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review Transformed encoding to P5 TEI.

The book at hand is an expression of the best North-American scholarship on Boccaccio (with some European additions). This is reflected in the prevailing "critical approaches of the historicist and the allegorical school," as the volume's editor, Elissa Weaver, writes in her introduction (11). "The semiotic, structuralist, and deconstructionist methods are also well represented," Weaver adds, "although most essays would better be labelled pluralist for their willingness to let the texts themselves suggest the most appropriate method of analysis" (11)--a strategy, one may add, forced upon any sensible critic by the irony and ambiguity of Boccaccio's text.

"Is the Decameron First Day, a day ostensibly without theme, a study of vices? Is there an implicit theme that unites all ten tales?" (3). Posing these questions, Weaver underlines the tendency of interpreters to see in the First Day (which conventionally includes the author's Proem and Introduction) a foundation for the entire work. This tendency is well represented here, in particular by Michelangelo Picone who, as Weaver points out, "argues that the entire First Day is a metanarrative...which gives directions for how to read the [whole] text" (4). In their "eclecticism," the various lecturae form a sort of prismatic lens, shedding multifaceted light on the Decameron's unique structural complexity.

In the opening essay, Robert Hollander focuses on the Ovidian subtext in the Decameron's Proem. [1] That Ovid (the Ovid of *Remedia Amoris*, in particular) is Boccaccio's Virgil and the "friend" who provides a rhetorical "remedy" for the author's emblematic malady, lovesickness, is a notion that, thanks to Hollander, is widely accepted by Boccaccio critics (Janet Smarr, quoted by Hollander, has also significantly contributed to this topic). [2] What deserves further investigation, as Hollander rightly points out, is the complex authorial strategy set in motion in the Proem with its copious, explicit or implicit references to both Ovid and Dante (Hollander makes no specific mention here of a third authorial ghost hovering over the Proem, that of Petrarca).

Thomas Stillinger openly tackles the issue of authorship, emphasizing the crucial function of the introduction for "a new characterization of the vernacular, secular author," who "simultaneously claims and disclaims authority for himself" (29). The relationship of the introduction to the body of the Decameron is both metonymic and metaphoric, Stillinger writes. The introduction is structured as a near chiasmus (Mazzotta), weaving together the description of the plague, in the first part, and the presentation of the brigata, in the second. Stillinger argues that the entire second half "is a privileged site of metaphorical signs" (36). The names of the ten narrators are in fact "transparent allegories," standing for works by Boccaccio himself or by eminent Others (Petrarch, Dante, Virgil and Ovid): "The brigata of the Decameron is thus an assembly of titles [...] an emphatic declaration of the Decameron's own status as a unitary work" (39). Against the backdrop of the Plague, the ten storytellers "together constitute an image of a literary lineage...which takes the form of an elegy, an *ubi sunt?*" (42-43). This "two-faced Introduction," Stillinger concludes, both a self-canonization and a self-effacing of the vernacular author, "seals the Decameron as a paradoxical object, both a mathematically complete totality and a space of boundless play" (50).

At the (third, fourth?) threshold of the Decameron, we find the Janus figure of Ser Cepparello-San Ciappelletto, the worst man who ever lived, worshipped as a saint after his death. Franco Fido calls this character "excessive and elusive," yet "endowed with a curious referential power, a kind of anthropological plausibility" (59). Fido addresses four questions that the novella intentionally asks its readers. Three of them impinge on the paradox of San Ciappelletto's sainthood. [3] This leads to the fourth and crucial question: "Why this story precisely at the beginning of the book?" (67). In order to answer this question, Fido extends his analysis to the (imperfect) symmetries linking the novella to the other stories of Day I, the other stories told by Panfilo and additional stories strategically positioned throughout the book, focusing on the "theological wedge" composed by the first three stories of Day One, the first two of Day Two, and the first of Day Three. The patterns he identifies articulate "the 'macro-trope' of inversion that frames the hundred stories, binding Ciappelletto [the false saint after his death] to Griselda [the true saint in life, in the last story of the book, told by Dioneo] and 'the courteous Torello, crusader, happy husband and father,' the very opposite of 'the debauched, blasphemous and homosexual Ciappelletto,' in the last story told by Panfilo (68). The enigmatic inversion of Saint Ciappelletto thus pervades the entire Decameron. If divine providence remains inscrutable and "our subjective semiosis is imperfect," Fido concludes, literature is paradoxically strengthened (73). Consequently, "the formula of 'the marginality of literature' proposed for Boccaccio not many years ago can be both accepted and overturned, considered alongside the opposite formula about the 'centrality of literature'" (74).

Marga Cottino Jones narrows her analysis down to the first three novellas of Day One and finds in the tales of Ciappelletto and Melchisedech the "subtexts" of the story of Abraham the Jew (who paradoxically converts after witnessing the corruption of the Roman Church). Cottino-Jones sees the second novella as an extension of the first (the sins of the Roman clergy as an extension of Ciappelletto's) and a preparation for the third (the comparison between Judaism and Christianity extended to Islam), stressing in particular the (ironic) mercantile logic which informs Abraham's reasoning and "wise" decision.

Pamela Stewart also underlines the close ties among the first three tales. She compares the parable of the three rings (recounted by the wise Jew Melchisedec in order to elude the Saladin's plan to extort money from him) to its pre-existing confessional and non-

confessional versions. The Decameron's version "stresses elements that allow one to read the three religions [Christianity, Judaism and Islam] as equivalent" (94). Its ideological significance then "is centered...on the notion of the overriding importance of faith above and beyond the diversity of religious institutions" (97). Stewart thus reaches an opposite conclusion to that of Fido: "Strategically situated in a position of prominence [at the beginning of the book], the three tales form rather a triptych on the paramount value of our faith in God" (98).

"The fourth tale of the First Day marks a shift in subject matter from the theological casuistry of Ciappelletto, Abraham the Jew, and Melchisedech, to the passions of the Flesh" (112). Ronald Martinez provides a close reading of the bawdy fabliau told by Dioneo (The Monk and his Abbot), as the first example of Dioneo's strategic role in establishing "a tension between rule and license that runs through the whole collection" (115). In short, "the first tale is both about a Rule--the Rule of St Benedict governing monastic life-- and about the breaking of that Rule by and for the sake of the body" (115-16). Martinez fleshes out his interpretation by showing how the letter of the Rule provides the detailed allegorical subtext of its own parodic subversion: "the real scandal of the novella is that the roles of monk and abbot are reversed... In Dioneo's mischievous little tale, the monk becomes clever by heeding the voices of the flesh" (122). This inaugurates "a trend in [Dioneo's] tenure as a narrator" (126). "In his insistence on reversal, on pleasure, on laughter, Dioneo is the Decameron's genius of play," identifiable with "Boccaccio himself *asmagister ludi*" (many of Dioneo's stories resemble the unfinished tale of Filippo Balducci, told by the author) (127). Yet, Dioneo "functions ironically as a voice of reason:" departing from "the routines initiated by [Queen] Pampinea" (which "mimic monastic rule") he "tempers the seriousness of the brigata's mood," helping to shape a narrative community which "exists in tension with, and finally for the sake of, the human city beleaguered by the plague" (128-29).

The following story, Dante Della Terza suggests, forms a chiasmus with the preceding one (135). Fiammetta and Dioneo are juxtaposed again, as narrators, in the Fifth Day where her story (Federigo degli Alberighi and his falcon, celebrating marriage) is followed by a sordid story of menage a trois told by Dioneo (Pietro di Vinciolo). Della Terza however plays down this sequence, and underscores instead another pattern, which all the novelle told so far share: they all end with clever responses, suggesting a structural similarity between the First Day, which has no official theme, and the Sixth Day, which will be expressly devoted to witty remarks and retorts (a similarity noted by other contributors as well). Fiammetta's story ("the chaste and dignified account of the marchioness of Monferrato") is an exemplum, freely adapted from Andreas Cappellanus' code of amorous behaviour for the benefit of the brigata's women. Della Terza's most remarkable contribution, however, is the suggestion of a new source: the story of King Manfredi's step-sister, Siligaita, drawn from Paolo Emilio Santorio's *Historiae Regni Neapolitani* (1580) and confirmed by a parallel reading of another novella told by Fiammetta, the sixth of the Tenth Day, whose protagonist is also a French king, Charles of Anjou, like king Philippe madly (and embarrassingly) in love with an unsuitable young woman.

In her essay on the sixth tale, the tale of the Inquisitor, Janet Levarie Smarr adopts what we may call a "mosaic-like" strategy. First, she explores the tale's historical sources (such figures as the Florentine inquisitors Frate Mino da San Quirico or Fra Pietro dall'Aquila known to extort large sums by threatening legal procedures against innocent persons); then, moving on to the tale's linguistic texture, Smarr focuses on the pairs "money-faith" and "coins-words," tracing their Scriptural and Dantean subtexts, in which "sacramental and spiritual meanings are signified [or wilfully misinterpreted] through physical images" (155). Privileging an allegorical over a parodic reading, Smarr emphasizes the spiritual message underneath the letter of the story which "uses language to attack the control over language...asserted by the Inquisition:" a strategy consistent with the overall strategy of Boccaccio's book, its attack against, and defense from, the hypocrisy of the clergy, the (bad) influence they exercise on its ideal readers, women.

Michelangelo Picone's essay is perhaps the most ambitious of the entire collection. As already mentioned, Picone considers the story of Bergamino and Can Grande as a *mise en abime* reproducing "in miniature the global structure of the book in which it appears" (160). This reflects the author's intent "to validate, not only theoretically but also practically, the literary code according to which the book is composed:" the "social order foreseen by Boccaccio finds its balance precisely in the median category of the oratores [here personified by Bergamino]...the new intellectuals, who, endowed with the ornate and effective word, make use of it ... [and] not only transform reality but overturn it..." (161). To this "unconditional affirmation of the *homo loquens*" (164), Bergamino's tale within the tale (the story of Primas and the abbot of Cluny) provides "an exceptional practical example...a perfect artistic organism in which the man of the court may successfully represent the deep sense of his psychological condition, the spiritual etymon of his malinconia, thereby setting the stage for its estirpation" (167 and 171-172). "Primas thus becomes the first name in a lengthy cultural genealogy ending with Boccaccio" (177).

Victoria Kirkham's exhaustive reading of one of the shortest stories of Day One is based on her view of an allegorically tempered Decameron, whose framework is the catalogue of virtues, in its emblematic evolution from classical to late Medieval culture. The confrontation of Ermino Grimaldi and Guiglielmo Borsiere thus "re- enacts the perennial enmity between avarice and its opposite, here conceived as courtesy" (182). Through a detailed analysis of Dantean references (Inf. 15, 16 and 17), along with a tapestry of quotations from other sources (Brunetto Latini's *Tresoretto* and Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*, above all), Kirkham shows how Boccaccio shifts "semantically from Dante's 'courtesy and worth' to the binomial pair 'court and purse'" (187). "Ironically, Boccaccio's tightwad meets his match in a man who is, *ad litteram*, 'of the purse'" (188). After retracing the genealogy of courtesy from twelfth-century France to fourteenth-century Florence, Kirkham underscores how by assigning his exemplary parable "to the narrator most like Justice [Loretta]...Boccaccio shapes an ethical system suited to historical reality--one that the new bourgeoisie could even read as 'an urban variant' [Branca] of the medieval courtesy book... The *cortesia* disbursed by Guiglielmo Borsiere is a very Decameronian virtue" (197-201).

Pier Massimo Forni shapes his reading of the novella of the lady of Gwascony (who, with a biting remark, awakes the king of Cyprus from his moral slumber) "around data pertaining on the author's life" (220). Quoting Fredi Chiappelli, Forni argues that this novella, like others similarly centered on "a verbal art in which the *arte di vivere* manifests itself," represents "an archetypal situation," a momentary breaking of conventions "accomplished on a level of intellectual fellowship" between inferior and superior (212-213). These stories, Forni suggests, together mirror the situation "of the author himself [stepping] from one social sphere (the one allotted to him by virtue of his

birth) into a more privileged one" (214), thus betraying a characteristic authorial anxiety.

The collection reaches a worthy conclusion with the essay by Millicent Marcus: as the ending of the first day, the story of Mastro Alberto "must fulfill the cumulative expectations for closure generated by the preceding tales," while also serving "as a beginning--the first in the series of ten day-ending tales," and the only one not told by Dioneo (224). "In its marriage of textuality and sexuality [the pun or erotic metaphor of the leek], D. I.10 synthesizes the metanarrative preoccupations of the preceding nine tales" (226) as well as the "interpretive openendedness" of the collection. Mastro Alberto's leek provides a *mise en abyme* of the Decameron's erotic code: "To put it simply--sex, like texts, requires interpretation," Marcus writes, but the relationship between "the reformatory power of figurative language" and its parodic and subverting energy, remains ambivalent: when we peel the leek, "we find in it no unitary truth, no allegorical *sovrasenso*" (227). Hidden behind its "didactic framing" (Pampinea's lesson to the ladies), is a more subtle subversion of the *stil novo* code (the pun of the leek would extol "the joys of non reproductive sexuality") (239). Is the book a *Galeotto* (like that of Dante's Francesca) or a *Galateo* (a manual of behavior)? According to Marcus, the Decameron is neither: "In the absence of didactic certainty, in the refusal of a *sovrasenso* to which the literal level unconditionally points, interpretation becomes a relative process whose morality inheres in the mind of the reader" (238).

This seems an apt quotation with which to end this review: whether we lean toward the centrality or marginality of literature, religion or ethics, toward allegory or parody, toward neither or both, the *magister ludi* Boccaccio invites us to enjoy the intellectual benefit and the pleasures of open-ended interpretation.

NOTES

[[1]] See, for example, "The Proem of the Decameron" in his *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 89-107.

[[2]] I take also the liberty of signaling my own essay, *Hereos/ Eleos. l'ambivalente terapia del mal d'amore nel libro chiamato Decameron, cognominato prencipe Galeotto*) *Italian Quarterly* XXXVI, 2000, 69-106.

[[3]] As Panfilo, the narrator, puts it: "When we make his enemy our go-between, believing him to be a friend, He answers us, as if we were making recourse to one who is truly saintly as a go-between of His grace."

The Decameron. "The Decameron" by Giovanni Boccaccio – last work, unpublished. The Decameron (1). The Decameron (2). The Decameron (3). The Decameron (4). The Decameron (5). The Decameron (6). The Decameron (7). The Decameron (8). The Decameron (9). The Decameron (10). The Decameron (11). The Decameron (12). The Decameron (13). The Decameron (14). The Decameron (18). Decameron was a rather obscure Folk Rock band from the 70's and *Third Light* is, not surprisingly, the third album of theirs to see the light of day. The music found here is a mix of Folk Rock, Beatles-esque Pop and straightforward Rock & Roll with only slight progressive touches. I would put them in the same category as Al Stewart or Lindisfarne rather than Strawbs or Jethro Tull, though a couple of songs like *The Ungodly* and *All The Best Wishes* approach the style of Strawbs a bit. The music of Decameron is not bad but by no means essential, not even from a Folk Rock perspective and even less so from a Prog Folk perspective. Still, this is a worthy addition to a collection of someone with a taste for the Folk Rock of both sides of the Atlantic.