The *Corbaccio* and Boccaccio's Standing in Early Modern Europe

In the early modern period, Boccaccio was widely acknowledged to be the greatest Italian vernacular prose writer, and yet his position as a canonical author, worthy of being read and studied by all, was in various respects uncertain. This essay will study some of the reasons for the insecurity of Boccaccio's standing, outlining some general issues that influenced his reception before looking more closely at the impact of one work that posed particular problems to readers, the *Corbaccio*.

Some sixteenth-century Italian judgments on Boccaccio are found in key works that both set and reflect the tone of highbrow and more middlebrow literary culture. Pietro Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* (Venice: Giovanni Tacuino, 1525) promotes Boccaccio as the best exponent of vernacular prose, just as Petrarch is the master of vernacular verse. "I miei due Toschi," as Bembo calls the pair, are his twin models for imitation (1.14). However, while Petrarch's writing is above criticism because of its relatively even and carefully managed nature, it turns out that Bembo has some quite serious reservations about Boccaccio's prose works. These are not all of equal quality: they improve as the author grows older (2.2). More seriously, Boccaccio could be an imprudent writer and he sometimes lacked good judgment, even in parts of the *Decameron* (2.19). Bembo does not elaborate on this, but he is evidently referring to the content of the works, not their language. As Carlo Dionisotti comments, his reservation was probably a social one; in other words, it concerned decorum and good taste, rather than, or more than, morality.[1]

Baldassarre Castiglione, too, refers to an error of judgment on Boccaccio's part, but it concerns style rather than behaviour. In the dedication of *Il libro del cortegiano* (Venice: heirs of Aldo Manuzio and Andrea Torresano, 1528), he responds to criticisms that he has not imitated Boccaccio's language. For Castiglione, the Tuscan wrote better when he followed his natural instincts than when he tried to write in an elaborate and polished

[1] In Bembo 1966, 175 n. 3.

style. Even his admirers see it as bad judgment on his part that he did not value more highly the works that had brought him most honour, presumably the *Decameron* above all. Castiglione also had reservations about Boccaccio's depiction of women. Bernardo Bibbiena, in 2.95, likens Boccaccio's views to those of the misguided misogynist Gaspare Pallavicino, who has just tried to justify the deceit of Ricciardo Minutolo (*Dec.* 3.6), and Bibbiena's comment that "Giovan Boccaccio era, come sete ancor voi, a gran torto nemico delle donne" is not contested.

In the other most widely read conduct book of the century, *Il Galateo overo de' costumi*, composed by Giovanni Della Casa in the early 1550s, Boccaccio is criticized for his characters' unbecoming use of language. First, Della Casa focuses on the language of the *brigata*, as a micro-society within the *Decameron*. It overstepped the boundaries of polite usage in its blasphemy so often that "ella merita bene di esserne agramente ripresa da ogni persona intendente."[2] The *brigata* can also go beyond the limits of the behaviour of a gentleman or lady in depicting the events they narrate, as if they were mere actors.[3]

Girolamo Bargagli, in the concluding section of his dialogue on the social games played in Siena (Siena: Luca Bonetti, 1572), is concerned that some tales from the *Decameron* are more suitable than others for telling in social entertainments. If one is recounting a story in a large company that includes many females, it would not be appropriate to tell the tales of Peronella and the tub, or of donno Gianni attaching a tail to compar Pietro's wife. One should avoid, above all, stories that contain "malo essempio di religione," such as those of ser Ciappelletto or Masetto da Lamporecchio, as well as ones that tell of "brutti e scellerati costumi" and those with an unhappy ending (2.472–76).

In the late fifteenth century, the Dominican friar Filippo da Strada condemned printed editions of not only the lustful poetry of Petrarch but also the *Fiammetta* and the *Decameron*.[4] Some believed that the *Decameron* was likely to corrupt women readers in particular. A reactionary speaker in Stefano Guazzo's *La civil conversazione* (Brescia: Vincenzo Sabbio for Tomaso Bozzola, 1574), Book 3, says that it would be acceptable for Italian women to be taught to read and write only if they were involved in law or

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[2] Della Casa 1999, 60.

[3] Della Casa 1999, 84.

[4] "Flammula dictus et est quidam stampatus in illis, | vhe, liber immundus – Centum" 'printed among those [books] is one called *Fiammetta* and alas the foul *Cento novelle*'; Pierno 2011, 66.

business as, apparently, French women were, because this ability could lead them towards the *Decameron* and the misuse of letter writing: "alle nostre, con insegnare a leggere e scrivere, si dà occasione di rivolgere le cento novelle del Boccaccio e di scrivere lettere piene di vanità e di lascivia."[5] This view is firmly rejected in Guazzo's dialogue, but the advice given in other conduct literature can reflect the same fears. The *Decameron* is forbidden to women readers by Lodovico Dolce (who, in contrast, recommends Dante and Petrarch), Juan Vives and Sabba Castiglione.[6] There is a similar warning about the corrupting effect of the *Decameron* on "[le] semplici giovanette" in Ortensio Lando's *Paradossi*.[7]

Another source of evidence for Boccaccio's early modern prestige, in relation to that of Dante and Petrarch, is how his vernacular works were published in print. Dante's *Commedia* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and *Triumphi* were edited at the very start of the Cinquecento by Bembo in Venice, and his texts established norms that were widely respected and followed by later editors. The texts of Boccaccio's writings that were printed in the Cinquecento were more prone to editorial interventions. In the case of the *Decameron*, the Florentine edition of 1527 emerged for a while as the dominant text, but later editors still felt free to alter its readings according to their tastes. In the second half of the century it became impossible to print this work in its entirety, mainly because of Boccaccio's portrayal of the clergy. Some of Boccaccio's other vernacular works proved particularly vulnerable to interventions by editors.

In summary, Boccaccio was admired and imitated as a vernacular prose writer, mainly on account of the *Decameron*, but this admiration was tempered in the eyes of some early modern readers (not all, of course) by some serious reservations. Boccaccio's corpus of writings was perceived to be uneven in standard. The behaviour and use of language of some of his characters overstepped the bounds of propriety. Some of the stories in the *Decameron* were unsuitable to be read or heard by women. Some of Boccaccio's writing was apparently misogynous, and this would have created a problem in an age when defences of women were becoming more common than attacks on them. There was no standard printed text of his works, even of the *Decameron*, in spite of editors' repeated claims to have corrected them diligently. The case of the censorship of the *Decameron* could have created doubts about whether a devout Catholic should read Boccaccio at

[5] Guazzo 2010, 1:237.
[6] Tippelskirch 2005.
[7] Lando 2000, 245.

all. Boccaccio may have been one of Bembo's "due Toschi," but his place in the canon was much less secure than that of Petrarch.

While the early modern critique of Boccaccio centred on the *Decameron*, the *Corbaccio* also played a significant part in shaping his reputation. Its reception can be considered from two points of view: the standing of the work in relation to others by Boccaccio, and how its perceived merits and defects contributed to his general standing in relation to the canon. We can gauge the reactions of its readers from comments made in a variety of contexts. We can then look at how the text was presented to readers in the original Tuscan and in translation, and at what the paratexts of editors and translators have to say to their readers about issues related to decorum and morality in the work.

San Bernardino of Siena had an ambivalent relationship with the *Corbaccio*. On the one hand, his misogyny was strongly influenced by Boccaccio's work. Sermons about women were sources for the *Corbaccio*; in turn, Boccaccio's work became a source for the sermons of San Bernardino.[8] On the other hand, the saint did not want others to read the *Corbaccio* freely. In one sermon, he advises listeners not to study "libri disonesti, come il *Corbaccio* e altri libri fatti da messer Giovanni Boccacci che […] ne fè parecchi che fusse il meglio se ne fusse taciuto."[9] One of the saint's rules for good students is to avoid activities such as playing dice, stealing hens and the harmful reading of works such as Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and the *Corbaccio*, which it is better not to know than to know.[10]

Francesco Filelfo saw the *Corbaccio* in the 1440s as illustrating a weakness shared equally by Petrarch and Boccaccio. In his commentary on *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 99, he uses a striking image to compare the way in which he thinks Petrarch, although corrupted by desire, used this sonnet to give advice to Boccaccio, who was supposedly sick with love for the cruel widow:

> fu scritto per risposta del Petrarcha a misser Giovan Boccaccio nel tempo che 'l detto era di quella donna fieramente innamorato contra di cui scrisse finalmente il *Corvatio*. Come dunque la troia amaestra gli suoi porcellini che mangieno costumatamente, mentre lei tiene il mostaccio et li piedi insieme dentro al catino, così lui essendo marcio d'amore conforta il Boccaccio che a tal vanità non attenda ma solamente a virtù per cui l'hom divien felice.[11]

[8] See Maldina 2011.
[9] Cited in Bec 1967, 396 n. 300.
[10] Bernardino of Siena 1950–65, 9:406.
[11] Cited from Petrarca 1490, c. F4^{r}. Filelfo may have had in mind *Corbaccio* §309.

Unusually, Petrarch is here put on the same low level as the author of the *Corbaccio*. As we shall see, all early modern readers of this work base their judgments on an identification of the narrator with a vengeful Boccaccio, and they implicitly link the author with the scholar who is rejected by a widow in *Decameron* 8.7.

In the Cinquecento, a number of Italian writers opposed the *Corbaccio*'s perceived misogyny. Mario Equicola, describing Boccaccio's works in his *De natura de amore* (Venice: Lorenzo Lorio de Portes, 1525), relishes the task of giving a detailed summary of the *Corbaccio*, to which he devotes twice as much space as to the *Decameron*. But the *Corbaccio*'s antifeminism also creates a problem in the context of his encyclopaedic study of the nature of heterosexual love. He gets out of this dilemma by concluding that, when the narrator of the *Corbaccio*, in other words Boccaccio, is attacking women, he is apparently excusing himself, but in so doing he in fact accuses himself. The truth is that Boccaccio simply does not like women, and Equicola cites a denial made by the spirit-guide (§§272–73) in order to hint darkly that Boccaccio himself had other sexual preferences: "noi vedemo come esso excusandose se accusa, che cagion ne fosse: però che altra spetie di libidine li piacque, li dispiacqueno le donne" (c. c2*r* [18r]).

Galeazzo Flavio Capra, writing his *Della eccellenza et dignità delle donne* (Rome: [Francesco Minizio Calvo], 1525), dismisses the *Corbaccio* for a different reason. Those who speak ill of women, he explains at the start of the work, usually do so because they have been rejected by one. Fileno in the *Filocolo* (3.35) and Boccaccio himself in the *Corbaccio* attack all women simply because they have been snubbed:

> Non altrimente il medesimo autore, reputandosi da l'amata vedova schernito, sdegnato il Labirinto d'amore detto *Corbaccio* compose, nel quale con sì gran fervore tante e tali cose scrisse in vituperio de le donne, che a chi lo ha veduto è malagevole pensar poter alcuna cosa bona da loro procedere.[12]

One of Ortensio Lando's justifications for his advice not to read Boccaccio, given in his *Paradossi* (Lyon: Jean Pullon, 1543), is that the *Corbaccio* is nothing more than "una sfrenata e rabiosa maledicenza contra d'una gentil e onesta vedova, che per disio d'onore compiacer non volle mai a' suoi libidinosi desiderii."[13]

Around 1571, Girolamo Muzio wrote to Domenico Venier to express his dislike of the edition that Iacopo Corbinelli had brought out in Paris in 1569 (to which I shall return later). Muzio begins with a remarkable tirade against

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[12] Capra 1988, 64.
[13] Lando 2000, 244.

Boccaccio, accusing him, just as Capra and Lando had done, of writing out of personal spite:

> Mi è venuto alle mani un *Corbaccio* stampato a Parigi per opera di un fiorentino, secondo che mostra una lettera posta per proemio nella fronte del libro, senza nome di auttore; et questa per regole canoniche da' catholici, che non hanno licenza di legger libri vietati, non doverebbe esser letta. Colui veramente commenda quel libro con maravigliose lodi, et io tanto sono lontano da lodarlo che lo ho per un libro infame. Et ben gli pose nome l'auttore *Il Corbaccio*, che di ogni più odioso corvo è più noioso. Né in altra opera veggo che al Certaldese più si convenga nome di Boccaccio che in questa, avendo egli voluto lacerare una gentildonna così vituperosamente. Et perché? Per non avere ella voluto sodisfare alla libidine di lui, alla quale se compiaciuto havesse, ella stata sarebbe la da bene et la virtuosa; et per non haver voluto macchiar la sua honestà, è la impudica et la vituperosa.
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> Bella cosa veramente, un huomo già di età canuta (et secondo che egli di se stesso si dipinge), persona grave et di riputatione, mettersi ad una opera così sporca et così fetida che più non pute luogo alcun publico, dove vada la plebe a scaricare il soverchio peso del ventre.[14]

For Muzio, not only does this work stink more than a public latrine, but it is more deserving than the *Decameron* of being condemned to the flames by the Inquisition, at least in Corbinelli's edition.[15] Muzio does, however, reveal his memory of a circumlocution from the *Decameron*, "diporre il superfluo peso del ventre" (2.5.37).

Lucrezia Marinella felt the need to add a rebuttal of the *Corbaccio* (along with a few other antifeminist works) in the second edition of her *La nobiltà et l'eccellenza delle donne* (1601). She argues: "Vituperò il Boccaccio etiandio il donnesco sesso più tosto con parole sconcie, piene di invidia, et di veleno, che di vere ragioni, overo apparente: et percio molte cose egli suppone, che havrebbono bisogno di realissime pruove." Boccaccio composed the book, she writes, "mosso da sdegno, e da una acerbissima afflittione, che lo indusse fino a desiderar la morte" (cc. I2^{r}–I3^{v} [pp. 131 and 134]).

Some other readers took a more positive view of the *Corbaccio*, for a variety of reasons. A work on the ideal woman, Federico Luigini's *Il libro della bella donna* (Venice: Plinio Pietrasanta, 1554), makes use of the spirit-guide's description of the widow (§399) in the course of its criticism of the excessive use of make-up.[16] An edition of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (Venice: Giovanni Andrea Valvassori, 1561) contains some annotations derived from

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[14] Muzio 1995, 171–72.
[15] Muzio 1995, 21–27, 171–85.
[16] Morgana 1994, 326.

Lodovico Dolce and others that treat the *Corbaccio* as an authority on ethical matters. The use of "gentile" with reference to a wild beast in the *Furioso*, 18.22, is justified with: "percioché il Boccaccio nel suo *Laberinto* mostrò, che Gentile è detto colui, che segue le virtù," accompanied by a quotation on true nobility from §503. A note in support of Zerbino's statement that "Amore ha volto sottosopra spesso | senno più saldo che non ha costui" (24.39) reads: "solo addurrò un'auttorità dal nostro Boccaccio cavata dal suo *Laberinto*," referring to §193 on love as a blinding passion. The English diplomat Sir Kenelm Digby (1603–65) read the *Corbaccio* with considerable interest. He seems to have linked it to the women he had encountered in Italy, probably on the Grand Tour. A marginal note in his copy of the Giolito edition of 1564, now in the British Library (shelfmark C.134.a.9.[2]), reads: "essential bellezza delle donne italiane è l'esser buone robbe." The expression "buona roba" normally referred to women who were attractive and of easy virtue,[17] but Digby perhaps understood it to mean stoutly built, since he writes this alongside a description of the widow's gluttony (§§308–09). He underlines passages such as "la loro lusuria è focosa et insatiabile" (§224). In a note on the final blank page of his copy (c. F6^{v}), Digby writes:

> Among all Boccace his vulgar workes, me thinke this (in his kinde) deserveth one of the first places of esteeme. It seemeth his displeasure was very great that was able to give so much tartenesse to his otherwise languishing conceptions; and yet his bitternesse in some places causeth him to make use of but lowe elocutions.[18]

In spite of this reservation, Digby goes on to comment appreciatively on the "gentilenesse" of Boccaccio's language and the "lively description of a malicious and luxurious woman that is in her declining yeares."

Like San Bernardino, some authors drew on the *Corbaccio* in their antifeminist writings. This would, of course, only have damaged the reputation of the work and its author still further in the eyes of pro-feminists. At the end of the fourteenth century, the Catalan humanist Bernat Metge used it abundantly as a source for his *Lo somni*. A fifteenth-century antifeminist work by Alfonso Martínez of Toledo, that went under the title *Arcipreste de Talavera*, did not borrow from Boccaccio; however, it may have been the renown of Boccaccio's work, and the resemblance of its title to the Spanish

[17] The entry for *roba* in the fourth edition of the Crusca dictionary (1729–38) includes: "Buona roba, o Bella roba, si dice in sentim. osceno di Femmina bella, anziché no, ma disonesta, o di partito."

[18] See also Gabrieli 1957, 25–26, 106–07.

word for "whip," that led to the use of the title *El Corbacho o Reprobación del amor mundano* for the first printing of the *Arcipreste* in 1498.[19]

In Italy, the author of the antifeminist invective known as *Il Manganello*, composed in the 1430s, was proud to begin his poem by setting it within a tradition in which the two key works are Juvenal's sixth *Satire* and the *Corbaccio*:

> Io credo ben che miser Zuan Bocacio
> vedesse Iuvenal Iunio d'Aquino
> prima ch'el componesse el so *Corbacio*
> donde ritrasse, in un vulgar latino,
> el vituperio, el fastidio e la pucia
> che mena al mondo el sexo feminino. (1.4–9)

Masuccio Salernitano opens the third part of his *Novellino*, "ne la quale il defettivo muliebre sesso serà in parte crociato," by recounting that he found himself lost in "un fulto e orrido bosco." Fortunately, Mercury appears and advises him to follow in the steps "del vetusto satiro Iovenale e del famoso commendato poeta Boccaccio."[20] Masuccio must have had in mind the *Corbaccio*, above all, but it is significant that the names of Juvenal and Boccaccio on their own are identified with antifeminism, with no need to identify the specific works in question.

Probably the most outspoken praise of the *Corbaccio*, given in a context and a language that was bound to condemn the work in the eyes of more conventional readers, is found in the letter to readers that opens Lorenzo Venier's poem *La puttana errante*, a mock-heroic account, written around 1530, of a prostitute's sexual odyssey. Venier invokes Boccaccio's work as a gospel of misogyny and an antidote to Petrarch:

> Fratelli beati coloro, che approno le orecchie del core alla gran tromba del quinto evangelista san Giovanni Boccaccio, e guai a quelli, che a gli incazziti fernetichi di messer Petrarca daran fede, perché l'uno è accesa candela de' buon socii, l'altro è tenebre di chi coglionescamente crede, che la sua monna Laura pisciasse acqua d'angioli, e caccasse ambracane;[21] però vigilate, carissimi miei, quod amen amen dico vobis, che 'l sacrosanto *Corbaccio* è quel, che cava l'anime del limbo, e 'l corpo dell'inferno, e le borse del purgatorio. Onde io, alluminato dal sopradetto san Giovanni Boccadoro, alla barba di quel mariolo di Cupido porgo all'imagine sua la presente opera non da me composta, ma dalla scomunicata vita d'una intemerata poltrona, il nome della quale per non vituperar il mondo si tace. Leggete

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[19] For more detail, see Farinelli 1929, 1:264–352; Todesco 1938; Blanco Jiménez 1977, 38–39; Riquer 1978; Ribera 2001; Solomon 1997, 113.

[20] Masuccio Salernitano 1957, 206, 208.

[21] Ambergris, a substance derived from whales and used as a perfume.

adunque, e leggendo non mi tenete disonesto, se con parole disoneste bandisco le disoneste opre sue, perch'io disonesto sarei se con voci oneste onestassi la disonestissima disonestà sua. Valete.[22]

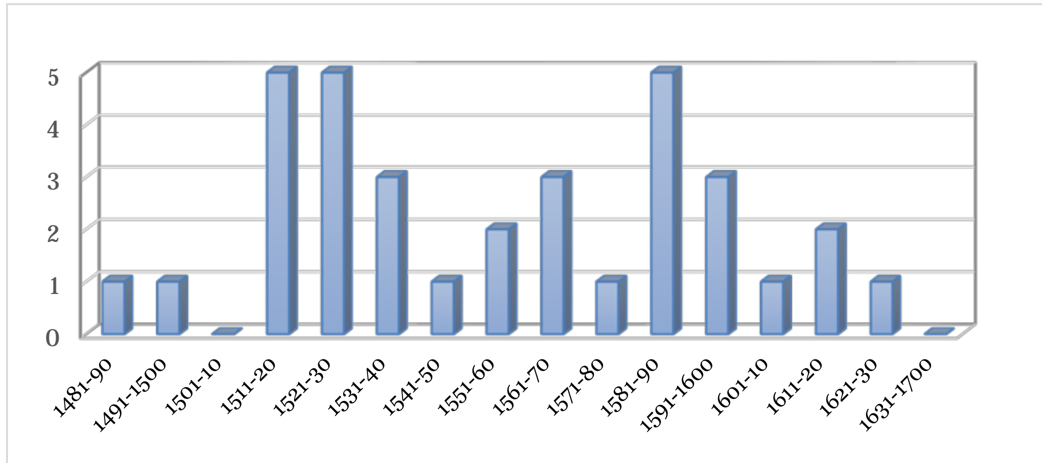

Chart 1. Numbers of editions of the *Corbaccio* printed in Italy, 1481–1700

As for printed editions of the *Corbaccio*, their appearance in Italy follows a quite irregular pattern up to the seventeenth century. In the Quattrocento, the work attracted little interest from print publishers in comparison with the *Decameron*, in spite of the high number of manuscripts of the work.[23] Only two Italian editions were brought out, and both came from Florence, whereas five of the eleven Italian *Decameron*s were printed in Venice and only one in Florence. The title of these *Corbaccio* editions highlights what is seen as the author's personal attack on an individual woman: *Invectiva di Messer Giovanni Boccaccio contra una malvagia donna: decto Laberinto d'Amore et altrimente il Corbaccio.*[24] In the Cinquecento, however,

[22] Venier 2005, 34.

[23] On the manuscripts, see Branca 1958–91, 1:24–29 and 2:27–29.

[24] Florence: Bartolomeo di Libri, 1487 and [Florence: Bartolommeo di Libri, after June 1497]. Manuscripts of the *Corbaccio* were present in Florentine households earlier in the fifteenth century. For some records of ownership of manuscripts of the *Corbaccio* in fifteenth-century Florence, see: Bec 1984, 109, 171, 175, 179; Castellani 1992–95, 2:52. (Castellani lent his manuscript together with two satirical works by Stefano Finiguerri, known as Za buffone; this might suggest that Boccaccio's work was seen as belonging to the category of reading for amusement.) The accounts of the bookseller-publisher Piero Pacini da Pescia show that he had "X libri di Corbacci" sent to the stationer Mariano di Gherardo in Siena on 21 October 1489: Verde 1973–85, 3.1:450.

the *Corbaccio* rises swiftly in popularity: there are 28 dated or datable Italian editions, which indicates that its print readership was catching up with that of the *Decameron*, published in 52 editions in Italy in the same century. Chart 1 maps the distribution of the 34 known *Corbaccio* editions printed in Italy up to 1700 and shows that there are two main periods of interest.[25] The first, 1511–30, coincides with the adoption and promotion of Boccaccio as a model prose writer by Bembo and others, although it is significant that Bembo himself practically ignores the *Corbaccio*, citing it only once in the *Prose della volgar lingua*, 3.77.[26] In ten editions printed between 1516 and 1532, the work is paired with another example of Boccaccio's later prose style, the consolatory letter to the exiled Pino de' Rossi.[27] The work's publication profile becomes lower in the mid-sixteenth century, before rising again in the 1580s. There are probably two factors behind this revival: one is that the unexpurgated *Decameron* could no longer be printed in Italy, but combined with this is the way in which the *Decameron* and the *Corbaccio* were singled out by influential critics in the second half of the century as the only acceptable models for imitation among Boccaccio's prose works. Della Casa in *Il Galateo* wrote that the language of Boccaccio could be excessively elaborate in some of his works, but he spared the *Decameron* and especially the *Corbaccio* from this criticism.[28] The Sienese writer Diomede Borghesi followed Della Casa's judgment, putting the same two works at the top of his hierarchy of approved works, also with a preference for the *Corbaccio*.[29] Lionardo Salviati accepts the *Decameron* and the *Corbaccio* alone as models in his treatise on the language of the *Decameron*. He goes on to elaborate on the distinction between these two works, on the one hand, and Boccaccio's other prose works, on the other, but he does not believe, as some do (he must mean Della Casa and perhaps Borghesi), that the *Corbaccio* equals, let alone surpasses, the *Decameron*.[30] In spite of the approval of

[25] The bar for 1491–1500 includes one edition datable post-June 1497; that for 1521–30 includes one datable 1527–33.

[26] Bembo 1966, 306–07.

[27] In manuscripts, the *Corbaccio* could be paired with a wide range of Boccaccio's other works: see Branca 1958–91, 1:24–29 and 2:27–29.

[28] Della Casa 1999, 94.

[29] Borghesi 2009, 19, 32, 114–16.

[30] *Avvertimenti della lingua sopra 'l Decamerone* (1584–86), 2.8 and 12, in Pozzi 1988, 827, 883. Lando criticizes the prolixity of Boccaccio's vernacular style in his *Paradossi* (Lando 2000, 243).

such authoritative figures, interest in the *Corbaccio* fades quickly in the Seicento: only four editions are printed in Italy, all in the first three decades of the century.

Printed texts of the *Corbaccio* could differ markedly in the criteria followed by their editors. Around 1525, Lucio Paolo Rosello, a priest of Padua, prepared the work for the Venetian printer Gregorio de Gregori, not only "improving" arbitrarily the language of his source text, the Florentine edition of 1516, but in one instance accentuating the antifeminist tone of a passage.[31] The original reads:

> Mobili tutte, et sanza alcuna stabilità sono, in una hora vogliono et disvogliono una medesima cosa ben mille volte […]. Et sono ritrose, et inobbedienti.

Rosello changes the word order and expands the criticisms:

> sono naturalmente ritrose, sospettose, pusillanime, mobili, et sanza alcuna stabilità, in un'hora vogliono, et disvogliono una medesima cosa ben mille volte […]. Et sono fuori d'ogni misura inobbedienti.

In contrast, Corbinelli's edition of 1569, mentioned above, was extraordinarily conservative in following closely a manuscript source that he had collated with the copy made by Francesco Mannelli in 1384.[32]

Most early modern editors and translators of the *Corbaccio* felt obliged to excuse the work in some way in their paratexts. Their two main arguments were that Boccaccio's target was the woman who had wronged him, not women in general, and that the work was a useful antidote to young men's excessive passions (a hope also expressed by Boccaccio's narrator, §560). Castorio Laurario of Padua defends the work in his two Venetian editions of 1516.[33] In the first, he argues that the *Corbaccio* helps young readers to extinguish the fiery arrows of love, as he knows from personal experience. The work is:

> cosa veramente singulare, et egregia et a ingegni sul fior delli verdi anni salutifera et di ciò per poter del cieco figluolo di Citherea gli accuti et penetrevoli strali rintuzati renderli, et le focose suoe saette estinguere, le quali alle più fiate arrechano grandissima cagione a cattivelli giovenetti pocco scaltri de incorrer in noiosa miseria et vergognosa ruina et sovente ancho in grandissimi perigli de la propria vita loro.[34] (cc. A1^{v}–A2^{r}) .

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[31] Richardson 1986, 270. This is §§245–46 in Natali's edition.

[32] Sozzi 1971b, 50–53; Gazzotti 2008.

[33] Richardson 1992.

[34] Antonio Ciccarelli, who censored Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* for the edition of 1584, similarly cited the *Corbaccio* as a warning against the pitfalls of sensual love: Panizza 2011, 205–06.

The *Corbaccio* will help readers to save their souls. It would be wrong, Laurario writes in the second edition, to suppose that Boccaccio was attacking all women:

> saria grandissimo isconcio et fuor di ogni ragionevel pensamento a voler dire che, se per amoroso orgoglio si ha voluto il Boccaccio vendicare d'una malvaggia sua amata di scorno degna, che ciò sia stato detto per tutte l'altre, ritrovandossene assai de grandissima laude et di eterna memoria degne. (c. +2$^{r–v}$)

In this prologue, women are in effect divided into two categories: the "nobilissime donne" who are his readers, and "le insensate malvagie et bestialissime femine" whom Boccaccio is attacking.

Iacopo Corbinelli, in 1569, makes a similar claim in his dedication, while taking the opportunity to flatter French women. His desire to edit the work using the Mannelli manuscript grew in him all the more, he writes, "quanto più l'inclementia di quella invettiva contro una malvagia femina, o forse anco indegna di quella ingiuria, operata, a considerare gl'honori dovuti all'altre, et a queste massimamente nobili donne di Francia, stimolo, et invitamento ne fu" (c. *2^{v}). For Filippo Giunta the younger, dedicating his Florentine edition of 1594 to a Piedmontese count, Amedeo Dal Pozzo (cc. *2^{r}–*4^{r}), Boccaccio's criticisms concern only one woman, and the work contains "ammaestramenti utilissimi:" it shows how to avoid the tyranny of such a viper and it will be especially useful for young men who are more prone to enter such a labyrinth. The dedicatee was only about fifteen years old, and Giunti seems to have been targeting the market of younger readers; but, he writes reassuringly, the count himself has no need of such advice.

Lodovico Domenichi used a contrasting approach in his Venetian edition of 1545. Clearly embarrassed by the work, he cites the response of his dedicatee, Bernardino Merato, to those who had criticized the intention of his printer, Gabriele Giolito, to bring out the *Corbaccio* alongside Boccaccio's other vernacular works:

> et fu degna risposta di voi il dire a quei, che biasimavano simil fatica, sì come poco grata al mondo per dir male delle donne, che egli è più d'honore alle femine esser vituperate dalla penna del Boccaccio, che lodate dall'inchiostro di molti scrittori plebei, che le sotterran vive, mentre si danno a credere di potere inalzarle al cielo. (c. A2$^{r–v}$)

Domenichi goes on to mention the view of Giolito that if just one copy of the work had survived, it would not have been wrong to burn it "per piacere a questo gratioso sesso"; but since there were so many copies, and incorrect ones at that, it was right for Giolito to bring out this edition. Domenichi's index of "cose degne di memoria" at the end of this edition tends to reinforce

the impression that the work is misogynistic by listing opinions as if they were universal axioms: for instance, "Le donne nate per esser serve de gli huomini," "Le donne tutte sono mobili, et senza alcuna stabilità," "Quanta sia la vanità delle femine," "Quanto l'huomo più degna, et più nobile cosa sia che la femina."[35]

The first translation of the *Corbaccio* was made into Catalan under the title *Corvatxo*, at the end of the fourteenth century, by a merchant of Barcelona, Narcís Franch.[36] Antonio Beccaria of Verona then turned Boccaccio's work into Latin in London in the early 1440s, commissioned to do so by Humphrey, duke of Gloucester.[37] The title of Beccaria's translation makes clear the perceived purpose of the work: *Corvacius adversum mulieres*. However, his letter of dedication shows deep unease about the translation and seeks to distance both the duke and himself from possible accusations of misogyny. Humphrey ordered it, he writes, "not to be stirred by any hatred against women but so that you could see the author's ability in this genre as well and praise it."[38] Beccaria even addresses women readers of all ages (rather incongruously, in the context of a Latin translation) in order to present himself as doing them a favour, and he promises to defend them in the future:

> But if any of all you young girls, maidens and married women ever had any shame and purity of life in her heart, you will be among the first to pardon me, since I have never sunk to these reproaches in order to cause any war with you, but rather in order to show you the war that others have waged. But fear not: I shall take up your protection and establish such defences of your praise for the future that it will not be permitted to fear the darts of enemies, and anyone who marks you with this sign of ignominy would prefer to have been silent, if my words have any effect.[39]

[35] This index is copied in Giolito's edition of 1551 and in Filippo Giunti's Florentine edition of 1594, which, moreover, inserts the entries into the margins of the text.

[36] Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, ms. 17675; see Boccaccio 1935.

[37] The copy in Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms. Lat. Misc. d. 34, was made around 1474–80 by Robert Sherborn (Albanese 1991, 96 n. 2; Clarke 2010, 112 n. 20).

[38] "[N]on ut adversum mulieres aliquo concitareris odio sed ut viri illius ingenium in hoc quoque dicendi genere perspicere posses et perspectum laudares" (Albanese 1991, 107).

[39] "Sed vos, o puelle, virgines ac matrone omnes que sunt, si qua sit ex vobis cui unquam pudicicia viteque castimonia cordi fuerit, mihi in primis veniam prestetis, cum certum sit me nequaquam in has contumelias descendisse ut vobis aliquod struerem bellum, sed potius ut vobis id, iam antea ab aliis instructum, indicarem. Sed ne formidetis: vestrum ego patrocinium suscipiam atque talia vestre laudis iaciam in posterum munimenta, ut nec formidare inimicorum iacula licebit et qui vobis hanc ignominie notam inscripserit tacuisse maluerit, si quid de se mea poterit oratio prestare" (Albanese 1991, 107–08).

As Gabriella Albanese has shown, the challenge facing Beccaria was not merely to turn Boccaccio's linguistically varied Tuscan into humanistic Latin, and in so doing to render the work more solemn and dignified: he also had to make substitutions, omissions, and additions in order to make it culturally acceptable to humanists. On the other hand, in spite of his claims not to be motivated by hatred of women, Beccaria engages with the tradition of misogynist literature by adding some further details to the spirit-guide's accusations against women; for example, "e sono ritrose e inobedienti" (§246) becomes "contumaces, si quid volueris, inobedientesque, si quid iusseris, quo nichil est in vita gravius neque molestius" 'stubborn if you want something, and disobedient if you order something; nothing in life is more troublesome or annoying.'[40]

In sixteenth-century France, the *Corbaccio* was known by at least the 1530s as one of those works written "contre l'onneur des dames."[41] The publication of Corbinelli's edition of the Italian text in Paris by Fédéric Morel in 1569 must have created sufficient added interest in the work to inspire the translation by François de Belleforest that was printed in the same city two years later, under a title similar to that of the Florentine edition of 1487: *Le laberinthe d'amour de M. Iean Boccace, autrement invective, contre une mauvaise femme, mis nouvellement d'Italien en Françoys* (Paris: Ian Ruelle, 1571). Like Italian editors, Belleforest has to defend the fact that he has undertaken this task. He tells his dedicatee, Guy de Quinsay, that he was motivated not by the wish to attack the female sex but rather by the erudition contained in the work. Further, the work is a useful prophylactic against the folly of love:

> non le desir de m'attaquer au sexe feminin lequel j'admire et estime, mais le sçavoir comprins en ce livret m'y a fait mettre la main. [...] Car quiconque lyra avec seur et bon jugement ce *Laberinthe*, il verra aussi encloz là dedans un vray laberinthe de saines interpretations, destournant l'homme de celle furieuse folie d'amour. (Sozzi 1971b, 53)

The author stresses that he has no grudge against virtuous women, only against hypocrites like the woman described in this work. In case this defence is insufficient, Belleforest adds a sonnet addressed to women readers of his book, assuring them that Boccaccio is attacking not them but only the woman who treated him badly. In the translation itself, he alters a passage that criticizes "femmine" in general so that it refers to mad women, *bêtes*

[40] Albanese 1991, 119 n. 2, 123–26, 133.
[41] Sozzi 1971, 267–69.

and *folles*, and he omits or abbreviates other passages that might give offence.[42]

What claimed to be another translation of the *Corbaccio* was printed under the title *Le Songe de Bocace*.[43] It appeared anonymously first in Paris in 1698 ("au Palais"), again in Amsterdam the following year (heirs of Antoine Schelte) and then in The Hague (Jean Swart, 1724), It is attributed in later editions first to a Monsieur de P.**** (Paris: Pierre Huet, 1705) and then to a Monsieur de Prémont (Amsterdam, 1788). Rather than a translation, this version is a very free adaption of parts of the Italian text, into which a variety of extracts from other works are incorporated. The author seeks to justify the result to both female and male readers in two paratexts. The edition opens with a dedicatory "Epistre a mademoiselle D*****." This is a surprising gift, Prémont admits, because Boccaccio, an admirer of women in most of his works, does not spare them in this one, to such a degree that Prémont has had to omit parts of the text: "Justement prévenu contre une mauvaise femme, il s'en prend à toutes les autres: il leur declare la guerre: il outre leurs defauts, et en fait une peinture si affreuse que je n'ay pû me dispenser d'en effacer une partie" (1698 edition, c. *2$^{r–v}$). However, he goes on, the image of the anonymous (and doubtless fictitious) mademoiselle will at least shine all the brighter by being contrasted with Boccaccio's portrayal of women.

Prémont then defends his work in another way in a Preface. He stresses that he personally has no grudge against women, as Boccaccio did when he wrote the work. But, rather than defending women, Prémont's approach is to argue that their faults are simply those of human nature. Further, this work has exemplary functions. Boccaccio portrayed a woman full of vices in order to correct ours and to make men more prudent in choosing a female companion. And knowing the faults of most women makes us appreciate better those who have none. As well as replacing passages perceived as offensive with extracts from other works, Prémont still feels obliged to persuade his readers that they should not be shocked by what remains of the original. As we saw, there were no Italian editions of the *Corbaccio* in the second half of the seventeenth century, and it is clear from this French version that Boccaccio's work was now considered difficult to publish in its original form in northern Europe as well.

The *Corbaccio* was, then, successful in several respects in early modern Europe. It was widely read in the original Tuscan, and appreciated as an

[42] Sozzi 1971b, 53–54; Pionchon 2008, 211–17. Belleforest also omits references to religion (Pionchon 2008, 214–15).

[43] Pionchon 2008, 217–23.

example of Boccaccio's unpretentious vernacular prose style, in spite of its textual instability. It was also read in Catalan, Latin, and French versions. It was a resource plundered in antifeminist writing, just as Boccaccio had plundered earlier sources. Many readers will have relished its excesses, while others will at least have tolerated them. Yet the *Corbaccio* was seen, rightly or wrongly, as one of the works, probably indeed the principal work, in which Boccaccio was guilty of what Bembo called imprudence, a fault of which he never accuses Petrarch. Even its editors and translators felt apologetic about its contents. For many readers in modern times, Boccaccio's transgression of conventional norms is part of what makes him interesting. In early modern Europe, however, it was one of the factors that meant that, of the "due Toschi," Boccaccio's location in the canon was by far the less secure. From the Quattrocento to the Seicento, Boccaccio was a paradoxical figure, admired and mistrusted at the same time; and, although some of the admiration stemmed from the reading of the *Corbaccio*, so did much of the mistrust.

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