

Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Decameron*. Ed. by Valeria Mouchet, Intro. by Lucia Battaglia Ricci. I Diamanti. Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2006. LXXVI + 1536 pp.

Format speaks volumes. We are fortunate to have a manuscript of the *Decameron* in the hand of Giovanni Boccaccio himself. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, MS Hamilton 90 is a fascinating witness to the author's *ultima volontà*, revealing much about how he saw his *Decameron* and how he wanted it to look. It is a large book, in two columns of text, written in a semigothic bookhand. Everything about the book indicates that what it contains is serious, something quite at home in a university context. There is not a little shock, then, in reading the opening pages of the Berlin *Decameron*, learning that the work is, in fact, directed at an audience of female readers suffering lovesickness and who have no recourse to external distractions for relief.

The book-format we might imagine as more appropriate for such a work is the edition under review here, a small two-volume set bound in red, with gold lettering and tooling on the binding and spine. These are volumes that are a pleasure to hold and to read. The series, according to the publishers, “Propone una raccolta organica dei grandi classici della letteratura universale in una Biblioteca ‘tascabile’ raffinata e preziosa.” Their small format and refined finish recall those small and exquisite Books of Hours commissioned and executed especially throughout the fifteenth century, illuminated by the greatest Flemish artists of their day, and often associated with female patrons and readers. The “tascabile” format in the publisher’s description implies that one would wish to keep this *Decameron* close at hand, taking it out during the day for a quick consultation. The *Decameron* can become, in such an edition, a kind of *vademecum*, ready for any social occasion. In the words of Stephen J. Milner’s contribution (“The Social World of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*”) forthcoming in the *Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio*, the *Decameron* acts as “a preceptive ‘social’ grammar, furnishing examples and teaching lessons (both in the *cornice* and the *novelle* themselves) that are worthy of imitation when composing a social self.”

This Diamanti edition has an introduction, a “Nota biografica” and a short bibliography by Lucia Battaglia Ricci. The editor, Valeria Mouchet has a short “Nota,” explaining that the text used is that of Vittore Branca’s 1976 edition for *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Vol. IV); she is also responsible for the explanatory notes throughout. Battaglia Ricci’s introduction is a marvel of compression, highlighting frequently the *Decameron*’s several and various pluralities, thematic, tonal, moral, de-

manding a variety of reading strategies. This plurality is nicely articulated in her (expressively innovative) assertion that the *Centonovelle* must be thought of as a “kaleidoscoped” reality (“una vera e propria ‘caleidoscopizzazione della realtà,’” xxxvi). In many ways it is appropriate that Battaglia Ricci introduce the volume since she has done so much to interrogate the material text as exerting hermeneutic force on the reader (and her new collection of essays *Scrivere un libro di novelle: Giovanni Boccaccio autore, lettore, editore* [Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2013] will surely be indispensable in further such analysis).

Mouchet’s commentary is itself a work of learned compression. The page size does not allow for any extensive commentary, a task in any case alleviated in the wake of the exhaustive notes in Branca, not to mention the several other important commentaries by, for example, Petronio, Sapegno, Marti and Segre (and now the commentary in the new Fiorilla, Quondam, Alfano edition for BUR Rizzoli). Mouchet’s notes aim at providing that minimum amount of help to keep the reader in the text. In this, she must be deemed successful.

It is clear that this Mouchet edition does not have pretensions to displace any of the canonical editions currently in use, but it is also true that there is nothing quite like it on the market. Indeed, during the recent exhibition at the John Rylands Library entitled “Locating Boccaccio in 2013,” included for display was a Giolito printing of the *Decameron* from 1542 with the shelfmark JRL 16651, which could claim to be an ancestor of the edition under review: it is beautifully produced in 16° format.

In its aesthetically pleasing and easily portable format, lending itself wholly to a reading for pleasure, this Diamanti edition might have been described approvingly by Boccaccio himself as a girl’s best friend.

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