

Rhiannon Daniels. *Boccaccio and the Book. Production and Reading in Italy 1340-1520*. Oxford: Legenda, 2009. Pp. 242. £45. ISBN: 978-19-065-4049-4.

Combining a study of both manuscripts and early printed books of the *Teseida*, *Decameron* and *De mulieribus claris*, Rhiannon Daniels offers a comprehensive picture of the reading process and the reception of Boccaccio's selected works during the gradual shift from manuscript to printed culture. Her contribution challenges the traditional method of evaluating Boccaccio's reception, which relies mainly on critical evidence. She instead adopts an approach based on the analysis of material and paratextual evidence, since all the areas of presentation discussed refer to the verifiable data presented in the Appendices. This emphasis characterizes the method broadly defined by Daniels as a "book-historical" approach (1), which illustrates the dynamic interchange between the producers of the text (such as the author, scribe, printer or editor) and the reader during Boccaccio's successful but complex reception.

Given that the analysis of material features such as binding and support material, together with paratexts such as prefaces and indexes, has only recently become an accepted field of reception studies, Daniels dedicates her first chapter ("Authorship, Publication and the Importance of Materiality") to a discussion of her methodological models and the role of the author in readership studies. She then considers the context in which Boccaccio's texts were produced and disseminated in medieval and Renaissance Italy and defines the terms used in book-historical research, accompanying them with some words on their significance. Though Daniels does indeed mention important studies in her opening chapter, there are others that could have been profitably added to her considerations, including: Wayne Storey's study, entitled *Transcription and Visual Poetics in the Early Italian Lyric* (1993), of the early lyric anthologies and the hermeneutics of scribal/authorial *compilation*; Furio Brugnolo's "Testo e paratesto: la presentazione del testo fra Medioevo e Rinascimento," in *Intorno al testo. Tipologie del corredo esegetico e soluzioni editoriali* (2003); and *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta. Codice Vat. lat. 3195* (2004), which was co-edited by the same two scholars.

Especially with regard to the future of book-historical research on Boccaccio, Daniels' clear use of terminology and definitions throughout this volume must be praised, both for her use of new terms, such as "text-object," which she uses to refer to "a text manifested in its material container which acts as a medium for the text, whether manuscript or printed" (15), and for often inconsistently used terms, such as "paratext," which in Dan-

iels always refers to “purely textual elements which are related to Boccaccio’s text and added either by the author, or by one of the subsequent producers of the text-object,” as distinguished from traces of readings, or marginalia (32–33).

Having outlined in her introduction and first chapter the authorial role that Boccaccio assumes, for instance in the 1373 letter to his friend and patron Mainardo Cavalcanti, and the ways in which he addresses his readers in the *Teseida*, *Decameron* and *De mulieribus*, Daniels devotes the remaining three chapters and the appendices to recovering the historical readership of the selected works. To each of the three texts Daniels dedicates a chapter wherein she first highlights the significance of the elements of the manuscript or printed book (such as size, layout, decoration and script or type) in relation to the social, cultural and economic status of the reader. Second, Daniels evaluates paratexts for the valuable insights they afford into editorial practices and marketing techniques, factors that influence and inform reception. Lastly, she discusses traces of reading, such as marginalia, as rare and significant records of readers’ responses to the literary text at hand.

The selected timeframe, 1340–1520, allows Daniels to examine evidence of Boccaccio’s reception in both manuscripts and printed books, thus avoiding the unfortunately common tendency to define studies in book history or reception in terms of one medium or the other. In considering both manuscripts and printed books, Daniels at once considers the impact of production technology on the reading process and offers valuable reflections on the issue of materiality. The outside limit of this range of years stops short of the 1525 publication of Pietro Bembo’s *Prose della volgar lingua* in 1525, which Daniels correctly identifies as the ushering in of a new stage in the reception of Boccaccio as a linguistic model.

Daniels’ interest in the *Teseida* and *De mulieribus*, which may not be familiar to as many readers as the *Decameron*, challenges the focus on the *centonovelle* in twentieth-century criticism, particularly in Vittore Branca’s extensive contributions on the manuscript tradition of the *Decameron*. As she points out in the introduction, the virtual exclusion of the so-called minor works is particularly dangerous in reception studies, since many of these “minor” texts may have been the object of “major” interest in previous centuries (2). It should be noted, however, that there has been increasing critical interest in Boccaccio’s minor works, especially in the last decade, thanks to the contributions of Marco Corsi, Victoria Kirkham and Margaret Franklin, upon which Daniels builds her research.

The focus on material evidence not only confirms the conclusions generated by critical evidence, but also reveals aspects of Boccaccio’s recep-

tion that might otherwise have been hidden and/or overlooked. Although readers of the *Teseida* were comprised within a wide range of social classes, from merchants to noblemen, Daniels elaborates convincing arguments in her third chapter that suggest the *Teseida* was mostly enjoyed by merchants who must have thought of it as popular reading material. That said, however, there is little indication that the *Teseida* was read in the same manner as that described by Branca for the *Decameron*, given that the blank leaves in *Teseida* manuscripts do not bear traces of financial transactions.

It is significant, furthermore, that Marco Cursi's recent studies challenge Branca's conclusions in regard to the transmission of the *Decameron* primarily within the merchant class and to the existence of large numbers of "copisti per passione." Instead, Cursi's investigations of the manuscripts emphasize that many scribes were professionals ("copisti a prezzo"), albeit often poorly paid copyists who produced low-quality exemplars. Daniels also points out that the readership of the *Decameron* was not as homogeneous as Branca had claimed, even if humanistic interest in it seems not to have been sparked until quite late in the fifteenth century. Spurred on by printers, Boccaccio's readership during the sixteenth century diversified to the extent that it is possible to speak of two distinct types of books that satisfied two types of readers. By that time, some paratexts and other traces of readings reveal readers primarily interested in the quality of Boccaccio's prose rather than the content of his *novelle*.

This study additionally aims to contextualize evidence concerning the *Decameron* (chapter III) by comparing it to comparable materials related to the *Teseida* (chapter II) and to the *De mulieribus* (chapter IV) in order to enhance our understanding of Boccaccio's reception on a wider scale. In Daniels' fourth chapter, we discover that the *De mulieribus* is the most bountifully annotated text and that its manuscripts contain the greatest quantity of marginalia, the traces of reading most likely to be associated with learned activity. This finding supports the impression transmitted by past humanistic critical responses that the Latin work enjoyed a higher status than many of Boccaccio's vernacular works.

The early print history of the *Decameron* in particular, but also that of the *Teseida* and *De mulieribus*, illustrates how the demand from competition and marketing, combined with growing numbers of readers, led printers and editors to increase their offerings of paratexts, which came to include a higher proportion of non-authorial texts. The inclusion of Boccaccio's own biography among these additional materials mirrors the changing perception of poets and artists in the new climate of the Renaissance, a time when their medieval status as anonymous craftsmen slowly gave way,

thanks to the new emphasis on the individual and his achievements, to a public standing as celebrated creators.

Here at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, one may be encouraged to hope that future studies on the manuscripts and printed editions of medieval artifacts, such as Boccaccio's *Teseida*, *Decameron* and *De mulieribus*, will be inspired by Daniels' study (and by the descriptions presented in her Appendices) and will, as a result, further bolster the use of critical evidence and philological analyses into our philological and interpretative assessments — not only of these three texts but of many others as well.

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