

## Boccaccio and the Canon Before Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525)\*

In October 1441 an event of extraordinary relevance took place in the Basilica di Santa Maria del Fiore, the Florentine cathedral: the *Certame coronario*, a poetry competition invented and organised by Leon Battista Alberti (1404–72) as a revival of the ancient Greek *agòn* in order to promote the *volgare fiorentino* as a perfectly suitable and noble language of culture. During the *Certame*, Anselmo Calderoni (1393–1446), the official poet of the Florentine *Signoria*, delivered a *canzone* which included the following interesting *stanza*:

Così come del greco fu Omero  
solo, simil Vergilio nel latino,  
e Dante fiorentino  
nobiltà questo nostro idioma.  
Boccaccio, in prosa e in rima sincero,  
e ser Brunetto, fulgente rubino,  
Guido e Guido, ognun fino,  
e Fazio, almen quel che trattò di Roma,  
Bindo Bonichi, che moral si noma,  
Petrarca, l'Aretino e 'l Salutato  
e molti hanno trattato,  
oltre al greco e latino, in bel volgare:  
or vedi a che speranza i' posso stare.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of this *stanza* lies in the fact that it corresponds to an early codification of a Florentine literary canon. Furthermore, Calderoni includes in the same poetic unit — just one *stanza* — all the best-known poets, not only from Florence, but also from classical literature, both Greek and Latin. This was not by chance, since Anselmo Calderoni's aim was to proclaim that no fracture ever existed in the literary tradition throughout the centuries, and consequently the Florentine vernacular was allowed to claim the same

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<sup>1</sup> Bertolini 1993, 285–86.

*auctoritas* for its poets as that of Homer or Virgil. Among the Florentine poets, Boccaccio was at the top of the list (after Dante, of course).

My paper analyses the presence of Boccaccio in fifteenth-century Florentine literature from two standpoints, practice and theory, in order to address whether Boccaccio was viewed as a literary model, especially for the *novellistica* in Florence before the publication of Bembo's treatise. And, if he was seen as a model, what kind of literary model was he thought to have provided. This survey, however, will venture outside the territory of the *novella* to examine different kinds of texts in order to trace whether the *Decameron* was of importance beyond the novelistic genre and if, indeed, Boccaccio's works played a role within the literary canon in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries. Since the authors and texts related to this topic are numerous, I have necessarily selected the best examples from prose works, in particular the so-called *novelle spicciolate* or scattered tales.

Surprisingly enough, the *Decameron*, a book of short stories with a complex and articulated structure, was never imitated in Florence until around the middle of the sixteenth century, whereas outside that city a considerably different tradition emerged. The *Quattrocento fiorentino* was characterised by the phenomenon of individual *novelle* (hence *novelle spicciolate*), which circulated with short *proemi* or with accompanying letters, sometimes in pairs, but were never included in a book or collected coherently as a whole. As indicated by Rossella Bessi,<sup>2</sup> the corpus of Florentine *novelle* in the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries consists of eleven texts, while in the early years of the sixteenth century there are only two famous examples: Machiavelli's *Favola* and Luigi Alamanni's (1495–1546) *Novella di Bianca di Tolosa*. The table below lists the complete *census*:

Author	Title	Date	Tradition
1. Anonymous	<i>Bonaccorso di Lapo Giovanni</i> <sup>3</sup>	1373–82	9 mss.
2. Multiple anonymous authors	<i>Grasso Legnaiuolo</i> <sup>4</sup>	ca. 1409–80	15 mss.
3. Piero di Filippo del Nero?	<i>Bianco Alfani</i> <sup>5</sup>	1430–37	4 mss.

<sup>2</sup> Bessi 2004b.

<sup>3</sup> Bessi 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Procaccioli 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Bessi 1994.

4. Piero di Filippo del Nero?	<i>Lisetta Levaldini</i> <sup>6</sup>	1424–37	6 mss.
5. Leonardo Bruni?	<i>Seleuco e Antioco</i> <sup>7</sup>	1437	63 mss.
6. Anonymous	<i>Giovanni Cavedone</i> <sup>8</sup>	ca. 1437	1 ms.
7. Anonymous <sup>9</sup>	<i>Istorietta amorosa</i>	?	14 mss.
8. Jacopo di Poggio Bracciolini	<i>L'origine della guerra tra Francesiosi e Inghilesi</i> <sup>10</sup>	1468–70	15 mss.
9. Marabottino Manetti	<i>Novella di un Piovano</i> <sup>11</sup>	ca. 1467	1 ms. autograph
10. Luigi Pulci	<i>Novella del picchio senese</i> <sup>12</sup>	1471	1 ms.
11. Lorenzo de' Medici	<i>Giacoppo</i> <sup>13</sup>	1488?	1 ms. autograph
12. Niccolò Machiavelli	<i>Favola</i> (Novella di Belfagor) <sup>14</sup>	1518–20	3 mss. 1 autograph
13. Luigi Alamanni	<i>Novella di Bianca di Tolosa</i> <sup>15</sup>	ca. 1527–29	3 mss.

From a structural standpoint, a comparison between these *novelle* and the *Decameron* in order to establish any relationships between them may initially seem unfruitful. Nonetheless, careful examination of the language, syntax, lexicon and the themes and situations repeatedly evoked in the *novelle spicciolate* shows that their dependence on Boccaccio's *Decameron* is marked. Limiting the survey to Decameronian themes and how they were re-used, it will become clear that Boccaccio's masterpiece was very much the source from which all the Quattrocento and Cinquecento *novelle* found their inspiration and structure. Some plots focus on the narrative of love,

<sup>6</sup> Bessi 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Marcelli 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See below, n. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Previously attributed to Leon Battista (Alberti 1960–73, 3:275–87), this *novella* has been proven to be a non-Albertian work (see Badioli 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Albanese and Bessi 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Bessi and Marangoni 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Marcelli 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Medici 1992, 2:819–31.

<sup>14</sup> Machiavelli 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Marcelli 2013.

with both happy and unhappy endings; others are related to examples of moral virtue and wisdom; some *novelle* reveal strong links to historical events; and finally, there are those that are infused with humour and cunning tricks, making the *novella di beffa* the most popular of such texts.

Over the past two decades, scholars have analysed the bond between Boccaccio and the *novelle spicciolate* in detail. Only a few examples are offered here for reasons of space but they will suffice to illustrate the point at hand. The first text worthy of mention is taken from the *Novella del Bianco Alfani*, namely the Proem (the speaker is Piero di Filippo del Nero):

Nella passata mortalità [*i.e.* the plague], che fu negli anni di Cristo 1430, essend'io rimasto in Firenze per alcune mie faccende, e essendo del mese di luglio, che i caldi sono smisuratamente grandi, un dì fra gli altri, essendo alla Loggia de' Buondelmonti<sup>16</sup> in compagnia con Piero Viniziano e con Giovannozzo Pitti, e ragionando delle cose allora occorrenti e massime della moria, alquanto buoni compagni con noi s'aggiunsono, infra i quali fu Lioncino di messer Guccio de' Nobili. Costui [...] disse: "Deh! lasciamo stare i morti coi morti<sup>17</sup> e i medici con gl'infermi, e noi sani cerchiamo di godere e star lieti, se la nostra sanità prolungare vogliamo."<sup>18</sup>

Soon after this speech, the *brigata* decide to narrate *novelle* to cheer themselves up, and not without an implicit moral purpose. As can be seen, some significant Decameronian *topoi* are involved, not to mention the fact that they are all gathered here in the Proem: the plague, the necessity to avoid contracting the disease by devoting themselves to leisure and cheerful activities (as prescribed by medical treatises of the time),<sup>19</sup> and finally the gathering in a pleasant, open air space.

The second example is a passage from the diptych of *novelle* by Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1370–1444), the first of which is a Latin rewriting of *Decameron* 4.1, the well-known history of Tancredi and Ghismonda, and

<sup>16</sup> The *Loggia* belonged to the *Casa Buondelmonti*: in today's Florence, some of these buildings still stand in the area between Via delle Terme and Borgo Santi Apostoli.

<sup>17</sup> See Luke 9:60: "Jesus said unto him: Let the dead bury their dead," meaning that a good Christian should not live as a dead person among dead people, but be alive by praying and proclaiming the kingdom of God.

<sup>18</sup> See Bessi 1994, 10–12.

<sup>19</sup> For example, the treatise of Tommaso Del Garbo (ca. 1305–70) *Consiglio contro a pistolenza* ["How to avoid contracting plague"], dedicated to the Florentine people. See De Ferrari 1988.

the second, in the vernacular, the *Novella di Seleuco e Antioco*.<sup>20</sup> The assembly of young men and women have already listened to the miserable and mournful story of Ghismonda, when an unknown Florentine gentleman decides to narrate another *novella*, in order to “ridurre a letizia e a festa gli animi conturbati di ciascuno,” to which end he “raccontò una novella quasi per l’opposito di quella di prima.”<sup>21</sup> He begins with the story of Seleuco, king of Syria, and his son Antioco, who fell in love with his stepmother Stratonica. The impossibility of attaining happiness with his beloved drove Antioco to a deadly illness. In order to avoid the death of his only son, Seleuco divorced Stratonica, leaving Antioco free to marry her. The apposition of *novelle* with plots of opposite character, i.e. with unhappy and happy endings, mirrors that used in the *Decameron* (Days Four and Five). Additionally, within the fourth *giornata* the more pleasant *Novella di frate Alberto* follows the tragic story of Ghismonda.<sup>22</sup> A broader and more complete account must be postponed to another occasion, since the phenomena seem so complex that the combination of tiles (*tesserae*) from the *Decameron*, frequently taken from different places in the work, turn into a polychromatic mosaic in the *novelle spicciolate fiorentine*. And yet in this regard we cannot pass over an extraordinary and unique case. The last example consists of a kind of *centone* from the *Decameron*: the still unpublished *Novella di Giovanni Cavedone*.<sup>23</sup> The following is an excerpt from the Proem:

*E’ non è guari di tempo passato che [Dec. 6.6.4], essendo io in Pisa all’albergo del Capello, dove si ritrovono più e più mercatanti di vari paesi, come tutto giorno veggiamo negli alberghi avvenire [Dec. 4.3.20 and 2.3.20], avendo tutti lietamente cenato [Dec. 2.9.4 and 8.7.18] e essendo d’inverno tutti ad uno grande fuoco a sedere [Dec. 10.5.18], disse l’uno di questi mercatanti che per li savi se teneva che il tempo era la più cara cosa che fosse e che, quello perdendo, mai racquistare non si potria; e però, ac-*

<sup>20</sup> There is no reason to doubt the authorship of the Latin translation from *Decameron* 4.1; however, for the *Novella di Seleuco e Antioco*, the situation is far more complex. See Marcelli 2010, 100–11.

<sup>21</sup> Marcelli 2010, 116.

<sup>22</sup> See *Dec.* 4.2.4.: “Pampinea, a sé sentendo il comandamento venuto, più per la sua affezione cognobbe l’animo delle compagne che quello del re per le sue parole, e per ciò, più disposta a dovere al quanto recrear loro che a dovere, fuori che del comandamento solo, il re contentare, a dire una novella, senza uscir del proposto, da ridere si dispose, e cominciò [...] per alquanto gli animi vostri, pieni di compassione per la morte di Ghismonda, forse con risa e con piacere rilevare” (all citations from the *Decameron* are from Branca’s edition, Boccaccio 1976).

<sup>23</sup> See Cappelli 1866. A modern edition is lacking.

ciò che a quella *particella della notte* [Dec. 1.concl.22] che veggiare intendevano, utile mente si spendesse dove agli altri piacesse, a lui parrebbe che si dovesse per alcuni di loro *novellare delle cose preterite* [Dec. 10.concl.2] e *narrare di casi fortuiti* (*several ex.*) già a molti adivenuti. *Fue da tutti molto commendato* [Dec. 1.intr.102, 2.3.44 and 6.3.2, etc.] il detto di quello, e così più e più bellissime novelle vi si raccontarono, in fra quali una ve ne fu che, sopra tutte le altre piacendomi, acciò che per li tempi futuri raccontata da molti fosse, m'è piaciuto di scriverla *come qui appresso udreti* [Dec. 2.5.2 and 7.7.3].<sup>24</sup>

As can be seen, the *Decameron* failed to initiate a literary tradition of colating short stories within carefully crafted frame narratives. Boccaccio's masterpiece, however, endured as a reservoir for lexical, syntactic, and stylistic themes used widely in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth century Florentine *novelle*. Indeed, the works of Machiavelli and Alamanni also present these very same characteristics.<sup>25</sup>

Moving on to discuss the theoretical aspect of the topic — that is to say, Boccaccio and the canon in fifteenth-century Florence — the first author worthy of note is Franco Sacchetti (1332/34–1400), who at the beginning of his *Trecentonovelle* declares:

Considerando al presente tempo e alla condizione de l'umana vita, la quale con pestilenziose infirmità e con oscure morti è spesso vicitata [...]; e ancora immaginando come la gente è vaga di udire cose nuove, e specialmente di quelle letture che sono agevoli a intendere, e massimamente quando danno conforto, per lo quale tra molti dolori si mescolino alcune risa; e riguardando in fine *allo eccellente poeta fiorentino messer Giovanni Boccacci, il quale descrivendo il libro delle Cento Novelle per una materiale cosa, quanto al nobile suo ingegno.*<sup>26</sup>

Although in some ways Sacchetti follows Boccaccio's example in writing a *raccolta di novelle*, from his perspective the *Decameron* was a *materiale cosa*; in other words, a work not comparable to the high standards of scholarship and stylistic elegance of Boccaccio's other works, namely the Latin *Genealogie deorum gentilium*. Sacchetti asserts this idea in his poem composed on the death of the famous Certaldese:

Canzone distesa di Franco Sacchetti per  
la morte di messer Giovanni Boccacci

Or è mancata ogni poesia

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Modena, Biblioteca Estense e Universitaria, ms. It. 346 (alpha J 6 6), cc. 264<sup>v</sup>–265<sup>r</sup>. Words given in italics indicate Decameronian references. On this novella, see now Mar-  
chi 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Marcelli 2013, 329–36; Martelli 1990, 26–35.

<sup>26</sup> Sacchetti 1970, 1. My italics.

e vòte son le case di Parnaso,  
 po' che morte n'ha tolto ogni valore [...].  
 Chi sonerà parola  
 in letture propinque, là dove libri cinque  
 di questo diretan composti stimo?  
 «De' viri illustri» il primo  
 conta, e 'l secondo «De le donne chiare»,  
 terzo si fa nomare  
 «Buccolica», il quarto «Monti e fiumi»,  
 il quinto «Delli dii e lor costumi». <sup>27</sup>

According to Sacchetti then, five books, all in Latin, constituted Boccaccio's canonical works, leading him to build up a long-lasting image of the Certaldese as a humanist and a scholar; he is presented as the ideal pupil of Petrarch, rather than the inventor of the *novella* and author of numerous vernacular works.

In the early-fifteenth century such an image was perpetuated by two outstanding figures of Italian humanism: Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1370–1444) and Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459). Bruni maintained a dismissive judgment of Boccaccio's biography of Dante, saying that it was neither accurate nor reliable in doing justice to the illustrious poet. Generally speaking, Bruni showed very little interest in vernacular literature. The lines below are taken from Bruni's biography of Dante and Petrarch:

Mi parve che il nostro Boccaccio, dolcissimo et suavissimo huomo, così scrivesse la vita et i costumi di tanto sublime poeta [*i.e.* Dante] come se a scrivere avessi il *Philocolo*, o il *Philostrato* o la *Fiammetta*. Però che tutta d'amore et di sospiri et di cocenti lagrime è piena, come se l'huomo nascesse in questo mondo solamente per ritrovarsi in quelle dieci giornate amoroze, nelle quali da donne innamorate et da giovani leggiadri raccontate furono le *Cento novelle*. E tanto s'infiamma in queste parti d'amore, *che le gravi et substanzievoli parti della vita di Dante lassa indietro et trapassa con silentio, ricordando le cose leggiere et tacendo le gravi*. <sup>28</sup>

Manetti, however, moves in a slightly different direction. To understand his idea of Boccaccio, three different works are worthy of mention: the *Dialogus in symposio*,<sup>29</sup> the *Vitae trium illustrium poetarum florentinorum*, and the treatise *Contra Iudaeos et Gentes*. In the *Dialogus in symposio*, the account of Boccaccio is limited to a short quotation where the speaker, Bernardo Manetti, Giannozzo's son, gives a dismissive definition of the

<sup>27</sup> Sacchetti 1990, 255 and 259.

<sup>28</sup> Bruni 1996, 537–38. My italics.

<sup>29</sup> See Albanese 2008 and the critical edition of the treatise in Manetti 2014.



*Decameron* as a book that, although elegantly composed, is meant merely for entertainment and laughter (“ridendi causa”).<sup>30</sup> Far more interesting is the life of Boccaccio in the tripartite biography,<sup>31</sup> and his abbreviated life of the Certaldese in the treatise *Contra Iudaeos*. Here Manetti reshapes the picture of Boccaccio as a connoisseur of Greek literature, a brilliant composer in prose and an elegant poet; in other words, as a predecessor of Florentine humanism. Manetti also adds a remarkable detail: that the field in which Boccaccio significantly prevails over his prestigious colleagues is in composing vernacular prose. The extract below is taken from the treatise *Contra Iudaeos* (ca. 1450):

Although written in his youth, the charm and the elegance of the language gracing all these works are so great that they fascinate even vernacular writers ignorant of Latin, as we see, provided they are endowed with an average degree of intelligence. Thus it happens that, imbued as they are with his charming style, they usually have an elegant appearance.<sup>32</sup>

Following this passage, Manetti enumerates five Latin works by Boccaccio, the same as those referred to in Sacchetti’s vernacular poem: *Bucolicum carmen*, *De casibus virorum illustrium*, *De montibus*, *De mulieribus claris*, *Genealogia deorum gentilium*.<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, here Manetti points out

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<sup>30</sup> Giannozzo Manetti, *Dialogus in symposium*: “Sed de famoso illo ac ridiculo Bocchacii nostri, facetissimi et elegantissimi poete, codice qui Centum Fabellarum seu Decameron vulgo inscribi et appellari consuevit, nonnulla ridendi gratia promere et in lucem prodere conabor, atque pulchram quandam et elegantem historiam, peregrinam ac grecam, a Leonardo Arretino maternis et vulgaribus litteris mandatam, oportune admodum adhibebo” (Manetti 2014, 353).

<sup>31</sup> Manetti composed this work in 1440. See Manetti 2003, 200–02: “Ceterum Boccaccio ita paene in omnibus praestat ut in paucis admodum ac levibus quibusdam, in graecarum scilicet litterarum cognitione, qua Dantes omnino caruit, et in materna ac soluta oratione, qua pauca scripsit, sibi cedere videatur. In quibus duobus dumtaxat etiam Petrarcham excelluit, cum ab eo tamquam a praeceptore suo in ceteris omnibus vinceretur.”

<sup>32</sup> See Manetti 2003b, 143 (with slight changes in the English translation): “Plura partim materno partim latino sermone composuit, quae omnia bifariam scripta apud nos extant. Materna quoque partim carmine, partim soluta oratione bipartita cernuntur. et quamquam haec omnia ab ipso adulescente descripta fuisse constet, tanto tamen lepore tantae verborum elegantia condita conspicimus ut latinarum litterarum expertes homines, modo mediocri ingenio praediti, magna quadam sermonis sui lepiditate plurimum capiantur. Proinde fit ut suo illo lepido et ornato dicendi genere imbuti plerumque elegantes appareant.”

<sup>33</sup> At the end of Boccaccio’s biography, Manetti quotes the epitaph that the Certaldese composed to be sculpted in his own tomb. He then reports Coluccio Salutati’s Latin poem on



— and probably for the first time — that Boccaccio’s vernacular prose was not only the best example of refined style for contemporary writers, but also that his rhetorical and oratorical skills were modelled on those of the Latin classical authors, which was the key to achieving a refined and outstanding level of writing.

In 1486 Angelo Poliziano (1454–94) produced one of his masterpieces as an introduction for his academic course on classical epic poems: the Latin *Silva Nutricia*. In composing this versified history of poetry from ancient times until the contemporary age, Poliziano ends his canon of poets with illustrious Florentines. After mentioning Dante and Petrarch, he eventually comes to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, which appears as a rather surprising mention amongst poetical works, and a somewhat remarkable exception.<sup>34</sup>

Another striking mention of Boccaccio is contained in the *De illustratione urbis Florentiae* of Ugolino Verino (1438–1516), a Florentine humanist who died in 1516 and who was a well-known Medici protégé throughout his life. This Latin poem is written in praise of the city of Florence, whose illustrious citizens are listed and described in Book Two. On Boccaccio, Verino says:

For his wit, not inferior to Plautus  
and similar to Menander is Boccaccio,  
so gifted in playing tender loves,  
whatever marvels of the ancient gods Hesiod had sung of.  
He expounded mountains and rivers,  
lakes and abodes of nymphs,

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the tomb of Boccaccio: “Your famous verses elevate / pastoral life; the names of mountains, / woods and fountains, rivers, marshes, lakes / and seas you leave behind, most carefully arranged. / Illustrious men and their great misfortunes / you collect together, from Adam to our age. / You celebrate famous mothers in solemn style. / You depict the gods, tracing them all from their obscure / origins in fifteen divine volumes, yielding to none / of the ancients” (Manetti 2003b, 145). See also Villani 1997, 339.

<sup>34</sup> Poliziano 1996, 246–47: “Nec tamen Aligerum fraudarim hoc munere Dantem, / per Styga, per stellas medique per ardua montis, / pulchra Beatricis sub virginis ora, volantem; / quique cupidineum repetit Petrarcha triumphum; / et qui bisquis centum argumenta diebus / pingit.” Poliziano 2004, 157: “Nevertheless, I would not wish to defraud Dante Alighieri of this tribute, who flies across the Styx, through the stars and under the beautiful gaze of the virgin Beatrice through the steep places of the mountain that separates the two realms; nor Petrarch, who sings of the triumph of love, and him who relates a hundred tales in ten days.”

brooks he depicted in shady woods.<sup>35</sup>

While Boccaccio's canonical Latin works could hardly be classified as dramatic, for Verino all of the Certaldese's talent was to be found in the comic genre (*Musa comica*) and his work deserved to be compared to the glorious comedies by Plautus and Menander.<sup>36</sup>

Before concluding my brief survey, I wish to emphasise the importance of the most interesting passage written prior to the treatise of Bembo, which appears in the *Comento de' miei sonetti* of Lorenzo de' Medici (about 1480):

In prosa e in orazione soluta, chi ha letto il Boccaccio, uomo dottissimo e facilissimo, facilmente giudicherà singulare e sola al mondo non solamente la invenzione, ma la copia e eloquenzia sua. E considerando la opera sua del *Decameron*, per la diversità della materia, ora grave, ora mediocre e ora bassa, e contenente tutte le perturbazioni che agli uomini possono accadere d'amore e odio, timore e speranza, tante nuove astuzie e ingegni, e avendo a sprimere tutte le nature e passioni degli uomini che si trovano al mondo, senza controversia giudicherà nessuna lingua meglio che la nostra essere atta a esprimere.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> See Verino 1583, c. 12<sup>r</sup>: "Nec minor est salibus Plauti, similisque Menandro, / Boccaccius, teneros docte qui lusit amores, / Quaecunque Ascraeus veterum miracula vatum / scripserat. Explicuit montes fluviosque, lacusque, / Nympharumque domos, fontes expressit opacos." My translation.

<sup>36</sup> A similar perspective was shared by the Dominican monk and theologian Giovanni Dominici (1357–1419), who in his treatise *Lucula noctis* enumerated rules for the good Christian, including a list of suitable books and authors to be read in order to achieve moral as well as rhetorical perfection. After mentioning some notable Church fathers, Dominici says "et ad ultimum morales libros venerabilis Petrarche, honorandi Certaldini tuique quamplures in omni uberes facultate, sermone comptos, refertos moribus, virtutibus ebrios, fundatos fide, in Deum animas rapientes, et ultra hoc Tulliana eloquentia redolentes" 'and finally, the moral treatises by Petrarch and those many of the Certaldese, composed as they are with fruitful topics, elegance in style, examples of good habits, bountiful of virtues and inspired by true faith, so that they drive all Christian souls to God, and above all, such works are deeply imbued with Ciceronian eloquence' (Dominici 1908, 411; tr. mine).

<sup>37</sup> Medici 1992, 1:368–69. Some years before Lorenzo's *Comento*, Cristoforo Landino devoted an academic course to a vernacular work, Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, in order to demonstrate that the *volgare fiorentino* was a noble and refined language, suitable for addressing any literary genre. In justifying his choice as well as his will to promote vernacular language, Landino also mentions Boccaccio, saying: "Né m'è incognito che nella passata età Giovanni Boccaccio, uomo di grande ingegno e di non poche lettere, dette grande aiuto alla fiorentina eloquenzia, ma maggiore sarebbe stato se avessi meno perdonato alla fatica e non si fussi tanto nel dono della natura confidato che nell'arte fussi

While composing the *Comento*, a *prosimetro*, Lorenzo had in mind the great example of Dante's *Vita nova*. He pursued a very clever idea: that his achievement of political power would benefit greatly from the promotion and publicity of the glorious Tuscan literary tradition dating back to the *Tre Corone*. For this project, Lorenzo surrounded himself by the most brilliant intellectuals and poets of the time, resulting in impressive literary works in terms of both quantity and refined style. Perhaps the most famous example of this cultural project is the *Raccolta aragonese* of 1476.<sup>38</sup>

Returning to Lorenzo's *Comento*, we may say that his opinion on the *Decameron* has neither the value nor the characteristics of a rigid, codified rule. It is nevertheless worthy of attention, as it lays the foundation and prepares the groundwork for the vast and thorny dispute over language and the solutions proposed by Pietro Bembo nearly half a century later.<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion, from the last years of the *Trecento* until the 1520s, two different images of Boccaccio coexisted in parallel. On the one hand, humanists such as Brunetti, Manetti and Verino, who composed their works in Latin and paid little attention to vernacular literature, tended to draw a portrait of the Certaldese entirely modelled on the example of Petrarch: a humanist, a devoted composer of solely Latin treatises, both of erudition and rhetoric. On the other, a rather different image of Boccaccio emanated from the vernacular tradition: a disciple of Dante, mainly *scrittore in volgare*, and the pinnacle of the style for *orazione soluta* or vernacular prose. Far from being rigid and schematic, however, this division, as we have seen, has exceptions, such as Poliziano (among the humanists) and Sacchetti (among vernacular writers). Nevertheless, it is clear that the views expressed on Boccaccio's works depended on the perspective of the authors looking at him. Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua*, in its general vision, depended on the vernacular tradition discussed here, and above all appears to be directly inspired by the *Comento* of Lorenzo de' Medici. But, of course, such an assertion deserves further investigation.

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alquanto negligente; merita senza fallo grandissima laude e onore singulare, perché sempre si debbe a' primi auttori delle cose portare quasi immortale reverentia" (Landino 1974, 1:35).

<sup>38</sup> There is no mention of Boccaccio in the letter of dedication written by Poliziano to Federico d'Aragona. However, the collection begins with Boccaccio's *Vita di Dante* and includes three of his poems (according to Florence, BML, ms. Laur. Plut. 90 inf. 37, one of the most reliable witnesses). See De Robertis 1978; Bologna 1993, 1:211–12.

<sup>39</sup> Bessi 2004b.

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