

MANCHESTER  
1824

The University of Manchester  
The John Rylands Library

# Locating Boccaccio in 2013

Locating Boccaccio in 2013  
11 July to 20 December 2013  
Mon 12.00 – 5.00  
Tue – Sat 10.00 – 5.00  
Sun 12.00 – 5.00

The John Rylands Library  
The University of Manchester  
150 Deansgate, Manchester, M3 3EH

Designed by Epigram 0161 237 9660





# Contents

Locating Boccaccio in 2013	2
The Life of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375)	3
Tales through Time	4
Boccaccio and Women	6
Boccaccio as Mediator	8
Transmissions and Transformations	10
Innovations in Print	12
Censorship and Erotica	14
Aesthetics of the Historic Book	16
Boccaccio in Manchester	18
Boccaccio and the Artists' Book	20
Further Reading and Resources	28
Acknowledgements	29



# Locating Boccaccio in 2013

2013 is the 700th anniversary of Boccaccio's birth, and this occasion offers us the opportunity not only to commemorate this great author and his works, but also to reflect upon his legacy and meanings today. The exhibition forms part of a series of events around the world celebrating Boccaccio in 2013 and is accompanied by an international conference held at the historic Manchester Town Hall, from 10-12 July 2013.

But where is Boccaccio in 2013? Who is he now, and what is his significance in the



Pallas Athena,  
*De mulieribus claris*  
(Ulm, 1473), fol. 8v

twenty-first century? His status as one of the *tre corone* (three crowns) of Italian medieval literature, alongside Dante and Petrarch is unchallenged, yet he is often perceived as the lesser figure of the three. Rather than simply defining Boccaccio in automatic relation to the other great men in his life, then, we seek to re-present him as a central figure in the classical revival, and innovator in the writing of literary prose. In this way, we affirm his achievements and innovations in their own right. His intellectual interest in gendered discourse, and the proliferation of female characters and gendered themes, has no doubt contributed to his cultural downgrading, and his personification as a 'ladies' man', or even as the author of medieval chick lit. While it would be historically anachronistic to understand Boccaccio as a feminist, we nonetheless see this attention to gender as one of his great strengths, and a signifier of his continuing relevance on this 700th anniversary.

Our exhibition locates Boccaccio and his works in different times, languages and places, from the fourteenth century to the present day, in manuscript, print, and beyond. Every one of his works is represented in some form in the exhibition, and we are able to showcase the amazing variety of forms his works have taken, using the remarkable resources of the Rylands. His enduring ability to inspire is demonstrated in the rich range of artists' books commissioned for this anniversary.

# The Life of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375)

Giovanni Boccaccio was born in 1313, either in Florence or nearby Certaldo, the son of a merchant who worked for the famous Bardi company. In 1327 the young Boccaccio moved to Naples to join his father who was posted there. As a trainee merchant Boccaccio learnt the basic skills of arithmetic and accounting before commencing training as a canon lawyer. On gaining access to the court of King Robert of Anjou, Boccaccio met a host of learned scholars who shared his interest in the Latin classics and from then on dedicated himself to the study of literature and poetry, both classical and chivalric.

His earliest works date from this Neapolitan period and include the *Caccia di Diana* (1334), *Filostrato* (1335) and *Filocolo* (1338), and demonstrate Boccaccio's interest in combining a wide range of literary sources from French romance to Latin and Italian poetic and historical works. Between 1341-48, on returning to Florence, he continued to write poetic and prose works such as the *Teseida*, *Amorosa visione*, *Comedia delle Ninfe* and the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* before commencing work on the *Decameron* in 1348, the year of the Black Death.

In the 1350 and 1360s Boccaccio was an active civic office holder and communal diplomat, sent on important political and cultural missions to popes and emperors, and he twice visited Petrarch in Padua and Milan. During this period he completed the *Decameron*, wrote his first version of



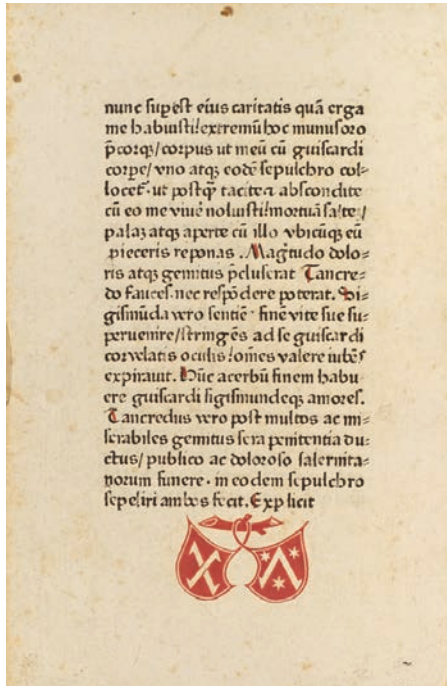
Author portrait,  
*Decameron*  
(Venice: 1546),  
fol. \*3v

the *Life of Dante* and began two of his Latin encyclopedic works, the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* and the *De casibus virorum illustrium*. Between 1360-65 Boccaccio withdrew from political life on the exile of his friends, including Pino de' Rossi to whom he penned a famous letter of consolation. In 1361 he began the *De mulieribus claris* and in 1365 wrote the misogynist tale *Corbaccio*. Boccaccio's interests as a scholar and writer are clearly reflected in his autograph notebooks, the so-called *zibaldoni*, into which he copied classical and romance material. In 1373 he began a series of public lectures in Florence on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, which remained incomplete on his death in December 1375.

Boccaccio's legacy as literary innovator, polymath, and transformational cultural mediator lives on!



# Tales Through Time

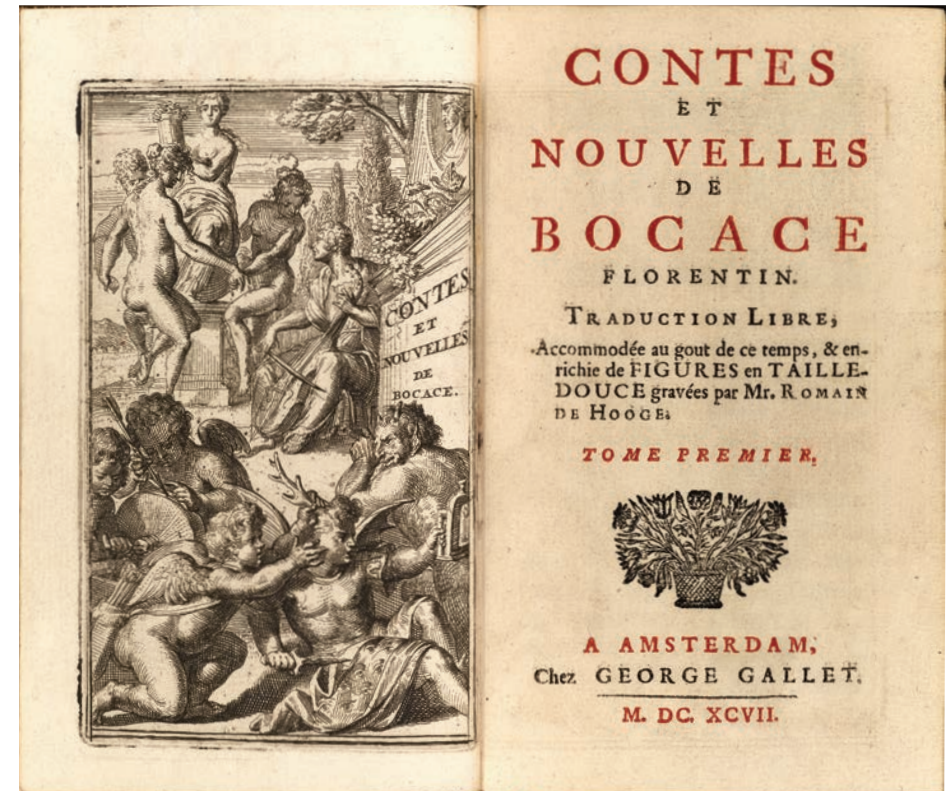


Leonardo Bruni's Latin translation of Dec. IV, 1: *De duobus amantibus* (Mainz, 1470)

Boccaccio's masterpiece, the *Decameron*, is a collection of 100 tales, told by a group of young noble men and women over ten days. Enormously popular since its first publication in the fourteenth century, it has been remade and reimagined for many different readerships.

Boccaccio's works were transmitted to France very soon after his death, and the first French translation of the *Decameron* was made by Laurent de Premierfait (who also translated the *De casibus*) around 1414. A new French translation was made by Antoine Le Maçon in the 1540s, and published as a sumptuous folio volume with rich paratextual framework and illustrations. It was also printed in German, Spanish, and Dutch translation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The first full English translation did not appear until 1620, and incorporated French woodcuts into its design to signal the best of continental printing practices. It has been translated into many more languages since, and a selection of stories were translated into Welsh by the former Serena Professor of Italian at the University of Manchester, T. Gwynfor Griffith (1951).

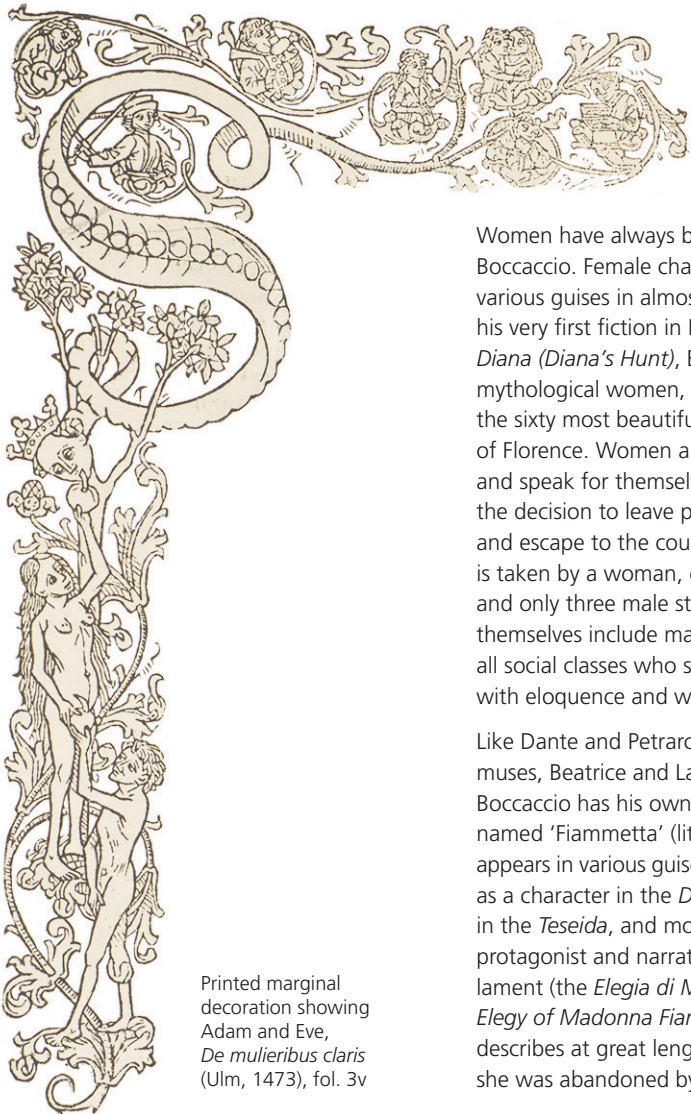
From the advent of print onwards, editions of the *Decameron* have proliferated in many different formats designed for different readerships, ranging in size from small pocket editions to larger prestige volumes. But whether the text appears as a prestige publication made for royal readers, or as a cheap post-war paperback, as a tiny sixteenth-century pocket edition or a heritage book club edition, the enduring ingenuity and insight of these stories continue to resonate across time and space.



*Contes et nouvelles* (Amsterdam, 1697)



# Boccaccio and Women



Printed marginal decoration showing Adam and Eve, *De mulieribus claris* (Ulm, 1473), fol. 3v

Women have always been associated with Boccaccio. Female characters appear in various guises in almost all of his works. In his very first fiction in Italian, the *Caccia di Diana* (*Diana's Hunt*), Boccaccio features mythological women, and also celebrates the sixty most beautiful women in the city of Florence. Women also have strong voices and speak for themselves. In the *Decameron* the decision to leave plague-ridden Florence and escape to the countryside to tell stories is taken by a woman, one of seven female and only three male storytellers. The stories themselves include many feisty women from all social classes who stand up for themselves with eloquence and wit.

Like Dante and Petrarch with their female muses, Beatrice and Laura respectively, Boccaccio has his own muse, most commonly named 'Fiammetta' (little flame). Fiammetta appears in various guises throughout his works, as a character in the *Decameron*, a dedicatee in the *Teseida*, and most significantly as the protagonist and narrator of her own extended lament (the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*/ *Elegy of Madonna Fiammetta*), in which she describes at great length the manner in which she was abandoned by her lover.

Boccaccio is pioneering in his location of women within new and experimental literary forms, creating a collection of biographies of famous women (*De mulieribus claris*/ *On Famous Women*) to complement the biographies of famous men composed from antiquity onwards. Such was the success of this work that it sparked a new tradition of defending women within Italy, and was also rapidly diffused across Europe in both Latin and lavishly illustrated translated editions.

Although Boccaccio has been championed as a lover of women, his works also contain several less than complimentary portraits drawn from the misogynist tradition. *De mulieribus claris* includes examples of female wantonness and cruelty, and moralizing outbursts on virtues such as female chastity.

The widow in Day VIII, story 7 of the *Decameron* is treated to a vicious series of punishments, including being left naked under the searing Tuscan sun and at the mercy of gadflies for an entire day, because she dared to trick a scholar. The *Corbaccio* is an amplification of this theme, wherein the narrator takes his revenge on the widow who mistreated him by enjoying a dream-vision in which her dead husband makes one of the most virulent antifeminist speeches in medieval literature.

The multiplicity of Boccaccio's representations of women reflects the range of different possible interpretations of his texts. The contradictory and often ironic nature of his narrators' attitudes has created an ongoing discussion over Boccaccio's position on the scale from antifeminism to protofeminism.



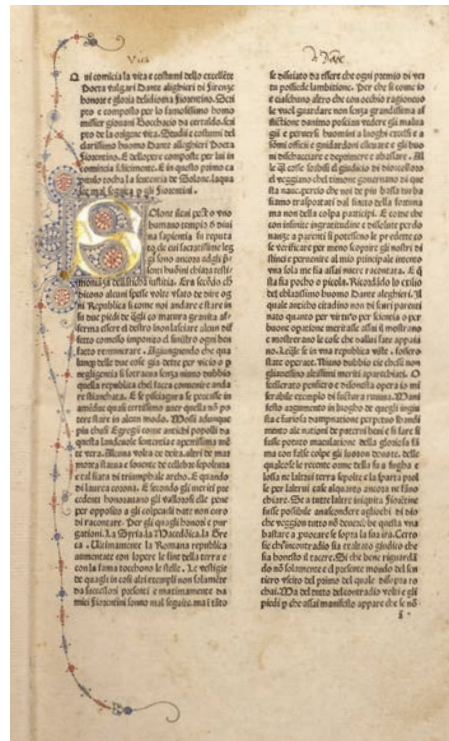
Colophon vignette, *Amorous Fiammetta* (London, 1929)



# Boccaccio as Mediator

Boccaccio occupies a central role as one of the key mediators between medieval and classical learning and literature. He functions as a go-between in the same way as Prince Galahalt, after whom Boccaccio subtitled the *Decameron*, on account of Galahalt's role in bringing together Lancelot and Guinevere. Yet in addition to writing works which purported to bring lovers together, Boccaccio's activity as author saw him assuming the roles of compiler, commentator, copyist and scribe. His sponsorship of the revived interest in classical learning, his fusion of medieval chivalric writing with civic orientated prose forms; his use of numerous literary registers from the encyclopaedic Latin works to vernacular poetry in *terza rima* and his sponsorship of Greek and the first translations of Homer into Latin all testify to his status as one of the most important cultural brokers and innovators of the late medieval period. In addition he was central to the critical reception and status afforded to both Dante and Petrarch. He wrote biographies of both authors early in his career, his *Life of Petrarch* in 1342 and his *Life of Dante* in 1351. Towards the end of his life he returned to Dante, producing a partial commentary on the *Divine Comedy* that he gave as public lectures in Florence in the late 1370s. His status as correspondent and friend of Petrarch (often held to be the founding figure of Renaissance humanism) has recently been re-evaluated, moving Boccaccio out of the shadow of his self-proclaimed master.

Significantly, Boccaccio also mediated his own works, constantly editing, rewriting, glossing and copying his texts in addition to collecting together texts and excerpts by classical and medieval authors in notebooks (*zibaldoni*) and forming his own collection of books that he lent to fellow scholars.



Boccaccio's *Life of Dante*, in Dante's *Commedia* (Venice, 1477), fol. 1r



*De mulieribus claris* (Augsburg, 1541), fol. A6v



# Transmissions and Transformations



John Lydgate's  
*Fall of Princes*  
(English version of the  
*Decasibus*), English  
MS 2, fol. 1r



*Fall of Princes* (London, 1494)

Boccaccio's works enjoyed almost instantaneous success and spread rapidly throughout Europe. During Boccaccio's own lifetime Petrarch translated the tale of Patient Griselda (Day X, story 10) into Latin. He was followed by the famous humanist Chancellor of Florence, Leonardo Bruni, in the early fifteenth-century, who wrote a Latin adaptation of the tale of Ghismonda and Guiscardo (Day IV, story 1). The tradition of publishing and adapting individual tales from the *Decameron* still endures. In France, Boccaccio's stories of chivalry and love found

a ready audience and the *Decameron* was translated into French in 1414, by Laurent de Premierfait working from an earlier Latin translation of the text, into Catalan in 1429 and German in 1473.

Boccaccio's Latin works also spread quickly across the continent. The *De mulieribus claris* was translated into French and English and reproduced in both manuscript and early printed form. His *De casibus virorum illustrium* was translated into Castilian by the statesman and scholar Pedro López de Ayala (1332-1407) the Grand Chancellor of Castile under King Henry III, testifying to the close links between the trading centres of Florence and Castile in the late medieval period.

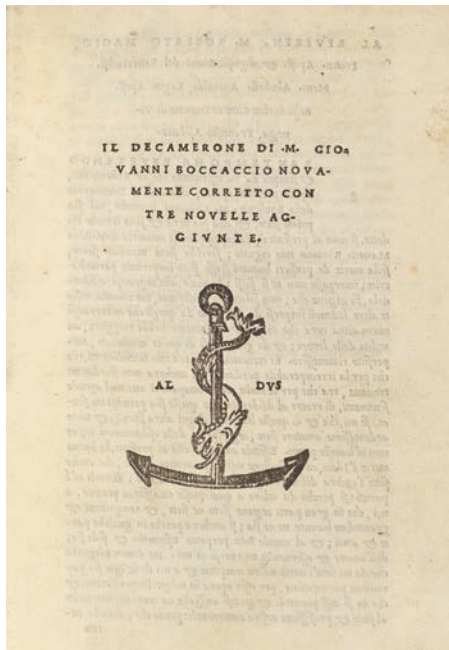
The Parisian edition of Boccaccio's *Genealogy of the Gentile Gods* on display here was produced by a German printer and French bookseller and was dedicated to another German printer, Gottfried Hittorp, by a Dutch scholar Joannes Kierherus. This illustrates perfectly how the network of printers, booksellers, editors, and scholars was a truly European-wide enterprise by the early sixteenth century.

Boccaccio's texts continue to be rendered in new fictive, cinematic and digital forms, from Pasolini's film version of the *Decameron* (1971) to the ongoing Brown University *Decameron Web* project.



# Innovations in Print

The German goldsmith Johann Gutenberg is usually credited with being the first in Western Europe to print books using moveable metal type. His invention quickly spread from Germany into Italy, where printed books appeared as early as the 1460s. Boccaccio's works were among some of the first vernacular texts to appear using the new technology, often selected as one of the first texts to be printed by the many

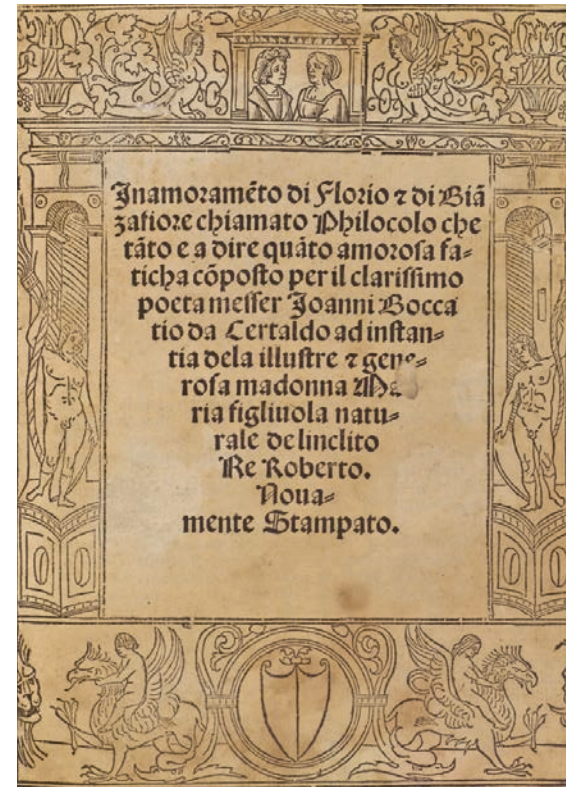


Title page with Aldine anchor, *Decameron* (Venice, 1522), fol. 1r

newly established print shops that were cropping up across Italy. The first edition of the *Decameron* was probably printed in Naples around 1470, but Venice very quickly established itself as the main centre for the printing industry in early modern Italy and the vast majority of sixteenth-century editions of the *Decameron* were produced by print shops based in Venice.

Printing houses often stayed within the control of the same family, who might print a whole series of works by the same author, sometimes producing several revised editions of the same work if it proved profitable. In the mid-1550s, the Venetian printer Gabriele Giolito brought out multiple editions of the *Decameron* in the same year, with each edition shaped to suit different readers through the inclusion of various supporting notes. Nearly two centuries after Boccaccio's death, readers were offered supplementary information about the author, often in the form of portraits and biographies, as well as guidance on how to write in Italian like a fourteenth-century Tuscan author, including lists of vocabulary used by Boccaccio.

Developments in the provision of supplementary material (such as word lists), together with the physical form of the book (for example, its size and page design), tell us much about the ways in which print technologies change across time, as well as about the ways in which books reflect the expectations and habits of their readers.



*Filocolo* (Venice, 1520)



Gauffered edge, *Roxburghe Decameron* (Venice, 1471)

As print contributed to a rise in the numbers of books in circulation in early modern Italy, marketing became increasingly important. Information about printers and authors which had been found at the end of the book, moved to the front, creating the title-page, which in turn developed over the sixteenth century to become ever more elaborate and persuasive. Over time, the size of printed books decreased as printers found new ways of formatting the page with smaller, italic typefaces, and readers required books which were lighter and more portable. Many fifteenth-century editions of Boccaccio's works could only have been read comfortably at a desk or lectern, but by the middle of the sixteenth century an avid reader of the *Decameron* could slip a copy into his or her pocket and read it while out walking.



# Censorship and Erotica

Boccaccio's *Decameron* is one of the great banned books of all time. Framed as a text designed to give comfort and consolation to lovers, it has been both celebrated and censured for its erotic content over the centuries. Illustrated editions have often foregrounded this, from the Venice 1492 edition, via the nineteenth-century 'gentleman's edition', to the exuberantly vulgar images of the 1930s Illustrated Editions series and beyond. While the text has acquired a notorious reputation, censorship has been concentrated on those novellas which were originally considered blasphemous for their sexual explicitness in the clerical context (e.g. Day III, story 10; Day IX, 10). Over time, the blasphemous connotations have been lost, to be replaced by a general perception of sexual libertinage.

Attitudes to censorship differ in different times and places: the woodcuts in the first illustrated edition of the *Decameron* (Venice, 1492) focused their attention on the sexual content of many of the tales, setting a precedent for generations of editions to come. In the sixteenth century the *Decameron* was placed on the Index of Prohibited Books, and tales were censored for their blasphemous sexual content. A variety of techniques were used to censor the tales: the Florentine editor Lionardo Salviati changed the wording and signalled omissions with asterisks, also removing

references to the Church and clerics, and even changing the endings of stories so that the adulterous were married (or punished). Other national traditions went in the opposite tradition. In French translations, the blasphemous phrasing might be edited, but the sexual content was often amplified by the inclusion of suggestive plates. Meanwhile, in English, the most notorious tales were censored either by total omission, or by the retention of the Italian text, until 1886; even then, their circulation was controlled by only being available in hugely expensive editions which were limited to subscribers. These English editions often themselves recycled French illustrations to promote notions of exotic continental sexual license.

The first freely available uncensored English translation was not published until 1930, in an American edition. Even after this date, the British Everyman edition kept the controversial passages of Day III, story 10 in Italian until the second half of the twentieth century.

Boccaccio's text enjoyed a flurry of popularity in the 1920s and 1930s as an example of 'gallant erotica'. Even in the late twentieth century, the *Decameron* was still being marketed as 'Classic Erotica', and the sexual connotations of this text still endure in popular culture, as seen in the 2007 film *Decameron Pie* (marketed as *Virgin Territory* in the UK and USA).



Woodcut of Day 5, story 4, *Decameron* (Venice, 1492)



# Aesthetics of the Historic Book

Boccaccio's status as one of the great medieval authors, combined with the visual possibilities of his works, has meant that his works have been republished many times by prestige printing houses and private presses. These editions deploy a variety of strategies to allude to historic early printed editions in their design, for example in their typography and page layout, in the reuse of woodcuts from specific editions, or by illustrations playing on the medievalized aesthetic.

PRIMA.	
Q	uiasi incomincia la prima giornata del decamerone nel quale dopo la demonstratione fatta del audace perche ragione aduenisse didouerli quelle persone che appresso si dimostrarano ragunate ad ragionare insieme: Sotto il regimento di l'ampinea si ragiona di quella materia che piu a gradisce ad ciascuno
C	ome l'ampinea confessa le compagnie ad ufcire dela terra
C	ome le donne uidita pampinea alcuna diloro respulse & ultimamente si accordarono al dicto suo
C	ome le donne stando nella chiesa di tal ragionate niuno uenire l'infalcrigi tra giovani
C	ome uolito il parlare di pampinea di concordia eleffono lei loro regina per la prima giornata
C	ome pampinea fa la regina ordino li officii & inche modo douelino uouere
C	ome per comandamento della regina la brigata si folazza & poi usano ad magnare & doppo ad dormire
C	ome laregina fece leuar tutta la brigata
C	ome laregina comanda che cada una dica una nouella
Ser	Ciappelletto chon una sua falsa confessione inganna uno fando frate & effendo itato in uita un pessimo huomo. morto se e reputato sancto nouella prima ad carte
Abra	m iudeo stimolato da Gismotto de ciuign perche dinouesse chrisiano na incorre di Roma & ueduta la malagata di cherci torna ad parisi & factosi chrisiano nouella lecoda ad carte
Melchisedech	iudeo chon una sua nouella di tre anella scampo un grm pericolo apparecchiato dal soldano nouella terza ad carte
Vno	Monacho caduto impicchato de grandissima punitione honestamente riproccando al suo abbate quella medesima colpa se libera dala pena nouella quarta ad carte

Table of contents, 'Roxburghe Decameron' (Venice, 1471)



Byam's Shaw's frontispiece to *Tales from Boccaccio* (London, 1899)

Different editions express these relationships in different ways. The 1913 parallel-text English retranslation of Boccaccio's *Buccolicum carmen*, translated from the Latin by Professor Israel Gollancz, is an elegant fine-press edition which draws explicitly on the typography of the incunabular book. This book was published for the 600th anniversary of Boccaccio's birth, and is an explicitly

A more visual historicizing strategy can be seen in the work of the illustrator Byam Shaw, who foregrounds the narrative possibilities of the frame in the 1899 *Tales from Boccaccio*.

The richly illustrated frame on the title page of the 1520 *Filocolo* (see page 13 for image) shows a similar strategy with the double portrait of the two lovers at the top of the page.



Front cover binding, French translation of the *Decameron* (Paris, 1545)



# Boccaccio in Manchester

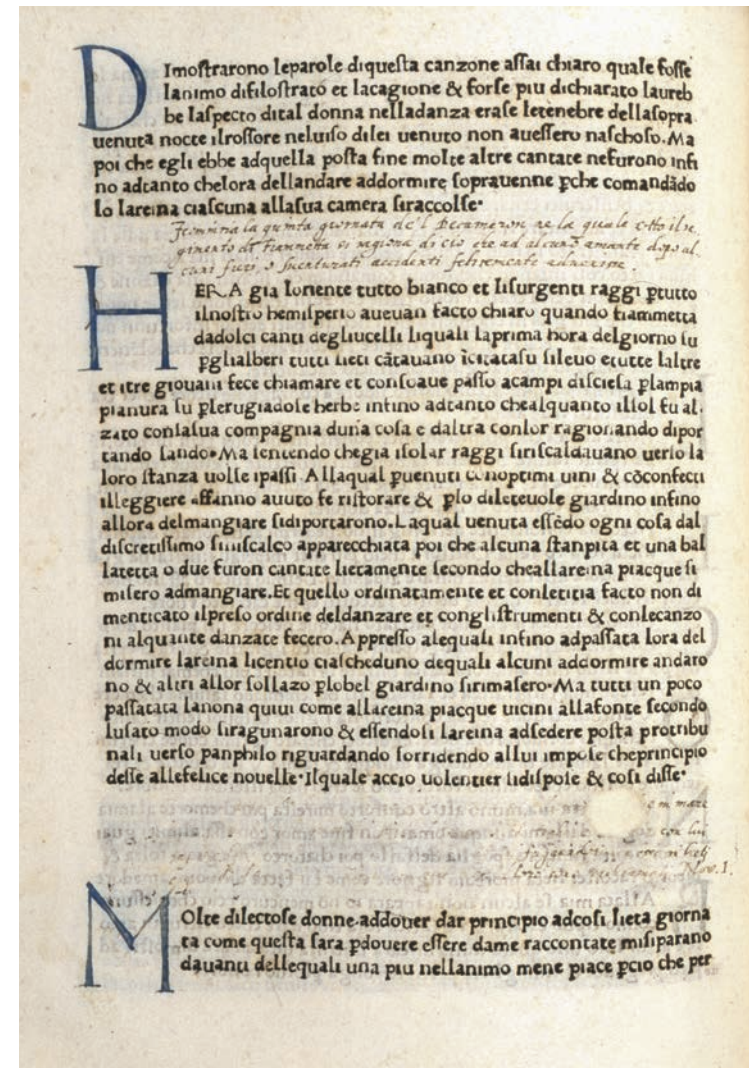
Manuscript, Manufacture, Manchester. Victorian Manchester provided a welcoming home for the works of Boccaccio as it often compared itself with late medieval and Renaissance Florence. Both cities were mercantile centres with trading networks that spread across the world. Both cities sought to invest their wealth in civic building, education, and cultured patronage. As a proud Florentine, Boccaccio was a member of the city's council, held numerous other civic offices, sat on the management committee of local charitable organizations, represented his city's interests on numerous diplomatic missions and was a major figure in the city's cultural life.

Boccaccio's writings reflect this civic engagement and account for his ready

reception in the merchant cities of northern England, especially Manchester. It was the invention of mechanical printing in the 1450s that led to the manufacture of books on a large scale and the more widespread diffusion of texts across the world. Fittingly, the John Rylands Library houses one of the largest collections of Boccaccio's printed works from the Renaissance to the modern day as many of the Italian collections made by merchants and scholars of the city contained editions of his writings. The study of the literary and material forms of his works has continued to be an object of study by Manchester-based researchers to this day, from translations of his works into Welsh to the study of Boccaccio's reception in English.



Three Rylands Boccaccios



Hand-written annotations in the first printed edition of the *Decameron* (Naples, c. 1470)



# Boccaccio and the Artists' Book

Boccaccio continues to be read across the world and to evoke responses seven hundred years after his birth. In order to commemorate his anniversary and explore the ways in which his works speak to new audiences we invited an international group of artists to create new books about Boccaccio. The parameters of the project were left deliberately open and artists were invited to make a book in response to Boccaccio himself or to any of his texts. The short catalogue which follows documents the enduring appeal of a fourteenth-century author as well as showcasing the dynamic form of the artists' book in the twenty-first century.

**Artist:** Mike Clements (UK)

**Title:** *From Pyrenees to Santiago – in the Steps of Matamoros*

**Medium/technique(s):** Ten postcards on Simili Japon 225gsm card, fan binding with pockets for postcards from mi-teintes 160gsm paper, cloth hard covers

**Edition size:** 1

**Artist Statement:** A frame story with ten instalments: a group of university friends,

meeting for their annual reunion, decide that they will all take time off to walk the *Camino de Santiago* from the French Pyrenees and through northern Spain. Alas, one of their number is denied time off by his boss. As they begin their journey, the ten others agree that each of them will tell a story about the *Camino* and then send it on a postcard to console their missing friend. The linking text, in ten instalments, is written by the left-behind friend, who, coincidentally, has the same name as the maker of this artist's book.



**Artist:** Steve Dales (UK)

**Title:** *Untitled altarpiece*

**Medium/technique(s):** Mahogany, walnut, brass, egg tempera on Bristol board, gold paint, artificial gold leaf, gold leaf, Zerkall and Somerset papers

**Edition size:** 1

**Artist Statement:** This book takes inspiration from Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*. Although quickly overtaken by other ideas, an initial stimulus was the set of engravings in the Matthias Apiarius edition of 1537. An embossed image of Eve, derived from an engraving in the Apiarius version, decorates the cover of this book.

Twelve women were asked to provide the name of an inspirational woman, an image and some information on the reason for their choice. No limitation was placed on choices and so, as with Boccaccio, choosers could select contemporary, historical or imaginary figures either famous or not. Their extremely interesting and varied responses are reproduced verbatim in the small white book, which sits inside the altarpiece and provided the inspiration for the images of the altarpiece.

*Untitled altarpiece* is based on the St. Humilitas polyptych, which is the work of trecento painter Pietro Lorenzetti (roughly contemporary with Boccaccio). With two

exceptions, the female characters depicted are all based on figures taken from the works of Pietro and his brother Ambrogio. Reading from left to right the inspirational women are: (top register) Sophie Scholl, Alice Axford, Gail Young, Mma Diapo; (central register) Ellen Wilkinson, Maya Angelou, Laura Allen, Myrtle Yeoman; (bottom register) Penelope Pitstop, Camila Batmanghelidjh, Florence Easton, Eva Watson. The central figure of Humility is now transformed into Minerva by virtue of an owl (in place of a donor) with a hint of Rosie the riveter by virtue of a spotted headscarf. She holds a copy of the book she now protects.

The work displays many imperfections, which seem to lend it a certain character and appear not to distract from the overall effect. Thanks to Ray Gill and Richard Chippington for their help and support.





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**Artist:** Jeremy Dixon, Hazard Press (UK)

**Title:** *Book for Boccaccio*

**Medium/technique(s):** The book is ink-jet printed and is produced from six sheets of folded A5 paper, plus cover inserts, and bound together with Japanese stitching.

**Edition size:** 100

**Artist Statement:** The book celebrates the legacy of Boccaccio and looks at what his name and work means to people today. The images have been sourced from the internet and the chapter headings text-mined from the *Decameron* as translated by Richard Aldington. The chapter text was generated by the Facebook group Modern and Contemporary American Poetry (Coursera ModPo).

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**Artist:** Sue Doggett (UK)

**Title:** *Doves and Firebrands*

**Medium/technique(s):** Digital print concertina with folded cover. Edges hand-coloured and polished.

**Edition size:** 5



**Artist Statement:** Giovanni Boccaccio wrote *De mulieribus claris* (*On Famous Women*) between 1361 and 1362. It was probably the first biography of women ever written. The women whose life stories are immortalized in this text were not only famous through myth or deed, but also infamous and even notorious. Although the biography seems to be dominated by goddesses, queens, empresses and virgins, there are also soldiers, politicians, scholars, artists, poets, and inventors among their number. Regardless of Boccaccio's fourteenth-century moral stance (particularly on virginity and chastity) and his views on femininity (strong women are more like men) the range of positive and negative human qualities that are attributed to these women offers us a surprisingly three-dimensional representation. This work presents the biography as a condensed sequence of characteristics not only to highlight the scope of the women's experience and achievements, but also to emphasize their gender. The biography was an acknowledgement of the possibility, from Boccaccio at least, that they might have made a difference.

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**Artist:** Glynnis Fawkes (US)

**Title:** *Alatiel: The Seventh Tale on the Second Day*

**Medium/technique(s):** Gouache on paper

**Edition size:** 1

**Artist Statement:** This particular story I chose initially because it is one of the few in the *Decameron* that mentions the island of Cyprus, where I spent nearly four years, and have published two books. A good friend in Cyprus (an artist herself and bookshop owner) told me about this Boccaccio festival and exhibition of artists' books, and pointed me to this tale, which is partially set in the city of Paphos. The tale of Alatiel was immediately captivating in its Mediterranean settings and the tension between Boccaccio's light-hearted attitude toward her adventures and the actuality of repeated rape and murder. It resonates with the story of Helen of Troy. Both are supremely beautiful women who travel eastward across the sea leaving a wake of smitten and dead men. There are even alternative ancient accounts that Helen went both to Cyprus and Egypt before Troy. Alatiel's adventure, though covering similar territory and themes, is several thousand years after Helen's, and is set on 'repeat': she encounters one man after the other who falls for her and kills his predecessor. But no ordinary men – only the best-looking of the nobility and royalty of such places as Majorca, the Morea, Athens, Constantinople, and Turkey. This fact, together with such comments as "Eventually, however, she responded to Constantine's efforts at consoling her, and began, as on previous occasions, to derive pleasure from the fate that fortune has consigned her", bring to mind a holiday party cruise as documented by a medieval *Hello!* magazine. Alatiel's reunion with her father, the clever lie that she is still a virgin that saves her from shame, and her eventual marriage

to the man she was supposed to marry – these all constitute a happy ending in the logic of the story. Alatiel's tale resonates with me especially as a (once) young woman traveling through the same Mediterranean countries today.

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**Artist:** Shirley Greer (Canada)

**Title:** *Decameron incipits*

**Medium/technique(s):** Leather, bookbinding thread, Somerset Satin paper, screen-printed text and imagery

**Edition size:** 3

**Artist Statement:** I am an artist and part-time University Professor, and I work primarily in the fields of book arts and printmaking. I live in a rural setting on the west coast of the Island of Newfoundland, which is situated on the east coast of Canada.

My artist's book is in response to the call for submissions for the Locating *Boccaccio in 2013* conference. I drew inspiration from the *Decameron* texts, and from the experiences of my own travels in Italy. I chose a traditional book format to house the text and images, both of which were screenprinted at Memorial University of Newfoundland's Grenfell Campus printshop.

Using re-purposed leather for the cover, "*Incipits*" is bound with a longstitch binding, and is a variation of limp binding from a 1531 account book owned by Jesper Kappenberg (see *Bookbinding: Limp bindings from Tallin*, Langwe Form, 2008, p. 16).

"Incipit" refers both to the opening words of a medieval manuscript, as well as to the default file name given to untitled documents in some word processing programs. In this way the ancient text is linked to modern technology, my way of 'locating Boccaccio in 2013'. My book presents an index of first



lines from Boccaccio's *Decameron*, arranged not in alphabetical order, but in chapter and story sequence. The *Incipits* are from each of the ten stories told on each of the ten days, and reading them allows the viewer/reader to create their own endings, to read the texts as poetry, or to otherwise respond to and engage with the text.



**Artist:** Heather Hunter (UK)

**Title:** *Famous Proba – found* (2013)

**Medium/technique(s):** Patchwork style collaged pages using hand and digital prints. Bound using 'designating duet' method from 'Woven and Interlocking Book Structures'

**Edition size:** 1

Artist Statement: My found poem (a cento) has been taken from a word pool collected from *On Famous Woman* by Giovanni Boccaccio, translated, with an introduction and notes by Guido A. Guarino, Chapter XCV, p. 218 : Faltonia Betitia Proba. Found poetry is not a modern phenomenon. The cento, a form of found poetry, was first developed in Ancient Greece when poets started stitching together their own poems entirely from lines or verses taken from Homer. The name came from the Latin word cento 'Cloak made of patches' (hence the shape of the book) or the Greek word *kentron* meaning 'to graft trees'. Proba in 360AD created her cento that Boccaccio so admired. Words for 20th-century

found poetry can be discovered anywhere; on street signs, overheard conversation, prose or newspaper articles. This form was used by surrealist and dada writers in the early 20th century and in the 21st century by the modern experimental Eco poets.

**Artist:** Paul Johnson (UK)

**Title:** *Landolfo Ruffolo*

**Medium/technique(s):** Unique accordion pop-up book with sculptural spine. Industrial textile dyes on Saunders Waterford watercolour paper with pen work and gold inlays. There are no folds in the pop-up construction. All sections are joined with dovetail joints.

**Edition size:** 1

Artist Statement: The sculptural cover of the book represents the rustic landscape of Fiesole where seven young women and three young men escaping the plague in Florence tell stories – Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

My original plan was for the book to be a carousel in five cyclical parts but this was



abandoned and instead the five 'spreads' open as a continuous 'pull-out' accordion.

The theme is the story 4 from the second day of the *Decameron*: Landolfo Ruffolo, a merchant from Ravello sets sails for Cyprus but is captured by pirates. Their ship sinks in a storm. Landolfo clings to a chest and is carried to Corfu where a compassionate woman rescues him. She bathes him and this restores his health. Landolfo makes his way back home and examines the precious stones in the chest – now contained in a sack. He shows his gratitude to the woman of Corfu by sending her a generous sum of money.

Ships at sea, pirates, storms, shipwrecks and rescues are the stuff of good adventure yarns so I reduced the text to five pop-ups that I thought would make good illustrations.

All the structural parts of the pop-up units are joined with dovetail joints and slotted units. As there are no folds and so no tension or spring action as with conventional folded structures the pages stay open. Another advantage is that there is no 'paper fatigue' caused by constant opening and closing of pages. The whole pop-up book can be taken to pieces and new sections replaced or added.

**Artist:** John McDowall (UK)

**Title:** *Giornata prima*

**Medium/technique(s):** Digital printed on Italian Magnani 120gsm mould made book 'velata avorio' paper. Case-bound with cloth-covered boards.

**Edition size:** Open

**Artist Statement:** From page to page and book to book, a reflection of story following story from teller to listener/reader over time from one version to the next. One page in sequence is reproduced from each of the editions of the *Decameron* as found in the

Brotherton Library University of Leeds, the Main Library University of Manchester and my own shelves. The first page is taken from the first book, the second from the next and so on until the end of the first day.

**Artist:** James Reid-Cunningham, Hematite Press (US)

**Title:** *Grievous Trouble and Annoy*

**Medium/technique(s):** Printed with an Epson Photo R-1800 inkjet printer using pigment inks on Chartham Translucent paper and Moab Lasal Matte 235 paper. Each copy has a unique binding.

**Edition size:** 10

**Artist Statement:** The tale is an extremely condensed version of a single tale from John Payne's 1886 translation of the *Decameron*. I have spent more than thirty years creating books, as a book conservator, design binder and book artist. As time passes, I am less and less clear of my intentions when creating a new book. Each book is an enigma, an abstract design, an evocative object to be handled and examined by readers as they explore myriad cryptic meanings leaf by leaf.





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**Artist:** Carolyn Thompson (UK)

**Title:** *The Eaten Heart*

**Medium/technique(s):** *The Eaten Heart* is an adaptation of the Penguin *Great Loves* version of Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Eaten Heart: Unlikely Tales of Love*. Text has been removed from every page with the use of a scalpel, leaving only words that could pertain to the body, or body parts. By removing these words from their context and grouping them together, their significance changes dramatically, thus exploring the abundant innuendo in Boccaccio's original text.

I often use techniques historically associated with craft, in its many forms, to transform an original object or text. Elements of weaving, quilting, sewing, papermaking, as well as the cut and paste aspects of collage are used formally, sculpturally and/or to illustrate a concept.

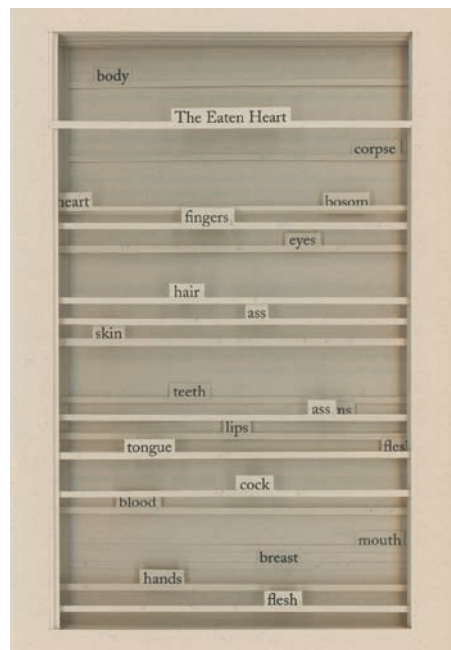
**Edition size:** 3

**Artist Statement:** My interest lies in developing pre-existing narratives into new adaptations that reference the original in either content or form. I use found objects, images and printed matter (text, books, maps and diagrams) as source material, in order to evoke a sense of memory, history, nostalgia and humour. The resulting adaptations are new visual versions in the form of artist's books, collages, drawings and installations that reflect, or work in contrast to, the stories, histories or language of the original ephemera, whilst responding to sculpture, drawing and architecture.

Contrasting notions are prominent in my work – adaptation and the original, narrative and form, truth and fiction. By presenting something that is part fact and part fabrication, and revealing just enough of the original to engage a viewer's interest,

I aim to challenge their initial perception of the work, whilst divulging its layers slowly. My intention is to question assumed truths.

Learning new skills and techniques has become an integral and necessary aspect of my practice. I hope to create works in which it is obvious time, skill and endeavour have been employed in the production. The result is a hybrid that lies somewhere between conceptual art and more traditional craft, encompassing the ideas of one and the skills of the other.



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**Artist:** Carolyn Trant (UK)

**Title:** *Caccia di Diana*

**Medium/technique(s):** My book is made as an accordion book with six card pages and cut and collaged papers, some hand-painted, and designed to be easily displayed open for this exhibition. The covers are wood veneered boards and it has a decorated slipcase.

**Edition size:** 1

**Artist Statement:** *Caccia di Diana* (*Diana's Hunt*), was Boccaccio's first book written around 1333-34 when he was about 20 years old. It is quite playful and related to stories by Ovid; I was attracted by the mysterious figure of the stag, who, unlike Actaeon, survives, and his 'lady', not named but probably 'Fiammetta', little flame. The plot is thus: the narrator sees the goddess Diana bathing and sends her nymphs out to the four quarters of the world to hunt roebuck, boar, lion and unicorn. Then a posse of Neapolitan noblewomen rush in to hunt, crashing through the woods chasing and killing all manner of beasts including a family of snakes. On the advice of a mysterious 'fair lady' they pile their trophies on a sacrificial fire dedicated to Venus, from which they spring transformed into beautiful young men, who running through a river emerge mantled in vermillion. As a final twist the narrator, who we now learn was actually a stag all along, is similarly transformed and offered to the 'fairest lady'.

The subject matter fitted well with my other work where a lot of storytelling grows out of the forest – the book is stored in its box which is like a wood with a stag and a snake.

I enjoyed playing with combined archaic and modern references in the way that Boccaccio probably did; the style of the titling is suggestive of archive and museum practice.

The last image uses early anatomy diagrams as the two main characters reveal themselves intimately to each other in all their corporeal glory – 'this is what I am made of', compared to the mythical and spiritual characters they are mixed up with in the story. I love the questing to-ing and fro-ing between material and spiritual in the art and literature of the medieval period.

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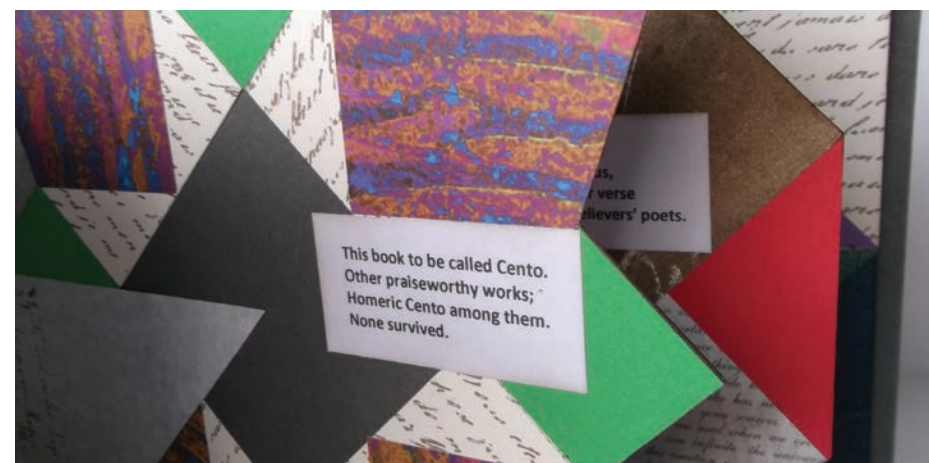
**Artist:** Horst Weierstall (Germany)

**Title:** *Navigatio now and then*

**Medium/technique(s):** Xeroxed text on transparent paper, string

**Edition size:** 1

**Artist Statement:** The work is based on Boccaccio's lovestory: Cymon and Iphigenia (*Decameron*, Day 5, story 1). The text stands for complex social and human conditions, a personal love story, where passion and pride dominate within a context of early capitalism, crisis and revelation.





# Further Reading

Guyda Armstrong, *The English Boccaccio: A History in Books* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013)

Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio: The Man and his Works*, trans. and ed. by R. Monges and D. J. McAuliffe (New York: New York University Press, 1976)

Rhiannon Daniels, *Boccaccio and the Book: Production and Reading in Italy 1340-1520* (London: Legenda, 2009)

Stephen J. Milner, 'Coming Together: Consolation and the Rhetoric of Insinuation in Boccaccio's *Decameron*', in *The Erotics of Consolation: Desire and Distance in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Catherine E. Légú and Stephen J. Milner (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 95-113

Brian Richardson, *Printers, Writers, and Readers in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

James Simpson, 'The Sacrifice of Lady Rochford: Henry Parker, Lord Morley's Translation of *De claris mulieribus*', in *Triumphs of English: Henry Parker, Lord Morley, Translator to the Tudor Court. New Essays in Interpretation*, ed. by Marie Axton and James Carley (London: The British Library, 2000), pp. 153-69

Janet Smarr, *Boccaccio and Fiammetta: The Narrator as Lover* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986)

*Boccaccio and Feminist Criticism*, ed. by Thomas C. Stillinger and F. Regina Psaki (Chapel Hill: Annali d'Italianistica, 2006)

David Wallace, *Boccaccio: Decameron* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

*The Decameron Web*:  
<http://www.brown.edu/decameron>

## Recommended translations

*The Decameron*, trans. by G. H. McWilliam (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 2003)

*The Decameron: A New English Version by Cormac Ó Cuilleain, Based on John Payne's 1886 Translation* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2004)

*The Decameron*, trans. by J. G. Nichols (London: Vintage Classics, 2012)

*Minerva, Mantone and Circes by Giovanni Boccaccio, Extracted from his 'De mulieribus claris', ed. and with an intro. by Rhiannon Daniels and Guyda Armstrong*

# Acknowledgements

This exhibition has been curated by Guyda Armstrong, Stephen Milner (both University of Manchester) and Rhiannon Daniels (University of Bristol). The curators' research and publications focus on the social and political context in which Boccaccio was working and the ways in which he has been read and imitated, inside and outside Italy.

We would like to thank the artists who made books for the exhibition and Sarah Bodman (University of the West of England) for her advice and encouragement.

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Ceres, *Les nobles et cleres dames* (Paris, 1493), fol. B5r