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REFLECTIONS ON THE "ARABIC" WORLD: BOCCACCIO'S NINTH STORIES

Our long-standing concepts of what constituted the "Arabic" world, and its influence, for a European of the eleventh through fourteenth centuries, are currently being amplified and revised.¹ Here we hardly have time to explore all that has been simplistic and anachronistic in our nineteenth- and twentieth-century "Orientalist" definitions, nor can we discuss all the hows and whys of an *Orientalism*, à la Said (1978), in much of our medieval studies. Without such an exploration of the critical background, then, we shall require some degree of good-faith acceptance of a different view of the constituent elements of the "Arabic" world (thus the quotation marks) for a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Italian.²

To begin with, the Hispano- and Siculo-Arabic world had provided a vast quantity of the philosophical texts and scientific innovations

¹ The reluctance of traditional Romance scholarship to acknowledge a central role for the Arabic world and its texts in the development of medieval literature is explored in Menocal 1981, 1985, and 1987. Discussions of this problem in the more general sphere of medieval European historiography include Watt 1972 and 1974, Chejne 1980, Gibb, 1955, and Makdisi, 1976, just to name a few.

² It is critical to underline here that the term "Arabic" is used in quotes because the material-cultural-geographical orbit that is to be called to mind is the one that we reconstruct as operative for a contemporary of Dante or Boccaccio. Thus, it may be in some part "inaccurate" from a factual, historical point of view, as were many of the popular views on what constituted both Arabic and Islam in the European Middle Ages (see especially Daniel 1960 and 1975). It also would have been likely

that had resulted in the so-called Renaissance of the Twelfth Century.³ Among the most noteworthy of these was certainly the New Aristotle, that is, Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle, which caused a revolution in philosophy throughout Europe. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries we have effectively, if unconsciously, euphemized much of this by naming exclusively the Greek writers and texts which, in new translations and with new commentaries, were the focus and stimulus for the great innovative movements of the day. But a less anachronistic and ideologically conditioned account would recognize that such texts, at the time of their introduction and acceptance in the rest of Europe, were closely associated with the European Arabic centers and individuals responsible for their translation and propagation. Thus, those instrumental in making available such texts, like Frederick II and Michael Scot, were naturally associated with that cultural "Arabism," considered by some dangerous and heretical, whose centers in the thirteenth century had been Toledo and Sicily.⁴ Identified with the same seductive, aggressively secular world were the fields of medicine, astronomy, astrology, and other natural sciences, and many other areas of scientific discourse in which basic texts destined to spread throughout Europe had been written and transmitted by the Arabs and/or by Arabophiles such as Scot and Frederick.

Also associated with that world, sometimes accurately, sometimes quite fancifully, was the whole territory of the Near East, and in some

to include, at least at its periphery, individuals and texts that were not Arabic strictly speaking, such as some versions of Aristotle (Greek) and individuals such as Frederick II (Norman-Sicilian), that were, however, inextricably tied to the multifaceted, polymorphous Arabic world at that time still in the process of being "Europeanized." In such cases, neither the "true" origins, say Greek, nor the eventual complete absorption into the revitalized Latin world (the perspective from which we generally view it) should be allowed to obscure the point of view at a time during which the immediate sources (Arabic, Siculo- or Hispano-Arabic) were most apparent and the eventual de-Arabization was not necessarily predictable.

³ See not only the classic Haskins, 1927, but also 1915 and 1924, both especially important for the material that was transmitted through Sicily, especially under the Normans. Succinct enumerations of the varied and abundant Arabic contributions to the intellectual and technological advances of this first Renaissance may also be found in Watt, 1972, Metlitski, 1977, and Makdisi, 1976, the latter with special emphasis on less explored areas of scholasticism and educational institutions.

⁴ A particularly revealing instance of this is in the image of Frederick II and his many pursuits. See, among his many biographies, Kantorowicz, 1957, and Van Cleve, 1972; see also Gabrieli, 1952, for the role played by Scot in intellectual pursuits and the translation activities at Frederick's court.

measure even the Greek world, which continued to be accessible largely through the translations provided by Arabophiles and whose geography was often linked with the larger Eastern Mediterranean. The Holy Land, at once the focus of crusading efforts and, as the inadvertent by-product, locus of much cultural interaction, was another of the centers of this Arab world.⁵ There, and in close-by Sicily and Spain, these Arabs had developed a courtly life style legendary for its extravagance—hardly a surprising image, since for several centuries the vast majority of the goods that began to improve the technological and material circumstances of northern Europe had been received directly or indirectly through the trade routes that led to the Middle East and the courts of Spain and Sicily.⁶ The Sicilian connection was especially strong during the reigns of the "baptized Sultans," Frederick II and his Norman grandfather, Roger.⁷ Finally, an integral part of this rich and complex view is the more stereotypical Arab, derived chiefly from epic literature and warfare, the religious-ideological enemy belonging to a society that is both morally and socially primitive. But it can only be considered a fraction of the much more variegated view—often a love-hate relationship—that would have been likely in the age when Arabic culture was a major force in Europe.⁸

We are perhaps fortunate that it is virtually *de rigueur* nowadays to begin with the Dantean subtext, for that is what opened a perspective for us on Boccaccio's view of the Arabic world. Thus, we shall here let the *Commedia* launch us into the *Decameron*. Dante's attitude toward this universe seems, at first blush, to have been unambiguously

⁵ Metlitski, 1977, is one of the various scholars to focus on the extraordinary degree of acculturation to Arabic ways produced, ironically, by the Crusading effort. The biographies of Frederick, note 4 above, provide comparable insights. A recent and fresh view of the interaction may also be found in Finucane, 1983.

⁶ Evocations of the richness, both material and cultural, of such courts, can be found in numerous sources, including especially Van Cleve, 172, Rizzitano, 1967 (both for Sicily), most recently in López-Baralt, 1986 (for Spain), and, for the interaction between the two, Gabrieli, 1950 and 1952.

⁷ Castro, 1954, neatly describes the grandson's ambivalent allegiance: "Frederick had one foot in Islam, the other in Rome."

⁸ Daniel, 1960, is the fullest exploration of the more stereotypical view as it was constituted and expressed in the medieval period, but see also Southern, 1962. It is a monochromatic view, however, that persists to this day and is believed by some scholars to have been the dominant or principal one between two cultures otherwise completely isolated from each other. A brief and succinct example of such attitudes, coming from an Arabist in this case, is Gorton, 1976.

negative, judging from what he says in the *Divine Comedy*. When Milton (*Paradise Lost* 1:348) would call Satan the "great sultan," he was perhaps echoing just such a view in his Dantean subtext. Araby's direct and easily identifiable representatives were, for Dante, first of all Muhammad and his followers, that "foul folk" who had usurped Christian right in the Holy Land. The Crusading ancestor whom Dante reverently places at the center of *Paradiso*, "insieme... cristiano e Cacciaguida," won his bejewelled place in heaven when he died fighting "the iniquity of that law":

Poi seguitai lo 'mperador Currado;
 ed el mi cinse de la sua milizia,
 tanto per bene ovvar li venni in grado.
 Dietro li andai incontro a la nequizia
 di quella legge il cui popolo usurpa,
 per colpa d'i' pastor, vostra giustizia.
 Quivi fu'io da quella gente turpa
 disviluppato dal mondo fallace,
 lo cui amor molt'anime deturpa;
 e venni dal martiro a questa pace. (*Par* 15.139-48)

If Cacciaguida, who soldiered for the faith, sparkles in the starry cross of the sphere of Mars, Dante drops Muhammad and his zealot son-in-law, Alî, deep into the funnel of Hell. As schismatics, their place is the ninth pouch of the *Malebolge*, where they are walking signs of horrifying violence and filth. Muhammad himself is spokesman for the ghastly population of the pouch, "seminator di scandalo e di scisma," whose shockingly mutilated bodies summon images of battlefield carnage. By contrast, Saladino, the chivalrous twelfth-century Sultan of Egypt, does win a place among the noble pagans in Limbus (nineteenth in Dante's census), yet he sits by himself off to one side: "solo, in parte, vidi 'l Saladino." Immediately after him comes Aristotle. Whereas their proximity on the page might suggest a cultural connection, what the poet stresses instead is Aristotle's Hellenic identity. The "maestro di color che sanno" sits among a ten-member family of Greeks, Socrates and Plato foremost, whose philosophical knowledge he epitomizes. As the catalogue winds down from moral philosophy to science, Greek and Arab are fleetingly coupled, however, in a single verse encompassing the medical authorities "Ipocrâte, Avicenna e Galieno." They, in turn, are followed by Averroes, "che 'l gran comento feo," last of the forty souls in the Limbus

of *Inferno* 4. When we recall the names Dante puts at the head of his list of unbaptized worthies—Homer, primal poet, and Electra, antiquity's earliest mother, the progenitress of Troy, hence Rome itself—the compliment paid Aristotle's great commentator dims. Averroes's final position, following all the philosophers and poets, seems to imply the endpoint of a tradition with no posterity.⁹

Dante might well have wished that Averroism had died with Averroes, whose mistaken doctrine on the mortality of the soul he corrects in *Purgatorio* 25. There Statius explains how the human embryo is formed and endowed with a spirit. The stage of its transition from the sensitive to the intellective soul, he remarks, was a point on which a man wiser than Dante once fell into error, assuming that the "possible intellect," or soul, could not be in the body, since there is no organ appropriated to it:

Ma come d'animal diveгна fante,
 non vedi tu ancor: quest'è tal punto,
 che più savio di te fé già errante,
 sì che per sua dottrina fé disgiunto
 da l'anima il possibile intelletto,
 perché da lui non vide organo assunto. (*Purg* 25.61-66)

⁹ Of course, Dante's relationship with the Arabic-Islamic orbit is infinitely more complex and problematic. The highly controversial question of the extent to which he knew and was influenced by the *mi'raj* tradition has received much attention, although much more of it from Arabists than from *Dantisti*. For a full bibliography, as well as a brief study of the vicissitudes of the argument through 1965, see Cantarino, 1965. Bowering, 1986, is of particular interest because it provides a clear and succinct narration of the *mi'raj* story itself as well as a discussion of work done on the subject before the famous Asín Palacios publication (1919). More recent discussions include Guidubaldi, 1978, who takes a Jungian perspective on the issue, and the second volume of Cerulli's monumental enterprise, 1972. The latter raises the particularly intriguing possibility, further pursued in Menocal 1987, that Dante is, among other things, writing an *anti-mi'raj*.

As for the "Arabic" personnel in the *Commedia*, Dante elsewhere gives Saladino and Averroes openly positive treatment. *De monarchia* cites Averroes commentary on *De anima* in a discussion of how man's "virtus intellectiva" is activated, and he is "lo Commentatore" by antonomasia in *Conv* iv.13.8. Saladino ranks with seven memorably liberal men in *Conv* iv.14. In his *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia* (iv.1.243-44) Boccaccio, who also admires Saladino for his generosity, does not pass judgment on whether Dante intended his solitary spot in the Limbus to suggest kingly superiority or social quarantine. Perhaps, he speculates more neutrally, Dante set him apart simply because he was not a "gentile" like those named before and after him. Boccaccio did not believe that Saladino was a practicing Moslem: "E fu per setta de'

Averroes was wrong to deny, in Dante's and others' assessment (a mistaken one, in fact) the soul's immortality.¹⁰ Yet that radical, left-wing Aristotelianism proved tenacious. Attracting many followers, it tainted even Dante's best friend, Guido Cavalcanti.¹¹ Dante must disapprove of Guido's intellectual heresy, friendship notwithstanding, and he approaches the painful problem at one remove by burying his father in Hell.¹² The visual imagery here is striking: the elder Cavalcanti's appearance is heralded by fiery-red mosque towers looming in the City of Dis (8), inside whose gate (9) is the graveyard of the heretics with Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti and Frederick II (10). Sepulchers like the Roman sarcophagi at Arles entomb them on flaming ground, here in the *sixth* of Dante's *nine* infernal circles.

Boccaccio penned a polemical answer to this infernal scene in his *novella* on Guido Cavalcanti: *Decameron* vi.9. In Robert Durling's elegant interpretation (1983), to which we are much indebted, Boccaccio counters Dante's condemnation of the Cavalcantian heresy, advocating openmindedness in the matter of Guido's alleged Averroism.

seguaci di Maometto, quantunque, per quello che alcuni vogliono dire, poco le sue leggi e i suoi comandamenti prezasse."

¹⁰ Padoan (1965:850) notes that Petrarch considered Averroes a "rabid dog." See *Seniles* 15.6-7 and *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*. See also Gabrieli, 1977, for a full discussion of Petrarch's virulent anti-Arab views and their connections with his prejudice against doctors. Boccaccio, by contrast, asserts that the founder of the Peripatetics would have been lost under a cloud of unlucky obscurity, forgotten in favor of Platonism, had it not been for Averroes, who broke the cloud with the light of his commentary. See *Esposizioni* iv.1.368: "Averrois dicono alcuni che fu arabo ed abitò in Ispagna; altri dicono che egli fu spagnuolo; uomo d'eccellente ingegno, in tanto che egli comentò ciò che Aristotile in filosofia naturale e metafisica composto avea; e tanto chiara rendé la scienza sua, che quasi aparve insino al suo tempo non essere stata intesa e però non seguita, dove dopo lui è stata in mirabile pregio, anzi a quella d'ogni altro filosofo preposta."

¹¹ Although there have been critics who questioned Guido's alleged Averroism, Durling's studies (1981, 1983) and others have reaffirmed Dante's condemnation of his *primo amico*; see also Parodi, 1915, and Quaglio, 1964. For the intellectual climate, greatly influenced by Averroism and Arabic-derived philosophy in the realm of medicine, of which Guido is an exemplar, see *inter alia*, Corti, 1981 and 1983, and Nardi, 1949. For an excellent and accessible presentation of interpretations of Aristotle by Muslims such as Averroes, and how some of those views were transmitted to the Latin west, see Peters, 1968.

¹² A full discussion of the intricacies of this scene and canto, as well as of the haunting absence/presence of Guido in the *Commedia* is Durling, 1981. A further, intriguing possibility is explored in Erasmi, 1986: that the Guido story in the *Decameron* has a source in Ibn 'Arabi, the Spanish Sufi.

His escape from an encroaching *brigata* by vaulting over a tomb playfully affirms the eloquent philosopher's resurrection into Christian immortality. This story's "Arabic" subtext, involving Dante's heretics—some Averroists—entombed beneath the burning mosque towers of Dis, suggests three things. First, since the Guido Cavalcanti *novella* is ninth on Day vi, its placement in the *Decameron* probably alludes numerically to *Inferno* 9, the canto in which Dante enters the sixth circle and "Arabian" Dis. Second, if *Decameron* vi.9 has an "Arabic" content, the same might be true of the anthology's other ninth stories. Third, Boccaccio's argument for tolerance in judging Guido's beliefs could mean that he is more explicitly discriminating generally than Dante in his view of the "Arabic" world.

At this point, we found that turning to the numerology of the intertwined texts produced some interesting correlations. The position of the Guido Cavalcanti tale at *Decameron* vi.9 is a strong hint that Boccaccio was aware of the numerological nexus linking nine, Hell, and Arab "evil" in the *Commedia*. Muhammad and Ali, recall, are in the *ninth bolgia*; Saladino occupies *nineteenth* place in the Limban catalogue; *nine* are the circles of *Inferno* itself; and Dante enters mosque-towered Dis in canto *nine*, to be met by the sight of the sarcophagi holding Cavalcante and Frederick II.

Earlier works by Boccaccio support the notion that he recognized nine as a number with infernal potential.¹³ Book I of the *Filocolo* (1333-1336), chapter 9, describes a council of devils in hell, summoned by their ruler to thwart the spread of Christianity. Its opening words transport us straight to his sunken realm: "Il miserabile re, il cui regno Acheronta circunda, . . . convocati nel suo cospetto g' infernali ministri,

¹³ Like his literary art, Boccaccio's numerology is eclectic in its sources. Pythagorean, Neo-Platonic, Patristic, and astrological traditions all contribute to his system of number symbolism. Numbers and their symbolic equivalents are naturally not rigid equations in Boccaccio's mind any more than they were for Dante, who gives nine two very opposite charges—angelic as well as infernal. Since a given figure may, in fact, have multiple hidden values, meaning must be deduced from context. Three, for example, is often a Boccaccian sign of Venus, since she resides in the third heaven (hence Troiolo and Criseida will consummate their love in *Filostrato* iii.3.33 ff.). It may alternatively imply Trinitarian love and the Theological Virtues, as in *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine* and *Decameron*. When his theme is amorous, nine as the square of three can also have Venerean significance. So it does in the *Caccia di Diana*, but there the ennead alludes more specifically to the miraculous identity of Beatrice expounded in *Vita nuova* 29. On the numerology of Boccaccio's fiction, see Kirkham, 1974, 1978, 1983, 1985, and Smarr, 1979.

disse, "Compagni, voi sapete che Giove non dovutamente degli ampi regni, i quali egli possiede, ci privò, e diedeci questa strema parte sopra il centro dell'universo a possedere..." The speech marks a startling shift of scene in the romance, which after a prologue in fourteenth-century Naples, had begun unfolding in the grandeur of early Christian Rome. Boccaccio deliberately springs diabolical forces against his protagonist, bound on a pilgrimage from Rome to Compostela, in the *ninth* chapter of the *Filocolo* because Dante had established such a strong connection between nine and hellish evil.

Even more specific in its allusive content is Book IX of Boccaccio's *Teseida delle nozze di Emilia* (1339-1341). As the eighth book of the epic closes, the tournament that is to decide whether Arcita or Palemone shall wed Emilia has gone in favor of Arcita, protégé of the warrior god Mars. But if Arcita won the battle, Palemone, under tutelage of Venus, is bound to get the lady. At the opening of Book IX, therefore, Venus intervenes to assure his success by conjuring a Fury from hell who will unhorse Arcita in a fatal upset.

The first chapter of *Teseida IX* has nine stanzas, preceded by the summary rubric: "Incomincia il libro nono del Teseida. E prima come Venere, mandata Erinis, infernal furia, a spaventare il cavallo d'Arcita, gliel fé cadere addosso." Venus visits "gli oscuri regni dell'ardente Dite" reveals her plan "al re nero," and sends Erinys personally onto the tournament field. The Fury comes with attributes that echo those of the Furies and Medusa in *Inferno 9*: snaky hair, green hydras spitting stinking, sulphurous flames, and serpentine whips in her hand. Compare Dante's verses:

Questa palude che 'l gran puzzo spira
cigne dintorno la città dolente
...
...in un punto furon dritte ratto
tre furie infernal di sangue tinte,
che membra feminine avieno e atto,
e con idre verdissime eran cinte;
serpentelli e ceraste avien per crine,
onde le fiere tempie erano avvinte." (*Inf* 9.31-42)

with Boccaccio's chattier account:

Venne costei di ceraste crinita,
e di verdi idre li suoi ornamenti
erano a cui in Elisso la vita

riconfortata avea, le quai lambenti
le sulfuree fiamme, che uscita
di bocca le facevan puzzolenti,
più fiera la faceano; e questa Dea
di serpi scuriata in man tenea. (*Tes* IX.5)

We thus came to see that the ninth *novella* of Day VI in the *Decameron*, like *Filocolo* 1.9 and *Teseida IX*, stanzas 1-9, has its intertextual antecedent in *Inferno* 8.9-10—a three-canto sequence centered in Canto 9.¹⁴ If, as Durling has shown, *Decameron VI.9* alludes to an aspect of that society symbolized in Dante's Hell by mosque towers ablaze, specifically Averroism, can we extend the connection to Boccaccio's other ninth stories? That is, in the thematic topography of the hundred tales, do those at ninth position belong to an "Arabic" world? Our belief is that they do, and that Boccaccio's dialogue with Dante on the issue of Averroism can be extended generally to this "Arabic" world more broadly defined.

Other ninth stories, like Cavalcanti's on Day VI, do indeed deal with individuals unmistakably associated with the Arabic-inspired intellectual avant-garde. *Decameron VIII.9*, in which Bruno and Buffalmacco play a dirty joke on stupid Maestro Simone, incorporates a variety of relevant characters and prejudices: doctors, Michael Scot, and Avicenna, whose name Bruno pretends is unpronounceable. A sample of his dialogue with the doctor reminds us of the tale's flavor:

"Stanotte fu'io alla brigata: ed essendomi un poco la reina d'Inghilterra rincresciuta, mi feci venir la gumedra del gran Can d'Altarisi."

Diceva il maestro, "Che vuol dir gumedra? Io non gl'intendo questi nomi."

"O maestro mio," diceva Bruno, "io non me ne maraviglio, ché io ho bene udito dire che Porcograsso e Vannacena non ne dicono nulla."

Disse il maestro, "Tu vuoi dire Ipocrasso e Avicenna."

Disse Bruno, "Gnaffe! io non so: io m'intendo così male de' vostri nomi come voi de' miei; ma la gumedra in quella lingua del gran cane vuol tanto dire quanto imperadrice nella nostra."

Reading this story from the same perspective Durling takes on Guido Cavalcanti seems to suggest a comparable reassessment of

¹⁴ It seems likely that nine, by extension of its specifically infernal properties, may also be intended as a symbol of ill-omen and destruction in several works whose sum of structural units is nine: *Filostrato* (nine *parti*); *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* (nine *capitoli*); and *De casibus virorum illustrium* (nine *libri*).

Michael Scot, the great translator and astrologer. Dante had condemned him as a frivolous, deceitful "soothsayer," one who "veramente de le magiche frode seppe il gioco." Boccaccio, on the other hand, equates belief in such "Arabic" necromancy with ridiculous superstition through the character Maestro Simone (Kirkham 1983-1984), himself a pseudo-scientific quack, in contrast to Avicenna, the profession's Arab exemplar.¹⁵

Only one man in thirteenth-century Italy (or Europe for that matter) was better known than Michael Scot for his intimate and often patron-like associations with the Arabic world. That was Scot's employer Frederick II, condemned, we will recall, alongside Cavalcanti's father in those tombs just beyond the mosques of Dis. Is it purely coincidental then, that the ninth story of Day v is that heart-wrencher about Frederick and his falcon? Emperor Frederick was and remains most famous for his treatise on falconry, the model in that genre. Remarkably detailed in ornithological and venatic lore, *De arte venandi cum avibus* does not appear to have a substantive intertextual relationship with the *novella*. Nevertheless, Boccaccio's play of names and nines does seem to connect Federigo degli Alberighi, scion of an eclipsed Florentine nobility,¹⁶ whose only consolation is his rare falcon, with that Swabian Federico renowned as an authority on hawking. If so, Boccaccio may be commenting on Dante's condemnation of another great medieval Arabophile, rendering benign the "heretic."

Suggestions of the other kinds of "Arabic world" connections we have begun to see in the ninth stories of the *Decameron* are tantalizing. Like our revised and variegated definition of what was evoked by the "Arabic" world, they run the gamut. Some evoke the geography of the "Near East": 1.9 is set in Cyprus after Geoffry of Bouillon's conquest of the Holy Land; and in 11.9, Bernabò's faithful wife Ginevra serves the Sultan in Alexandria disguised as Sicurano. Counterpart

to the tale of Maestro Simone (viii.9) is iii.9, where a better kind of medicine is practiced by Giletta di Nerbona (Cottino-Jones 1982:154). This story's medical subject puts it within the "Arabic" world. So, too, does its setting, Narbonne, a city prominent in French epic literature about fighting the infidel. It figures in the William of Orange cycle, which Boccaccio mentions in his *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia* when glossing the sepulchers at Arles, a cemetery to which Dante compares the graveyard of the heretics at the end of *Inferno* 9.¹⁷ Solomon, a semi-mythical figure of great wisdom from the East, is invoked in ix.9. Finally, x.9 tells how the Crusader Torello was captured by Saladino, who courteously sent him home to Pavia on a fabulous flying carpet.¹⁸

Every ninth story does not, at least at first glance, fit into the pattern, and there are some "Arabic" stories that are not ninth. The latter would be the case for the match of wits between Melchisedech and Saladino (1.3), and perhaps, too, Alibech's conversion in the "diserti di Tebaida" (iii.10).¹⁹ Alatiel's Mediterranean adventures, though, are assimilable to Boccaccio's "Arabian nines": the *novella*'s position adds up to a 9 (it is 11.7), and that is also the number of men with whom, according to the rubric, she has "nuptials."²⁰ While we do not

¹⁷ "Di queste [sepulture] dicono i paesani una lor favola, affermando in quel luogo essere già stata una gran battaglia tra Guiglielmo d'Oringa e sua gente d'una parte, o vero d'altro principe cristiano, e barbari infedeli venuti d'Africa, ed essere stati uccisi molti cristiani in essa, e che poi la notte seguente, per divino miracolo, essere state quivi quelle arche recate per sepoltura de' cristiani, e così la mattina vegnente tutti i cristiani morti essere stati sepelliti in esse" (*Esposiz* x.1.90-91).

The Guillaume cycle is, curiously, one of those most intertwined with the Arabic world at both the overt thematic level and in terms of the possible origins of some of its themes, images, and names. For a comprehensive presentation of all of the *chansons* of the Guillaume cycle, as well as considerable bibliography, see Frappier, 1955, 1967. See also Menéndez Pidal, 1955, for a brief presentation of possible Arabic textual interaction and, more recently, Daniel, 1984.

¹⁸ O'Cuilleánáin (1984:89-95) comments on Boccaccio's ideological neutrality toward Islam: "The leaders of Islam and the Crusaders are equally exalted, in the service not of doctrinal conflict but of aristocratic pageantry."

¹⁹ The tale of Melchisedech and Saladino (1.3), although not a "nine," belongs more significantly to a pattern of three's. See Kirkman, 1985:7. Other *novelle* that would enter a broadly defined Arabic orbit are the two Barbary Coast tales (iv.4; v.2).

²⁰ There is a discrepancy between rubric and text in the count (Branca, 1980). Although her lovers actually total eight, nine was obviously the figure that mattered to Boccaccio, who may have envisioned his Alatiel as a humorous antitype to Beatrice (Potter, 1985).

¹⁵ It should be noted here that although Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) was a Muslim, many of the burgeoning medical profession's other luminaries were Jewish. Foremost among them, of course, is certainly Maimonides, whose work was greatly favored by Frederick II. Maimonides, like many other Spanish Jews of the "Golden Age," wrote primarily in Arabic transcribed into the Hebrew alphabet, and he, like Averroes, is a key Aristotelian. The cultural admixture revealed by the commingling of traditions apparent in this case is another example of why one needs a broader, more eclectic, definition of "Arabic."

¹⁶ The Alberighi are one of the families prominent in Cacciaguida's day whose fame time has hidden (*Par* 16.89).

wish to push all and only Boccaccio's ninth tales into a Procrustean Araby, we do still affirm that there is enough evidence to argue the existence of a pattern. The ninth stories, where we see an "Arabic" world with intertextual roots in *Inferno* 8-9-10, are, in any event, clearly a family in the *Decameron*. They are, moreover, an important family that invites further study as a group, for each marks the culmination of its day's topic and, after Day 1, each is reserved for the day's ruler.²¹

We come to a final, particularly appealing suggestion for our study, one first made by the great Hispanist Menéndez Pidal, and one that seems all the more plausible in view of the more complex definition of "Arabic" that we think accurate historically. While scholars as far back in our discipline as the nineteenth century have identified the ultimate derivation of certain *specific novelle* of Boccaccio's from the *Disciplina clericalis* of Petrus Alfonsi, far less notice has been taken of the two texts' overall affinities. The *Disciplina* is one of many "Arabic" texts that, while variously labelled, are perhaps most accurately called "Andalusian." They embody and exemplify the marvelous eclecticism of derivation (traditional Judaic, Arabic adaptations from India and other points East, Iberian peninsular, etc.) that marked so many Arabic-European texts. Such cultural hybridism finds a fitting example in the *Disciplina clericalis* of Petrus Alfonsi, a Jew educated in both Arabic and Hebrew traditions who converted and wrote stories in Latin for Christian instruction. But less attention has been paid to what may be an important affinity in the curious relationship of individual stories to the frame: the scatological or scandalous story in an avowedly didactic context. More work is in order on this Semitic rhetorical device and its relationship with the *Decameron*.²²

To conclude, we have some reason to believe that our diverse lines of inquiry will prove to be fruitfully combinable. After all, if Boccac-

cio were able to use the infernal nine to present stories that deal benignly with the variegated Arabic world, and if he could use the quintessentially "Arabic" *Disciplina clericalis* as a model for the marriage of scatology and a Christian message, our fusion of numerology and the medieval "Arabic" world is perhaps not at all as eccentric as it might first seem.

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²¹ The ninth stories are fleetingly dealt with as a group by Almansi (1976:28-29).

²² For source studies involving Arabic texts see the bibliography in Branca, 1976:973-74. Recent translations of the *Disciplina* include Jones and Keller, 1969, and Hermes, 1970. The "daring" suggestion that both the *Disciplina* and the *Decameron* should be read as texts with overriding Christian meaning that use scatological material appears in Menéndez Pidal, 1956:24-25. More recent endeavors to identify the larger, structuring Christian meaning of the *Decameron* include Branca 1981, Kirkham, 1981 and 1985, and Smarr, 1976. Another text to be explored along these lines is the *Book of the Wiles of Women* (Keller, 1956 and 1959). A recent, quite useful, discussion of many of the culturally hybrid narratives of medieval Spain is Lacarra, 1979; she has also recently translated the *Disciplina* into Spanish (1980).

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