

## A Medieval Love Story: The Lisabetta da Messina Novella in the Italian Language Class

When interpreting an oral or written text, listeners and readers use different cognitive processes that can be summarized in top-down and bottom-up processing of information (Brandl; Menn and Dronkers). “Top-down” means using previous linguistic, social and pragmatic knowledge to decode a message. For example, individuals are able to predict a word or sequence of words without reading or listening to the entire utterance because they know what to expect in a given context (Menn and Dronkers 90). Conversely, “bottom-up” denotes the decoding process starting with sounds and letters progressing up to words, chunks of words, phrases, and sentences, in order to reconstruct meaning. Foreign language students tend to rely highly on bottom-up processing, as they usually lack cultural (social, historical, pragmatic) knowledge (90).

The novella *Lisabetta da Messina* may pose two major interpretation problems to students. First, it may be hard for them to read the text using their grammatical knowledge (bottom-up processing) because of the discrepancy between premodern and contemporary Italian morpho-syntax. Second, their interpretation of the novella may also be impaired by the cultural distance between Boccaccio’s era and their own context (top-down processing). For example, contrary to contemporary Italian syntactic sequence SVO (Subject Verb Object), the auxiliary verb “erano” has been omitted in the coordinate clause “e assai ricchi uomini rimasi” (Dec. IV.5. 4), while the past participle “rimasi” has been placed at the end of the clause, according to Boccaccio’s Latin-based syntax: SOV (Subject Object Verb). Moreover, if the readers ignore the fact that women were under the control of men in the Middle Ages, they may have a distorted understanding of Lorenzo’s murder perpetrated by Lisabetta’s brothers. The readers’ context of interpretation (the time in which they read the story, their social and cultural norms) is not sufficient to decode the semantic meaning because it ignores the particular cultural conditions in which Boccaccio wrote his *Decameron*. In fact, as Umberto Eco maintains, every generation reads literary works differently (*Sulla letteratura* 11). Therefore, the student’s reading can be facilitated through the manipulation of morpho-syntax and the contextualization of utterances according to

the author's temporal, spatial, social, political, and religious parameters.

The correct interpretation of a discourse is strictly connected to the cultural context in which the text was created (Kramsch, *Language and Culture, Context and Culture*; Spencer-Oatey and Žegarac; Szende; Todorov), since the author is also influenced by their own culture when writing a text. On the other hand, when reading a text, the readers apply their own encyclopedic knowledge (knowledge of the world) (Croft and Cruse 80) and socio-cultural background (remembered experiences and knowledge) (103). Concordant interpretation can occur only when the author and reader share a singular understanding, created in their minds through references to their respective contexts, which Claire Kramsch calls "pragmatic coherence" (*Language and Culture* 28). Students should therefore undertake research on Boccaccio's life and works, as well as women's social conditions in the medieval period, in order to gain a better understanding of the novella. This paper will suggest a number of listening and reading strategies to approach Boccaccio's story and to help students process and contextualize the input.

The following pedagogical unit will show how to integrate Lisabetta da Messina in an Italian language class. It is addressed to college students at the advanced level,<sup>1</sup> according to ACTFL proficiency levels.<sup>2</sup> The unit will comprise six to seven class hours plus extra time for homework. At the end of the unit, students will be able to 1. interpret, analyze, narrate and compose a novella in an academic context through the identification of syntactic clauses and the categorization of the syntactic constituents, extrapolating and elaborating information; 2. discuss the socio-cultural aspects related to love in fourteenth-century society; 3. critique and compare them with the current concepts of love from a cross-cultural perspective.<sup>3</sup> The unit will be broken down into the phases proposed by Paolo Balboni (*Le sfide di Babele* 151-53): globality, analysis, synthesis, and reflection.

### **1. Globality Phase**

The globality phase consists in approaching the text holistically. It includes brainstorming activities and multiple listening as well as reading tasks. Because listening to the whole novella at once implies multiple cognitive efforts, it may be frustrating, and, consequently, demotivating to students. To keep students focused, it is more

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appropriate to break down the listening into six steps followed by comprehension tasks: 1. the novella's rubric (the initial summary); 2. Filomena's introduction to the narration; 3. the presentation of the mercantile family up to 4. Lorenzo's murder; 5. Lisabetta digging up Lorenzo's head and returning home; 6. Lisabetta burying Lorenzo's head in the basil pot, and her eventual death. Each passage can be played multiple times as necessary. A useful web-based tool for the listening activities is the *Decameron* audiobook hosted by *Liber Liber* open source, as the professional performance contributes to the interpretation of the textual meaning through highly expressive prosody.

Having students first read through the comprehension questions will prepare them for interpretation of the listening passage, since questions contain meaningful information (keywords, chunks, and syntactic structures) that activate contextual expectations. Therefore, the instructor should ensure that students fully understand the questions, because misunderstanding may cause frustration and/or an unsuccessful accomplishment of the task. After each listening session, students will report back to class, and the instructor will give feedback.

### *First Session*

In the first session, the instructor motivates students through brainstorming activities that prompt their previous encyclopedic knowledge. While displaying pictures of Boccaccio (fig. 1) and the brigata (fig. 2), the instructor sets the stage for the content of the pedagogical unit and asks students general questions about the author and the *Decameron*. This activity can be performed in plenum, or in pairs.



**Fig. 1.** Morghen, Raffaello.  
*Giovanni Boccaccio*. Detail.  
1822, British Museum,  
London.



**Fig. 2.** Waterhouse, John William. A  
*Tale from the Decameron*. 1916, Lady  
Lever Art Gallery, Liverpool.

1. Conoscete il personaggio nella prima foto?
2. Come si chiama?
3. In che periodo è vissuto?
4. Descrivete i personaggi nella seconda foto. Secondo voi, che cosa fanno?
5. Che cos'è il *Decameron*?

The instructor will then draw the students' attention to the subject of Boccaccio's novella by having them formulate hypotheses on Jean Mansel's illustration (fig. 3) in peer work. Cooperative learning is highly beneficial in this context for two major reasons. First, it helps lower student anxiety, since working directly with the instructor may cause feelings of uneasiness and apprehension which may hinder acquisition (Krashen, *Principles and Practice* 31). Second, it contributes to sharing and creating knowledge among students, who work together to reach an objective while solving linguistic problems (Balboni, *Fare educazione linguistica* 27-28).

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**Fig. 3.** Mansel, Jean. *Lorenzo viene ucciso dai fratelli di Lisabetta. Lisabetta nasconde la testa dell'amato in un vaso.* 1430-1450, MS, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, Paris.

◆ A gruppi di tre fate un'ipotesi sul contenuto, il periodo e il luogo a cui si riferisce l'immagine (fig. 3) e spiegate perché siete arrivati alla vostra ipotesi. Poi confrontatevi con il resto della classe.

This task will be followed by a composition activity.

◆ A coppie, create una brevissima storia basata sulle ipotesi relative all'immagine (fig. 3) che avete formulato precedentemente. Poi presentatela alla classe.

Students will listen to the rubric, answer true/false questions, give a title to the rubric, and compare this with their stories.

**Primo ascolto:** ascoltate la rubrica (il riassunto iniziale) della novella e decidete se le affermazioni sono vere o false. Poi leggete la rubrica e verificate.

1. I fratelli di Lisabetta uccidono il suo amante. V/F
2. L'amante sogna Lisabetta nella terra. V/F
3. Lisabetta dissepellisce la testa dell'amante. V/F
4. Lisabetta piange ogni giorno sul vaso di basilico. V/F
5. Lisabetta si lascia morire di dolore, perché i fratelli non portano via il vaso di basilico. V/F

◆ Adesso rileggete la rubrica e pensate a un titolo adeguato. Poi confrontate la vostra storia con la rubrica e discutete delle somiglianze o delle differenze.

For homework, students will be assigned a research project on Boccaccio's biography, the *Decameron*, and the Middle Ages, to be conducted in pairs or small groups and posted in a forum. Each group will focus on a specific subject, so as to collect as much information as possible. In order to facilitate students' work, a list of questions may be appropriate.

1. Riassumete la biografia di Giovanni Boccaccio.
2. Descrivete l'ambiente storico e culturale in cui è nato e cresciuto.
3. Quali opere ha composto?
4. Come si struttura il *Decameron*?

This forum activity will give students the opportunity to share the collected information with their classmates, while the instructor will be able to give feedback on the content. The goal of this assignment is to present the context of cultural production in which Boccaccio composed his *Decameron*, and to facilitate the students' interpretation of the novella.

### *Second Session*

The second lesson will be dedicated to a listening session for the novella itself, which will begin with the introduction to the novella, followed by a true/false statement activity and multiple-choice questions. Listening to and grasping the language of Boccaccio's novella is not an easy task, even for Italian natives. However, it represents an initial approach to the overall comprehension of the text, in order to facilitate the subsequent reading activity. Indeed, the situational context presented through the listening comprehension questions, along with the voice acting, pitch, rhythm, tempo, and sentence stress and intonation, contribute to the decodification of the content, since "prosody . . . convey[s] information about the structure and meaning of an utterance" (Nordquist). In addition, the listening exercise evokes the oral narration performed by the members of the brigata, who fled

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Florence to escape the 1348 plague, instead spending their time in the countryside narrating stories to one another.

**Secondo ascolto:** ascoltate l'introduzione alla novella e decidete chi la racconta.

1. Elissa
2. Filomena
3. Gerbino

◆ Adesso leggete l'introduzione e verificate la vostra risposta precedente. Poi confrontatevi con il resto della classe.

**Terzo ascolto:** ascoltate la seconda parte della novella e decidete se le seguenti affermazioni sono vere o false. Poi discutetene con gli altri compagni.

1. La novella è ambientata a Messina. V/F
2. Lisabetta appartiene a una ricca famiglia di mercanti. V/F
3. Lisabetta è innamorata di Lorenzo, ma Lorenzo non ricambia il suo amore. V/F

**Quarto ascolto:** ascoltate la terza parte della novella e a coppie scegliete la risposta giusta.

1. Una notte,
  - a. mentre Lisabetta va da Lorenzo, viene scoperta da uno dei fratelli.
  - b. Lorenzo va da Elisabetta e viene scoperto da uno dei fratelli.
  - c. Lisabetta va a trovare Lorenzo e il fratello non se ne accorge.
2. Il fratello passa la notte
  - a. annoiato.
  - b. muto.
  - c. a riflettere sull'accaduto.
3. Il fratello
  - a. non racconta nulla di Lisabetta e Lorenzo agli altri fratelli.
  - b. racconta a Lisabetta e Lorenzo di averli visti.
  - c. racconta di Lisabetta e Lorenzo agli altri fratelli.

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4. I fratelli decidono di
  - a. comportarsi come se non sapessero nulla e aspettano un momento migliore per risolvere la questione.
  - b. non agire perché hanno paura del danno alla propria reputazione.
  - c. non fare nulla per salvare la reputazione della sorella.
5.
  - a. Lorenzo finge di voler andare fuori città per divertimento con i fratelli e questi lo uccidono. Poi tornano nella loro azienda e raccontano di aver mandato Lorenzo in un altro luogo per affari.
  - b. I fratelli fingono di voler andare fuori città per divertimento con Lorenzo e lo uccidono. Poi tornano nella loro azienda e raccontano di aver mandato Lorenzo in un altro luogo per affari.
  - c. I fratelli mandano Lorenzo in un altro luogo per affari. Poi fingono di voler andare fuori città per divertimento con lui e lo uccidono.

As a homework assignment, students will be required to read parts two and three of the novella, and complete a given grid with the names, characteristics, and roles of the main characters. The goal is to help students decode the meaning of the discourse by making associations between the listening exercises and the written material.

### *Third Session*

In the third session, students will be asked to listen to the fourth excerpt of the novella and put the summary in the correct sequence. The prior narrative events should help students predict the rest of the story and facilitate the performance of their task. For example, Lorenzo's slaughter generates assumptions in the students' minds with respect to Lisabetta's reaction: she may wonder why her lover does not return and grow very sad. Therefore, given their knowledge of the previous passages, students should now be able to formulate hypotheses about the ending of the story.

**Quinto ascolto:** il seguente riassunto non è in ordine cronologico.



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Leggetelo, ascoltate la quarta parte della novella e dopo mettete il riassunto in ordine cronologico. Poi confrontatevi con il resto della classe. L'esercizio è avviato.

- Qui trovò il corpo dell'amante.
- Una notte, Lisabetta piangendo si addormentò e le venne in sonno Lorenzo.
- La mattina seguente Lisabetta si alzò e insieme alla fante andò nel luogo dove era seppellito Lorenzo.
- Non potendo portare via tutto il corpo, con un coltello gli tagliò la testa, che portò a casa.
- 1. Lisabetta, non vedendo tornare Lorenzo, chiedeva insistentemente di lui ai fratelli.
- Lorenzo le disse che non poteva tornare perché i suoi fratelli lo avevano ucciso. Così, indicatole il luogo dove era sepolto, sparì.
- Uno dei fratelli un giorno la rimproverò per questo. Ella, allora, triste e addolorata, lo aspettava nella sua dimora, piangendo e pregandolo di far ritorno.

Substantial studies have shown that words are learned in context and that meaning is created through the intertwining of multiple factors such as senses, perception, environment, and context (Menn and Dronkers 80). Providing students with multiple media will enhance both the coding and decoding of meaning, resulting in a better memorization and retrieval process. Moreover, contrary to words, images deliver a whole sentence meaning (Metz 65). Therefore, they can contribute to the interpretation of a written text. Having students view and describe Hunt's painting (fig. 4) will facilitate the performance of the next fill-in-the-gap task, since the picture illustrates the core of Boccaccio's novella.

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**Fig. 4.** Hunt, William Holman. *Isabella and the Pot of Basil*. 1867, Private Collection.

Through the following matching activity, students will become familiar with new vocabulary that will help them interpret the last excerpt, since they will be able to better predict the missing words.

- |     |                    |   |  |
|-----|--------------------|---|--|
| 1.  | <i>rinchiusasi</i> | a | pianta profumata dalle foglie verdi        |
| 2.  | <i>testo</i>       | b | si ammalò                                  |
| 3.  | <i>drappo</i>      | c | molto profumato                            |
| 4.  | <i>basilico</i>    | d | chiusa dentro                              |
| 5.  | <i>piagnere</i>    | e | chiedere                                   |
| 6.  | <i>odorifero</i>   | f | chiedere qualcosa indietro                 |
| 7.  | <i>vicini</i>      | g | vaso di terracotta per piante              |
| 8.  | <i>dí</i>          | h | mettere sotto terra                        |
| 9.  | <i>richiese</i>    | i | una stoffa pesante                         |
| 10. | <i>infermò</i>     | l | giorno                                     |
| 11. | <i>adimandare</i>  | m | persone che abitano nello stesso quartiere |
| 12. | <i>sotterrata</i>  | n | piangere, versare lacrime                  |

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.

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The final listening fill-in-the-gap activity will require linguistic, morpho-syntactic, and socio-pragmatic knowledge, as students will have to choose the appropriate word based on the fitting situational context. The morpho-syntax of the novella may be too complex for the students to interpret. To facilitate the students' comprehension, the original text has, therefore, been abridged. In fact, according to Krashen's *Input Hypothesis*, acquisition takes place when input is slightly above students' interlanguage (foreign language competence) (*Principles and Practice* 21, *Explorations* 4). Input should also be comprehensible: students should be able to comprehend most of the text even if they do not know all the vocabulary (*Principles and Practice* 63-64, *Explorations* 5). For this reason, the following excerpt has been adapted according to students' competence.

**Sesto ascolto:** leggete questo passo ridotto relativo alla quinta parte della novella, poi ascoltate la quinta parte e completate gli spazi vuoti con le parole dell'esercizio precedente. Infine confrontatevi con il resto della classe.

*Quivi con questa testa nella sua camera \_\_\_\_\_, sopra essa lungamente e amaramente pianse. ... Poi prese un grande e un bel \_\_\_\_\_, di questi ne' quali si pianta la persa o il basilico, e dentro la vi mise fasciata in un bel \_\_\_\_\_; e poi messavi sú la terra, sú vi piantò parecchi piedi di bellissimo \_\_\_\_\_ salernetano .... E per usanza aveva preso di sedersi sempre a questo testo vicina e ... cominciava a \_\_\_\_\_, e per lungo spazio, tanto che tutto il basilico bagnava, piagnea.*

*Il basilico ... divenne bellissimo e \_\_\_\_\_ molto; e servando la giovane questa maniera del continuo [= continuamente], più volte da' suoi \_\_\_\_\_ fu veduta. Li quali, ... disser [ai fratelli]: "Noi ci siamo accorti che ella ogni \_\_\_\_\_ tiene la cotal maniera." Il che udendo i fratelli e accorgendosene ..., nascosamente da lei fecero portar via questo testo; il quale non ritrovando ella con grandissima istanzia [= con molta*

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*insistenza] molte volte \_\_\_\_\_, e non essendole  
renduto, non cessando il pianto e le lagrime, \_\_\_\_\_  
... I giovani si maravigliavan forte di questo  
\_\_\_\_\_, e per ciò vollero vedere che [= che cosa]  
dentro vi fosse; e versata la terra, videro il drappo e in  
quello la testa ... di Lorenzo. Di che essi si maravigliaron  
forte e temettero non questa cosa [= che questa cosa] si  
risapesse: e \_\_\_\_\_ quella, senza altro dire,  
cautamente ... se n'andarono a Napoli.*

*La giovane ... piagnendo si morì, e così il suo  
disavventurato amore ebbe termine.*

This activity completes the globality phase. Students will then be assigned an extensive reading of the novella, because the general understanding of a discourse facilitates the input manipulation that will follow (Balboni, *Fare educazione linguistica* 99). Moreover, since a communicative activity should always aim at a learning outcome, students will be required to assign a title to each paragraph while reading the novella. The purpose is to prompt students' increasing cognitive skills (Anderson et al.; Krathwohl), such as comprehension (identifying the gist of each passage), application (employing previous knowledge in a new context), analysis (comparing and choosing possible titles), and synthesis (formulating the appropriate title). In the next class, students will be asked to share their titles and evaluate the most appropriate ones.

## 2. Analysis Phase

### *Fourth Session*

The fourth and fifth hours will be dedicated to the analysis phase. Students will analyze some passages of the novella from a syntactic and cultural perspective. They will be prompted to use the target language as expected in a storytelling context. To this end, students will relate and connect a number of excerpts through paraphrase and summarizing activities. These activities aim at having students produce contextualized output and negotiate meaning while interacting with each other. As Kramsch points out, students generate context when producing a discourse, because they need to choose the appropriate vocabulary, register, style, and other socio-cultural items (*Context and Culture* 34-36). In doing so, they are stimulated to use the foreign language according to its socio-

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pragmatic norms and expectations (i.e., in a given situational context, one would expect a certain word instead of another, or a specific reaction from the interlocutor).

The benefits of the following cooperative group tasks are also revealed in the negotiation of meaning. Studies have shown that acquisition takes place when meaning is being negotiated through interaction (Ellis; Gass et al.; Lightbown and Spada; Long; Richards and Rodgers), because students exchange opinions and knowledge, ask for clarifications and repetitions, and employ various speaking strategies to make themselves understood. In other words, by working cooperatively, students will engage in a real-world communicative situation while creating context and negotiating meaning.

◆ A gruppi di tre identificate i passi nel testo che si riferiscono all'amore tra Lorenzo e Lisabetta, poi analizzate in dettaglio il brano assegnato (ogni gruppo riceverà un brano diverso) e spiegate che cosa succede. Per esempio:

*Lorenzo, ... essendo assai bello della persona e leggiadro molto, avendolo piú volte Lisabetta guatato, avvenne che egli le cominciò stranamente a piacere. Di che Lorenzo accortosi e una volta e l'altra, similmente, lasciati suoi altri innamoramenti di fuori, incominciò a porre l'animo a lei; e sí andò la bisogna che, piacendo l'uno all'altro igualmente, non passò gran tempo che, assicuratisi, fecero di quello che piú desiderava ciascuno. (Dec. IV.5. 5)*

Students will now engage in an intensive reading task, which will be broken down into two activities: a jigsaw-like exercise and a discussion. The former will be focused on form, the latter on meaning. Students will first reconstruct Boccaccio's prose into contemporary Italian, paying particular attention to vocabulary and morpho-syntactic constituents. Using parsing, the processing mechanism employed to recognize blocks of words (Pinker 194-95; White 153), students will identify individual clauses and place each syntactic category (i.e. phrase, noun, verb, adjective) under the appropriate constituent in the column, according to the contemporary Italian sequence SVO. For example, clause 2. "avendolo piú volte Lisabetta guatato" presents a VOSV (Verb Object Subject Verb) syntactic sequence that differs from the

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contemporary Italian. This variation may cause an interpretation failure for the readers when they attempt to assign a structural representation to the clause. Placing the different constituents in the Italian SVO order will result in the new syntactic structure “Lisabetta, avendolo guatato più volte,” which will be easier to identify and interpret. In other words, by assigning constituency relations to this clause, readers will be able to recognize their mental syntactic structure (the Italian syntactic structure they have learned so far) and proceed to the interpretation of its meaning.

	Optional Constituent	Necessary Constituent	Necessary Constituent	Necessary Constituent	Optional Constituent
		Subject (S)	Verb (V)	Object (O)	
1.		Ø	essendo	assai bello della persona e leggiadro molto	
2.		Lisabetta	avendolo guadato		più volte
3.		Ø	avvenne		
4.	che	egli	incominciò		stranamente
5.	a		piacere		
6.		Lorenzo	accortosi	di che	e una volta e l'altra
7.	similmente	Ø (egli)	incominciò		
8.	a	Ø (egli)	porre	l'animo a lei	
9.		Ø (egli)	lasciati	suoi altri innamoramenti	di fuori
10.	e	la bisogna	andò		sí
11.	che	gran tempo	non passò		
12.		l'uno	piacendo	all'altro	igualmente
13.	che	Ø (essi)	fecero	di quello	
14.		Ø (essi)	assicuratisi		
15.	che	ciascuno	disiderava		più

Table 1. Key Terms: Ø = ellipse of a constituent

### *Fifth Session*

The fourth session ends here. In the fifth hour, students will focus on meaning and explain what happens in each of the assigned passages. To engage students more intimately in discussion and give more levity to the latter, the instructor can ask questions that highlight the meaning between the lines in the assigned passage. For example, the fact that Lorenzo gives up “all his other amours” (Dec.

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IV.5 5, translated by Rigg) is worth a conversation with students, as insight this may be intriguing to them.

◆ Che cosa succede in questo passo? Che significa *Lorenzo ... lasciati suoi altri innamoramenti di fuori*? Secondo voi, i personaggi si concentrano solo su un amore? Discutetene e prendete appunti. Poi il rappresentante di ogni gruppo riferisce alla classe.

Thereafter, students will write the love story between Lisabetta and Lorenzo.

◆ Adesso, a coppie, ricostruite per iscritto la storia dell'amore tra Lorenzo e Lisabetta, collegando insieme i passi identificati e analizzati. Poi riferite alla classe e decidete quale ricostruzione vi sembra la più accurata. Per esempio:

*Lisabetta si innamora di Lorenzo, il quale contraccambia il suo amore. Di notte si incontrano segretamente...*

### 3. Synthesis Phase

A homework assignment should help students prepare for the next unit step. The synthesis phase aims at having students produce output. In other words, they will be prompted to use the learned items in new and different contexts. To this purpose, students will compose a love story set in the Middle Ages, in which they can also freely reverse stereotypes and gender roles. However, in order to do so, they need to collect information and knowledge about various medieval cultural topics, such as love, women, family, and male-female relationships.

As noted by Umberto Eco (*I limiti dell'interpretazione*), a text can be interpreted either semantically or critically. The latter implies an active reader who is willing to understand and explain the structural reasons (i.e., context, inferences, assumptions, author's intentions) for a given semantic interpretation. Expanding on Eco, literature also offers the opportunity to conduct an analysis of society. While a literary text represents a diegetic social reality, it also makes connections between the narrative discourse, the context of its production, and the author's intent. All of these factors deeply influence the literary work. On the one hand, Boccaccio's *Decameron* represents a fictional work set during the 1348 plague. On the other hand, it shows aspects from Boccaccio's society along

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with his personal erudition, and various cultural perspectives. Therefore, Lisabetta da Messina could work as a stimulus for student reflections on such topics. One method enables the instructor to elicit students' analysis and criticism through a list of open questions, like the following, which will serve as a guide for at-home research.

◆ A gruppi di tre, fate una ricerca sulla società mercantile del Trecento, particolarmente sul ruolo delle donne, su come era concepito l'amore e sul matrimonio. Completate la scheda assegnata e portatela alla prossima lezione. Esempio:

1. Com'era considerata la donna nel Trecento?
2. Che ruolo aveva in famiglia?
3. Come venivano organizzati i matrimoni?

### *Sixth Session*

The sixth session is dedicated to the synthesis phase. Students will share their findings in small groups and discuss the research topics. This discussion will pave the way for the following tasks, because students will have gained further knowledge of the novella's cultural background. In addition, this group discussion will give them tools to express their ideas while taking a stand on the concept of love and the role of women in the Middle Ages. After formulating hypotheses on the motivations that led to Lorenzo's killing, students will engage in a class discussion on fourteenth-century society. They will analyze and relate socio-historical factors to Lisabetta's love story. For example, students should examine and explain why Lisabetta was not allowed to continue her relationship with Lorenzo, and they could hypothesize what would have happened if she had defied her brothers. Students should also be encouraged to consider the love bond between Lisabetta and Lorenzo through questions that challenge their deeper thinking. For instance, the instructor could ask them to envision the lovers' feelings, dreams, plans, fears, and compare them with their own personal experiences and cultural norms. Students will likely find that love is universal, and that it involves individuals of all generations. In other words, students will realize that while culture may change in time and space, human beings will always be characterized by the same emotions, which are, indeed, what make them truly human.

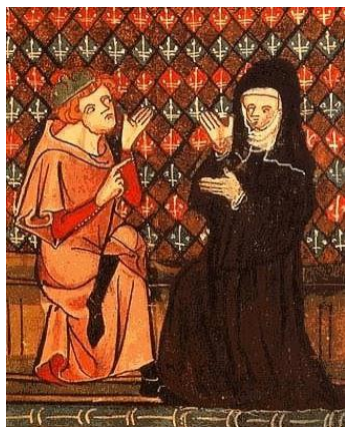


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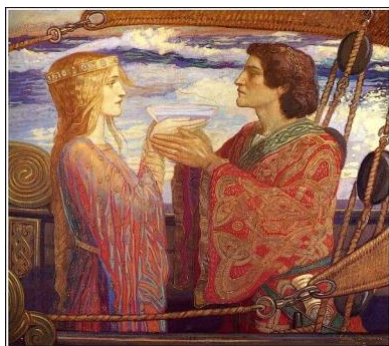
- ◆ A coppie, formulate delle ipotesi sulle ragioni dell'uccisione di Lorenzo. Poi discutetene con il resto della classe.
- ◆ Ora confrontate le schede che avete completato a casa. Scambiatele con quella degli altri. Dapprima discutete degli aspetti socio-culturali nella società trecentesca e del concetto di amore, poi paragonateli a quella della vostra cultura contemporanea.
- ◆ In base alle vostre ricerche, sono valide le ipotesi che avevate formulato sulla morte di Lorenzo? Sarebbe accettabile un tale omicidio in una società democratica? Spiegatele le ragioni.

As a homework assignment, students will work in groups of three and write a short love story set in the Middle Ages, which they will present at a literary competition. This task will be performed through the cooperative (students work together for the same scope) and collaborative (each student is assigned a specific role) learning methods (Balboni, *Fare educazione linguistica* 27-28; Richards and Rodgers), so that students will be able to share their cultural knowledge, while interacting and negotiating meaning. They will also take responsibility for a specific role in performing their tasks. One student will write the outline, another will type it, and the third will proofread it. Before assigning the task, the instructor may encourage students to brainstorm famous medieval love stories, such as Abelard and Heloise, or Tristan and Isolde, by showing the following pictures (fig. 5 and fig. 6), and asking questions such as:

- ◆ Conoscete una storia d'amore del Medioevo? Secondo voi, chi sono i personaggi nelle foto? Discutetene in plenum.



**Fig. 5.** De Meung, Jean. "Abelard and Heloise." 1460, Illumination, *Le Roman de la Rose*, Musée Condé, Chantilly.



**Fig. 6.** Duncan, John. *Tristan and Isolde*. 1912, City Art Centre, Edinburgh.

Thereafter, the instructor will assign the composition with the following guidelines:

◆ Istruzioni per l'elaborazione del componimento.

1. A gruppi di tre fate una ricerca su una storia d'amore nel Medioevo e presentatela in classe.
2. Formate nuovi gruppi di tre. Immaginate di partecipare a un concorso sulla letteratura medievale. Scrivete una novella d'amore, tenendo conto dei fattori sociali e culturali della società trecentesca. Pubblicatela sul forum.
3. Dividetevi i ruoli: uno studente si occuperà di redigere lo schema della novella; uno studente si occuperà di scriverla al computer e un altro di correggerla.

*Seventh Session*

The short story will be presented in the final class session. At the end of each presentation, the class will ask questions. This is intended to hold the students' attention and keep them engaged in their classmates' presentations. After all students have delivered their presentations, the class will evaluate them and decide which one is the best, while explaining the reasons for their choice.

#### **4. Reflection Phase**

The pedagogical unit ends with a reflection on what students have learned about Boccaccio's novella, love, and the cultural aspects of fourteenth-century society. This task can be carried out by assigning a short list of questions on a forum, which students will answer:

1. Che cosa hai imparato in questa unità?
2. Quali sono gli aspetti della società trecentesca che ti hanno colpito?
3. Che cosa hai trovato difficile?
4. Che cosa ti piacerebbe approfondire?

This paper has attempted to show that Italian language can be taught through literature. Specifically, by employing listening and reading strategies that take into consideration input processing, it is possible to have students approach authentic medieval Italian literature with success. The interpretation of meaning should consider both the morpho-syntactic form and the discourse coherence of the presented text. It is crucial not only to reconstruct the prose of Lisabetta da Messina into contemporary Italian, but also to explore the context of production in which Boccaccio composed his work. This examination likewise facilitates and contributes to a cohesive interpretation of meaning. Boccaccio's novella represents a rich source for further medieval socio-historical investigations, which, in turn, prepare the way for cultural reflection, discussions, and comparisons on the universal feeling of love, and the status of women across the centuries. Bringing more literature-based input into the Italian as a foreign language class will also encourage curiosity about Italian literature, with the intended result that students will continue their study of Italian in upper-division courses.

Paola Quadrini ISTITUTO ITALIANO DI CULTURA—BERLIN

#### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup> The author has not used this unit in class. However, based on her extensive experience as an Italian lecturer at American universities, she suggests this unit be used in the second semester of the advanced Italian level.

<sup>2</sup> ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines evaluate students' foreign language proficiency based on six levels: novice, intermediate, advanced, superior, distinguished. These

guidelines describe what students can do with language as to speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills.

<sup>3</sup> The learning objectives have been formulated according to Bloom's revised taxonomy of educational objectives (Anderson et al.; Krathwohl).

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