Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni. Volume 1: Maurizio Vitale, *La riscrittura del* Decameron: *I mutamenti linguistici*. Volume 2: Vittore Branca, *Variazioni stilistiche e narrative*, Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2002. ix + 571 pp. and 220 pp. respectively, ISBN 88–88133–13–0, price €60 for the indivisible set of two volumes.

Whereas we have no example of Dante's handwriting, not even of his signature, both Petrarch and Boccaccio have left us autograph manuscripts of the principal works they are remembered for. At first sight this happy chance might simplify our attempt to gauge what these authors really meant their works to be, but sometimes such authentic testimony makes things more complicated. Petrarch, for instance, left us his early attempt at the *Canzoniere*, the so-called "codice degli abbozzi" (Vat. Lat. 3196), but also worked obsessively on the poem cycle until the last years of his life, leaving a "final" but perhaps not definitive version (Vat. Lat. 3195). The poet, and consequently the poetry, had considerably changed in the meantime. Which of the many Petrarchs is the "real" Petrarch? The answer is, of course, as many autographs as you can lay your hands on. But comparisons require care.

The same thing happened with the *Decameron*. Boccaccio is thought to have composed his masterpiece in the years immediately following the Black Death, circa 1349–51, before gradually turning towards output in Latin, but he went on to make a fair copy of the *Decameron*, with substantial alterations, in the early 1370s. This copy has survived almost intact. The manuscript, from Berlin (Hamilton 90), recognised by Vittore Branca as autograph, has underlain all recent editions of the text. However, much of the manuscript tradition (about 30 MSS to Hamilton 90's 20 or so) of the *Decameron* clearly derives from a version in many respects quite different from this autograph, leading one to suspect that an earlier version of Boccaccio's masterpiece had been in circulation. Branca has made a strong case for a manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris 482) as being an immediate descendant of something much closer to Boccaccio's Urtext. Copied by an Italian merchant, Giovanni di Agnolo Capponi, in the second half of the 1360s when Giovanni was still a young man, the Parisian manuscript is also enlivened by drawings which are thought quite possibly to be by Boccaccio himself. Thus we have an unusual model of an author personally illustrating an antigraph or perhaps even an apograph of his own work.

If Capponi's copy is indeed a lot closer to Boccaccio's original intentions, then we are in the privileged position of being able to observe, in a text of quite exceptional length, the process of authorial variants in snap-

shots taken some twenty years apart. We can therefore indulge to a limited extent in genetic criticism, tracing moments in the evolution of the text, both as linguistics and as poetics, provided we can first remove the contamination of scribal variants due to Capponi's enthusiastic activity.

This is precisely what Maurizio Vitale sets out to do in the first volume of this study. Professor Vitale has been active and prominent in the history of the Italian language for well over half a century, but this does not prevent him from making imaginative, indeed innovative use of digital technology, in this case exploiting the textual database Letteratura italiana Zanichelli (LIZ). Conceived primarily as a searchable archive of literary texts, LIZ has been put to excellent alternative use by Vitale as a structured corpus of linguistic phenomena by which to compare both Capponi's and Boccaccio's *usus scribendi* with that of a wide sample of contemporaries.

Vitale begins by identifying those elements of the Paris MS which are almost certainly the result of Capponi's intervention as a copyist. He does this by sifting through the variants between the Paris and Berlin texts, highlighting for elimination those popular Florentine forms, almost the language of the street, which cannot be found in any other works by Boccaccio (of which a number, fortunately, are autograph). The examination is systematic, starting with vowels, then consonants, moving on to morphology and finishing with syntax. Each phenomenon is dealt with in a dense but admirably clear exposition, replete with examples, and finishing up invariably with a summary sentence. As a model for a linguistic reference work, the layout and ease of use are outstanding, despite the complexity of the data. Some of the entries are little jewels, as with the treatment of the variants "fisolofi" and "fisofoli" (<filosofi), pp. 58–59, where Boccaccio's coy popularising form is outdone unconsciously by a genuinely popular Capponi.

There then follows a short but necessary section on those variants which do not seem to be clear evidence either way, for the author or the scribe. Again, the examination is structured from first principles, vocalism and consonantism, and arrives at an analysis of syntax. This short section, coupled with the previous more substantial examination of Capponi's almost certain input, allows all subsequent discussion in the volume to be based on differences imputable to Boccaccio's own change of heart. The remainder of the study, therefore, is a disciplined, rigorous comparison of the earlier and later *Decamerons* against a background of late Duecento and Trecento linguistic usage. Not only does it provide a real "grammar of the *Decameron*" (as opposed to Todorov's famously narratological one), but it offers an extraordinarily rich discussion of register — popular, elite,

local, classicising, etc. — capable of being applied to other authors and texts as well. It is a monumental achievement.

Compared to the text represented by Paris 482, the Berlin Hamilton 90 *Decameron* shows an older and wiser Boccaccio avoiding ostentatious, "high," and frequently archly antiquated forms (which had peppered his youthful works) in favour of a language closer to current everyday usage. It also shows him opting for flow, rather than artifice, when building his periods. In other words, Vitale argues that Boccaccio in his maturity was showing off less and trying (or allowing himself) to be more natural.

This systemic change, which Vitale catalogues with awesomely telling detail, seems initially to go counter to the received idea of a first Boccaccio as carefree vernacular fabulist followed by a second, erudite Boccaccio intent on proving his moralistic and scholarly credentials in literary essays in high culture. In fact, the two go together, for in producing his major Latin works of biography and mythology, Boccaccio finally unburdened himself of the need to prove his status as *littérateur*, purely on the basis of his works in the vernacular. The *Decameron* could finally develop free of the stylistic hang-ups and over-compensation which had occasionally marred his youthful efforts in the Florentine tongue. This evolution was not confined to the *Decameron*, and had perhaps been fermenting in Boccaccio's mind for some time, provoking a gradual shift in his Latin style from Apuleius to Livy, and in his vernacular writing from the pre-stilnovisti towards more sober contemporary styles (though Apuleius makes a late come-back in the *Corbaccio* and the second redaction of the *Decameron*). Perhaps proof, if proof were needed, of the increase in self-confidence and cultural autonomy can be found in Boccaccio's progressive abandonment of the stratagem of claiming that his works were the re-writing of ancient stories or translations of antique texts.

However, in "flattening" his linguistic palette and expressive register, Boccaccio also ran the risk of producing text of excessive homogeneity. So along with the purposeful "democratisation" of the *Decameron*, in Berlin Hamilton 90, we also now see a compensatory search for *varietas* as a conscious element of discourse. To give some flavour of the rich pickings in the main body of the study, it is worth picking out some examples from the two main sections in which the examination is divided. Part one deals with the phenomenon of linguistic levelling, whereas part two deals with the compensatory search for variety and expression.

The evidence for linguistic levelling is remorseless and relentless. Boccaccio's earlier preference for a posh but antiquated "giovine" (found in the *Teseida* as well as in the Paris *Decameron*) as opposed to the more popular and contemporary "giovane" pointedly used in the Berlin auto-

graph (pp. 132–33) is typical of the kind of mellowing or flattening the text underwent in the course of the two decades separating the versions. Even banal questions like the specific form of the third person plural of the *passato remoto* can be seen in this light, as Boccaccio massively if not entirely consistently moves from the by now affected form "cominciaro" to the more contemporary "cominciarono" (pp. 160–61). Even cries of anguish can be seen in this light, as Boccaccio's interjection moves from a distinctly old fashioned and poetic "omè" to a more common-or-garden "oimè" (pp. 181–82). Similarly, in syntactical terms, Boccaccio as he gets older shows an increasing propensity to use the article with the names of people, coming closer to spoken Florentine norms (p. 184). Only in a few cases, such as the Provençalising "amore" in the feminine in the Paris MS, compared with the less marked masculine gender in the Berlin text, is it not possible to prove a consistent intent, and the probability of scribal inattention has to be entertained. Finally, the richly exemplified section on topology, or word order (pp. 299–313), where Vitale convincingly sets out the case for Boccaccio's increasing intolerance for showy *ordo artificialis* and for highly emphatic displacement, deserves a read for its own sake, and constitutes one of the most fascinating insights into Boccaccio's evolution as a vernacular prose writer.

The second section deals with those areas where Boccaccio, driven by a more mature sense of the poetics of *variatio*, now readmits, for comic or tragic intent (or for the sheer joy of playful expressivity), punctual insertions of the kinds of marked language he had systematically eliminated as the basic, load-bearing continuity of the *Decameron*. The result, which we have all experienced as readers, is that these conscious, frequently provocative choices stand out all the more effectively, giving an energy and a power to the text which relentless linguistic hyperbole could never have achieved.

Because the language adopted in these "purple patches" is characterised by its exceptionality, the direction in which the register can travel is not fixed. This means that the discussion in this section of Vitale's study loses some of the massive coherence shown earlier, but it gains, by contrast, in subtlety. Each case is taken on its merits, and, though the analysis is organised into the standard parts of a historical descriptive grammar, the results approach those of a critical work on style.

Central to the robustness of Vitale's thesis here is that Boccaccio's emendatory behaviour is not consistent across the whole text, but is concentrated in particular narrative contexts. Thus in the oscillation between the forms "orrevole" and "onorevole" (pp. 361–62), the frequency of the older, popular form with assimilation is greater in the stories of Buf-

falmacco and Calandrino, where a patina of "old time" Florence needs to be created, whereas elsewhere the more cultivated "onorevole" is used. Similarly, Boccaccio was normally in the habit of using the form of the conditional in "sarebbe," but just occasionally, in contexts with a tragically lyric resonance (such as II.8.3), he would use the more marked poetic form "saria" (pp. 396–97). Similar sophisticated alterations can be seen in the choice of verbal mood, where indicative and subjunctive are swapped for stylistic reasons, and not just for syntactic ones (pp. 527–30). These observations by Vitale really take one into Boccaccio's mind as he chews over his text, hesitating, doubting and taking the plunge.

The last, short section of Vitale's study concerns the "'ratio' correttoria," or rationale underlying the changes. It is a kind of "dissertation abstract," summarising the kinds of change operated. Whereas in the first version of the *Decameron*, the various marked usages were part of an antiquarian, slightly precious, but essentially homogeneous literary koiné, elaborated over repeated experiences in different genres in the preceding years of apprenticeship, the second redaction is characterised by generally plain language contextually highlighted by a focused, punctual use of marked features. These departures are now used for specific narrative ends, and lend the text what we now appreciate most, its fantastic modulation of language.

Vittore Branca's contribution, in the second volume, comes from an entirely different tradition, that of the textual scholar and critic. This shows immediately in the layout, which after a brief introduction, supplies a long bi-columnar list of variants between the two versions, and then goes on to discuss, with selected examples, their rationale and narrative context.

Branca begins by cautioning the reader. The Paris MS still awaits a critical edition, and the Berlin 90 edition needs revising to remove some hundreds of printing errors. So the work here is preliminary, and scientifically definitive results are not yet available. He then suggests that an edition with face-to-face text, such as that carried out for the 1944 Crusca edition of the *Amorosa visione*, be published. Such an initiative is to be welcomed, but in this digital age, a hyper-linked edition of the two texts would surely be preferable, and would undoubtedly encourage the new generation of researchers and scholars. Branca then goes on to show, with typical modesty, that literary critical acumen can add in a single sentence something which would not appear in over five hundred pages of historical grammar. The corrections and alterations Boccaccio makes to the Paris text in the Berlin one are front-loaded, and become increasingly perfunctory towards the end. In part this was a question of space: Boccaccio was

trying to cram the remaining text into what parchment he had left. But in part it betrays perhaps waning energies or enthusiasm. One might add that the exceptional tenth day, with its accent on liberality and nobility, might have discouraged such a root and branch attempt to dislodge embedded marked forms in favour of punctual ones.

Branca's criterion for including alterations in his list of variants is that they must introduce a substantial change of meaning, style or emphasis. He is not, therefore, as concerned as Vitale in the minutiae of vocalism or of whether to use transitive or intransitive forms of verbs, though his findings corroborate those of his colleague. Whereas Vitale's discussions were ordered by a standard "historical grammar" layout, Branca proceeds by the order of the text. The two schemas in practice are highly complementary, especially if combined with the generous indices. Those parts of the text missing in Hamilton 90 are integrated with the relevant sections of Mannelli's copy of it.

After the listings, which represent a Herculean labour by both Vittore and Olga Branca, come the commentaries. These are brief, but concentrate a lifetime's reading and study. If Vitale offers a picture of an author somewhat impatient with his previous means of expression, Branca fills in the gaps, showing a Boccaccio who was reading his earlier text like a copy-editor, removing incoherence, factual mistakes, logical inconsistencies. Thus, when the bumptious doctor, Maestro Simone, reminisces on his graduation ceremony, Boccaccio corrects the details, removing a reference to the hood, but keeping the gown, for the hood was not part of the ceremony, per se, but rather an item of the professional garb once qualified (pp. 195–96). Similarly, in the conclusion to the story of the scholar and the widow (VIII.7), Boccaccio adjusts the ambulance service, offering a stretcher only to the maid, whose femur is broken, rather than to the widow, who, though suffering from second degree burns, can be carried on the farmer's back (p. 195). In the famous tale of Griselda (X.10), Boccaccio realises as he revises the *Decameron* that Griselda's daughter must have been conceived out of wedlock if she returns aged thirteen to a mother who has been married for thirteen years. The correction to "tredici anni o più" is therefore a piece of editorial hygiene in an exemplary novella (p. 197).

There then follows a short section of discussion of areas of the text where cancellation or alteration shows the degree of involvement of the corrector when reading the text of the Paris MS. This section is really present only to justify the authenticity of the Berlin MS as a radical revision of the Paris one. Another short section details the kinds of disattention which could creep into the process, but without disastrous consequences for the text. After these two complementary parentheses, Branca then concludes

the discussion of the variants with a series of observations on Boccaccio's late expressivity, starting with his colourful use of localisms and sectional usage (such as con-man's language, or uneducated speech), and going on to a fascinating discussion of historical and mercantile allusions, which show that even in old age, Boccaccio was acutely aware of current affairs, and wished to anchor his narrative in an imaginary framework of real events. Branca finishes off with a discussion of the Paris text, arguing convincingly that it displays all the characteristics of Boccaccio's *usus scribendi* in the pre-1350 works.

This selfless labour, by two veterans of Italian language and literature, is a major contribution to our understanding of how Boccaccio wrote (and perhaps more importantly how he read and re-read!) in the vernacular. Coupled with the publication of a similarly important work on Boccaccio's writing in Latin by Vittorio Zaccaria (*Boccaccio narratore, storico, moralista e mitografo*, Florence: Olschki, 2001), students of the greatest prose writer of the Trecento can now obtain an overall picture for the first time. But in acquiring it, through reading Vitale and Branca, they will get an unparalleled wider grounding in the language and stylistics of fourteenth-century Italian, generally, and also observe an exemplary model of how to offer the results in a user-friendly form.

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