

“Lessons meete to be followed”

The European Reception of Boccaccio’s “Questioni d’amore”

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ABSTRACT

The “Questioni d’amore” from Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Filocolo* were both works of imagination and forms of cultural capital in medieval and early modern Europe. Translations into French, Spanish, and English resituated the *Questioni* into new contexts of reading, reception, and social use. Prefaces and paratexts give direct evidence of recontextualizations within political structures, cultural programs, and regimes of self-fashioning. These recontextualizations depend to a significant extent, however, on Boccaccio’s fiction itself. If the *Questioni* are stabilized into forms of exemplary meaning for later readers, their aesthetic tensions remain in both the narratives and the interpretations debated in the *Questioni*.

GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO’S WRITINGS CIRCULATED IN MEDIEVAL AND early modern Europe as works of imagination and instruction and as forms of cultural capital. The differences between these two aspects—between Boccaccio’s literary production as a writer and his reception as an author—are by no means absolute or even particularly tidy. Boccaccio served Geoffrey Chaucer as a private, suppressed, and disguised source for ambitious public poems of a pseudo-antique cast. John Lydgate repeatedly cites “myn auctour Bochas” (1.226), while recognizing Laurent de Premier-fait as the intermediary translator for his *Fall of Princes*. As a writer, Boccaccio followed the medieval protocol of composing with an eye toward the *modus tractandi* (the multiple forms of discourse used in composing) and the *modus tractatus* (the organizing principle) of a work (MINNIS 1979, MINNIS 1988). We can track his writerly impact through the influence of his narratives, formal structures, literary techniques, themes, and ideas. At the same time, we register the exchange value of his work by attending to the means of transmission through manuscripts, editions, redactions, reinventions, and translations—that is, the presentation of his writing considered as a historical form of social and cultural authority.

The sequence of thirteen "Questioni d'amore" posed and debated in Book IV of the *Filocolo* provides a particularly striking example of the hermeneutic reframing that Boccaccio's imaginative writing undergoes as it circulates within traditions at once cosmopolitan and national. Vittore Branca has observed that Boccaccio was the first vernacular writer to be redacted in other European vernaculars, and he credits Boccaccio's cultural influence to both manuscript transmission and narrative artistry (BRANCA 2001, 22–25). The *Filocolo*, as Silvia D'Amico points out, was an indispensable handbook for ambitious courtiers with literary and social aspirations (D'AMICO 2008, 196.). Recent scholarship has largely mapped the translation history of the Questioni in European vernaculars (MUÑIZ MUÑIZ 2003, RECIO 2003). Translation permitted the Questioni to be resituated in differing contexts of reception and to circulate as the products of a vernacular laureate, prolific poet, or humanistic orator able to shape identity, refine character, and support social mobility (SOZZI 1971, 12–14). What has not been understood fully in this process are the ways that Boccaccio's fiction as an imaginative work conditions its reception as cultural capital. The relation of mimesis to hermeneutics, I want to suggest, is not just linear (moving from the cause of writing to the effects of reading and social use) but frequently recursive. In significant measure, the literary fictions of the Questioni structure their own recontextualization in the paratexts and translations that mark their entry into the social imaginary of late-medieval and early modern Europe.

The Questioni function as a "lunga parentesi" (BOCCACCIO 1967, 1: 53; CHERCHI 1979, 210), situated within Book IV of the *Filocolo*, the ambitious prose retelling of the Floris and Blanchefleur story that Boccaccio composed around 1336–38 in Naples while nominally a student of canon law but actively haunting the university, royal library, and Angevin court as an apprentice writer (BRANCA 1976, 36; KIRKHAM 2001, 135–57). In Boccaccio's narrative, the Questioni are the product of enforced literary *otium*. Florio and his companions are stalled by weather from pursuing their recovery of Biancifiore and happen upon a company of young Neapolitan aristocrats whom they join in the pastime of debating questions about love under the fictive sovereignty and guidance of Fiammetta. By turns, each character in the group sets a problem of love casuistry, either as a direct question or as a story that poses a question. Fiammetta gives an answer, which is then disputed by the teller but subsequently confirmed by her with still more explanation. Fiammetta gives "lievi risposte" (4.18.6), light and gracious answers that consciously avoid plumbing the depths of the topics.

For modern critics, the Questioni represent the values of “cultura ‘ufficiale’” (Guardiani 1985–86, 34) derived from the themes and rhetorical situations of courtly lyric and transferred into narrative (BATTAGLIA 1935, CHERCHI 1979) and social performance (EDWARDS 2006). They present the “dream of a nobler world of moral excellence and gentle affections, of *gentilezza* and *amor*, of *magnanimità* and *cortesìa*” (PERELLA 1961, 337). Allegorical interpretations of the Questioni emphasize a double perspective on earthly and Christian love (KIRKHAM 2001, 193; SURDICH 2001, 23; GROSSVOGEL 1992, 26; SMARR 1986, 34–60). Despite the twin decorum of courtly trifles and Christian morality, the questions frequently unsettle the arrangements of the noble life and its stable morality. Some questions are conventional items in debate literature, with roots in Andreas Capellanus’s *De amore* and the *disputatio in utramque partem*; others reveal the hermeneutic pressures of decoding words and gestures—*parole ed atti*—within the social sphere. Parmenione’s story of clandestine courtship (4.63–66), for example, threatens to become a fabliau when kinsmen discover their sister and her lover brought together by an old woman, the Ovidian *vetula*. Caleon, the character hopelessly in love with Fiammetta calls the question on the underlying fiction of the sequence by asking directly whether a man should love or not (4.43–46). Messaallino’s final question (4.67–70) almost makes literal the modern equation of death and desire in a story that borders on necrophilia but ends in sublimated bonds of familial affection.

Boccaccio’s Questioni enjoyed an extensive reception, beginning with Boccaccio himself who retold two stories (Questioni 4 and 13) in the *Decameron* (10.4 and 10.5) and adapted the framing device for the *Ameto* and *Decameron* (recent discussion in SURDICH 2002, 146–54). Chaucer drew on Menedon’s story of Tarolfo’s impossible love with its final question about generosity (4.31–34) to tell the Franklin’s Tale (EDWARDS 1996). From the fifteenth century and perhaps earlier, the Questioni circulated as a separate work in independent manuscripts, of which four, possibly five, witnesses are extant.¹ The holdings of Renaissance libraries contain other

1. Independent Manuscripts of the Questioni d’amore (s.xv)

Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellonska, Cod. Ital. qu. 16

Rome, Biblioteca dell’Accademia dei Lincei, Codex 44, E, 31 (Rossi 184)

Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Ottoboni Latinus 2151

Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Rossi 936

Another fifteenth-century manuscript of the Questioni is reported from a sale on May 5, 2003: “Questo codice contiene le tredici questioni d’amore disperate e risolte nel 5° Libro del Filocolo di Messer Giovanni Boccaccio” following the division of the *Filocolo* into seven books made by Gaetano Tizzone da Pofi

possible evidence of lost versions of the Questioni. The 1436 inventory of the possessions of Niccolò III d'Este, Marquis of Ferrara lists "Libro uno chiamato Filogolo che trata de fati d'amore in vulgare", and a sixteenth-century list refers to "li Dubii del Philocolo" bound with the intriguing title "lo libro de Griseyda cum Pandiro" (BRANCA 1958, 40). The 1472 edition of the *Filocolo* signals the integral quality of the Questioni by distinguishing the episode typographically from other portions of the work (SURDICH 1975, 111). Victoria Kirkham tracks multiple lines of influence from the Questioni. The fifteenth-century Sienese poet Giacomo di Giovanni di Ser Minuccio rewrote the episode in terza rima in his *Libro delle difinitioni* (SURDICH 1975, 111; KIRKHAM 2001, 15; BOCCARDO 1991; PAPA 1887 for Varchi's rendering of Parmenione's question). From the same period a panel on a *cassone*, a large wedding chest, illustrates a scene from the first *Questione* (KIRKHAM 2001, 188). Benedetto Varchi used the Questioni as a source for lectures about love and jealousy presented to the Florentine Academy in the sixteenth century.² Certainly the most influential restaging of the Questioni occurs in Baldassare Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano*, where Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga presides over "belle questioni" (1.5) at the court of Urbino, fine questions whose coverings conceal allegorical significance and so give the lie to Fiammetta's pretense of trifling courtly banter.

Outside Italy, the Questioni are a source for themes and phrasing in the fifteenth-century Catalan chivalric romance *Tirant lo Blanc* (PUJOLS 1999). In France, Pierre Brantôme's *Recueil des Dames* mentions "deux livres tant excellens: *La Flammette*, et *Le Philocope*" (1.7). Later, Brantôme adapts Grazia's question (4.59–62) to debate whether touch, sight, or words give the greatest pleasure in love (2.2) and retells Ferramonte's question (4.51–54): "Or le venerable et docte Boccace, parmy ses questions de son *Philocoppe*, en le neufiesme, il fait celle-là mesme: de laquelle de ces trois, de la mariée, de la vefve et de la fille, l'on doit plustost s'en rendre amoureux pour plus heureusement conduire son desir à effect?" (2.4; BRANTÔME 1991, 455). In France, the Questioni stand as a synecdoche for the *Filocolo* as a whole and as a source for the traditions of the sentimental novel (HAUVETTE 1909, 3). In England, Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels from 1578, likely found the source for his *Flower of Friendship* in Pedro

in his 1527 edition and observed in the 1594 Giunti edition (Venezia – Finarte Semanzato asta 5 Maggio 2003).

2. The second of Varchi's *Lezzioni* was translated by Tofte 1615. In the sixteenth-century Sienese *Congrega dei Rozzi*, "questioni" remained vital sources in both high and popular culture (CHIERICHINI 2006).

de Luján (MONCADA 1970) but acknowledges as his models “Boccace & Countie Baltizar” who “with others recou[n]ted many proper deuises for exercises, both pleasant, & profitable, which . . . were vsed in the courts of Italie, and some much like to them, are practised at this day in the Englishe court, wherein is not onely delectable, but pleasure ioyned wyth profite, and exercyse of the witte” (TILNEY 1571, sig. A5). Brian Melbancke’s *Philotimus* (Melbancke 1583) cites Menedon’s story, misidentifying the lady as Fiammetta (sig. O4v-P) and Parmenione’s story from the Questioni (sig. I37).

Evidence for the Questioni as cultural capital rather than narrative or exemplary sources lies in translations made in the sixteenth century, particularly in the framing and paratexts given these translations. And it is in these materials that Boccaccio’s writerly commitment to fiction (MENETTI 2009, 34) structures the reception and social use of his work. The Questioni were translated into French in 1530 under the title *Treize elegantes demandes d’amours* with a privilege from Jean de la Barre, Provost and Governor of Paris, granting four-years’ exclusive printing rights to Galliot du Pré, printer to the University of Paris and the publisher of Villon and Vergil. A version without the privilege appeared soon thereafter, possibly in 1531 (RAJNA 1902, 32). The translation was reprinted in 1541 with illustrations that had appeared earlier in the court collection *Les Fleurs de Poesie Françoysse* and Hélisenne de Crenne’s sentimental novel *Les angoyssees douloureuses* (D’AMICO 2008, 199–200). The translation also exercised an influence on the full translation of the *Filocolo* made by Adrien Sevin in 1542 (HAUVETTE 1909, 15).

A Spanish translation of the Questioni made its way from manuscript to a pirated edition in Sevilla in 1541 under the title *Laberinto de amor*. The translation is the work of Diego López de Ayala, vicar, canon, and artistic superintendent of the cathedral of Toledo and co-translator of Sannazzaro. His collaborator on the Sannazzaro translations, Diego de Salazar, wrote poetic summaries of each question and answer. This translation appropriates a title usually associated with Boccaccio’s *Corbaccio* but perhaps adapted here for commercial purposes to echo Juan de Mena’s *Laberinto de Fortuna*. A second issue, likewise unauthorized, appeared in 1546. The translation regained its title as *Treze questiones muy graciosas* in another 1546 edition, prefaced by Blasco de Garay. This edition was reissued in 1549 and was subsequently reprinted in Venice in 1553 when Boccaccio’s Questioni were added to an earlier work, Diego de San Pedro’s *Question de amor*, which debates which of two lovers suffers more—one whose beloved is dead or one who serves his beloved without hope of reward. An English

version of the *Questioni* appeared in 1567, translated by H. G., probably Henry Grantham, tutor in Italian to the children of aristocrats and gentry and translator of Scipio Lentulo's Latin treatise on Italian grammar (WRIGHT 1941, 300–3). Its original title—*A plesaunt disport of diuers noble personages*—became the subtitle to *Thirteen most pleasant and delectable questions* when the work was reprinted in 1571 and 1587.

The front matter of these translations serves as a literary space where Boccaccio's imaginative work provides sources to reimagine and recontextualize the *Questioni*. Here reception involves not just new frames of meaning but the shaping of readers in differing historical contexts. In his prefatory letter, the anonymous French translator regards the *Questioni* as an illustration of a four-fold taxonomy devised, he says, by the ancients to distinguish separate species of love, their aims, and the rewards and punishments that follow from pursuing them. His narrative source is Fiammetta's discourse on three kinds of love, which, as we shall see, both elevates love and recognizes its constraints and contingency. In the translator's hierarchy of love, these broad concerns narrow to matters of conduct and erotic self-governance. Each species has a classical deity and corresponding narratives: chaste love is represented by Apollo with the stories of his slaying the Python and pursuing Daphne, loyal love by Orpheus and Eurydice, disdainful love by Narcissus and Echo, and bestial, libidinous love by Circe. The highest love for the French translator is "louable amytié qui est chaste & pudique" (fol. iiv), and Apollo's laurel is a sign of virtue and victory founded on the denial of pleasure. Loyal love provides an example to inspire imitation in domestic life and beyond. The lesson of Narcissus is a form of self-alienation, death without knowing the experience of honest joy. Circe provides a monitory example as "la deuoratrice de tout bon cuer" and "linique immitatrice et heritiere de vices" (fol. vr). If Boccaccio's Fiammetta recognizes the complexity and risks of love, the French translator describes the moral technology for negotiating courtly values, particularly as they apply to women as social agents. The likely milieu is the one that supported the active collaboration of Clément Marot, Marguerite de Navarre, and François I in *Les Fleurs de Poesie Françoisye* and sustained the explicit female audience of Hélienne de Crenne's works.

The translator makes two revealing gestures in his prefatory letter. His work, he says, is a chance discovery. The collection has fallen into his hands with questions already debated that confirm his taxonomy: "fort bien iugees et decidees co[n]firmatiues des dictes quatre especes" (fol. 5r). His exegesis, then, precedes his text, and the *Questioni* serve as an occasion for doctrine already established and simply awaiting illustration for the lady

addressed in his preface. Here Boccaccio's fiction, not its interpretation, is belated, and we can gauge the separation of the two by the translator's mistaken impression that there are twelve rather than thirteen Questioni. Moreover, the Questioni are placeholders, he claims, for other works that will bear his direct, even sexualized authorship—"oeuvres par luy mesmes procrees" (fol. vv). For some readers, the motif of a future work echoes the ending of Dante's *Vita nuova* (HAUVETTE 1909, 5; D'AMICO 2008, 200). Boccaccio's work provides, however, an immediate context. The translator, who signs his letter as "Le seruiteur", appropriates the discourse of ethics and conduct to position himself doubly within a fiction of women's reading, as if he were Caleon within the Questioni and Boccaccio in the introduction to the *Filocolo*.

The Spanish translation made by Diego López de Ayala reproduces a different Boccaccian metanarrative of composition. López de Ayala occupies the same place of otium—of cultured leisure—that is forced upon Florio and his companions at Naples as the enabling fiction of the Questioni. He reads Boccaccio's Italian romance "por mi passatiempo" but establishes its cultural value by situating the Questioni explicitly within the Angevin court of Naples. In his framing, "madama Maria" (sig. A3r), King Robert's daughter, is the authorizing source for composition, and Maria rather than Fiammetta is made the queen presiding over the Questioni in his translation. Sending his work to its recipient, the translator suggests a path of reading on a straight road toward its ending ("por camino derecho . . . a la fin de la obra") that metaphorically retraces Florio's pursuit and recovery of Biancifiore and Boccaccio's larger pattern of converting desire to married love and pagan to Christian Spain.

Blasco de Garay, in his remarks to the reader, returns the translation to its initial literary space of cultivated leisure. He discovers the translation in López de Ayala's library, a male domain of literary retreat for students of letters, of connoisseurship for those who can appreciate the refinements of style, and of play among the coterie of readers, friends, and intimates (LÓPEZ-VIDRIERO 1992). The game in the library is to discover the author who has composed "tan elegante y polída Castellana prosa" (sig. A2r)—that is, a prose that corresponds in its own idiom to the stylistic achievement already seen in Boccaccio's writing. The "verdadero interprete" of the Questioni is of course the owner ("dueño") of the library, who exercises dominion and jurisdiction ("poder") over its contents. Blasco de Garay contrives to publish his edition of the Questioni as a corrective to a pirated text, for which he will supply emendations, a title, and the author's latest refinements. His aims, as recent scholars note, are manifestly self-

serving, linking author, translator, and editor-publisher (MUÑIZ MUÑIZ 2003, RECIO 2003). What has gone unremarked is Blasco de Garay’s troping of Boccaccio in the midst of publishing his *Questioni*. His preface tells a parallel story to the narrative of the *Filocolo* in the romance of a translation wrongfully taken, published without authorization, but now recovered and published in its proper form. Moreover, in the *Filocolo*, Boccaccio claims that he takes on the task of recording the story of Florio and Biancifiore so as to rescue it from the mob, from the “fabulosi parlari degli ignoranti” (1.1.25). The issue in the Spanish translation, however, is to control the dispersal of the text, to negotiate the movement not just from Italian to Spanish but also from the curatorial, coterie world of the manuscript to the unruly world of print and mass readership. Blasco de Garay’s “corrected” and titled book is a product for the marketplace and for the readers he pretends to despise.

H.G. locates his English translation in a sphere closer to Blasco de Garay’s than to “Le seruiteur” of the French translation. In his dedicatory letter to his patron, he commends the *Questioni* as a work offering “sundrie Lessons meete to be followed”. His patron, William Rice, Esquire, was possibly the beneficiary of a land grant and a lease assigned in the reign of Queen Mary. If so, he was doubtless a man of some political agility who managed to remain close enough to power to continue offering “good tournes” and benefits despite the murderous toll of regime change in mid-sixteenth-century England. H.G.’s commendation of the *Questioni* follows the literary decorum of Horace’s *Ars poetica* to claim that the work will bring “pleasure and delight”. He asserts the fitness of the lessons because in their framework of casuistry and debate the *Questioni*, as in the French translation, have been “duely considered” — carefully pondered and teased out in their moral complexity. Boccaccio’s authorship secures a welcome for them among learned readers who know “his sundry well written workes”, by which H.G. means the Latin genealogy of the gods and the fates of illustrious men and women.

H.G. offers his translation as a “toke[n] and pledge” of good will. The social world it enters is the sphere of what he might call the early modern managerial class — counselors, men of affairs, landholders, political and cultural middlemen. His work also participates in an agenda of literary nationalism by making Boccaccio’s *Questioni* as available in English as it is in Italian or French. (The same argument was famously made in Henry V’s commissioning of Lydgate’s *Troy Book*.) H.G.’s metaphor to express this national ambition remains, however, strangely Boccaccian. It is a commonplace of early modern translation that writers reclothe a work in native

dress. In this particular case, the work advertised on the title page is “Written in Italian by M. IOHN BOCACE Florentine and Poet Laureate”. Thus when H.G. offers “this ITALIAN Disporte, the which I haue tourned out of his natiue attyre into this our ENGLISH habite”, he evokes one of the most popular tales from the *Decameron*, propagated by Petrarch and other translators, including Chaucer’s Clerk in the *Canterbury Tales*. H.G. specifically recalls the scene in which Griselda is “translated” from her home in Giannucolè’s *villetta* to Gualtieri’s palace and reclothed in the garments appropriate to her new office as marchesa of Saluzzo. The Questioni enter early modern English culture through the figure of Boccaccio’s Griselda, who brings the right virtues to a new social use. Like the Griselda story in medieval and early modern Europe, the Questioni are adapted from the refined environment of the Florentine *brigata* to the sphere of domestic and civic instruction, from aristocratic *otium* to the moral business of appropriate lessons and self-improvement. They have become in the process the vehicle of self-fashioning rather than the markers of election and exclusion. The imaginative power of Boccaccio’s fictions furnishes not just models of conduct and being but also the conditions of intelligibility.

The translators’ framing aims to stabilize the reception of the Questioni in various ways—as illustrations of love doctrine, as a pirated text reauthorized by being reconnected to its source, as “sundrie Lessons meete to be followed” by men operating in a sphere of power, favors, and symbolic exchange. The Questioni themselves do not, however, resolve the issues they raise. Of Fiammetta’s interlocutors, only Menedon seems to be satisfied—“fu rimaso contento” (4.35.1)—in the silence that follows her final judgment. The debate, like the question or story that generates it, is designed to remain open and thus continually to demand and forestall closure. This quality explains much about Boccaccio’s hold on his readers and much about the cultural power and social utility that his Questioni exercised in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The questions are not riddles to solve but exercises to model conduct and—most important—to transform those who posit answers to them into reflective moral agents. Boccaccio certainly captures this sense of aporia at the end of the *Decameron*, as characters take various sides in response to Dioneo’s scandalous tale of Griselda and Gualtieri. Two of the Questioni hold a particular interest for readers and early translators because they disclose what might underlie the lessons ostensibly taught by the questions and stories.

At the center of the Questioni, in the seventh of thirteen questions, Caleon uncovers the tragic predicament beneath the moral enterprise of love, conduct, and courtesy. Boccaccio sets this disclosure within two

moments of silence—first Caleon's mute distraction before he speaks and then Fiammetta's considered pause before she answers him. In this protracted moment, a ray of sun penetrates the greenery surrounding the meadow, strikes off the surface of the fountain, illuminates the face of Fiammetta, and reflects in the laurel crown she wears. Caleon, who sits directly opposite Fiammetta, explains to her that a small spirit came with the light and lodged first in her eyes, then in her crown where it moved like a bird and sang a balletta in praise of her. Florio and the others look at Fiammetta, as she sits transfigured, "vestita d'umiltà" (4.43.15). Caleon then poses what Luigi Surdich (2001, 24) has called the only serious philosophical question in the episode: "Graziosa reina, io disidero di sapere se a ciascuno uomo, a bene essere di se medesimo, si dee innamorare o no. E questo a dimandare mi muovono diverse cose vedute e udite e tenute dalle varie opinioni degli uomini" ("Gracious queen, I wish to know if every man, for his own well-being, ought to love or not. And several things seen, heard, and held in the various opinions of men move me to ask this" [4.43.16]).

This scene, as scholars have noted, is densely layered in its poetic allusions and resonance. The description of Fiammetta "vestita d'umiltà" echoes Dante's Beatrice as she is seen in the social and civic world of the *Vita nuova* (26.2, 26.6). The balletta sung in Fiammetta's honor has a likely source in Dante's lyric "Per una ghirlandetta". As the "spirittello", identified as Cupid, takes the form of a bird in Fiammetta's crown, it becomes a visual quotation of Guido Guinizelli's famous simile, "Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore / come l'ausello in selva a la verdura" ("Love returns always to the noble heart like a bird to the green in the forest"). The imagery of spirit, eyes, and light is taken from the working lexicon of love lyric and particularly the dolce stil nuovo. Caleon is helplessly in love with Fiammetta, and he is the counterpart to Boccaccio as lover in the metafiction of the *Filocolo*.

Caleon's question makes the crucial philosophical stipulation of a final cause for love: should every man love for his own well-being or possibly to belong to himself, to realize fully what it is to be oneself (BOCCACCIO 1969, 507n)—"a bene essere di se medesimo"? Fiammetta's answer unsettles Caleon's expectations and those of Boccaccio's readers. She rejects Caleon's assumption that a lover can ever be in full possession of himself or herself. Forced by the rules of the game to speak against what they desire, the company is subject to Cupid and serve him at the cost of their own interests—"per bene di sé" (4.44.9). Fiammetta goes on to distinguish honest love ("amore onesto"), pleasurable love ("amore per diletto"), and

utilitarian love (“amore per utilità”). The scheme, as commentators note, is adapted from Aristotle’s discussion of friendship in Book 8 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* and from Cicero’s *De amicitia*, and it is applied in Dante’s three great poetic topics in the *De vulgari eloquentia* (2.2.8): *salus* (well-being), *venus* (passionate love), and *virtus* (virtue) (SURDICH 1975, 119). Fiammetta gives a Platonizing cast to “amore onesto” by evoking the love of the Creator for his creatures and the bonds that hold together the physical and social worlds. She replaces Aristotle with Boethius, and not entirely in a smooth fit (EDWARDS 2006, 115). Her most radical formulation, however, is the recognition that the love she and her companions follow is both tragic and impossible. They are constrained to follow “amore per diletto” and do so against the true interests of self and of liberty (“libertà”). They invest love with the impossible demand of meeting their desires completely: “che egli interamente possa i nostri disii fornire” (4.44.6). As she claims later, echoing the definition given by Andreas Capellanus, love is an irrational will originating in the pleasures of sight and memory and multiplying to the point where it misdirects one’s attention toward useless ends (4.46.3).

At the very center of the *Questioni*, then, Boccaccio places the entire enterprise of love under erasure. Fiammetta has, as she feared, said “in vere parole” what ought perhaps to have properly remained unsaid (“il licito tacere” [4.46.2]). The festive world of love casuistry that she calls into being stands revealed as radically disenchanted. Early modern translators responded to key elements of the episode in ways that contain its radical disavowal of love as a moral project. The final cause that Caleon stipulates for love—that it serves one’s well-being—is transformed by López de Ayala into love for or with all one’s power (“a todo su poder”). H.G., without specific textual authority, nonetheless gets the underlying idea exactly right: should a man, he asks, be “enamoured for his delight” (fol. 34; sig. I2r)? The useless ends toward which Fiammetta says pleasurable love directs our attention become things of little benefit or success (“de poco prouecho” [sig. D1r]) in the Spanish translation and “things unprofitable” (fol. 36v; sig. I4v) in H.G.’s rendering. The most dramatic change occurs, however, in the French translation: here the elaborate machinery that surrounds the question simply disappears.³ Caleon returns from the unexplained reverie of his

3. The *Treize elegantes demandes d’amours* also cut out the account of Tebano’s magic journey to secure the materials to make the May garden in January in Menedon’s question, a set piece adapted from Ovid’s description of the healing of Eson, Jason’s father, in the *Metamorphoses*. The English and Spanish translations retain the episode.

"doulx pensers" to pose the question: "Je desire scauoir tresgrande royne si aucun ho[m]me ayma[n]t le bien [fol. 46v; sig. F6v] de soy mesmes se doit enamourer ou non / et a ce dema[n]der me meuuent diuerses choses ouyes & veues / et venues de diuerses oppinions des hommes". Caleon's original question is robbed of its poetic allusions and resonance and becomes instead merely another item illustrating the translator's taxonomy of love. The French translator cancels out the literary references that signify, in effect, the entire poetic topic of love. The fruit of moral lessons has made the pleasing fictional surface disappear.

Messaallino, the last speaker to pose his question, extends Fiammetta's uncovering of love at the same time that he seeks to recuperate the social world put at risk by her tragic perspective. He sees the final question as summative and rivalrous, for he aims to adorn and elevate the other questions by appropriating the style of easy graciousness that Fiammetta initially claimed as her own mode of expression. His story is "una novelletta assai graziosa a udire, nella quale una quistione assai leggiera a terminare cade" ("a little story that is very charming to hear, which raises a question that will make a pleasant conclusion" [4.67.1]). In many respects, Messaallino tropes Menedon's story of Tarolfo, the gentleman who courts a happily married woman who poses an impossible demand, which he answers through the powers of beneficent magic. Both *novelle* are rewritten by Boccaccio in the *Decameron* with the same thematic resolution in which desire is transformed into charity. This particular story also has a fascinating analogue in the fourteenth-century account of Ginevra degli Almieri, who uses the central conceit of a woman recovered from death to exchange husband for lover (RAJNA 1902, 62–68).

Messaallino's story is a parable of the accommodations of desire that an aristocratic subject must make in the public sphere. Its protagonist, the knight who loves a married lady, receives no word or gesture of her interest and so displaces his desire into honorable service as a magistrate in another city. After the woman dies in childbirth and is buried honorably by husband and kinsmen in a family sepulcher with her ancestors, he returns to claim, as he says, what love has denied him. Entering the sepulcher, he kisses the woman, takes her in his arms, and, unable to satisfy himself with kisses, moves his hands over her bosom and cold breasts and begins to probe "le segrete parti" (4.67.7) beneath her rich clothing. He detects a feeble pulse, whether from the woman or the child is not clear, and carries her out of the tomb to his mother's house where she is revived in an herbal bath and gives birth to her son. As she recovers in the knight's household, he enjoins her to silence while he returns to discharge the last part of his

official duty. When he returns, he invites the woman's husband, brothers, and others to a banquet at which he presents the woman in her burial clothes and jewelry, and seats her between her husband and himself. The husband cannot decide whether the woman is his wife or a simulacrum. Asked who she is, the wife replies that she has been brought here by the knight through unknown means from "that gracious life which is desired by everyone" ("da quella vita graziosa che da tutti è disiata" [4.68.20]). To resolve the ambiguity that he has so carefully orchestrated, the knight leads his guests to another room where he gives the infant son to his father and presents the woman as wife and mother.

Messaallino brings the Questioni to an end by creating and resolving a scandal. The knight gains access to his beloved only in his moment of private pleasure in the tomb, which verges on necrophilia. Taking what love has denied him, he shows what desire demands. Commentators rightly observe that his desire is "a sterile love—a desire for something dead" (GROSSVOGEL 1992, 230–31), a penetration to secret parts that remain the same in life or death. But the knight's desire does not merely have an apparent corpse as its object; his desire is death itself, for it makes an impossible and escalating demand of satisfaction from the lady's body—from kiss to touch to fondling. Moreover, the knight's vicarious penetration depends on another form of trespass—he must enter the space of a family tomb where the lady has bonds of blood and alliance to a husband, family, and ancestors. If entering the tomb represents the wish to enter her body, it also signifies a wish to enter the social network where she reposes, the community of the living and the dead. The resolution Messaallino devises for his tale turns precisely on the artful transposition of erotic desire with social affinity.

The translations of the Questioni register the tensions of Messaallino's scandalous story. When the husband asks who the lady is, the knight claims that he can say only that he brought her "di sì piacevole luogo" ("from so pleasing a place" [4.67.20]). The lady immediately confirms that she has come "da quella vita graziosa che da tutti è disiata" ("from that gracious life desired by everyone"). The immediate reference here is to the promised bliss of the afterlife. Boccaccio's translators, however, take the woman's tomb as the intended referent, so that the knight removes her from "so unpleasant a place" (fol. 56v; sig. D2v) in H.G.'s translation and "de vn lugar desplaziente" (sig. E6v) in López de Ayala's version, the charnel house of her premature death. The further implication of this reading is that he has put her beyond the condition of his desire in the place where

he comes close to violating her body. Similarly, when the knight probes "le segrete parti" of her body, the Spanish translation goes beyond Boccaccio's euphemism by saying explicitly that he moves his hands down her body to its most secret parts: "baxando las manos por las partes mas secretas de su cuerpo" (E6r). Later, he places the woman's body in an herbal bath in order to revive her. Boccaccio calls it a "solenne bagno" (4.67.9), a ritual bath. The Spanish translation suppresses the ritual associations, just as elsewhere it replaces Boccaccio's archaizing references to pagan gods with Christian references. In H.G.'s translation, the bath becomes a "hote house" (fol. 55r; sig. D1r), a term that denotes both a bathing-house and a brothel in Elizabethan English.

Boccaccio's narrative turn at the end of Messaallino's tale employs a device that he uses earlier in Menedon's story and refines later in the *Decameron*, where he retells Menedon's and Messaallino's *novelle*. The lover's desire is an unwanted demand for a virtuous married woman and a threat to the social order for powerful men in civic life. It can be deferred by ingenuity in the impossible task assigned Tarolfo or displaced in Messaallino's tale by the honorable service performed by the knight as a magistrate in a neighboring city. At the end of the Questioni, however, Boccaccio stages the full transformation of desire into charity. In the scheme that Fiammetta sets out earlier, pleasurable love ("amor per diletto") becomes honest love ("amore onesto"). This occurs after the knight restores the lady to her husband and begins to serve her "con quella tenerezza e pura fede che se sorella gli fosse stata" ("with such tenderness and pure faith as if she had been his sister" [4.67.22]). His love for her as a sister places the knight within the structure of bonds and connections in "amore onesto", which radiate, as Fiammetta explains, from the Creator's love to his creatures to the physical ordering of the world to the cohesion of social institutions. When he rewrites the story in the *Decameron*, Boccaccio will work out the social implications of loving another man's wife as if she were a sister. Gentile de' Carisendi, the Bolognese counterpart of Messaallino's knight, becomes, in effect, the husband's brother-in-law and so a friend with him, his relatives, and his wife's relatives—the entourage summoned to the scene of restoration. The Questioni stop short of explaining the full articulation of these wider social bonds. H. G. translates Boccaccio's terms exactly: "This knight entreated this Gentlewomen with that tendernesse and that pure faith, as if she had bene his sister" (fol. 57r; sig. D3r). The Spanish translator emphasizes the joy of reunion and the couple's thanks for the knight's gift, "la merced rescebida". The knight continues to serve

the lady with loyalty and love: “con aq[ue]lla fee y amor como si fuera su hermana”. The French translator suggests nonetheless that Boccaccio’s early modern readers recognized the story’s transformation of desire into honest love. In the *Treize elegantes demandes*, he evokes Fiammetta’s highest form of love to describe the knight’s service with “honestete & pure foy” (fol. 78r; sig. J6r).

The translators of Boccaccio’s *Questioni* performed significant work in the transition from late-medieval to early modern Europe, from manuscript to print culture. To exercise historical influence they had to become in some measure unhistorical, for the context of Boccaccio’s writing in Naples in the 1330s gives way to a general sense that the *Questioni* represent courtly culture at all times and in all its European places. The *Questioni* are associated with the rise of humanism in Spain, with regimes of discipline and power fostered by central monarchic power in France, with the self-fashioning that historicist critics have made the moral and psychological narrative of Tudor and Elizabethan England. The translators’ framing certainly registers the effects of historical forces, as the *Questioni* are made to answer the demands of exemplarity, to give lessons in conduct to social actors in differing contexts. But the *Questioni* are “historical” in another sense when they engage the imaginative power of Boccaccio’s fiction and seek to render it in another idiom. The translators’ task requires an act of invention that finally mirrors our own effort to read Boccaccio’s text with understanding and insight.

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