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Author-Text-Reader:
Boccaccio's *Decameron* in 1384

The so-called “Mannelli Codex” (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, ms. Plut. 42.1) is an important early manuscript of Boccaccio's *Decameron* and *Corbaccio*.¹ The scribe, one Francesco d'Amaretto Mannelli, records his identity in a colophon and dates his work to 1384. The book is of large dimensions (measuring 392 x 285 mm) in two columns, written in a fluent *mercantesca* script; rubrics are inserted and initials are executed decoratively in red and blue. Mannelli had access to a text of a very high quality: indeed, the greater part of critical attention to the manuscript has concentrated on philological and textual questions. The text contained in the missing quires in the only autograph of the *Decameron* (Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, ms. Hamilton 90) is supplied by the “Mannelli Codex” in the standard modern edition, while Padoan's edition of the *Corbaccio* uses the manuscript for its base text.² No less remarkable than the quality of the texts copied in the manuscript is the apparatus of notes and marginalia added by Mannelli.³ While the glosses to the *Decameron* have been in the public domain for a considerable time and were recorded, for example, by Vittore Branca in his standard and widely available Einaudi edition, they have suffered striking neglect in scholarship on the early reception of Boccaccio's work.⁴ Branca made reference to the glosses in his

¹ See Cursi 2007, 180–82 (number 15), with previous bibliography. See also Cursi's *scheda* (number 24) in De Robertis *et al.* 2013, 140–42. The manuscript may be consulted online in digital reproduction at:

<<http://teca.bmlonline.it/ImageViewer/servlet/ImageViewer?idr=TECA0000624150&keywords=plut.42.01#page/0/mode/lup>>.

² On the Berlin autograph, see Cursi 2007, 161–64 (number 1); for a facsimile, see Boccaccio 1975. The *Corbaccio* is in Boccaccio 1994, 5.2:413–614.

³ On Mannelli's glosses in the margins of his *Corbaccio*, see Clarke 2010. For a transcription of the *Decameron* glosses, see Clarke 2011, 165–73.

⁴ See Boccaccio 1976 and 1992. Amongst the only critical work on the glosses is Carrai 2002. See also Clarke 2011, 119–28, and Clarke 2013.

critical edition published with the Accademia della Crusca, describing Mannelli as “quasi primo commentatore del *Decameron*.”⁵ The neglect suffered by these glosses is not easy to explain fully when one considers, first, how uncommon it is to find such contemporary notes in margins of *Decameron* manuscripts, and, second, how unusual and revelatory some of the glosses are in recording a near-contemporary reader’s response to the text.⁶ Indeed, the manuscript presents a rich matrix of intersecting concerns: material philology, authorship, textual criticism, reader reception. Doing justice to the complexity of it as Book/Text, as *testo-nel-tempo*, requires not just the traditional tools of textual philology, but also what has been termed a “filologia del Lettore.”⁷

Though few biographical certainties are available with regard to Francesco d’Amaretto Mannelli, we do know that he was from a bookish family and that his father was the author of a chronicle, written in the vernacular. He has also been associated with the copying and commissioning of books in Florence in the second half of the fourteenth century, most notably the illuminated copy of Villani’s *Cronica* in Vatican City, Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, ms. Chig. L. VIII. 296.⁸ The family was prominent in Florentine civic and economic life, involved in trade and commerce. Mannelli, then, is a reader and copyist who can be placed in a prosperous, mercantile, bookish milieu.

He seems to have been particularly interested in the work of Boccaccio. Not only does the “Mannelli Codex” also contain the *Corbaccio*, but a catchword on its final *charta* suggests that the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* was intended to follow: “suolle a’ miseri crescere” (c. 191^v). In addition, there is evidence that he copied, amongst other vernacular works, the *Ameto* and the *Amorosa visione*.⁹ It is possible (though by no means certain) that Mannelli knew Boccaccio personally, since several remarkably familiar glosses directly engage with the author in an imagined marginal dialogue, sometimes naming him. If he did not know Boccaccio personally, he certainly was aware of the format authorized by Boccaccio in the Berlin au-

⁵ Boccaccio 1976b, lxxix.

⁶ On early readers of the *Decameron*, see Daniels 2009.

⁷ On this, see Antonelli 2012; see also Antonelli 2012b. For *testo-nel-tempo*, see Contini 1986, 9–12, 14–15 (and cited by Antonelli 2012, 23–24 and n. 38). For an excellent overview, see Antonelli 1985.

⁸ Cursi 2002.

⁹ See Padoan 1997, 189–99; also in Padoan 2002, 112–21.

tograph, ms. Ham. 90, and it is significant that Mannelli should have carefully replicated the autograph in terms of its size, its *mise en page* and bicolumnar *ordinatio*.

Mannelli could well be described with the term coined by Malcolm Parkes, as a “professional reader.”¹⁰ In the Middle Ages such “professional” reading was not a casual, passive activity. Mannelli’s engagement with Boccaccio in this manuscript is not simply that of reading the text; he is also producing that text, copying it out. The dynamic between reading and copying, copying and reading, leads to a highly textualized, philological engagement with the *Decameron*. As Walter Benjamin (himself an inveterate copyist) said in a beautiful section entitled “Chinese Curios” (*Chinawaren*) in *One-Way Street (Einbahnstraße)*, written between 1923 and 1926 but only published in 1928, “the power of a text is different when it is read from when it is copied out.”¹¹ For him the difference was like flying over a landscape and looking down, rather than making one’s way through the terrain, constantly reacting to its ever-changing forms: “Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it.”¹² This sentiment is echoed by Michel Foucault who, in his “Afterword to The Temptation of St Anthony” (a piece also known under the title of “Phantasia on a Library”), boldly asserted that “to copy is *to do* nothing; it is *to be* the books being copied.”¹³ Naturally, such observations must be tempered with due consideration paid to the material realities of the pre-modern context, but in the margins of the Mannelli codex it is clear that the act of copying and reading comprise a richly intimate and mutually intense engagement.

The copying and reading of Mannelli is decidedly critical in articulation. Often his glosses will simply be *notae*; sometimes he will offer a correction to Boccaccio’s prose, or make other linguistic or philological comments on the text; sometimes he will place a *crux* in the margin, indicating a point of interest. An abiding concern in his reading is centred on gender, on the women in the *Decameron*, their behaviour and how to interpret it.¹⁴ His marginal interventions are often marked with a highly emotional engage-

¹⁰ Parkes 1991, 275 (first published in Daiches and Thorlby 1973).

¹¹ “[D]ie Kraft eines Textes eine andere, ob einer ihn liest oder abschreibt” (Benjamin 1991, 4.1:90); Benjamin 1996, 1:448.

¹² “So kommandiert allein der abgeschriebene Text die Seele dessen, der mit ihm beschäftigt ist” *ibid.*

¹³ “[C]ar copier, c’est ne rien *faire*; c’est *être* les livres qu’on copie” (Foucault 1994, 1:312); Foucault 1997–2001, 2:121.

¹⁴ Feminism has been a rich vein in Boccaccio criticism: see Stillinger and Psaki 2006, Ronchetti 2007 and Migiel 2004.

ment with the author, the text and its characters. This affectivity is sometimes expressed in what might be called “optative” terms; that is, wishing that things were different for a particular character. For example, at *Dec.* 7.9.53, just as Panfilo describes the scene where the credulous Pyrrhus is having a (healthy) tooth extracted by Lydia, Mannelli glosses it with: “hor t’avess’ella cavato l’ochio” (c. 117^rA). The foolishness of Pyrrhus has struck a chord with Mannelli, and he angrily wishes that things could have turned out worse for him. A similar kind of remark is found in the margins of the final story of the *Decameron*, that of Griselda and Gualtieri. When Gualtieri asks Griselda if she will have him for a husband, she meekly assents: “Signor mio, sì” (*Dec.* 10.10.21). At this very moment Mannelli’s emotions cannot be controlled and he writes in the margins of c. 168^vA: “De hora avess’ella decto ‘Io non vo’ pazo per marito.’”¹⁵ If *only* she’d said no, is Mannelli’s response. He even provides Griselda with a kind of alternative script in the margins where her resistance is registered.

Mannelli also resists elsewhere in his engagement with the *Decameron*. The pithy novella opening Day 10 has Neifile describe how messer Ruggieri de’ Figiovanni entered the service of King Alphonso of Spain but feels insufficiently rewarded by the king for that service; after time away from the court, he is recalled, whereupon the king proceeds to explain that fortune has bestowed rewards and not the king. He takes him to a chamber with two sealed chests, one filled with earth, the other filled with the king’s riches, and is asked to choose. Ruggieri chooses the chest full of earth and learns a hard lesson in fortune. The king, however, in spite of fortune, gives him the other chest in recognition of his virtues. The slightly sententious tone of the tale, and the narrative role of fortune in the choice of chest, leave Mannelli with an arched eyebrow. His gloss on c. 150^vB, at §18, reads: “O s’egli avesse preso l’altro, che aresti tu decto, beccone?” The *gravitas* of the king’s moral message is humorously undercut by this reader, who wonders how the story would have gone if Ruggieri had chosen the chest of riches.

The glosses in the margins of Mannelli’s book show him often interested in style. For example, Boccaccio has the opening of Pampinea’s story of Master Alberto of Bologna (*Dec.* 1.10) echo the opening of Filomena’s story of Madonna Oretta (*Dec.* 6.1). This has been much discussed by critics, who note the thematic and interpretive strategies at work.¹⁶ Mannelli, too, registers the echo, but is somewhat less sympathetic: “nota che questo medesimo prolago usa l’autore di sopra nella decima novella decta da Pampinea, il che pare vizioso molto” (c. 97^vA). In contrast to Mannelli’s unease with style is

¹⁵ For a fuller discussion of this gloss, see Clarke 2011, 121.

¹⁶ See Stewart 1976; see also Barolini 2006, 241–43.

his ease and familiarity with the structure of the *Decameron*, referring to the story as “the tenth story told by Pampinea”; that is, by number and teller and omitting reference to it being the first day. Pampinea has only once told a tenth story, since in each of the following days Dioneo claims the privilege of going last.

Several glosses engage directly with Boccaccio personally, creating an imaginary dialogue between the glossator and the author. This engagement is often inflected with gender concerns, which Mannelli is frequently quick to note. The story of the aging scholar Rinieri and the young and beautiful Elena is told by Pampinea as the seventh of Day 8. The scholar explains to the woman that youth is often preferred by women when, in fact, age and experience make for better lovers:

Voi v'andate innamorando *et* disiderate l'amor de' giovani, perciò che alquanto co' lle carni più vive *et* con le barbe più nere gli vedete *et* sopra sé andare *et* carolare *et* giostrare: le quali cose tutte ebber coloro che più alquanto attempati sono *et* quel sanno che coloro ànno ad imparare. Et oltre a ciò gli stimate miglior cavalieri *et* far di più miglia le lor giornate che gli uomini più maturi. (*Dec.* 8.7.102, c. 129^vB).¹⁷

The entire passage is marked in the margins by Mannelli, and a gloss reads: “messer Giovanni mio tu predichi nel deserto, quantunque a me paia che dica il vero” (gloss to §102; c. 129^vB, lower margin). The voice of the scholar Rinieri is associated with that of Boccaccio, who is figured here as a St John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness to an unwilling or non-existent audience. The tale has figured in autobiographical readings of Boccaccio's work, connected too with the *Corbaccio* in this respect.¹⁸ The tone is one of exasperation, of two old men shaking their heads at the way they are no longer in the game. It is not only a Mannelli who sees the truth of Boccaccio's text, but it is also a recognition of the variousness of reception, and of the wilfulness and resistance of readers. This familiarity with Boccaccio is expressed in a gloss to *Dec.* 6.4.11, where Currado Gianfigliuzzi, having been presented with dinner prepared by his cook Chichibio, notices that it has only one leg, the other having been eaten already by Chichibio. Told that cranes have only one leg, he reacts angrily with: “Come dyavol non ànno che una coscia e una gamba? Non vid'io mai più gru che questa?” The phrase “come diavol [...]” prompts Mannelli to note in the margins of c. 99^vB:

¹⁷ In the interests of engaging with Mannelli's reading experience, citations to the text of the *Decameron* are to that of his own manuscript, rather than the edited text of Branca. Punctuation, u/v distinction and accents are added for ease of reading, but otherwise Mannelli's text is represented.

¹⁸ On this, see Marcus 1984.

“modo usato di parlare, e dello autore.” If one must be cautious in suggesting that the two men knew each other, this gloss implies, at least, that he is familiar with how Boccaccio swore.

In a rather curious gloss in the margins of *Dec.* 6.7, Mannelli directly addresses Boccaccio as *autore*. When Boccaccio describes the illegal, adulterous relationship between Madonna Filippa and Lazzarino de' Guazzagliotri being discovered by her husband, they are described reciprocating each other's affections: “il quale ella quanto se medesima amava” (*Dec.* 6.7.5).¹⁹ Mannelli here intervenes with: “Messer Giovanni mio, tu ài tagliato lo scilinguagnolo” (c. 100^vA). What prompts this gloss and how is it to be interpreted? The rare expression, which is used once by Boccaccio in *Dec.* 3.1.36 (*romper lo scilinguagnolo*), means “to begin to speak,” “to speak much and frankly,” perhaps also “to decide to speak after a silence,” in the sense of getting over one's timidity to do so.²⁰ Perhaps Mannelli is commenting on the expression used to describe their mutual love, which often recurs in the *Decameron*.²¹ In *Dec.* 3.1.36, the expression is used when Masetto speaks up and finally confronts the abbess, explaining that he can no longer keep up with their sexual demands. Masetto, the man who has nothing more to give, is, in a sense, answered by Madonna Filippa, who has plenty more to give. It is a feature of the lexicon of Mannelli's glosses that it is drawn from the *Decameron* itself. That is, we see the book develop Mannelli's critical engagement and the words he uses to interact with the stories and their characters.

If Boccaccio is addressed directly here, at the end of the story it is with Madonna Filippa that Mannelli enters into dialogue. In an extraordinary moment of self-possession, Madonna Filippa bluntly asks the judge what she is to do with the sexual appetite left over after her husband has been satisfied, “lasciarlo perdere o guastare?” Mannelli directly addresses her:

¹⁹ Branca (1992, 746 n. 2), *ad loc.*, notes that in the *Decameron* these are not *espressioni peregrine*, citing *Dec.* 4.6.22n, which in turn refers to the expression as “quasi una formula,” pointing to examples in *Dec.* 2.7.83; 2.10.30; 3.3.10; 3.6.41; 3.7.47; 3.9.26; 4.2.41; and analogous to that used in 2.8.52.

²⁰ For definitions see Battaglia 1996, 18:37, *s.v.* scilinguagnolo: “incominciare o decidersi a parlare dopo un silenzio per lo più alquanto lungo e avendo superato ogni timidezza, remora o imbarazzo,” citing *Dec.* 3.1.36; see also Cortelazzo and Zolli 1999, 1474, *s.v.* scilinguagnolo. The word is recorded in the first edition of the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (1612), and its definition is amplified in each subsequent edition. See the website <www.lessicografia.it> for an electronic interface permitting a comparative consultation.

²¹ Carrai 2002, 104.

“Monna Filippa, tu ài ragione, che tristo faccia Dio che vi puose la vergogna, però che il danno è molto piccolo” (c. 10^{1r}A). The question of tone immediately presents itself. Is Mannelli lacing this supportive gloss with irony, or is he supporting her sexual freedom, cursing whoever has made her feel guilty and asserting that the *danno* is really only very little? If it is ironic, it is not entirely clear how the irony is intended to steer an imagined reader in the right direction. If we read this “straight,” then the text is having precisely the effect on this reader (Mannelli) that Boccaccio and the censors feared, inciting attitudes that do not accord with the morally acceptable.²² Monna Filippa, in other words, has managed to convince not only the assembled crowd and the *podestà*, but also Francesco d’Amaretto Mannelli, who is making his way through her story, carefully recording her words as if he were a notary present at her trial.

In the glosses, Mannelli envisages a diverse readership, including women. On a number of occasions, he addresses female readers, in particular those who are prone to vices such as gossiping. For example, in the space of two *chartae* containing the story of Master Alberto of Bologna (*Dec.* 1.10; the famous medic who falls in love with a younger woman), Mannelli glosses in the inner margin, at §3: “Nota tutto il Prolago di questa novella qualunque sè donna lisciatrice o ciarlatrice” (c. 17^vB); shortly afterwards, in the left-hand margin, to §6, he writes: “nota tu femina ciarlatrice” (c. 18^rA).²³ A simple gloss to §12, “nota,” in the right margin, draws attention to the statement that the women in the tale “quasi credessero questa passione piacevolissima d’amore solamente nelle scioche anime de’ giovani *et non in altra parte capere et dimorare.*” In a note to *Dec.* 4.8.20, during a nocturnal encounter between Salvestra, her former lover Girolamo, and her sleeping husband, Salvestra urges Girolamo to leave so as not to be discovered by her husband, thus destroying the happy life she shares with him:

Per che io ti priegho per solo Idio che tu te ne vada, ché se mio marito ti sentisse, pogniamo che altro male non ne seguisse, sí ne seguirebbe che mai in pace né in riposo collui viver potrei, dove hora amata da llui in bene *et in tranquillità con lui mi dimoro* (*Dec.* 4.8.20)

Mannelli, clearly approving of Salvestra’s chaste reaction to the sudden appearance of her old flame, glosses this with: “nota bene donna che leggi” (c.

²² On this, see the letter sent by Boccaccio to Mainardo Cavalcanti about the women in his household reading Boccaccio’s work (Epistle 22): Boccaccio 1992b, 700–11. On this letter, see Clarke 2011, 105–07; Daniels 2011.

²³ On ‘sè’ for ‘se,’ see Castellani 1999.

76^vA). He seems to be to be pre-empting a female reader, drawing her attention to a moment of moral virtue. There is a strong sense here that Mannelli is envisaging real female readers.

A fascinating glimpse of how Mannelli sees women being authorized to read the book is found in a gloss to the story of Zinevra and Bernabò of Genoa. The story opens with Bernabò and Ambrogiuolo discussing women. Bernabò has just expounded upon the virtues of his wife; Ambrogiuolo explains that if men take every opportunity possible to be unfaithful, then how can one expect women, who are weaker than men, to behave more virtuously. Bernabò concedes that foolish women may behave in such a manner, but “queste che savie sono ànno tanta sollecitudine dello honor loro, che elle diventan forti più che gl’uomini, che di ciò non si curano, ad guardarlo” (*Dec.* 2.9.18).²⁴ Mannelli’s response to this passage betrays a recognition that Bernabò’s staunch defence of women, and of his own wife in particular, will appeal to potential female readers. He glosses the passage: “nota bene e meglio questo decto, il quale ha forza di far concedere alle donne di leggere questo libro” (c. 39^rA). That is, Mannelli sees Bernabò’s philogynous championing of virtuous women, especially his assertion that in respect of honour they are superior to men, as an authorially licensed point of entry for female readers. The story of Zinevra and Bernabò as text, *il detto*, exerts a power, *ha forza*, and almost acts as a password for female possession and use of the book by bypassing masculine control and mediation.²⁵

Mannelli’s engagement with the story of Rinieri and Elena (*Dec.* 8.7) has been noted above for the gloss figuring Boccaccio as a St John the Baptist preaching in the wilderness. But this engagement extends to several other glosses on the tale: two of these are especially noteworthy because they are amongst the relatively few Latin source glosses in the margins of the *Decameron*.²⁶ The first appears to *Dec.* 8.7.67, where Rinieri, while secretly watching the beautiful Elena as she strips naked and prepares to climb the tower and begin her necromantic incantations, finds himself in a state of sexual excitement: “*et d’altra parte lo stimolo della carne l’assali subitamente et fece tale in piè levare che si giaceva.*” Mannelli sees here an allusion to the second book of Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, where Lucius sees Photis in the kitchen and, unexpectedly, “*steterunt et membra que iacebant ante*”

²⁴ Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, ms. Hamilton 90 reads “quelle che savie sono” (c. 28^vA); Mannelli copies “quelle che savie sono” in Ambrogiuolo’s response, *Dec.* 2.9.19 (thus, too, in ms. Hamilton 90, c. 28^vA–B).

²⁵ For some comments on women being granted a mediated access to the *Decameron*, see Cursi 2007, 44, 140. On the story, see also Clarke 2012, 354–59.

²⁶ Latin glosses in the margins of the *Corbaccio* are more frequent; on this, see Clarke 2010.

(c. 128^vA, left margin). The placement of a Latin *auctoritas* in the margins of Rinieri's behaviour is itself a fascinating impulse, but its effect on the reader is multiple. If on the one hand it bolsters Rinieri, filtering that behaviour through a classical source, it also highlights the stark differences between Rinieri and Lucius: Lucius does not miss the sexual opportunity, while Rinieri's voyeurism emerges in high relief, not to mention his ability to resist these desires in the service of vengeance.

The second Latin gloss to this tale appears during a long diatribe by Rinieri against Elena. The scholar challenges what he says is her presumptuous self-regard and opinion of her own beauty: "Et da che dyavol, togl[i]endo via cotesto tuo pochetto di viso, il quale pochi anni guasteranno riempiendolo di cresse, sè tu piú che qualunque altra dolorosetta fante?" (*Dec.* 8.7.89). Mannelli sees here a (perhaps rather subtle) reference to Ovid's *Ars amatoria* 3.73, which reads: "quam cito, me miserum, laxantur corpora rugis" 'How quickly, alas!, is the body furrowed by wrinkles.' The narrator of this line is sympathetically encouraging young women to realize how quickly time passes, bringing old age and physical decline with it.²⁷ Whatever one may argue happens to the scholar's misogynist abuse in light of this reference, one aspect of Mannelli's gloss remains to be explored. In the manuscript, on c. 129^vB, Mannelli's marginal gloss reads: "quam cito me miseram lassantur corpora rugis." That is, the exclamatory accusative "me miserum" uttered by the masculine narrator of the *Ars amatoria* is rendered feminine in the gloss's "me miseram."²⁸ One approach to this variant is to treat it as a banal slip, a mere *lapsus calami* of the kind copyists so often commit; it is an error in need of correction and has no further meaning. However, everything about the context and the kind of emotional involvement of Mannelli in the margins of his manuscript lead one to wonder if, rather than an error, this could be described as a slip with at least something of the Freudian about it.²⁹ If the voice is to be identified with Elena (rather than a feminized Rinieri), a voice that thus echoes its agreement with Rinieri, Mannelli considerably lessens the force of the scholar's words. This is an Elena who is reading the same book, who is as ethically engaged in its contents, and who, in the end, knows how to cite them when needed.³⁰

²⁷ See Ovid 2003, 116.

²⁸ On "me miserum," see previous note, and also Hinds 1998, 29–34; Knox 1986, 56: "This colloquialism becomes a favorite device in Ovid." For "me miseram" in Ovid, see *Amores*, 1.8.26 and 2.18.8; *Heroides* 5.149, 7.98, 15.204, 17.182, 19.65, 19.121 and 19.187; *Fasti*, 3.486 and 4.456; and *Metamorphoses* 8.138, 8.509, 9.474 and 10.334.

²⁹ See, of course, Timpanaro 1976.

³⁰ See Clarke 2013, 201–02.

Halfway through the journey of the *Decameron* is told the story of Pietro di Vinciolo, whose sexual disinterest in his wife (and women in general) leads her, after consulting an old woman and carefully considering the problem, to take a lover. A dinner with Pietro's friend Ercolano is interrupted when the hidden lover of Ercolano's wife is discovered, and he returns home early, forcing his own wife, who had been taking advantage of his absence, to quickly hide her own lover. She reacts with vehemence when told of the escapades of Ercolano's wife, complaining of the bad behaviour of women and wives, and suggesting they should be burned at the stake. At this moment, a donkey steps on the protruding fingers of the hiding lover, and his subsequent cry of pain reveals his presence to Pietro. The story is resolved when Pietro's wife, seeing that her husband is rather taken with the beautiful young man, devises that they end up sleeping together, so that the following morning the young man is left uncertain as to what, precisely, he got up to the previous night.

The story has attracted a certain amount of critical attention for its representation of disruptive desire and unconventional (homo)sexual behaviour.³¹ The Berlin autograph is even furnished with a catchword in which Boccaccio is responsible for a portrait bust of Pietro.³² The tale's resolution, where all three figures are happy with the way things turn out, is as surprising for the reader as it is effective for Pietro and his wife. One might expect the tale to elicit certain kinds of responses in a contemporary Florentine reader. For example, the subject of homosexuality, at least, might be seen as a likely topic for comment. This turns out not, in fact, to be the case. Mannelli makes three comments in the margins of *Dec.* 5.10, and they are a potent reminder that nothing can readily be taken for granted when reconstructing "the medieval reader."

Dioneo asserts that though some of the story is "meno che honesta," it nevertheless "dilecto può porgere," since he tells the story to those *innamorate giovani* "ad niuno altro fine [...] se non ad dovervi torre malinconia, et riso et allegrezza porgervi" (*Dec.* 5.10.4). Those who are listening, Dioneo says, "cogl[i]ete le rose et lasciate le spine stare" (§5). Taking a cue from this, Mannelli responds by asserting in the upper margin of c. 94^vB: "Questo modo si vuole usare per tutto questo libro, pigliandone il bene et lasciando il male." That is, taking that which is good, leaving that which is bad, is the

³¹ See Ferguson 2008, 55–77, for a very good discussion and bibliography; see also Conoscenti 2008.

³² Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, ms. Hamilton 90, c. 71^v. For an illustration, see Branca 1999, 2:64, fig. 29. See also Clarke, forthcoming.

way in which the book should be used. The reader is placed in an ethically charged position of choosing how to use the material, and the effect is to diffuse any potential blame directed at the author. It echoes Boccaccio's own indication in the *Proemio* that he has endeavoured to empower readers with informative rubrics so that they "potranno cognoscere quello che sia da fuggire *et* che sia similmente da seguitare" (*Dec.* proem.14).

When Pietro's wife, unhappy with his lack of sexual attention, consults an old woman on her options, the old woman assures her there is no greater pain than to realize that time has been wasted and opportunities lost. She tells the younger woman that she speaks from personal experience: "et bene che io nol perdessi tutto, ché non vorrei che tu credessi che io fossi stata una milensa, io pur non feci ciò che io avrei potuto fare" (*Dec.* 5.10.17). So, while she did not miss every opportunity that presented itself, she could indeed have taken more lovers and she regrets not having done so. The advice is frank, and exactly what Pietro's wife needed to hear. Mannelli glosses the old woman's assertion that not every opportunity passed her by with: "ben facesti *et* io ti credo" (c. 95^rA). Even admitting of some humour or irony, this is a remarkable moment of readerly assent in support of the old woman.

The moment of climax in the tale is the sudden discovery that Pietro's wife is hiding a lover. She defends herself vigorously from opprobrium and, seeking to set the record straight ("farei un poco ragione"), makes her case. She is well provided for by Pietro, but she says that she would gladly go about in rags if it meant sharing a sex life with him: "*et* io vorrei innanzi andar con gli stracci indosso *et* scalza *et* esser ben tractata da te nel lecto, che aver tutte queste cose tractandomi come tu mi tracti" (*Dec.* 5.10.57). It is a powerful statement and it resonates with Mannelli. He glosses this passage thus: "elle son frasche: brevemente il mal furo non vuol festa, *et* debesi fare alle mogli buona giacitura rimettendo spesso il diavolo in inferno" (c. 96^rB). The sense is that wives should not be deprived of conjugal relations, but Mannelli expresses himself in a lively manner with reference to two other stories in the *Decameron*. The first part of the gloss repeats a proverbial saying that occurs in *Dec.* 2.10.42, where Messer Riccardo explains that his wife does not want him back (preferring her lover Paganino da Monaco) with "Il mal furo non vuol festa." Indeed, the word *furo* for *foro* may have been an intentional caricature of the Pisan pronunciation, and Mannelli, perhaps not fully recognizing the linguistic play, places a gloss in the margins here stating: "credo che voglia dire foro" (c. 42^vB, inner margin). The second part of the gloss to *Dec.* 5.10.57 is a direct echo of the story told by Dioneo on Day 3, Alibech and Rustico the monk. This justly celebrated tale turns on the naïve and pious Alibech being convinced that sex with Rustico is a form of religious observance, a way of "putting the devil back into hell."

The severely ascetic and the exuberantly sexual clash spectacularly in the novella, and the scandalous use of a religious language to describe sex adds to the *frisson* of Dioneo's *risqué* storytelling.³³ In talking about sex, Mannelli derives his lexicon from the *Decameron* itself. In other words, the book teaches him how to talk about sex and furnishes him with a way of reading the tales.

The margins of Francesco d'Amaretto Mannelli's copy of the *Decameron* offer scholars a rich resource for thinking about how Boccaccio's Florentine contemporaries read the hundred tales. Mannelli's responses are highly variegated, stratified along (amongst others) linguistic, philological, literary, and ethical lines. He reads texts side by side, recognizes sources, and makes cross-references between stories and between texts in the manuscript. But those characters that populate his book are much more than fictions built upon previous texts. With considerable energy, he emotionally engages with them, enters into a dialogue. For him the *Decameron* was a vibrant and living text demanding *impegno*, drawing upon all of his resources, intellectual and emotional. As such, he joins the ranks of many who have found in the *Centonovelle* a book of stories celebrating la "suprema arte [...] del saper vivere."³⁴

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³³ On Dioneo in the *Decameron* see Grimaldi 1987.

³⁴ Getto 1972, 33. For support towards this research, my gratitude is warmly extended to the Department of English and Related Literature, University of York, and the Danish National Research Foundation (DNRF102ID).

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