5

From Plague to Pleasure

The previous chapter gave evidence that a number of medieval works and genres rely on recreational and hygienic arguments. We turn now to further material, both fictional and nonfictional, that depends on those arguments, principally the medical ones. This material appears in the years following the Black Death, and it involves a relationship between plague and mental pleasure, usually in the form of a structural movement from a world riddled by pestilence to a happier, healthier environment dominated by repose and recreational enjoyment. It may seem surprising to associate entertainment with the catastrophe that had such terrible impact on late medieval society. But I hope to show that the relationship between the Black Death and certain literary and social recreations suggests a potent value to such mundane joys, and the evidence assembled here may help redress the natural tendency to dwell on only the most pessimistic kind of medieval responses to pestilence.

This is not the place to try to summarize the enormous impact of the Black Death on western Europe during 1348–50, nor of the subsequent outbreaks of plague that continued in the fourteenth century and beyond. The effects of the Black Death on late medieval literary and artistic expression are usually discussed in terms of increased preoccupation with the arbitrariness of life and the terrors of dying—the evidence from art is more abundant and convincing, but it is common to cite such written material as Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale* and the appearance of the theme of the dance of death. Little attention has gone to less macabre responses, and the pattern of moving

from plague to pleasure has not, to my knowledge, been treated per se in much detail. The *Decameron*, which is the most famous example of that movement, is of course immensely well known and is my principal subject. But it is not the only work to reveal the pattern, and some of its force and logic may be more fully appreciated if it is considered in the context of other works that also deal with the relationship of plague and pleasure. That relationship is predicated on the ideas about literature this book has been examining.

The *Decameron* and the Plague Tracts

Let us start with the *Decameron* and with its principal structural feature: the frame story that begins amidst the chaos of plague-torn Florence and moves into the orderly, gracious world of country estates and gardens. This pattern, as almost every critic of the work notes, provides dramatic contrast of the strongest order. But to leave the matter there is hardly sufficient, and most commentators try to answer the question of what purposes that contrast serves. Many have seen it as a device to allow the creation of a more or less ideal secular society. Charles S. Singleton's well-known explication of the frame interprets the contrast as a kind of escape, which produces a privileged, insulated world that can let the Augustinian journey go by and attend to literature for its own sake. More recently, some critics have taken the movement as indicative of other aesthetic concerns on Boccaccio's part: Giuseppe Mazzotta, in a provocative essay, discusses it as a structure that allows Boccaccio to probe the relationship between literature and history; and Guido Almansi sees it as part of the self-consciously artificial construction of the *Decameron*, an "artistic game" that keeps calling attention to itself as such.[1] All these

[1]For a recent summary of critical opinion on various aspects of the frame story, including the significance of the movement from plague to gardens, see P. L. Cerisola, "La questione della cornice del *Decameron*," *Aevum*, 49 (1975), 137–56. For Singleton's views see "On *Meaning* in the *Decameron*," *Italica*, 21 (1944), 117–24. Mazzotta, "The *Decameron:* The Marginality of Literature," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 42 (1972), 64–81. Almansi, *The Writer as Liar: Narrative Technique in the* Decameron (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 1–18. There is much in an essay by Carlo Ballerini that parallels the discussion to follow, but he does not explore texts other than the *Decameron;* see

views approach the movement as a literary device serving certain artistic purposes, and while I certainly do not dispute that premise, I do think that the relationship between plague and pleasure has a psychological and medical basis that has not been fully appreciated, that its medical logic suggests a therapeutic function for the *Decameron* fictions and by implication for other secular literature as well, and that, accordingly, these pragmatic values should raise some questions about interpretations that tend to read the work as if Boccaccio's aesthetics were Nabokov's.

The movement from plague to pleasure in the *Decameron* reflects in some way the fact of pestilence and people's responses to it. Petrarch, writing in 1373, did not comment on Boccaccio's introduction as a clever literary strategy; he admired rather the way his friend "accurately described and eloquently lamented the condition of our country during that siege of pestilence which forms so dark and melancholy a period in our century."[2] And modern historians of the Black Death seem to find the pages as reliable as chronicle testimony (not terribly accurate itself, to be sure), regardless of the fact that Boccaccio drew on earlier material for his description. If the depiction of the plague appears true to reality, perhaps there is a comparable fidelity in the movement at the center of the work, the flight from the chaotic and terrified city to gracious and jovial living in serene gardens. The chronicles tell of people fleeing the plague, of course, but the best sources for understanding the rationale of the *Decameron*'s frame narrative are the plague tracts, those manuals of advice on how to cope with the pestilence which appeared concurrent with its arrival and which, judging from their numbers, enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the later Middle Ages and Renaissance, surviving in fact as long as plague remained a serious epidemic threat in western Europe.[3]

"Il recupero della letizia dalla tragedia della peste alla libera vita di Bruno e di Buffalmacco," in *Atti del convegno di Nimega sul Boccaccio (28–29–30 ottobre 1975)*, ed. Carlo Ballerini (Bologna: Pàtron, 1976), pp. 51–203.

[2]Thompson, p. 233. For Boccaccio's loss of family and friends due to plague, see Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and His Works*, trans. Richard Monges (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 76. On this translation of Branca see Piero Boitani in *Medium Aevum*, 47 (1978), 316–17.

[3]There are a few pages on the tracts in Philip Ziegler's *The Black Death* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), which is a good survey of all the aspects of the

To discuss the plague tracts is to return to material much like that treated in the second chapter. Many a treatise calls itself a *consilium,* and the works are in essence generalized *consilia,* treating the subject of plague itself rather than one individual's malady. The most complete treatises generally contain three sections. The first deals with the nature and causes of the pestilence—the principal immediate cause was thought to be corrupted air, which entered the body and destroyed it, the principal remote cause, usually, a particularly malevolent conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars in 1345. Although there was no official theory of contagion, some writers mention it as a contributing factor. The tracts also recognize varying degrees of susceptibility, depending on such matters as age, sex, regimen, and place of habitation.[4] The second section, directed to people who have not yet caught the disease, consists of a regimen to observe in order to minimize the chances of being stricken. The final section consists of specific remedies for those afflicted; here one finds directions on bloodletting and prescriptions for a variety of presumably curative potions. This kind of material often makes medieval medicine the butt of jokes and criticism, but even phlebotomy and lectuaries can be justified rationally given the theoretical understanding of the age, and it is important to remember that the writers of the plague tracts

plague. More substantial discussions are in C.-E. A. Winslow, *The Conquest of Epidemic Disease* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), pp. 98–114, and in Anna Montgomery Campbell, *The Black Death and Men of Learning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 34–92, still the fundamental work on the early plague treatises. The chief source of texts is the collection edited over the years by Karl Sudhoff in *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin,* 4–17 (1910–25), under the general title "Pestschriften aus den ersten 150 Jahren nach der Epidemie des 'schwarzen Todes.' " I will henceforth cite texts in *Archiv* by volume and page numbers. Essential for bibliography is Dorothea Waley Singer and Annie Anderson, *Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Plague Texts in Great Britain and Eire in Manuscripts Written before the Sixteenth Century* (Paris: Académie Internationale d'Histoire des Sciences, and London: William Heinemann, 1950), as well as the works cited in Chap. 2, n. 12. For bibliography of incunabular tracts and facsimiles of some early printed French treatises, see A. C. Klebs and E. Droz, *Remedies against the Plague* (Paris: E. Droz, 1925). For a survey of plague tracts in England from the late Middle Ages on, see Charles F. Mullett, *The Bubonic Plague and England: An Essay in the History of Preventive Medicine* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1956).

[4]On all these ideas of causation see Séraphine Guerchberg, "The Controversy over the Alleged Sowers of the Black Death in the Contemporary Treatises on Plague," in *Change in Medieval Society,* ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), pp. 208–24.

were not opportunists trying to mulct a desperate populace but were among the most eminent physicians of their time.

Not all the tracts are so neatly constructed, and many are much less complete. Some writers concern themselves with only one subject—an investigation of causes, a *regimen preservativum,* or a *regimen curativum.* Our interest lies in the material in the hygienic regimens, especially those which proceed according to the nonnaturals.[5] Their advice sometimes differs from that of the regimens discussed in Chapter 2 because of the particular problems the Black Death posed. For example, they are much more cautious about advocating exercise, and more strict in censuring sexual intercourse, because of their concern that physical exhaustion might render one more susceptible to the plague. (The ethical dimension of hygiene is nowhere more forcefully felt: overindulgence, by imbalancing the humors, lowers resistance to the plague and thus may have disastrous consequences.) Since the pestilence was attributed to contaminated air, the chapters on that nonnatural in the tracts are often quite extensive, with recommendations on how to purify the air, such as what woods to burn and what herbs to smell. A great deal of this material, like that dealing with the other nonnaturals, is thoroughly traditional. Concern with miasmic air goes back to Hippocrates, and the Middle Ages could find chapters on pestilential atmosphere long before the Black Death in such authorities as Avicenna and Rhazes.

In regard to the *accidentia animae,* the plague tracts do not so much alter the general principles of the regimens as make the recommendations a bit more pointed and sometimes more detailed. The most influential plague treatise of its time, the *Compendium de epidimia* of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Paris, written in 1348 at the request of the King of France, offers a succinct guide to the disposition of the emotions which parallels much of the physiological material discussed in Chapter 2:

[5]The tracts composed in the tradition of John of Burgundy's (1365), which seem to have been especially popular in England, do not use the nonnaturals as an organizing principle, though in places they touch on similar ideas. On these works see David Murray, *John de Burdeus and the Pestilence* (Paisley and London, 1891), and Dorothea Waley Singer's informative "Some Plague Tractates (Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries)," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine,* Part II, Section of the History of Medicine, 9 (1916), 159–212.

> . . . since bodily infirmity is sometimes related to the accidents of the soul, one should avoid anger, excessive sadness, and anxiety. Be of good hope and resolute mind; make peace with God, for death will be less fearsome as a result. Live in joy and gladness as much as possible, for although joy may sometimes moisten the body, it nevertheless comforts both spirit and heart.[6]

Here the standard recommendation for cheerfulness carries with it an interesting concessive clause. The *Compendium* notes elsewhere that the plague is caused principally by Jupiter, a hot and moist planet, and that people whose humoral balance contains an excess of heat and moisture are most susceptible to it. Since *gaudium* promotes moisture and heat in the body (see the Middle English treatise quoted on p. 45), it would appear that happiness in time of plague might well cause a dangerous imbalance of qualities. But although the *Compendium* is aware of the theoretical problem, nevertheless it insists that the beneficial effects of cheerfulness outweigh the disadvantages of such alteration.

The Faculty's advice was soon available in the vernacular. A close French translation reproduces this passage exactly, and even an abridged translation, more practical in its concerns than the *Compendium* itself, recommends that one should "flee sadness and melancholy, and live as merrily and happily as possible (fouir tritesces et melencolies et uiure plus ioieusement et lieement que on puet)."[7] More interesting, because more expansive, is an adaptation of the *Compendium* dated 1425, which amplifies its wisdom into 3,500 lines of French verse. The chapter on the accidents of the soul explains in detail how the passions alter the body and how the "imaginative power" also has corporeal effects. It follows the original in arguing that

[6]"De accidentibus vero anime, est notandum quod quia nonnumquam ex accidentibus anime infirmitas corporis contingere potest, iram caveant et tristiciam nimiam, sollicitudinem; sint bone spei et fortis ymaginationis, cum Deo faciant pacem, quia inde mortem minus timebunt; in gaudio vero et leticia, quantum plus poterunt, vivant et, licet gaudium quandoque corpus humectet, spiritus tamen et cor confortat." Ed. H. Émile Rébouis, *Etude historique et critique sur la peste* (Paris, 1888), p. 114.

[7]Bibliothèque Nationale MS f. fr. 2001, f. 101; entire treatise on ff. 97–103v. The more accurate translation is in B.N. fr. 12323, ff. 135v–144; the passage on the accidents of the soul is on f. 140v. For discussion of the *Compendium* and these translations, see Alfred Coville in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 37 (1936–38), pp. 336–59.

although the movement of joy ("action / De joie") may produce moisture, it is nevertheless "natural in order to resist pestilence" because of the "comfort and lightness" it brings to the heart and *spiritus,* enabling people to avoid "many dangers."[8]

Since the *Compendium*'s approach to the emotions is based on the conventional wisdom concerning the *accidentia animae,* it is difficult to know whether later treatises follow it directly or simply rely on the standard ideas. In any case, recommendations to avoid fear and sadness and keep oneself cheerful appear in a variety of plague tracts from 1348 on. For purposes of analysis, and for later applicability to the *Decameron,* we can in some instances distinguish those more concerned with the problem of fear from those dealing principally with the attainment of joy.

The earliest, and certainly one of the most interesting of the plague treatises, is by Jacme d'Agramont, a Catalan physician who wrote in April, 1348, to instruct the people of his city of Lerida as the plague was approaching.[9] He discusses the nature and causes of pestilence and presents a preventive regimen, but he omits the section on cures since his work is for laymen and he believes that treatment should remain in the hands of physicians. The regimen is organized according to the nonnaturals, and in regard to the emotions Jacme begins by recommending "gaiety and joyousness" as long as one's behavior is temperate. He then turns immediately to the dangerous effects of "fear and imagination. For from imagination alone, can come any malady." He gives some examples of its power, including the familiar assertion of prenatal influence on a baby's appearance. Unlike Chaucer's Doctour of Phisik, Jacme apparently studied both Galen and the Bible, for his next example is from Gen.30, in which Jacob's sheep and goats conceive spotted offspring

[8]Olivier de la Haye, *Poëme sur la grande peste de 1348,* ed. Georges Guigue (Lyon, 1888), pp. 108–11. Olivier's work is notable too for its glossary of medical and psychological terms, which he added at the end of his poem so that less educated readers could better understand the recommendations in the text.

[9]"Regimen of Protection against Epidemics of Pestilence and Mortality," trans. M. L. Duran-Reynals and C.-E. A. Winslow, *BHM,* 23 (1949), 57–89; the following quotations are from 84–85. For background see the same authors' "Jacme d'Agramont and the First of the Plague Tractates," *BHM,* 22 (1948), 747–65.

because at the time of conception they were thinking of the varied colors of the boughs he put before them.

> Another proof of this proposition can be made by the following experiment: When somebody stands on a level board on the flat floor he can go from one end to the other with nothing to hold on to, so as not to fall off, but when this same board is placed in a high and perilous position, no one would dare to try to pass over the said board. Evidently the difference is due wholly to the imagination. In the first case there is no fear, and in the other there is. Thus, it is evidently very dangerous and perilous in times of pestilence to imagine death and to have fear. No one, therefore, should give up hope or despair, because such fear only does great damage and no good whatsoever.
>
> For this reason also it is to be recommended that in such times no chimes and bells should toll in case of death because the sick are subject to evil imaginings when they hear the death bells.

Later in the century the same concern with the evil effects of fear appears in the tract of Nicholas de Burgo, a Florentine physician who recommends that people avoid thinking and speaking of the sick and the dead unless to report a recovery (*Archiv,* 5: 356). The treatise on plague by the French physician Chalin de Vivario, dating from 1382 as does Nicholas's, argues that fear and imagination are reasons why people do not recover once they have contracted the plague, and it paints a vivid picture of the debilitating effects of hearing nothing but pestilence-induced sounds—ringing of bells, offices for the dead, transporting of the sick, morbid gossip.[10] A fifteenth-century treatise notes approvingly the opinion that "simply thinking about the plague makes a person infected" (7: 92). As we will see later in this chapter, the fear of fear on the part of physicians has relevance to details in the *Decameron*

[10]Partially edited by Robert Hoeniger as an appendix to his *Der Schwarze Tod in Deutschland* (Berlin, 1882), p. 172: "alia racio quia tempore epidimiali plurimi homines infirmantes sunt ac moriuntur ex continuis terroribus timoribus et ymaginacionibus inductis ex pulsacione nimia campanorum et ex cantu mortuorum per carrerias et audiendo corpus extra deportari ad communicandum infirmos et audiendo eciam continue quod nunc Peter nunc Paulus moriatur." See also *Archiv,* 17: 35–39, 87.

frame and to actions taken by some communities affected by plague.

What means of attaining *gaudium* do the plague treatises discuss? The *Compendium* offers no specific recommendation, though it is possible that one might interpret its advice to be happy in the context of the previous sentence about making peace with God. Certainly the joy that comes with the hope of celestial bliss would seem beneficial, and some tracts make *gaudium* explicitly religious.[11] But in general the ways to mental contentment are considerably more earthly. One says that cheerfulness comes by listening to "songs, stories, and melodies" (5: 390). Another recommends "gaudium temperatum," attained by associating with friends and by listening to "comforting talk, pleasing songs, and sweetly harmonious sounds" (6: 322). The standard trinity of delights—music, songs, and stories—appears in Gentile da Foligno and Pietro da Tussignano as well.[12] More extensive is the list of pleasures in Nicholas de Burgo, who mentions singing, dancing, proper companions, fine clothing, and who would have people enjoy themselves "through every means of moderate cheerfulness."[13] The advice of one treatise to be "continually merry and cheerful" (6: 336) epitomizes the prevailing attitude; but many tracts stress as well that merriment should be moderate, and for this the reasons are, as in the *Compendium* and the regimens discussed earlier, physical: excessive joy overextends the *spiritus* and natural heat (6: 365). A fif-

[11] *Archiv,* 5: 82: "Making peace with God will always bring joy, for one will not fear death." See also 11: 61 and the epistolary tract discussed by Singer, "Some Plague Tractates," 174–75.

[12] *Domini Gentilis fulginatis singulare consilium contra pestilentiam* [Salamanca, ca. 1515], f. 8v: "gaudeamus et delectemur in mellodiis, cantilenis, hystoriis et similibus delectationibus." Pietro's brief *Consilium pro peste euitanda* may be found in the facsimile edition of the Venice, 1491, text of *The* Fasciculus medicinae *of Johannes de Ketham,* intro. Karl Sudhoff, trans. Charles Singer, Monumenta Medica 1 (Milan: R. Lier, 1924), [f. 14v]: "congaudendum est et delectandum cum sono, cantu, historiis et his similibus."

[13] *Archiv,* 5: 356. For another extensive inventory of delights, including the recommendation to "hear pleasant things and attractive stories," see the Italian version of Giovanni de' Dondi's pest tract, ed. F. Carabellese, *La peste del 1348 e le condizioni della sanità pubblica in Toscana* (Rocca San Casciano, 1897), p. 74, a passage not in the Latin version in *Archiv,* 5: 352–54. Also the plague treatise of Maino de' Maineri, ed. R. Simonini, *Maino de Maineri ed il suo Libellus de preservatione ab epydimia* (Modena: Umberto Orlandini, 1923), p. 20 and n. pp. 43–44; cf. p. 26.

teenth-century physician sharply distinguishes between *gaudium temperatum* and *gaudium intensissimum;* the latter is dangerous, the former alone "impedes the plague and preserves people from it" (4: 218).

Dispensing medical advice was not the province of the plague tracts alone. Eustache Deschamps, who wrote lyric poems on almost every conceivable subject, produced some ballades and a virelay summarizing the established regimen to observe in times of pestilence, and his views may serve to indicate how the advice of learned physicians became available outside the tracts themselves.

> Qui veult son corps en santé maintenir
> Et resister a mort d'epidemie,
> Il doit courroux et tristesce fuir,
> Laissier le lieu ou est la maladie
> Et frequenter joieuse compaignie.[14]
>
> Whoever wishes to keep himself healthy and fight against death from pestilence should flee anger and sadness, leave the place where the sickness exists, and associate with cheerful companions.

Like many of the authors of the *Pestschriften,* Deschamps puts quite stringent limits on what is properly "joieuse," for he asserts a few lines later that one must lead a sober life and explicitly prohibits intercourse. As he puts it in another ballade, "Be cheerful without disturbing the heart" (VII: 41)—a conditional warning comparable to the *Compendium*'s recognition that too much joy might create a dangerously large imbalance of qualities. But within this restriction he sanctions a fair amount of secular enjoyment, all with hygienic intent. His advice to wear "robes plaisans" derives from ideas we have seen in the *Secretum secretorum;* and when he tells his audience to "keep company with those whom you like," he is clearly reflecting medical views of the value of pleasant social *confabulatio.*

Not many years later John Lydgate offered the same kind of practical counsel in England. This is the first stanza of his bal-

[14]Deschamps, VI: 100. See also IV: 169–70, VII: 40–41, and VIII: 139–40. There is a longer regimen, not specifically for the plague, in VIII: 339–46.

lade on the pestilence, the opening lines of which are practically identical to Deschamps's:

> Who will been holle & kepe hym from sekenesse
> And resiste the strok of pestilence,
> Lat hym be glad, & voide al hevynesse,
> Flee wikkyd heires, eschew the presence
> Off infect placys, causyng the violence;
> Drynk good wyn, & holsom meetis take,
> Smelle swote thynges, & for his deffence
> Walk in cleene heir, eschewe mystis blake.

Although Lydgate makes no specific reference to the nonnaturals, his poem touches on all of them. This stanza alone involves four. It begins, significantly, with the *accidentia animae:* lightness of mind helps one resist the disease. Then follows the standard advice to flee the corrupted air and to eat and drink the proper substances. The recommendation to smell sweet things is part of the tracts' concern with rectifying the contaminated air, and the last line is also concerned with air, though the mention of walking implies the category of exercise and rest as well. The second stanza touches on repletion and evacuation, baths, coitus, and air again; the third deals with sleep and returns, in more detail, to food. In some manuscripts this poem is attached to Lydgate's famous *Dietary,* with no indication of a break in the text. That a poem specifically concerned with the plague could so readily fuse with a general regimen reveals both the pervasiveness of pestilence in fifteenth-century life and the widespread familiarity of the rules for dealing with it first announced in the plague *consilia.*[15]

[15]Text in Lydgate, II: 702; notes on the MSS in I: xv, though for a full list of MSS of the plague poem see the *Index of Middle English Verse* and *Supplement,* #4112. In addition to the MSS mentioned by MacCracken that do not distinguish the two poems, British Library Add. 10,099, ff. 211–211v, prints both under the single heading "Incipit doctrina sana." The first stanza of Lydgate's balade also found its way into his translation of the *Secretum secretorum,* where it appears as part of a prince's regimen of health. Ed. Robert Steele, *Lydgate and Burgh's Secrees of Old Philisoffres,* EETS e.s. 66 (1899; rpt. Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus Reprint, 1973), p. 41. For Lydgate's other references to the plague, usually more moralistic and religious than medical, see Charles F. Mullett, "John Lydgate: A Mirror of Medieval Medicine," *BHM,* 22 (1948), 403–15.

In the plague treatises I have seen, the most extensive discussion of how to dispose the accidents of the soul belongs to Dino del Garbo's son, Tommaso, himself a famous Florentine physician and a friend of Petrarch.

> Now we shall consider the means of bringing joy and pleasure into your hearts and minds during this time of pestilence. You should know that one of the best ways of doing this is to embrace cheerfulness in a reasonable way, following these precepts: dò not occupy your mind with death, passion, or anything likely to sadden or grieve you, but give your thoughts over to delightful and pleasing things. Associate with happy and carefree people and avoid all melancholy. Spend your time in your house, but not with too many people, and at your leisure in gardens with fragrant plants, vines, and willows, when they are flowering. But you should not spend too much of the night in gardens or in other places out in the air, since the night air is always more harmful and dangerous than that of the day. And you should avoid associating with tipplers, loose women, gluttons, and drunkards; if you do not want to be thirsty, drink what is appropriate in a controlled way, as mentioned above. And make use of songs and minstrelsy and other pleasurable tales without tiring yourselves out, and all the delightful things that bring anyone comfort.[16]

[16]"Ora è da vedere del modo del prendere letizia e piacer in questo tal tenpo di pistolenza e nell'animo e nella mente tua. E sappi che una delle più perfette cose in questo caso è con ordine prendere allegrezza, nella quale si osservi questo ordine, cioè prima non pensare della morte, overo passione d'alcuno, overo di cosa t'abi a contristare, overo a dolere, ma i pensieri sieno sopra cose dilettevoli e piacevoli. L'usanze sieno con persone liete e gioconde, e fugasi ogni maninconia, e l'usanza sia co non molta gente nella casa ove tu ai a stare e abitare; e in giardini a tenpo loro ove sieno erbe odorifere, e come sono vite e salci, quando le vite fioriscono e simile cose. E non si vuole stare troppo la notte nè in giardini, ne' in altri luoghi all'aria, però che l'aria di notte senpre è più nociva e sospettosa che quella del dì. E vuolsi schifare d'usare con bevitori e con feminacciole co' mangiatori ingordamente e con ebri, avegna che non si vuole patire la sete, ma bei assai ordinatamente, come detto è di sopra. E usare canzone e giullerie e altre novelle piacevole sanza fatica di corpo, e tutte cose dilettevoli che confortino altrui." *Consiglio contro a pistolenza,* ed. Pietro Ferrato, Scelta di curiosità letterarie inedite o rare 74 (Bologna, 1866), pp. 40–41. On manuscripts and dating see also *Archiv* 5: 348–51 and 16: 134–35. Tommaso's attention to social rather than spiritual pleasures may reflect something of his own predilections; Filippo Villani, in his *Liber de civitatis Florentiae famosis civibus,* says that he was "refined, pleasant, and jovial, and he would very frequently enjoy himself in the company of other people." Ed. G. C. Galletti (Florence, 1847), p. 29.

Tommaso's tract undoubtedly postdates the *Decameron*, but if we take its recommendations as representative of a detailed regimen in regard to the *accidentia animae* and apply this medical perspective to the *Decameron* frame, the parallels are self-evident. What this and other plague treatises present in prescriptive form becomes the central dramatic movement of Boccaccio's frame narrative.

First of all, the *brigata* does what the treatises recommend if possible: they flee. The *Compendium de epidimia* advocates flight in its discussion of the first nonnatural, air, since moving to a new location is choosing the proper kind of air. It cites Haly Abbas as authority on this point.[17] Other treatises also advise flight, and a shorthand summary of this recommendation in three Latin adverbs became widely known: *cito, longe, tarde*—flee quickly to avoid exposure, go far away to escape the corrupted air, return slowly to insure that the disease is over (explained in *Archiv*, 4: 420–21). Some writers recognize complicating factors. Chalin de Vivario, in a medically sophisticated discussion, says that flight is advisable only if the corrupted air is regional rather than universal, and he is aware of the problem of people carrying the plague with them if they migrate (Hoeniger, p. 175). Olivier de la Haye, in his expansion of the *Compendium*, recognizes a moral problem: some people lack "charité" and abandon their nearest relatives, fleeing "like cowards." Nevertheless, he realizes that "Nature" ordains that everyone in danger wishes to save himself, and this natural instinct for self-preservation leads him to follow his source in approving flight from the plague (pp. 74–77). At times the advice takes on real urgency. In a fifteenth-century plague tract, Friar Thomas Multon begins the section on regimen by saying that the "first and principall" rule for preservation is "to gouerne the well and wisely and fore to fle al that may gender eny ffeuer or eny agewe." He follows with other hygienic precepts, and in regard to air repeats his first rule: "Also hit is good to fle the pestilence aier and go to an other contrey, for the sikenesse of the pestilence is contagious." Then follows a passage on bloodletting; Multon's conclusion to this section re-

[17]Rébouis, p. 96. The abridged translation, B. N. fr. 2001, f. 97v, attributes the advice to "flee the places and the cities where this mortality is rampant" to "wise men and ancient authorities."

turns with some forcefulness to that "principall" remedy: "And if thou rule the thus, as I haue told the, thou may bi the grace of god and by this gouernaunce preserue thiself fro the pestilence. But yit I sey, I rede the, fle the contrey be tyme that hit reynes, for hit is contagious."[18]

In light of these precepts, particularly Olivier's reflections on the problem of desertion, which are confirmed in chronicle accounts of the horrors of family members abandoning one another, we can see that Boccaccio is at pains to make the *brigata*'s flight from Florence as morally and medically justified as possible. In his long set piece on the ravages of the plague, he mentions disapprovingly those who, cruelly thinking only of themselves, abandoned city, home, and relatives in order to escape the pestilence. He elaborates on the dissolution of personal ties—people neglecting neighbors, even the closest relatives leaving each other, and, most terribly, parents forgetting children.[19] The members of the *brigata,* it turns out, are victims of precisely that kind of cruelty. These young men and women meet only when the city has been "almost emptied of its inhabitants" (p. 58); Pampinea notes that "we shall not be abandoning anyone by going away from here; on the contrary, we may fairly claim that we are the ones who have been abandoned, for our kinsfolk are either dead or fled, and have left us to fend for ourselves in the midst of all this affliction, as though disowning us completely" (p. 61). With reasoning that anticipates Olivier de la Haye, she argues that "every person born into this world has a natural right (natural ragione) to sustain, preserve, and defend his own life to the best of his ability" (p. 59; Branca, p. 29).

That right is the ultimate medical and moral justification for leaving Florence. It is not only the external danger that motivates Pampinea, however, but also awareness of her current emotional anguish and its causes:

> Here we linger for no other purpose, or so it seems to me, than to count the number of corpses being taken to burial . . .

[18]British Library MS Sloane 3489, ff. 46–49.

[19]*Decameron,* ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965), pp. 18–19. *The Decameron,* trans. G. H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth, Eng.: Penguin, 1972), pp. 53–54. Introduction, translation, and notes copyright © G. H. McWilliam, 1972. All subsequent references in the text will be to page numbers of these editions; any alteration of McWilliam's translation is indicated by italics.

> or to exhibit the quality and quantity of our sorrows, by means of the clothes we are wearing. . . . And if we go outside, we shall see the dead and the sick being carried hither and thither . . . . Moreover, all we ever hear is "So-and-so's dead" and "So-and-so's dying"; and if there were anyone left to mourn, the whole place would be filled with sounds of wailing and weeping.
>
> And if we return to our homes, what happens? . . . now that there is no one left apart from my maid and myself, I am filled with foreboding and feel as if every hair on my head is standing on end. Wherever I go in the house, wherever I pause to rest, I seem to be haunted by the shades of the departed, whose faces no longer appear as I remember them but with strange and horribly twisted expressions that frighten me out of my senses. [Pp. 59–60]

Her speech catalogues all those things that Jacme d'Agramont, Nicholas de Burgo, and other physicians caution against: the depressing effects of seeing and hearing nothing except what betokens death. The apparition of dead relatives appearing "con una vista orribile" is precisely the kind of morbid *ymaginatio* that the plague tracts are concerned about. No wonder that Pampinea says "mi sembra star male" (p. 31; McWilliam's "I always feel ill at ease" [p. 60] understates the case); her fearfulness, dejection, and grotesque imaginings are not only a natural response to the plague but potentially a factor in her own succumbing to it.

Another motive exists, this one more moral than psychological. Pampinea is distraught not only by what she sees of death but also by what she sees of dissipation:

> And if we go outside . . . we shall see people, once condemned to exile by the courts for their misdeeds, careering wildly about the streets in open defiance of the law . . . or else we shall find ourselves at the mercy of the scum of the city who . . . go prancing and bustling all over the place, singing bawdy songs that add insult to our injuries.
>
> . . . no one possessing private means and a place to retreat to is left here apart from ourselves. But even if such people are still to be found, they draw no distinction, as I have frequently heard and seen for myself, between what is honest and what is dishonest; and provided only that they are

> prompted by their appetites, they will do whatever affords them the greatest pleasure. . . . [Pp. 59–60]

She includes monks as well as laymen in this condemnation, for they too "have broken the rules of obedience and given themselves over to carnal pleasures" (p. 60). Her recognition of the difference between those who are "oneste" and those who are not is a moral awareness like that of Tommaso del Garbo's, who would have people pursue delight reasonably, "con ordine," drink "ordinatamente," and avoid associating with profligates.

This firm distinction between orderly and disorderly pleasure, based ultimately on the ethical separation of proper recreation from improper play, governs our understanding of the morality of the events in the frame story. For not only does the *brigata* leave Florence, it pursues the mental regimen most conducive to resisting the plague and most likely to return its members to mental and physical well-being. Pampinea's goal is to attain cheerfulness ("allegrezza") without violation of reason ("ragione") (p. 33; Branca notes the parallel to Tommaso here), precisely the kind of moderate pleasure the plague treatises recommend cultivating. The movement from the "afflicted city" to a country estate with "delectable gardens" takes only a few sentences, and Dioneo immediately proclaims that he has abandoned his "troubles" and has given himself over to "laughter, song and merriment" (p. 64). As the most jovial and boisterous member of the group, he is the quickest to make the mental shift that the movement from plague to pleasure is meant to induce. (He is, correspondingly, the one character whose appetite for *gaudium* verges on the uncontrolled, and the fact that he has to be restrained at times helps us understand the company's proper *gaudium temperatum* by presenting its limitations on his potential *gaudium intensissimum*.) Pampinea agrees that the *brigata* has left Florence in order to flee "sorrows" and live "a merry life" (p. 65) but notes the need to obey rules in order to preserve their happy state. They will live with order and with pleasure ("con ordine e con piacere") (p. 41), thinking only of pleasant things. Hence the servants have instructions "to bring us no tidings of the world outside these walls unless they are tidings of happiness" (p. 66), a restriction motivated not by indifference to

suffering but by the need to dispose one's feelings joyfully, and one that Nicholas de Burgo recommended some years later in his plague tract.

The hundred tales, it must be remembered, exist as part of a larger set of activities, all of which are designed to produce that orderly pleasure which Pampinea has established as an ideal. Their regimen includes a certain amount of exercise before the two daily meals, usually in the form of walks; music, songs, and dancing after meals; and of course a great deal of congenial conversation throughout. The choice of storytelling as a means of recreation occurs within the context of these other pleasures:

> . . . as you will observe, there are chessboards and other games here, and so we are free to amuse ourselves in whatever way we please. But if you were to follow my advice, this hotter part of the day would be spent, not in playing games (which inevitably bring anxiety to one of the players, without offering very much pleasure either to his opponent or to the spectators), but in telling stories—an activity that may afford some amusement both to the narrator and to the company at large. [P. 68]

Pampinea's concern about avoiding the anxiety that can come when a situation involves winning and losing is not trivial. Medieval games, even chess, often elicited violent reactions in the participants, and a civilized company would want to avoid, especially in the heat of the day, a circumstance in which tempers could flare.

Arnold of Villanova, in fact, recognizes this problem in his discussion of entertainment as a secondary nonnatural (see p. 42):

> Play in itself alters the body through exercise and the accidents of the soul (delight, sadness, anger, and intensity). In chess, dice games, and any other game in which loss or profit occurs, fear or hope is involved, and happiness or sadness follows. Even if a game is played only for the sake of winning, with no material loss to be feared, resentment and unhappiness still disturb the loser. Such effects are most clearly seen in certain dispositions: greedy and selfish people, if they lose something of value in a game, cannot escape sadness; irascible people, if they are beaten and, because of the presence of

> others, dare not get angry, are immediately gnawed by frustration.[20]

The members of the *brigata* are surely neither greedy nor irascible, but since virtue involves in part avoiding the occasions of sin, there is good reason to make every effort to escape the potential ill effects of competition. Pampinea's solution is an excellent one: she chooses as principal entertainment something that is not a zero-sum game. In storytelling, all the participants gain "diletto."

It is in this context of pervasive but thoughtfully controlled disport that the narratives begin. At the end of the first day the "onesto diletto" of the *brigata* has been successful enough that the newly elected queen decides to continue with the same entertainment, but with the provision that the activities may later be abandoned should they become annoying, "noiose" (pp. 116–17). Obviously they do not, but I suspect that a detailed survey of all the evidence showing the company's continued cheerfulness would. At the conclusion of the ten days' regimen of recreations, Panfilo, who chose as the final topic the high secular virtue of *magnificenzia*, summarizes the purposes of the journey and explicitly links pleasure and health:

> Tomorrow, as you know, a fortnight will have elapsed since the day we departed from Florence to provide for our relaxation *in order to* preserve our health and our lives (per dovere alcun diporto pigliare a sostentamento della nostra sanità e della vita), and escape from the sadness, the suffering and the anguish continuously to be found in our city since this plague first descended upon it. [P. 824; Branca, p. 1234]

The "diporto" is in the cause of health ("*a* sostentamento . . ."). The *brigata* has done what Tommaso del Garbo and other phy-

[20]"Ludus per se immutat corpus speciebus exercitii et accidentibus animi, scilicet delectatione, tristitia, ira, et studio, sicut in ludo scacorum et alearum et omnem quidem ludum quem sequitur amissio seu lucrum concomitatur timor aut spes et sequuntur letitia vel tristitia. Quod si tantummodo ludus ad victoriam fiat in quo rerum amissio non timetur, nihilominus indignatio atque displicentia victum conturbant et huiusmodi effectus manifestissimi sunt in dispositis. Nam auari et cupidi, si in ludo quicquam boni amisserint, non euadunt tristitiam. Iracundi vero, si victi fuerint vbi propter presentiam maioris irasci non audent, saltem displicentia corroduntur." Chap. 85, f. 32.

sicians recommend: they have avoided melancholy through pleasant garden walks, music, and delightful *novelle,* and in so doing they have kept themselves both physically and mentally well.

It would be possible to cite other connections between the plague *consilia* and the *Decameron* frame—Pampinea's reference to the country air being "much more refreshing" (p. 61), for example, is not just an ordinary detail in a conventional portrait of a *locus amoenus* but a significant medical observation. My concern here, though, is only with the *accidentia animae.* This much seems to me indisputable: the structural movement of the *Decameron* from plague to pleasure involves a set of activities and dispositions which fourteenth-century medicine defines as hygienic, and the telling of stories is part of that regimen. What is the significance of this fact? I am not trying to argue that the *Decameron* represents volunteer medical service on Boccaccio's part, nor that a reading of the plague tracts inspired his frame story. A parallel is not a cause, and the medically sound activities of the *brigata* can be found in other works of Boccaccio written before the plague. The parallel is probably not so much a matter of direct influence as it is of a shared response to the plague based on common assumptions about the role of mental attitude in hygiene and about the power of literary delight to affect mental attitude. I think it is important for a number of reasons. First, it enriches our understanding of the logic and coherence of the *Decameron* frame, giving the dramatic movement from plague-ridden Florence to orderly gardens firm psychological and medical plausibility, making it not merely escapist but therapeutic. Second, and something to be taken up later in this chapter, is what the pattern in both the tracts and the *Decameron* implies about fourteenth-century response to the Black Death. Third, and more the focus of this book as a whole, is what the parallel suggests about late medieval attitudes toward the function of nondidactic literature. Far from being seen in any kind of art-for-art's-sake way, the *Decameron* fictions exist in a structure that imputes to them beneficial hygienic effects on human beings. That structure, however, consists not only of the frame story but also of the author's own comments about his work and his audience. I will discuss these matters in the next chapter, since

they take us too far away from the pattern that is the subject of this one.

The Pattern in Literature and Life

Let us turn now to the second major literary work based on the plague-to-pleasure pattern. About the same time that Boccaccio created the *Decameron,* in the years immediately following the arrival of the Black Death, Guillaume de Machaut, fourteenth-century France's greatest composer and probably its greatest poet as well, wrote the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre.*[21] Independently of Boccaccio he conceived the same structural movement, though his poem is quite different from the tale collection. It begins with summer passing into autumn, and with the colder season comes a corresponding tone; Machaut tells us that he was melancholy, musing alone in his room that the world governs itself "by the wisdom of the tavern" (39), that avarice and corruption reign, that nothing has order, "ordenance" (102). He tries to pull himself out of his brooding by reflecting on the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, that the world is "all vanity, and that there is nothing better to do than to be happy (liez) and to do good" (134–36).[22] But even more terrible thoughts assail him, of "horrible marvels" (143) that have never been seen before, signs of "war, agonies, and plagues" (154–55). He mentions a variety of ills—war, water poisoned by Jews, the hypocritical flagellants—which prompt Nature to send winds and to corrupt the air. Seeing all this "desordenance" (352), God lets loose death in vengeance, and Machaut describes vividly the ravages of plague. Fearful, he locks himself in his house, and leaves it only when spring comes, and with it the end of the epidemic.

[21] *Oeuvres de Guillaume de Machaut,* ed. Ernest Hoepffner, 3 vols., SATF (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1908–21), I: 137–282. References in the text are to line numbers of this edition.

[22] Eccles. 1:2 and 3:12. The significance of these allusions has been discussed by Margaret J. Ehrhart, "Machaut's *Jugement dou roy de Navarre* and the Book of Ecclesiastes," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen,* 81 (1980), 318–25. She shows that Machaut's view of Ecclesiastes follows that of Nicholas of Lyra's commentary, which, influenced by the *Nicomachean Ethics,* stresses not contempt of the world but the moderate use of earthly pleasures according to right reason. We will see shortly what the poem offers as means of being happy.

This famous introduction constitutes only the first eighth of the poem. The rest of it is a love-debate. On one side is Machaut, whose previous debate poem, the *Jugement dou roy de Behaingne*, had decided that a man whose lover was unfaithful to him had greater grief than a woman whose lover had died. On the other side, arguing exactly the opposite, is Bonneürtez (Happiness), aided by other personifications such as Raison, Attemprance, Honnestez, Prudence, and Mesure. With a lineup like that there can be little doubt who will win, and at the end of the poem Charles of Navarre pronounces judgment in favor of Bonneürtez, telling Machaut that as penance he must write a lay, a chanson, and a ballade. Until recently it was commonplace to write the debate off as a routine court performance (Machaut changing his mind to please ladies offended by the decision in *Behaingne*) and to think of the introduction as a piece of interesting but excrescent realism, without thematic relevance. But Robertson has called attention to the fact that the plague is not only described with verisimilitude but personified and related to the "abstract reality" of God's order (in fact, Machaut even makes it a divinely ordered consequence of phenomena that historically followed it, not preceded it); William Calin and Margaret Ehrhart have argued a number of thematic connections between prologue and debate; and Douglas Kelly has found in the poem's reversal of *Behaingne*'s verdict evidence of an important evolutionary change in Machaut's conception of *fin amour*.[23] *Navarre* is a sophisticated and substantial poem, and I want only to consider briefly one pertinent aspect of it, the connection between the plague and the debate.

The plague itself is only one manifestation of a disordered, chaotic world. Whereas the introduction to the *Decameron* devotes all its time to the effects of the Black Death, *Navarre* treats the pestilence in the context of God's punishment for sinfulness and links it with other examples of disharmony, especially war. Machaut's "realistic" lines about people being thrown into pits and about fields lying uncultivated appear as part of a larger theme, what Calin, following Curtius, defines as "the universe upside-down" (p. 125). The poem uses the plague

[23]Robertson, *Preface to Chaucer*, pp. 235–36; William Calin, *A Poet at the Fountain: Essays on the Narrative Verse of Guillaume de Machaut* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974), pp. 110–29; Kelly, pp. 137–44.

more for what it tells us *about* the world than for what it does *to* the world. This symbolic use of the Black Death was anticipated some months earlier by Jacme d'Agramont, who at the end of his plague tract has a fascinating chapter in which he allegorizes it on the level of tropology: "In this article the principle of pestilence is conceived as applicable in a moral, as well as a physical sense."[24]

Jacme begins by citing biblical parables that edify when morally understood. Similarly, "for those with clear and subtle understanding, all that has been said about pestilence in its natural sense, will apply equally clearly and truly to the moral pestilence." He defines moral pestilence as "a contra-natural change in the spirit and in the thoughts of men, from which come enmities, rancors, wars and robberies, destruction of places and deaths in certain definite regions beyond what is customary to the people living there." The rest of the chapter elaborates on this statement. Just as "natural pestilence" causes pathological changes in the body, so moral pestilence causes changes in the soul. The analogy between disease and sin has a long history in medieval thought, of course, and as John Alford has reminded us, it is not simply an analogy but a manifestation of an "essential connection."[25] Thus Jacme's allegorical finale to his scientifically scrupulous treatise should not come as a great surprise. He goes on to justify the other details in his definition, explaining how hatred, war, and other evils all evolve out of "the contra-natural thoughts above mentioned." He restricts moral pestilence to "certain definite regions" because it appears in different countries at different times; should it become universal, it "would be a great sign of the advent of the son of abomination, that is the Antichrist." Like the plague itself, moral pestilence "has causes, is announced by signs . . . and would respond to a regimen of prevention." But Jacme does not think his understanding adequate to work out all the details of his parallel, and so he closes with a prayer for protection to Christ, "who has preserved us from the pestilence, naturally or morally understood."

[24]*BHM*, 23 (1949), 87–89, for this and all the following quotations from Jacme. Augustine had long before analogized physical and moral pestilence, in *The City of God*, I, chap. 32.

[25]Alford, 388.

Machaut depicts the natural pestilence as a consequence of the moral pestilence of an avaricious age. Are we meant to see the debate as a response to that situation, containing perhaps elements that might belong to Jacme's hypothetical "regimen of prevention"? In *Navarre* the dramatic movement is sequential—spring comes, the plague disappears, Machaut ventures out of his "prison" (485) and into an encounter with Bonneürtez; in the *Decameron* it is causal—the *brigata* leaves the city in order to save itself. The weaker structural connection makes the link between plague and pleasure less integral in Machaut than in Boccaccio, yet it still implies, I think, a relationship much like that in the hundred tales. Machaut is out hunting rabbits, rejoicing in the now-healthy air, when Bonneürtez (though she is not named until later in the poem) sees him and sends her squire to tell him that she wants to debate. She accuses Machaut of wronging women and refers to the decision in *Behaingne;* he says he will defend himself, and they agree on the King of Navarre as judge. They enter a place of peace and beauty, "De deduit e de bon repos, / Ou uns cuers se puet reposer / Qui a point se vuet disposer" (1126–28)—a place of delight and tranquillity, where a heart that wants to set itself right could take repose. The terminology here suggests the re-creative functions of delight and mental *quies.* In an elegant room where the debate will take place, Machaut meets Bonneürtez's companions. They include Attemprance, who reveals no vice or "desordenance" (1200) in her behavior; Pais, who says that a life of peace, happiness ("leësse"), and tranquillity ("repos") involves avoiding anger and vengeance (1207–18); Prudence, carrying Sapience in her heart, who knows the cause of all things in the firmament, including air and the other elements (1239–64); and Largesse, who reproves avarice as the worst sin (1277–78). Surely these virtues are meant to answer, in one way or another, the "desordenance" of the cupidity, aggression, and natural corruption depicted in the introduction.

That answer, though, by no means takes the form of a moral tract. The love-debate is first and foremost gracious social entertainment, something meant to give pleasure "to lovers" (1516). Calin has made a firm case for its large and equitable comic perspective, one capable of having fun at the expense of both Machaut-the-character and the occasionally overearnest

female personifications.[26] Good humor permeates the poem; even as the judge and his counselors whisper among themselves before deciding Machaut's "penitence" (4047), he knows that their discussion is lighthearted, for he can hear them laughing (4056–57). But at the same time, the judge's "ordenance" (3755), which he arrives at with the help of Raison and Mesure, among others, clearly suggests a mode of secular behavior meant to be seen as admirable, one that would be a corrective to the moral pestilence that has led to the Black Death. Toward the end of the poem Raison delivers a long panegyric to Bonneürtez, and it entails, I think, an affirmation of the validity of well-ordered living, secular or sacred, one that implicitly offers a range of human experience that stands against the irrationality and destructiveness which the introduction portrays. Happiness, she says, transcends the vicissitudes of Fortune (3851–56) and appears in many places: between loyal lovers, in learning, in the contemplative life, even "in many recreations (esbanois), such as jousts and tournaments, for the purpose of advancing chivalry and making the deeds of good men known to women" (3909–13).

Properly motivated recreations, apparently, belong as much to the world of Raison and Mesure as true friendship and learning. Like Gace de la Buigne, whose hunting treatise we examined in Chapter 3, Machaut has a comfortably secular notion of moral "ordenance." His heart finds *quies* a lot nearer at hand than Augustine's does, and one suspects that he would wish us to add another domain of Bonneürtez to Raison's list: the satisfactions offered by an urbanely written love-debate that in the face of pestilential destruction asserts the value of properly ordered courtly pleasures. In late 1348 the Paris *Compendium* had told people, as the adaptation cited earlier puts it, to flee "melencolies" and to live as "ioieusement et lieement" as they could. Some months later, Machaut's response to the plague is to demonstrate that the movement from melancholy to happiness must involve a movement from avarice and rapacity to Charité and Mesure, and to embody that movement in the structure of a poem which itself will make people "ioieuse."

[26]James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 94–102, also discusses the comic narrator and notes his relevance to Chaucer's poetic *personae*.

If the literary movement from plague to pleasure in Boccaccio and Machaut reveals a common medical and ethical response to the Black Death, one seen as well in Jacme's discussion of moral pestilence, it is reasonable to expect that other writers might use the plague thematically in their work. An obvious example is the rather perfunctory appearance of the pestilence in the love allegory known as the *Songe vert,*[27] where the interesting structural resonances of Boccaccio and Machaut have been reduced to a simple attempt at added pathos. The narrator has lost his beloved at the time of the "grant mortalite" that has caused so many men and women to grieve. He is melancholy, despairing, and, when he hears the bell ringing where her body lies, suicidal. Then he has a dream in which the Queen of Love leads him back from grief to interest in a new lady and to a renewed faith in love, a psychological movement symbolized by his change from black to green clothing. The plague here is the implicit cause of death, and the author interested in it only insofar as it helps establish plausibility and a suitably dolorous beginning. In another instance, religious rather than secular and moving not from plague to pleasure but from natural to moral pestilence, the *Somnium* of the Cistercian monk Peter Ceffons of Clairvaux is set in Paris as the plague is raging; then follows a dream vision in which Peter argues against a definition promulgated by the General Chapter which he thinks will do more damage than the Black Death because of its effects on men's souls.[28]

More elaborate, and more revealing of the literary and moral polarities of plague and pleasure, is the structural logic of a work that moves in the opposite direction from that of the *Decameron* and the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre,* from delight to pestilence. *Les livres du roy Modus et de la royne Ratio* consists of two loosely connected parts. The first is an elaborate hunting manual, the *Livre des deduis,* complete not only with instructions on hunting and hawking but with moralizations drawn from the animals and a debate on the relative merits of the "deduit de chiens" and the "deduit d'oisiaus." In Chapter 3 we saw its place in the development of hunting treatises in the fourteenth century. The second part is a moral tract, the *Songe du pesti-*

[27]Ed. Léopold Constans, *Romania,* 33 (1904), 490–539.

[28]The *Somnium* is discussed by Damasus Trapp, O.S.A., "Peter Ceffons of Clairvaux," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale,* 24 (1957), 109–14.

lence, about the evils present in the world, in the form of a dream vision and with such familiar conceptualizations as the three temptations, the three estates, and the battle of vices and virtues. Following the vision the author has a clerk interpret it, who supplies a set of prophecies (really written after the fact, of course) concerning the pestilence and war that will ravage France in the third quarter of the century.[29] At first glance the two parts appear unrelated, and their independence is further suggested by the fact that each appears alone in some manuscripts. Yet their author clearly saw them as connected in some way, and the logic of that relationship is, I think, very close to what we have seen in Boccaccio and Machaut.

The principal element that unifies the two parts is the presence of King Modus and Queen Ratio. In the *Livre des deduis,* Modus gives the rules for proper hunting behavior and Ratio the allegorical significance of the animals. The author, Henri de Ferrières, claims to be copying from an ancient book and asserts initially the harmony of that society where Modus and Ratio governed. Modus, we later find out, means "Bonne Maniere," and he is wedded to Reason because the two cannot exist without each other (I: 268). He represents more than just "good manners" in the modern sense; he manifests the properly ordered behavior of secular culture governed by reason. Together, says the author, they ruled over all human activity. Ratio's sphere was more theoretical: she gave basic rules for behavior that insured the "droit commun" (I: 5). Modus's authority involved more practical knowledge. He knew medicine and gave lawyers the skill to plead cases (I: 5). He was also in charge of "all games and entertainments," and his abilities as a musician enabled him to be "lord of peace" (I: 6). He hated idleness, and "he created all the hunts (deduis)—for red deer, boar, and fallow deer—so that we would not be idle" (I: 6). We have seen this argument for hunting previously; here too it works to give an ethical sanction to the sport and to the fact that Modus wrote a book about it. In all the instances depicting

[29]Ed. Gunnar Tilander, 2 vols. (Paris: SATF, 1932). Hereafter I will cite volume and page numbers of this edition. Whereas the hunting treatise is well known, the second part of the work has been generally ignored; according to Tilander, it was written in the mid-1370s, the first part sometime between 1354–76.

the rule of Modus we see the principle of orderly activity, disciplines with rules, a more precise meaning of *modus* as method, not just manner. Against such properly governed recreations as hunting stand the wicked ones, such as dicing and other "entertainments that promote war and conflict" (I: 7–8). As in the *Decameron* and in most of the theoretical material discussed in Chapter 3, the line is drawn not between sobriety and amusement but between proper and improper forms of play.

In the second part, Modus and Ratio no longer control society. We see them trying to win back mankind from Satan. We see them pleading before God that the World, the Flesh, and the Devil (the three temptations had been introduced in the *Livre des deduis* in some of Ratio's moralizations) have seduced people away from obedience to them. And finally we see precisely such things as "war and conflict" forecast for mankind as a result of people's not having followed Modus and Ratio. With these disasters goes "the pestilence to come," which will be sent by the Holy Spirit "in chastisement of the people for their great sins" (II: 199). The clerk supplies a description of the conjunction of Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter in 1345 as a sign of the epidemic to follow. We also discover at the end of the dream just why the author had set down the *Livre des deduis*, as he responds to a question from the clerk:

> Then he asked me if I had made the *Livre des deduis* which was based on Method and Reason, who had left the realm of France, which would for that reason experience great devastation from wars and plagues, and a great many people would die. "The reason that caused me to put the *deduis* in writing was that it seemed to me that few people remained who knew how to give them order (ordener), either in word or deed." Thus I told him that I had put down everything I knew, all of which was built on Method and Reason. [II: 192]

Reason and proper behavior have been lost, and no one in the present age knows how to arrange properly such noble recreations as hunting. Since the loss of Modus and Ratio is the "cause" of plague and war, the author's attempt to reestablish their principles in the guidance of hunting can be seen as an effort to combat corruption and chaos, as can Boccaccio's *brigata*'s delineation of principles in the guidance of how to em-

ploy their leisure. Both storytelling and hunting are properly ordered secular activities which oppose idleness and license.

It seems obvious that the *Livre des deduis* and the *Songe du pestilence* were written essentially out of two quite different motives; one instructs in a sport, the other harrangues about a world gone bad. But the ethical aspects of recreation stressed so firmly in the hunting manual allowed Henri de Ferrières, when he later composed the *Songe,* to set the ideal of pleasure properly taken, with due regard to using that delight "according to reason" and remembering "always to serve God first" (I: 12), against the wicked kinds of indulgence that lead people to sin. In creating a structure that moves from pleasure to plague, *Les livres du roy Modus et de la royne Ratio* reverses the pattern we have been considering, but it intimates nevertheless that proper recreation may be one means of counteracting the disorder that caused the plague and that the plague in turn exacerbates.

I have been stressing the close connection between literature and life in works that involve movement from plague to pleasure. The pestilence, literally and tropologically, is disorder, chaos. Affirmation of secular order in the face of the Black Death is a moral and therapeutic response in itself, regardless of the particular form (storytelling, love-debate, hunting) that order takes. We have seen this shared response to the pestilence on the part of certain writers and physicians. Is there any evidence that their attitudes played a role in the society at large, that concerns for avoiding fear and attaining pleasure were historical as well as literary responses?

There is certainly a connection between the plague tracts' pronouncements on fear and actions that can be documented as social responses to the Black Death. We have seen Jacme d'Agramont's recommendation that bells not toll for the dead because of the dangers of instilling fear into the living, and we have seen Boccaccio's Pampinea give voice to just such fears. Chronicles reveal the same beliefs about fear that the physicians have. One Greek report of the plague in Constantinople, after a clinical account of its symptoms, moves on to psychological effects: "Most terrible was the discouragement. Whenever people felt sick there was no hope left for recovery, but by turning to despair, adding to their prostration and severely

aggravating their sickness, they died at once." Because of the emotional damage done through the fear instilled by the tolling of the death bell, communities acted according to Jacme's advice. The sanitary ordinances of Pistoia issued to combat the plague in 1348 include, among a variety of rules for burial and mourning designed to minimize the omnipresent feeling of death, a provision that forbids the ringing of church bells at funerals, "so that the sound of the bells will not assault the sick, and fear not triumph over them." When the Sienese chronicler, Agnolo di Tura, reports that burials often took place without the proper offices, he adds that the death bell did not sound. There is no record of Sienese sanitary legislation in 1348 comparable to Pistoia's, but the absence of the bell might well suggest a common-sense, if not officially ordered, response to the dangers of fear. Similar efforts occurred farther north: Gilles le Muisit records that in Tournai the constant bell-ringings left the entire population afraid and that the clergy did not make any effort to change the situation because of its own financial interest. In response city officials issued legislation on a variety of moral matters, including some restrictions on burial services and mourning; later in 1349, as the plague grew worse, they issued further regulations, intended "for the benefit of the city," prohibiting entirely the ringing of bells for the dead and the wearing of black.[30]

Even more clearly tied to the plague tracts' advice on the *accidentia animae* is a law enacted in Venice on August 7, 1348. Taking note of the fact that many citizens were wearing mourning throughout the city, "which brings pain and sorrow to those who see it," the regulation forbids the populace to do so (with a few exceptions), for the reason that such garb would not do the souls of the dead any good and that "it would be

[30]Christos S. Bartsocas, "Two Fourteenth Century Greek Descriptions of the 'Black Death,' " *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences,* 21 (1966), 396. Alberto Chiappelli, "Gli ordinamenti sanitari del comune di Pistoia contro la pestilenza del 1348," *Archivio storico italiano,* ser. 4, 20 (1887), 11. W. M. Bowsky, "The Impact of the Black Death upon Sienese Government and Society," *Speculum,* 39 (1964), 15. *Chronique et annales de Gilles le Muisit,* ed. Henri Lemaître (Paris: Renouard, 1906), pp. 255–57. I am not sure that it is fair to see these responses only as "petty acts," as does Stephen d'Irsay, "Defense Reactions during the Black Death, 1348–49," *Annals of Medical History,* 9 (1927), 175, though he is no doubt right that there was a greater concern for spiritual than for psychological relief.

more useful for the living to cast off such sadness and in its place introduce plenty of joy and feasting."[31] Here is a clear instance of cheerfulness perceived as a useful response to the plague—at least psychologically, one may infer, and perhaps hygienically. It is not necessary to prove that this and other legislation was directly due to the advice of physicians or the reading of plague tracts, though these possibilities are certainly likely. It is enough to recognize the correlation, to see that the ideas expressed in the treatises and the decisions of civic authorities reveal an identical attitude toward the proper disposition of emotions during the plague. The logic of the *Decameron* is to be found not only in medical advice but also in official public actions.

There is evidence as well that people entertained themselves out of motives similar to those of Boccaccio's *brigata,* though it is less clear-cut than community legislation designed to prevent destructive emotions. It is easy to infer from the Venice law or from the many chronicle accounts of people leaving plague-struck areas that citizens sought pleasure, but what they actually did or thought can only remain conjectural. Conjecture may have more foundation in the case of Giangaleazzo Visconti, who, when he left his palace in Pavia during outbreaks of plague in the years after the Black Death, would go to one of his country estates which he used principally for hunting.[32] Motives are much more explicit, however, in a story entered into the *Grandes chroniques de France,* which tells of two religious of Saint-Denis traveling on a visitation during the period of the Black Death. They passed en route through a village where the people were dancing and "making great revelry." When the two inquired about all this activity, the people told them that they were dancing because the epidemic had not yet entered their town, "nor do we expect that it will come because of the happiness that is in us (ne si n'avons pas esperance qu'elle y entre pour la leesce qui est en nous)." When the religious re-

[31]"... quia talis portatio non sit propterea suorum defunctorum liberacio animarum et pocius sit utile pro videntibus removere talem merronem [sic] et suo loco inducere plenum gaudium atque festum." Quoted in Mario Brunetti, "Venezia durante la peste del 1348," *L'ateneo Veneto,* 32 (1909), II: 16–17.

[32]D. M. Bueno de Mesquita, *Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan (1351–1402)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1941), pp. 177, 297.

turned to the village, having completed their visitation, they found "very few people, whose faces were very sad," and when the two asked about those who had previously been celebrating, they were told that God's anger had descended on the village, so that some had been killed, and others, because they did not know where to go to avoid the plague, "died of the fear they had."[33]

The story is told without commentary. It serves principally to show the sudden devastation caused by pestilence—one thinks of the youth at the beginning of the *Pardoner's Tale* who has, overnight, gone from carousing to coffin. But what of the villagers' emotions? Are we to believe that God has punished them for their revelry, or is their swing from "leesce" to "faces moult tristes" simply designed to show the futility of thinking that one can have control over the spread of the disease? Obviously gaiety is no protection against the Black Death—though one might observe that it seems to be more *intensissimum* than *temperatum* here. Fear, however, seems to be taking its toll. Still, that fact that some people believed that joy could ward off plague (or, to be more cautious, the fact that a chronicle includes as history an anecdote in which people believe it) testifies to at least some acceptance of the physicians' contention that the *accidentia animae* play a role in one's susceptibility to pestilence.

Perhaps the most interesting historical case, though a complex one, is that of the famous court of love established in France at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Its avowed purpose was to honor and serve women, which it did through such means as poetic contests and love-debates. It is often mentioned by historians and literary scholars, usually as an example of the consuming interest taken by late medieval French court circles in splashy social pastimes.[34] But the charter of the court of love suggests a firm therapeutic reason for its existence: it claims that Philip of Burgundy and Louis of Bourbon requested that Charles VI establish it "during this displeasing and harmful epidemic of plague presently at large in the realm" in order to "pass part of the time more graciously and to create an awakening of

[33]*Les grandes chroniques de France,* ed. Jules Viard, IX (Paris: Champion, 1937), pp. 315–16.

[34]E.g. Huizinga, pp. 115–17.

new joy (affin de trouver esveil de nouvelle joye)."[35] Later the charter specifies that the members of the court are to gather on Valentine's Day "to dine in joyous recreation and amorous conversation" (209), and it indicates that visitors are to be given a place at court should they wish "to enjoy themselves (esbattre) to pass the time during the festivities of the *pui* or of other worthy gatherings of our court of love" (217). These references to passing the time, to "recréacion" and enjoyment, suggest that whatever the court's claims may be to celebrate humility and loyalty, its essential social and personal functions are comparable to the activities of Boccaccio's *brigata;* composing lyrics and engaging in genteel conversation about love are gracious entertainments that will, through their creation of "joye," alleviate the discomforts of the plague. Boccaccio is more explicit about the nature of that alleviation, but it seems reasonable to assume that a similar hygienic rationale underlies the pleasantries of French society as well.

Thus the charter of the *cour amoureuse.* That the court existed in some form is indisputable, for in addition to its charter are various documents and references that testify to its existence, and to an extensive membership, in the early fifteenth century. But Theodor Straub has shown that the charter's statement about the court's origins cannot be true and has raised questions about its historical reliability.[36] As it turns out, the more accurate history of the establishment of the court that he proposes does not entail rejecting its therapeutic motivation, for although the founding fathers could not have been where the charter says they were on January 6, 1400, the founding mother was: Queen Isabeau of Bavaria was at Mantes, waiting in the royal castle there, unable to return to Paris because of an outbreak of plague. Straub has shown that during this period Isabeau bought a copy of the

[35]Ed. C. Potvin, "La Charte de la Cour d'Amour de l'année 1401," *Bulletins de l'Académie Royale des Sciences, des Lettres et des Beaux-Arts de Belgique,* 3d ser., 12 (1886), 202.

[36]For the contemporary evidence see Arthur Piaget, "La cour amoureuse, dite de Charles VI," *Romania,* 20 (1891), 417–54, and "Un manuscrit de la *cour amoureuse de Charles VI,*" *Romania,* 31 (1902), 597–603. Straub's argument is in "Die Gründung des Pariser Minnehofs von 1400," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie,* 77 (1961), 1–14.

Cent balades, precisely the kind of elegant secular love poetry that the *cour amoureuse* sought to foster. He argues that the court must have been conceived at this time; though it is impossible to know how and why the history of its founding became altered, the inaccuracies of the charter as it survives in a late manuscript do not compel rejection of the existence of the court or of the motivation for its establishment. It was created as a pastime to bring joy during the plague, and if it seems as though we have life imitating Boccaccio's art, that is only because Boccaccio's art was so firmly based on medieval medical and psychological thinking.

A Response to the Black Death

I conclude this chapter with speculation on two principal points. The first has to do with the literary implications of the pattern of plague to pleasure. Its appearances in Boccaccio, the plague tracts, and the charter of the *cour amoureuse* point to a late medieval view of literary pleasure as therapeutic. This view would seem to be predicated on ideas discussed in the second chapter, ideas which, perhaps because of the impact of the Black Death, became sharpened enough to prompt literary creations that self-consciously embodied in their very structures what medieval medicine had been saying for centuries about the hygienic values of delight. How far ought this line of inquiry be pursued? Did Boccaccio really think that his work might have a physically beneficial effect on his readers or listeners? I believe he did. Not, of course, in the simple and extreme way that the villagers in the *Grandes chroniques* seem to have understood, but in the rationally plausible way of the regimens which recognizes cheerfulness as a factor in hygiene and hygiene as a factor in susceptibility to disease. The evidence of the plague treatises is firm on this point—they may debate questions of causes and technical medical remedies, but I am not aware of any controversy over or cynicism about the values of a good regimen, including the proper disposition of the *accidentia animae.* And the prevalence of the idea throughout subsequent waves of epidemic suggests its durability. In fact,

when some of the early notions of how to deal with disease come into question, it is not the nonnaturals that are ridiculed but the faith in lectuaries and phlebotomy.[37]

Perhaps we are in a position today, after some years of popular interest in what is variously known as holistic medicine or alternative medicine, to acknowledge the powers attributed to mental attitude in the tracts as something more than silliness. There is certainly substantial documentation of a variety of ways in which the mind can affect bodily response, such as the correlation between meditative states and altered physiological patterns and the power of hypnosis to deal with pain. Clinical research has demonstrated psychosomatic factors in illness, but there has been much less controlled examination of their role in therapy or hygiene, the evidence for which tends to remain anecdotal, such as Norman Cousins's recent celebrated recovery from ankylosing spondylitis with a regimen of ascorbic acid and laughter.[38] This modern instance has a fifteenth-century parallel in the case of Alfonso V, who according to Jacques Amyot, after finding physicians useless in curing his sickness, decided to take "no mo medicines" but to have the deeds of Alexander read to him for his "recreacion," which created "so wonderfull pleasure, that nature gathered strength by it, and overcame the waywardness of his disease."[39] Nothing in this chapter, naturally, constitutes evidence that laughter at the *Decameron* increased people's resistance to the plague bacillus. But there is a great deal of evidence that educated people in the fourteenth century believed that enjoyment of music and fiction would decrease the likelihood of their being struck by

[37]See e.g. the opinions of the seventeenth-century physician Francesco Redi, as quoted in Carlo M. Cipolla, *Public Health and the Medical Profession in the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), pp. 110–11. In a delightful letter to a hypochondriac who has been trying every medicament he can get his hands on, Redi notes: "you will get well whenever you ignore ailments and do not fear them." Cf. Deschamps, VII: 249–50.

[38]First reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, 295 (1976), 1458–63; now available as part of a book, *Anatomy of an Illness as Perceived by the Patient* (New York: Norton, 1979). For related evidence see Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Laugh after Laugh: The Healing Power of Humor* (Jacksonville, Fla.: Headwaters Press, 1978), pp. 17–40.

[39]Quoted, from Sir Thomas North's translation of the Preface to Amyot's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, by Geoffrey Shepherd in his edition of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), pp. 169–70.

plague. I am not suggesting that this hygienic function was the only or even the principal motive for the writing or the reading of the *Decameron* and the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre,* but it must have existed as one element in a complex of motives that produced those works.

At least in regard to the *Decameron,* some subsequent testimony points to its perceived medical value. As we will see in the next chapter, Laurent de Premierfait assumes that the work was written to give solace to the survivors of the Black Death still suffering from fear or sorrow. In a late fifteenth-century plague tract, Boninus Mombritius recommends the "book of the hundred tales" along with other "books of pleasure and delight" as works designed to dispel destructive accidents of the soul.[40] The therapeutic dimension of literary and conversational pleasure may also help account for the popularity of later *Decameron*-like structures of tale collections, beginning with Sercambi's direct imitation, in which a group of travelers leave plague-ravaged Lucca, and extending through all those Renaissance anthologies that feature what Clements and Gibaldi in *Anatomy of the Novella* call the "disaster cornice" (pp. 42–49).

A second concern of this chapter, and one more important to understanding Boccaccio's and Machaut's literary intentions, is what the movement from plague to pleasure says about fourteenth-century response to the Black Death. Most modern studies of the psychological effects of the plague stress the exaggerated reactions it produced: on the one hand, an intensified concern with sin and death which led to such bizarre religious phenomena as the flagellants; on the other, the dissolution of normal moral behavior into brigandage and profligacy. Boccaccio, Machaut, and the chroniclers testify to these polarities, which are in fact opposite sides of the same coin and which have parallels in the response of other eras to plague and similar cataclysmic events.[41] It would be absurd to deny that these

[40]*Una ignota opera sulla peste del medico umanista Bonino Mombrizio,* ed. Antonio di Giovanni, Scientia Veterum, XXXVI (Genoa, 1963), pp. 35–36. A scholar and editor of religious texts, Mombritius adds that such works are for a youthful world interested in pleasure and that "in regard to the soul" the best way to flee death is with the "pleasure and delight of spiritual consolation" provided by prayer and contemplation.

[41]Ziegler, pp. 270–79, gives a fairly typical summary, saying that if one had to "identify the hall-mark of the years which followed the Black Death, it would

extreme forms of behavior must loom very large in any assessment of the "mind" of the later Middle Ages after the plague, however risky such generalizations may be considering the need to deal with variables of time and place. And there is certainly hard evidence, beyond the judgments of medieval commentators and modern researchers into collective psychology, to show that the plague did occasion both increased religious fervor and increased immorality.[42]

But perhaps the conventional wisdom suffers from what F. R. H. Du Boulay, in a different but related context, has called the "overstatement of repetition."[43] Too often, I think, more moderate responses to the pestilence have been drowned out by the sounds of flagellations and orgies, and it is as part of a more rational attitude that Boccaccio and Machaut, as well as the plague treatises themselves, have a major place. For they affirm the power of natural reason to deal with the plague; they do not take refuge in either passionate religiosity or carnal abandonment. Insofar as they acknowledge those extremes, they do so only to reject them and seek a saner way. It seems to me that the richest morality of the *Decameron* and the *Jugement* (and, mutatis mutandis, of *Modus et Ratio*) lies not so much in any particular assertions of value within the fictions as in the implications of their structure: that in the face of chaos and disintegration, it is possible for people to reassert civilization, to

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be that of a neurotic and all-pervading gloom." For other psychological assessments, see William L. Langer, "The Next Assignment," *American Historical Review,* 63 (1958), 283–304, and James Westfall Thompson, "The Aftermath of the Black Death and the Aftermath of the Great War," *American Journal of Sociology,* 26 (1920), 565–72. The most respected study of the artistic evidence for a change in religious sensibility is Millard Meiss, *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), which includes a chapter on Boccaccio which argues that the plague did not affect him deeply until after the writing of the *Decameron.* There is a strange article by B. S. Gowen, "Some Aspects of Pestilences and Other Epidemics," *American Journal of Psychology,* 18 (1907), 1–60, which begins as an assessment of the Black Death's effects on people's minds (and includes, on 20–22, some consideration of pleasure as a preventative), but which evolves into a cross-cultural survey of most anything the author considers mentally aberrant, from lycanthropy to the South Sea bubble.

[42]See e.g. Elisabeth Carpentier, *Une ville devant la peste: Orvieto et la peste noire de 1348* (Paris: Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, 1962), pp. 192–98, 220–21.

[43]*An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1970), p. 12.

conduct their lives in an orderly manner, and to reaffirm the stability and worth of such secular virtues as polite discourse, wit, and even recreational pleasure.

Such a moderate, secular response is in no way antipathetic to religion. Boccaccio's *brigata,* after all, pauses on the weekends from its worldly entertainments for religious reasons, spending its time in prayer and meditation rather than storytelling. Taking earthly means to counteract the plague, even though it may be sent by God, is not incompatible with obedience to the divine will. The Paris *Compendium* notes that even though God sometimes sends pestilence and we must accept His judgment, that does not mean that we should neglect earthly remedies, since God created medicines.[44] Medieval and Renaissance plague tracts and regimens sometimes cite Ecclus. 38: 11–12 as justification: "give place to the physician. For the Lord created him: and let him not depart from thee, for his works are necessary." Jacme d'Agramont acknowledges that "if the corruption and putrefaction of the air has come because of our sins the remedies of the medical art are of little value, for only He who binds can unbind."[45] But if it comes from planetary conjunctions, he continues, or from the earth or water, there are things one can do about it. He does not deal with the thorny problem that since God works through natural things, divine chastisement and an unpropitious conjunction are not mutually exclusive causes, and perhaps his very failure to push further philosophically suggests the way in which religious orthodoxy and medical wisdom could coexist. The physician acknowledges God's power but does what he can, recognizes first causes but concentrates when possible on secondary ones, since they allow for practical response.

Of course there were other views on the relationship of secular and sacred remedies. Chaucer's Physician testifies to a tradition that perceived at least some discrepancy between medical and Biblical study. And in 1480, more than a hundred years after Gentile da Foligno wrote his plague treatises, the Bishop of Foligno, Antonio Bettini de' Gesuati di Siena, trying to stop desertion of the city during another wave of pestilence, felt the

[44]Rébouis, p. 92; cf. Olivier de la Haye, pp. 60–62.
[45]*BHM,* 23 (1949), 78.

need to attack Gentile's advice to flee the infected area. He argues that the physician's "natural and earthly remedies" deal only with the body, "having no regard for the health of the soul."[46] Since the soul is more important than the body, one must listen to the spiritual advice of the Church and look to the ultimate cause of the plague, which is God. Only charity, care for the sick, can finally save one's soul. The bishop's attack on Gentile's practical medical advice is not unique, and one can find similar oppositions throughout late medieval and Renaissance debates on how to deal with the pestilence.[47]

But such antagonisms are often the result of extreme positions, and they do not represent the more moderate course that seems to have been taken in the early diffusion of the plague tracts and in the immediate secular responses to the Black Death of Boccaccio and Machaut. It is simply not accurate enough to generalize, from evidence like the bishop's Christian fatalism, that "the Middle Ages, ignoring the teachings of the Greek physicians and relying entirely upon Scripture and the writings of the Church fathers, considered disease the scourge of God upon a sinful people" (Langer, 298–99). However much one can find this tendency in a lot of medieval medical thinking and in literary uses of disease, it does not reflect the governing spirit of the plague tracts, nor can it account for the secular plague-to-pleasure pattern discussed here. Sylvia Thrupp's conclusions seem to me much truer to the texts: "medieval men recognized the role of contagion in a plague-struck environment, advocated better sanitation and invented quarantine measures. Religious feelings did not hinder their efforts: no one would have suggested that prayer would clean up the streets or make dirty water pure."[48] This line of reasoning does not seek to deny medieval reliance on divine aid, merely to see it as part of a continuum of response. There is no inconsistency in John Lydgate's praying for relief from plague in one poem and delineating earthly remedies in another, nor in a sick person's turning to

[46]*Liber de diuina preordinatione uite et mortis humane* [Rome, 1485?], chap. xix, unpaginated.

[47]For England, see Mullett, passim; for Italy, Richard John Palmer, "The Control of Plague in Venice and Northern Italy 1348–1600" (Diss. University of Kent at Canterbury, 1978), pp. 280–314.

[48]"Plague Effects in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 8 (1966), 480.

faith-healing when other cures have failed.[49] As Paul H. Kocher has shown in regard to Elizabethan attitudes, the accommodations that existed between religion and medicine are too complex to be put in terms of simple opposition.[50] He argues that the Elizabethan view gave doctors sufficient intellectual room to think and practice, and it seems to me that the early plague tracts reveal a similar secular confidence.

It is precisely such secular confidence that Boccaccio and Machaut manifest. They saw the plague, and they saw the extremity of response it engendered, and they were more concerned about the latter. Both writers lend support to René Girard's thesis that the prevalence of the plague in Western literature reflects a greater interest in its metaphoric than in its medical impact. Pestilence, he says, disguises an even more terrible threat, the violence that destroys individual and social relationships.[51] This is the threat that Jacme d'Agramont attends to in the terminology of medieval allegory and that Boccaccio and Machaut respond to in their fictions. They see the plague principally in terms of what it does to (or reveals about) the human community, and they face the threat of disorder not by denying the values that have created community but by affirming the possibility of their reestablishment. In Machaut this affirmation centers principally on the figure of Bonneürtez and the other personified virtues; in Boccaccio it appears overtly in the secular virtues of wit, love, and magnanimity that are espoused in the tales themselves and implicitly in the decorum with which the *brigata* conducts itself.

The value of decorum becomes explicit in Panfilo's speech to the ladies after the hundredth tale has been told:

> For as far as I have been able to observe, albeit the tales related here have been amusing, perhaps of a sort to stimulate carnal desire, and we have continually partaken of excellent food and drink, played music, and sung many songs, all

[49]For Lydgate, see p. 174. For the medical aspects of visits to shrines, see Ronald C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London: J. M. Dent, 1977), pp. 59–82.

[50]"The Idea of God in Elizabethan Medicine," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 11 (1950), 3–29.

[51]"The Plague in Literature and Myth," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 15 (1974), 833–50.

> of which things may encourage unseemly behavior (cose meno oneste) among those who are feeble of mind, neither in word nor in deed nor in any other respect have I known either you or ourselves to be worthy of censure. On the contrary, from what I have seen and heard, it seems to me that our proceedings have been marked by a constant sense of propriety (continua onestà), an unfailing spirit of harmony, and a continual feeling of brotherly and sisterly amity. All of which pleases me greatly, as it surely redounds to our communal honour and credit. [P. 825; Branca, pp. 1234–35]

More than just self-congratulation, this passage is an accurate assessment of the narrator's behavior. Here the line is drawn between the content of fiction and the deportment of morally responsible people, a distinction implicit from the beginning of the work when the *brigata* chose first to live "onestamente" in orderly cheerfulness, "fuggendo come la morte i disonesti essempli degli altri" (p. 33), and subsequently chose storytelling as one means of such living.[52] Vicious living is to be avoided like the plague—Boccaccio's phrase fuses the natural and moral pestilences. The journey into health and well-being is also a journey into "onestà"; as in the regimens, medical good sense has an ethical dimension. The company maintains decorum, refuses to overindulge itself even in a time of license, and uses storytelling properly, for pleasure and profit and their resulting benefits to mind and body. The very act of intelligent listening (and, by extension, reading) becomes part of the shared values of propriety, harmony, and amity. In this sophisticated work, as in the *Jugement dou roy de Navarre,* pleasure and profit blend in most interesting ways, as the taking of literary or conversational entertainment becomes a moral image of preserving social order even in the face of pestilence.

We tend to forget that the plague that swept over Europe in the fourteenth century did not receive the grim name of "Black Death" until centuries later, that the 1300s had earlier suffered through various disasters, especially famine, that in 1340 there was enough of a "pestilence of infirmities" to prompt Augustine of Trent to write a treatise that anticipates the later plague

[52]Cf. Branca, "Coerenza dell'introduzione al *Decameron:* Rispondenze strutturali e stilistiche," *Romance Philology,* 13 (1960), 357–58.

tracts,[53] and that waves of pestilence struck Europe throughout the rest of the century. Without wishing to minimize the devastation of the Black Death, I do think that the modern tendency to isolate it so extremely may make it appear to have been even more cataclysmic psychologically than it was. Boccaccio and Machaut are so often cited by historians for their initial pages on the horrors of the plague that it encourages neglect of their real concern, which is to transcend those horrors. At any rate, as I hope this chapter has shown, the Black Death did not promote only increased morbidity in literature. Amidst all the work that reflects the fear of death and that looks to last things, there is some, at least, that reflects the value of secular life and that looks to proximate things. For the living, singing songs and telling pleasant tales are important means of coping with the plague. The emphasis on order and measure in Boccaccio and Machaut reveals their concern for establishing an appropriate mode of behavior that in its moderate morality will guide reasonable people, those who wish to bruise neither body nor soul, through the pestilential time.

[53]Discussed by Thorndike, *History*, III: 224–32, with selections on 699–707. Though it makes no specific reference to the nonnaturals, Augustine's regimen recommends a number of after-dinner pleasures to preserve health (703).