

Deified Men and Humanized Gods: The Epistemic Character of the *Fabula*

Knowledge, order, and different categories mark the classification of ancient gods as is contained in Boccaccio's *Genealogie deorum gentilium*. Although an evident taxonomic attitude, in general, can be seen as a relevant feature of Boccaccio's literary production (in addition to the *Genealogies*, see, for instance, works like the *De casibus*, *De montibus*, *De mulieribus claris*), the principles underlying such a classification as well as organizing the knowledge of ancient mythology can be seen as the main, specific epistemological subjects of the *Genealogies*. As recent scholarship on the taxonomy of knowledge showed, the period from the late twelfth through fifteenth centuries was truly an information age in Western Europe. This era witnessed a proliferation of manuscripts of large information texts such as the works of Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Vincent de Beauvais.¹ Boccaccio's *Genealogies of the Pagan Gods* can certainly be considered another instance of those books in so far as it clearly presents itself as an early modern encyclopedia of mythology. Unfolding in a descending direction from progenitor to progeny, the structure of this work, in fact, functions taxonomically in so far as the book constitutes a system through which knowledge can be organized, classified, and utilized. Like many other books of this kind, the way information is presented is nearly as important as the information itself. Boccaccio's ability to organize the genealogy of the gods requires an ordered construction comparable to an encyclopedia; for this, he devises a system in the shape of an upside-down family tree that neatly arranges the different relations, a system also integrated with autograph painted diagrams.² Besides being

a cosmic symbol alluding to the universe and life, this structure implies the presence of a cognitive aptitude to arranging knowledge into a more easily recognizable and accessible system that privileges and facilitates memory.³ In other words, not only does Boccaccio aim to inform his readers, but he is also concerned with how to more easily preserve the memory of the knowledge he presents.

In this chapter, the epistemic value of Boccaccio's *Genealogies* will be investigated within the way Boccaccio presents the mythological materials together with the way he describes the language of poetry, namely the peculiar language that, as much as philosophy, is able to transmit knowledge. The *Genealogies* and their theory of poetic language can reveal as much about Boccaccio's attitude toward philosophy as does the study of the language of the *Decameron*. The first part of the chapter will thus illustrate the peculiar idea of the obscurity of poetry as it appears in Boccaccio's poetic manifesto in books XIV and XV through an examination of the semantic scope of the term *fabula*, the term that the author uses to indicate fictionalized accounts (both poetry and prose narratives) from classical mythology. The second part will explore the novel features of Boccaccio's poetics in relation to the cognitive aspects of literary fictions and will consider the psychological advantages of the theory of obscurity. The third section will discuss the origins of poetry and connect the cosmological order described by the *Genealogies* to Boccaccio's conception of poetic creation, showing how in the description of the cosmos no neat distinction can be made between the nature of men and gods. The chapter will conclude by further examining Boccaccio's poetics in order to show how poetic imagination can be a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the intuitive power of the mind. As a preliminary approach to Boccaccio's collection of tales, the aim of this chapter is also to explain that both the *Genealogies* and the *Decameron* explore mechanisms of knowledge acquisition through similar modalities of discourse.

Before getting into the core issue of knowledge and Boccaccio's idea of poetry in the *Genealogies*, a brief introduction to this text will not only provide the historical background of the composition and its narrative framework but will also clarify the strict correspondence with the *Decameron*. The *Genealogie deorum gentilium* is a long text of unparalleled scholarship and knowledge of the ancient Latin and Greek world, composed in different periods between 1305 and 1375 (almost simultaneously with the *Decameron*).⁴ Here Boccaccio aims to expound, first to the commissioner of the work, Hugh IV, King of Cyprus, and then to his

readers, the history of the descendants of the pagan gods and heroes of Antiquity as recounted by ancient poets and authors. At the same time, Boccaccio intends to uncover the meanings that these authors wanted to communicate under the veil of poetry (*Genealogie*, I.Proemio.i.1).⁵ On the one hand, the plot and structure of the *Genealogies* recall the features of wisdom literature, but particularly the biblical model of the book of *Genesis*, where the genealogies of Israel are exposed and intermingled with the stories of various characters—worth mentioning, here, are significant recurring phrases such as “these are the generations,” or “generations of heaven and earth”. On the other hand, the structure of the *Genealogies* echoes the *Decameron* itself: its ten-day structure alludes to the six days of creation through the example of Ambrose’s *Hexaameron* evoked in the title (the pseudo-Greek *Decameron* meaning “ten days” like *Hexaameron* “six days”), and the ten Days of narration, each containing ten short stories, aim at imposing a meaningful order to the variety of characters in real life.⁶

When considering the overall approach and historical, systematic analysis of the forgotten past of men and gods, a new rational attitude unknown to the most authoritative structural models (the cosmogonists Herodotus, Lactantius, and possibly Hesiod) pervades the entire erudite discussion. A certain scientific attitude appears to be emphasized in the proem, where Boccaccio both belies the madness of the ancients who believed they descended from the blood of the gods (I.Proemio.i.4) and mocks—later on he will de facto confute them—the ridiculous argument that, under the bark of narration, the ancients had only wanted to invent stories devoid of any further meaning and content (I.Proemio.i.16). Boccaccio declares himself ready to write a work so daring and demystifying that, in many ways (including its difficulty), could be compared to that of a theologian (I.Proemio.i.18). He does so by setting the proper historical and rational background, even complaining about the loss of works and documents that could have recounted the facts of ancient history, facts that time (I.Proemio.i.32), or specifically, Christianity (I.Proemio.i.28) had destroyed or passed over silence with the intention of proclaiming the truth of a single God. In fact, hidden under the language of poetry of the *Genealogies* a scholarly, historical, and rational work of restoration is concealed. Since this work is meant to explain a vast material whose current condition consists of the scattered fragments of a large shipwreck, it required the skills of a divine personality like Prometheus, the only one able to reassemble them properly

(I.Proemio.i.40–42). Boccaccio, however, does not aspire to be compared to a god, rather, and more modestly, he puts himself only in the guise of a scientist ante litteram, a young doctor who wants to reassemble the *membra disiecta* of the body of the gods, as in the past the semi-god Aesculapius (or Asclepius, the founder of medicine) rearranged that of Hippolytus (“corpus deorum procerumque gentilium nunc huc nunc illuc collecturus et, quasi Esculapius alter, ad instar Ypoliti consolidaturus sum” [in order to collect from here and there the huge corpus of gods and noble princes ... as if it were Hippolytus and I another Aesculapius] [I.Proemio.i.50]).⁷ To the multiplicity of the scattered body parts of the myth is associated the multiplicity of interpretations that the ancients wanted to bequeath to their successors, just as one can see in the polysemic sacred Word hidden under the veil of allegory (I.Proemio.i.43).

In toto, however, the image of the shipwreck of the Ancient mythological tradition recalls the tragic event, the plague, that constitutes the theoretical premise of the *Decameron*. By implicitly establishing such a parallel, Boccaccio emphasizes the power of the literary work to recreate and renovate the world after a terrible disaster, a power that can reestablish order, knowledge, and civilization which were previously lost. The *Decameron*, in fact, has been interpreted by critics as concerned with palingenesis, that is, with regeneration after a universal catastrophe.⁸ Recently, by following the various threads of Boccaccio’s creativity in many of his mythological works, Tobias Foster Gittes has gone as far as to state that Boccaccio “deftly constructed an entirely new paradigm of cataclysm and rebirth out of elements selected from a handful of established literary models, classical and biblical.” By comparing the account of the plague with the literary and philosophical tradition that describes cataclysms, as Gittes also explains, one can even reconsider the *Decameron* as “a literary bulwark, a monumental compendium of human knowledge, designed to safeguard the intellectual legacy of human civilization from the corruptive forces of the plague (understood not just physically but morally).”⁹

Another significant image allows establishing further parallels with the *Decameron*. A nautical image of the sea journey appears in the poem of the *Genealogies* (I.Proemio.i.51). Although typical of classical Greek-Roman poetry,¹⁰ it echoes analogous metaphors of the journey also present in the *Filocolo*,¹¹ in the *Decameron* (Proemio.5), especially in the Second Day (see Chap. 3), and the very experience of the storytellers in the Florentine countryside. The metaphor of navigation, however, in the

Genealogies as in the *Decameron* alike, sets itself as the cipher of the hermeneutic experience related to poetry; an experience made of ramifications and alternative cognitive directions.¹² In addition to sailing the sea of the genealogies of the pagan gods, the author intends to find out their meanings in order to offer to the reader his personal interpretations. In order to do so, Boccaccio does not limit himself to report and collect the shipwrecked tradition of Ancient mythology, but he also dares to reshape the myth by manipulating his sources according to his own agenda.¹³ His is not only a scholarly exposition, it is also an existential journey of an individual who observes and reflects on the condition of antiquity, on its current state of incomprehension on the part of the *litterati*; the abysmal failure to recall its lost values is shown by an almost elegiac picture of the decline of the ancient cities taken directly by the panoramic view of the author (“... paucis elapsis seculis, ruinis suum finem venisse testantur. In mortem profecto nos et nostra corruunt omnia celeri passu”) (V.Proemio.3–4) (... a few centuries have gone by, and they bear witness that their end has come to ruins. Surely we and all that is ours rush at a swift pace unto death).¹⁴

When providing the first explanation of a myth, there comes to Boccaccio the need to account for the conception of the *fabula*, which he refers to as objectively known by tradition, while it actually proved to be a fully original idea.¹⁵ Old fables are evidently reflective of that time in human history when a fervid imagination could see into nature’s hidden meanings and catch signs of life and mysteriously divine presences in every aspect of the world, signs that the imagination was, then, able to represent by words and rhythm. Yet, a certain polysemy that is bound to the sense of the fable has to be added to the power of imagination. The first, essential meaning of the fable is fully conventional and can be traced, through the metaphor of the cortex and the medulla, back to the medieval fourfold system of allegory, which was applied to the Bible, and in which a literal (or historical) sense is distinguished by the allegorical—and in turn divided into moral, allegorical and anagogical (I.iii.7–9). According to tradition, the purpose of explaining the fables of the ancients is to isolate the truth by removing it from the bark (the *cortex*) of fiction. This is something that Boccaccio meant to do with the stories of the gods. But before doing that, and that is where we can see a significant element of originality in Boccaccio’s poetics, it is necessary to go one step further, namely, to understand why ancient poets wanted to create and promote an obscure form of poetry.¹⁶ In other words, it is

not simply a matter of unveiling hidden meanings—a thing that everyone had tried to accomplish, even the late-Antique commentators of classical texts—but most importantly to question the reasons and purposes of so much obscurity in order to see if this was meant to convey other meanings. One first explanation provided by Boccaccio is that poets do not just cover up the truth with the veil of allegory as if a natural inclination to poetry required them in order to delight themselves in creating fiction, but mostly because, as confirmed by the authority of Macrobius, it is the very essence of Nature, represented by the poets, to create mysteries by covering the truth and hiding it from human intelligence and comprehension. Thus, the mystery of fables is hidden “naturally” to the eyes of the profane, and only the initiates are allowed to see into the arcane:

Sic ipsa *misteria* fabularum cuniculis operiuntur, ne vel hoc *adeptis* nudam rerum talium natura se prebeat, sed summatibus tantum viris *sapientia* interprete, veri *archani* consocii contenti sunt reliqui. (I.iii.5–7, quoting Macrobius)

(In this way the very mysteries of the fables are hidden deeply away so that nature does not lay herself bare for even those who understand such things, but only for superior men, using their wisdom as their guide, who are privy to her arcane truths.)

It is obvious, then, that among the initiates Hugh IV, King of Cyprus, is included to whom Boccaccio presents his work along with the right clues to unravel its hidden meanings: “confido, quoniam tibi nobile sit ingenium, quo possis quantumcunque parvis datis *indiciis*, in quoscunque *profundissimos sensus* penetrare” (I.iv.14) (I am assured that your noble nature allows you to penetrate into the deepest meanings even if provided with only a small amount of information). Boccaccio speaks of *misteria*, which may well be mystical truths, but also speaks significantly of *archana*, and intends to penetrate *profundissimos sensus*, intending to evoke quite different contexts.¹⁷

The language of poetry is full of secret elements as the romance tradition, after all, clearly shows. The troubadours themselves, beyond the courtly elements of their poetry, bring forth a spiritual, symbolic discourse that should not be overlooked and that was certainly influential among the *stilnovisti* as much as among the writers of the fourteenth century, Boccaccio included.¹⁸ John of Salisbury, defining ancient

allegorism, wrote that poetry contains secret wisdom and knowledge of universal things: Mercury symbolically joins in marriage with Philology in order to seek the truth, while the so-called “lies of the poets” (the fables) do not deceive because they are limited to the service of truth.¹⁹ The same theory is also found in Carolingian writers, in Theodulf of Orléans for instance.²⁰ Poetry offers an indirect route to the “secrets of philosophy,” either by arousing wonder, as Jean de Meun maintains, or by functioning as a fictional veil for philosophical truths, as in Albert the Great, for instance.²¹ Dante acknowledges this latter feature: “*O voi ch’avete li ’ntelletti sani, / mirate la dottrina che s’asconde / sotto ’l velame de li versi strani*” (*Inferno*, IX, 61–63) (O you who have sound intellects, / consider the teaching that is hidden / behind the veil of these strange verses). Moreover, Dante’s poetry contains mysteries and enigmas that have still to be unraveled. The poetry of the so-called *Fedeli d’Amore*, whether real or invented, still gives rise to the desire to investigate the hidden secrets of the poetic text.²²

In the context of the *Genealogies*, however, the obscurity of poetry may also refer to the hermetic idea of obscure discourse; that is, to the kind of literature whose language hides its meanings and the truth without completely denying their knowledge and understanding. In other words, the author himself who hides the meaning in his work would also be the first to reveal the truth in one way or another. The Latin *Asclepius* recalls this concept while warning that the hermetic idea of obscurity is not to be confused with that of the abstruseness of the sophists, which instead drives away from the true, pure, sacred philosophy.²³ The *Asclepius* (also called *Perfect Discourse*), along with the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Stobei Hermetica* and the *Testimonia*, is part of the so-called *Hermetica*, a set of philosophical and theological writings composed in Late Antiquity.²⁴ The dissemination in the West of the Hermetic philosophy seems to have been limited almost exclusively to the *Asclepius*, a Latin translation of a lost original Greek text falsely attributed to Apuleius of Madaura. For Renaissance writers, and for Boccaccio, who knew the corpus at least in its Latin part,²⁵ the author of these writings, a mysterious Hermes Trismegistus,²⁶ was considered a contemporary of Moses, and his philosophy was seen as an ancient theological doctrine as important as the Bible, so much so that it was thought to merge with Platonism and anticipate the doctrines of Revelation. Interestingly, the *Asclepius*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus in the Middle Ages,²⁷ and the *Decameron* begin with much the same convivial

frame story featuring a small group of people. In the *Asclepius*, four semi-divine characters meet and discuss the cosmos, the nature of God, and man's place in the universe, without allowing anyone else to participate in the discussion. In the *Decameron*, a group of seven women and three men meet in a church, and then flee to a country retreat where they tell each other stories while remaining away from the plague-stricken city. The conviviality, the philosophical character of the situation and, at the same time, the elitist aspect of their gathering secluded from the rest of the community constitute salient aspects of the framework of both texts.²⁸ Although remaining at the paratextual level, it is important to emphasize that the conviviality that pertains to the *Decameron*'s framework is also present in the tutelary deity of the collection, that is, the eloquent Mercury (the Greek Hermes, perhaps not coincidentally) that hovers enigmatically at the beginning of the storytellers' journey in the *Decameron*, on Wednesday (in Italian, *Mercoledì* being the day of Mercury), and who presides over the social and narrative communication.²⁹ If it were not for the same symposium frame which is also present in another text known to Boccaccio, the *Saturnalia*, and for the same philosophical connotation, it would appear that the idea for the *Decameron*'s setting be derived from the *Asclepius*.³⁰ However, since Boccaccio often escapes attributing his ideas to any particular source, it will be more useful to emphasize the philosophical features of his poetics in order to better understand the epistemological aspects of fiction, aspects that emerge, primarily, from his *Genealogies*, and, in hermeneutic perspective, in the *Decameron*.

In order to compare the two texts and their theories of obscurity, it will first be useful to look at their epistemological language, for which the *Asclepius* can provide a valuable insight into the terminology of the *Genealogies*. According to several scholars, the Latin language of cognition, perception and intuition of the *Asclepius* is somewhat vague, yet one can recognize the trends that may help account for similar meanings in the *Genealogies*. (Analogous ambiguities, however, existed in Greek for the same concepts.³¹) In Greek, there is a large group of terms related to the word *nous* (mind), and to the noun *gnosis* (knowledge). In Latin, and particularly in the *Asclepius*, it is possible to connect the word *sensus* with the Greek *nous*, translating it mostly with "intellect," "divine power of intuition"³²; but the word *sensus* also has countless connotations which mean "sense," "faculty," "meaning," etc.³³ Yet, when focusing on the first group of meanings of the term

sensus, one realizes that it acquires a peculiar emphasis in the *Asclepius*. In particular, the human ability of intuition (the *sensus*), according to the *Asclepius*, was given to man, and to him alone, so that he could understand the evil of the world and fight against it. Consciousness, learning, and understanding are the means that human beings have to use against evil; and this is also the main indirect response to the presence of evil in the world:

prouisum cautumque est, quantum rationabiliter potuisset a summo deo, tunc cum *sensu*, disciplina, intellegentia mentes hominum est munere dignatus. hisce enim rebus, quibus ceteris antestamus animalibus, soli possumus malitiae fraudes, dolos uitaeque vitare. ea enim qui, antequam his implicitus est, ex aspectu uitae, *is homo est diuina intellegentia prudentiaque munitus*, fundamentum est enim disciplinae in summa bonitate consistens. (*Asclepius*, 16)

(Acting as reasonably as possible, the supreme god took care to provide against evil when he deigned to endow human minds with *consciousness*, learning and understanding, for it is these gifts alone, by which we surpass other living things, that enable us to avoid the tricks, snares and vices of evil. He that avoids them on sight, before they entangle him, *that person has been fortified by divine understanding and foresight*, for the foundation of learning resides in the highest good.)

This multiplicity of meanings related to the Latin term *sensus* could partially account for the use that Boccaccio makes of it in the *Genealogies* to charge its discourse with hidden connotations and to link it to the scope and activities of the mind. Specifically, however, the proximity of “meaning” and “intuition” (or “sense” / “consciousness”) within the semantic scope of the term *sensus* can explain Boccaccio’s epistemic attitude when he emphasizes the importance of searching for the “deepest meanings” (*profundissimos sensus*) hidden in the myth. In other words, the best way to understand hidden meanings is by using sense and intuition.

Directly related to the significance of the term *sensus* is also the semantic scope of the *fabula* which, according to the quadripartite definition given by Boccaccio, also implies a distinction between “sense” and “truth”. Poetry makes “sense,” but what makes sense does not necessarily contain truth. Although it does not seem to have specific authoritative sources,³⁴ the taxonomy of fables (the *divisio fabularum*)

that Boccaccio suggests defines the characteristics of each type of fable on the basis of its content of truth: the first kind of fable has no truth in its “bark”; the second compounds imagination and truth on its surface; the third is more like history because it mainly relates events; and the fourth contains no truth at all in either its surface or on the inside and, not accidentally, consists of “foolish old wives’ tales” (XIV. ix.5–7). The fourth type of fable, on first glance, seems to be excluded from the domain of poetry in so far as it is totally divorced from any content of truth. But if one looks at what Boccaccio will later say about the content of the old wives’ tales, we realize that these, too, are worth our attention since they are not totally outside the domain of poetry (XIV.x.7). As Thomas Ricklin acutely observes, the fables of the *vetulae* are, at first, condemned (XIV.ix.11) only for strategic purposes linked to promoting Boccaccio’s argument against hypothetical detractors.³⁵ Soon afterward, in fact, Boccaccio enumerates the cases in which fables, even when devoid of manifest meaning, prove to have other relevant functions (consolatory, didactic, etc.) beyond the presence of a content of truth, so that the ignorant person would be delighted in reading them, while the learned one would practice the discovery of its hidden meanings. In this way, the appreciation of the various functions of the fables, beyond that of bearing the truth, can also be used to restore dignity to the fable of the fourth type (that one narrated by old wives) and bring it into the domain of poetry. This might also have some implications for the tales of the *Decameron* and the list of story types given in the Proemio (“*novelle, o favole o parabole o istorie*”). Indirectly, therefore, in addition to the tales drawn from Ovidian fables (see *Decameron*, V.10 and VI.2), even the tales of the *Decameron* that apparently do not convey meanings related to a certain truth are saved. By doing so, the tales of the *vetulae* regain poetic dignity, but solely and exclusively in the domain of meaning, that is, in the domain of *sensus*, and not in that of truth.³⁶ In sum, Boccaccio refashions the semantics of fables first by distinguishing between the concept of truth and that of meaning, and secondly by privileging meaning as the basis of the conception of poetic language. The criterion of truth that was central to Dante’s vision is no longer paramount, now giving way to intuition and the *sensus*—an element inclined to be associated with the domain of language—so that even the tales of the *vetulae* are raised to the dignity of poetry.

POETRY, SECRECY AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LANGUAGE

As we have seen, Boccaccio's peculiar idea of the obscurity of poetry comes to the fore when examining the semantic scope and epistemic character of the term *fabula*. Now, to further explore the features of Boccaccio's poetics, let us consider the cognitive aspects of fiction. Since it deals with the language of literature, the theory expressed in the *Genealogies* has very close ties with the narrative of the *Decameron* and with the way in which the reader is encouraged to discover the meanings within it.

Besides the pure amusement provided by witty answers, mockeries, and even obscene stories, the *Decameron* stimulates the mind and attracts us, especially when the author shows his mastery in using the Italian language for illusionistic purposes. The first tale of the First Day, the story of Cepparello—to name just one example—nicely illustrates how the artificial usage of discourse in his false confession can have multiple effects and signify both one thing and its opposite. In this regard, Kurt Flasch skillfully identified a trap conceived for the reader in the story of Cepparello, a trap built with sophistication, and orchestrated on the problematic relationship between words and things. The relationship between language, thought, and objects no longer reflects the univocal connection typical of the thirteenth century; at the time of Boccaccio, language has unveiled its ambiguity, and a chasm has opened between words and things. Since the inner life of the individual has entered into a hidden and unfathomable sphere, the error of Cepparello's confessor consisted in believing in a real repentance where there was nothing else but deception.³⁷ In the wake of Foucault's ideas that the fundamental conventions of culture impose an order on our cognitive experience and understanding, Flasch identifies in the *Decameron* a disruptive moment of transformation of the world and society that is based on the very relation that words establish with what they want to, or should, signify.³⁸ In fact, Italian literary culture, even prior to the mid-fourteenth century, and in particular the Neapolitan milieu where Boccaccio was raised, had accepted, and in a way assimilated, the findings of the new English logic which problematized the relationship between words and things. In a famous letter, the *Mavortis miles extrenue*, a letter to an unknown person written in 1339,³⁹ Boccaccio shows how logic (or dialectics) is essential for a poet's own formation. According to Boccaccio, who gives us an anticipation of his later reflections on poetics, the new dialectic

for which Ockham constitutes a model should be a guide to the poet. In this case, the logic for which Ockham is placed next to Boethius and Cicero is the logic of language, namely, the philosophy of language that is responsible for investigating the relations between terms (the *terminus* as words, phrases, predicates), things and meanings, and for tracing their transformational rules. We do not know exactly what Boccaccio read of Ockham (in the letter, he mentions him with regard to logic: the *Summa Logicae*?), but he could very well have been influenced by his practical, methodical distrust of the reality of the general concepts.⁴⁰

If on the one hand the difficult relationship between words and things is a visible issue of the *Decameron*, as is shown in Cepparello's tale, the use of allegory, the *velamen*, and the *fictio* have important cognitive implications that are worth exploring in the *Genealogies*. Following the immediate enjoyment resulting from the reading of poetry in its literal meaning, from the aesthetic appreciation of the beauty of mythological or imaginary figures, from the fascination of the sound of the poetic meter, there is a moment, conscious or unconscious, in which the educated reader understands that fiction hides, beneath its peculiar language, something else behind the literal. It is precisely in this second cognitive phase that a special capacity inherent in the mechanisms of poetry is carried out. This capacity of poetry stimulates the reader to reflect on the meanings veiled in the literary expression. Boccaccio experimented with it before in the *Filocolo* with the figure of Florio, whose epistemological *quête* urges him to gain knowledge of the divine mysteries through a love conversion; or in that of Idalogo, a living allegory of the poetic discourse which explores the potentiality of ornate words, an allegory whose hidden truth Florio himself intends to reveal to the ignorant.⁴¹ Yet, in the *Genealogies*, when faced with the interpretation of myth, the cognitive aspect of fiction is charged with more philosophical implications and acquires a clearer epistemological value. The cognitive process of fiction is fulfilled here in what Boccaccio calls "composition" and "elocution," which are peculiar operations of the creative moment insofar as judgment (the active intellect, in the Thomistic sense) presides over them. The *fictio* is an aggregate of *inventiones* that must be dominated by an act of judgment in order to be set in the body of the fable. The act of judgment is finally associated with the use of *artes* accredited with scientific (i.e. epistemological) validity.⁴²

A certain cognitive aspect of fiction was already clear to Albertino Mussato, author of a famous defence of poetry.⁴³ But if we look at the closest predecessors of Boccaccio in relation to the problem of poetry

and knowledge, we find that Petrarch, in his *Invective contra medicum*, focuses on the rational aspects proper to any poetic creation because they allow him to introduce a comparison between poetry and the other sciences. The outward and inward form—the formal aspect and the content—of poetry are not juxtaposed but complementary, because both of them jointly concur in establishing an essential link between “word” and “concept,” that is, between form and content in every kind of poetry, a link that is made possible precisely by an act of judgment. Moreover, even before Petrarch, embracing a symbolic-exegetical poetics, Dante claimed for poetry the epistemological primacy over other speculative disciplines due to its ability to address universal knowledge and to match literary form and symbolic content of the secular world with regard to the truth. For Dante, in other words, it is poetry only that can provide an intuitive representation of Divinity.⁴⁴ In this way, and through different passages, it became possible to assign a specific epistemological function to poetry, that of uniting form and content, word and concept. Poetry made its entrance among the sciences insofar as it encompassed notions of a philosophical, historical, moral, and even theological nature that made it constantly relevant to its own age.⁴⁵ Thus, Boccaccio, too, reasserts the solid unity of form and content theorizing poetry as *exquisita locutio*, a sort of Aristotelian *synolon* of form and content.⁴⁶

Promoting the notion of the obscurity of poetry, in addition to being part of a well-established epistemological tradition, provides a psychological advantage for the act of comprehension over the limited potentialities that can be achieved with the clarity of the letter. Gregory the Great, for instance, maintains that “obscure divine discourse” is useful because it sharpens the wits: the fatigue and the difficulty of understanding enable the mind to apprehend what it could not grasp in a state of rest.⁴⁷ We also find the same notion in Mussato (*Epistulae*, VII.31–34 and IV.59). According to Augustine of Hippo, on the one hand, the lack of a precise meaning in the text of the Holy Scriptures produces a variety of interpretations, and on the other hand, it does not aim to confuse the readers, but rather to sharpen their wits so that they can derive more spiritual wealth.⁴⁸ Petrarch, too, expresses these views in his *Oratio capitolina* as well as in the epistle to Visconti (*Collatio* 9.8; *Metr.* 2.10, v. 162–163), from whence Boccaccio possibly took it. In the *Genealogies*, however, Boccaccio constantly questions himself and his readers: why must poetry be obscure? (XIV.18) Poetry is ambiguous and obscure insofar as it represents nature, the truth of reality, which

appears enigmatic to the eye of the poet as if he had seen it in a dream.⁴⁹ Yet poetry needs to be obscure because this very feature makes it more interesting, attractive and therefore stimulates the reader's mind (*labore ingeniorum quesita*):

Nec sit quis existimet a poetis veritates fictionibus invidia conditas, aut ut velint omnino absconditorum sensum negare lectoribus, aut ut artificiosiores appareant, sed ut, que apposita viluissent, *labore ingeniorum quesita* et diversimode intellecta comperta tandem faciant cariora. (XIV.xii.9)

(Surely no one can believe that poets invidiously veil the truth with fiction, either to deprive the reader of the hidden sense, or to appear the more clever; but rather to make truths which would otherwise cheapen by exposure the object of strong intellectual effort and various interpretation, that in ultimate discovery they shall be more precious.)

In order to validate his ideas, Boccaccio cites various sources in support of his psychological theory of *obscuritas* (see XIV.xii, 9–112 and XIV.13, where he cites various texts of Augustine).⁵⁰ In fact (and from another perspective), this concept is one of the theoretical premises for the reading of the *Decameron*: the initial and “obscure” account of the plague (“questo orrido cominciamento”) is conceived with the intent to establish a solid background for the reading of the tales, that is, to stimulate the mind (“A questa breve noia ... seguita prestamente la dolcezza e il piacere quale io v’ho davanti promesso e che forse non sarebbe da così fatto inizio, se non si dicesse, aspettato.” [I.Intro.6] [To this brief exordium of woe ... succeed forthwith the sweets and delights which I have promised you, and which, perhaps, had I not done so, were not to have been expected from it.]). Besides inviting the reader to establish a meaningful relation between this account and the rest of the *Decameron*, reading about the moving description of a disaster allows for a better appreciation of what will follow in the narration and to better understand it from the intellectual point of view as well.

To further illustrate this point, a reconsideration of the theory of knowledge of the *Hermetica* is enlightening to better understanding Boccaccio's poetics and his discourse on the obscure quality—the *velamento*—of his literary production in connection with the activities of the mind. The psychological dimension involved in the cognitive act of man towards reality (often not appearing fully comprehensible) is beautifully illustrated in Carl Gustav Jung's observations on hermetism. “Whereas

the scientific attitude seeks, on the basis of careful empiricism, to explain nature on her own terms, Hermetic philosophy,” Jung says, “had for its goal an explanation that included the psyche in a total description of nature.” We can understand the importance of a philosophy that focuses on the psyche, because philosophy regards “psychic premises, the archetypes, as inalienable components of the empirical world-picture.”⁵¹ The vision of poetry as science—as cognitive discipline—in the *Genealogies* has something similar to Jung’s conception. In the process of poetic creation, the emphasis is placed on the creative moment, namely, on that *fervor* of the mind that characterizes creation as a not fully rational act, but covertly psychological. If we look at Boccaccio’s literary career from his first literary experiences (from the *Elegia di Costanza* and *Allegoria mitologica* to the *Ninfale fiesolano* and *Buccolicum carmen*), it seems that he consistently dramatized poetics that reconciles the “fervor” of writing with interior refinement, existential with formal quest, through meditation on the mystery of archetypal origins and in search of a sapiential truth hidden beneath the veil of poetic fiction.⁵²

Jung also explains how, within the formative process of the dream, the emergence of the unconscious consists in a process of separation and alienation. The confrontation with the unconscious is both an irrational experience and a cognitive process.⁵³ The formative process of the dream may have an analogy with the creative process by which the poet, driven by an unconscious and relentless force, then taken by the sacred fervor, feels the need to communicate—by removing himself from it—the inner product of his knowledge in poetic forms. And this inner product, as a kind of inexpressible desire, seems eventually estranged from the individual who generated it. Even the concept of *exquisita locutio*, if one looks at its etymology, implies a will of the subject to seek (from the verb *exquiro*), or even to “desire,” and thence to know, his poetic product in order to then express it by *detaching* himself from it (note the separative feature of the prefix *ex-* to the verb *quaero* in the word *exquisita*).

The link between the secrecy of poetry, its psychological dimension and the search for the truth hidden beneath a veil is poetically illustrated in the explanation that Boccaccio provides of the nature of dreams.⁵⁴ The mechanism of dreams is strikingly similar to that of the *fabula*. According to Macrobius, Boccaccio says, there are several types of dreams, but there is one (called *somnium*) that reveals real things hidden under a veil (I.xxxi.12); and another for which the soul, detached from the body when sleeping, goes toward his divine origin and, through the

power of the intellect, is able to see the truth concealed to mankind: "... sentiens quod anima, sopito corpore, tanquam paululum solutior in suam divinitatem nitatur, et in latens humanitatem verum aciem omnem dirigat intellectus, et non nulla videat et discernat, et plura videat quam discernat, seu longius abdita sint, seu densiori tegmine occultata" (... when the body was sleeping, the spirit, as if slightly unrestrained, progressed toward its divinity, and the intellect directed its entire awareness toward the hidden truth lurking in humankind; some things it sees and understands, and it sees more than it understands, whether they are buried more deeply or hidden under a thicker cover [I.xxxi.16]). And according to the ideas of the ancients mentioned by Boccaccio, it is Mercury who is responsible for summoning the souls back to their bodies with his rod after their death and purification (II.vii.7); it is to Mercury that the ability to preside over the formation of the fetus in the womb and the ability to infuse the rational soul to the *conceptus* pertains (II.vii.8).

Amid the proliferation of theories on poetics that recur in the literary, philosophical and aesthetic traditions, it is first necessary to distinguish in the *Genealogies* the elements related to the defense of poetry that were traditional from the new elements that Mussato and Petrarch added to the debate. After that, the novel features of Boccaccio can be isolated with the aim of reading them in relation to both his poetry and the understanding of myth. Thus, even the text (the *Genealogies*) that Boccaccio submits to the attention of the community of literates and scholars can be understood as a palimpsest whose strata deriving from different traditions are analyzed separately in order to bring out the originality of its author.⁵⁵ Besides being the first to systematically discuss the problems of poetic theory, Boccaccio also brought a novelty to the aesthetic reflection on poetry that is, in my view, to be ascribed specifically to the philosophical and epistemological implications of the *fabula*. The discussion with Petrarch on the role and function of poetry certainly merges in numerous theoretical passages of the *Genealogies*. The *theologia poetica* expressed by Boccaccio in the *Trattatello* and in the *Genealogies* clearly derives from Petrarch's letter to his brother Gherardo (*Familiare*, X.4), which in turn was inspired by the well-known, and revolutionary for that epoch, theories of Mussato.⁵⁶ Boccaccio, however, draws on the theories of Mussato, of Petrarch, and of the philosophical-patristic tradition—he really does not hide his sources—but he also develops his thinking through the *reading* of the mythological stories,

on which it operates his own allegorical hermeneutic. In order to unravel the myth, according to Boccaccio, it is necessary to go further and look into the “recesses” of the poetic language in order to explore meanings “other” than allegorical with the aid of the intellect. For the readers of the *Decameron*, it is essential to adopt this way of reading, in order to increase their knowledge and multiply the levels of understanding of the tales.

THE HUMANIZED GODS: THE “WOMB OF GOD” AND THE TREE OF WISDOM

If Boccaccio’s poetics is firmly based on the cognitive aspects of fiction and the theory of obscurity has manifest psychological advantages for the act of comprehension, not surprisingly the cosmological order described by the *Genealogies* constantly refers to poetic creation. If *Sapientia* and *Prudentia* are clearly synonyms in the *Genealogies*, and the light very often features the state of the wise man (cf. XIV.ii.5; XIV.iii.6), myth, wisdom, and the creative human potentiality are frequently bound together in describing characteristics proper to the gods. We almost never know whether the gods are indeed creatures of the imagination or truly transcendent entities. Moreover, we fail to distinguish their divine nature from human nature. Thus, a god often merges with a human being, so that the euhemeristic explanation that describes the gods as deified men is not fully accepted by Boccaccio and does not serve to explain the totality of the cosmos; nor can the “theological physiology,” which explains the myths as natural phenomena, provide all solutions.

A clear example of this fluidity between the natures of men and gods is the god Hermes, mentioned in the *Genealogies*, whose figure was always confused with that of Hermes Trismegistus. If we look at the symbolic and historical evolution of the figure of Hermes Trismegistus (literally, “the thrice-great”), sometimes considered human and sometimes divine, we can recognize both a euhemeristic process whereby Hermes was treated as a deity, the Olympic Mercury or the Egyptian Thoth, and its reverse process whereby Hermes represented a god in his fall into human history; namely, the process of humanization of a deity. These opposite processes inevitably created fluctuations and encouraged the proliferation of fluid genealogies as well as the appearance of various forms of Greek Hermes.⁵⁷ From this point of view, and considering

only the god Hermes, confused or equated with the Trismegistus, it does not seem difficult to account for a similar proliferation of various gods or mythological figures described with the same name in the *Genealogies*, and consequently a proliferation of explanations as to their nature, human or divine, which they inevitably carry within themselves in all their ambiguities. In the *Genealogies*, neither the euhemerism, according to which a man is deified, nor the “counter-euhemerism,” according to which a god is humanized, proves to be valid heuristic explanation for the cosmos on which Boccaccio wants to base his account; rather, they are two opposite and contradictory phenomena of the evolution of the universe that serve to enliven the story of the divine genealogies and the origins of life itself. In sum, Boccaccio does not show a preference for the euhemeristic solution to explain the nature of the gods; rather, he merely represents the opposing forces of the world in a twofold process that goes from God to man and vice versa.⁵⁸

At the origin of all gods Boccaccio describes the belief in a deity, earthly by nature, yet joint with a divine and intelligent mind that epitomizes the wisdom of the world (I.Proemio.iii.3). The Demogorgon mentioned by Theodotus is a monadic and cosmic divinity that symbolically embraces heaven and earth.⁵⁹ Demogorgon’s mysteriousness eludes any characterization, but the imaginary etymology of the name that Boccaccio provides, the “God of the earth” or “the wisdom of the earth,” suggests an implication related to wisdom: “Nam *demon deus*, ut ait Leontius, *gorgon* autem *terra* interpretatur; seu potius *sapientia terre*, cum sepe *demon sciens* vel *sapientia* exponatur” (*daemon* means “god,” as Leontius says, and *gorgon* means “land,” or perhaps “wisdom of the land,” since *daemon* is often explained as “knowing” or “knowledge” [I.Proemio.iii.11]). Other important deities symbolize wisdom in the *Genealogies* and all evoke creation. Among the various attributes of mythological Minerva, Boccaccio draws attention to Minerva as the daughter of Jupiter. As seen before (cf. Introduction), the myth recounts that Minerva, wisdom, was born from the brain of Jupiter. Ancient natural philosophers, who believed that the mind (as intellectual faculty) resided in the brain, imagined that wisdom—personified as Minerva—was actually originated from the brain (of Jupiter), that is, symbolically from the depths of divine wisdom (II.iii.5).

Even the story of Prometheus—demigod and demiurge, who created men from dirt and water, and stole the fire from the gods to infuse it into the human chest (IV.xliv.1 and 5)—refers to the meaning of

wisdom concealed in the deeds of mythological characters.⁶⁰ First of all, Prometheus can be considered a historical figure—almost a self-commentary, as it were, on Boccaccio's literary career. In fact, Prometheus, by refusing to pursue the profession of his father Iapetus, follows his natural inclination and devotes himself to sciences and knowledge in a remote place on the top of the Caucasus. There, he acquires the astrological knowledge that he will later transmit to the uneducated men of Assyria thus becoming a civilizing hero (IV.xliv.8–9). Prometheus, the prototype of the learned man, educates humanity, and it is as if he created it a second time through science and virtue. Besides the autobiographical references, the presence of a further strong link with wisdom is confirmed by Minerva's intervention in the story: Minerva raises Prometheus to the sky in order to give to him what will be necessary to perfecting human nature, namely the guidance of wisdom that is nurtured by perfect substances and by the light of heaven, that is, the truth (IV.xliv.13). Truth and wisdom, whose eternal natures are represented by the wheel of the sun, are apprehended in the sky, namely, in meditative retreats, where Prometheus steals the fire from the gods. Wisdom is acquired almost in secret, like the theft of fire:

Non enim in theatris vel plateis et in propatulo veritatis claritatem adipiscimur, quin *imo in solitudinibus semoti*, et exquisita taciturnitate speculamur, et crebra meditatione rerum naturas exquirimus; et quia ista talia *clam fiunt, quasi furari* videmur, et ut appareat unde *sapientia* veniat in mortales, dicit quod a rota solis, id est e *gremio Dei*, a quo omnis sapientia est, ipse enim verus est sol “qui illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum,” (Io. 1:9) cuius eternitatem per rotam non habentem principium neque finem designare voluere, et hoc apposuerunt ut de ipso vero Deo et non de sole creato acciperemus dictum. (IV.xliv.14–15)

(Indeed, this is not described inappropriately, for we do not obtain the clarity of truth in theaters or town squares or in open spaces but secluded in solitude, and it is in silence that we pursue our inquiries and investigate the natures of things with much deep thought. And because such things are done in secret, as if we seem to be stealing them, and to explain whence wisdom comes to mortals, the fable says that it is from the wheel of the sun, that is, from the bosom of God, whence comes all wisdom, for He is the true sun “who illuminates every man coming into this earth.” They wanted to designate his eternity in that the wheel has no beginning nor end, and they add this so that we accept what was said about the true God himself and not about the created sun.) (In the Latin text, the word

“gremio” has not been properly translated with “lap.” I therefore change Solomon’s translation with “bosom,” which renders “gremio” more literally.)

And with the wisdom (fire) received from God, the wise man (Prometheus) gives life to the appeased soul of the man made of mud and clay, that is, of the ignorant man (IV.xliv.16). Fire can be traditionally associated with life and the soul is also found in the *vitalis calor* that Vulcano instilled in Psyche in Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis*, and that Eriugena and Remigius of Auxerre interpreted as the heat present in every creation. Fire is the source of vitality and generation, but also of *ingenium* in humans, of imagination and the power of understanding. Moreover, according to Eriugena, the *igniculi* preserve the memory of the soul’s original dignity before the fall into earth.⁶¹

The opening of the fourteenth book of the *Genealogies*, best known for the defense of poetry, is charged with cosmological meanings and demiurgic connotations assigned to the work of the author.⁶² The panoramic view of the author appearing at the very beginning focuses on the narrative path he has taken, a journey from the dark caverns of hell to the heights of heaven, through seas, valleys, cities, forests and mountains, up to a flight among the abodes of the gods where one can admire the harmony of the rotating spheres. The author’s journey is not simply an erudite description or an informative compilation. It is, precisely, a “demiurgic” undertaking which provides the history of “creation” from primordial chaos. Behind the implicit metaphor that compares cosmic with poetic creation, Boccaccio’s work consists, as we have seen, in reassembling the shipwrecked fragments of the genealogy of the gods into a single body with the aim to show them in an orderly, detailed, taxonomically correct work of interpretation. And that the operation is a demiurgic one is confirmed by the penetrating gaze of the erudite poet who benefits no less than from divine inspiration; his meditation on the nature and destiny of the gods is illuminated from above (“divina tamen luce previa perambulavimus” [With stumbling pace, yet led of the divine light]); his vision is sharpened in order to move freely among the vast mythological geographies (“ac insuper eius profundissimos gurgites adeo *perspicaci* quadam indagatione sulcavimus” [I have even sounded with exploring glance the lowest depths of Ocean] [XIV.Proemio.1–3]). Before reaching the well-deserved harbor after a daring navigation, the defense of poetry that is about to follow to

this “cosmic” introduction is inspired by divine intelligence (“Attamen consilium longe probabilius *menti* desuper *infudit deus*” [But God hath inspired a far more worthy purpose in me] [XIV.Proemio.4]), so that the work will religiously pass into the sacred hands of the Creator (“in sacras Celsitudinis tue manus” [the sacred hands of your Highness] [XIV.I.1]) before gracefully arriving into those of the King of Cyprus, who will be pleased to see, at last, that the ancient poets were men of learning, possessing divine art and intellectual faculties (“latentes nuper sub rudi cortice sensus nunc productos in lucem ... mirabundus aspicias, teque ipsum modesta quadam delectatione laudabis, quod iam dudum de poetis vera arbitratus sis, eos scilicet ... eruditissimos quidem atque divino quodam animo et artificio preditos” [you will wonder to see the meaning that was lately hidden under a rough shell brought forth now into the light ... and you will even praise yourself with a kind of mild satisfaction, that you have long been of the right opinion about poets ... taking them ... for men of great learning, endowed with a sort of divine intelligence and skill] [XIV.i.1–2]).

Then, Boccaccio’s defense of poetry against the ignorant begins (XIV. ii), a defense against those who want to appear wise (XIV.iii), and especially against jurists eager to accumulate money (XIV.iv). By mentioning the well-known, traditional concept of the artistic product intended as unusual joining of words (the Horatian *callida iunctura*), Boccaccio comes to locate the domain and role of poetry in the highest sky, and to identify the divinity with the Aristotelian *Primo mobile* of poetic inspiration. Here, poetry is the privilege bestowed on a few exceptional and elected minds that the divine intelligence is able to guide by stimulating their minds:

Si nesciunt isti, poesis maioribus vacat, nam, cum celos inhabitet divinis inmixta consiliis, *paucorum hominum mentes* ex alto in desiderium eterni nominis *moveret*, et sua pulchritudine in sublimes cogitationes impellit, tractisque *inventiones peregrinas* ostendit, atque ex *ingeniis egregiis sermones exquisitos* emittit. (XIV.iv.9)

(But, though my opponents may not be aware of it, Poetry devotes herself to something greater; for while she dwells in heaven, and mingles with the divine counsels, she *moves the minds of a few men* from on high to a yearning for the eternal, lifting them by her loveliness to high reverie, drawing them away into the discovery of *strange wonders*, and pouring forth most *exquisite discourse* from her exalted mind.)

The aspiration to heavenly heights does not simply have a Christian meaning. It has a religious character, though it does not seem to be intended to achieve the knowledge of God. Poetry intended as wisdom, as well as aspiring to consider heavenly things, is directed at stimulating the mind and meditation (XIV.iv.11) that takes advantage of natural solitudes (“poete in silvis et solitudinibus ocia meditationibus terunt” [poets delight meditation in the solitude of the countryside (trans. mine)] [XIV.iv.28]); it is a science based on unchangeable and stable principles (XIV.iv.12).⁶³ Poetry possesses features in common with philosophy, the most important among these being its cognitive capacity and its meditative dimension. Furthermore, poetry is distinct from philosophy, and is independent, because it is defined by the uniqueness of its language. Yet, poetry does not bring material wealth because, as with other speculative disciplines (i.e., philosophy and theology), it has another purpose (XIV.iv.7–8).

Although not inspired by the true God, ancient poetry was a peculiar activity of human beings; ancient poets were able to craft exceptional poetic products, just like the human body is able to generate the exceptional fruit of its womb (“Gentiles fuere homines; non Christum novere; suam extulere, quam sacram arbitrabantur, religionem, fictiones edidere, gratissimos et commendabiles *utero* persepe gerentes fructus” [XIV. xviii.5] [They were Gentiles, who knew not Christ, and who upheld their own religion, because they regarded it as holy, and in publishing their works, they often held out the pleasing and acceptable fruit that was in their womb] [As with Solomon’s translation quoted above, I had to adapt Osgood’s translation as well because he did not translate the word “utero”]). Poetry, in other words, is not simply a gift from God, but derives precisely from His womb (*gremio Dei, sinu Dei*): “... ut appareat unde *sapientia* veniat in mortales, dicit quod a rota solis, id est e *gremio Dei*, a quo omnis sapientia est ...” (IV.xliv.14–15; quoted extensively above) (... to explain whence wisdom comes to mortals, the fable says that it is from the wheel of the sun, that is, from the bosom of God, whence comes all wisdom ...). This metaphorical language of the “womb of God” is not secondary, and rather seems to have a Platonic, and even hermetic, connotation.⁶⁴ Moreover, if it is not coincidental that in modern Italian the expression “to come from the womb of God” means “something whose origin is completely ignored,” and that the womb is the part of the human body where procreation takes place, it seems even more reasonable to think that Boccaccio wanted to connect the concept of poetry as an unknown generative act to the equally mysterious and

unknown generative act of the creation of the gods. Thus, poetry is just like creation, like a generative act, whose origin is lost in the mists of time, and whose beginning is still unknown, despite all the efforts of rational reconstruction of the various genealogies. Boccaccio probably had in mind this idea of poetry when he conceived the general framework of the *Decameron* as a cosmological metaphor of creation (i.e. the Ten Days as a reference of the six days of creation in the *Genesis*) and the flight of the storytellers from the plague as a symbolical act of recreation.

The term “womb of God” can also have an explanation in relation to the Platonic conception of matter as the “womb,” or receptacle that receives the form for the creation of life. Indicative of this aspect are certain metaphors in Bernard Silvestris’s *Cosmographia* where Nature is depicted as “blessed fruitfulness of my (i.e. of Noys) womb” (*uteri mei beata fecunditas* [*Cosmographia*, p. 69]), or the figure of Hyle as the “inexhaustible womb of generation” (*Cosmographia*, p. 70), metaphors that are furthermore contaminated with a Marian vision of Nature.⁶⁵ Poetic creation is also similar to the divine act of creating the soul, as shown by the ontological speculations of Marius Victorinus: it is from the womb of God that the soul is breathed into the human body, precisely from the innermost part of God.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the generation of human being and matter from the womb of God is peculiar to the speculation of Hermetism. Here, the term “womb” (*sinus*) acquires precisely the characteristics of “unknown,” “mysterious,” whose connotations are also reflected in the *Genealogies*. See, for example, what the *Asclepius* says, replacing the term “gremio” with the more poetical *sinus*:

sic ergo et mundus, quamvis natus non sit, in se tamen omnium naturas habet, utpote qui his omnibus ad concipiendum *fecundissimos sinus praestet*. hoc est ergo totum qualitatis materiae, quae creabilis est, tametsi creata non est. (*Asclepius*, 15)

(Therefore, although matter did not come to be, it nonetheless has in itself the natures of all things inasmuch as it furnishes them most fertile wombs for conceiving. The whole of matter’s quality, then, is to be creative, even though it was not created.)

And also see how *Hermetica* XIII begins:

I do not know what sort of womb mankind was born from, O Trismegistus, nor from what kind of seed.

2. My child, <the womb> is the wisdom of understanding in silence,
and the seed is the true good.

The acquisition of wisdom, and therefore salvation, is like a rebirth, as the womb is nothing but wisdom itself.

Similarly, the bond that the *Genealogies* establish between the gods and the human body is very tight and presents significant implications. The author himself is responsible for reconnecting the limbs of a disconnected body in order to form a whole, as we have already seen in the initial metaphor of the *membra disiecta*. However, the metaphor of the body extends to the whole system of the *Genealogies* so as to involve its conception and the general architecture of the narrative. If one looks at the autograph manuscript of the *Genealogies*, which is accompanied by genealogical diagrams—designed by Boccaccio himself—⁶⁷ illustrating the various genealogies, and one notices how Boccaccio decided to arrange the overall narrative according to a hierarchical tree with its roots placed in the sky, everything becomes clearer: “In arbore signata desuper ponitur in culmine Demogorgon *versa in celum radice*, nec solum infra descripte progeniei sed deorum omnium gentilium pater, et in ramis et frondibus ab eo descendentibus describuntur eius filii et nepotes” (In the tree illuminated above, the roots are turned upward toward the sky and Demogorgon is placed at the top. He is father of not only the progeny described below but of all the pagan gods. His sons and grandsons are shown in both the branches and the leaves extending from this) (I.Proemio.iii.rubrica; see also I.Proemio.i.47, and each initial section, or rubrica, of books II–XIII). The *stemma deum* of the descent of the gods is beautifully represented, for example, in the autograph ms. Laurenziano, Pluteo 52, No. 9, f. 31b, or in the Egerton 1865, f. 59v of the British Library, as a huge inverted tree whose unique root at the top is constituted by the presumed father of the gods, Demogorgon, and whose lower branches are formed by various descendants, divine, heroic, and, finally, human or semidivine like Asclepius. The idea of the symbolic tree is certainly no novelty. For instance, the famous so-called Tree of Jesse refers to the biblical tradition (cf. Isaiah 11:1; or the story of the book of *Genesis* as the generation of Adam). Another well-known tree is that of the third century Neo-Platonist Porphyry (a pupil of Plotinus), who defines the hierarchy of the ontological predicates (the categories of being) in order to support the explanation of Aristotle’s categories.⁶⁸ For its “cascade” conception, whose idea was suggested by Porphyry in his *Isagoge* (a

text which was considered the textbook of logic in the Middle Ages) and then represented visually by other unknown scribes in the Middle Ages, this tree has a close analogy with the same kind of representations, from top to bottom, in the *Genealogies*. Even the True tree mentioned in the Qur'an (14:24) has a firm root, its branches in the heavens. Interestingly, in Western folklore as well as in Middle Eastern traditions, the theme of the tree of deception contains epistemological connotations (cf. Thomson, "tree of deception"); in some of these texts, an enchanted pear tree deceives the sight of someone climbing it as in Boccaccio's story of Lidia and her cuckolded husband Pirro in *Decameron* VII.9.⁶⁹

But in merely chronological terms, the inspirational model closer to Boccaccio may probably be that of Dante, who in the Garden of Eden evokes the tree of knowledge that symbolizes several things at the same time, namely the knowledge of good and evil, and humanity in the ages of its history ("... una pianta dispogliata / di fiori e d'altra fronda in ciascun ramo" [... a tree stripped of its leaves / and any other flowering on its branches] [*Purgatorio*, XXXII.38–39]), or even metaphorizes the whole structure of Paradise as an inverted tree that feeds on the top, as shown by Cacciaguida's words to Dante describing the fifth heaven, the heaven of Mars ("El cominciò: 'In questa quinta soglia / de l'albero che vive de la cima / e frutta sempre e mai non perde foglia..." [And he began: "On this fifth tier of the branches / of the tree that draws its sustenance from above / and always is in fruit and never sheds its leaves"] [*Paradiso*, XVIII.28–30]). The Paradise, in fact, is presented metaphorically as a tree that receives its nourishment from above (the Empyrean). The image of the inverted tree, then, echoes the same words of Cacciaguida in the precedent *canto*, this time, though, referring to Dante ("O cara piota mia che sí t'insusi..." ["O my precious root, you are raised so high"] [*Paradiso*, XVII.13]). These metaphors of the tree, like that of the plant, have their natural reference in the shape of the human body. The whole heaven is represented as an inverted tree, and the pilgrim is compared to a root that "s'insusa." Furthermore, in the *Commedia*, Adam and Saint Peter are compared with two roots of the glowing rose of the Empyrean ("Quei due che seggon là sú piú felici / per esser propinquissimi ad Augusta, / son d'esta rosa quasi due radici" [These two who are seated there above us, / most happy for being so near the Empress, / are, as it were, the two roots of this rose] [*Paradiso*, XXXII.118–120]) thus emphasizing the climax of the poetic upside-down vision of Paradise.⁷⁰

The idea of a human being as an inverted tree seems to be widespread in the Middle Ages.⁷¹ The tree is often represented as an individual in various cultures, and as a symbol of human life.⁷² Besides the tree of life appearing in *Genesis* 2:9 and the biblical Tree of Jesse already mentioned, also Joachim of Fiore, in his *Liber figurarum*, uses the tree of human history and the genealogies of Christ to comment and illustrate his own prophecies.⁷³ The *Liber figurarum*, beautifully copied, among many others, in two manuscripts from Reggio Emilia (Seminario Vescovile Urbano), in a manuscript from Oxford (Corpus Christi College, 255 A), and in a manuscript from Dresden (Library of Dresden, Ms. A 121), looks remarkably like Boccaccio's tree for its structure, use of colors in relation to the different levels of descent, and for the shape and style of the foliations.⁷⁴ Yet we do not know when the Tree of Jesse, and that of Joachim, assumes the upside-down form as portrayed in Dante's Empirean tree. In the *Genealogies*, the various trees of the gods, for their taxonomic intent, may have been inspired by the biblical Tree of Jesse, or that of Joachim, or the so-called *arbor iuris* of the medieval legal tradition.⁷⁵ However, the analogy of the tree representing gods' descendants using the shape of the human body, whose limbs can be associated with the branches and roots, sets the human being at the center of everything; precisely, at the center of the cosmos. It also assumes symbolical connotations, reinforced by the demiurgic attitude of Boccaccio who wants to carry out an *ante litteram* "alchemical" reconstruction, in a single body, of the *membra disiecta* of pagan mythology.

DEIFIED MEN: THE POWER OF THE MIND AND THE FUNCTION OF THE POET

As we have seen, the cosmological description of the universe is significantly rendered with a peculiar language of knowledge, a language that does not always make a clear distinction between the natures of men and gods. By paralleling cosmic creation with poetic creation, the very nature of poetry is revealed: poetry is exquisite elocution whose creative power derives from God's womb. Ultimately, the fluidity and unity established between the natures of men and gods has a metaphorical counterpart in the image of the tree of knowledge that epitomizes the entire structure of the cosmos as one body. The focus of the *Genealogies*, however, is not only the cosmos, or the gods. As we shall see, humans have an essential

part in creating the harmony of the universe; above all, they are the protagonists of the cognitive experience of philosophy, an experience that can be achieved only with the intuitive power of the mind.

Although built on the image and likeness of gods' abodes, the house of philosophy is right here on earth (XIV.v.1). Philosophy reigns over this house holding a scepter and a book; and to those who are willing to listen, she points out human morals, the forces of nature, the true good, and heavenly secrets (*celestia docet arcana*). Anyone who enters this house is aware of being in a highly revered shrine (*sacrarium ... dignissimum videas*).⁷⁶ Furthermore, if a person looks around this house, he can see the greatness of human knowledge, the speculation of the great geniuses, and everything that the intellect can comprehend. Philosophy deals with rational things, yet is also a sacred thing in so far as it is a divine gift.⁷⁷ The house itself is a representation of the whole in the one, namely, the representation of the divine mind:

et adeo miraberis, ut tecum dicas *unum totum continens* domum esse, imo ipsam fere *divine mentis effigiem*. (XIV.v.2)

(you regard it not merely as one all-inclusive household, but almost the very image of the divine mind).

One aspect of this description not to be overlooked is the Christian-pagan syncretism of the language adopted by Boccaccio, or the neo-Platonic connotations of associating philosophy with the sacred representation of a deity to worship. Above all, it is worth noting the hermetic aspects of certain terms which link the message unraveled by philosophy with the mystery and secrecy of divine truth (*celestia ... arcana*), or an allusion to the concept of the union of the One with the Whole (*unum totum continens*), which appears with similar words also at the very beginning of the *Asclepius*.⁷⁸ Last but not least, not only is philosophy the object of veneration, but it is indeed man himself who is revered so that he sits on a high place, on an elevated seat, behind the queen of the house:

Et inter alia, summa veneratione dignissima, sunt ibi post dominam cel-siore in sede locati *homines*, non multi tamen, mites aspectu atque eloquio et morum etiam gravitate, tanta honestate atque vera humilitate spectabiles, *ut credas deos potius quam mortales*. Hi iam presidentis dogmatibus pleni, abunde aliis ingerunt, que noverunt. (XIV.v.3)

(Among other objects of great veneration there, behind the mistress of the household, are certain men seated in high places, few in number, of gentle aspect and utterance, who are so distinguished by their seriousness, honesty, and true humility, *that you take them for gods not mortals*. These men abound in the faith and doctrine of their mistress, and give freely to others of the fullness of their knowledge.)

Here, one can perceive the real cosmic meaning of human nature. Man—venerated, deified, wise, of honest morals—is the human model of divine knowledge. As a microcosm, in the Chartrian way, he reflects the essence of the totality, but he is also the one who, as a mediating and eloquent Mercury, is responsible for communicating to others what he has learned.⁷⁹ Ultimately, Boccaccio's demi-god man is an admirable prefiguration of the deified man typical of some aspects of the Renaissance philosophy of man.⁸⁰ And such a half-divine man, however, is not to be confused with the false wise man who, according to the discussion that follows, only simulates his wisdom (paragraphs 4–14).⁸¹

When Boccaccio enters the core of his exposition of poetic creation, he summarizes his findings in a Ciceronian mini-*Pro Archia* defence speech condensed into three paragraphs. When it comes to discussing the essence, origin, and function of poetry, his language, as well as conveying the more traditional concepts of poetry as *velamen*, also involves the cognitive dimension of the creative process by emphasizing the moment of imagination as an activity of the mind and putting human faculties in competition with the divine:

Poesis enim, quam negligentes abiciunt et ignari, est fervor quidam exquisite inveniendi atque dicendi, seu scribendi, quod inveneris. Qui, ex sinu dei procedens, paucis mentibus, ut arbitror, in creatione conceditur, ex quo, quoniam mirabilis sit, rarissimi semper fuere poete. Huius enim fervoris sunt sublimes effectus, ut puta mentem in desiderium dicendi compellere, peregrinas et inauditas inventiones excogitare, meditatatas ordine certo componere, ornare compositum inusitato quodam verborum atque sententiarum contextu, velamento fabuloso atque decenti veritatem contegere.... Et, quoniam ex fervore hoc, ingeniorum vires acuate atque illustrante, nil nisi artificiatum procedit ars ut plurimum vocitata poesis est. Cuius quidem poesis nomen non inde exortum est, unde plurimi minus advertenter existimant, scilicet a poio pois, quod idem sonat, quod fingo fingis, quin imo a poetes; vetustissimum Grecorum vocabulum Latine sonans exquisita locutio. (XIV.vii.1–3)

(This poetry, which ignorant triflers cast aside, is a sort of fervid and exquisite invention, with fervid expression, in speech or writing, of that which the mind has invented. It proceeds from the bosom of God, and few, I find, are the souls in whom this gift is born; indeed so wonderful a gift it is that true poets have always been the rarest of men. This fervor of poesy is sublime in its effects: it impels the soul to a longing for utterance; it brings forth strange and unheard-of creations of the mind; it arranges these meditations in a fixed order, adorns the whole composition with unusual interweaving of words and thoughts; and thus it veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction.... Now since nothing proceeds from this poetic fervor, which sharpens and illumines the powers of the mind, except what is wrought out by art, poetry is generally called an art. Indeed the word poetry has not the origin that many carelessly suppose, namely *poio*, *pois*, which is but Latin *finigo*, *finigis*; rather it is derived from a very ancient Greek word *poetes*, which means in Latin exquisite discourse.)

As one can discern through Boccaccio's theoretical complexity, poetry is indeed the result of various elements. With his words, the poet manages to create an unusual weave (easily compared to the Horatian *calida iunctura*) whereby he intends to convey hidden truths. Truth, in turn, is covered by the veil of fiction. While poetry as fervor is a well-known concept in the ancient tradition and in the subsequent medieval and Renaissance views,⁸² Boccaccio does not seem to indulge in speculation that would represent it as divine frenzy in which any link with reason is cut off. However, as the obscure nature of poetry originating in the womb of God and given as a gift to a selected few has already been discussed, what remains to be explained is how the mind is involved in the poetic creation (the sublime effect), how it is able to make human beings imagine and then express their thoughts, and why Boccaccio repeatedly focuses on the activity of the mind. The latter could also specifically explain why Boccaccio rejected the idea of poetic inspiration as folly.

After having set out in a sort of mini-catalog the outcomes of poetry in its various poetic genres (epic, pastoral, mythological, penegirical, moral: "reges armare, in bella deducere ... et huiusmodi plura" [it can arm kings, marshal them for war ... and many other such, are the effects of poetry]⁸³), Boccaccio restates, albeit indirectly, that poetry is not uncontrolled frenzy but needs to be guided by technical skills so that it can express itself without keeping all the beautiful images in

the mind (“perraro impulsus commendabile perficit aliquid, si instrumenta, quibus meditata perfici consuevere, defecerint” [it very rarely accomplishes anything commendable if the instruments by which its concepts are to be wrought out are wanting]). This knowledge consists of all the available instruments for composition, that is, the historical disciplines, grammar, rhetoric, geography, natural science, and morality, which become *ancillae* of poetry and allow for images first to be designed in the mind and subsequently to be expressed. Everything contributes to the achievement of an act that can be considered purely mental. What is necessary to the realization of this act, then, are solitude, peace of mind, and the desire for glory (not to mention the ardor of young age), which all together promote creativity and prevent the energies of the mind from becoming numb (“si deficiant hec, non nunquam circa excogitata torpescit ingenium” [If these conditions fail, the power of creative genius frequently grows dull and sluggish]). The logical implication of this discourse is the exaltation of the mental stage, and, in turn, the exaltation of poetry as a pure act of the mind. The fervor itself intensifies and illuminates the intellectual forces (“ex fervore hoc, ingeniorum vires acuate atque illustrante” [this poetic fervor, which sharpens and illumines the powers of the mind]); namely, it constitutes itself as the founding moment of the creative act, albeit limited to be merely the initial phase. By recalling the etymology of the word “poetry,” Boccaccio suggests that the domain of art relates only to a limited part of creation, that is, the name of poetry, not the concept; poetry takes its name from its effects, that is, from its outcomes. Therefore, what matters most is what is created by the highest act of the human intellect, as sort of neo-Platonic *acies mentis*. Art and technique have contributed only to the completion of the poetical product and cannot claim any other major role. Finally, Cicero’s words reflecting those of the poet Archias (Cicero’s work is also cited in the text) are used by Boccaccio to restate the total supremacy of the *ingenium* and the mind of the poet against doctrine, precepts and technique: “ceterarum rerum studia et doctrina et preceptis et arte constare, poetam natura ipsa valere, et mentis viribus excitari, et quasi divino quodam spiritu inflari” (while other arts are matters of science and formula and technique, poetry depends solely upon an inborn faculty, is evoked by a purely mental activity, and is infused with a strange supernatural inspiration [XIV.vii.6]).⁸⁴

In sum, poetry is an art (*facultas*) whose inspiration is a gift that comes from the womb of God, and whose meaning is covered by a veil (XIV.vii.5–8). Since poetic fervor sharpens the mind, poetry is also a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the power of the intellect. At this point of the *Genealogies*, Boccaccio enquires about the first poets. Here, not only does he confirm that they were also theologians,⁸⁵ but also he describes how divine poetical inspiration captured their minds and stimulated the writing of poems. Musaeus, Linus, and Orpheus were driven by a certain impulse of the mind to compose verses in praise of God (“Museus, Lynus, et Orpheus, quadam *divine mentis instigatione conmoti*, carmina peregrina mensuris et temporibus regulata finxere et in dei laudem invenerunt” [Musaeus, Linus, and Orpheus—under the prompting stimulus of the Divine Mind, invented strange songs in regular time and measure, designed for the praise of God] [XIV.viii.6]), and in order to make the mysteries of God more authoritative and religiously respected they covered them with beautiful words (“ut amplioris essent autoritatis, sub verborum cortice excelsa divinorum misteria posuere,” [To strengthen the authority of these songs, they enclosed the high mysteries of things divine in a covering of words] [XIV.viii.6]). The power of the mind, however, differs depending on the type of inspiration one has received. Boccaccio does not believe that the ancient Greeks were the first inspired poets; rather, he believes—perhaps even in a contradictory way, considering the previous glorification of the pagan poets, or maybe even for a certain fear of antagonizing the ecclesiastical authorities—that the first ones were the holy prophets, like Moses, who, under the inspiration of God, wrote the entire Pentateuch.⁸⁶ Pagan poets simply followed the example of the prophets, the only difference being that while prophets were inspired by the Holy Spirit, pagan poets, instead, composed with the power of the mind: “Quorum ego, nec forsan insipide, reor poetas gentiles in componendis poematibus secutos vestigia; verum ubi divini homines Sancto pleni Spiritu, eo impellente, scripsere, sic et alii *vi mentis*, unde vates dicti, hoc urgente fervore, sua poemata condidere” (And I think the poets of the Gentiles in their poetry—not perhaps without understanding—followed in the steps of these prophets; but whereas the holy men were filled with the Holy Ghost, and wrote under His impulse, the others were prompted by mere energy of mind [XIV.viii.12–13]).

The emphasis on the power of the mind is temporarily left aside when Boccaccio moves to the exposition of the fable. Then, he goes back to it again, using the metaphorical language of the eyes of the mind and the light, and making reference to some of his concepts on poetics that will later reappear, as we shall see, at key points in his minor works and in the *Decameron* (see Chap. 3). First of all, as Boccaccio explains, obscurity should not be condemned as the poets' flaw. The language of poetry is as obscure as that of philosophy and sacred texts (XIV.xii.2–3). The inability to understand a text should not make us believe that it is defective. It is rather the human eye that is imperfect, just like when it attempts to observe the solar disk. The obscurity of the text, therefore, relates to the ability of intellectual vision and not to the incomprehensibility of the text (XIV.xii.6–7). Second, there remains to consider why poets wanted to cover their truths with the veil of fable. Here, again, Boccaccio explains that the veil of fable is necessary to give more dignity to the truth, and to prevent it from the sight of those who would not comprehend it due to their little understanding (“ab oculis torpentium auferre,” XIV.xii.9). If the power of intellectual sight is necessary for the understanding of a text, equally necessary is the health of the mind—on this concept Boccaccio reveals the influence of an Augustinian source on his cognitive theory. Poets have hidden the truth as the Holy Spirit has concealed the meaning of Scripture in order to protect it and to increase its meanings:

Quod longe magis Sanctum fecisse Spiritum unusquisque, cui *sana mens* est, debet pro certissimo arbitrari. Quod per Augustinum in libro *Celestis Ierusalem* XI firmare videtur, dum dicit: “Divini sermonis *obscuritas* etiam ad hoc est utilis, quod plures sententias veritatis parit et *in lucem notitie* producit, dum alius eum sic, alius sic intelligit.” Et alibi Augustinus idem *super Psalmo* CXXVI dicit: “Ideo forte *obscurius* positum est, ut multos intellectus generet, et ditiores discedant homines, qui clausum invenerunt, quod multis modis aperiretur, quam si uno modo apertum invenirent.” (XIV.xii.10)

[In a far higher degree is this the method of the Holy Spirit; nay, every right-minded man should be assured of it beyond any doubt. Besides it is established by Augustine in the *City of God*, Book Eleven, when he says: “The obscurity of the divine word has certainly this advantage, that it causes many opinions about the truth to be started and discussed, each reader seeing some fresh meaning in it.” Elsewhere he says of Psalm 126: “For perhaps the words are rather obscurely expressed for this reason, that

they may call forth many understandings, and that men may go away the richer, because they have found that closed which might be opened in many ways, than if they could open and discover it by one interpretation.”]

Poets, therefore, are *not* mendacious because they lack the intention to lie (XIV.xiii.2–3); similarly, the Scripture does not lie simply because it veils the eye of the intellect, or the truth itself, with its poetical *figurae* (“Si me hoc velint credere, nil aliud erit quam mendacio velare michi oculos intellectus, uti illa [scil. figura] velant suppositam veritatem” [If they wish me to think it does, what else is it but a lie thus to veil the eyes of my understanding, as they also veil the truth beneath?] [XIV.xiii.6]). In conclusion, the accusation of obscurity ascribed to poetry is conceived only by those who do not understand (par. xiv), by those who want to judge things that they do not know (par. xv); hence, we should blame them, not poetry.

This “mental” and cognitive conception of poetic creation, and this constant recourse to Platonic, hermetic, and obscure language, seems quite original compared to Petrarch and Mussato. In their works, in fact, poetic *furor* has a divine origin—the poet is indeed the repository of the divine spirit—but they do not formulate any explanation on the elaboration of the poetic material in the mind. It is Boccaccio, then, who first draws attention to the role of the mind. If Christian poets are inspired by the Holy Spirit, pagan poets, instead, are captured by a certain divine fervor that sharpens their minds, enlightens them (to use a peculiarly Augustinian term), and stimulates them to act and express their poetic efforts. Thus, the mind becomes the human organ that produces poetry. The mind forms poetic images that can be transformed into literary products through the use of art and rhetoric, which would otherwise remain unexpressed. In other words, the mind functions as an epistemological tool. It is the mind that fulfills the cognitive functions of the human being regardless of the dictates of God.

So far we have explored the obscure nature of poetry as originating in the womb of God and given as a gift to a select few. Poetry appears to be a cognitive tool that takes advantage of the power of the intellect. Boccaccio repeatedly focuses on the activity of the mind involved in poetic creation (the sublime effect), which is able to make human beings imagine and then express their thoughts. Poetry and cognition, in sum, contribute to the achievement of an act that can be considered purely mental. What is necessary to the realization of this act, then, are solitude,

peace of mind, and desire for glory, which together promote creativity and enhance the energies of the intellect. This, in turn, contributes to the exaltation of the mental stage as well as the exaltation of poetry as a pure act of the mind. Within this system, human nature assumes a cosmic dimension whereby Man is venerated and deified as a model of divine knowledge that is able, in turn, to become a model of philosophical learning. To conclude this chapter, what remains to be considered is the function of the poet in the poetics of the *Genealogies*.

Boccaccio expressed his initial intention of reflecting on both the meaning of poetry and the importance of the poet in his biography of Dante. In fact, the *Trattatello in laude di Dante* (first conceived around 1350) manifests the awareness and intention to create a true legend from the experience and poetic biography of Dante.⁸⁷ The human and literary figure emerging from the *Trattatello* is that of a great literary personality whose importance has not been adequately recognized and appreciated in the midst of the moral deluge of Florentine society. The plague that affects the city is not only physiological but is also a moral disease related to dissolute customs, and in the midst of the “furori” and “impeti” of Fortune, no one can recognize the proper merits and virtues of the Poet, merits that are granted, instead, to dishonest and criminal individuals. Almost ten years before, in 1342, Boccaccio wrote a biography of Petrarch.⁸⁸ The episode of his life that constitutes the occasion for the composition, and on which the biography focuses, is the awarding of the poetic laurel to Boccaccio’s *magister* on the Capitol of Rome in 1341. The importance given to this event in Petrarch’s biography illustrates the relevance that Boccaccio attributed to poetry and to the recognition of the poet’s merits within the civic virtues. The narrative of biographical events (paragraphs 1–17), the physical and moral portrait of Petrarch (paragraphs 18–27) and the catalog of his works (paragraphs 28–30), are amalgamated into a coherent and functional unity which perfectly associates poetry with the poet’s personal glory. In addition to being the poet-theologian who is able to reveal historical and meta-historical truths,⁸⁹ Boccaccio’s admired teacher appears in the guise of an alter-Cicero, or an alter-Seneca (see par. 9), who at the peak of his experience is preparing to confront himself with both the past and the future. Petrarch is not only *the* poet, but, first and foremost, is the wise man (paragr. 18) who lives his philosophical experience honestly (paragr. 19) by combining wisdom and integrity of customs,⁹⁰ by mastering all the philosophical disciplines, especially ethics and theology.⁹¹ Boccaccio also narrates

of Petrarch's stay in Naples at the Angevin court of King Robert where he received the poetic crowning, and persuaded the court that poetry is a form of knowledge. Furthermore, the fact that King Robert acknowledged poetry with a high recognition, the *laurea*, within the liberal arts is revealing of the environment wherein Boccaccio had been educated. In fact, the cultural milieu of the Neapolitan court was connected, thanks to diplomatic relations, travel and the remarkable intellectual resources of its library, with the most innovative artistic and intellectual centers of that time: Florence, Paris, Avignon, and Oxford.

As the particular attention for historical poets like Dante and Petrarch shows, the function of the poet, as was intended by Boccaccio, can be better understood within a full reevaluation of the subject that produces poetry against the Thomistic aesthetic conception, which instead emphasized the reality of the artistic product and faded the figure of the poet into the background. The novelty of Boccaccio's conception—in accordance with Petrarch—can be seen as an appreciation of the subject (the poet) of the aesthetic judgment, and the pursuit of morality in the subject-author.⁹² From this point of view, it is significant that Boccaccio emphasized the importance of poetry as much as that of the poets; it is also significant that he made constant reference to the *ingenium*, to the poet's *ardor*, the *fervor*, and to the need to remain in *solitudines*.⁹³ Poetry, thanks to its refined discourse (*exquisita locutio*), has its genesis in the innate ability of the poet to meditate inventions, that is, from his productive *ingenium*. Consequently, unlike the Thomistic conception according to which artistic perfection lies, not in the artist, but in the finished product of his work, the personality of the poet becomes the most important thing.⁹⁴ Boccaccio restores the personality of the artist to the field of aesthetics, as is also evidenced in the representations of writers and artists in the *Decameron*, from Giotto to Cavalcanti. And the personality of the poet, in the *Genealogies*, is called on to investigate aspects of reality by making reflections on knowledge, which are peculiarly the terrain of philosophical speculations.

The emphasis on the poet as a creative subject, then, is coupled, and sometimes confused, commingling the mythical with historical (even autobiographical) aspects. For instance, the figure of Orpheus, one of the oldest authoritative poets, can be described as half legendary and half historical (V.xii). Claude Cazalé-Bérard draws attention to this figure that incorporates the complementary dimensions of the epistemological and the poetical quest, and whose motives and exemplary story is along

the lines of the representation of the nobility of poetry and the dignity of the poets.⁹⁵ Orpheus is a leading character in the theoretical system of the *Genealogies* since he receives the lyre from Mercury-Hermes: he becomes his heir and also inherits his obscure and polysemous discourse which, according to Cazalé-Bérard, stimulates and enhances the hermeneutic activity.⁹⁶ The centrality of the myth of Orpheus bears witness to an initiatic conception of poetry alien to the universal project of Dante; it also demonstrates how much Boccaccio was aware of having started a fruitful tradition of theologizing poetry based on the recovery of mystical contents whose religious and philosophical syncretism is alien from Scholastic rationalism.⁹⁷

As this chapter has argued, the obscurity of poetry in the context of the *Genealogies* not only contains irrational elements but specifically refers to the philosophical idea of obscure discourse, that is, the kind of literature whose language hides its meanings and truth without completely denying their knowledge and understanding. The ambiguous, obscure nature of poetry is theorized as originating in the “womb of God” and as being given as a gift to a select few. Finally, one may wonder who would hand on, after Orpheus, the baton of a theologizing and potentially obscure poetry. When Boccaccio is called in to make his case on a personal level, he justifies his choice to pursue a career as writer and poet with the theory of natural inclinations and the *ingenium*. Every individual pursues the studies for which he/she is naturally inclined. It is Mother Nature who generates different natural inclinations with the aim of ensuring the conservation of the human species (XV.x.2). Although individuals are also equipped with free will with which they are able to oppose the forces of nature, the natural inclination is, however, for them a kind of invincible, irrational force that draws them to their predestined goals (XV.x.5). Boccaccio, too, was prepared by nature, in “his mother’s womb,” to follow his natural inclinations, that is, to follow poetic meditations (“Verum ad quoscunque actus natura produxerit alios, me quidem experientia teste ad poeticas meditationes dispositum *ex utero matris* eduxit et meo iudicio in hoc natus sum” [Whatever the vocation of others, mine, as experience from my mother’s womb has shown, is clearly the study of poetry. For this, I believe, I was born] [XV.x.6]). Therefore, he could not have followed the *mercatura* as his father wanted, but he devoted himself to literary studies and to poetry, driven by an uncurbed desire to write (XV.x.8), and, specifically, to keep the meaning of his words concealed.

NOTES

1. Cf. E. Steiner and L. Ransom, eds., *Taxonomies of Knowledge: Information and Order in Medieval Manuscripts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).
2. The encyclopaedic system, besides the ancient and medieval traditions, is also part of the Dantean model that Boccaccio had evidently at hand. Baranski, "La vocazione enciclopedica," in *Dante e i segni*; Cazalé-Bérard, "Sistema del sapere e istanze narrative," 346 and 358. On Dante and encyclopedism see also Mazzotta, *Dante's Vision and the Circle of Knowledge*, Chap. 1: "Poetry and the Encyclopedia," which shows how the medieval epistemological system interacted with poetry so that to put the *Commedia* in the position of being a structural element of other literary forms of discourse on knowledge. As for the genealogical trees present in the ms. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Pluteo 52.9-L² of the *Genealogies* and its attribution to Boccaccio see M.G. Ciardi Dupré, "Boccaccio 'visualizzato' dal Boccaccio. I. 'Corpus' dei disegni e Cod. Parigino It. 482," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 197–225, in part. 206–209.
3. This aptitude certainly derives from classical culture: cf. Hesiod's mythography. Besides showing a special interest for genealogy, Hesiod's *Theogony* has certain similarities with Boccaccio's *Genealogies*. In *Theogony* 26–28, the Muses ask the poet to expound the genealogies of the gods as well as the knowledge of the cosmos. Other analogies with Hesiod's text can be found in *Theogony* 22–25 and 30, where poetry is said to be a gift from the Muses. Yet, we do not know if Boccaccio ever read Hesiod in translation or through the mediation of his Greek *magister*. The intrinsic taxonomic and epistemological attitude of the *Genealogies* is confirmed by the interest that the fifteenth century humanists showed. Domenico Bandini, for instance, compiled an alphabetic glossary of the *Genealogies* containing 1966 entries. Two additional indices were compiled by Matteo d'Orgiano and by an anonymous author at the end of the fourteenth century. Furthermore, Domenico Silvestri composed a versified table of contents. Conceived as an aid to reading, all these works were attached to the text of the *Genealogies* in its subsequent tradition (cf. J. Solomon, ed., *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods. Volume 1. Books I–V* [Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011], x).
4. Boccaccio's exceptional knowledge of Latin, as well as Greek sources (albeit mainly in translation), is attested not only by the huge amount of references in the *Genealogie* but also by the author's defense of poetry in which he states that he founded the information for his text by reading directly his sources (*Genealogie*, XV.vii.2); this statement, after all, is

confirmed by the number of books present in the catalogue of the so-called *parva libraria* of Santo Spirito (cfr. Mazza, “L’inventario”). Although in a first, but not ultimate, definitive form, as witnessed by the autograph ms. Laurenziano, Plut. 52, n. 9 (dated from 1365 to 1370), the *Genealogie* seem to have been composed during a very long period of time, first in the form of schedules, and then as a partially complete work. The long time of composition bears witness to the great attention that the author conferred to his work (the dates of composition are those proposed by the last editor of the text, Vittorio Zaccaria, in *Genealogie*, nota al testo, p. 1592 ff.).

5. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations are taken from V. Zaccaria edition of the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, a cura di Vittore Branca (Milano: A. Mondadori, 1967–1998), vol. vii–viii, tt. 1–2. English translations are taken from Giovanni Boccaccio, *Genealogy of the Pagan Gods. Volume 1. Books I–V*, ed. Jon Solomon (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2011) and Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry: Being the Preface and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Books of Boccaccio’s Genealogia Deorum Gentilium in an English Version with Introductory Essay and Commentary* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1978).
6. According to G. Mazzotta, “Boccaccio: the mythographer of the city,” in J. Whitman, ed., *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 349–364, in part. p. 363, the fifteen-book structure of the *Genealogies* echoes the fifteen books of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and at the same time represents the historical process of formation of the cosmos, from the origins until present. On the complex, ambiguous question of the restoration of order and law in the final Day of the *Decameron* see R. Hollander and C. Cahill, “Day Ten of the *Decameron*: The Myth of Order,” in R. Hollander, *Boccaccio’s Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), 109–168. An interpretation of the *Decameron* as Boccaccio’s response to a diseased society in which order eventually prevails over chaos is M. Cottino-Jones, *Order from Chaos: Social and Aesthetic Harmonies in Boccaccio’s Decameron* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1982).
7. The allusion to a Promethean figure and the presence of it among the deities in book IV of the *Genealogies* allowed for establishing a parallel between this god and the authorial voice of the *Decameron*. According to T.F. Gittes (*Boccaccio’s Naked Muse: Eros, Culture, and the Mythopoeic Imagination* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016], 155–156), S. Barsella (“The Myth of Prometheus in Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron*,” *MLN* 119 [2004]: S120–S141, and “Boccaccio, i tiranni e

la ragione naturale,” *Heliotropia* 12–13 (2015–2016): 131–163, in part. 137) and L. Marino (“Prometheus, or the Mythographer’s Self-Image,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 12 [1980]: 263–273), the figure of Prometheus symbolizes a civilizing hero and, similarly, a poet-philosopher who is able to provide knowledge and wisdom to the reader. This figure would also conceal the author of the *Decameron*. Yet, to this interpretation one can object that the semigod Prometheus is mentioned in the proem of the *Genealogies* only as an *exemplum fictum*, that is of a person that could hardly achieve a perfect literary work (“Horresco tamen tam grande opus assumere, et vix credam, si resurgat et veniat Prometheus alter seu is idem, qui poetarum assertione prisco tempore conseruat homines ex luto componere, nedum ego, huius operis sit artista sufficiens” [And yet I shudder to embark on so huge a task; why, if another Prometheus should appear, or the very one who, as poets tell, upon a time made men from clay, I hardly think they would be equal to the task, let alone me.] [Trans. Osgood.]). Boccaccio seems more at ease in comparing himself to the doctor Aesculapius, a minor deity of the Greek Pantheon.

8. Cf. G. Bàrberi Squarotti, “La ‘cornice’ del *Decameron* o il mito di Robinson,” in *Il potere della parola. Studi sul «Decameron»* (Napoli: Federico & Ardia, 1983), 109–158.
9. Gittes, *Boccaccio’s Naked Muse*, 22–23, 142–143. The idea of a juxtaposition of cataclysm and rebirth with a consequent restoration of lost knowledge is present all over Gittes’s work. He compares Plato’s *Timaieus*, the *Decameron* and the *Genealogies* according to this ideal juxtaposition: “It is significant that, presented with these various models, Boccaccio follows Plato’s lead by introducing the theme of a devastating scourge as a counterpoint for the complementary theme of a social renovation; one that is founded on the careful and methodical recollection (through the collation of the one hundred novella) of the myriad elements of a culture that have been forcibly dispersed and threatened with extinction by the plague” (pp. 152–153). At p. 154 he thus concludes: “The embedded novella serve to commemorate and preserve the myriad facets of a lost world whereas the “frame”—the micro-society of the brigata—constitutes the projection of an ideal society onto the ruins of Fiesole, an idealized place that assumes responsibility for the task of establishing the new social norms (the rigorous schedule of activities, code of conduct, etc.) and of disseminating and preserving knowledge (the novelle).”
10. On the nautical metaphors in Antiquity and in the Italian literature see Curtius, *European Literature*, 128 ff. For a trans-historical, politico-philosophical overview of the nautical metaphor, cf. M. Vito, *Terra e mare: metafore e politica in conflitto* (Roma: Aracne, 2012).

11. "Adunque, o giovani, i quali avete *la vela della barca* della vaga *mente* dirizzata a' venti che muovono dalle dorate penne ventilanti del giovane figliuolo di Citerea, negli amorosi pelaghi dimoranti disiosi di pervenire a porto di salute con istudioso passo, io per la sua inestimabile potenza vi priego che divotamente prestate alquanto alla presente opera *lo 'ntelletto*" (*Filocolo* I.2).
12. On the philosophical and epistemological purposes of poetry see J. Chydenius, *The Theory of Medieval Symbolism* (Helsingfors: Academic Bookstore, 1960); G. Mazzotta, "Dante e la critica americana di Charles Singleton," *Lettture Classensi* 18 (1989): 195–209, in part. p. 201; F. Tateo, *Retorica e poetica fra medioevo e rinascimento* (Bari: Adriatica Editrice, 1960); G. Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche sulla poesia: (Mussato e Petrarca)* (Roma: Bulzoni, 1976), 14 and passim. On the epistemological purpose of poetry in Dante see Barański, *Dante e i segni*, 77–78, 87; id., "Benvenuto da Imola e la tradizione dantesca della Commedia," in P. Palmieri and C. Paolazzi, eds., *Benvenuto da Imola lettore degli antichi e dei moderni: atti del convegno internazionale, Imola 26 e 27 maggio 1989* (Ravenna: Longo, 1991), 215–230; Cazalé-Bérard, "Sistema del sapere e istanze narrative." On the history of humanist poetics cf. C.C. Greenfield, *Humanist and Scholastic Poetics, 1250–1500* (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, 1981), in part. pp. 110–128 on Boccaccio's poetics; Wallace, Minnis, Scott, eds., *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism*, 373–519.
13. Gittes, *Boccaccio's Naked Muse*, 18–20. He also beautifully concludes: "The task of scripting such innovative myths demands a rare combination of qualities: the diligence of an archivist, the understanding of an intellectual, and the creative spirit of a poet. It is, in short, a labour for which Boccaccio was ideally suited" (p. 21).
14. Cf. T. Hyde, "Boccaccio: The Genealogies of Myth," *PMLA* 100 (1985): 737–745, in part. p. 738. Mazzotta, "Boccaccio: the mythographer of the city," 356–357 (who does not comment on the passage about the decadence of the ancient cities) notices an elegiac connotation as well as an element of crisis in Boccaccio's perspective on the glories of Antiquity: human history and the myth, as far as the history of human creative imagination, are subject to the inexorable flowing of time and for that reason are destined to die.
15. Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, 27 (final remarks on pp. 157–160) shows how Boccaccio's conception of the *fabula* can be considered an original element within the panorama of theories on poetry, and how this conception is projected forward to the future speculations of Humanism. On the theme of the "ancient fables" and the role of the pagan gods between Middle Ages and Renaissance see B. Croce, "Gli dei antichi

- nella tradizione mitologica del Medio Evo e del Rinascimento,” in B. Croce, *Varietà di storia letteraria e civile: serie seconda* (Bari: G. Laterza, 1949), 50–65; E. Garin, “Le favole antiche,” in *Medioevo e Rinascimento: studi e ricerche*, 63–84; J. Seznec, *La survivance des dieux antiques: essai sur le rôle de la tradition mythologique dans l’humanisme et dans l’art de la Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1940); A. Renaudet, *Dante humaniste* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952); Y. Bâtard, *Dante, Minerve et Apollon; les images de la Divine comédie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952); N. Lenkeith, *Dante and the Legend of Rome* ([London]: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1952); J. Huizinga, *L’Autunno del medioevo*, ed. Ludovico Gatto (Roma: Newton Compton, 1992), 459 ff.
16. According to Curtius, *European Literature*, 205, ancient and medieval conceptions of poetry as bearer of obscure meanings and secret wisdom are based on the conviction that the gods manifested themselves to mankind in enigmatic forms. Albertino Mussato described the ancient poets as inventors of enigmas (*Epistolae*, VII.15–22, quoted by Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche sulla poesia*, 21). On obscurity in the Middle Ages cf. J. Rider, “Textual Obscurity in the Middle Ages,” in L. Doležalová, J. Rider, and Al. Zironi, eds., *Obscurity in Medieval Texts* (Krems: Institut für Realienkunde des Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit, 2013), 1–14. J.M. Ziolkowski, “Theories of obscurity in the Latin tradition” and “Introduction,” in J.M. Ziolkowski, ed., “Obscure styles in Medieval Literature,” *Mediaevalia* 19 (1996): 1–22, 101–170, quoting Barthes (*S/Z*, Paris 1971, p. 10), distinguishes between texts with a single “closed” meaning (*lisible*) and texts with multiple “open” meanings (*scriptible*).
 17. The same term “archana” appear in Boccaccio’s *Mavortis milix extrenue* (*Epistole* II.9).
 18. Going beyond the values reflected in courtly literature, N. D’Anna, *Il segreto dei trovatori: sapienza e poesia nell’Europa medievale* (Rimini: Il cerchio, 2005) emphasizes the spiritual aspects of troubadour lyric and their sapiential symbolic meanings.
 19. “Ut sit Mercurio Philologia comes, / Non quia numinibus falsis reverentia detur, / Sed sub verborum tegmine vera latent. / Vera latent rerum variarum tecta figuris, / Nam sacra vulgari publica jura vetant” (*Entheticus de dogmate philosophorum*, ll. 184–190, quoted by Curtius, *European Literature*, 206). On the lies of the poets at the service of truth cf. Giovanni di Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. Webb, I, 186, 12. Yet, Alain de Lille (*Anticlaudianus*, I.142–143) further develops this same idea by emphasizing the deceiving aspects of poetry: “Virgili musa mendacia multa colorat / Et facie ueri contextit pallia falso” (Virgil’s Muse colours

- many lies and weaves cloaks of falsehood with the appearance of truth) (Trans. Simpson, in *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*).
20. Alain de Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, II, 278 (PL, 210, 451B); Theodulf of Orléans, *Poetae*, I.543.19 ff., both quoted by Curtius, *European Literature*, 206–207.
 21. Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Lecoy, vv. 7137–7140: “Bien l’entendras [i.e. the truth], se bien repetes / Les integumanz aus poetes. / La verras une grant partie / Des secrez de philosophie.” Albertus Magnus, *Metaphysica*, I.2.6 [ed. Geyer]: “ipse philomythos secundum hunc modum philosophus est, quia fabula sua construitur ab ipso ex mirandis. Dico autem philomython poetam amantem fingere fabulas.... Sicut in ea parte logicae quae poetica est, ostendit Aristoteles, poeta fingit fabula, ut excitet ad admirandum et quod admiratio ulterius excitet ad inquirendum et sic constet philosophia.” Both passages are quoted by Baranski, “‘Per similitudine di abito scientifico’,” 14.
 22. On Dante’s *enigma* forte cf. Chap. 3, n. 33. The attention to the so-called *Fedeli d’Amore* was brought by Gabriel Rossetti’s contention that the Italian love literature was essentially symbolic and employed a secret language to convey a mystic philosophy. On the *Fedeli d’Amore* see L. Valli, *Il Linguaggio Segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d’Amore* (Milano: Luni, 2004); A. Ricolfi, *Studi sui fedeli d’amore*, vol. 1: Le Corti d’amore in Francia ed i loro riflessi in Italia (Roma: Albrighi, Segati e C., 1933); vol. 2.: Dal problema del gergo al crollo d’un Regno (Roma: Albrighi, Segati e C., 1940); both vols. are reprinted as *Studi sui fedeli d’Amore: dai poeti di corte a Dante: simboli e linguaggio segreto* (Foggia: Bastogi, 1997); A. Liborio, *Dante e i fedeli d’amore* ([S.l. : s.n., 1930?]; Extract from: *Convivium*, 6 [1930]); G. Gambuto, *Cenni sui Fedeli d’amore e simmetrie della croce e dell’aquila nella Divina Commedia* (Roma: Olimpica poligrafica, 1994); M. Cima, A. Iacomini, T. Riva, and F. Riva, eds., *Opere e linguaggio segreto di Dante e dei Fedeli d’Amore straordinari rischiaratori dell’universo* (Latina, Il Levante, 2007); M. Ciavolella, “Il testo moltiplicato: interpretazioni esoteriche della *Divina Commedia*”, *Tenzzone. Revista de la Asociación Complutense de Dantología* XI (2010): 227–246.
 23. “—Quomodo ergo multi incomprehensibilem philosophiam afficiunt aut quemadmodum eam multifaria ratione confundunt? —O Asclepi, hoc modo: in varias disciplinas nec comprehensibiles eam calida commentatione miscentes ἀριθμητική et musicen et geometriam ... sophistarum calliditate decepti, a vera, pura sanctaque philosophia auertentur.” (*Asclepius*, 12–14) (What is it that the many do to make philosophy incomprehensible? How do they obscure it in the multiplicity of their reasoning? In this way, *Asclepius*: by combining it through ingenious argument with various branches of study that are not

- comprehensible—*arithmētikē* and music and geometry ... Accordingly, the people who will come after us, deceived by the ingenuity of sophists, will be estranged from the true, pure and holy philosophy.)
24. On the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the monumental work of A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris, J. Gabalda, 1949–1954) still remains unequalled. See also the English translation, with introduction and commentary, by Brian P. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica*.
 25. Mazza, *L'inventario*, 52, n. 4. Boccaccio quotes Hermes three times in the text of the *Genealogie* (V.xxi.2; VII.xxxiv.1; VII.xxxvi.1) and states he saw his *de Ydolo* (“ego librum hunc Hermetis Trimegisti ... vidi”; the *de Ydolo* is the *Asclepius*; cf. Hortis, *Studi sulle opere latine del Boccaccio*, 456 e III, 26, n. 68 e VII, 34). Boccaccio wrote that Hermes was a pious man, educated and revered by the Egyptians who never named him in order to respect his sanctity and not to reveal his mortality.
 26. Cicero (*De natura deorum* III.56) confirms the ancient identification of Hermes Trismegistus with the Egyptian god Toth, symbol of the sun, the light, and the truth through the word. This assimilation was probably based on a peculiar link with the “word,” the “discourse,” the “interpretation,” which ancient Greeks used to assign to Hermes (cf. Plato, *Cratylus* 407 E–408 A) in order to make him an interpreter of the Logos and, therefore, of the universal order (cf. P. Scarpi, intr. to *Poimandres*, 24).
 27. According to the *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*, a work known by Boccaccio (see Zibaldone Laurenziano XXIX, 8; cf. Mazza, *L'inventario*, 36–37, n. 15), even Hermes is included among the great philosophers of the past: “HERMES in Egipto natus fuit, et Hermes in greco dicitur, Mercurius latine, et in ebrayco Enoch ... Et fuit primus inventor scientie stellarum; et stabilivit omni populo cuiuslibet climatis legem pertinentem et convenientem suis opinionibus. Cui obedierunt reges et tota terra, et habitantes insulas maris. Et invitavit omnes ad legem Dei et ad confitendum veritatem, et ad horrendum mundum et observandam iusticiam et querendam salvationem alterius mundi.” (Franceschini, “Il *Liber philosophorum moralium antiquorum*,” 402–403).
 28. Cf. The beginning of the *Asclepius*: “Quo ingresso Asclepius et Hammona interesse suggessit ... praeter Hammona nullum vocassis alium, ne tantae rei religiosissimus sermo multorum interventu presentiaque violetur. Tractatum enim tota numinis maiestate plenissimum inreligiosae mentis est multorum conscientia publicare” (*Asclepius*, 1) (“When Tat came in, Asclepius suggested that Hammon also join them.... Call no one but Hammon lest the presence and interference of the many profane this most reverent discourse on so great a subject, for the mind is irreverent that would make public, by the awareness of the many, a treatise so very full of the majesty of divinity”). The same aspects of conviviality and segregation

- of the dialoguing mini-community from the rest of society is also present in Plato's *Symposium* ("... when suddenly there was a great knocking at the door of the house, as of revellers, and the sound of a flute-girl was heard. Agathon told the attendants to go and see who were the intruders. 'If they are friends of ours,' he said, 'invite them in, but if not, say that the drinking is over.'" (*Simposio*, xxx, trans. B. Jowett); or even within the romance literature, metaphorized in the meal offered to the fairies, and in the conviviality of the *Confrérie* during the banquet in the tavern in Adam de la Halle's *Jeu de la feuillée* (cf. ed. J. Dufournet [Louvain, Belgium: Peeters, 1991]).
29. C. Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica: Mercurio, Orfeo, Giasone, tre chiavi dell'avventura ermeneutica," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 277–306, in part. pp. 293, 296–297. Boccaccio (*Genealogie*, VII, xxxvi, 3) reports Petrarch's interpretation (*Invectivae in medicum*) on the nature of the god Mercury as the lord of eloquence and protector of merchants.
 30. Lucia Battaglia Ricci, *Ragionare nel giardino: Boccaccio ei cicli pittorici del "Trionfo della morte"* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1987), maintains that the idea of the *Decameron's* conviviality came to Boccaccio from the *Trionfo della morte*, the fresco cycle in the monumental cemetery of Pisa. On another possible influential text, i.e. the *Aenigmata*, see also Chap. 4. The symposium as a framework for a philosophical work dates back from Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistai* (3rd c. BC), Macrobius's *Saturnalia* (5th c.), up to the twelfth century *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (see *Il Libro dei ventiquattro filosofi*, ed. P. Lucentini [Milano: Adelphi, 1999]).
 31. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica*, 96, commentary to *Corpus Hermeticum*, I.1, and 217–218, commentary to *Asclepius* 3.
 32. Cf. Commentary to *Asclepius*, in *Corpus Hermeticum*, ed. A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière (Paris: Le Belles Lettres, 1945), II.359, n. 26 and 363, n. 53.
 33. Copenhaver, ed., *Hermetica*, 218, commentary to *Asclepius*, 3. Among other terms used in the *Asclepius* to refer to cognitive and intuitive processes, see also: *mens* (mind), *animus* (thought, thinking, soul), *cognitio* (knowledge), *contemplatio* (contemplation), *intellectus* (understanding), *intentio* (concentration, intention, effort), *nosco* (know), *percipio* (grasp), *ratio* (reason).
 34. Cf. P. Dronke, *Fabula: Explorations into the Uses of Myth in Medieval Platonism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 27 and n. 3.
 35. T. Ricklin, "Vetulae et fables dans les *Genealogiae deorum Gentilium*: Boccace entre Dante et Pétrarque," in J. Biard et F. Mariani Zini, eds., *Ut philosophia poesis. Questions philosophiques dans l'oeuvre de Dante, Pétrarque et Boccace* (Paris: Vrin, 2008), 191–211, in part. 202–204.
 36. Ricklin, "Vetulae et fables," 205.

37. K. Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste: saggio su Boccaccio* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1995), 93.
38. Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*, Chap. 1.
39. Cited by C. Vasoli. See Boccaccio, *Opere*, vol. V:1, p. 118.
40. Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*, 91–92. The *Mavortis milix* is part of a group of four letters dated 1339 and copied in two fascicoles of the Zibaldone Laurenziano XXIX 8. *Crepusculi celsitudinis*, *Mavortis milix extrenue* and *Nereus amphytritibus* are part of the same palimpsest quaternion at ff. 51r–52r; the *Sacre famis* is copied at f. 65r–v. In the *Mavortis milix*, Boccaccio appeals to an erudite scholar resident in Avignon, a person known through a common friend. Analogies with Petrarch biography (*De vita*) allow us to identify this character in Petrarch himself. Abandoned by his lover and seeking tranquility for his studies, Boccaccio asks Petrarch for help. Behind this apparently banal request a meta-literary allusion has been seen, an allusion whose purpose was to “registrare, attraverso il gioco delle personificazioni, il passaggio tra due tempi della propria esistenza: quello passato, contraddistinto dalla passione d’amore e da un esercizio delle lettere eminentemente lirico; quello del tempo a venire, segnato dalla libertà e da una pratica poetica più elevata” (Cf. C. Cabailiot, “La *Mavortis Miles*: Petrarca in Boccaccio?,” in M. Picone e C. Cazalé-Bérard, eds., *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio: memoria, scrittura, riscrittura: atti del seminario internazionale di Firenze-Certaldo, 26–28 aprile 1996* (Firenze: F. Cesati, 199), 129–139, quoted at p. 135. In 1954, Eugenio Garin (“Le favole antiche,” in *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 66–89; id., “La cultura fiorentina nella seconda metà del Trecento e i barbari Britanni,” 187 and note 16) identified Boccaccio as a key thinker and scholar of mythology, and drew attention to these two letters in order to highlight the influence of English philosophy on fourteenth-century Florentine culture.
41. Cf. Cazalé-Bérard, “Boccaccio e la poetica: Mercurio, Orfeo, Giasone”, 287–288; *Filocolo*, V.7, p. 557.
42. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 153, n. 63, and 154–155 compares the aesthetic conception of Boccaccio to the Thomistic whereby one can formulate an objective aesthetic judgment through the categories of *proportio*, *integritas* and *claritas*. He also points out (p. 89 ff.) the key role of the *artes* in the mechanism of creation of poetry, and how a scientific characterization is given to them.
43. Cf. Mussato, *Epistulae* I, IV, VII and XVIII in Eugenio Garin, ed., *Il pensiero pedagogico dell’umanesimo* (Firenze: Giuntine, 1958). By invoking Aristotle, Mussato argued that ancient poets were the first theologians and that poetry contained allegorical representations pertaining to divinity. Mussato’s texts can also be read in P.H. Wicksteed and E. Garratt

- Gardner, eds., *Dante and Giovanni Del Virgilio, Including a Critical Edition of the Text of Dante's "Eclogae Latinae" and of the Poetic Remains of Giovanni Del Virgilio* (Westminster: A. Constable & Co, 1902). On Mussato's poetics in relation to the pre-humanist and Renaissance poetics see P.O. Kristeller, *Otto pensatori del Rinascimento italiano*, Milano-Napoli, Ricciardi, 1970; R. Weiss, *The Spread of Italian Humanism* (London: Hutchinson, 1964); R. Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1969); R. Bordone e B. Garofani, "Les chroniqueurs Italiens," in I. Heullant-Donat, ed., *Cultures Italiennes (XIIe-XVe siècle)* (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 2000); L. Gualdo Rosa, "Préhumanisme et humanisme en Italie: Aspects et problèmes," in I. Heullant-Donat, ed., *Cultures Italiennes (XIIe-XVe siècle)*, 87–120; R.G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients. The Origins of Humanism From Lovato to Bruni* (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
44. Cf. Baranski, *Dante e i segni*, 84–87 and 101; Mazzotta, "Dante e la critica americana," 201.
 45. Cf. Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche*, 100–101. In addition to placing poetry within a vast panorama of epistemological activities and assigning to poetry a specific epistemological function, C. Cazalé-Bérard, "Riscrittura della poetica e poetica della riscrittura negli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio," in M. Picone and Cazalé-Bérard, eds., *Gli zibaldoni di Boccaccio*, 425–453 advances the hypothesis that Boccaccio's poetics were influenced, too, by a direct knowledge of Aristotle's *Poetics*.
 46. Cf. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 29–30 who dwells on the characteristics of Aristotle's *symbolon*.
 47. Gregory the Great, *Hom. in Ezech.* 1.6.1 (*PL*, 76, col. 829).
 48. Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 11.19; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 126.11; 146.12. These passages, as we shall see, are quoted also in *Genealogie*, XIV.xii.9–12. On the same concept cf. also *Trattatello*, 1.139, and *Esposizioni sopra la Commedia*, I (2), 8–9, where Macrobius is quoted.
 49. Cf. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 166.
 50. Cf. also Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 166–167. Gagliardi, *Boccaccio*, Chap. 1, maintains that Boccaccio makes a revision of St. Augustine's Christian doctrine according to which the esthetic experience is instrumental to men's spiritual ends; literature, moreover, like prophetic writings, is the nexus between mankind and God. This view, very pervasive in medieval theories of esthetics, is of considerable influence on the last two books of the *Genealogie*. See also Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, "Poesia e favola nella poetica del Boccaccio," 62–202.
 51. C. G. Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, in *Collected works*, ed. H. Read, M. Fordham and G. Adler. New York: Pantheon Books, 1953–, vol. 13: *Alchemical Studies*, 1967, pp. 288–289. On the *The Philosophical Tree*,

- see also D. Verardi, "L'albero filosofico. C.G. Jung e il simbolismo alchemico rinascimentale," *Psychofenia* XII.21 (2009): 51–64.
52. Cf. Cazalé-Bérard, "Boccaccio e la poetica," 281.
 53. Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 348. Boccaccio, in *Genealogie*, VII.xxxvi.4, reports, among other interpretations, a peculiar feature of the god Mercury. Mercury is *trophonum*, that is "convertible," which for him could perfectly fit the ability of merchants to adapt to the customs of many countries and to exercise their profession and business with intelligence and astute manipulation of the discourse.
 54. The secrecy inherent in the concept of poetry and the power of allegory to veil hidden meanings have their spiritual counterpart in the secrecy of the religious ritual. The meaning of the Latin *sacer/sanctus* contains the connotation of a hidden place, a secret place, intended as the thing that is kept separate from the world in order to be given to the gods. Cf. G. Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion: With an Appendix on the Religion of the Etruscans* (Baltimore, Md: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), I, 129–130. On the ambivalence of the figure of the *homo sacer* from Antiquity to modernity see G. Agamben, *Homo sacer: Il potere sovrano e la nuda vita* (Torino: Piccola biblioteca Einaudi, 2005).
 55. To cite just an instance of critical bias against the originality of Boccaccio's poetics, cf. Curtius, *European Literature*, 225–227.
 56. Cf. G. Billanovich, *Petrarca letterato* (Roma: Edizioni di "Storia e letteratura", 1947), 121 ff. and recently M. Papio, "Boccaccio: Mythographer, Philosopher, Theologian," in Elsa Filosa and Michael Papio, eds., *Boccaccio in America: 2010 International Boccaccio conference, American Boccaccio Association, UMass Amherst, April 30–May 1* (Ravenna: Longo, 2012), 123–142, and "Boccaccio between Mussato and the Neoplatonists," in F. Ciabattini, E. Filosa and K. Olson, eds., *Boccaccio 131–2013* (Ravenna: Longo, 2015), 275–286. On the relationship between medieval poetry and theology, see D.J. Nodes, *Doctrine and Exegesis in Biblical Latin Poetry* (Leeds: F. Cairns, 1993); F. Stella, *Poesia e teologia: l'Occidente latino tra IV e VIII secolo* (Milano: Jaka Book, 2001); F. Stella, *La scrittura infinita: Bibbia e poesia in età medievale e umanistica: atti del convegno di Firenze, 26–28 giugno 1997, promosso dalla Fondazione Carlo Marchi ...* [et al.] (Tavarnuzze [Firenze]: SISMEL, 2001). On Petrarch's use of the poetic theology and to some degree its relationship to Dante, Mussato, and Boccaccio, see A.R. Ascoli, "Blinding the Cyclops: Petrarch After Dante," in Z. Baranski and T. Cachey, eds., *Petrarch & Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 114–173.
 57. Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes*, 16–17.

58. Zaccaria, *Boccaccio narratore, storico, moralista e mitografo*, xii, defined Boccaccio's attitude toward the different possible interpretations of the myths in the *Genealogies* as "cautious euhemerism". Following Mazzotta ("*Boccaccio: the mythographer of the city*"), who reads the *Genealogies* as a history of the human creative imagination, Lummus ("*Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the Genealogie Deorum Gentilium Libri*," *Speculum* 87.3 [2012]: 724–765) attempts to interpret euhemeristically Boccaccio's vision on the nature of the gods making reference exclusively to the power of human imagination that created a plethora of divine and mythological characters.
59. Theodontius was author of a now lost Latin work on myth. Boccaccio wrote he knew it from Paolo da Perugia's *Collectiones*. Paolo da Perugia was the librarian of the Angevin court; his literary and historical work was burnt by his wife right after his death (*Genealogie*, XV.6). In mentioning the legend of Batillo, who was born from Forco and a marine monster, Boccaccio complains of the fact that Theodontius' text was illegible (*Genealogie*, X.7). From this fact one can infer that he could have consulted a manuscript or, at least, read some of Theodontius's works. M. Pastore-Stocchi, instead, maintains that this constitutes the evidence that Boccaccio knew Theodontius through Paolo da Perugia (M. Pastore-Stocchi, "*Teodonzio, Pronapide e Boccaccio*," *Quaderni Petrarqueschi* 12–13 [2002–2003] 187–211). Some scholars, however, maintain that Boccaccio invented this source. Besides the *Genealogies*, there existed a Theodontius who wrote on Troy's war, as reported by Servius in his commentary to *Aeneids* I.28. And Domenico Bandini, a fourteenth century author of an index to the *Genealogies*, calls him "Teodontius Campanus diligens investigator poetici figmenti." In 1930, even Carlo Landi, in the work entitled *Demogòrgone. Con saggio di nuova edizione delle "Genologie deorum gentilium" del Boccaccio e silloge dei frammenti di Teodonzio* (Palermo: Casa editrice remo Sandron, 1930), maintained that Boccaccio's Theodontius was a philosopher from Campania who lived between the ninth and eleventh century. According to Landi, Theodontius may have provided Boccaccio with euhemeristic and naturalistic interpretation of the myth and inspired his philosophical speculation on mythology. Landi mentions the now lost Greek historian Philochorus. More significantly, Philochorus may have been Boccaccio's source for the idea that all gods were descended from Demogorgon, which Theodontius instead referred to Pronapides from Athens. According to another explanation, Boccaccio is the only responsible for the diffusion of the narrative attributed to Theodontius that makes Demogorgon the progenitor of all heavenly gods—that narrative would be based on an error in the writing of a scholion to Statius, who meant instead to give credence to Plato's Demiurge. All this may have given way to a long lasting literary

and iconographic tradition until John Milton and Shelley (cf. M. Bull, *The Mirror of the Gods, How Renaissance Artists Rediscovered the Pagan Gods* [Oxford: UP, 2005], 22).

60. The same Christian authorities quoted by Boccaccio—Augustine, Rabanus Maurus, Ivo of Chartres, Eusebius, Servius, Lactantius, and Pliny—confirm that Prometheus was a learned and wise man (IV.xliv.19 ff.). Assuming Lucia Marino's view that Boccaccio casts himself as a sort of Prometheus' redivivus ("Prometheus, or the Mythographer's Self-Image," *Studi sul Boccaccio* 12 [1980]: 263–273), Gittes interprets Prometheus' fire as a symbol of knowledge: "Prometheus' furtive act is taken to symbolize the acquisition of the light of truth by the diligent scholar, while the stolen flame itself represents the clarity of education that the wise man encloses in the chest of the ignorant (thereby effecting a variety of intellectual redemption)" (*Boccaccio's Naked Muse*, 156).
61. Johannes Scotus Eriugena, *Annotationes in Marcianum*, ed. Cora E. Lutz (Cambridge, Mass., 1939), p. 13; Remigius of Auxerre, *Commentum in Martianum Capellam, libri I–II*, ed. Cora E. Lutz (Leiden: Brill, 1962), p. 79, quoted by Wetherbee, in Bernard Silvestris, *Cosmographia*, intr., 41.
62. Boccaccio theoretically elaborates his defense of poetry over the course of his career in different works: in the *Trattatello*, in the last two books of the *Genealogies*, and in his commentary to Dante's *Commedia* (Accessus, Canti I, II, and IV).
63. As for meditation and solitude, the concept is again emphasized in XIV.xi.4.
64. After all, Neoplatonists considered the books of Hermes as a text inspired by the heaven, and used to see humanity in its struggle to regain its lost "source" from the sky. Cf. Scarpi, intr. to Hermes Trismegistus, *Poimandres*, 29. For Mussato, poetry is a gift from heaven, but it does not derive from its womb. Cf. Mussato's words (quoted by Curtius, *European Literature*, 215): "Haec fuit a summo demissa scientia caelo, /Cum simul excelso ius habet illa Deo." Not even Petrarch uses such expression; cf. *Familiaries*, X.4: "Miraris? parum abest quin dicam theologiam poeticam esse de Deo"; and *Collatio laureationis*, 2.6: "Quanta, inquam, sit naturaliter difficultas propositi mei ex hoc apparet quod, cum in ceteris artibus studio et labore possit ad terminum perveniri, in arte poetica secus est, in qua nil agitur sine interna quadam et divinitus in animum vatis infusa vi." According to Mazzotta, "Boccaccio the mythographer of the city," 351–352, the idea of the myth as philosophical speculation on the structure of the cosmos and the form of human life within it derives, in Boccaccio, from the school of Chartres and the debates on myth and symbolism during the twelfth century. The authors of the school of Chartres linked myth and literature with philosophy with the awareness that fictions and fables convey philosophical and ethical truths.

65. R. Kraye, *Frauenlob und die Natur-Allegorese; Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchungen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des antiken Traditionsgutes* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1960); W. Wetherbee, "The Function of Poetry in the *De Planctu Naturae* of Alain de Lille," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 87–126. The relation between form and matter (as "receptacle," "wet-nurse," or "mother" [cf. 51a]) was already explained through the simile of the three elements of human generation (father, mother, and son) in Plato's *Timaeus* (48e–49a and 50 cd) and then in Calcidius' commentary (Chaps. 273 and 330). In the *Timaeus*, matter is compared to the mother, the forming model (the idea) to the father, and the nature intermediate between the two to the son (cf. 50d). Calcidius's commentary (*Commentario al Timeo di Platone: testo latino a fronte*, eds. Claudio Moreschini, Lara Nicolini, and Ilaria Ramelli [Milano: Bompiani, 2003], CCCXXX–CCCXXXI) draws on this distinction and uses the term "gremium" to qualify the nature of matter (also called "silva") as receptacle.
66. Marius Victorinus, *Liber de generatione Divini Verbi, Ad Candidum Arianum*, PL 8, cols. 1031D–1033A.
67. Hecker, *Boccaccio-Funde*, 94–95, and tab. XIX (ms. Laurenziano, Pluteo 52, n. 9, f. 31b); E.H. Wilkins, *The Trees of the Genealogia Deorum of Boccaccio* (Chicago: The Caxton club, 1923); E.H. Wilkins, "The Genealogy of the Genealogical Trees of the 'Genealogia Deorum'," *Modern Philology* 23.1 (1925): 61–65.
68. The text was translated into Latin and commented by Boethius. On the Porphyrian Tree cf. Eco, *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*, 91–106; E. Stump, *Differentia and the Porphyrian Tree: Boethius's De Topicis Differentiis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, UP, 1978). On Porphyry's thought, see A. Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition. A Study in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1974); G. Girgenti, *Il pensiero forte di Porfirio: mediazione fra genealogia platonica e ontologia aristotelica* (Milano: Vita e pensiero, 1996). The Porphyrian Tree was also used by Ramon Llull in his *Ars magna* to catalogue the entire system of sciences in the so-called "arbor scientiae" (cf. F.A. Yates, "The Art of Ramon Lull. An Approach to it through Lull's Theory of the Elements," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 17 [1954]: 115–173; S. Weigel, "Genealogie. Zu Ikonographie und Rhetorik einer epistemologischen Figur in der Geschichte der Kultur- und Naturwissenschaft," in H. Schramm, ed., *Bühnen des Wissens. Interferenzen zwischen Wissenschaft und Kunst* [Berlin: Dahlem Univ. Press, 2003], 226–267; T. Macho, "Stammbäume, Freiheitsbäume und Geniereligion. Anmerkungen zur Geschichte genealogischer Systeme," in S. Weigel, ed., *Genealogie und Genetik. Schnittstellen zwischen Biologie und Kulturgeschichte* [Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002], 15–43). Porphyry is quoted several times in

- the *Genealogies*, maybe indirectly through Augustine, Fulgentius and Macrobius (cf. *Genealogie*, indice degli autori).
69. Cf. F. Lewis, "A Persian in a Pear Tree: Middle Eastern Analogues for Pirro/Pyrrius," in *Reconsidering Boccaccio: Medieval Contexts and Global Intertexts* (University of Toronto Press, Forthcoming).
 70. As Jung puts it, the idea of an inverted tree with the roots in place of the crown evokes a psychoid ancient archetype symbolizing growth, life, the maternal aspect, personality, death, and rebirth, which are all formed in that mitopoietic laboratory which is called the collective unconscious (Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 311–315, 349). All this may also open a hermetic perspective on Dante's work, as Paolo Valesio maintains. In the alchemical tradition, the philosophical tree (*arbor philosophica*) is an image that alludes to the crowning achievement of the philosophical work, that is, the philosopher's stone (*lapis philosophorum*) (Cf. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*; and in particular the pictures described on p. 256; cf. also Verardi, "L'albero filosofico," 58; P. Valesio, "La vena ermetica della Commedia," *Annali d'italianistica* 8 [1990]: 278–299, in part. 294), but can also have links with the conformation of the human body. The Platonist Gerard Dorn conceives of the tree branches as "the veins spread through the different limbs" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 287); moreover, the body can be interpreted as "a metaphorical form of the arcane substance, a living thing that comes into existence according to its own laws, and grows, blossoms, and bears fruit like a plant," inserted "in that more comprehensive, Platonic nature as Dorn understood it, that is, in a nature that includes psychic "animalia," i.e., mythologems and archetypes" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 291, 292).
 71. As Jung reports, according to the humanist Andrea Alciati (†1550) who wrote *Emblemata cum commentariis*, "it pleased the Physicists to see man as a tree standing upside down, for what in the one is the root, trunk, and leaves, in the other is the head and the rest of the body with the arms and feet" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 312). It is also possible to identify a unique thread that, passing through Plato, goes back to the ancient Indian conceptions. In the *Bhagavadgītā*, the divine Krishna says: "I am the Himalaya among mountains and the *ashvattha* among trees. The *asvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*) pours down from above the drink of immortality, soma" (*The Philosophical Tree*, 312–313). Moreover in the *Bhagavadgītā* (xvi. 1 and 2), the god says: "There is a fig tree / In ancient story / ... Rooted in heaven, / Its branches earthward ..." (*The Philosophical Tree*, 313).
 72. "Like the vision of Zarathustra, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, and the report of Bardesanes (A.D. 154–222) on the god of the Indians, the old rabbinic idea that the tree of paradise was a man exemplifies man's

relationship to the philosophical tree. According to ancient tradition men came from trees or plants. The tree is as it were an intermediate form of man, since on the one hand it springs from the Primordial Man and on the other it grows into a man. Naturally the patristic conception of Christ as a tree or vine exerted a very great influence. In *Pandora*, as we have said, the tree is represented in the form of a woman, in agreement with the pictures reproduced in the first part of this essay, which, unlike the alchemical pictures, were done mostly by women.” (Jung, *The Philosophical Tree*, 337–338).

73. L. Tondelli, *Il libro delle figure dell'abate Gioachino da Fiore*. Vol. 1: Introduzione e commento; le sue rivelazioni dantesche (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1953); L. Tondelli, M. Reeves e B. Hirsch-Reich, *Il libro delle figure dell'abate Gioachino da Fiore*. Vol. 2: Tavole XXIX, di cui XIII a colori; testo relativo su grafici (Torino: Società editrice internazionale, 1953); M. Reeves and B. Hirsch-Reich, *The Figurae of Joachim of Fiore* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).
74. Cf. the tree of humanity ending with the second coming of Christ in ms. Reggio Emilia, Seminario Vescovile Urbano (second half of the 13th century); and the allegorical interpretation of the divine chariot of Ezekiel in ms. Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, A 121 (second half of the 13th century (see plate XXV in Tondelli, *Il libro delle figure*, vol. 2).
75. Wilkins, *The Trees of the Genealogia Deorum of Boccaccio*; Wilkins, “The Genealogy of the Genealogical Trees of the *Genealogia Deorum*.”
76. Just like a shrine is the place where Hermes’s interlocutors get together in the *Asclepius* (cf. *Asclepius*, 1, quoted above).
77. Cf. the “sacred philosophy” of *Asclepius*, 14.
78. “Deus te nobis, o Asclepi, vt diuino sermoni interesses adduxit, eique tali, qui merito omnium antea a nobis factorum vel nobis diuino numine inspiratorum videatur esse religiosa pietate diuinior. quem si intellegens videris, eris omnium bonorum tota mente plenissimus—si tamen multa sunt bona et non unum, in quo sunt omnia. alterum enim alterius consentaneum esse dinoscitur, *omnia unius esse aut unum esse omnia*; ita enim sibi est utrumque conexum, ut separari alterum ab utro non possit. sed de futuro sermone hoc diligenti intentione cognosces. tu vero, o Asclepi, procede paululum, Tatque, nobis qui intersit, euoca.” (*Asclepius*, 1) (God, Asclepius, god has brought you to us so that you might join in a divine discourse, such a discourse as, in justice, seems more divine in its reverent fidelity than any we have had before, more than any that divine power inspired in us. If you are seen to understand it, your whole mind will be completely full of all good things—assuming that there are many goods and not one good in which all are. Admittedly, the one is consistent with the other: *all are of one or all are one*, for they are linked so that

one cannot be separated from the other. But you will learn this by careful concentration from the discourse to come.) On this concept see also *Asclepius*, 1 and 2, quoted above; cf. also *Hermetica*, XII, 8; but above all *Hermetica*, XVI, 3, which seems to echo literally Boccaccio's words. Boccaccio will later mention the One again (XIV.viii.4), with regards to how the first men used to wonder on its nature.

79. On man as God's image, see *Hermetica*, I.12; X.23–24. According to *Hermetica*, I.27, for instance, human beings, after having acquired knowledge, are inevitably drawn to communicate it to humanity.
80. See, for instance, Pico della Pirandola's *Oration*, or Marsilio Ficino's *Five questions concerning the mind* (*Epistulae*, II.1), translated and commented in E. Cassirer, P.O. Kristeller, and J.H. Randall, eds., *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. Selections in Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).
81. Boccaccio speaks about the union of philosophy and wisdom as a divine gift in XIV.vi.3. Here again, the emphasis is placed, not simply on poetry, but rather on human knowledge whose product (the effect) is poetry.
82. On poetry as folly in late-antique and medieval literatures see Curtius, *European Literature*, 474–475. The concept of poetry as *furor* was theorized by Plato's *Phaedrus* and will be later elaborated with the second generation of humanists, with Marsilio Ficino, Cristoforo Landino and Politian (cf. Branca, *Poliziano e l'umanesimo della parola* [Torino; G. Einaudi, 1983], 50–54, 321).
83. V. Zaccaria, intr. to *Genealogie*, 32, observes that this passage constitutes a sort of catalog of poetical genres to which also Boccaccio's preferred authors could be referred to (Virgil, Ovid, Statius, Claudian and Homer).
84. The erroneous etymology of the word poetry from "poetes" is derived from Petrarch (*Familiare*, X.4.4), who in turn draws it from Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 8.7.1–3). This etymology was present in a manuscript possessed by Petrarch (Paris, BNF, 7595, f. 76r; cf. Rossi's note in his edition of the *Familiare*).
85. Aristotle (*Metaphysics*, 983b.29) was the first to define these poets "theologians," meaning those ones who first made the gods the object of their meditations. Yet "theologians" means also "scholars/researchers of the origin of the world," as Curtius notices (*European Literature*, 218).
86. Even the Judaic-Christian apologetical literature maintained that the Ancient Testament was more ancient than the works of classical poets (Curtius, *European Literature*, 220).
87. G. Billanovich, "La leggenda dantesca del Boccaccio dalla lettera di Ilaro al *Trattatello in laude di Dante*," *Studi danteschi* 28 (1949): 45–144. The edition of the text I used is *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, in Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, vol. X.

88. On the time of composition of this work, two hypotheses are presented. Some critics think that the work was written in the years 1342–1343; other lean for the years 1348–1350 (cf. *Vite di Petrarca, Pier Damiani e Livio*, ed. R. Fabbri, in *Tutte le opere*, V, 1, pp. 881–885 nn.; G. Villani, intr. a G. Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca* [Roma: Salerno editrice, 2004], 20–30). Villani (ibid., p. 30) maintains that the 1344 could be the *terminus ante quem* of the composition, and the period 1349–50 the *terminus* for additions and amendments.
89. Villani, intr. a Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca*, 20.
90. This assessment was later confirmed in *Genealogie*, XIV.xix.17.
91. Cf. Flasch, *Poesia dopo la peste*, 243. All these interests are, after all, confirmed in the *Lettera ai posteri* (*Seniles*, XVIII), which constitutes the spiritual legacy of Petrarch (cf. *Lettera ai posteri*, in Boccaccio, *Vita di Petrarca*, ed. Villani, par. 11).
92. On the defense of poetry in relation with the emergence of the intellectual figure of the poet, see É. Gilson, “*Poésie et vérité dans la Genealogia de Boccaccio*,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 2 (1964): 253–282; Branca, “Motivi preumanistici,” in Branca, *Boccaccio medievale*, 331–356; Tateo, *Retorica e poetica*, 157 ff.; G. Billanovich, “Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte tra il Petrarca e il Boccaccio,” in *Medioevo e Rinascimento, Studi in onore di Bruno Nardi* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1955), vol. 1: pp. 1–76; and then in *Petrarca e il primo Umanesimo* (Padova: Antenore, 1996), 459–524; Gagliardi, *Giovanni Boccaccio*, 46, n. 3; G. Martellotti, “La difesa della poesia e un giudizio su Lucano,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 6 (1967): 256–279 [then in id., *Dante, Boccaccio e altri scrittori dall’Umanesimo al Romanticismo* (Firenze: Olschki, 1983), pp. 163–183]; Ronconi, *Le origini delle dispute umanistiche*, 7 ff.; A. Buck, “Boccaccios Verteidigung der Dichtung in den *Genealogie deorum*,” in G. Tournoy, ed., *Boccaccio in Europe. Proceedings of the Boccaccio Conference, Louvain, December 1975* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1977); Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 155–157; C. Peirone, “Il *poetarum officiorum* del Boccaccio,” in G. Barberi Squarotti, ed., *Metamorfosi della novella* (Foggia, Bastogi, 1985), 53–78; A. Asor Rosa, “La fondazione del laico,” in *Letteratura italiana*, vol. V: *Le questioni* (1986), pp. 17–124. Susanna Barsella analyzes the different ways in which Petrarch and Boccaccio considered the life of Peter Damian, the Camaldolese theologian and Church reformer of the eleventh century. She maintains that only with Petrarch there has been an evolution toward a social and intellectual role of the poet of a humanistic type (S. Barsella, “Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Peter Damian: Two Models of the Humanist Intellectual,” *MLN* 121.1 [2006]: 16–48).
93. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 77.

94. In other words, according to Thomistic aesthetics, perfection lies in the object, and not in the subject to which the validity of the creative moment is denied. Cf. Stefanelli, *Boccaccio e la poesia*, 79. On Thomistic aesthetics in relation to the poetic product, see Eco, *Arte e bellezza nell'estetica medievale*, 94–95. Aquinas's negative judgment on the dignity of poetry as a cognitive means is notorious (see *ST*, I–II, 101, 2, ad. 2: “poetica non capiuntur a ratione humana propter defectus veritatis qui est in eis”).
95. Cazalé-Bérard, “Boccaccio e la poetica,” 299–300. On the myth of Orpheus between Middle Ages and Renaissance see S. Ferrarese, *Sulle tracce di Orfeo: storia di un mito* (Pisa: ETS, 2010).
96. Cazalé-Bérard, “Boccaccio e la poetica,” 300.
97. Cazalé-Bérard, “Boccaccio e la poetica,” 304.



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