Guyda Armstrong. *The English Boccaccio: A History in Books*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 464pp. ISBN: 978-1-4426-4603-2.

In *The English Boccaccio*, Guyda Armstrong offers an ambitious study that traces English translations of Giovanni Boccaccio's works from the fourteenth to the early twentieth century. Following Rhiannon Daniels' *Boccaccio and the Book* (2009), Armstrong chooses to focus on "the book as object, rather than merely as the text in translation," and in doing so constructs a rich and complex history of Boccaccio's many afterlives in England, from manuscript to print to mass production (5). Her aim is to "highlight the accidents of history and the localization of each individual incarnation of the text in each translated book-object" and in that she succeeds, providing fascinating readings of Boccaccio's major and minor works alike (6). The choice to divide the book both chronologically and by text — with individual chapters devoted to the *De casibus virorum illustrium*, the *De mulieribus claris* and the *Decameron* — allows Armstrong to explore the multifaceted responses to Boccaccio from both scholarly communities and the general public, and call attention to the moments when these discourses intersect.

Armstrong begins with the *De casibus virorum illustrium*, the first of Boccaccio's texts to be fully translated into English. The strength of the first chapter lies in its careful elucidation of the manuscript production contexts for Boccaccio's Latin original, composed in the court of Naples; Laurent de Premierfait's early fifteenth-century French translation *De cas des nobles hommes et femmes*; and John Lydgate's *Fall of Princes*, composed in English rime royal for Duke Humphrey of Gloucester in the 1430s, each of which is given its own detailed subsection. This approach might seem repetitive, but is in fact the opposite; by calling attention to individual manuscript versions and their peculiarities, Armstrong provides a glimpse of the different purposes the *De casibus* potentially served in translation, as well as the role of Boccaccio himself as textual authority. In Lydgate's case in particular, rather than simply functioning as a straightforward translation—unnecessary, Armstrong argues, since the text was already "known and read in both Latin and French in England; the linguistic and generic shift must thus express a more complex purpose, one that seeks to appropriate important 'foreign' (learned, humanist) writings into a new English canon" (93). She illustrates this through careful use of an early Lydgate manuscript from the John Rylands Library in Manchester, almost certainly the fair copy from which the earliest printed editions were derived, thus providing a clear connection between the generic markers evident in manuscripts and those in early printed books.

The second chapter on the *De mulieribus claris* is, Armstrong admits, something of a dead end, since this text did not enjoy the *De casibus*' early popularity in manuscript or in print; indeed, there are only two extant English translations, both in manuscript. The first, a verse paraphrase, was likely composed after Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* and is similar in style, but only includes 21 of Boccaccio's original 106 lives. The second, composed around 1543 by Henry Lord Morley and dedicated to King Henry VIII, is a lavish presentation copy intended for inclusion in the royal library. It too is incomplete, containing 46 lives and concluding with the biography of Lucrece: a bold step for a writer whose daughter, Jane Rochford, had been executed with Henry's fifth queen Katherine Howard the previous year. As Armstrong illustrates, these two translations also offer divergent interpretive frames for Boccaccio's work. The anonymous version interpolates original material such as Latin prayers that are strikingly sympathetic to potential women readers, while Morley's version, perhaps unsurprisingly given its context, "seeks urgently to establish shared values between two aristocratic men" (155). The real strengths of this chapter lie in Armstrong's extensive inclusion of material from both of these texts, neither of which is readily available in print, and her detailed discussion of the interpretive strategies at work.

The third chapter charts Boccaccio's English fortunes from manuscript to print, beginning with the *De casibus* but focusing more closely on three vernacular works that Armstrong uses to illustrate the changing public tastes in the late sixteenth century. Central to all of these vernacular translations is the French connection: the excerpts from *The Decameron* printed in story collections in the 1560s and 1570s, Bartholomew Young's translated *Fiammetta* (1587), and a prose rendering of *Il ninfale fiesolano* (1597) all came through French intermediaries. The *Fiammetta* alone retained some vestige of its Italian context, containing an English translation of Gabriel Giolito's 1542 address to aristocratic female readers.

The history of *The Decameron* in English from 1620 (the first full edition) to 1930 (the first mass-market Everyman edition) in the fourth chapter allows Armstrong to tackle a variety of related subjects including illustration, shifting paratextual material, and, of course, censorship. She demonstrates that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century editions of the *Decameron* relied primarily on French translations, and that nineteenth-century editions were often split between those intended for academic audiences and those specifically circumscribed on account of potentially scandalous content. The most offensive passages (e.g., Alibech and Rustico) were usually rendered in Italian if not excised altogether. Even the only translation by a

woman, Frances Winwar, first appeared in an edition limited to subscribers only, accompanied by an introduction by American author Burton Rascoe that Armstrong describes as "a kind of *Bildungsroman* of his sexual coming-of-age through Boccaccio" (281). What emerges in her discussion of turn-of-the-century *Decameron* translations in particular is an interesting interplay between American and British editions, clearly vying for similar audiences but taking very different approaches to the subject matter.

Armstrong's two final chapters focus on Boccaccio's minor works and their publication history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The fifth chapter concerns works that were studied and translated primarily for their connections with Dante and Chaucer (the *Teseida*, the *Filostrato*, and the *Trattatello*), while the sixth discusses the "recovery" of those works (including the *Fiammetta*, the *De casibus* and the *De mulieribus*) abandoned between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as works such as *Olympia* and the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, which had not been previously translated. Again, her attention to specific editions as encapsulations of prevailing attitudes about the individual work and Boccaccio's place in the canon more generally pays off, as she provides an illuminating snapshot of the development of Boccaccio as a subject of study, first in the shadow of Dante and Petrarch, and gradually in his own right as "a floating signifier in the cultural field; an everyman text for everyone [...] depending on the intentions and prejudices of his editors and translators" (396).

In her 2011 review of Rhiannon Daniels' study, Beatrice Arduini called for scholars to follow in Daniels' interdisciplinary footsteps, and Guyda Armstrong has most assuredly done so, not just in terms of manuscript and early print editions of Boccaccio's works, but situating later English translations within their own vivid and fascinating contexts. In doing so, she has not simply provided a history of Boccaccio in English; she has also effectively illustrated the slow evolution of Boccaccio's place within the larger literary canon. In spite of its encyclopaedic subject matter, Armstrong writes with clarity and purpose, and her frequent close-readings are both illuminating and engaging, making this book accessible to both the Boccaccio expert and readers who are perhaps less familiar with him and more familiar with his English adaptors, whether Chaucer, Lydgate, Rossetti, or countless others.

KAVITA MUDAN FINN INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR