Introduzione al "Decameron." Lectura Boccaccii Turicensis. A cura di Michelangelo Picone e Margherita Mesirca. Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2004. Pp. 323. € 32.

Introduzione al Decameron, edited by Michelangelo Picone and Margherita Mesirca, is the result of a series of classes on the *Decameron* held at the University of Zurich in the summer of 2002, classes that were, in turn, the outgrowth of a longer-term research project on a "hypertextual *Decameron*" that the editors hope to make available soon on the World Wide Web. The volume contains chapters dedicated to the frame tale or *cornice* (Michelangelo Picone, "Il macrotesto"), to the Author's interventions (Luciano Rossi, "Il paratesto decameroniano"), and to each of the ten Days of the Decameron: Michelangelo Picone on Days 1, 4, 6 and 8, Sergio Zatti on Day 2, Jonathan Usher on Day 3, Michelangelo Zaccarello on Day 5, Andrea Battistini on Day 7, Luigi Surdich on Day 9 and Luciano Rossi on Day 10. There is also a closing contribution, by Tatiana Crivelli, on the *Decameron* as hypertext.

The volume takes its place alongside other single volumes designed to introduce the reader to Boccaccio's masterwork: the very informative *Approaches to Teaching Boccaccio's "Decameron,"* ed. James McGregor (New York: Modern Language Association, 2000); the ambitiously conceived and imaginatively organized *Lessico critico decameroniano*, eds. Pier Massimo Forni and Renzo Bragantini (Torino: Boringhieri, 1995); David Wallace's *Giovanni Boccaccio: "Decameron"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and the standard (though under-consulted in Anglo-American circles), *Prospettive sul "Decameron,"* ed. Giorgio Barberi-Squarotti (Torino: Tirrenia, 1989).

Picone's opening sentences to the first chapter, "Il *Decamerone* come macrotesto: Il problema della cornice," are excellent ones: "È possibile scrivere un'opera unitaria a partire da pezzi sparsi e indipendenti? È a questa fondamentale domanda che Dante Petrarca e Boccaccio, alle origini della letteratura italiana e europea, hanno cercato di rispondere: Dante con la *Vita Nova*, Petrarca coi *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (dove è significativo già il titolo), e Boccaccio col *Decameron*" (p. 9). Indeed, this is the question that one could ask regarding the sorts of multi-authored volumes that aim to provide an introduction to the *Decameron*. For the main challenge that a volume like *Introduzione al "Decameron"* faces is how to make this seem something more than the isolated interventions of individual scholars caught up in their own musings on the section of the *Decameron* that has fallen to them to discuss.

One of the essays that best fulfills its mission is Jonathan Usher's "Industria e acquisto erotico: La Terza Giornata." This essay places Day 3 into context (symbolic significance of the setting and the calendar of storytelling) and then addresses how the novellas intersect with the frame tale and how they communicate a system of values. While Usher does cast his eye over a range of narrative features that marks Day 3 (the predominance of illegitimate relations, the weighty presence of the religious, and especially of friars, the frequency with which lovers encounter obstacles), he pauses at length over a single novella (3.7, about Tedaldo degli Elisei), on the grounds that it tells us a good deal about Boccaccio's narrative technique and contains the greatest number of elements that link it to other novellas of Day 3. After an intelligent in-depth reading of the novella, Usher sums up. This novella, he tells us, teaches us about what is really at stake in Day 3: not the declared theme of *industria* but rather the importance of *discrezione* 'discretion.' Throughout Day 3, there are characters who know things, other characters who know nothing. For the characters, success depends on knowing when to reveal information and when to keep it back. This technique of knowing how to handle complex information is also crucial, Usher argues, for Boccaccio. On Day 3, and in particular in the very complex narration of novella 7, Boccaccio uses techniques of *entrelacement* that we typically associate with the romance epic of the Renaissance. Usher's contribution to this volume is exemplary: it moves easily between the specifics and a theoretical overview, providing the reader with original insights about the significance of textual features. One cannot help but infer that Usher's own skill in parceling out information to the reader at just the right time is inextricably linked to his keen observations about the characters of Day 3 and about Boccaccio's own narrative technique.

Michelangelo Picone, who is of course responsible for the overall organization of the volume, has a clear idea of the project's goals; this emerges clearly in each of the chapters that he writes. In a very valuable commentary on the cornice, he provides a comparatist perspective, succinctly evaluating the way in which the *Decameron* partakes of three types of frame tale narrative: the first where the storytelling is designed to defer an event (as in the *Thousand and One Nights*), the second where storytelling has a didactic aim (as in the *Disciplina clericalis*), and the third where stories told *in itinere* (as in the *Book of Delights* and in the *Canterbury Tales*) with the aim of pausing during the journey or overcoming its tedium. Picone then turns to one of the most important meta-novellas in the *Decameron*, the story of Madonna Oretta (6.1). Against the background information provided by the third type of frame tale *in itinere*, Picone observes that the story of Madonna Oretta has almost no quotient of narra-

tivity and a very high quotient of meta-narrativity; rather than simply "telling a story," this novella seeks to explain what a novella is, and is therefore, in Picone's estimation, a valuable key for understanding the other 99 novellas. In his readings of Days 1, 4, 6 and 8 (the Days that seem most privileged for their meta-narrative quality), Picone is especially attentive to the macrotextual level (the way in which all of the textual elements function as a whole) and to the way that certain novellas function as especially significant microtextual summaries of a Day's themes and motifs. Attention to these matters has been a constant in Picone's work over some years, and Picone does not disappoint. If the reader is attuned to the ideological tones of critical interventions, however, she will have occasion to question Picone's gender politics, particularly as these emerge with special force in his analyses of microtexts he identifies as significant. In concluding his remarks on the *Decameron*'s macrotext, Picone names Madonna Oretta (a long-time favorite of his) an honorary member of the *Decameron*'s narratorial club. This seems unobjectionable. But then at the end of his essay on Day 1, he reasserts Pampinea's criticism of Madonna Malgherida who dared criticize Maestro Alberto (1.10) and Pampinea's proposed model of a cultured and well-spoken woman; moreover, he closes his essay with the peremptory "Solo così la donna potrà competere ad armi pari con l'uomo, e affrontare con successo il difficile cammino della vita." This conclusion strikes me as disconnected from the evidence. As I have argued in an essay of mine previously published in *Heliotropia*, the novella's relation to its main subtext — ably identified by Picone as the scene of the *gabbo* in Chapter 18 of the *Vita Nuova* — could lead us to different conclusions, and even more important, Pampinea suppresses evidence that would allow an audience to assess Madonna Malgherida's speech independently. When we get to Pampinea's story of the scholar and the widow (8.7), which Picone argues is invested with special significance for the whole *Decameron* on account of its length, Picone's ideological views emerge even more directly. He sees *Decameron* 8.7 as an authorial intervention that — in contrast to the explicit authorial interventions (of the Proem, the Introductions to Day 1 and Day 4, and the Author's Conclusion) — marks Boccaccio's turn away from the philogyny of his younger works and toward the misogyny of his mature period. Dwelling on the crucial moment in which the scholar passes from *eros* to *sophia*, Picone declares that "Sconfiggendo la falsa retorica di Madonna Elena, Rinieri fa trionfare la Filosofia. Di conseguenza la misoginia non è il punto d'arrivo della sua difesa, ma una conseguenza o un corollario. Chi ama la Filosofia, non può amare nessuna donna terrena" (p. 222). Picone's argument requires that we judge the scholar (possessed of considerable cultural capital

and now dedicated to an unnamed wise woman that Picone believes we should recognize as Lady Philosophy) to be morally and culturally superior to the widow and, by extension, to all earthly women. Glorification of culture and philosophy is fine, in my opinion, and there's not enough of it these days; but I would balk at the uses to which philosophical learning is put in this novella, where there is quite a bit of bad behavior spread around amongst all the parties involved. Let's not be praising people just because they have scholarly degrees.

A number of essays, dense with information and detailed readings, make worthwhile points. Luciano Rossi, in "Il paratesto decameroniano: Cimento d'armonia e d'invenzione," tracks Boccaccio's use of Ovidian texts and the *Roman de la Rose* in order to valorize his own work as he compared himself to Dante and Petrarch. Rossi argues that Boccaccio — contrary to what many scholars might think — was less in the camp of Petrarch and more in the camp of Dante. Andrea Battistini, in his analysis of Day 7, explores some ways to go beyond the compactness of the Day, which had been placed into relief by Cesare Segre's identification of the triangular relationship (Woman, the Lover, and the Husband who gets tricked). Tatiana Crivelli, in her essay "Il 'commendabile ordine' e la 'spezial grazia' della libertà: Dinamiche ipertestuali e di genere nel *Decameron*," explores the delicate balance that the *Decameron* — like the optimal computer hypertext — would have the reader establish between being a passive consumer of information and being an unguided producer of quirky personalized readings.

Some of the other contributors find it more of a challenge to stay with the project. Sergio Zatti struggles to communicate a coherent thesis about Day 2, whose multiple, romance, and wandering ways threaten to get away from him at every turn; by the end of his essay, at least, he manages to articulate what would appear to be an overarching main idea, namely, that we should move away from understanding the dynamics of Day 2 exclusively within the iconography of Fortune, and instead see a logic of mercantile investment and profit at work here, even when the protagonists are not merchants. Michelangelo Zaccarello's discussion of Day 5 seems forced, as he moves first to demonstrate the possible relevance to the *Decameron* of Graziolo de' Bambaglioli's *Trattato delle volgari sentenze sopra le virtù morali*, then pauses over questions of misogyny and philogyny (not clear how this is related to the previous argument), then attaches a coda about "Uccellacci e uccellini," dedicated to exploring the polarity that emerges between *Decameron* 5.4, the novella of the nightingale, and *Decameron* 5.9, the novella of the falcon. Also troubled is Luigi Surdich's essay, "La 'varietà delle cose' e le 'frondi di quercia': La Nona Giornata." Sur-

dich notes that Day 9, with its open topic, is often seen as providing the space for a recapitulation and rearticulation of previous motifs. He encourages us to follow lines of thought advanced by Alberto Asor Rosa, who focuses on the experimental character of Day 9, and Francesco Tateo, who notes that each narrator on Day 9, in taking up previous material, tends to highlight elements that came into focus when that narrator was Queen or King. The beginning of the essay is thus promising in its attempt to persuade the reader of Day 9 to select one perspective rather than another. Yet as Surdich pursues his own reading, one feels overwhelmed by the "variety of things." He bounces from subsection to subsection — in all, they total fourteen — with disquisitions on things like "La libertà tematica," "I personaggi di memoria dantesca e una 'questione d'amore,'" "La verità del sogno," and "L'eros negativo e la circolarità narrativa." In Surdich's essay, as in Zaccarello's, the reader can find individual interesting insights about specific details, but will be hard-pressed to find a real argument.

Luciano Rossi's essay on Day 10 is marred by some of this lack of focus, since his commentaries on sources and analogues are sometimes presented in a way that threatens to derail his main argument, which is that a truly new reading of Day 10 would have to grasp the fundamentally paradoxical character of this portion of the *Decameron*. Also problematic, both in this essay of Rossi's and in his contribution on the paratext of the *Decameron*, is his tendency to omit some key voices at key moments. In his essay on Day 10, Rossi's argument — about the subtle ironies that pervade the stories of the final day and about how Boccaccio highlights the divide between the declared noble magnificence of the characters and their less than inspiring behavior (see p. 271) — sounds to me a good deal like the argument that Robert Hollander and Courtney Cahill advanced in their very lengthy and detailed essay, "Day Ten of the *Decameron*: The Myth of Order," first published in *Studi sul Boccaccio* and later included in Hollander's book, *Boccaccio's Dante and the Shaping Force of Satire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997). Rossi includes this essay in his bibliography (although minus the name of co-author Ms. Cahill, a lawyer and a professor in her own right) but does not mention the essay or take account of its argument in his analysis. Hollander, who has made some of the most significant scholarly contributions to our understanding of the Author's interventions and to our understanding of Boccaccio's relation to Dante, again appears twice in the bibliography following Rossi's "Il paratesto decameroniano"; and again, Rossi does not mention Hollander or take account of Hollander's work in his actual analysis. Janet Smarr, in recompense, receives two-time mention in the footnotes for her publica-

tions on Ovid, Boccaccio and Fiammetta, and then is curiously passed over in the bibliography.

In fact, Rossi's treatment of other critics highlights the problem of bibliographical citation and scholarly dialogue throughout the volume. There is no general bibliography at the end of the entire work; rather, each essay concludes with a bibliography that does not always match up with the works that each author cites in the footnotes. Anglo-American criticism is pushed to the side in many of the essays; and there is a tell-tale inattentiveness in the typographical errors in non-Romance-language names and words.

There is some downside to having a volume generated by the teaching and research collaboration of individuals at a specific site, rather than being generated by an attempt to represent an array of voices across the field. Half of the chapters are authored by two of the contributors (Picone is responsible for five chapters out of the thirteen, and Rossi for two of the thirteen) giving their voices a hefty predominance. Furthermore, it seems curious — given the subject matter of the volume and its year of publication (2004), the fact that the Author of the *Decameron* privileges his female audience, and the fact that the scholarly arguments so frequently turn to how women should read and speak and act — that among the contributors, there is but a single woman.

All in all, this is a useful volume, but within well-circumscribed limits. Some of the essays — such as Picone's on the *Decameron*'s frame tale narrative, Usher's on Day 3 and Crivelli's on the *Decameron* as hypertext — are excellent summary introductions to the issues, ones that could be recommended to doctoral candidates and even perhaps to advanced undergraduates. Many of the other essays are territory that the already advanced reader can profitably mine for detailed information about the *Decameron* and its dialogue with other texts.

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