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Papertown. The Image of Naples and the Foundation of Poetry in Boccaccio's Early Works

Giancarlo Alfano

1. Boccaccio's Latin *epistula* IV, known as *Mavortis miles extremue* (1339) describes the young writer leaving his "gurgustiolum," or little hut, in the early morning and walking along the seafront until he reaches the "busta Maronis," Virgil's grave. When he arrives there, he has a vision which makes him astonished (*obstupere*): he sees a woman whose beauty makes him fall in love, but not without sorrow. Profoundly troubled, he comes across a friend of his who suggests that he read the works of a poet who, living in Avignon, is assumed to be Petrarch. The *epistula* we read is the very text of the letter which has been probably addressed to this author.¹

This brief account of a well-known text is interesting for our discussion as it underlines the topical coincidence between landscape and love, which are both terms connected to poetry.² From the *Busta Maronis* to vernacular poetry the leap is quite an unusual one, as it means moving away from the Latin tradition to production in a modern language. This passage is of the utmost importance to Boccaccio, and finds its seal in the Neapolitan landscape.

Discussing tombs and great poets thirty-five years later, the author recalled his own words. It is 1374, Petrarch has just died, and his devoted friend Boccaccio writes to Francesco da Brossano (*Epistula* XIII) to mourn the "transitum . . . patris et praeceptoris nostri."³ Petrarch's death makes necessary a Petrarchan "sepulcrum." It seems as though Boccaccio is suggesting that "busta Petrarchae" are needed in order to be compared to "busta Maronis" as a symbol of the *translatio poetriae* from Latin to vulgar culture. The reference to a "sepulcrum" in this Latin letter indeed starts a series of analogical superimpositions: Arquà, the site of the burial is on the hills near Padova, just as the bones of Virgil have found their rest beneath the "Posilipi colles." Once we discover that the analogy continues with the names of Ovid (and thus the Black Sea where the poet was buried), and Homer (who Boccaccio believed had died in Smyrna), the ideological construction appears to be clear: Naples is the *figura*, the tenor, the permanent landscape through which we can read the whole of the history of literature, from ancient poets to modern ones—because it is the last ring of the long chain of *translatio studii* (or better *translatio poetriae*, as Boccaccio had learned from that *De vulgari eloquentia* he had long meditated on).⁴

2. Let us now look at *La caccia di Diana* (*Diana's Hunt*) Boccaccio's first work.⁵ Written in *terza rima*—a sign of the newly established Florentine tradition—this allegorical short narrative ends with the transformation of the titular hunt into a honorable meeting where beasts are revealed to be young gentlemen (the Author himself appearing among these characters),

¹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Epistole*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. Vittore Branca, vol. 5.1 (Milan: Mondadori, 1992).

² After the 1947 E.R. Curtius' masterpiece, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press [1953], with a new Epilogue, 1990, pp. 195, ff.) a series of studies have been conducted on the topical and typical use of space and landscape in medieval literature. For the moment, I would take into consideration L. Battaglia Ricci's beautiful book, *Ragionare nel giardino: Boccaccio e i cicli pittorici del Trionfo della morte* (Rome: Salerno, 1987) and G. Pozzi's introductory work "Temi, topoi, stereotipi," in *Letteratura italiana*, ed. A. Asor Rosa, vol. III, *Le forme del testo, t. I, Teoria e poesia*, 391-436 (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).

whereas the huntresses are presented as some of the most prominent ladies of the Angevin city.

Just as the *busta Maronis*, by means of an archeological metonymy, represents Naples as the site of an important literary history, in *La caccia di Diana* the noble huntresses are a symbol for the courtly values of the Angevin capital city in Italy: Naples. Consequently, there are a series of attitudes and practices represented by the very word “Partenope.” While no other reference is made to the city after the beginning of Canto I (v. 12), where the name of *Partenopé* is pronounced, the opposition between *valle* and *montagnette* (the valleys and hills setting the scene), on the one side, and the town, on the other, turns into a superimposition: the rich Angevin *aule*, where noble ladies and “giovinetti gai e belli” used to meet,⁶ are transformed into the typical *locus amoenus*.

There is no reason to believe, as far as I can judge, that the forest where the hunt takes place alludes to the Campi Flegrei or the hills of Posillipo in a direct, explicit way. This forest *is* Naples, for the simple reason that a great number of historical Neapolitan women, whose real names and surnames have been recorded, inhabit that literary landscape. I mean that, for our author, the forest where the hunt takes place is just a transfiguration of the city where he (and the characters of his narrative) lived. This is not a case of realistic attitude: quite on the contrary, the real city, as represented by its noblest ladies, is turned into a piece of literature, courtly literature, halfway between the French chivalric narrative and a classical masquerade.⁷

From 1334 (when *Caccia di Diana* was supposedly composed) to 1374: at the beginning and at the end of his poetic life, Giovanni Boccaccio transforms the city of his youth into the depository of a rich, literary imagery. What kind of imagery, though? One should say that the two examples that I have briefly presented focus on two different dimensions: on the one hand, Naples as the foundation site of poetry itself, whose emblem is the tomb of Virgil; on the other, Naples as the ideal setting for courtly values. In fact, with a close reading, one sees that these two different possibilities are not that easily distinguished.

Indeed, no real opposition can be established between Naples and its outskirts. If anything, one might notice a difference of scale rather than of kind. In *Caccia di Diana*, *Filocolo*, or even *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* there is no sign of the typical Florentine

³ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Epistole*, ed. Vittore Branca.

⁴ As Victoria Kirkham has explained, the entirety of Boccaccio’s Neapolitan production, and in particular his literary building of the idol of beloved Fiammetta has to do with his image as an author. See the splendid Victoria Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio’s Filocolo and the Art of Medieval Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), especially 21-75.

⁵ Giovanni Boccaccio, *La caccia di Diana*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* (vol. 1), ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1967). For the English text and an important introduction to Boccaccio’s work, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Diana’s Hunt: Boccaccio’s First Fiction*, ed. and trans. A. K. Cassel and V. Kirkham (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

⁶ See Boccaccio, *La caccia di Diana*, Canto XVII, v. 41.

⁷ Despite their attention to the allegorical level, A.K. Cassel and V. Kirkham seem to adhere to such a literal interpretation: “As Eden, the *locus amoenus* at the end of *Diana’s Hunt* is, in the mind of the twenty-one-year-old Boccaccio, a redeemed realm of a Christianized Venus, tutelary of chaste, matrimonial love. On a more worldly note, Venus may owe her triumph in the poem not merely to the young B.’s love of myth, but to his blithe observation of contemporary customs as well. The court of Naples frequently enjoyed outings to Baia, a coastal watering place and country retreat near Naples, where ruins still remain of the ancient Roman Terme di Venere, or Baths of Venus. ‘Baia-Partenope’ was the playground where the upper classes meet, parried, and wooed for matrimony. In the simplest terms, the poem’s literal level also reflects the historical truth of days spent hawking, hunting, bathing, and flirting—summer pastimes that the aristocracy enjoyed around the bays of Naples, and precisely those that Boccaccio’s Madonna Fiammetta would enjoy there and relate in her own mature ‘elegy’ of amorous passion.” Cassel and Kirkham, *Diana’s Hunt: Boccaccio’s First Fiction*, 63.

polarization *città* vs. *campagna* (town vs. countryside): quite on the contrary, hills and valleys appear to be the metamorphosis of urban streets and squares. I would highlight the fact that in the Parthenopean semiotic structure, as presented by Boccaccio, no difference is made between *città* and *campagna*.⁸ As this opposition is abandoned, the two spaces fail to identify different social values: the chivalric world is to be found both inside and outside of the town.

3. This semiotic “suspension” of contrast is probably a consequence of the actual position occupied by the author halfway between the two poles. We have seen how the twenty-six years old epistolographer walked along the shore outside of Naples all the way to Virgil’s tomb. During his fifties, the same author will talk of the Latin poet finding peace “haud longe a Neapoli,” into a “semotum locum quieto atque solitario litori proximum . . . inter promontorium Posilipi et Puteolos.”⁹ Such was the love that Virgil had for this site, says Boccaccio, that Augustus had the poet’s bones transferred from Brindisi to Naples. Scholars have already noticed that this Virgilian reminiscence is connected to another reference to Petrarch: “Franciscus Petrarca, celestis homo profecto et nostro evo poeta clarissimus, . . . spreta Babilone occidentali atque pontificis maximi benivolentia . . . in vallem clausam abiit.” There he spent the time “meditando atque componendo.” Petrarca’s “parva domus et hortulus,” Boccaccio adds, will stay for ever as a witness (“testes”) to his laborious life.¹⁰

Petrarch’s *Vaucluse* and *busta Maronis* appear to represent quite the same values. In this sort of geographical narrative about the foundation of literature, love, landscape, and poetry are again represented as one: far from the urban crowds and uncontaminated by country folk, the poet lives in a *parva domus* and cultivates his *hortulus*. This statement takes on much greater importance when one notes that the author is writing it in Book XIV of his *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, that is to say the section dedicated to a personal *praise of poetry* within his complex and influential mythological treatise.

4. Let us now go back to our previous discussion about the noblewomen as a depiction of the whole city of Naples in the *Caccia di Diana*’s scenes. By the first half of the fourteenth-century Arcadian fashion had not yet spread over all of Europe, as would happen some three hundred years later during the age of Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain. And yet, the scene is similar. A social milieu reflects itself in a particular practice, in a style, in a cultural code of behavior. This was not a literary invention of Boccaccio himself. On the contrary, it was something more complex: a recognized and approved social pattern. As a consequence, what was depicted in *Caccia di Diana* was not simply a *topos*, the typical *locus amoenus* where love reigns and lovers

⁸ For a classical study on space and semiotics, see Y. Lotman and B. Uspenskij, *Tipologia della cultura* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975); an interesting study on Petersburg is to be found in Y. Lotman, *La semiosfera. L’asimmetria e il dialogo nelle strutture pensanti*, ed. S. Salvestroni (Venice: Marsilio, 1985). See also G. Alfano, *Paesaggi mappe tracciati. Cinque studi su Letteratura e Geografia* (Naples: Liguori, 2010).

⁹ See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri*, XIV, XIX, ed. V. Romano (Bari: Laterza, 1951). A more recent edition, by Vittorio Zaccaria, with an Italian translation, appeared in the series of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* vol. 7/8 (Milan: Mondadori, 1998).

¹⁰ Ibid. The friendship between Boccaccio and Petrarca, and its influence on Italian cultural context in the second half of the fourteenth century is the object of a great many studies. For this peculiar aspect, one can usefully read C. Cabaillot, “La Mavortis Miles: Petrarca in Boccaccio?,” in *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura*, ed. M. Picone and C. Cazalé Bérard (Florence: Cesati, 1998), 129-139. As regards Neapolitan milieu, one has still to go back to G. Billanovich, “Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte tra il Petrarca e il Boccaccio,” originally published in *Medioevo e Rinascimento. Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Florence: Sansoni, 1955), 1-76, then reedited in Id., *Petrarca e il primo Umanesimo* (Padua: Antenore, 1996), 459-524.

can live in peace. It was the emblem of a whole society mirroring itself. Archival research gives evidence: a good number of the women represented here were already married when the young Florentine wrote about them. Have you ever seen a matronly woman taking part in the cortège of Diana, the goddess of the virgins?

We do not know today who Zizzilla Barrile was, but her surname meant much in the Neapolitan milieu of that age.¹¹ At the same time, we know something of the other names registered in this work bringing us to real women who lived at that time. This is the case of Beritola Carafa, Cecca Bozzuta and Principessella Caracciola, among others. We can imagine all these women being busy, at the time when the work was written, with the organization of their weddings or feeding their children. The Angevin aristocratic courts studied by De Blasiis in 1886 are the real places where these women were spending their time;¹² if the reader is interested in their *controfigura di carta*, or paper miniature, he needs only to consider the gothic hills of Boccaccio's first work, all green and gold, as in a medieval illumination.¹³

Another transformation of this kind is to be found in *Teseida per le nozze d'Emilia*, Boccaccio's epic poem which translates Theseus' deeds into a chivalric but lethal contest between Arcita and Palemone, two Theban knights who fall in love with Emilia, the charming younger sister of Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons. It is quite obvious that no reference to Naples can be found here, as the story predates even the Trojan War, let alone the founding of Partenope. Still, many scholars have recognized the Angevin rituals in the equestrian fight between the lovers. In particular, it has been noted that, beneath the classical facade, the joust closely resembles Neapolitan parties and celebrations.¹⁴ Even more important for the sake of this particular discussion, is the act performed by Theseus, who, having found the rivals confronting each other in the forest, asks them to fight in the proper fashion, confronting each other inside a "teatro."

Despite it having been partially written after Boccaccio's stay in Naples, the *Teseida* is generally considered a Neapolitan work of the author: it was concluded in Florence, but the project, and I would say the *allure*, is Angevin (as the long dedication to Fiammetta clearly illustrates). And, I maintain that this peculiarity is afforded by only one device: the reference to an architectural element, the theater. There has been some argument as to whether Boccaccio knew of ancient theaters and their form and function.¹⁵ But, I would say that theater to him

¹¹ See the Introduction to Cassel and Kirham, *Diana's Hunt: Boccaccio's First Fiction*, 10-11.

¹² G. de Blasiis, "Le case dei principi angioini nella piazza di Castelnuovo," *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, 11 (1886); 12 (1887). See N. De Blasi, "Ambiente urbano e linguistico di Napoli angioina (con testimonianze da Boccaccio)," *Lingua e stile*, XIV (2009): 173-208.

¹³ R. Morosini has argued that one would have a hard time finding a "rappresentazione urbana della città" in Boccaccio's works. See her "Napoli: spazi rappresentativi della memoria," in *Boccaccio geografo* (Florence: Polistampa, 2010), 179-204.

¹⁴ R. Librandi, "Corte e cavalleria della Napoli angioina nel *Teseida* del Boccaccio," *Medioevo romanzo* 4 (1977): 53-72 [64]. For a whole consideration of this aspect, see D. Anderson, *Before the Knight's Tale. Imitation of Classical Epic in Boccaccio's "Teseida"* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988). It is worth noticing that to Fiammetta, Boccaccio's lady-love, the town of Partenope acquired, immediately after its foundation, "in picciol tempo di teatri, di templi e d'altri abituri" (A.E. Quaglio, ed., *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, xxxv 21 [Florence: Sansoni, 1963]). A thorough discussion in the important book by F. Bruni, *Boccaccio. L'invenzione della letteratura mezzana*, (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990), 196-97. See also V. Kirkham, "Chiuso parlare" in Boccaccio's "Teseida" in A.S. Bernardo and A.L. Pellegrini, eds., *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio. Studies in the Italian Trecento in honor of Charles S. Singleton* (Binghamtown: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1983), 305-51.

¹⁵ J.H. Mc Gregor, "Boccaccio's Athenian Theater. Form and Function of an Ancient Monument in *Teseida*," *Modern Language Notes*, 99 (1984): 1-42; see also J.H. Mc Gregor., *The image of antiquity in Boccaccio's "Filocolo," "Filostrato" and "Teseida"* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991).

meant “Naples,” or better, a peculiar form of gathering together which he considered typical of this town. Evidence is given by *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, where contemporary Naples is presented as a magnificent city whose citizens spend their time at weddings, bathing, taking walks by the sea, and playing. But, most of all, “nostra città,” as Fiammetta calls it, is the city of “armeggiare,” the fighting watched by smart noblemen and beautiful ladies sitting together in “logge” or, here, in “teatri.”¹⁶

I insist on this theatrical arrangement because I would suggest that the optical set is part of the transformation of Naples into a “papertown.” Naples is a real place. It is not King Arthur’s court or the garden in *Roman de la Rose*; nor is it the *Cité des dames*. On the contrary, it is a historical place well-known to the author, who makes considerable effort to convert it in a site where everyday life is abandoned. Yet in Boccaccio’s Neapolitan works, all reference to historical social life is interpreted through the cultural filter of courtesy. Between the two elements of “Real” and “Ideal,” there you find the theater: idealized urbanism transforms the Angevin capital into a written town.

5. Another aspect of this transformation is Boccaccio’s literary treatment of the littoral of Baia, which has been studied at length and whose density of poetic reference has already been demonstrated.¹⁷ This was indeed quite natural since Baia represented, along with Pozzuoli, a hydro-therapeutic site *à la page*, and was a well-known *topos* of erotic Latin poetry, both in a positive sense (Propertius, Horace, and Boccaccio’s beloved Ovid, who had exalted that beautiful town) and in a negative sense (Cicero and Seneca who had described it as a place to be vituperated). Nothing, therefore, would be more obvious than making Baia the setting, as a movie director might say today, for a love affair. What is more important for the purpose of our discussion is that the real Baia is not a part of Naples, lying as it does some thirty kilometers to the North. Neither can it be considered a kind of *villa*, a private dominion where order and work, *ratio* and *labor* could exist together in the form of honest leisure. However, Baia is not Cicero’s Villa at Tuscolo or the meditative *hortulum* of a Christian intellectual. Quite to the contrary, it was a rather noisy and crowded location, where all kinds of easy solutions were offered to lovers to satisfy their passions, whether spontaneous and licit or not.

But, what does all this mean in the rough semiotic analysis we are tracing in our discussion? If the opposition between *città* and *campagna* is suspended in Boccaccian Angevin Naples because of the intermediate position the Author occupies in its territory, halfway between the two, then the *topos* of Baia is a part of this symbolic geography. Fiammetta helps us to explain this shortly. When she recounts the period she has spent in Baia at her husband’s suggestion, she speaks of *bagni, cibi, liete danze, grandissima festa*, and of course love and lust. On the other hand, speaking of her life in Naples, she underlines *nozze, bagni, marini liti*, beautiful young men and preciously dressed ladies: apparently, you can have real fun in Baia, but you can be similarly amused in Naples. Again, there is no contrast between the two places: the first is highly recommended for both physical and psychic health, just as in the second you can

¹⁶ *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, cap. V, 27, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* vol. 5.2, ed. C. Delcorno (Milano, Mondadori, 1994). For the *logge* see Francesco Torraca, “Giovanni Boccaccio a Napoli, 1326-1339,” in *Rassegna critica della letteratura italiana*, XX e XXI (1915 and 1916). Francesco Bruni, in his quoted *Boccaccio*, has discussed the complex role and meaning of this character in the whole of Boccaccio’s work (Bruni has moreover commented, at p. 198 of his book, the reference to the ancient theater of Pozzuoli which is to be found in the same chapter five of this epistolar novel (*Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, cap. V, 27-28). After this study, M.L. Doglio, “Il libro, “lo 'ntelletto e la mano”: Fiammetta o la donna che scrive,” *Studi sul Boccaccio*, 35 (2005): 97-11, has recently stressed Fiammetta’s importance in the intellectual position elaborated by the author.

¹⁷ See I. Tufano, *Quel dolce canto: letture tematiche delle “Rime” di Boccaccio* (Florence: Cesati, 2006).

spend your time dancing and watching equestrian sports. As Fiammetta declares in Chapter V of her *Elegia*, such is the pleasure, the delight, the joy one can find in Naples that not even Homer or Virgil could have found the words to express it.¹⁸ The arenas of feasting stretch from the Neapolitan aristocrats' courts to the hills and the sandy beaches beyond. There is a cultural and symbolical uniformity between the two poles: they possess the same function. As a consequence, no opposition between *otium* and *negotium* is to be found here: in young Boccaccio's Naples there is no *negotium*, only courtesy and liberal arts are practiced in his town.

6. Although the opposition between town and countryside is suspended, the treatment of the topographic reference to Naples and its outskirts is quite different. Even if, for example in the *Filocolo*, one can read of Monte Falerno, Monte Barbaro, Baia, Pozzuoli, the "mirteo mare," and even the "bagno di Tritoli," no names are to be found when the scene is set inside the town, such as in the case of *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*.¹⁹

As there is no definite space, so too is there no calculated time: chronotopy is generic in these works.²⁰ Of course, one would expect it in the case of an "Alexandrine novel" such as *Filocolo* or a "cantare" like *Filostrato*, and yet this removal is striking. Moreover, even in his later personal correspondence Boccaccio does not seem to be interested in any particular definition of time and space when talking of the Angevin capital city. In *Epistula IX* to Zanobi da Strada (dated 1353) and in *Epistula XIII* to Francesco Nelli (probably written in 1363 but never sent on Petrarch's suggestion), where he laments the poor treatment he had suffered from Niccolò Acciaiuoli, he mentions Baia, or even the tiny village of Tripergole, but he remains silent about the Neapolitan urban sites.

Without any specific topography and chronology, there can be no specific *political* or *social* conflict, which always takes place in real time and real space. As a consequence, in Boccaccio's early works Naples appears as a site of peace where one can live at his leisure. As a matter of fact, after his return to Florence, the author writes the *Amorosa visione*, in which he condemns King Robert for his thirst for gold.²¹ Nevertheless, the judgment on the Angevin dynasty is on the whole positive because of the praise given to Carlo d'Angiò in the same *Amorosa visione* a couple of cantos before (XII, 7-27). In both cases, negative and positive, no clear reference to the town is made: this may be even due to the allegorical system of this particular case, but it does confirm a general tendency one can find everywhere in Boccaccio's work. This happens in the *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* as well, where the author hints at an ugly Midas (King Robert) who is unable to rule his country because of his greed (xxxv, 32, ff.). Harsh as this statement may sound, one should not forget that the same king is presented after all as Fiammetta's father (xxxv, 36-46). There is no real conflict, then, inside the town, which on the contrary is always offered to the reader as a wonderful place replete with "teatri, templi e altri abituri" (xxxv, 21). The "virgiliana Neapolis," as our author called it in his second Latin *epistula*, remains a city of delights.

7. The paper-like consistency of the Angevin town is particularly impressive in the celebrated

¹⁸ Boccaccio, *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*, cap. V, 27.

¹⁹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* vol. 1, ed. A.E. Quaglio, (Milan: Mondadori, 1967).

²⁰ For the concept of chronotope, see M.M. Bakhtin, "Le forme del tempo e del cronotopo nel romanzo. Saggi di poetica storica" [1937-38], in Bakhtin, *Estetica e romanzo*, ed. C. Strada Janovic (Turin: Einaudi, 1975), 231-405.

²¹ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Amorosa visione*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 3, canto XIV, ed. Vittore Branca (Milan: Mondadori, 1974), 22-33.

case of the love court in the *Filocolo*, the long episode in Book IV where Florio arrives in Partenope and is introduced to the festive activities of the young aristocratic group led by Fiammetta. I would stress the geographical consistency of this section of Boccaccio's novel. Florio, who has changed his name to "Filocolo," has arrived on the Neapolitan coast. After a dream in which he has witnessed some extraordinary things, he decides to go for a walk along the seafront with a group of friends. Let us now read the description of their quiet stroll: "con lento passo, di diverse cose parlando, verso quella parte ove le reverende ceneri dell'altissimo poeta Maro si riposano, dirizzarono il loro andare. I quali non furono così parlando guari dalla città dilungati, che essi pervenuti allato ad un giardino, udirono in esso graziosa festa di giovani e di donne."²²

Here are all the basic elements of the semiotic construction we have come across since the beginning: the walk along the sea; the tomb of the poet; the stroll down the hill of Posillipo away from the city; and finally, the garden (in *Diana's Hunt* it is the valley where the women converse with the goddess Diana). The 1339 letter in which Boccaccio promoted himself as a writer through the use of the image of Naples finds here its background: a courtly conversation in a garden is the literary interpretation of Boccaccio's ambition to be an author. No other reason is to be sought in the beginning of *Filocolo* Book I, where the writer describes himself and his melancholic love, his stroll around an abstracted city and the final encounter with his woman, who in turn orders him to compose a "picciolo libretto."²³ This *libretto*, needless to say, is the same *Filocolo*.

From the garden to the parchment, one might say: from the *onesto ragionare* to the *comporre*. This short-circuit between orality and literacy, which is so typical of Boccaccio's interpretation of the medieval tradition, is assured by a highly constructed image of the city of Naples where all particular reference to time and space, all conflict, all ideological opposition has been erased: Baia, which later in *Epistula XIII* will prove to be a space of sorrow and humiliation for the real author, is presented as a site for a delightful and peaceful life, just as it is for the chivalric center of Angevin power. As the garden is a paradigm of discussion and rhetoric cohabitation, the town is a place where all can enjoy themselves with *giostre, feste* and *danze*, sitting in a *corona*, or *circolo*, that is to say taking place within the geometrical symbol of an equally shared dignity, the archetypical figure of courtesy.²⁴

8. I would like to conclude this presentation of Boccaccio's literary treatment of Naples by briefly discussing the Neapolitan set of a celebrated story collected in his *Decameron*. In his famous essay on the *novella* of Andreuccio da Perugia (*Dec.* II, 5), Benedetto Croce shows how intensely our author took advantage of historical spatial elements.²⁵ Not only is topography much respected, it also participates in the meaning: the sheer web of narrow roads intertwining in the center of town becomes a sort of symbol for the process of growth experienced by the main character, a young merchant on his first mission abroad to buy horses in the important market of Naples.

If we may choose a parallel, we might say that Andreuccio's nocturnal journey through

²² Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, book IV, 14.

²³ Ibid, book I, 1.

²⁴ See L. Battaglia-Ricci, *Ragionare nel giardino: Boccaccio e i cicli pittorici del Trionfo della morte*. The contiguity between oral tradition and literacy in both Boccaccio and the history of Italian short story (*novella*) has been recently discussed by G. Alfano, *Nelle maglie della voce* (Naples: Liguori, 2006).

²⁵ Benedetto Croce, "La novella di Andreuccio da Perugia" [1911], in *Storie e leggende napoletane*, ed. G. Galasso (Milan: Adelphi, 1999).

the city is just like the sleepless night of the young feudal man waiting to be made a knight: when dawn arrives, both start a new life. But most of all, in this *novella*, the whole semiotic scheme we have been reconstructing is inverted: first of all, the story takes place inside the city and when, at the end of it, the character walks along the seafront, it is only to return to his accommodation (II, 5, 84). Consistently, all the other elements are inverted. Where there was courtesy in the previous works, here there is wicked ruse; where there were noble ladies, now there are prostitutes; where gallant brave young men were jousting and practicing other equestrian sports, here there are suspect pedestrians ready to steal jewels and rich garments from fresh tombs.

Moreover, there is a strong connection between this inversion and the importance the author gives to the space of what we might call *romance*. Whereas the web of roads gives life to what a modern reader would call a *novel*, or better the short *Bildungsroman* of a young merchant without much experience, the *romance* takes place in the closed space of a room, the *camera* where the Sicilian prostitute Fiordaliso makes Andreuccio believe that he is her brother. I say *romance*, and in fact, in Fiordaliso's account you can find the wonderful adventures of a young fellow (Andreuccio's father): his love affair in a distant country, a world of courtesy and ease, a political conspiracy, noblewomen falling in love. By this way, Boccaccio opposes two different registers: the *romance* of the Sicilian adventures and the *novel* of Andreuccio's nocturnal wanderings. In doing so, he gives us another version of the conversations in the garden near the "busta Maronis": Naples' gut and Naples' gardens are just the two sides of the same coin. A charming, double sided papertown, which is a further version of the image of Naples he had started building ten years before, when he was living in the Angevin Kingdom as a young man in his twenties starting his career as an author.

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