Le tre disposizion che ’l ciel non vole,  
incontenenza, malizia e la matta  
bestialità? e come incontenenza  
men Dio offende e men biasimo accatta?  

[Three dispositions which Heaven wills not: incontinence, malice, and mad bestiality? and  
how incontinence less offends God and incurs less blame?]  

—Inferno, Canto XI, 81–84

Day X, and the brief valedictory section that follows it, are not conclusions in the everyday sense of the word. Instead of tying up loose ends, Day X presents vitally new material, new issues, and new avenues for dialoguing with Boccaccio’s literary backgrounds. Its message, so clearly divergent from that of Days I–IX, comes as a surprise. It suggests that, in its light, we should reevaluate the moral import of the Decameron as a whole.  

Day X: Overview. Day X is designated—this time with some accuracy—as a celebration of generosity. As the brigata variously narrate stories of love, friendship, magnanimity, and self-sacrifice, the text begins to exhale an atmosphere of institutional benevolence that contrasts sharply with the satirical and rebellious spirit of the earlier days. However, although one of its heroes is a cleric, nowhere in Day X is generosity strongly related to Christian values; its most eminent heroes are Nathan (a Jew), Titus (a Roman), and Saladin (a Moslem). Boccaccio, it would seem, while not renouncing his characteristic unorthodoxy, is radically reforming his moral perspective. How, then, do we unpack this revolution in tone?
Perhaps the best way to begin is to place Boccaccio in a tradition of which he had already repeatedly availed himself. Cicero, Brunetto, and Dante all conclude major works with a similar sense of uplift. Cicero concludes his De re publica with Scipio’s dream of a heavenly realm in which good deeds are rewarded, and when Brunetto breaks off his Penitenza at the end of the Tesoretto, his narrator has purified himself, and the spirit of Ptolemy is about to give a lecture on the heavens. Dante, writing under the influence of both Cicero and Brunetto, describes a similar form of geographic and spiritual ascent in the Paradiso, which itself shows Ciceronian influences. With Day X Boccaccio takes his place in this illustrious tradition. The understanding of human nature expressed in Days I–IX is now applied to a vision of an enlightened individual and a resurrected commonwealth. As Giuseppe Mazzotta remarks, the image of successful marriage conveyed by many of the tales is an “exemplary metaphor of order and reconciliation.”

How all this works specifically is well illustrated by one of the two flagship tales of the day: X. 8, the famous story of Titus and Gisippus.

Titus, Gisippus, and the Ciceronian Commonwealth. Here is Boccaccio’s own description of X. 8:

Sofronia, credendosi esser moglie di Gisippo, è moglie di Tito Quintio Fulvo e con lui se ne va a Roma, dove Gisippo in povero stato arriva; e credendo da Tito esser dispersato sé avere uno uomo ucciso, per morire, afferma; Tito, riconosciutolo, per iscamparlo dice sé averlo morto; il che colui che fatto l’avea vedendo se stesso manifesta; per la qual cosa da Ottaviano tutti sono liberati, e Tito dà a Gisippo la sorella per moglie e con lui comunica ogni suo bene. (X. 8.1)

[Sophronia, believing that she is the wife of Gisippus, is actually married to Titus Quintus Fulvius [Quintius Fulvus], with whom she goes to Rome, where Gisippus arrives in an impoverished state. Believing that he has been scorned by Titus, he claims, in order to be put to death, that he has murdered a man; when Titus recognizes him, in order to save Gisippus he declares that he himself committed the murder. When the actual murderer perceives this, he confesses; as a result, they are all freed by Octavianus, and then Titus gives Gisippus his sister in marriage and shares all his possessions with him.] (640)

Thorny and detailed as it is, this synopsis does little to suggest the complexity of the lengthy tale, which abounds in conflict, suspense, and soul-searching, not to mention long passages of deep reasoning or daunting eloquence. The narrative follows a love triangle literally from the groves of Academe in Athens to the Roman senate, and it concludes with three acts of conspicuous self-sacrifice, all reconciled by the mercy of Caesar himself.