

## Olivia Holmes and Dana E. Stewart. Reconsidering Boccaccio. Medieval Contexts and Global Intertexts

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specialists will also draw inspiration from such a rich and well-balanced resource, both broad and specific in scope. In sum, the volume astutely incorporates an array of diverse voices that intertwine and diverge as, collectively, they expand the horizons of the field of Cultural History.

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**Olivia Holmes and Dana E. Stewart. *Reconsidering Boccaccio. Medieval Contexts and Global Intertexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018. Pp. 444. ISBN: 9781487501785.**

The fifteen essays that constitute this volume are based on the papers delivered at the “Boccaccio at 700: Medieval Contexts and Global Intertexts” conference, hosted by Binghamton University’s Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies in 2013. The Editors’ Introduction states that one of the goals of this volume is to showcase Boccaccio’s exceptional social, geographic, and intellectual range “not only as a creative writer, but also as a Florentine ambassador, politician, scribe, glossator, mythographer, biographer, geographer, and priest” (3). The book explores how Boccaccio’s literary and epistolary output, among which *De mulieribus claris* features prominently, both benefitted from a complex system of social, legal, economic, and literary networks, and in turn influenced and transformed them. The volume employs a wide range of methodologies and critical approaches (political, socio-cultural, ethical, and legal) in exploring Boccaccio’s versatility as a cultural mediator.

The volume is divided into five sections based on the type of contexts elucidating Boccaccio’s works and their legacy. The first part, “Material Contexts,” opens with an essay by K. P. Clarke, who examines Boccaccio’s illustrated catchwords in the MS Hamilton 90 autograph of the *Decameron*, arguing that they should be seen not as simply decorative, but rather as “expertly managing the reader’s encounter with the text” (30). Rhiannon Daniels continues the material and codicological emphasis by analysing the content, form, and function of Boccaccio’s dedications, which complicate the distinction between Boccaccio’s fictional and biographical worlds.

In Part Two, “Social Contexts: Friendship,” Jason Houston examines Boccaccio’s rhetorical treatment of his friends Niccolò Acciaiuoli and Zanobi da

Strada, suggesting that while Boccaccio's theoretical observations about friendship rely on the ideals of *amicitia* espoused by Virgil, Cicero, and Ovid, his descriptions of the practical realities of friendship are indebted to medieval Tuscan writers, such as Boncompagno da Signa and Brunetto Latini. In the following chapter, Todd Boli reconstructs the parameters of Boccaccio's friendship with Mainardo Cavalcanti, delineating the important role that friendships played in contemporary literary culture.

Part Three moves to a different set of social contexts, namely, gender, marriage, and law. Alessia Ronchetti opens the section with an interpretation of compassion in the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*, presenting the readers with the rich philosophical and rhetorical history of the word and suggesting that in Boccaccio's work, we see the encounter of different hermeneutic schemes centred on pity. Grace Delmolino then proposes an interpretation of *Decameron* 2.10 in the light of the treatment of conjugal debt in Gratian's *Decretum*, arguing that the *novella* allows Boccaccio to offer a critical treatment of the legal profession, informed by his own study of canon law. Sara E. Díaz further enriches our understanding of Boccaccio's treatment of marriage by focusing on the discourse against matrimony in Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*. Díaz links *Trattatello*'s rhetoric with Boccaccio's desire to establish the authority of Dante's vernacular poetics, suggesting that the antifeminist discourse acts as a strategy designed to bring Dante's love poetry in line with the notion of Latinate authorial prestige. Mary Anne Case rounds off this section by returning to the topic of law in relation to a question much debated in the Middle Ages, namely, whether women could be accorded the status of *homines* (human beings). Case compares Boccaccio's position on the humanity of women in *De mulieribus* to Christine de Pizan's, proposing that in *Decameron* 6.7, Madonna Filippa succeeds in showing that women are not only fully human, but also Christ-like.

The penultimate section of the book focuses on the intersection of Boccaccio's writing and the lives of historical women. Elizabeth Casteen's contribution examines Boccaccio's changing attitudes to Queen Johanna of Naples from the *Amorosa visione* to *De mulieribus*, suggesting that Boccaccio's shaping of her reputation allowed him to establish himself as a voice actively engaged in contemporary Neapolitan politics. Kevin Brownlee's careful examination of the references to Boccaccio in the *Cité des dames* and Lori J. Walters's analysis of Christine de Pizan's portrayal of the Queen Ysabel de Bavière, based on Boccaccio's Queen Johanna, show that the French writer modelled her literary authority both by

alluding to Boccaccio's example and transforming his rhetorical and narrative techniques.

The volume ends with an analysis of the sources, intertexts, and reception of Boccaccio's writing. Franklin Lewis examines the relationship between the story of the pear tree in *Decameron* 7.9 and its numerous analogues in the Middle Eastern, Hellenistic, and Hebrew storytelling and iconography. Katherine A. Brown shows that the *beffe* of *Decameron* 8.5 and 8.6 are indebted to Boccaccio's technique of splitting and recombining the plot elements of French *fabliaux*, and Filippo Andrei demonstrates the influence of *Fiammetta's* elegiac rhetoric on Fernando de Rojas's *Celestina*. Finally, Nora Martin Peterson analyses the representation of confessional practices in *Decameron* 1.1 and Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*: while both authors stress the connection between storytelling and confession, their writing also reflects changing historical attitudes toward the sacrament.

The volume's particular strength lies in its extensive discussion of women's voices in Boccaccio's writing. The individual contributions dialogue with each other well beyond section boundaries, both in terms of methodological approaches and topics discussed. The volume does not admittedly live up to the promise of a global geographical reach indicated in the title. While the majority of essays interrogate Boccaccio's underexplored inter-European connections, only Lewis's contribution provides an extensive discussion of Boccaccio's Persian and Arabic analogues, and the book does not investigate Boccaccio's reception in Africa or the Americas. However, if we see the notion of globality in terms defined by Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen ("Defining the Global Middle Ages," 2015), the book does an excellent job in outlining the non-elite contexts of Boccaccio's literary production and reception, as well as the movement of texts and material objects within and across cultural traditions. A valuable contribution to Boccaccio studies, this volume has the potential to spark a much broader discussion about what further scholarly collaborations may be necessary in globalising the *Tre Corone* and the Italian Middle Ages.

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