

Holmes, Olivia and Stewart, Dana E. (eds.). *Reconsidering Boccaccio. Medieval Contexts and Global Intertexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. 400 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4875-0178-5.

*Reconsidering Boccaccio. Medieval Contexts and Global Intertexts* contains fifteen essays by scholars of Italian studies, history, classics, law and Middle Eastern literature. The volume consists of five parts: Material Contexts; Social Contexts: Friendship; Social Contexts: Gender, Marriage and the Law; Political and Authorial Contexts: On Famous Women; Literary Contexts and Intertexts. As shown by the emphasis on the term “contexts” in the subtitle, as well as in all five subheadings, it is clear the volume pays particular attention to the relationships among Boccaccio’s literary works within historical and cultural frameworks in an attempt to include Boccaccio in a global discourse on the Middle Ages. As pointed out by editors Olivia Holmes and Dana Stewart in the introduction, such an approach highlights Boccaccio’s versatility, which encompasses his familiarity with the literary elite, as well as “his omnivorous poaching from such varied sources as geographical maps, merchant’s manuals, papal decrees, glosses, and scientific treatises” (5). In so doing, *Reconsidering Boccaccio* aims at grasping Boccaccio’s interdisciplinary dialogue “with the multiple voices and traditions — the mercantile, scholarly, clerical, legal, political, social, and popular cultures — that he inherited and in which he was immersed” (6).

In the introduction, editors did outstanding work in proposing an overview of the volume’s objectives and targets. In addition, they summarize methodologies, contents and intertextual references that authors adopt in their essays. The first contribution, K. P. Clarke’s “Text and (Inter) Face: The Catchwords in Boccaccio’s Autograph of the *Decameron*,” explores Boccaccio’s use of illuminations in Hamilton 90, arguing that images serve as hinges in the book’s structural language. The following essay, “Reading Boccaccio’s Paratexts: Dedications as Thresholds between Worlds” by Rhianon Daniels, focuses on the role of dedications, which connect the world outside the narrative to the one inside it, in crossing the boundaries between these worlds.

Through a study of Boccaccio’s epistolary and historical records, Jason Houston’s “Boccaccio on Friendship (Theory and Practice)” marks the transition from the analysis of the material aspects of Boccaccio’s works to considerations of the social context. By comparing four of Boccaccio’s epistles, Houston demonstrates the stylistic dissonance in the treatment of friendship between the theoretical model of classical authors and writing personal experiences in the style of medieval Tuscan authors. The fourth essay, “Among Boccaccio’s Friends: A Profile of Mainardo Cavalcanti” by Todd

Boli, examines the friendship between Boccaccio and Mainardo Cavalcanti that culminates in the dedication of *De casibus virorum illustrium*.

Alessia Ronchetti's "Reading Like a Woman: Gendering Compassion in the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*" opens the volume's third part, which contains impressive essays on the subjects of gender, marriage and the law. While the text of the *Elegia*, according to Ronchetti, shows a variety of perspectives on what compassion is, Sara E. Diaz's "Authority and Misogamy in Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*" examines the humanistic prejudice against vernacular and argues that "Boccaccio's use of misogamy, namely the rhetorical dissuasion against marriage, is part of a concerted effort to advance Dante's fame as the poet-lover of Beatrice, while bringing him closer in line to the androcentric world of Latin humanism" (165). This section's fourth essay, Mary Anne Case's "What Turns on Whether Women Are Human for Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan?" examines the social and philosophical status of women by comparing the dedication of the *De mulieribus claris*, the representations of the *brigata* in the *Decameron* and Christine de Pizan's *Cité des dames*.

Since it sums up very well the interdisciplinary and global vision that drives the volume as a whole, I will pay special attention to Grace Delmolino's "The Economics of Conjugal Debt from Gratian's *Decretum* to *Decameron* 2.10: Boccaccio, Canon Law, and the Loss of Interest in Sex." By interpreting Riccardo di Chinzica's sexual restrictions in the light of Causa 33 of Gratian's *Decretum*, and in recalling young Boccaccio's studies in canon law, Delmolino proves the novella's background incorporates topics in canon law, such as consent and consummation as well as conjugal debt, which also involves technical and economic subjects like usury, *damnum emergens* and *lucrum cessans*. In the last part of her essay, Delmolino uses linguistic analysis (as in the case of *conoscere*, which can mean both "to recognize" and "to have carnal knowledge," and *vacassimo* in the sense of the set phrase *vacare orationi*) to demonstrate the implications of 2.10 for the Conclusion of Day Two. According to Delmolino, it is no coincidence that the *brigata*'s decision to *vacare orationi* follows the story of Riccardo and Bartolomea, the first one using devotional days of rest as an excuse to avoid sex, the second one claiming she will never respect any days of rest. Delmolino argues that "the act of limiting the *brigata*'s language proves the power of that language, for Neifile has drawn an implicit connection between abstinence from sex and abstinence from storytelling, suggesting that the *brigata*'s words truly can become deeds" (149).

Elizabeth Casteen's "On She-Wolves and Famous Women: Boccaccio, Politics, and the Neapolitan Court," the first of three essays that compose volume's part four, focuses on fourteenth-century Naples and the treatment

of Queen Johanna I in Boccaccio's works. The following text, "Christine Transforms Boccaccio: Gendered Authorship in the *De mulieribus claris* and the *Cité des dames*" by Kevin Brownlee, proves that Christine de Pizan uses Boccaccio as a principal literary reference even in the act of subversion. Lory J. Walters' "Reading Like a Frenchwoman: Christine de Pizan's Treatment of Boccaccio's Johanna I and Andrea Acciaiuoli" concludes the book's section dedicated to *On Famous Women* by exploring Christine's portrayals of Queen Ysabel de Bavière and the influence of Boccaccio's works on her.

In examining Boccaccio's literary sources and heritage, Franklin Lewis' "A Persian in a Pear Tree: Middle Eastern Analogues for Pirro/Pyrrus" aims at establishing connections amongst *Decameron* 7.9, Islamic culture and Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale*. While in "Splitting Pants and Pigs: The *Fabliau* 'Barat et Haimet' and Narrative Strategies in *Decameron* 8.5 and 8.6," Katherine A. Brown addresses the influence of French *fabliaux* on the *Decameron*, Filippo Andrei's "The Tragicomedy of Lament: *La Celestina* and the Elegiac Legacy of Boccaccio's *Fiammetta*" explores the impact of Boccaccio's *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta* on fifteenth-century Spanish literature. Finally, Nora Martin Peterson's "Sins, Sex and Secrets: The Legacy of Confession from the *Decameron* to the *Heptaméron*" analyzes the trope of confession in both the *Decameron* and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*.

In fostering the dialogue among researchers in various areas of study, *Reconsidering Boccaccio* has the merit of expanding Boccaccio studies in an interdisciplinary fashion, according to a pluralistic view of the Middle Ages. The only real criticism is that the link between Boccaccio and the Global Middle Ages is not entirely clear. Despite some contributions grappling with the concept of Boccaccio as a cultural mediator more directly than others, a stronger focus on concepts such as mobility, political mediation, networks and economy could provide a better knowledge of Boccaccio's works in the light of the Global Middle Ages. But having said that, the overall quality of the volume is excellent.

ALESSANDRO CETERONI

UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT