

HUI216

Italian Civilization

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23.0 Announcements

- <http://www.campo7.com/hui216/>
 - Readings have been posted
 - The review page has been updated
- Review session
 - Monday, May 8, 3:50-5:10, in our usual classroom, Javits 102
- The last office hour will be on Monday, May 8, 5:30-6:30
- All midterms are available for pickup
 - Bring any documents that were requested

23.0 Announcements

- The deadline for the paper is May 3
 - Avoid plagiarism (for information and advice, you can review topic 2.2, from the [Jan. 30](#) lecture)
 - Unintentional plagiarism is still plagiarism
 - Occasional plagiarism is still plagiarism
 - Recommended format for quoting from the PowerPoint presentations
 - The class designator, the topic number, followed by the slide number
 - For example, this slide would be referred to as "HUI216, 23.0 slide 3"

23.0 The final exam

- The final exam will be on May 15 (5:10-6:50), for all students
 - The questions will be based on the topics introduced from Mar. 15 to May 3 (weeks 8-9 and 11-14, topics 15.2-25.x)
 - Topics from week 1 may also be included in the exam (topics 1.1-1.7)
 - The required readings from week 8 on will be included

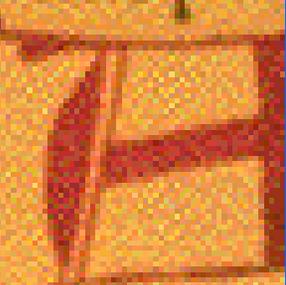
23.0 The final exam: format and grading

- There will be 35-36 multiple choice questions, and 4-5 short-answer questions, for a total of 40; each is worth 2.8 points, for a total of 112 points
- To receive a passing grade in this exam, you have to answer correctly to at least 22 out of 40 questions
- To receive an A out of 40 in this exam, you have to answer correctly to at least 34 out of 40 questions

23.0 The final: instructions and rules

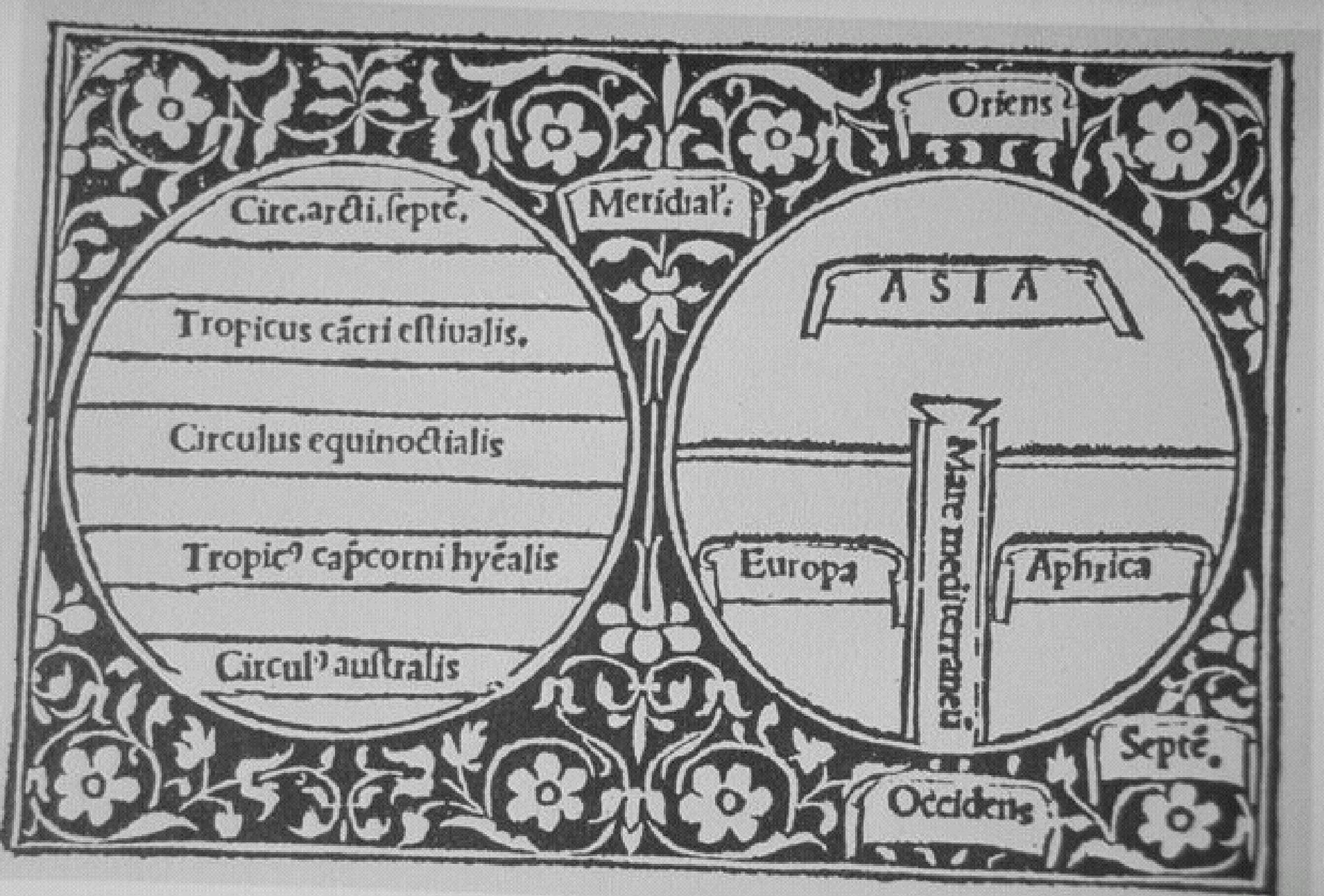
- Bring your ID, a pencil, a pen, and an eraser
- Multiple choice answers must be filled in on the scantron form with a black #2 pencil; short-answer questions must be written on the exam, with a pen
- You are not allowed to ask any questions
 - Even if you believe that you found a typo or a mistake inside a question, complete the exam and contact me later
- You cannot leave the room until you've handed in the exam
- Once you get up to hand in the exam...
 - you cannot go back to your seat
 - you cannot write anything on your exam or on the scantron form, even if you forgot to include your name

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23.1 The world in the Middle Ages



23.1 From Foresti's *Supplementum*, 1503

23.2 The house of Dante in Florence (reconstructed)



23.3 Giovanni Boccaccio's account of his life

- He maintained that he was born in Paris, from the secret affair his father allegedly had with the King's daughter
- Then, as his father moved back to Florence, he was brought along
- When he was still very young he went to live in Naples, where he studied and practiced accounting
- In Naples, he met Fiammetta, illegitimate daughter of the King of Naples
- Boccaccio claims that he became a poet and a storyteller because of her

23.3 Boccaccio's life as we know it

- He was born in Florence, from a widow who had an affair with Boccaccio's father
- Fiammetta was the daughter of a Neapolitan noblewoman, wife of a rich merchant
- Boccaccio's family lived in the small town of Certaldo (near Florence)
- His father was Boccaccio da Chellino
 - Boccaccio's father moved to Florence
 - From 1310 to 1342 he worked for the Bardi Financial Company

23.3 Boccaccio (1313-1374)

- Boccaccio's father was in Paris a few times, including the year of Giovanni's birth (1313)
- However his son was born in Florence (or perhaps in Certaldo)
- Boccaccio went to Naples around 1325
 - There he worked for the Bardis, getting the training needed to become a merchant
- He left Naples in 1340, when the Bardi were forced to close many of their offices

23.3 Boccaccio and the Black Death

- In 1348 in Florence he witnessed the Black Death
 - An epidemic of plague that killed more at least 40% of the population of the city
 - The epidemic is described in the Introduction to the *Decameron* (written 1348-51)
- Later he also worked as a diplomat, traveling to different places in Italy

23.3 Boccaccio: the last years

- He retired to Certaldo with little money
 - Here many scholars and poet visited him, as he was already famous
 - Following Petrarch's lead, he wrote many scholarly books
 - Among them, a Life of Dante and a series of lectures on the Inferno, and the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium*, a dictionary of mythology, in Latin
 - He became a deacon, for various reasons, personal as well as economic
- Died in 1374

23.4 *The Decameron* (1348-51)

- Follows the tradition of the *specula Principum* (mirrors for Princes)
 - short stories with moral principles to teach, while also entertaining the reader
 - e.g., *Il libro dei sette savi* (The book of the 7 wise men)
- Reflects the political struggles of the merchants in Florence
 - The plague is also an allegory of social change (the demise of the old world)
- The title reminds of St. Ambrose *Hexameron*, a commentary of the six days of creation
- The frame story (*cornice*) allows the author to add another level to the narration
 - The characters telling each other stories also offer different commentaries and different reactions

23.4 The structure of the *Decameron*: topics of the various sections

- Day 1: narrators are free to pick any topic
- Day 2: fighting against fortune
- Day 3: overcoming adverse fortune with one's virtue
- Day 4: tragic love stories
- Day 5: love stories with a happy ending
- Day 6: wit and intelligence
- Day 7: wives tricking their husbands
- Day 8: man and women tricking each other
- Day 9: no fixed topic (mostly vices and pranks)
- Day 10: the greatest virtues

23.5 Multiple points of view in Ciappelletto's novella (*Dec. 1.1*)

- One of Boccaccio's stylistic innovations is the introduction of multiple points of view inside the story, a common approach in modern literature, seldom used before by medieval writers
- The narrator present the novella as a theological dilemma, concerning good saints and bad saints
- The characters have differing views/opinions of the main character, Ciappelletto
- For example, Musciatto's choice, to send him to deal with the crafty Burgundians, reflects his practical values and social identity
 - As a businessman, the wicked notary is simply the right man for the job, exactly because of his wickedness

23.5 Multiple points of view in Ciappelletto's novella

- The priest's opinion (and the Burgundians' opinion)
 - They judge him based on their limited contacts and experience
- The 2 Florentine brother's judgment
 - They have no idea that Ciappelletto's confession is his legacy, his masterpiece: based on very limited knowledge of this character's past life, they justifiably think he is a terrible man, as he is able to play such a prank on his deathbed, to save them, absolute strangers
- The audience (the *brigata*) laughs and appreciates the story (remarking that it is just a story)
- The author's point? Inside the changing culture of Humanism, it is as important to know about man and human nature as it is to know about the holiest of things

23.6 The narrator introduces *Dec. 1.1*

- ...dear Ladies... a man ought to begin whatever he does, in the great and glorious name of Him, who was the Creator of all things. ...seeing that I am the man appointed to begin this story-telling: I intend to begin also with one of God's wonders. To the end, that this being heard, our hope may remain on Him...
- Now... as temporal things are mortal and transitory, so are they both in and out of themselves, full of sorrow, pain, and anguish, and subjected to infinite dangers: so... we... cannot continue or defend ourselves, if God by His special grace and favor, give us not strength and good understanding.

23.6 The main message of the novella?

- To... [the Saints] (as to advocates and procurators, informed by the experience of our frailty) we offer our prayers, not daring to confront so great a Judge with our petitions.
- ...we may be misled in opinion, by electing such and such as our intercessors... who perhaps are far off from Him, or driven into perpetual exile...
- ...He... more regards the sincerity of him that prays, than ignorant devotion, committed to the trust of an improper intercessor...
- As manifestly will appear, by the Novella which I intend to relate...

23.6 Musciatto the merchant/knight

- There was a man named Musciatto Franzesi, who from being a most rich and great merchant in France, had become a Knight, and was preparing to go into Tuscany...
- ...the merchant found his affairs greatly intricate here and there... and that very hardly he could unentangle them, without referring the charge of them to a number of people.

23.6 The right man for the job

- And he managed to do so in every case save one; he remained doubtful, whom he might sufficiently leave, to recover his debts among many Burgundians.
- His doubt arose from reports that the Burgundians were people of bad nature, litigious, and inclined to mischief: so that he could not be think himself of any man (no matter how wicked) in whom he might repose trust to meet with their slyness.
- ...at last he remembered one Master Cepperello from Prato...

23.6 Evil?

- ...being a Notary, he held it in high disdain, that any of his Contracts (although he made but few) should be found without falsehood.
- He would never refuse a request for a fraudulent certificate, and he'd sooner hand one of these out for nothing, than issue a genuine one against a hefty payment.
- He took the only pleasure of the world, to bear false witness, if he were thereto entreated, and (oftentimes) when he was not requested at all.

23.6 A backward saint?

- ...He delighted (beyond measure) and addicted his best studies, to cause enmities and scandals between relatives and friends...
- If he were called to kill anyone, or to do any other villainous deed, he never would make denial, but go to it very willingly...
- He was a great glutton and a drunkard, even he was not able to take any more...
- ...suffice to say, that never was there a worse man born...

23.6 Playing with viewpoints

- This Ciappelletto, being thus remembered by Musciatto (who very well knew his life and behavior) he perfectly persuaded himself, that this was a man apt in all respects to meet with the treachery of the Burgundians...
- Ciappelletto, seeing himself idle, and greedy after worldly goods, considering that Musciatto... was now to depart from there, without any dreaming on the matter, and constrained... by necessity, set down his resolution, and answered, that he would gladly do it.

23.6 The many faces of Ciappelletto

- Ciappelletto went to Dijon, where he was unknown of any. ...there... he began benignly and graciously, in recovering the debts due; which course he took the rather, because they should have a further feeling of him in the end.
- Being lodged in the house of two Florentine brothers who were practicing usury; and (for Musciatto's sake) using him with honor and respect: it happened that he fell sick, and the two brothers sent for doctors...

23.6 What shall we do... with this man?

- ...for to send him away (sick as he is) we shall be greatly blamed thereby... On the other side we are to consider also that he has been so bad a man, as he will not now make any confession..., and dying so without confession, there is no Church that will accept his body... And yet if he would confess himself, his sins are so many and monstrous, as the like case also may happen, because there is not any Priest or Religious person, that can or will absolve him. And being not absolved, he must be cast into some ditch or pit, and then the people of the Town..., in furious madness will they come upon us, and our house....

23.6 Ciappelletto's plan

- "...Procure therefore... that the most holy and religious man that is to be found... may come unto me, and refer the case then to me, for I will deal in such sort for you and myself, that all shall be well, and you no way discontented."
- The two brothers, although they had no great hope in his speeches, went... to a Monastery of Friars, and requested that a holy and wise man might come to hear the confession of a Lombard... And one was granted unto them, being an aged religious Friar, well versed in the sacred Scriptures, a very venerable person, who being of good and sanctified life, all the Citizens held him in great respect and esteem...

23.6 The sin of gluttony: playing the context against the sin

- "...over and beside the Fasts of our Lent season... I brought myself to such a customary use, that I could fast three days in every Week, with Bread and Water. But indeed (holy Father) I confess, that I have drunk water with such a pleasing appetite and delight (especially in praying, or walking on pilgrimages) even as greedy drunkards do, in drinking good Wine. And many times I have desired such Salads of small herbs, as Women do gather out in the open fields, and feeding only upon them, without coveting after any other kind of sustenance, has seemed much more pleasing to me, than I thought to agree with the nature of Fasting..."

23.6 Switching the roles...

- "Son, Son" replied the Confessor "these sins are natural, and very light... It happens to every man (how holy he may be) that after he has fasted too long, feeding will be welcome to him, and drinking too."
- "Sir" said Ciappelletto "never tell me this to comfort me, for well you know, and I am not ignorant of this, that such things as are done for the service of God, ought all to be performed purely, and without any blemish of the mind..."

23.6 Reframing the sin of anger

- "Oh Sir" said Ciappelletto "therein I assure you, I have often transgressed. And what man is able to bear it: looking at the daily actions of men to be so dishonest? No care of keeping God's Commandments, nor any fear of his dreadful judgments. Many times in a day, I have rather wished myself dead then living, seeing youth pursuing idle vanities, to swear and forswear themselves, drinking in Taverns, and never attending Churches..."

23.6 The switch...

- "But" said the Confessor "have you done nothing else?"
- "Yes" said he "... once I spat in God's Church."
- The Friar smiling, said: "Alas Son, that is a matter of no moment; for we that are Religious persons, do use to spit there every day."
- "The more is your shame" answered Ciappelletto, "for no place ought to be kept more pure and clean than the sacred Temple, wherein our daily sacrifices are offered up to God."

23.6 The two brothers...

- The two brothers... heard... the passage of all, between him and the Friar, being many times scarcely able to refrain from laughter... And often they said...: "What manner of man is this, whom neither age, sickness, nor terror of death so near approaching..., nor that which is much more, God, before whose judgment he knows not how soon he shall appear, or else be sent to a more fearful place; none of these can alter his wicked disposition, or make him think twice about dying as he has lived?" Notwithstanding, seeing he had so ordered the matter, that he had burial freely allowed him, they cared for no more...

23.7 Pierpaolo Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971)

- Pasolini's intention was to comment on contemporary Italian society
- Pasolini chooses to ignore the frame story entirely
- Pasolini alters Ciappelletto's novella to support a Marxist view of social relationships
 - Ciappelletto, from the point of view of the lower class, appears to be a victim of the wealthy merchants
 - Ciappelletto is "sacrificed" and manipulated by the bourgeoisie
 - Thanks to his sacrifice, while he loses his soul the usurers can continue with their capitalist pursuits
 - The Church can appropriate his "good" reputation and gain power
 - North vs. South: in the movie the merchants are portrayed as Neapolitan immigrants, nostalgic of their land, and the setting is moved from France to Switzerland or Austria

23.8 Boccaccio's novella and its protagonist, Ciappelletto

- Ciappelletto is not your ordinary criminal, a petty thief or a paid killer
- What sets him apart from other evil characters is that he participates to criminal activities freely and willingly, with full pleasure, and with a sort of gusto
- He does not have a trivial motivation to account for his behavior, such as money or success or fame
- His life is that of a backward saint, somebody trying to make his life into a work of art, an extraordinary thing, by always being consistent, always setting up goals that are not easy to reach, and that require hard "evil" work to be achieved
- Ciappelletto is evil, nobody can deny that, and there is no apology for his behavior from the point of view of religious morality, or from any other point of view
- Yet it is clear that Ciappelletto is a talented fellow, that he is bright and that he has a strong will and a quick intellect

23.8 Boccaccio's novella and its protagonist, Ciappelletto (2)

- In the context of traditional medieval culture, for example from the point of view of a poet-theologian such as Dante, Ciappelletto deserves to be in Hell for two equally powerful reasons
 - first because he is evil and he has committed many crimes against religion, against God and against other men and women
 - and secondly because he had received so many talents from God, but he wasted them or misused them in a life of crime and debauchery
- Medieval culture was all about the unification or the reconciliation of different, paradoxical points of views
- Boccaccio's culture, as it appears from this novella, is an anticipation of our modern 'schizophrenic' culture, in which there is no effort to reconcile opposing views and contradictory judgments at all costs
- Therefore, for the reader of Boccaccio and for the more modern reader, Ciappelletto can still be admired for his talents, his intelligence, his wit, his wicked smarts, while at the same time he will have to be considered immoral from a different point of view

23.8 Boccaccio's novella and its protagonist, Ciappelletto (3)

- This is the same mechanism that drives you to empathize with and to like the protagonist of a story or a movie even when you recognize that he or she is evil, that technically he or she has violated social or moral laws
- Many a movie are based on this mechanism, on this separation of judgments
- What you as the reader or the viewer do, in front of such a character, is to adopt only one point of view at a time, to consider one set of values at a time
- Judging solely on a limited definition of success and intelligence, Ciappelletto therefore can be admired because he has outsmarted a wise old priest, who was well versed in the Scriptures, but clearly knew very little about the power of rhetoric and about human nature in general
- From the point of view of the businessman, the merchant, Ciappelletto is the right man for the job of recovering the money of the wealthy Italian who lived in Paris, because only he can outsmart the clever and not-so-honest Burgundians
- And, finally, from the point of view of religion, there is little doubt that Ciappelletto will end up in Hell, even though technically he could have repented sincerely at the very last moment, and God might have forgiven him for mysterious reasons

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (1)

- Regarding the style of this novella, the point of view is introduced here for the first time after the literatures of the Greeks and Romans, as a new literary device
- What I mean is that in this novella each character has a different point of view, a different opinion and a different knowledge of what is going on in the story
- For example the rich Italian merchant who lives in Paris and charges Ciappelletto with the mission of recovering his money from the French people of Burgundy knows Ciappelletto to be a crafty evil man, and therefore, from his angle, the right man for the job at hand
- The two Florentine merchants who accept Ciappelletto into their house do not know him as well as the merchant who sent him
- They do not believe that there can be a positive solution to the problem of the confession of this evil man, and they cannot understand why he would do something like that, that is a false confession, just to save them
- We, the readers, having read about Ciappelletto's frame of mind, his past history and his approach to anything that looks even remotely evil, do understand that the confession is the ultimate challenge, the best and last test for his natural talents

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (2)

- Previously, inside medieval literature, the narration was usually conducted from only one point of view, which is often similar to the point of view of a hypothetical eyewitness, who being present on each scene could then report what was told and what was done, with very little insight into the minds of the characters
- In the case of Boccaccio, the reader usually is able to understand what the character feels or thinks, and most importantly the reader is able to appreciate the distance that often separates the characters' thoughts and feelings and what he or she will say to other people
- In the case of the first novella, for example, Ciappelletto will first admit to himself that when Musciatto leaves Paris he will be without protection, and that therefore going to Burgundy is the only option he has at that point, if he wants to stay alive
- Yet he will "gladly" agree to the merchant's offer
- The two brothers do not believe that Ciappelletto will be able to make his confession in such a way that no harm will come to him or to them. Nonetheless, they accept his proposal to call for a wise holy man

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (3)

- Even the novella itself is presented from different angles
- The narrator, who belongs to the group of young men and women spending time in the Florentine villa during the Black Death epidemic, introduces the novella as a story about a theological dilemma, which is not entirely false, but certainly does not reflect the relevance of comedy in the structure of this story
 - (This novella also provides the reader with much needed relief after the grim description of the plague in Florence. And yet there is a similarity between the absolute social chaos in the city and the sum of all evils in Ciappelletto.)
- The confession is supposed to be (and still is, for many contemporary readers) a hilarious piece of comedy, built on the huge difference between the reality of Ciappelletto's life and the incredible lies of his fake confession
 - (Which helps explain why Ciappelletto needs to be an all-evil character, in the narration, since... the bigger the lie, the funnier the story.)

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (4)

- The audience, that is to say the other young men and women who listen to the narrator, react to the narration with smiles and they clearly like the story, which provides another point of view
- Then it is legitimate to ask ourselves what was Boccaccio's point of view, creating this narration and presenting it at the beginning of his collection of short stories
- In identifying Boccaccio's point of view, there are several points to consider
- First of all, since he is the author, the storyteller behind all the narrators, this story serves the purpose of arranging the organization and the structure of the entire collection of short stories around a clear criterion, imposed by the laws of the comical genre: the collection opens with the gloomy description of a terrible disease and its victims, followed by a story where the protagonist is an evil man who manages to overthrow all the laws of religion and piety, and it ends with a novella where the protagonist is Griselda, a woman from a low-class family of the countryside, who shows and uses successfully all the major virtues, humility and strength, dignity and courage, magnanimity and intelligence

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (5)

- But Boccaccio is also a writer, very much involved with the social and political issues of his times, an intellectual
- As such the "message" of the author must be connected to the many references to religion in the story, in particular the details of the not-so-flattering treatment of the character of the French priest who confesses the protagonist
- At the beginning of the 14th century the libraries of many Italian convents received a considerable amount of manuscripts dealing with the topic of confession, while at the same time instructions arrived regularly for the heads of the convents to be particularly careful in the choice of friars to be assigned to the sacrament of confession. It is clear from those instructions that the friars confessing the members of the community should be educated, well-read men (while not all friars were able to read or write at that time), and that confession was not to be considered an easy task, but rather one requiring culture and a large experience of the world.
- Boccaccio might have been aware of the ongoing debate inside sections of the Church about the peculiar skills required to be a good confessor

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (6)

- Boccaccio then also used the story to offer a comic allegory of the contrast between the new culture of Humanism, which was then coming out in Florence and in other areas of Italy, and the traditional culture where knowledge of the scriptures implied simply that one was competent in the ways God administers the universe and in the laws of religious morality
- At the core of the new humanistic culture instead, one finds the belief that all books, from the Bible to the works of the great Greeks and Romans, are worth reading only if the reader makes an effort to identify the 'historical' contents in them, that is to say those elements that pertain to human nature, human society and to nature in general
- The reason why still have a section in many universities called Humanities derives exactly from that attempt to reorganize culture around the belief that the students should read literary and historical texts to learn more about themselves

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (7)

- Finally, it is evident that the longest section of the novella, the confession itself, gives great emphasis to rhetoric, to some of the rhetorical devices that one can use to win over an argument, to convince the other party, or even to conclude a successful commercial transaction, since any merchant relies often on his communicative skills in his line of work, and merchants were the target audience of this book written by Boccaccio
- There are a few "tricks" that are used over and over by the main character to take advantage of the holy man's simple nature
- For example Ciappelletto will admit to a sin, exaggerating greatly the gravity of the act that he has committed against God, so that the holy man will have to convince him that it is really nothing, a minor infraction, a common albeit not entirely appropriate behavior (spitting in a church, eating with pleasure after fasting, etc.)
- Whenever the priest does that, Ciappelletto has the chance to take over and become himself the judge, scolding the friar for not showing enough respect for God's laws, as even the most minute rules are to be followed to the letter

23.9 Boccaccio's novella: final notes (8)

- Often a minor sin is also framed in the context of practices that show Ciappelletto to be the most pious man that ever lived
- While he is apparently giving attention only to the presumed gravity of a certain offense against God, in order to get to the actual sin he will 'have to' describe the kind of life that he leads, and that he (here is the clever twist) considers so totally inadequate and so unworthy of God's love
- The description of a fictional life where morality and moral considerations are central becomes effective and convincing exactly because rather than bragging about it, rather than looking for approval and praise, Ciappelletto shows that he is so disappointed with himself, so sure that he has not done enough to comply with the rules and the behaviors prescribed by Christian religion