yet been discussed in relation to medieval discourses. This is

---

and Janet L. Smarr (Chicago, 2014), 23–39, at 24–25 and 36–39; and Stephen J. Milner, "Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the Semiotics of the Everyday," in *Companion to Boccaccio*, 83–100, at 86–93 and 97–98. For influential examples of this scholarship, see Giuseppe Mazzotta, *The World at Play in Boccaccio's* Decameron (Princeton, 1986); and Millicent Marcus, *An Allegory of Form: Literary Self-Consciousness in the* Decameron (Saratoga, 1979).

[23] For the view that Boccaccio is a protorealist writer, an interpretation of Boccaccio's authorial identity that is largely indebted to Erich Auerbach and Vittore Branca, see Erich Auerbach, "Frate Alberto," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, 1953, repr. 2013), 203–31; Albert R. Ascoli, "Auerbach fra gli epicurei: Dal canto X dell'*Inferno* alla VI giornata del *Decameron*," *Moderna* 9 (2009): 135–52, at 135–39; Dino S. Cervigni, "Introductory Note," in *Boccaccio's* Decameron*: Rewriting the Christian Middle Ages*, ed. Dino S. Cervigni (Chapel Hill, NC, 2013), 15–16; Charles L. Leavitt IV, "'Il realismo di un nuovissimo medio evo': Boccaccio in the Age of Neorealism," *Le tre corone* 3 (2016): 135–55; and Justin Steinberg, "Mimesis on Trial: Legal and Literary Verisimilitude in the *Decameron*," *Representations* 139 (2017): 118–45.

[24] For summative accounts of recent scholarly trends in Boccaccio studies, see Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg, and Janet L. Smarr, eds., *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide*; and *Companion to Boccaccio* (n. 14 above). For discussions of and bibliography on Boccaccio's diverse engagements with Dante, see Robert Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor, 1997), 9–19; Simone Marchesi, *Stratigrafie decameroniane* (Florence, 2004), 31–66; Jason M. Houston, *Building a Monument to Dante: Boccaccio as Dantista* (Toronto, 2010), 3–11; Martin Eisner, *Boccaccio and the Invention of Italian Literature: Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the Authority of the Vernacular* (Cambridge, 2013), 1–28; Kristina Olson, *Courtesy Lost: Dante, Boccaccio, and the Literature of History* (Toronto, 2014), 24–25; Francesco Ciabattoni and Pier Massimo Forni, "Introduction," in *The* Decameron *Third Day in Perspective*, ed. Francesco Ciabattoni and Pier Massimo Forni (Toronto, 2014), 3–8; Marilyn Migiel, *The Ethical Dimension of the* Decameron (Toronto, 2015), 3–17; Luca Azzetta and Andrea Mazzucchi, eds., *Boccaccio editore e interprete di Dante: Atti del Convegno internazionale di Roma, 28–30 ottobre 2013, in collaborazione con la Casa di Dante in Roma* (Rome, 2014); and Guyda Armstrong, "Boccaccio and Dante," in *Companion to Boccaccio*, 121–38. A full account of Boccaccio's diverse engagements with Dante is impossible in this context. However, the present research is indebted to and complements two areas of scholarship. This article complements scholarship on how Boccaccio promoted Dante and vernacular literature by compiling anthologies of and commenting on Dante's writings (for example, the works of Houston, Eisner, and Armstrong). It also complements research on how Boccaccio characterized the pedagogical and ethical dimensions of his texts versus these aspects of Dante's works (for example, the studies of Hollander, Marchesi, and Migiel). Scholars have explored how Boccaccio, in comparison to Dante, dramatized in more sustained terms matters related to the complexities inherent in the (subjective) interpretation of meaning (for example, Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante*, 69–88; Migiel, *Ethical Dimension*, 11–14 and generally 3–17). They have also examined how he taught issues about personal conduct by more sustained reference to humanity's experience of earthly, temporal reality (for example, see

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an important scholarly omission given that the marvelous was a *trait d'union* for late medieval writers, who drew on it to highlight the properties, utility, and ideology of their texts.

In the primary self-reflexive passages of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio signaled that he and Dante drew on different conceptions of marvels by recalling parts of the *Comedy* that concern marvels and wonder. Section 2 of this article addresses how the opening pages of the *Decameron* engage with ideas about marvels related to the torments of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. For example, in *Decameron* 1.1, the narrator Panfilo frames his story about the sodomite and notary Ser Ciappelletto with remarks about wonder and storytelling.[25] In dealing with marvels and sodomy, the story evokes the marveling associated with the notary and writer Brunetto Latini, who is punished with the sodomites (*Inferno* 15).[26] Section 3 treats Boccaccio's reflection on notions of the marvelous in Dante's encounter with Geryon (*Inferno* 16–17). In *Decameron* 3.8, the narrator Lauretta alludes to the monster before telling a story about an abbot who creates a purgatorial punishment.[27] Finally, section 4 addresses the import of marvels in the "Introduction" to Day 4, in which the narrator defends his decision to write erotic stories to please women (and names Dante); and in the "Conclusion" to Day 6, in which the female narrators explore the "Valley of Women." The wondrous topography of the Valley recalls the marvelous natural setting admired by the pilgrim in the Earthly Paradise.[28]

In evoking the marvels associated with suffering, monsters, and prelapsarian spaces in the *Comedy*, Boccaccio highlighted that his text — set in Florence in 1348 — was informed by different ideas about marvels and wonder. He was contrasting the foreign, otherworldly, and sometimes bizarre marvels of the *Comedy* to the Mediterranean, local, and domestic marvels described in the *Decameron*. By making this distinction, Boccaccio was drawing on a recent though widely discussed change in thinking about the marvelous. Whereas early medieval writers often described the faraway wonders of the east, thirteenth-century historians discussed more directly, systematically, and self-consciously those associated with European places. Like these historians, Boccaccio recalled ideas about the wonder engendered by western marvels versus eastern ones to justify an expansion of literature's thematic scope. As these historians were also doing, Boccaccio

Marchesi, *Stratigrafie decameroniane*, 18 and 40–58). For a summary of other analyses of ethical concepts in the *Decameron*, see Migiel, *Ethical Dimension*, 7–12.

[25] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.2 and 85 (ed. Branca, 49–50 and 68).

[26] See, for example, Dante, *Inferno* 15.24 (*La Commedia*, 2:244).

[27] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.3 (ed. Branca, 414–15).

[28] For example, compare Boccaccio, *Decameron* 6 *Conc.*, 27, (ed. Branca, 780); and Dante, *Purgatorio* 28.29 (*La Commedia*, 3:480).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

foregrounded the significance of local wonders to champion the delights associated with domestic, daily life.

In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio engaged authoritative ideas about natural *mirabilia* to defend a text that could be perceived as controversial. Not only were literary works criticized for being unnatural and untruthful, but texts featuring erotic or mundane material were considered especially provocative. The *Decameron* did, in fact, engender debate during Boccaccio's lifetime both because it depicts mundane experiences and because it often characterizes them positively.[29] Moreover, by writing about the wondrous aspects of this world, Boccaccio endeavored to complement Dante's poem about the marvels of hell, purgatory, and paradise.[30] He recalled ideas about marvels — defined as novel occurrences — to highlight the original nature of his prose text in comparison to the most commented upon vernacular poem in the fourteenth century. Furthermore, he suggested more overtly than Dante that the domestic experiences of this present life are as worthy of our attention as the realities of the afterlife. Boccaccio may have emphasized this point because the *Comedy* occasionally characterizes earthly existence in terms that could engender confusion about its dignity. For example, in paradise the contemplatives urge the pilgrim to ponder the earth's "vile appearance" (vil sembiante).[31] What follows contributes to scholarship on medieval literature by suggesting that Boccaccio's engagement with Dante was intertwined with a change in views of marvels, one that influenced both Latin historians and vernacular authors. This article also contributes to a growing body of scholarship dedicated to assessing when, where, and why writers began to discuss local wonders in the late medieval period.[32]

[29] Petrarch was particularly critical of the *Decameron*. On Petrarch's criticisms of Boccaccio's erotic vernacular text and on Boccaccio's response to Petrarch, see Kriesel, chap. 5: "The Hatred of the Corpus: *Corbaccio*," in *Boccaccio's Corpus*.

[30] This in no way implies that Boccaccio thought Dante did not value the dignity of earthly reality, temporal existence, and local wonders.

[31] Dante, *Paradiso* 22.135 (*La Commedia*, 4:389).

[32] See Caroline Wilky, "Chronicling Creation: Nature and History Writing, c. 1150–1240" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 2015); and Shayne Aaron Legassie, *The Medieval Invention of Travel* (Chicago, 2017). Legassie observes that writers did not frequently discuss local places and marvels prior to the mid-fourteenth century. He notes that the thirteenth-century historian Gerald of Wales, who writes about the marvels of his homeland, is exceptional (Legassie, *Medieval Invention*, 165). He also states that Petrarch, who discusses traveling around the Mediterranean and at Rome in his Latin texts, is part of an emerging trend dedicated to describing Mediterranean places (Legassie, *Medieval Invention*, at, for example, ix and 152–67). The work of Wilky, discussed above and cited below, instead documents that accounts of Mediterranean and local marvels were present in historical texts composed in the first decades of the thirteenth century. Moreover, medieval historians discussed whether the events of the present were as worthy of wonder as those of the past. For examples of such reflection in late medieval histories, see also Justin Lake, ed., *Prologues to Ancient and Medieval History: A Reader* (Toronto, 2013), 207, 212–14, and 248–51. My article contributes

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

2. Boccaccio's Introduction to Marvels

Boccaccio highlighted the importance of marvels in the *Decameron* through the title. The title *Decameron* recalls the genre of hexameral literature, namely commentaries devoted to expositing the account of the six days of creation in Genesis.[33] The Greek *hexameron* etymologically means "six days," while the *Decameron* means ten (the one hundred stories are told during ten days of storytelling). In the Middle Ages, hexameral commentaries were dedicated in part to encouraging readers to marvel at God's creation. All of creation was considered a marvel since it was made by God, the *Deus artifiex*.[34] In his *Hexameron*, a collection of sermons, Ambrose (c. 340–397) repeatedly admired the many marvels that appeared both while and after God created the world in six days.[35] Bede (c. 672–735), in his *Libri quattuor in principium Genesis … sive Hexameron*, and Bonaventure (c. 1218–1274), in his *Collationes in Hexameron* (1273), also frequently wondered at a plethora of natural phenomena.[36] Furthermore, other

to this scholarly topic by exploring how these thirteenth-century historians inspired a vernacular Tuscan author to write about quotidian and domestic phenomena (versus Mediterranean or even faraway peninsular wonders, for example, at Rome or Naples).

[33] For a general introduction to hexameral literature, see Frank E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (Chicago, 1912); Arnold Williams, *The Common Expositor: An Account of the Commentaries on Genesis, 1527–1633* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1948); and Gunar Freiburgs, "The Medieval Latin Hexameron from Bede to Grosseteste" (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1981). On the resonances of the title *Decameron*, see Marco Veglia, "Messer *Decameron* Galeotto: Un titolo e una chiave di lettura," *Heliotropia* 8–9 (2011–12): 99–112, accessed 4 May 2017, www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/heliotropia/08-09/veglia.pdf; and Martinez, "Also Known" (n. 22 above), 36–37.

[34] *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*, ed. Robert Weber et al., 4th ed. (Stuttgart, 1994), Exod. 34:10–27; and Pss. 9, 47, 71, 85, 105, and 118; and Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.9.49–53, ed. Bernardus Dombart and Alphonsus Kalb, 2 vols., CCL 48–49 (Turnhout, 1955), 2:775.

[35] Words related to *mirabilia* appear on fifty occasions: search conducted through the Library of Latin Texts, accessed 5 May 2017, clt.brepolis.net. See Ambrose of Milan, *Exameron*, in *Opera*, ed. Carolus Schenkl, CSEL 32.1 (Vienna, 1897). Ambrose drew heavily upon Basil of Caesarea's (c. 329–379) Greek *Hexaemeron*, which also foregrounds ideas about wondering at the marvels of creation. On wonder in Basil's text, see Robbins, *Hexaemeral Literature*, 43 and 58–59; Richard Lim, "The Politics of Interpretation in Basil of Caesarea's *Hexaemeron*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 44 (1990): 351–70, at 362–63; and Daniel Wade McClain, "Contemplating Genesis 1 as a Political Act in Late Antiquity," in *Reading Scripture as a Political Act: Essays on the Theopolitical Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Matthew A. Tapie and Daniel Wade McClain (Minneapolis, 2015), 101–26, at 115–20.

[36] Words related to *mirabilia* appear on 27 occasions in Bede's work and on 51 occasions in Bonaventure's text: search conducted through the Library of Latin Texts, accessed on April 25, 2017, clt.brepolis.net. See Venerable Bede, *Libri quattuor in principium Genesis usque ad nativitatem Isaac et eiectionem Ismahelis adnotationum (sive Hexaemeron)*, ed. Charles W. Jones, CCL 118A (Turnhout, 1967); and Bonaventure, *Collationes in Hexaemeron*,

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

commentaries on the creation narrative in Genesis foregrounded the importance of wondering at the marvels of nature in overt ways. In his commentary on the Pentateuch, Hugh of St. Victor (c. 1096–1141) reflected on the marvels described in Genesis. He argued that it is "useful to wonder at and venerate God … [and since] he made the world from nothing, we wonder at his power" (utile est Deum admirari et venerari … [atque] id est de nihilo fecit mundum, miramur eius potentiam).[37] For his part, Boccaccio understood that hexameral texts dealt with marvels. In the *Genealogie*, he refers to a passage in Ambrose's work to help explicate the "wondrous" (mirabile) birth of the bird Halcyon.[38] Given the common connotations of hexameral texts, the title *Decameron* would have encouraged readers to consider Boccaccio's stories in relation to a literature and creative act that were bound up with marvels. It prompts readers to compare the content and formal properties of Boccaccio's text to the marvels created by God in history and nature.

Boccaccio could have learned about the literary resonances of marvels from various sources.[39] He carefully read and commented upon the *Comedy*, which was inspired by diverse ideas about marvels. He was also familiar with the works of late medieval historians, who drew on ideas about marvels while inaugurating a new genre of history. Vincent of Beauvais's (1190– c. 1264) *Speculum historiale* and *Speculum naturale*, Gervase of Tilbury's (1150–1228) *Otia imperialia*, and Gerald of Wales's (c. 1146–1223) *Topographia Hiberniae* feature the deeds of men, the traditional purview of history writing. However, these works also contain a large quantity of material about geography and natural marvels.[40] Though ancient histories and early medieval chronicles also present information about geography and nature, late medieval historians treated these topics much more comprehensively.[41] These historians also — and this is key — underscored the novelty of their works by making overt connections between

ed. Ferdinand M. Delorme, Bibliotheca Franciscana Scholastica Medii Aevi 8 (Florence, 1934).

[37] Hugh of St. Victor, *Adnotationes elucidatoriae in Pentateuchon* (PL 175:33). In Latin citations, u/v and s/ſ have been regularized.

[38] Boccaccio, *Genealogie* 11.18.4 (*Tutte le opere*, 8:1113); compare Ambrose, *Exameron* 5.13.40 (CSEL 32.1:172–73).

[39] For example, see Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.6.53–58 (CCL 49:767–68). In his work on the marvels of creation, *De tribus diebus*, Hugh also considered human writing to be a wondrous imitation of God's marvelous creation. See Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 4.94–109 and 15.506–28, ed. Dominique Poirel, CCM 177 (Turnhout, 2002), 9–10 and 32–33.

[40] For an introduction to the significance of marvels in these historical writings, see Bynum, "Miracles and Marvels" (n. 1 above), 801–7; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (n. 1 above), 21–27; and Wilky, "Chronicling Creation," 120–23 and 242–49.

[41] See Natalia Lozovsky, *The Earth Is Our Book: Geographical Knowledge in the Medieval West ca. 400–1000* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2000), 68–94; and A. H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2005), 20–34.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

marvels and their texts.[42] Boccaccio probably encountered these historical writings in Naples during his youth, and he cited them repeatedly in his Latin scholarly works.[43] Gervase and Gerald, for example, highlighted the innovative content and utility of their works by recalling Augustine's view that novelty was one of the defining characteristics of a marvel. In *De civitate dei*, the bishop gave voice to what would become influential ideas about marvels and marveling while discussing biblical verses about the burning torments of hell. He argued that readers should believe these verses because there are things in nature even more marvelous to behold, but that we do not wonder at them because they have become "familiar" (cotidiana) to us.[44] Augustine thereby suggested that various things, in reality, can be marvelous: what constitutes a marvel partially depends on one's subjective perception.[45] Gervase and Gerald drew on Augustine's ideas about the relative nature of marvels to distinguish their works about western marvels from earlier medieval texts.[46] Gerald explains:

> Just as the countries of the East are remarkable and distinguished for certain prodigies peculiar and native to themselves, so the boundaries of the West also are made remarkable by their own wonders of Nature. For sometimes tired, as it were, of the true and the serious, She draws aside and goes away, and in these remote parts plays in these shy and hidden excesses.
>
> Sicut enim orientalis plagae propriis quibusdam et sibi innatis praeeminent et praecellunt ostentis, sic et occidentales circumferentiae suis naturae miraculis illustrantur. Quoties quippe, tanquam seriis et veris fatigata negotiis, paululum

[42] See n. 40.

[43] Gervase's *Otia* and other texts about marvels like Gaius Julius Solinus's (fl. early third century) *De mirabilibus mundi* circulated at Naples where Boccaccio lived until 1341. See Stefano D'Ovidio, "Boccaccio, Virgilio e la Madonna di Piedigrotta," in *Boccaccio angioino: Materiali per la storia culturale di Napoli nel Trecento*, ed. Giancarlo Alfano, Teresa D'Urso, and Alessandra Perriccioli Saggese (Brussels, 2013), 329–46, at 334–41; and Carla Maria Monti, "Scheda 76," in *Boccaccio autore* (n. 14 above), 374–76. Boccaccio also copied the apocryphal letter of Alexander to Aristotle *De miraculis Indiae* (third century BCE) in his notebooks. See Marco Petoletti, "Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio" in *Boccaccio autore*, 291–99, at 293; and Petoletti, "Tavola di ZL + ML secondo l'ordinamento originale," in *Boccaccio autore* (4. ZL, fols. 41r–45r). For the impact of Gerald and Gervase on Boccaccio's scholarship, see Vittorio Zaccaria, ed., *Genealogie* (*Tutte le opere*, 8:1790) (index of passages indebted to their writings); and Manlio Pastore Stocchi, ed., *De montibus* (*Tutte le opere*, 8:2039–122) (notes frequently highlight Boccaccio's debts to these works).

[44] Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.4.67–71 (CCL 49:763). Compare 21.2, 21.4.105–110, 21.5.37–41, and 21.8.80–83 (CCL 49:759, 764, 765, and 772, respectively).

[45] For this notion and a fuller discussion of Augustine's views of marvels and wonder, see Bynum, "Miracles and Marvels," 802–3; and Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 23, 39–41, and 62.

[46] See Bynum, "Wonder," 7–8 and 14; Bynum, "Miracles and Marvels," 802–5 and 811–14; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 23–27, 39–48, and 62–64; and Wilky, "Chronicling Creation" (n. 32 above), 121–27.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> secedit et excedit, remotis in partibus quasi verecundis et occultis natura ludit excessibus.[47]

By writing about western wonders, Gervase and Gerald were contrasting the sometimes wondrous and delightful marvels of their histories to the marvels described in previous texts. In Isidore's *Etymologiae* (c. 600–625) or in the anonymous *Liber monstrorum* and *Tractatus monstrorum* (c. 720), the marvels of the east often encompassed exotic landscapes, monsters and monstrous races, deformed human bodies, and strange births.[48] These wonders typically engendered fear and horror because they were considered signs of God's displeasure.[49] Gervase instead asserted that domestic and local things could also be novel marvels, in part because his writings transform "the oldest things … into new, natural things into wondrous, and things familiar to us all, into strange things" (antiquissima … in nova, naturalia in mirabilia, apud plerosque usitata in inaudita).[50]

In the *Proemio* of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio recalled ideas about novelty while reflecting on the ethics of his text. Though novelty was frequently discussed in literary works, Boccaccio was partially indebted to ideas in history writing about the utility of *novitas*.[51] Boccaccio-narrator characterizes the *Decameron* as a book that will help readers confront the instabilities of the world, especially those stemming from lovesickness (and, by extension, the plague). The narrator explains that he was suffering from a failed relationship, but then found a "remedy" and "consolation" (tanto rifrigerio; consolazione; conforto) in conversing with a friend.[52] In gratitude, he has decided to write for women who suffer the

[47] Gerald of Wales, *Topographia Hibernica Pr. Sec.*, in *Opera*, ed. James F. Dimock, 8 vols., Rolls Series 21 (London, 1861–91), 5:20–21; translation adapted from Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 25–26. Compare Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia imperialia: Recreation for an Emperor 3 Pr.*, ed. Sheila E. Banks and Jonathan W. Binns (Oxford, 2002), 562–63.

[48] On these specific differences between earlier and later medieval history writing, see Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 25–39; and Wilky, "Chronicling Creation," 178–91. For a general introduction to monsters in (earlier) medieval literature, see Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the* Beowulf-*Manuscript* (Cambridge, 1995); John B. Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Syracuse, 2000); and Dana M. Oswald, ed., *Monsters, Gender, and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* (Woodbridge, 2010).

[49] See n. 46; and Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae sive origines* 11.3, ed. Wallace M. Lindsay, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1911, repr. 1989), 2:n.p.

[50] Gervase, *Otia 3 Pr.*, 558–59. Compare Gerald, *Topographia Intr.*, in *Opera*, 5:6–7.

[51] For a summary of the metaphysical and artistic resonances of novelty in medieval culture, see Patricia Claire Ingham, *The Medieval New: Ambivalence in an Age of Innovation* (Philadelphia, 2015), 3–5, 7–12, and 28–36. In reflecting on novelty, medieval Christian writers were generally indebted to biblical passages that characterized God as the creator of the new (Isa. 43:18–19, and 2 Cor. 5:17).

[52] Boccaccio, *Decameron Pr.* 3–5 and 8 (ed. Branca, 5–7).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

travails of love more than men do, and whose pain persists unless replaced by "new discourses" (nuovi ragionamenti).[53] His help and remedy will consist in the telling of one hundred *novelle*.[54] In early vernacular texts, *novella* had resonances ranging from novelty and new information to a generic kind of short narrative.[55] The narrator's remarks about "new discourses" evokes the valences of novelty inherent in the word *novelle*. The subsequent gloss on the types of *novelle* in the *Decameron* — "either fables, or parables, or histories" (o favole, o parabole, o istorie) — highlights the term's literary connotations. These remarks also echo passages in the *Otia imperialia*, in which Gervase discusses the value of novelty in similar terms. In the work's *Praefatio*, he too explains that the world is full of instability and change, and that "the best remedy for a weary mind is to delight in novelties and to enjoy variety" (optimum nature fatigate remedium est amare novitates et gaudere variis).[56] In the preface to book 3, Gervase repeats that his book of marvels features "novelties" (nova) that will refresh spirits wearied by mundane concerns.[57] Moreover, as Gervase explains that his stories will be both useful and pleasurable, so Boccaccio concludes that his novel stories will instruct and delight readers.[58]

In the "Introduction" to Day 1, Boccaccio then recalls the distinction in historical texts between earlier and later medieval ideas about marvels. The narrator evokes the horrible marvels and disfigured bodies typically found in earlier medieval literature when he describes the plague.[59] The narrator specifies that how the plague spread between persons seemed marvelous: "A marvelous thing it is to hear what I must say: which, if it had not been seen by the eyes of many and my own, I would not dare to believe it, let alone write it, even though I had heard it from a trustworthy person" (Maravigliosa cosa è a udire quello che io debbo dire: il che, se dagli occhi di molti e da' miei non fosse stato veduto, appena che io ardissi di crederlo, non che di scriverlo, quantunque da fededegna udito l'avessi).[60] The narrator then explains that the plague maimed human bodies, engendered fear, and made family members abandon the bodies of the dead in ditches.[61] Marvels

[53] Boccaccio, *Decameron Pr.* 11 (ed. Branca, 8).

[54] Boccaccio, *Decameron Pr.* 13 (ed. Branca, 8–9).

[55] On the resonances of *novella*, see Selene Sarteschi, "Valenze lessicali di 'novella,' 'favola,' e 'istoria' nella tradizione volgare fino a Boccaccio," in *Favole, parabole, istorie: Le forme della scrittura novellistica dal medioevo al rinascimento; Atti del convegno di Pisa, 26–28 ottobre 1998*, ed. Gabriella Albanese, Lucia Battaglia Ricci, and Rossella Bessi (Rome, 2000), 85–108, at 85–97.

[56] Gervase, *Otia Pr.* (n. 47 above), 12; and compare Gerald, *Topographia Intr.*, in *Opera* (n. 47 above), 5:6–7.

[57] Gervase, *Otia* 3 *Pr.*, 558.

[58] Boccaccio, *Decameron Pr.* 14 (ed. Branca, 9).

[59] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 8 (ed. Branca, 15–16).

[60] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 14 and 16 (ed. Branca, 17–18).

[61] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 18–42 (ed. Branca, 18–26).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

associated with natural pleasures and delight are subsequently recalled at the end of the "Introduction" to Day 1. When the brigata meets in Santa Maria Novella, Pampinea marvels that they do not take measures against the horrors surrounding them.[62] Consequently, they travel to a place near Florence with meadows and "marvelous gardens" (giardini maravigliosi), where they will delight in telling stories, singing, and dancing.[63] Other gardens that host their pleasurable storytelling are also described as marvelous. For example, the gardens of Day 3 feature a variety of natural and artistic marvelous elements, which make them seem an earthly paradise.[64] The marvelous setting of Day 3 may be inspired by the fact that God created plant life on the third day of the six days of creation.[65]

In evoking two kinds of marvels, Boccaccio was beginning to highlight that one kind of marvel inspires the *Decameron* and another kind informs the *Comedy*, especially the canticles of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Boccaccio guides perceptions of the marvels in Dante's poem by recalling the *Comedy*'s thematic trajectory and *Inferno* 1 in the narrator's gruesome description of the plague. In the "Introduction" to Day 1, the narrator evokes the general thematics of comedy by explaining that the *Decameron* will begin sadly and end happily.[66] He then compares the *Decameron*'s horrible beginning to a harsh mountain that readers must ascend, and its happy conclusion to a beautiful clearing.[67] These images recall the "harsh wood" (selva … aspra) and the "delightful mountain" (dilettoso monte) of *Inferno* 1, and also the pilgrim's voyage up Mount Purgatory.[68] Moreover, the description of the marvelous spread of the plague recalls the physical torments of the simoniacs (*Inferno* 19). These sinners are punished by having their feet burned.[69]

Dante:	
Qual suole il fiammeggiar de le cose unte	As the flaming of oily things
muoversi pur su per la strema buccia,	moves along the outer rind,
tal era lì dai calcagni a le punte.[70]	thus did it do there from heel to toes.

[62] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 55 (ed. Branca, 32–33).

[63] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 89–90 and 111–12 (ed. Branca, 40–41 and 47, respectively).

[64] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3 *Intr.* 5, 9, and 11 (ed. Branca, 324–26).

[65] Gen. 1:11–13.

[66] For this citation and reference, see n. 16. That these passages and phrases in the *Decameron* encourage readers to think of Dante's *Comedy* is a critical commonplace. For example, see Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante* (n. 24 above), 23–26.

[67] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 4 (ed. Branca, 13).

[68] Dante, *Inferno* 1.5 and 77 (*La Commedia*, 2:4 and 13).

[69] For a general introduction to *Inferno* 19, see Michael Sherberg, "Coin of the Realm: Dante and the Simonists," *Dante Studies* 129 (2011): 7–23; and Lino Pertile, "*Inferno* XIX," in *Lectura Dantis Bononiensis* 3, ed. Emilio Pasquini and Carlo Galli (Bologna, 2014), 111–33.

[70] Dante, *Inferno* 19.28–30 (*La Commedia*, 2:316–17).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> Boccaccio:
> The plague … spread … not otherwise than the fire does on dry or oily things when they are close to it.
>
> Questa pestilenza … s'avventava … non altramenti che faccia il fuoco alle cose secche o unte quando molto gli sono avvicinate.[71]

Boccaccio instead highlights that his own *novelle* are inspired by the marvelous pleasures of nature. He draws attention to this issue first by having the narrator discuss the delight engendered by his stories in the *Proemio*, and then by having the brigata tell stories in wondrous natural settings. Comprehensively, therefore, the *Proemio* and "Introduction" to Day 1 highlight that parts of the *Comedy* signify by featuring marvelous horrors, monsters, and disfigured bodies, whereas the *Decameron* signifies by reference to beautiful, pleasurable, and delightful wonders. Years later Boccaccio also clarified his understanding of marvels in parts of the *Comedy* in his commentary on *Inferno* 16. In the *Esposizioni*, he notes that the monster Geryon frightened the pilgrim, a subjective interpretation since the pilgrim's reaction to Geryon is glossed over in the canto: "Then the author … says that this figure was *Marvelous to every sure heart*. A horrible thing therefore it must have been and was, just as he himself shows in the beginning of the next canto" (Poi l'autore … dice che questa figura era *Maravigliosa ad ogni cuor sicuro*. Orribil cosa adunque doveva essere ed era, sì come esso medesimo dimostra nel prencipio del seguente canto).[72] Like the "Introduction" to Day 1, the commentary guides perceptions of the kind of marvels inspiring large sections of the *Comedy*. In the *Decameron*'s first story, Boccaccio then concludes his introduction to marvels in Dante's poem and his own text.

In *Decameron* 1.1, Boccaccio recalls an episode from the *Comedy* that features remarks about marvels and descriptions of maimed figures. However, he rewrites the episode to transform it into something that prompts laughter. The narrator Panfilo begins the story by addressing matters related to novelty, marvels, and storytelling. In accord with contemporary ideas about the utility of marvels, he suggests that the "recounting of … marvels/new things" (novellare … maravigliose cose) can provide a remedy for the instabilities of a changing world: "For, I, being obliged as the first to begin your *storytelling*, *intend to begin with one of His marvelous things*, so that, having heard it, our hope in Him, as in an unchangeable thing, might be fixed and His name might always be praised by us" (Per che, dovendo io al vostro *novellare*, sí come primo, dare cominciamento, *intendo da una delle sue* [*di Colui*] *maravigliose cose incominciare*, acciò che, quella udita, la nostra speranza in Lui, sí come in cosa impermutabile, si fermi e sempre sia da noi il suo

[71] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1 *Intr.* 14 (ed. Branca, 17).

[72] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 16.87–88 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:705–6); and compare Dante, *Inferno* 16.130–32 (*La Commedia*, 2:275); 17.1–27 (*La Commedia*, 2:277–80); and 17.81–90 (*La Commedia*, 2:286–87).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nome lodato).[73] He adds that the story about marvels will encourage the brigata to have faith in something stable in a world full of temporal and transitory things.[74]

Boccaccio then foregrounds that the tale concerns marvels in the *Inferno* by modeling the story's protagonist on a sinner described in *Inferno* 15, one who is overtly associated with wonder. Diverse scholars have noted that the protagonist of Panfilo's story, Ser Ciappelletto, recalls Dante's teacher, Brunetto Latini (c. 1220–1294/5).[75] The pilgrim encounters Brunetto among the sodomites, who are punished in a fiery landscape. Brunetto immediately shouts "What a marvel" (Qual maraviglia!) upon seeing his former student.[76] In the *Esposizioni*, Boccaccio explains that Brunetto was a notary, whose "great self-confidence" (grande estima) led him to make a legal mistake.[77] The ensuing accusations prompted Brunetto to travel from Florence to Paris, where he wrote the *Tresor*, a work in a French vernacular about the liberal arts, philosophy, and metaphysics. Like Dante's Brunetto, Ciappelletto was a notary who accused people falsely, spent time in Paris, and was a sodomite.[78] Other thematic echoes of *Inferno* 15 also suggest that Ciappelletto is a "new" Brunetto Latini. For example, as Brunetto addresses the pilgrim as "my son" (figliuol mio), so the confessor addresses Ciappelleto repeatedly as "my son" (figliuol mio).[79] The apostrophe has ironic resonances in *Inferno* 15 since as a sodomite Brunetto did not produce offspring.

[73] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.2 (emphasis added) (ed. Branca, 49–50). Given these remarks and given the analysis that follows, it seems Boccaccio carefully underscored that his art was akin to a marvel and not to a miracle. As noted, the miraculous was considered exclusively the purview of God (see Ciabattoni, "Boccaccio's Miraculous Art" [n. 21 above] for a contrary view). Compare Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 1.1.83; and see below.

[74] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.2–3 (ed. Branca, 49–50).

[75] Scholars have often suggested that Boccaccio recalls Dante's teacher in a story about saintly, linguistic, and symbolic intermediaries to question Dante's truth claims, namely, that he has certain knowledge of the world and afterlife. This skepticism, in turn, supposedly implies that for Boccaccio the world is composed of unstable, manipulable, and confusing signs. For the potential echoes of Brunetto in the story and/or the "deconstructive" implications of the tale, see Mazzotta, *World at Play* (n. 22 above), 59–63; Marcus, *Allegory of Form* (n. 22 above), 11–26; Hollander, *Boccaccio's Dante* (n. 22 above), 21–39; Jonathan Usher, "A 'Ser Cepparello' Constructed from Dante Fragments (*Decameron* I, 1)," *Italianist* 23 (2003): 181–93; and Paolo Cherchi and Selene Sarteschi, "L'*innocentia* di Ser Ciappelletto," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 38 (2010): 57–68.

[76] Dante, *Inferno* 15.24 (*La Commedia*, 2:244). For an introduction to *Inferno* 15, in particular as it relates to *fama*, sodomy, and (vernacular) poetics (issues that also appear in Boccaccio's story), see Cornish, *Vernacular Translation* (n. 6 above), 133–45; and Justin Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits of the Law* (Chicago, 2013), 36–40.

[77] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 15.17–18 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:668–69).

[78] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.9–14 (ed. Branca, 52–54).

[79] Dante, *Inferno* 15.31 and 37 (*La Commedia*, 2:245–46); Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.33, 42, 50, 52, etc. (ed. Branca, 58–62).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For this reason, the sodomites' bodies are perhaps burnt and thus seem charred and infertile. Brunetto's sexual sterility also appears to have metaliterary resonances.[80] As Brunetto did not create other human bodies, so he appears to have produced a kind of writing that was not spiritually fertile, namely, concerned with eternal life. Brunetto betrays the fact that he was focused on engendering worldly fame by recommending to Dante his book "in which [he] still live[s]" (nel qual viv[e] ancora).[81] Comprehensively, these evocations of marvels and fame introduce differences between a sinfully sterile and an unnatural kind of writing, symbolized in part by the unnatural appearance of the sodomites' bodies, versus the naturally marvelous *Comedy*, symbolized by Geryon's hybrid body in the next canto. In the *Esposizioni*, Boccaccio also commented on the connection between *fama* and marvels in the Brunetto episode. However, he discusses Brunetto's writing in positive terms — thus giving a self-reflexive hint for interpreting his engagement with Dante in *Decameron* 1.1. He characterizes Brunetto's lessons about fame as "holy and good" (santi e buoni), and then defends the value of literature by discussing the concept of wonder. Boccaccio notes that great writers make readers marvel, which creates for them a "praiseworthy reputation" (laudevole ricordazion).[82] And, in *Decameron* 1.1, the sinner Ciappelletto-Brunetto eventually acquires "the fame of … holiness" (la fama della … santità) through his fictional inventions.[83]

The marvel recounted by Panfilo involves changes to Ciappelletto's and, by extension, to Brunetto's body. By means of a false confession, Ciappelletto transforms his sick and sinful body, which is in danger of being discarded in a ditch, into an object of worship. When Ciappelletto becomes ill, his hosts worry that upon dying his body will be abandoned along the side of a road.[84] Their concern recalls the deformed, plague-ridden bodies in ditches at Florence, which were previously likened to the disfigured sinners of the *Inferno*. However, unlike the abandoned bodies in Florence, Ciappelletto's body winds up buried in a Christian monastery as a result of Ciappelletto's linguistic artistry. When the confession starts, Ciappelletto immediately begins the process of transforming his body into a holy relic. For example, instead of admitting that his body is tainted by sodomy, he lies that it is pure and virginal: "I am as virginal as when I came out of my mother's body" (io son cosí vergine come io usci' del corpo della mamma mia).[85] After Ciappelletto similarly lies about his other sins, the priest

[80] On the metaliterary and erotic resonances in this episode, see Cornish, *Vernacular Translation*, 127, 133–35, and 137–39; and Steinberg, *Dante and the Limits*, 38–39.

[81] Dante, *Inferno* 15.85 and 120 (*La Commedia*, 2:252 and 256, respectively).

[82] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 15.63 and 94 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:678 and 684, respectively).

[83] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.88 (ed. Branca, 69).

[84] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.24–25 (ed. Branca, 56).

[85] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.33 (ed. Branca, 59).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

absolves him, declares him about to be "healed" (sano), and inquires if his religious order can have the notary's body: "Sir Ciappelletto, with the help of God you soon will be healed. … Do you want your body to be buried in our monastery?" (Ser Ciappelletto, con l'aiuto di Dio voi sarete tosto sano. … Piacevi egli che 'l vostro corpo sia sepellito al nostro luogo?)[86]

The conclusion of the tale highlights the metaliterary implications of Panfilo's story for creating a marvel. Subsequent references to texts and manuscripts foreground the literary resonances underlying the transformation of Ciappelletto's body. The impression that Ciappelletto's body is a relic stems not only from Ciappelletto's false confession, but also from the priest's "narrating" (narrando) marvelous things about the sinner.[87] His preaching also occurs in a physical space (*pergamo*: pulpit) that is reminiscent of manuscript parchment (*pergamena*):[88] "having ascended the pulpit (pergamo), he began about him and his life … *to preach marvelous things*, among other things *narrating* that which Sir Ciappelletto … had confessed to him" (salito in sul pergamo di lui cominciò e della sua vita … *maravigliose cose a predicare*, tra l'altre cose *narrando* quello che ser Ciappelletto … gli avea confessato).[89] Influenced by this "narrating textual *corpus*," people then fight to tear off the veils or "clothes" (panni) covering Ciappelletto's body: "[the priest] so put [Ciappelletto] in their heads and in the devotion of all that were there, that … *all his clothes were torn off him* … and many swear that God performed many miracles through him" (sì il mise nel capo e nella divozion di tutti coloro che v'erano, che … *tutti i panni gli furono indosso stracciati* … e affermano molti miracoli Iddio aver mostrati per lui).[90] Not only were texts (*textus*) related etymologically to textiles in medieval culture, but the "tatters" (stracci) again recall the bodies of the sick abandoned in ditches.[91] By evoking images of texts and manuscripts, Boccaccio was suggesting that the author creates marvels in literature. Indeed, the metaphoric terms of the story imply that a writer transforms (textual) bodies into objects of wonder. Finally, these lines underscore that while humans, like God, can create marvelous wonders, only God and Christ are responsible for miracles (supernatural healings, resurrections, etc.).

The implications of Panfilo's story for Boccaccio's engagement with Dante and marvels are various. First, the tale shows how a writer re-presents an object in a text or transforms a previous literary *corpus* — in this case, Brunetto Latini's

[86] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.75 (ed. Branca, 66).
[87] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.85 (ed. Branca, 68).
[88] *Tesoro della lingua italiana delle origini* (TLIO), ed. Pär Larson and Paolo Squillacioti, s.v. *pergamo* (1, by Andrea Felici), accessed May 4, 2017, tlio.ovi.cnr.it/TLIO; *Latin Dictionary* (n. 1 above), 1342, s.v. *Pergamum* (2).
[89] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.85 (ed. Branca, 68, emphasis added).
[90] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.86 (ed. Branca, 69).
[91] *Latin Dictionary*, 1865, s.v. *texo* (I.B and II.2.B).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

body and *Inferno* 15 — to create a marvel. As Ciappelletto transforms impressions of his sick body to create a new object of worship, so Boccaccio transforms the physical and textual bodies related to Brunetto into something new. In accord with Gervase's and Gerald's ideas, Boccaccio thus demonstrates how a writer creates wonder by presenting something old in a new light. At the same time, Boccaccio's tale distinguishes both the kinds and the effects of marvels in his text from the types and effects of diverse marvels in the *Comedy*. Whereas the horrible marvels of hell engender fear and worry, the marvels of the *Decameron* prompt laughter. Ciappelletto's first public, his hosts who overhear his confession, feel a "great desire to laugh" (gran voglia di ridere).[92] Their reaction anticipates the female members of the brigata, who also laugh at Panfilo's story about marvels: "The story of Panfilo prompted some laughter and was entirely praised by the women" (La novella di Panfilo fu in parte risa e tutta commendata dalle donne).[93] Moreover, whereas Dante distinguished his textual marvels from certain kinds of fiction, Boccaccio's story implies that all kinds of texts, even those that are completely fictional, can have positive effects in a world full of suffering and instability. Finally, by evoking different reactions to the *Comedy* and *Decameron*, Boccaccio was starting to introduce ideas about what aspects of reality merit our attention. The opening story of the *Decameron* begins to emphasize that readers should not only worry about the sublime realities of eternity. It encourages readers to think about, engage with, and delight in the wonders of daily life and earthly reality, namely, the kinds of marvels depicted in *Decameron*. In 3.8, Boccaccio continues to highlight differences between marvels and marveling in the *Comedy* and in the *Decameron*.

3. A Well-Said Human Marvel

The rubric of 3.8 explains that the story concerns an abbot who tricks a jealous man named Ferondo into thinking he is in purgatory in order to sleep with his wife. The narrator Lauretta prefaces her story by recalling verses in the *Comedy* that describe the marvel Geryon. As Dante swore that he saw the "truth that has the face of a lie" (ver c'ha faccia di menzogna) as the monster rose before him, so Lauretta says that there appears before her a truth that has the semblance of a lie: "there appears before me the obligation to recount a truth that has, much more than what it was, the appearance of a lie" (a me si para davanti a doversi far raccontare una verità che ha, troppo piú che di quello che ella fu, di menzogna

[92] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.1.78 (ed. Branca, 67).
[93] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 1.2.2 (ed. Branca, 71).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

sembianza).[94] Her next comments put the story in dialogue with *Decameron* 1.1, a tale that, like hers, concerns marvels and authorial *fama*:

> I will tell therefore how a man was buried for dead, and how he was then resuscitated, and that he himself and many others thought him not alive but rather to have come out of the tomb, for which he was worshipped as a saint whereas he should have been condemned as culpable.
>
> Dirò adunque come un vivo per morto sepellito fosse, e come poi per risuscitato, e non per vivo, egli stesso e molti altri lui credessero essere della sepoltura uscito, colui di ciò essendo per santo adorato che come colpevole ne dovea piú tosto essere condannato.[95]

Lauretta's allusion to the marvelous Geryon intimates that the topics of marvels and marveling are among the story's primary concerns. In fact, words related to *maraviglia* appear on four occasions in the tale. These occurrences will be treated in this section. Moreover, her preface suggests that how one views the protagonists of the story, and by extension the story about marvels, is relative. Impressions of the story depend on whether one believes the man who supposedly saw purgatory to be a prophetic figure or a liar. Consequently, the following reading of the tale will be twofold.

On the one hand, the story will be considered in light of Dante's presentation of himself as a truthful *scriba Dei*. By treating matters of truthfulness in relation to Geryon, Boccaccio was engaging with one of the *Comedy*'s key passages about the prophetic dimension of the poem. In the *Esposizioni*, Boccaccio glossed the poet's oath by noting that Dante was concerned that he would have a bad reputation if people considered him a "huge liar" (grandissimo bugiardo).[96] Indeed, Dante claimed to have faithfully recorded a visionary experience in the "sacred poem" (poema sacro).[97] In 3.8 Boccaccio clarifies that the *Comedy* is a *human* and fictional creation, one that is thus marvelous but not miraculous. In the *Trattatello*, Boccaccio similarly specified that Dante had composed the poem "by wondrously

[94] Dante, *Inferno* 16.124 (*La Commedia*, 2:274); and Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.3 (ed. Branca, 414). Recent readings of the tale have proposed that the story dramatizes difficulties related to distinguishing truth from fiction (in general, but especially in relation to Dante's characterization of the *Comedy* as a prophetic poem about the afterlife). See Marilyn Migiel, "Some Restrictions Apply: Testing the Reader in *Decameron* 3.8," in *Boccaccio in America: 2010 International Boccaccio Conference, UMass Amherst April 20–May 1*, ed. Elsa Filosa and Michael Papio (Ravenna, 2012), 191–207, at 192–93 and 207; and Martin Eisner, "The Tale of Ferondo's Purgatory (III.8)," in *Third Day* (n. 24 above), 150–69, at 150–52 and 157–61. Other readers have explored the relationship between desire and fantasy in the story: see Cottino-Jones, "Desire and the Fantastic"; and Vanni Bramanti, "Il 'pugatorio' di Ferondo (*Dec.* III.8)," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 7 (1973): 178–87, at 178–80.

[95] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.3 (ed. Branca, 414–15).

[96] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 16.82 and 83–84 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:704–5).

[97] Dante, *Paradiso* 25.1 (*La Commedia*, 4:409).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

creating fiction" (mirabilmente fingendo).[98] Far from a negation of Dante's importance, Boccaccio's characterization of Dante as a fully human (that is, not miraculously inspired) author of fiction was central to his championing of the poet.[99] In his scholarship, Boccaccio did not celebrate Dante's significance by classifying him as a miraculous voyager of the otherworld or as a supernatural writer. Rather, he promoted the dignity of a fictional poem that was composed by a man who, like many others, struggled with human desires.[100] Boccaccio emphasized that Dante was a non-miraculous author with erotic yearnings for several reasons. First, he could thus ennoble the vernacular by including the Florentine writer in an emerging canon of Tuscan love poets (See section 4 below).[101]

[98] Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante* §179 (ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci, *Tutte le opere*, 3:482) (citations of the biography are from the first redaction).

[99] In the *Genealogie*, Boccaccio explains that writers are influenced by divine inspiration but specifies that the process is "marvelous" (mirabilis), namely, wondrously natural and not miraculously supernatural (*Genealogie* 14.7.1 [*Tutte le opere*, 8:1400]). He specifies that a writer creates according "to his own nature" (natura ipsa) and according "to the power of his mind" (mentis viribus) (*Genealogie* 14.7.6 [*Tutte le opere*, 8:1403]). In other words, writers do not exceed their natural limitations in any way. See in general Boccaccio, *Genealogie* 14.7.1–7 (*Tutte le opere*, 8:1400–1407). This understanding of creative inspiration informed humanist ideas about the *poeta-theologus*, namely that there were ancient poets who were not liars, but rather were authors of truthful literature (e.g., Virgil). In his scholarship, Boccaccio promoted Dante by suggesting that the poet belonged in this classicizing canon of writers. Boccaccio's clarification that Dante is not an extra-natural author does not contradict, but is a crucial element of this rhetorical strategy. On Boccaccio's characterization of Dante as a poet-theologian, see Armstrong, "Boccaccio and Dante" (n. 24 above), 128–33; Lummus, "The *Decameron* and Boccaccio's Poetics," in *Companion to Boccaccio* (n. 14 above), 65–82, at 65–67; Gur Zak, "Boccaccio and Petrarch," in *Companion to Boccaccio*, 142–44; and Robert Hollander, "Boccaccio's Divided Allegiance (*Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*)," in *Boccaccio: A Critical Guide* (n. 22 above), 221–31, at 224–25 and 229–31. This scholarship also addresses how Boccaccio downplayed Dante's prophetic self-fashioning.

[100] Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante* §§29 and 172 (*Tutte le opere*, 3:444 and 480); and Boccaccio, *Esposizioni Acc.* 8–9, 18–22, and 33 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:2–3, 4–5, and 8).

[101] To include Dante in a canon of similar writers, Boccaccio of course needed to qualify the poet's claims about being an exceptional *scriba Dei*, who had a unique — indeed, seemingly miraculous — experience of the afterlife. Boccaccio was also skeptical of Dante's prophetic self-fashioning, an issue that has been highlighted by other scholars (for example, see nn. 94 and 99), but not by reference to the subject of marvels. Topics related to vernacular and classical literary canons will be briefly touched upon in sections 4 and 5 below, but the focus of this and other sections is necessarily Boccaccio's ideas about marvels and the *Comedy*. Though the following pages address Boccaccio's canonization of Dante, see Houston, *Building a Monument* (n. 24 above); Eisner, *Boccaccio and Invention* (n. 24 above) (in general, but especially 5–8 and 50–73); and Armstrong, "Boccaccio and Dante," 122–27 for a comprehensive discussion of the subject. These scholars also have references to bibliography on Boccaccio's canonizing and anthologizing of Dante. The importance of Boccaccio's autograph copies of Dante's works is discussed in section 5 below, and the relevant manuscripts are listed in n. 199.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Second, he could thereby promote Dante by reflecting on his dignity in relation to the illustrious, but not miraculous, ancient *auctores* (See section 5 below).[102] Third, by not considering Dante a *scriba Dei*, Boccaccio was able to justify his reflection on the limitations of Dante's poem (which also does not negate his championing of Dante).[103] In 3.8, he reflected on both the strengths and the ambiguities of the *Comedy* by reference to discourses about marvels. On the other hand, the story will be read in light of Boccaccio's attempt to promote the significance of his own text, which is presented as a fictional work. The protagonists of 3.8 recall aspects of both Dante's and Boccaccio's authorial identities. Therefore, the story clarifies ideas about the nature of Dante's marvelous creation while also highlighting the properties and significance of Boccaccio's.

Like late medieval historians, both Dante and Boccaccio guided impressions of their marvelous writings by addressing matters related to geography. The geographical setting of Dante's encounter with Geryon is discussed when the pilgrim meets Florentine sodomites.[104] Though the Florentines recognize Dante as a fellow citizen due to his dress, the "blackened and burnt appearance" ('l tinto aspetto e brollo) of their bodies makes them seem foreign.[105] Subsequent references also underscore differences between the domestic and recognizable and the foreign and unfamiliar. Whereas the *girone*'s topography reminds the poet of the Apennines, the monster Geryon is introduced as something novel and foreign.[106] After Virgil signals Geryon by tossing a cord that Dante was wearing into the abyss, the pilgrim underlines the novelty of Geryon twice: "And now it seems something new answers / … to the new sign / that my

[102] See n. 99 for Boccaccio's views about creative inspiration and classical canonization. See also in general the remarks in nn. 99, 101, and 199.

[103] Other medieval writers also acknowledged (or tried to explain away) the fact that the *Comedy* contained potentially ambiguous or mistaken ideas. For a discussion of these issues, see Robert Wilson, "'Quandoque bonus dormitat Dantes'? The Treatment of Dante's Errors in the Trecento Commentaries," *Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana* 29–30 (2007): 141–56; Wilson, "Allegory as Avoidance in Dante's Early Commentators: 'Bella menzogna' to 'roza corteccia,'" in *Interpreting Dante: Essays on the Traditions of Dante Commentary*, ed. Paola Nasti and Claudia Rossignoli (Notre Dame, IN, 2013), 30–52; and Simon Gilson, "Modes of Reading in Boccaccio's *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*," in *Interpreting Dante*, 250–82, at 265–66.

[104] Dante, *Inferno* 16.7–12 and 28–33 (*La Commedia*, 2:260 and 263). This paragraph draws on and synthesizes Barański, "Marvellous and the Comic" (n. 12 above), 79–81. On *Inferno* 16, see also Gary P. Cestaro, "Queering Nature, Queering Gender: Dante and Sodomy," in *Dante for the New Millennium*, ed. Teodolinda Barolini and H. Wayne Storey (New York, 2003), 90–103, at 96–101 (on geography and nature in the canto); and Anthony Oldcorn, "*Inferno* 16: Il secondo canto degli uomini sessuali," in *Lectura Dantis Bononiensis* (n. 69 above), 41–58, at 43–45 (on geography and nature), and 47–49, 51 (on the bodies and appearances of the sodomites).

[105] Dante, *Inferno* 16.7–9 and 30 (*La Commedia*, 2:260 and 263).

[106] Dante, *Inferno* 16.94–105 (*La Commedia*, 2:270–72).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

master gazes at" (E' pur convien che novità risponda / … al novo cenno / che 'l maestro con l'occhio sì seconda).[107] Geryon does not seem to be a local marvel; rather, his body has shapes and designs of a kind that not even the Tartars or Turks ever made.[108] The emphasis on the novelty and foreignness of the monster underscores — given that Geryon is an analogue of the *Comedy* — the newness of the content and properties of the poem. It is presented as a novel text about familiar and foreign, worldly and otherworldly subjects.

After citing Dante's verses about Geryon, Lauretta too addresses matters related to geography. In *Inferno* 16, geographical references highlighted the merging of the familiar and unfamiliar, worldly and otherworldly in the *Comedy*. By contrast, Lauretta's remarks about topography suggest that her tale concerns persons and places near Florence: "There was in Tuscany an abbey, and there still is, of the kind we often see, in a place not often frequented by passersby" (Fu adunque in Toscana una badia, e ancora è, posta, sì come noi ne veggiam molte, in luogo non troppo frequentato dagli uomini).[109] Moreover, in contrast to the noble Florentines in *Inferno* 16, the protagonists of 3.8 are not of noble origin or exceptional. The abbot is generally a "holy person" (santissimo) but with one fault; Ferondo is a rather "material and ignorant" (materiale e grosso) person of the lower classes; and Ferondo's wife is described simply as beautiful.[110] Therefore, by evoking *Inferno* 16 but changing key details of the canto in 3.8, Boccaccio encouraged readers to consider his story as a commentary on Dante's text. By "relocating" his Dantean narrative in Tuscany, Boccaccio specified that the *Comedy* was inspired by everyday reality and not by an otherworldly voyage. The opening of the story thus implies that Dante did not record the wonders of the afterlife. It reminds readers that Dante actually created marvels by transforming something commonly known into something novel.

In the *Inferno*, Dante's encounter with Geryon highlighted both the properties of the sacred poem and the objective truthfulness of the writer. In 3.8, the analogues of Dante-poet and Dante-pilgrim instead behave in ways that foreground the author's subjective humanity. The abbot is an analogue of Dante in part because he creates, as Dante supposedly did in the *Comedy* (according to Boccaccio), an otherworldly punishment. Moreover, the abbot echoes the first words spoken by Dante-pilgrim in the *Comedy*. At the end of the tale, he sings the penitential

[107] Dante, *Inferno* 16.115–17 (*La Commedia*, 2:273).

[108] Dante, *Inferno* 17.16–18 (*La Commedia*, 2:279): "with more colors, intertwined and overlaid, / never did Tartars or Turks make cloths, / nor did Arachne arrange the loom for such weaves" (con più color, sommesse e sovraposte, / non fer mai drappi Tartari né Turchi, / né fuor tai tele per Aragne imposte).

[109] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.4 (ed. Branca, 415).

[110] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.4–5 (ed. Branca, 415). For a comprehensive analysis of Boccaccio's ideas about and depictions of diverse social classes in relation to Dante's views and representations, see Olson, *Courtesy Lost*. Olson does not discuss *Decameron* 3.8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

psalm *Miserere*, the opening verse of which Dante shouts upon seeing Virgil in *Inferno* 1.[111] Boccaccio also intimates that the abbot is representative of Dante by having the ecclesiastical figure struggle with erotic desires. As noted, Boccaccio stated in his scholarship that the vernacular author often battled the "most fierce" (fierissima) passion of love.[112] Ferondo's wife initially expresses surprise that a holy abbot would make amatory advances. He retorts "do not wonder" (non vi maravigliate); like all men, he has erotic impulses, which do not diminish his holiness because "sanctity … dwells in the soul and what [he] ask[s] … is a sin of the body" (la santità … dimora nell'anima e quello che … domand[a] è peccato del corpo).[113] By highlighting the abbot's carnal motivations, Boccaccio was recalling Dante-author's supposed struggles with desire as well as depictions of the pilgrim in the *Comedy*. In the *Esposizioni*, Boccaccio interpreted Dante's encounter with the "leopard" (lonza) in *Inferno* 1 as evidence of his excessive yearnings for food, lust, and the "marvelous pleasure" (maraviglioso diletto) of sex.[114] Boccaccio also noted that the pilgrim's fixation on erotic desires is recalled in *Inferno* 16, when Geryon was called up with a cord that the pilgrim had considered using to capture the leopard.[115] And, in *Purgatorio* 30–31, Beatrice explains that Dante was preparing a "wondrous result" (mirabile prova), but then failed to accomplish it.[116] She partially attributes his troubles to the fact that he misunderstood the spiritual import of her body, both while she was alive and after she died.

In 3.8, Ferondo also has tendencies that recall Boccaccio's views about Dante's fascination with bodily matters. Ferondo too is an analogue of Dante insofar as he, like the pilgrim in *Inferno* 1, feels a "sleepiness" (sonno) and has "lost" (smarrita) his way.[117] As Dante-poet did, he also recounts a narrative about the otherworld: "he was making by himself the most beautiful fables in the world about the facts of Purgatory" (faceva da se medesimo le piú belle favole del mondo de' fatti del Purgatoro).[118] And crucially, like the pilgrim, Ferondo has passions that

[111] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.73 (ed. Branca, 427); Dante, *Inferno* 1.65–66 (*La Commedia*, 2:12).

[112] Boccaccio, *Trattatello in laude di Dante* §29 (*Tutte le opere*, 3:444).

[113] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.25 (ed. Branca, 418).

[114] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 1.2.102 and generally 94–111 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:76 and 73–78, respectively).

[115] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 1.1.33–35 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:25–26).

[116] Dante, *Purgatorio* 30.117 (*La Commedia*, 3:527); and then 30.121–32 (*La Commedia*, 3:528–29) and 31.47–60 (*La Commedia*, 3:536–37).

[117] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.32 and 33 (ed. Branca, 420–21); and Dante, *Inferno* 1.3 and 11 (*La Commedia*, 2:3 and 5).

[118] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.74 (ed. Branca, 427). The fact that the analogue of Dante recounts "fables" is significant, and the issue is treated in the following two paragraphs.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

impede his ability to comprehend fully the spirituality of his beloved.[119] Instead, he thinks about his wife primarily in carnal and gastronomic terms: "Ferondo said, '[My wife is] the sweetest: she was more full of honey than candy, but I did not know that the Lord God did not want man to be jealous, for then I wouldn't have been" (Disse Ferondo, "[Mia moglie è] la piú dolce: ella era piú melata che 'l confetto, ma io non sapeva che Domenedio avesse per male che l'uomo fosse geloso, ché io non sarei stato").[120] For these carnal transgressions, Ferondo-pilgrim appears to be punished as the panders are in *Inferno* 18. As devils "beat" (battien) the panders' shade-bodies "with great whips" (con gran ferze), so Ferondo is beaten with similar instruments by the abbot's accomplice: "The monk from Bologna … with certain whips in hand … gave him a great beating" (Il monaco Bolognese … con certe verghe in mano … gli diede una gran battitura).[121] By recalling the pilgrim's carnal fixations in a tale about truth and Geryon, Boccaccio was reminding readers that Dante was not a supernatural or an omniscient writer. These characterizations of Dante suggest that he was a human author who created a poem with many factual — but also with ambiguous — elements.

After underlining the subjective nature of Dante's Christian vision, Boccaccio emphasized that the poem features fictional material. He addresses the issue by associating the Dantean-abbot with necromancers, illicit magicians, and diviners. In the Middle Ages, these figures were condemned because they supposedly manipulated nature or attempted to understand reality in deceptive ways.[122] Passages of *Inferno* 20 may have inspired Boccaccio to consider the *Comedy*'s narrative properties in this manner.[123] In this canto, Dante underscored the truthfulness of the poem by distinguishing it from the fraudulence of necromancers and magicians. Whereas Dante wondered at Geryon's marvelous body, so he also wonders — but then cries — at the disfigured bodies of these sinners: "wondrously each appeared twisted / between the chin and the beginning of the chest"

[119] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.5 (ed. Branca, 415) (Ferondo's burning passion); 3.8.7 (ed. Branca, 416) (he ignores his wife's spiritual needs); 3.8.8 (ed. Branca, 416) (his uncontrolled jealousy); and 3.8.55 (ed. Branca, 424) (fixation on food).

[120] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.51 (ed. Branca, 423).

[121] Dante, *Inferno* 18.35–36 (*La Commedia*, 2:27); Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.46 (ed. Branca, 423).

[122] On necromancy and illicit magic, see Isidore, *Etymologiae* 8.5.2–3 and 8.9 (n. 49 above); and see the succinct overview in Simon Gilson, "Medieval Magical Lore and Dante's *Commedia*: Divination and Demonic Agency," *Dante Studies* 119 (2001): 27–66.

[123] On the relevance of necromancy and divination in these cantos, especially as related to differences between Virgil's tragedy and Dante's comedy, see Robert Hollander, *Studies in Dante* (Ravenna, 1980), 131–218; Barolini, *Undivine Comedy* (n. 12 above), 76–83; and Barolini, "Canto XX: True and False Seers," in *Lectura Dantis*; *Inferno: A Canto-by-Canto Commentary*, ed. Allen Mandelbaum, Anthony Oldcorn, and Charles Ross (Berkeley, 1998), 275–86.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

(mirabilmente apparve esser travolto / ciascun tra 'l mento e 'l principio del casso).[124] The metaliterary relevance of the episode emerges when Virgil subsequently corrects a passage of the *Aeneid*, which is categorized as a "high … tragedy" (alta … tragedìa).[125] Virgil explains that his native Mantua was founded by the witch Manto. His remarks contradict a passage of the *Aeneid* that describes how Mantua was founded by Ocnus, the warrior son of the same witch.[126] The Roman poet then commands Dante not to believe any other account.[127] Thus, whereas the symbol of Dante's poem was classified as a truthful "marvelous … figure" (figura … maravigliosa), Virgil's poem is associated with a witch and fraudulence.

In 3.8, Boccaccio signals that Dante engaged in a fictional creative act by having the Dantean-abbot put Ferondo in purgatory with the help of "a powder of marvelous power" (una polvere di maravigliosa virtú).[128] In medieval culture, substances like herbs and potions could be employed either in medicinal, natural healings or in acts of black magic and necromancy. The distinction depended on their provenance and on how they were employed.[129] At first blush, the abbot appears to be acting like a doctor (Dante himself belonged to the guild of apothecaries and physicians).[130] After administering Ferondo the powder, the abbot checks his "stomach humors" (fumosità di stomaco) and pulse.[131] However, the marvelous powder has a compromised pedigree. Lauretta explains that the "Old Man of the Mountain" (Veglio della Montagna) used this powder to make others believe they were in paradise.[132] Her remarks refer to a passage of the *Milione* about how the Old Man employed this substance to trick people into creating deceptions for him.[133] The abbot makes Ferondo initially sleep for three days by adding the powder to Ferondo's wine; he then

[124] Dante, *Inferno* 20.11–12 (*La Commedia*, 2:331).

[125] Dante, *Inferno* 20.113 (*La Commedia*, 2:342).

[126] Dante, *Inferno* 20.55–99 (*La Commedia*, 2:335–40); Virgil, *Aeneid* 10.198–202, in *Opera*, ed. Roger A. B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), 339.

[127] Dante, *Inferno* 20.97–99 (*La Commedia*, 2:340): "Therefore, I warn you, if you ever hear / my city has any other origin, / do not let any lie defraud the truth" (Però t'assenno che, se tu mai odi / originar la mia terra altrimenti, / la vertià nulla menzogna frodi).

[128] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.31 (ed. Branca, 419).

[129] For distinctions concerning natural medicine and licit magic versus infernal magic and necromancy, see Gilson, "Magical Lore," 28–34; and Frank Klaassen, *The Transformation of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park, PA, 2013), 2–3, 13–15, and 17–32. On the necromantic uses of herbs and potions, see also Dante, *Inferno* 20.117 (*La Commedia*, 2:342) and 20.122–23 (*La Commedia*, 2:343).

[130] On Dante's guild membership, see Marco Santagata, *Dante: The Story of His Life*, trans. Richard Dixon (Cambridge, MA, 2016), 95.

[131] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.33 (ed. Branca, 420–21).

[132] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.31 (ed. Branca, 419–20).

[133] Polo, *Milione* 30–31 (n. 10 above), 31–34. For Boccaccio's knowledge of this story, see ed. Branca, 420 n. 1.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

puts Ferondo into a so-called purgatory located in the basement of a monastery; and finally, he employs the powder to call Ferondo "back to life" (rivocato a vita; riscuscitato).[134] The abbot's actions evoke spiritual healings and the resuscitation of the dead, which were generally considered necromantic unless effected through or by God.[135] Therefore, whereas Dante differentiated his poem from types of fraudulence, Boccaccio implies that Dante wrote a text with several deceptive (namely, fictional) elements. In other words, the story emphasizes that Dante, like Virgil or other writers, manipulated the presentation of reality and featured creative illusions in his poem.

Boccaccio also reflected on aspects of Dante's "sacred poem" (poema sacro) in relationship to God's marvelous and miraculous signifying.[136] With respect to poetics, 3.8 highlights that Dante's marvelous poem has imperfections by virtue of being a human work. In 3.8, the symbolic analogue of Dante's poem evoked from below is not the monster Geryon, the creation of God or of God and a human author (depending on how one understands Dante's truth claims). Instead, the analogue is an illegitimate baby born from an adulterous relationship. The baby's name is Benedetto, son of Ferondo. The anagram of the father's name is either *frodone* (huge fraud) or *on frode* (a fraud). Therefore, *Benedetto Frode* means either a blessed (*benedetto*) or a well-said (*bene-detto*) fraud. The compromised pedigree of this stand-in for Dante's text is further underscored when the abbot marvels with "a great admiration" (una grande ammirazione) at his resuscitation of Ferondo.[137] The Dantean abbot then implicitly asks for forgiveness when he intones the *Miserere*. The psalm was thought to have been written by David after sinning with Bathsheba.[138] In the penitential psalm, the author laments that he has sinned. He acknowledges that he himself was "conceived in iniquity" (in iniquitate conceptus) — just as the little creation Benedetto Frode was conceived in a sinful act.[139] The *Comedy*, 3.8 further clarifies, does not

[134] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.30–33 (ed. Branca, 419–21) and 3.8.64 and 3.8.73 (ed. Branca, 425 and 427, respectively).

[135] Eisner also notes that Renaissance editors of the *Decameron* were aware of Boccaccio's suggestion that Dante was potentially engaging in necromantic activities (see "The Tale" [n. 94 above], 156–57). Whereas it was thought that only God could effect a resurrection, writers believed that magicians and demons could resuscitate someone's body to make her or him appear alive. On these notions of necromancy (and the related concept of divination), see Gilson, "Magical Lore" (n. 122 above), 34–45. For differences between natural magic and necromancy, see Klaassen, *Transformation*, 57–80. See also Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.6–7 and 22.8–10 (CCL 49:766–70 and 815–28); Isidore, *Etymologiae* 8.5.2–3 and 8.9 (n. 49 above); and Gervase, *Otia* 3 *Pr.* (n. 47 above), 558–61.

[136] Dante, *Paradiso* 25.1 (*La Commedia*, 4:409).

[137] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.73 (ed. Branca, 427).

[138] Ps. 50. On the adulterous resonances of the *Miserere*, see Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 1.2.59 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:66).

[139] Ps. 50:7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

necessarily and always approximate God's "writing" in and through the Incarnation. Rather, 3.8 specifies that the poem at times imperfectly imitates God's carnal signifying. Differences between God's and Dante's writings are highlighted when the abbot announces to Ferondo that he will have a son. His words recall the Annunciation, Christ's virgin birth, and the Incarnation: "you will have a son from your lady, whom you will call Benedetto" (tu avrai un figliuolo della tua donna, il quale farai che tu nomini Benedetto).[140] Moreover, the pilgrim analogue Ferondo subsequently declares that he has received revelation from "Ragnolo Braghiello," a jumbled pronunciation of the *Arcangelo Gabriele* who announced the birth of Christ to Mary.[141] Comprehensively, the allusions to the *Miserere* and the Incarnation encourage readers to ponder a crucial distinction. God had "chaste intercourse" with Mary to create the Word-made-flesh (virgin birth, Incarnation). By contrast, the abbot's unchaste intercourse with Ferondo's wife engenders an illegitimate (literary) body. In the *Comedy*, Dante never claimed to be able to imitate or record God's signifying perfectly. Boccaccio's story clarifies that Dante's approximation of God's marvelous "writing" is, in some instances, limited in its scope and success. Boccaccio thereby highlighted that Dante imitated, depicted, and reflected upon a part — and not the entirety — of God's marvelous creation.

Finally, by writing about marvels and divine punishment, Boccaccio was encouraging readers to recall Augustine's hugely influential, often cited, and well-known discussion of marvels. Augustine had discussed marvels and marveling to defend the truthfulness of biblical passages about how the damned experience physical torment yet do not perish. The bishop also reflected upon the extent to which such passages should be interpreted literally or figuratively. He concluded that these verses should, to a degree, be read literally: "let each person decide, and either attribute [the punishment of] fire to the body and the worm to the soul, the former literally and the latter figuratively, or attribute each to the body" (eligat quisque quod placet, aut ignem tribuere corpori, animo vermem, hoc proprie, illud tropice, aut utrumque corpori).[142] Still, Augustine hastens to add that humans should not be afraid. He specifies that humans undergo punishments in this world to make us fit for salvation, and that thus even the "wondrous punishment" (malum mirabile) of earthly purgation should promote an appreciation of life.[143] In 3.8, Boccaccio clarifies ideas about Dante's vision of the afterlife

[140] Luke 1:31: "Behold you will conceive in your womb and give birth to a son, and you will call him Jesus" (Ecce concipies in utero et paries filium et vocabis nomen eius Iesum).

[141] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.74 (ed. Branca, 427).

[142] The citation is Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.9.43–45 (CCL 49:775), but see also 21.9.53–63 (CCL 49:775); and more generally 21.9–10 (CCL 49:774–76).

[143] Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.15.3 (CCL 49:780) and generally 21.14–15 (CCL 49:780–81).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in relation to these common Augustinian concepts. Ferondo himself expresses skepticism about the carnal nature of purgatory while receiving beatings and also food and drink: "the monk brought something to eat and drink; upon seeing this, Ferondo asked: 'O the dead eat?'" (il monaco portò alquanto da mangiare e da bere: il che veggendo Ferondo disse: "O mangiano i morti?").[144] The characterization of this carnal purgatory as absurd reminds readers that the extreme physical punishments of the *contrapasso* are an approximate, indeed a highly symbolic, depiction of the eternal realities. Moreover, Ferondo's subsequent "fables" (favole) about his experience in purgatory create fear. Those who initially encounter him express concern about his reappearance and narrative; and, upon returning home, even his wife flees from him.[145] Ferondo's subjective understanding and account of the afterlife also signal that readers do not *de facto* need to fear the otherworldly marvels — which are textual creations — depicted in the *Comedy*. Instead, the tale encourages readers to consider critically what Dante's poem might teach about personal conduct and the afterlife.

While *Decameron* 3.8 addresses ideas about the poetics and ethics of the *Comedy*, it also sheds light on the properties and utility of the *Decameron*. First, by setting 3.8 in Tuscany, Boccaccio was continuing to underscore his own debts to the near, local, and quotidian. Like Gervase and Gerald, Boccaccio was implying that marvels occur not only in foreign and exotic places but also in familiar spaces. Moreover, Lauretta's tale does not feature famous persons, monsters, or maimed bodies, but normal people. Finally, Boccaccio clarifies that his own dispositions — though as flawed as Dante's — do not compromise his ability to write about marvels. Boccaccio makes the point by associating his authorial persona with the abbot. As the abbot pandered to Ferondo's wife, so Boccaccio overtly characterizes his text as a "Go-between" (Galeotto).[146] The title and subtitle of the short stories highlight that Boccaccio's text about marvels (title: *Decameron*) will bring people together (subtitle: *Galeotto*). The narrator also noted that he wanted to write stories to help women who were confined to their rooms by their parents, brothers, and husbands.[147] In 3.8, the abbot similarly tries to help the lady fulfill her desires by correcting her husband's jealousy, the result of which is immediate "delight and pleasure" (delitto e piacere) for her and, later, a better marriage for the family.[148] The parallels between the *Proemio* and 3.8 recall the literary resonances of pimping and eroticism in the *Decameron*. They highlight that Boccaccio-abbot draws on and creates marvels of a carnal

[144] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.43 (ed. Branca, 422); more generally see 3.8.38–48 (ed. Branca, 422–23).

[145] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.68 (ed. Branca, 426) and 3.8.73 (ed. Branca, 427).

[146] Boccaccio, *Decameron Pr.* 1 (ed. Branca, 3).

[147] Boccaccio, *Decameron Pr.* 10 (ed. Branca, 7).

[148] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.37 (ed. Branca, 422); and 3.8.76 (ed. Branca, 427–28).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nature for ethical ends. Boccaccio thus clarifies that even erotic marvels can have moral benefits, provided they are understood properly.

Moreover, while Dante distinguished the marvelous *Comedy* from the frauds of magicians and diviners, Boccaccio suggests that magical illusions inspire his text. Boccaccio appears to celebrate the abbot's (and his own) ability to create illusionary lies, namely, a conventional fiction like other fictions. As noted, the authorial persona eventually self-reflexively admires with "a great wonder" (una grande ammirazione) his ability to manipulate Ferondo.[149] Indeed, though the story evokes the possibility that the abbot acts with the help of magic, the brigata knows that the events were done naturally and humanly. (Even if the abbot were a magician — the story is ultimately a fiction.) The abbot created spaces, tricks, and illusions, and by implication, we too should wonder at his cleverness and artistry. In comparison to Dante, Boccaccio thus more overtly defends his writing by highlighting that humans too create wondrous phenomena. Indeed, Boccaccio revels in blurring the lines between kinds of fraud while creating tales not characterized as prophetic or historical. Dioneo overtly specifies that the brigata is just telling stories, namely, creating "words" (parole) and not doing "facts" (fatti).[150]

Finally, Boccaccio highlighted that though his marvelous story is a fiction, it nevertheless encourages ethical behaviors. As noted, the nature of the literary *corpus* is elucidated by comparison to God's perfect signifying in the virgin birth and Incarnation. With respect to God's carnal signifying, Boccaccio's human creation is necessarily distorted and confused. His *Benedetto Frode* is an imperfect but not a totally disfigured approximation of God's signifying. Whereas the analogue of the *Comedy* is a monster conjured from the deep, the analogue of Boccaccio-abbot's creation is a healthy human baby. In fact, in comparison to Geryon, the baby Benedetto more fully resembles the human figure of Christ. Finally, unlike Augustine or Dante, Boccaccio does not draw on marvels to interrogate the nature of the punishments of the other world. Instead, Boccaccio writes about wonders and wondering to reflect upon matters like repentance and healing in daily life.[151] Boccaccio's story depicts the human capacity to sin, repent, and reform, which results in everyone enjoying a happy ending. After the abbot and Ferondo sinned, they both repent and then, together with the wife, are fully satisfied.[152] Indeed, a new (fictional) family has been formed no

[149] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.73 (ed. Branca, 427).

[150] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 6 *Conc.*, 7–16 (ed. Branca, 776–77) and 33–35 (ed. Branca, 781). On the words versus facts distinction, see Teodolinda Barolini, "Le parole son femmine e i fatti sono maschi: Toward a Sexual Poetics of the *Decameron* (*Decameron* 2.9, 2.10, 5.10)," in *Dante and the Origins of Italian Literary Culture* (New York, 2006), 281–303.

[151] Augustine himself emphasized that Christ was incarnated to offer forgiveness and "compassion" (misericordia). See Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.15.13–24 (CCL 49:781).

[152] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.8.76 (ed. Branca, 427–28).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

matter how unconventional or imperfect in comparison to the Holy Family. Thus, unlike those who fear Dante-Ferondo's fables due to ignorance, the brigata understands the metaphoric resonances of the abbot's marvelous fraud and has fun. They experience pleasure because "few … of the other [stories] would have pleased [them]" (poche … dell'altre [novelle gli] sarebbon piaciute) like Lauretta's.[153] In harmony with Hugh's and Gerald's ideas, Boccaccio thus implies that the utility of his marvelous story consists in teaching and delighting readers.[154] The "Introduction" to Day 4 continues to address the utility of wondering at the pleasures associated with domestic and human marvels.

4. The Female Gender of Maraviglie

In the "Introduction" to Day 4, Boccaccio-narrator addresses criticisms that women delight him excessively, and that he is too old to please women.[155] Others are concerned about his reputation and declare that he should stay with the Muses on Parnassus rather than write trifles for women.[156] In response, Boccaccio tells a story about Filippo Balducci that draws on ideas about marvels. After Balducci's wife dies, he and his son withdraw from Florence to Mount Asinaio, where they never speak about anything "earthly" (temporal), but only discuss spiritual matters.[157] Necessity eventually obliges them to travel to Florence, and the son marvels continually at the novelties around him:

> Seeing here the palaces, houses, churches, and all the other things that are seen in the city, like one who no longer had a memory of things seen before, *the adolescent began to marvel so strongly* and asked his father questions about what these things were and what their name was.
>
> Quivi il giovane veggendo i palagi, le case, le chiese e tutte l'altre cose delle quali tutta la città piena si vede, sí come colui che mai piú per ricordanza vedute no'

[153] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.9.3 (ed. Branca, 429).

[154] Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 4.84–90 (CCM 177:8–9).

[155] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 5 (ed. Branca, 460). This section complements scholarship on how Boccaccio engaged notions related to women and gender while reflecting on hermeneutic, rhetorical, social, and linguistic matters. See, for example, Marilyn Migiel, *A Rhetoric of the* Decameron (Toronto, 2003; examines how Boccaccio drew on gender while interrogating rhetorical and hermeneutic matters related to speaker and audience in the *Decameron*); F. Regina Psaki, "Voicing Gender in the *Decameron*," in *Companion to Boccaccio* (n. 14 above), 101–17 (addresses matters concerning misogyny and philogyny in relation to social and linguistic issues in the *Decameron*); and Kristina Olson, "The Language of Women as Written by Men: Boccaccio, Dante and Gendered Histories of the Vernacular," *Heliotropia* 8–9 (2011–12): 51–78 (discusses how literary traditions were coded as masculine [Latin] and feminine [vernacular] in the Middle Ages).

[156] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 6 (ed. Branca, 461).

[157] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 15 (ed. Branca, 463).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> n'avea, *si cominciò forte a maravigliare* e di molte domandava il padre che fossero e come si chiamassero.[158]

However, when his son encounters women, Balducci tries to deflect his interest by calling them goslings.[159] His son still marvels at them more than at anything else: "*A marvelous thing to hear*! He who had not seen anything before, no longer paying attention to the palaces, ox, horse, ass, money, or anything he had encountered, suddenly said, 'Father, I beg you to give me one of those goslings'" (*Maravigliosa cosa a udire*! Colui che mai più alcuna veduta non avea, non curatosi de' palagi, non del bue, non del cavallo, non dell'asino, non de' denari né d'altra cosa che veduta avesse, subitamente disse, "Padre mio, io vi priego che voi facciate che io abbia una di quelle papere").[160] He even considers them to be more pleasing and beautiful than the angels depicted in paintings.[161] Balducci denies his son's wishes by replying "you don't know how they are fed" (tu non sai donde elle s'imbeccano), but nevertheless feels that nature has defeated him.[162]

Scholars have often suggested that Boccaccio's story implies that human desires cannot, or should not, be suppressed.[163] Other readers have considered the literary implications of the tale, especially as it relates to the representation of vulgar topics, the symbolic potential of metaphoric language, and ideas about *turpiloquium* (immodest speech).[164] Less attention has been dedicated to the ideological underpinnings of the story's implied defense of erotic desires and literatures. Boccaccio justifies his ideas about these subjects, in part, by reference to marvels. This topic was his unique addition to previous versions of a popular story.[165] By including remarks about geography and marvels, Boccaccio again

[158] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 19 (ed. Branca, 464, emphasis added).

[159] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 23 (ed. Branca, 465).

[160] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 24 (ed. Branca, 465).

[161] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 28 (ed. Branca, 465).

[162] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 29 (ed. Branca, 465).

[163] These interpretations have been commonly proposed by scholars. See, for example, Ernesto Virgulti, "In Defense of a Literature for a New Age: Boccaccio's 'Introduction' to Day IV of the *Decameron*," in *Transitions: Prospettive di studio sulle trasformazioni letterarie e linguistiche nella cultura italiana*, ed. Dario Brancato et al. (Florence, 2006), 105–22, at 114–18 (other bibliography related to this interpretation at 114 n. 16); and Michelangelo Picone, "Le papere di Fra Filippo (*Intr.* IV)," in *Boccaccio e la codificazione della novella: Letture del* Decameron, ed. Nicole Coderey, Claudia Genswein, and Rosa Pittorino (Ravenna, 2008), 171–83, at 173 and 181–83.

[164] See, for example, Catherine Baxter, "*Turpiloquium* in Boccaccio's Tale of the Goslings (*Decameron*, Day IV, Introduction)," *Modern Language Review* 108 (2013): 812–38; and David Lummus, "Boccaccio's Poetics" (n. 99 above), 74–81.

[165] For a summary of Boccaccio's engagement with other versions of the story, see Michelangelo Picone, "La circolazione di un racconto-cornice: Dal *Barlaam e Josaphat* al *Decameron*," in *La Circulation des nouvelles au Moyen Âge: Actes de la journée d'études (Université de Zurich, 24 janvier 2002)*, ed. Luciano Rossi et al. (Alessandria, 2005), 147–66. Picone does not address matters related to marvels.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

encouraged readers to recall theological and historical notions about the relativity of marvels, namely, that various things can be marvelous if viewed properly. In accord with Augustinian thought, the hermit's marveling at Florence is explicitly likened to the wonder a person feels who encounters anew a once familiar place: "like one who no longer had a memory of things seen before, the adolescent began to marvel strongly" (sí come colui che mai piú per ricordanza vedute no' n'avea, si cominciò forte a maravigliare).[166] The implication is that if we too look anew at our daily realities with childlike eyes we will feel wonder and pleasure at our surroundings.

In drawing on these concepts, Boccaccio was distinguishing the content of his text from that of other vernacular, classical, and humanist writings about foreign and/or ancient marvels. For example, the vernacular *Milione* documents the urban, architectural, and natural marvels of the east, and the *Comedy* features a mixture of monstrous, otherworldly, and celestial wonders. Boccaccio himself reflected on classical marvels in his youthful *Filocolo*, a vernacular romance about Florio's and Biancifiore's journeys to find each other. While wandering around the Italian peninsula, the couple wonders at the marvels of the ancient world, which were made famous by great (classical) writers: "They go about looking now and then at the ancient marvels, and in their souls [they ponder] how the authors of them become great" (Essi tal volta guardando l'antiche maraviglie vanno e negli animi come gli autori di quelle diventano magni).[167] In the *Genealogie*, Boccaccio also discussed the marvels of antiquity located around the Mediterranean. At one point, the narrator pauses to admire that Italy has more famous monuments than Greece does.[168] Instead, in the *Decameron*, a child finds things and places worthy of wonder near his home in Florence. Therefore, Boccaccio was creating a (vernacular) literature that complemented travel writing about eastern places and humanist texts about antiquity. In comparison to the authors of these texts, he was asserting more directly that the familiar and quotidian could be serious and appropriate topics for literature. By recalling theological notions, Boccaccio was also — and this is key — defending his decision to promote the dignity and significance of experiences associated with daily reality and domestic life.

Moreover, Boccaccio evoked ideas about natural wonders to introduce the idea that women and human sexuality should be considered marvelous. In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio does not write about famous women like Helen of Troy who, as noted in the *Esposizioni*, inspired the ancient world with a "marvelous

[166] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 24 (ed. Branca, 465).

[167] Boccaccio, *Filocolo* 5.5.3 (ed. Vittore Branca, *Tutte le opere*, 2:555); and compare with 3.33 (*Tutte le opere*, 2:301–4); and 5.44 (*Tutte le opere*, 2:602–4). On marvels in the *Filocolo*, see Biow, *Mirabile dictu* (n. 20 above), 65–93.

[168] Boccaccio, *Genealogie* 12 *Pr*, 2 and 4 (*Tutte le opere*, 8:1154).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

beauty … beyond [that of] any other woman" (belleza … oltre [quella] ad ogni altra maravigliosa).[169] Nor does he reflect upon the types of mythical nymphs of the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* who made Ameto wonder. Instead, Boccaccio highlighted that women explicitly associated with domestic life, those around contemporary Florence and those confined to their homes, are marvelous. Consequently, the hermit's natural reaction to seeing Florentine women for the first time is to wonder at them, even more than at the paintings of angels.[170] In proposing that Florentine women and human sexuality are wondrous, the story about Balducci's son engages an idea first introduced in Day 3. In 3.10, the monk Rustico and the young girl Alibech wonder at each other's bodies and at the phenomenon of desire. Rustico "marvels" (maravigliandosi) when he unexpectedly finds Alibech on his doorstep, and she in turn wonders while discovering the pleasures of sexuality: "And thus situated, Rustico more than ever excited in his desire for having seen such female beauty, *there came the resurrection of the flesh; which when Alibech saw it marveled and said*: 'Rustico, what is that thing?'" (E cosí stando, essendo Rustico piú che mai nel suo disidero acceso per lo vederla cosí bella, *venne la resurrezion della carne; la quale riguardando Alibech e maravigliatasi disse*: "Rustico, quella che cosa è?")[171] In the "Introduction" to Day 4, the metaliterary implications of wondering at women are then evoked when the narrator defends his decision to write to please women: "I most openly confess it, namely that you please and that I try to please you: and I ask them [my critics] if they marvel at this" (io apertissimamente confesso, cioè che voi mi piacete e che io m'ingegno di piacere a voi: *e domandogli* [*ai miei riprensori*] *se di questo essi si maravigliano*).[172] The narrator later adds that, in writing about women, he is simply obeying the laws of nature.[173]

By characterizing women as natural and pleasurable marvels, Boccaccio was again drawing on a nexus of common medieval ideas. However, he was also expanding upon remarks by writers who argued that humankind and the human body are the ultimate, supreme wonders. Like Augustine, Gervase wondered at humankind because we are a microcosm of the universal megacosm, namely, comprised of both carnal and spiritual elements.[174] Ambrose and Hugh also wondered at the disposition, harmony, and beauty of the individual parts

[169] Boccaccio, *Esposizioni* 5.1.103 and 102–6 (*Tutte le opere*, 6:305–6).
[170] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 28 (ed. Branca, 465).
[171] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 3.10.6 and 13 (ed. Branca, 445 and 446, emphasis added).
[172] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 31 (ed. Branca, 466, emphasis added).
[173] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.* 41 (ed. Branca, 470).
[174] Gervase, *Otia* 1.1 (n. 47 above), 26–27; Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.10.25–27 (CCL 49:776).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the human body.[175] Hugh specified that the marvel of humankind was made for (divine) pleasure; we were not created for utilitarian reasons but "so that [God] himself might delight us" (ut homini … seipsum fruendum daret [Deus]).[176] Of course, implicit in these remarks is the notion that women are wonderful and pleasurable too. Still, though defending his ideas by reference to theological concepts, Boccaccio was more overtly characterizing women and erotic pleasures as marvels of divine creation. He explicated this point, first and foremost, to promote the status of women and feminine cultures broadly speaking. He also foregrounded this idea in order to defend the controversial fact that women and feminine pleasures figure among the primary subjects of the *Decameron*.

Boccaccio also drew on notions pertaining to marvels to highlight the signifying properties of his text. The relevance of the story about marvels for this aspect of Boccaccio's poetics appears in a subsequent passage about Dante. When addressing the criticism that he is too old to please women, Boccaccio says that Dante and the poets Guido Cavalcanti and Cino da Pistoia also tried to please women in their old age.[177] Boccaccio adds that no one can actually dwell with the Muses on Parnassus, so he takes pleasure in something that resembles them: "I agree that it is good advice that I should stay with the Muses on Parnassus, but we cannot dwell with the Muses nor they with us. If therefore when a man leaves them he delights in seeing something that resembles them, this is not something to reproach" (Che io con le Muse in Parnaso mi debbia stare, affermo che è buon consiglio, ma tuttavia né noi possiamo dimorar con le Muse né esse con essonoi. Se quando avviene che l'uomo da lor si parte, dilettarsi di veder cosa che le somigli, questo non è cosa da biasimare).[178] Consequently, he concludes that not the Muses but women showed him how to write.[179]

Other readers have noted that these remarks highlight that Boccaccio and Dante belong to a similar, emerging vernacular literary tradition.[180] The comments imply that the two authors are part of a group of individuals who have written or are writing about love in Tuscan. As stated previously, Boccaccio also underscored Dante's relationship to *eros* in his scholarly works. At the same time, the passage foregrounds differences between the signifying properties and content of Boccaccio's and Dante's writings. Fourteenth-century readers would have been sensitive to such differences because these differences had

[175] Ambrose, *Exameron* 6.9.54–74 (CSEL 32.1:246–60); and Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 4.163–69 (CCM 177:12–13); 4.180–90 (CCM 177:14); 7.247–92 (CCM 177:17–20); and 11.401–6 (CCM 177:25).

[176] Hugh of St. Victor, *De tribus diebus* 14.484–86 (CCM 177:30).

[177] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 33 (ed. Branca, 467).

[178] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 35 (ed. Branca, 467–68).

[179] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 4 *Intr.*, 36 (ed. Branca, 468).

[180] On the relevance of these remarks for establishing a Tuscan literary canon, see Eisner, *Boccaccio and the Invention*, 5–8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

already been introduced and partially treated in 3.8. In the "Introduction" to Day 4, the phrase "he began to marvel strongly" (si cominciò forte a maravigliare) recalls a highly significant female marvel in Dante's writings that is different from the female marvels in the *Decameron*. In the *Decameron*, the young hermit "began to marvel strongly" at the sensuous, erotic, earthly women met by chance at Florence. In the *Vita nova*, a young Dante-lover instead "began to marvel greatly" (si cominciò a maravigliare molto) when he first met the chaste, sublime Beatrice.[181] Moreover, Dante's encounter with Beatrice was not, like the hermit's, a chance encounter at Florence; rather it was an event with universal import. In fact, it was not located with any geographical precision, but was dated by reference to the turnings of the stars and planets.[182] Dante subsequently marvels at the "very young angel" (angiola giovanissima), and others, too, consider Beatrice a marvelous wonder created by God: "And others were saying: 'This is a marvel; blessed be the Lord, who so wondrously knows how to work!'" (E altri diceano: "Questa è una maraviglia; che benedetto sia lo Segnore, che sì mirabilemente sae adoperare!").[183] On more than one occasion, Dante-narrator discusses her divine, angelic, and miraculous (supernatural) attributes. He notes twice that she did not appear to be born from a mortal man but from God, and he writes that she "came from heaven to reveal a miracle on earth" (da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare).[184] When discussing why events in her life were associated with the number nine, he also boldly classifies her as a divine miracle: "she was a nine, namely a miracle, whose root, that is of the miracle, is only the wondrous Trinity" (ella era uno nove, cioè uno miracolo, la cui radice, cioè del miracolo, è solamente la mirabile Trinitade).[185] In the Earthly Paradise, Beatrice then criticized Dante for misunderstanding her spiritual import — she whose beauty surpassed everything presented to him by "nature or art" (natura o arte).[186]

Moreover, the phrase "A marvelous thing to hear" (Maravligiosa cosa a udire) in the "Introduction" to Day 4 recalls the horrible bodies of the "Introduction" to Day 1. This type of phenomenon was also described as a "marvelous thing … to hear about" (maravigliosa cosa … a udire). These figures were, Boccaccio suggested, inspired by the disfigured and monstrous bodies of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. Boccaccio's evocation of certain types of marvels in Dante's works seems to highlight the following. Whereas Dante's texts signify by reference to angelic,

[181] Dante, *La vita nuova* 2.5 [1.5], ed. Michele Barbi (Florence, 1932), 8. The references in square brackets refer to the divisions of the text proposed by Gorni: *Vita nova*, ed. Guglielmo Gorni (Turin, 1996).

[182] Dante, *La vita* 2.1–2 [1.1–2] (ed. Barbi, 4–6).

[183] Dante, *La vita* 26.2 [14.2] (ed. Barbi, 117).

[184] Dante, *La vita* 2.8 [1.9], 26.2 [14.2], and 26.6.8 [17.6.8] (ed. Barbi, 9 and 117–19).

[185] Dante, *La vita* 29.3 [19.6] (ed. Barbi, 129).

[186] Dante, *Purgatorio* 31.49–51 (*La Commedia*, 3:536–37).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

celestial, and chaste marvels (Beatrice, angels, Muses), Boccaccio's signify by reference to human, earthly, and erotic marvels (Florentine and Mediterranean women). Whereas Dante's texts signify by featuring monstrous wonders and disfigured bodies, Boccaccio's *novelle* signify by featuring the normal and imperfect human body.

Finally, in the "Introduction" to Day 4, Boccaccio draws on marvels to highlight both the existential significance and the pedagogical utility of marveling at daily, mundane reality. In particular, he engages the primary discourses about marvels to defend the delight that domestic life in Florence and women provide him. When reflecting on how one should respond to marvels, with belief, fear, or awe, writers also debated the extent to which they should engender pleasure. Pleasure, in fact, was considered fundamental for stimulating curiosity about God's creation (see Hugh's remarks cited previously). In accord with this notion, the young Alibech and the hermit want to engage the world because they find it to be a delightful and fun place. Their delight prompts them to inquire about what things are called, about what the properties of things are, and about how things function. Given the foregoing, Boccaccio's point seems to be that what will give readers the most pleasure — and thus stimulate learning — are the things present in daily reality. In the *Decameron*, the female bodies and nearby spaces around Florence engender more wonder and curiosity than the bodies and far-away spaces that interest Balducci. Therefore, the collection of short stories deliberately and consistently promotes the utility of earthly reality and common daily experiences.

By championing the utility of pleasures associated with marvels, Boccaccio was drawing a final distinction between his and Dante's works. In the "Conclusion" to Day 6, Boccaccio more overtly clarifies what is implicit in the "Introduction" to Day 4, namely, that his worldly marvels will be as pleasurable — and thus useful — for readers as Dante's otherworldly ones. In the "Conclusion," the female members of the brigata enjoy a marvelous terrestrial paradise called the "Valley of Women" (Valle delle Donne). After Dioneo remarks that the brigata has every right to enjoy themselves given the crisis at Florence, the women travel to a place overtly specified as being "very nearby" (assai vicina).[187] After passing through a narrow passageway, they glimpse a valley that is an "artifice of nature and not of human hand" (artificio della natura e non manual), that is surrounded by little mountains that remind one of theaters, and that is populated by such verdant vegetation that it seems created by the best artist.[188] From a nearby hill, a delightful river falls with dulcet sounds and waters a little pond populated by fish — which "beyond being a delight was also a marvel" (oltre al diletto era

[187] Boccaccio, *Decameron*, 6 *Conc.*, 18 and see also 9–18 (ed. Branca, 776–77).
[188] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 6 *Conc.*, 19–24 (ed. Branca, 778–79).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

una maraviglia).[189] The women then enter into the pond to play, which suggests that the valley is symbolic of women's bodies. As a natural, textual, and bodily space, the valley recalls antithetically the masculine Mount Asinaio of Balducci, which was void of all temporal delights.

The female valley also antithetically recalls the Earthly Paradise located on the other side of the planet at the top of Mount Purgatory (*Purgatorio* 28). Like the women, the pilgrim enters through a narrow opening (of a thick forest), encounters art of various natural kinds, and enjoys the view of a body of water (the river Lethe).[190] As that river is not stained by "any imperfection" (mistura alcuna), so the water in the Valley is not tainted by "any imperfection" (mistura alcuna), nor does it obscure the bodies of the women when they enter: "[the little lake] did not hide their white bodies other than how a thin piece of glass would a pink rose" ([il paleghetto] non altramenti li lor corpi candidi nascondeva che farebbe una vermiglia rosa un sottil vetro).[191] Once in the garden, the pilgrim wonders repeatedly: at the celestial Matelda, at the verdant topography, and at Matelda's account of the origins of the Earthly Paradise and the river.[192] By drawing on notions related to the gender of marvels at the conclusion of Day 6, Boccaccio was perhaps again inspired by the Bible and hexameral literature. As plant life was made by God on the third day, so men and women were created on the sixth.[193]

The allusions to *Purgatorio* 28 in the "Conclusion" to Day 6 invite readers to consider differences between the marvels witnessed by Dante and those viewed by the female brigata. Whereas the pilgrim ascends to contemplate prelapsarian marvels, the brigata descends to a valley to gaze upon postlapsarian ones. As opposed to that masculine space (mountain) characterized by masculine and classical textual traditions (along with Dante, the epic poets Virgil and Statius wonder), Boccaccio's female narrators take delight in a female geographical and textual space.[194] Dante wonders at a space created at the origins of time; the women instead have fun in a space located in the present-day world. Whereas Dante hears about original sin and why humankind lost the Earthly Paradise, the description of women frolicking in water recalls the virgin birth/Incarnation, an event that began the healing of humankind's sinfulness and redeemed nature.[195] Dante wonders at and about a reality that is no longer accessible to

[189] Boccaccio, *Decameron* 6 *Conc.*, 27 (ed. Branca, 780).

[190] Dante, *Purgatorio* 28.1–3, 14–15, and 25–33 (*La Commedia*, 3:479–80).

[191] Dante, *Purgatorio* 28.29 (*La Commedia*, 3:480); Boccaccio, *Decameron* 6 *Conc.*, 27 and 30 (ed. Branca, 780).

[192] Forms of *maraviglia* and *ammirazione* appear at Dante, *Purgatorio* 27.35, 39, 79, 89, 115 (*La Commedia*, 3:481, 481, 485, 486, 489).

[193] Gen. 1:11–13, 26–31.

[194] Dante, *Purgatorio* 28.139–48 (*La Commedia*, 3:492–93).

[195] The likening of women's bodies illuminated in water to a rose seen through glass recalls a sunbeam penetrating but not changing glass. The rose without thorns and a ray

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

humans before ascending to heaven; by contrast, the women delight in their present marvelous surroundings. Indeed, instead of interrogating the ultimate theological meaning of marvels, they revel in finding joy and pleasure in a wondrous world that was nearly destroyed by the horrible plague.

5. The Pleasure and Novelty of Marvels

This article has explored how Boccaccio addressed issues related to the marvelous, especially in the most overt metaliterary sections of the first six days of the *Decameron*. His decision to reflect on theoretical topics concerning marvels in these sections of the text was probably not an occasional one. It was likely inspired by the fact that God originally made the marvels of creation in six days (*hexameron*). By reflecting on marvels in Days 1–6, Boccaccio was encouraging readers to view the stories told in all ten days of the *Decameron* as an approximation of the marvels made by God. In other words, he was suggesting that the properties of his erotic literary creation are not *contra naturam*. By proposing analogies between his tales and marvels, he implied that his fictional text has traits that resemble the properties inherent in God's creation. That is to say, Boccaccio affirmed that his controversial *novelle* about carnal experiences signify in and through the things of the present world in a manner that approximates how God signifies though history. For his part, Dante, too, defended the *Comedy* by likening the poem to a natural marvel, thereby distinguishing it from other fictions. Instead, Boccaccio engaged concepts related to marvels to suggest that even conventional fictions can be a wondrous part of God's creation, provided they signify by reference to humanity's embodied, physical experience.[196]

In reflecting on marvels and Dante, Boccaccio was also interested in existential questions concerning what, in reality, deserved to be considered marvelous. Like his peers, he was reflecting on what should be deemed worthy of our attention and wonder. In the *Comedy*, Dante-pilgrim marvels at the eternal punishments of hell, the process of spiritual cleansing in purgatory, and the experience of

of light through glass were common images of Mary, who remained a virgin though pregnant with Christ. On these Marian images, see Teresa McLean, *Medieval English Gardens* (Mineola, NY, 2014), 127–31; Brian Reynolds, *Gateway to Heaven: Marian Doctrine and Devotion, Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods*, vol. 1, *Doctrine and Devotion* (Hyde Park, NY, 2012), 72 and 87; and Andrew Breeze, "The Blessed Virgin and Sunbeam through Glass," *Celtica* 23 (1999): 19–29.

[196] Some of Boccaccio's subsequent reflection on marvels deals explicitly with misuses and misunderstandings of marvels as well as with necromancy. For example, see *Decameron* 8.3 (8.3.5 [ed. Branca, 907]; Calandrino and the Heliotropia); 8.7 (8.7.47, 77, and 114 [ed. Branca, 954, 960, and 968]; Scholar and Widow); and in 10.5 (Ansaldo and a Marvelous Garden). For a discussion of these stories and issues, see Biow, *Mirabile dictu* (n. 20 above), 86–93.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

beatitude in paradise. He also frequently, and of course correctly, reacts to many of the wondrous and miraculous things witnessed in hell and purgatory with fear, dread, and horror. By responding in this way, the pilgrim's reactions recall classical, late antique, and early medieval ideas about the didactic utility of marvels. Boccaccio complemented Dante's poem by writing a work that overtly, deliberately, and systematically foregrounds the marvelous nature of earthly and local phenomena. Moreover, the brigata and other implied readerships in the *Decameron* respond to the local and domestic marvels depicted in the *novelle* with delight, pleasure, and joy. They also respond to such wonders with laughter, especially a chortling eruption of amusement at a humorous situation. In the *Comedy*, the word *ridere* appears in various contexts: five times in *Purgatorio* 1–27 and about eighteen times from *Purgatorio* 28 (Earthly Paradise) to the end of the *Paradiso*, and often with the connotations of smiling or shining.[197] By promoting the marvels associated with earthly delight and overt humor, Boccaccio was (re)claiming as fit for literature aspects of human experience and emotion that were not — in his view — clearly addressed in the *Comedy*.[198] He was also reminding readers of the importance of engaging with the quotidian, temporal, and earthly. Therefore, the *Decameron* proposes that Dante was indebted to an older tradition that characterized marvels, portents, and monsters as signs of God's displeasure. Boccaccio, in contrast, signaled that he was drawing on newer views about marvels, views that celebrated the marvels of this world as things to delight in and laugh at. Indeed, medieval theologians such as Hugh of St. Victor explained that God did not make marvels and creation to scare people but to delight them.

Boccaccio did not emphasize that Dante was part of an older tradition of marvel-writing to raise questions about the *Comedy*'s cultural relevance or import. Although Boccaccio at times engaged critically with Dante's poem, he did not downplay the significance of Dante's writings and achievement. Rather, Boccaccio's reflection on Dante and marvels was informed by a calculated twofold strategy. On the one hand, Boccaccio foregrounded Dante's debts to earlier views of marvels in order to champion the poet as a classical *auctoritas*. He highlighted that Dante's engagement with marvels was not innovative but

[197] The search for *ridere* was conducted through the Dartmouth Dante Project, accessed May 6, 2017, dante.dartmouth.edu. See Peter S. Hawkins, "All Smiles: Poetry as Theology in Dante's *Commedia*," in *Dante's* Commedia*: Theology as Poetry*, ed. Vittorio Montemaggi and Matthew Treherne (Notre Dame, IN, 2010), 36–59; and Diego Sbacchi, "Il cielo che sorride a Dante," *Italica* 92 (2015): 298–308.

[198] On the restorative and hygienic effects of pleasure in medieval culture and in the *Decameron*, see Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca, 1982), 164–232; and Olson, "The Profit of Pleasure," in *Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, vol. 2, *The Middle Ages*, ed. Alastair J. Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge, 2005), 275–87, at 279–85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

was part of an earlier literary tradition that stretched back to antiquity. Boccaccio's reflection on Dante and marvels thereby complemented his classicizing characterization of the poet in his manuscript anthologies. His autographs of Dante's texts feature elements that were typically present in the manuscripts of ancient Latin works, such as wide margins for glosses and ornate rubrics.[199] On the other hand, Boccaccio was pointing out that *he* was part of a literary and historical movement that engaged the new marvelous, the wonders associated with domestic life and pleasure. Bolstered by recent historical and theological ideas, Boccaccio was highlighting the highly novel and innovative — indeed modern (as opposed to classicizing) — character of his writings. By drawing on marvels to foreground his own cultural achievement, Boccaccio demonstrated a great deal of self-awareness and cultural sensitivity. The defining feature of a marvel in medieval culture was its novelty. While Boccaccio acknowledged Dante's originality throughout his writings, he also asserted in the *Decameron* that parts of Dante's otherworldly poem are unoriginal in their appropriation of horrible wonders. At the same time, he was suggesting that his *novelle* are highly novel in their engagement with and systematic promotion of the delightful marvels of daily life. Viewed anew with childlike wonder, Boccaccio thus seems to say, our quotidian experience can be an endless source of meaningful entertainment and pleasure.

Villanova University

Keywords: body, erotic literature, gender, human sexuality, laughter, marvels, miracles

[199] These codicological properties suggest that the poet's vernacular works should be considered on par with the writings of ancient authors. They thereby support Boccaccio's view that Dante should be included in the canon of *auctoritates*. On the properties and ideological import of Boccaccio's anthologies of Dante's writings (*Vita nova*, *canzoni distese*, and *Comedy*), see Armstrong, "Boccaccio and Dante" (n. 24 above), 122–27; and Eisner, *Boccaccio and Invention* (n. 24 above), 1–16 and 50–73. The manuscripts in question are: Toledo, Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares Zelada 104.6 [late 1340s to mid-1350s]; Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana 1035 (c. 1360); Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Chigi L.V.176 (c. 1363–66); and Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Chigi L.VI.213 (c. 1363–66).

https://doi.org/10.1017/tdo.2018.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press