

Locating Boccaccio in 2013 Introduction

The seven-hundredth anniversary of Boccaccio's birth, which was celebrated around the globe in 2013 with a wealth of academic and public events, signalled the continued importance of this fourteenth-century Tuscan author. As is often the case with such anniversaries, the increased critical attention also permitted the re-evaluation of Boccaccio's status and reception history as well as the revision and republication of his major works.¹ In Boccaccio's case this led to extensive reconsideration of his standing relative to Dante and Petrarch, the other two members of the *tre corone* of Italian literature.² In the UK, celebration centred around a three-day international conference, "Locating Boccaccio in 2013," which was held in Manchester Town Hall (10–12 July) and accompanied by an exhibition in the John Rylands Library (10 July–20 December), with a related public study day hosted by the British Library, entitled "Boccaccio & Company: An introduction to the *Decameron*" (30 September).³

The decision to host the UK-based celebrations in Manchester was in keeping with several other celebratory events that focused upon Boccaccio's links with specific regions, as in the case of the Veneto and Romagna, or with cities, such as Naples, Florence and Ravenna.⁴ Victorian Manchester often compared itself with late medieval and Renaissance Florence as a city that combined manufacture with cultured patronage. The works of Boccaccio were of particular interest to merchant collectors in both cities, which,

¹ For a summary of anniversary conferences and events from around the world see Cazalé Bérard and the listing on the website of the Ente Nazionale Giovanni Boccaccio: <<http://www.casaboccaccio.it/boccaccio2013.html>>. For the anniversary edition of the *Decameron*, see Quondam, Fiorilla and Alfano 2013 and the studies by Alfano 2014 and Cervigni 2013.

² See, for example: Rico 2012; Azzetta and Mazzucchi, 2014; Veglia, 2014.

³ At <<http://locatingboccaccio.wordpress.com>>, one can find the archived Locating Boccaccio conference blog.

⁴ See Alfano, D'Urso and Perriccioli Saggese 2012; Albanese and Pontari 2015; Formisano and Morosini 2015.

in the context of Manchester, accounts for the outstanding Boccaccio holdings in the John Rylands Library, including twenty-eight incunable and seventy-nine cinquecentine editions.⁵ One of the jewels of the collection is the Valdarfer *Decameron*, also known as the Roxburghe *Decameron*. The most famous text of nineteenth-century “bibliomania,” this 1471 Venetian printing of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* was the prize lot in the forty-six day auction of the library of the Duke of Roxburghe in 1812, selling for a record £2,260 after a famous bidding war. It remained the most expensive book sold at auction in the world until 1873.⁶

An account of the auction, and the battle between the second Earl Spencer and the Marquis of Blandford to secure the volume, was the centrepiece of Thomas Frognall Dibden’s 1817 *Bibliographical Decameron*, a work that took Boccaccio’s famous text as a model for examining the rivalry between the great aristocratic book collectors.⁷ Dibden’s deliberate use of the terminology of the Round Table and the joust sought to characterise their exploits in terms of medieval chivalry. The subsequent *fortuna* of the Roxburghe *Decameron*, however, can be read as an indicator of the extent of social and cultural change in nineteenth-century Britain, as the new money of the industrial revolution challenged the cultural hegemony of the landed gentry. It was the merchant wealth of the widow of Manchester’s first cotton millionaire, John Rylands, that saw the text migrate from the Earl Spencer’s library at Althorp House in Northamptonshire to Trafford in Manchester when Mrs Enriqueta Rylands purchased the Spencer Collection of over 40,000 volumes wholesale in 1892. Questions concerning the social and gender profile of Boccaccio’s readers are as germane to the nineteenth century as they are to the fifteenth. We were delighted, therefore, when the members of the Roxburghe Club, the UK’s leading society of bibliophiles (established in the wake of the famous auction in 1812), accepted an invitation to hold their bicentennial dinner and Annual General Meeting at the John Rylands Library on 16 July 2013. A highlight of the visit was a curatorial tour of the ‘Locating Boccaccio in 2013’ exhibition which featured their foundation text.⁸

“Locating Boccaccio in 2013” was thus envisaged as a programme of events and publications that would reflect our own interests in, and commitment to, the importance of the “material turn,” which then influenced

⁵ For a summary of holdings see <<http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/search-resources/guide-to-special-collections/atoz/giovanni-boccaccio-collection>>.

⁶ See <<http://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/s/rdc1el>>.

⁷ Dibden 1817.

⁸ See <<https://rylandscollections.wordpress.com/tag/roxburghe-club>>.

our decision to highlight the foundational roles played by the cultures of the book in the formation of Boccaccio's own culture, as well as in his reception. This is reflected in the keynote lectures: Professor Anne D. Hedeman's (University of Kansas) "The Role of the Visual in Translating Boccaccio: Paris, 1400–1420"; Professor Marco Corsi's (Sapienza Università di Roma) "Boccaccio tra Dante e Petrarca: manoscritti, *marginalia*, disegni"; and Professor Brian Richardson's (University of Leeds) "Locating the *Corbaccio* in Early Modern Europe." A public lecture by Sarah Bodman (University of the West of England), entitled "The Artist and the Book," opened the exhibition, which used the exemplary holdings of the Rylands Library to showcase the rich variety of the full range of Boccaccio's works, in the vernacular and in Latin, in verse and in prose, copied in manuscript and reproduced in print and digital media, over a span of time from the fourteenth century to the present day. The Manchester exhibition's focus on the reception of Boccaccio in print complemented the exhibition that was held at the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence in 2014, "Boccaccio autore e copista," which drew on that library's outstanding collection of Boccaccio autographs to focus on his manuscript production and personal library.⁹ In order to emphasize the continuing relevance and vitality of Boccaccio, we commissioned thirteen artists to create new books in response to the author and his works, and these books were exhibited alongside the historical books, before travelling on to a further exhibition in Bristol.¹⁰ In addition, and to mark the anniversary and conference, Graham Moss of Incline Press in Oldham, Greater Manchester, printed a limited edition of three biographies selected from Lord Morley's 1543 translation of *De mulieribus claris* (the autograph manuscript itself having been loaned to us for the exhibition by the Duke of Devonshire), accompanied by seven woodcuts reproduced from the John Rylands printed editions of the 1473 Ulm edition in Latin and the 1541 Augsburg edition in German.¹¹

During the close-up session at the John Rylands Library on Day 2 of the conference, we continued the emphasis on materiality by showcasing how new technologies are enabling the interrogation of the substrates and materials which were used in the manufacture of book objects. Stephen

⁹ See the catalogue edited by De Robertis, Monti, Petoletti, Tanturli and Zamponi. For surveys of each of Boccaccio's known texts, see Kirkham, Sherberg and Smarr 2013. Other events and studies that concentrated specifically on Boccaccio's autographs and scribal practices include Corsi 2013, Canettieri and Punzi 2013 and Bertelli and Cappi 2014.

¹⁰ See <<https://locatingboccaccio.wordpress.com/artists-books>> for an online exhibition of the artists' books.

¹¹ See Daniels and Armstrong 2013.

Mooney from the Collection Care Team at the Rylands presented the findings of the pigment analysis undertaken by Cheryl Porter on the illustrations from the Vérard 1493 Paris edition of *Les nobles et cleres dames*. Sarah Fiddymont and Matthew Collins from BioArCh at the University of York demonstrated how a new non-invasive sampling technique now enables us to interrogate parchment as a bioarchaeological text carrying DNA and microbial data that we are only now learning to read.¹² The same Vérard edition was amongst the first parchment books to be tested with the new technique, revealing the use of calf rather than goat as the textual substrate, the latter being the preferred medium for most Italian printers pre-1500. As part of the same session, Guyda Armstrong presented a previously unknown early fifteenth-century manuscript that she had identified as the A-version of Laurent de Premierfait's first French translation of Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium*, the *Des cas des nobles hommes et femmes*. This had been discovered uncatalogued by the library's curatorial staff shortly before the exhibition.¹³ The exhibition itself lives on in the booklet (which includes a formal catalogue of the artists' books), and in a short film that features a number of the Boccaccio manuscripts and printed editions from the John Rylands collection. You can find links to the Exhibition booklet and film on the index page of this special issue.

The aim of the Manchester events, collectively entitled "Locating Boccaccio in 2013," was therefore not simply to reflect the current state of Boccaccio studies, but rather to probe more provocatively into the reception of this canonical author and stimulate a lively debate about his critical position, particularly in relation to Dante and Petrarch, and the material *fortuna* of his printed works. The same impulse lay behind our approach to editing *The Cambridge Companion to Boccaccio* (2015) in which we sought to bring together the social and material facts of Boccaccio's textual cultures in a series of essays that began by examining Boccaccio's desk and ended by considering his trans-medial afterlife in contemporary culture.¹⁴ Surveying the field as we began to plan the conference and exhibition, it seemed that Boccaccio was often presented to lower-level undergraduates as one of the more "accessible" medieval authors, that the Anglophone world of Boccaccio studies included a good proportion of women scholars and that much of

¹² See <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBAXaLvGe5I>>.

¹³ see <<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-23259368>>.

¹⁴ Armstrong, Daniels and Milner, 2015. On Boccaccio's reception and afterlife see also Anselmi, Baffetti, Delcorno and Nobili, 2013; Holmes and Stewart, 2013; Garavelli, 2014; Ciabattoni, Filosa and Olson, 2015; Masoero, 2015; Ferrara, Ricci, and Boillet, 2015; Veglia 2015–16.

the scholarship was dominated by an interest in the vernacular, and literary Boccaccio. At the same time, we noted that there seemed to be significant and persistent lacunae in Boccaccio's historiography, which continued to overlook or underplay aspects of his contribution, such as the political dimensions of his ambassadorial and diplomatic roles in Florence and his role in the development of humanistic studies. We asked whether it was still relevant to consider Boccaccio studies as a unified field, or whether Italian and Anglophone scholarship had substantially different aims and motivations. The aim of the conference was to stimulate enquiry into the perceived marginality of Boccaccio in literary and historical studies, and attempt to relocate him temporally (in 2013 and in the past), materially (in the forms of his writings and the forms of their subsequent incarnations), geographically (within Italy and beyond) and critically, for the twenty-first century. The conference brought together some sixty scholars from around the world to discuss these questions within formal panels of research presentations, as well as over close-up sessions with manuscripts and printed books in the historic reading room of the Rylands Library, and the informal social occasions programmed throughout the three days.

This special issue of *Heliotropia* presents a selection of the papers delivered at the conference, and its contents and ordering reflect the shape and themes of the conference itself. We begin with our two keynote contributions from Marco Cursi and Brian Richardson, who each engage explicitly with the material focus of the event, with a focus first on Boccaccio's own manuscript practices (Cursi) and then on his more complex status in the print cultures of the early modern period (Richardson). Cursi's article finely outlines Boccaccio's career with a focus on the very large number of surviving autograph manuscripts, and his concerns as a book-producer, examining his writings page-by-page and penstroke-by-penstroke for a deep and detailed material portrait of the works. From Boccaccio's desk, Richardson moves us to a later point in the author's reception history, the sixteenth century, when Boccaccio occupies a nuanced position, admired and acknowledged as the greatest vernacular prose writer, while also the object of serious reservations for the social, moral, and linguistic propriety of his works. Richardson reads this reception through the *Corbaccio*, outlining how the complexities of this perceived "imprudence" shape its *fortuna* in manuscript and print cultures from the early Quattrocento to the end of the seventeenth century, in the Italian territories and far beyond in translation. These two keynotes introduce vital themes that will be reprised in many of the other papers: material expression, translation and transmission, and the controversies of Boccaccio's writing, which will remain a presiding concern

and, indeed, a major selling-point even in much later cross-genre and trans-medial adaptations.

Our two keynotes are followed by William Coleman's study of the presence (and non-presence) of the 1475 Ferrara edition of the *Teseida* in the University of Manchester's John Rylands Library. He takes these themes and locates them squarely in the iconic site of our event, telescoping time and space and highlighting the ambiguities and vagaries of the material record. The remaining contributions of this collection are then ordered in a roughly chronological and thematically grouped way, and cover the span from the first manuscript copies of the *Decameron*, produced during Boccaccio's lifetime, through to perhaps the last great iconic Boccaccian production, Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Decameron* (1971). The first articles are all in some way concerned with Boccaccio's own authorial (and material) concerns and his very early reception. Irene Cappelletti examines the implications of the particular presentation of the Decameronian selections found in the *frammento magliabechiano*, while Kenneth P. Clarke reads the physical manuscript of the Mannelli Codex for the three-way dynamic among the authorial text, interventionist scribe Francesco d'Amaretto Mannelli and the readers implied by the many scribal glosses. Laura Refe, William Robins, Cosimo Burgassi and Catherine Baxter all address questions of literary intertextuality and textual relations within Boccaccio's writings in their essays. Refe considers Boccaccio's own intra-textual mechanisms and auto-reprisals in his various biographical portraits of Petrarch, while Robins analyses his characteristic *ars combinatoria* through a reading of the tale of Bernabò and Ginevra (*Decameron* 2.9) and some of its presumed sources. Using traditional and computational analytical techniques, Burgassi examines the translation of sections of Livy's *Ab urbe condita*, the so-called *Decades*, which have conventionally been attributed to Boccaccio, while Catherine Baxter situates Boccaccio's (in)famously lascivious speech within the historical context of contemporary writings on the Sins of the Tongue and other literary genres such as the French *fabliaux*.

With Simone Ventura's essay, we extend the field of enquiry into Boccaccio's early transmission and translation beyond the Italian language and into the Quattrocento, with a comparative study of one Catalan and two Middle French translations of *Decameron* 10.10 that themselves derive from Petrarch's Latin rendering of the tale. Irene Iocca discusses two manuscript witnesses of the *Caccia di Diana* that were both made by a prisoner, thought to be Giovanni Ardinghelli, who made copies in the Stinche prison in Florence. Martina Mazzetti examines the transmission and survival of some of Boccaccio's characteristic book-forms and marginal graphic details

in the manuscript tradition of the *Teseida* through the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Remaining in the Quattrocento, Elisabetta Guerrieri analyses Giovanni Gherardi da Prato's *Paradiso degli Alberti* in relation to the *Decameron*, while Nicoletta Marcelli addresses the wider question of Boccaccio's position as a model for fifteenth-century Florentine literature, in practice and theory.

Our final four articles consider questions of adaptation, intertextuality and transmedial transformation in sixteenth-century drama, eighteenth-century science writing and twentieth-century film. Ambra Moroncini analyses Boccaccio's comic presence in Cinquecento drama, specifically Annibal Caro's *Gli Straccioni*, while Clorinda Donato demonstrates how Boccaccio was adopted as a model for prose scientific writing by anatomists and natural scientists writing about human physiology. To conclude, we have two essays on Pasolini's *Decameron*, from complementary perspectives: Paula Regina Siega addresses the film as a formal rereading, using classic reception study theories of Jauss and Iser, while Enrica Ferrara approaches the two works through the lens of authorship and authorial representations, identifying the film's character of Giotto as the key to Pasolini's performativity of gender and the figure of the gay author. The papers collected here offer a range of stimulating responses to Boccaccio and his works, from the resolutely material documents of his own text-objects, through to contemporary critical theory and the lenses through which we have now come to view his works.

With these words, we conclude this epic programme of anniversary events and textual productions. Many people have contributed to these in many ways, from our teachers to our students, but we would like to highlight in particular those whose contribution has been especially significant. First and foremost, we would like to thank: Julianne Simpson, John Hodgson and Caroline Checkley-Scott from the John Rylands Library for their help in hosting the conference and close-up sessions; Hannah Mansell, the conference and summer school administrator from the University of Manchester; Elaine Lee from Manchester City Council, and Ben Robson and Anne-Marie Stead, our conference interns. Both Paul Clarke and Kathryn Jenner helped chase down references and format parts of the conference proceedings, and Phil Smethurst was responsible for the production and editing of the "Locating Boccaccio in 2013" video. Jamie Robertson and Gwen Riley-Jones of the John Rylands Centre for Heritage Imaging photographed our books and the conference events for posterity, while we were able to prevail on Spencer Pearce for commemorative calligraphy. We are also grateful to the following organisations and societies for the financial assistance they

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