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Maurizio Vitale and Vittore Branca. Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni. Reviewed by V. Kirkham

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Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni. 2 vols. Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2002. €60: Vol. 1. Maurizio Vitale, *La riscrittura del "Decameron". I mutamenti linguistici*. Pp. 571; Vol. 2. Vittore Branca, *Variazioni stilistiche e narrative*. Pp. 220.

Reviewer's Note:

The following review article was written in May, 2004, during what were to be the last days of Vittore Branca's life. Unaware of how close the end was, I hoped to deliver a printout to him in Venice this summer. Since that visit is not to be, I take consolation remembering the many we did have, when he and his wife Olga extended their warmth as hosts. Sometimes we dined out in elegance with other scholars; once they treated me to a riveting performance of Pina Bausch and her dance troop at La Fenice, followed by a private champagne reception. As we were walking to the theater that time, Olga recalled a concert of contemporary music they had attended there, disrupted when a siren began sounding. People didn't know if it was part of the composition or the high water alarm. Half of the audience interpreted it as art, half as the signal to go home. Whoever didn't leave spent the night stranded in the theater. The Brancas could chuckle over that episode because they were among those who in the confusion thought it safer not to stay. In recent years they would invite me to come at midday, for *pranzo al branzino*. I looked forward to these rituals, when in his book-lined study Vittore and I would first exchange news about our research (and all the academic gossip we knew), background voices rising from the Grand Canal through the windows in damp air carried by June breezes, or we would sit outside in the sun for an aperitif on the little terrace overlooking the Accademia Bridge. Then Olga would appear and graciously summon us into the cool recess of the dining room for a simple but delicious meal. To me these encounters, at once professional and friendly, took on a symbolic dimension. They captured Branca's will to maximize every moment, his constant intellectual animation, and his enthusiasm for the scholarly life carried out in the world — not just the career he indefatigably pursued at an international level, but his fondness for socializing more informally, finding or making occasions to mingle culture with company. When he invited me for a visit at the Getty to work on the collaborative project *Boccaccio visualizzato*, my weekend assignment after days in the library was to chauffeur the three of us in a rented car from Santa Monica to San Diego, where we stopped at the university campus to take a Paduan colleague's daughter to lunch, then progressed to the museum in Balboa Park, strolled the harbor area, boarded a small boat that plowed into choppy whale-watching waters, and spent an afternoon like children seeing the zoo. Younger scholars today, chained to their computers and tuned in only to email, don't engage with the public dimensions of life to which Branca's humanistic commitment went so deep. It ran a gamut from his courage in the Resistance, his energies as a driving force at the Fondazione Cini and Istituto Veneto, to the smiles that welcomed all whom he ushered as guests into their home. He struck an ideal balance between solitude in the *studiolo* and solicitude for "civil conversation." In his last letter to me, of March, 2004, Branca told of his own recent projects and inquired gently about the review he had been wanting me to do of *Il Decameron del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni*, sent about a year before. Daunted by the task, I delayed. To my regret, he missed what I wrote, which speaks now as a memorial tribute.

June 27, 2004

Startling as it may seem, the venerable classic we comfortably call *Decameron* still cannot claim a “definitive” scholarly edition. In comparison with its literary siblings, Dante’s *Commedia* and Petrarch’s *Rime sparse*, Boccaccio’s masterpiece has had a bedeviled textual history. For Petrarch we are fortunate enough to have his lyric sequence in both some of the author’s working papers and his final fair copy (Vatican Mss. 3196 and 3195). For Dante, while not even a fragment of anything he wrote survives in his own hand, there does exist within the daunting labyrinth of 600 *Commedia* manuscripts a small, well defined early family that transmits the poem in a form presumed authentic, the so-called “antica vulgata.” Chosen by Giorgio Petrocchi as basis for the Edizione Nazionale to celebrate the 1965 centennial of Dante’s birth (Milan, 1966–67), that “vulgate” has prevailed as the most authoritative.¹

Beloved of its readers from the beginning, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* has managed to survive Lady Fortune’s ups and downs in about 100 manuscripts, catalogued and described magisterially by Vittore Branca.² An immediate success among the Florentine merchant class, who claimed the *cento novelle* as their “epic” and gave them broad European diffusion,³ the book found formidable rivals during the Quattrocento in competing Latin texts of moralizing history and myth by Johannes Boccacci himself. Happily the *Decameron* met a humanistic redeemer in Pietro Bembo, whose *Prose della volgar lingua* (1525) canonized the *novelle* as a linguistic norm. Bembo and a public who persisted in affectionately reading their Boccaccio saved the collected tales, at least in bowdlerized form, from life-threatening exile on the Index of Prohibited Books. Vincenzo Borghini’s 1574 *Decameron*, rewritten by a committee of Deputies to expurgate whatever offended the Church, was the first in a series of Catholic Reformation “corrected” versions that left in tatters the Trecento text, all the more vulnerable to editorial censorship because no autograph was known.⁴ Borghini and his Deputies did, though, believe they had the next best thing, a manuscript copied directly from Boccaccio’s mastertext. Led — paradoxically, one might say — by a sense of philological responsibility, they privileged it as “the best.” This “Ottimo” took on the name of the Florentine who transcribed it in 1384, less than ten years after Boccaccio’s death, Francesco d’Amaretto Mannelli.⁵ The Mannelli codex (Mn = Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Ms. 42.1), venerable for age and accuracy, would become an archetype for the *Decameron* in its own “vulgate” tradition.

Nevertheless, aside from Mn and unsuspected by all the learned men who saw it, a copy of the *Decameron* transcribed by Boccaccio himself did exist. Its travels through time run a course alternately mysterious and illustrious. About a hundred years after Boccaccio died, the so-called “Deo Gratias” first edition of the *Decameron* (ca. 1470) came into contact with this exemplar, contaminating the textual tradition in ways that persist as a scholarly conundrum.⁶ Bembo consulted and annotated the same copy during his Urbino years (1506–12), when it was in the possession of Giuliano de’ Medici, brother of Pope Leo X. In the eighteenth century, it adorned the library of Apostolo Zeno, a Venetian enlightenment polymath and bibliophile whose many accomplishments include the libretto for an operatic version of the Griselda tale. Zeno’s library at his death (1750) was transferred to the Dominican order of Gesuati at Le Zattere, but times were stormy, and many volumes disappeared. Some, a battered *Decameron* among them, resurfaced around mid-nineteenth century in England, property of Lord Hamilton, whose collection passed into the library of the German capital in 1883 (B = Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Ms. Hamilton 90).⁷

Precisely half a century would elapse before someone who knew what it was saw the codex, now minus several quires but nonetheless still a noble artifact — parchment folios painstakingly copied in brown ink, the script neatly arranged for visual effect in regular columns and brightened by red and blue initials nestled inside beautifully penned arabesques. Here, just where a more predictable narrative ought to end with an exciting public announcement, the story instead grows murkier, unfolding more like a novella by Luigi Pirandello or Leonardo Sciascia, with variant versions depending on who tells it and twists as strange as they are inexplicable. I first heard it *viva voce* during the late 1960's at the Johns Hopkins University in a graduate seminar on Boccaccio taught by Charles S. Singleton, an engaging raconteur.⁸

The great encounter between Italy's prince of philology, Michele Barbi,⁹ and Boccaccio's autograph *Decameron* took place in 1933, when Hamilton 90 was out on loan to the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence. Only after the manuscript had been long awaiting Barbi's expert eye and was about to be sent back to Berlin did the *Professore* at last go for a look. After a reportedly silent and cursory inspection, he closed the cover, raised his head, nodded as he gave the book a pat with the open flat of his hand, and quietly pronounced the incredible words: "È lui."¹⁰ Barbi had spoken, it seemed, not with awe but almost dismissively, as if this were a routine check to verify the obvious. Singleton chuckled and broke into his impish smile when he had finished telling the anecdote, delivered with practiced dramatic touches — crack timing on the two-word line, calm in his resonant voice, and tight control of gesticulation (two small taps with his open palm on the old oak Gilman Hall seminar table, around which our small class hung on his words). We were hearing what he had learned from Alberto Chiari, who had been Barbi's university *Assistente* and witness to the scene. Not until 1948, fifteen years after the event and then only in an informal article that appeared in a non-scholarly source, did Chiari eventually communicate to the world the great Barbi's verdict.¹¹

Why did Barbi not publicize his discovery, an event that would have dazzled the Italianist community? His silence is all the more puzzling since in 1927, with a very substantial article on textual issues surrounding the *Decameron*, he had been among the founding contributors to a Florentine journal conceived as a vehicle of the "new philology." Yet not even when he reprinted this sixty-page study in 1938 did he make any reference to the Berlin autograph.¹² On the contrary, he ridiculed those who had decided to "idolize" it.¹³ As for Chiari, why did he wait so long to say anything? He would twice republish (1955, 1961)¹⁴ his first casual announcement of the *Decameron* autograph — or as it should perhaps more properly be called in English, the holograph, since no authorial signature appears in the manuscript.¹⁵ He did not, however, act on his knowledge and proceed to prepare a new edition.

The 1950's, postwar years of renewed scholarly activity (when the Berlin manuscript re-emerged from protective hiding), produced a veritable Boccaccio boom. New editions appeared by Giuseppe Petronio, (Turin: Einaudi, 1950); Vittore Branca (Florence: Le Monnier, 1950–51); Enrico Bianchi (Milan: Ricciardi, 1952); Charles S. Singleton (Bari: Laterza, 1955); Natalino Sapegno (Turin: U.T.E.T., 1956); and Mario Marti (Milan: Rizzoli, 1958). Scholars could by now appreciate that Mn had a superior rival in B.¹⁶ They weren't quite ready, though, to call it the autograph. In spite of Barbi's legitimization and Chiari's own impeccable reputation, doubts persisted. How could Boccaccio himself have copied out Hamilton 90, marred as it by scribal errors so gross they could not possibly be attributed to an au-

thor, no matter what his age or vulnerability to distraction? It had always been assumed, moreover, that the *Decameron* was a youthful work. Why then didn't the script of Hamilton 90 match known samples from Boccaccio's younger days, such as the autograph of the *Te-seida*?

Answers and a turning point came in 1962 with the team study by Vittore Branca and Pier Giorgio Ricci, whose collaboration uncovered the ultimate provenance of Hamilton 90.¹⁷ That manuscript, errant through the centuries across Italy from Certaldo to Urbino and Venice, to England, and to Germany, was indeed the lost treasure — the final authorial redaction lovingly copied out with little retouchings. Contrary to the Certaldan's legendary biography, his *Decameron* had not been a folly of youth, abandoned and rejected in wiser old age. The hand of Hamilton 90 proved that he, like his friend Petrarch, had continued to revise until the end a vernacular masterpiece ostensibly scorned. The script didn't match that of his earlier works for the simple reason that it wasn't early. It flowed from the pen of the *old* Boccaccio, as comparison with other late works in Latin confirmed. Examination with the technology of ultraviolet light explained the "beastly" blunders. In some passages the elderly and financially strapped Boccaccio had used an inferior ink to make revisions that soon faded. Later hands, meaning well, mangled the text in their efforts to retrace letters no longer legible.¹⁸

After a history of six hundred years, Italy's prose masterpiece had yielded up nearly unbelievable news, but this was not the end of its stunning revelations. Like a widening archeological site that keeps getting richer the more excavators dig, so the families of *Decameron* manuscripts, when explored in a broadening sweep beyond the "fetishized" Mn and B, disclosed chronologically separate stages in the book's formation and bright new facets of Boccaccio's creative activity.¹⁹ The *Decameron*, Branca has discovered, survives not just in one, but two authorial redactions. They represent two distinct phases in the evolution of the text, twenty years apart. Berlin houses Boccaccio's final version, the holograph preserved in Hamilton 90 (B, 1370–72?). An earlier version, arguably the first complete draft, has resided since the late fifteenth century in France (P = Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Ital. 482, 1349–51?). Not autograph in its text, this latter contains a full cycle of seventeen lively, graceful drawings penned by Boccaccio. They reveal the poet to be more skilled and prolific as an amateur draftsman than anyone before had thought.²⁰

About P's scribal identity there has never been any doubt. Giovanni d'Agnolo Capponi signed his name near the beginning, in a table of contents of the rubrics for each novella. Born in the mid-1340's and documented until 1378, he came of a family that lived in the same Santo Spirito *quartiere* of Florence as the Boccaccios, with whom the Capponi had further connections through the Arte della Calimala wool guild and Bardi bank. He probably transcribed the manuscript as a young man, before business fully absorbed him. Although a copyist by passion not profession,²¹ he carried out the task with scrupulous accuracy. Boccaccio's contribution to his friend's manuscript, drawings that dovetail strikingly in their detail with the written text, stamp it with a powerful sign of authorial approval. In fact, P is the source for another whole family of *Decameron* manuscripts approximately thirty in number, the non-vulgate tradition, which diffused the text north of the Alps and served Laurent de Premierfait for his French translation (1411–14).

In the trinity of *Decameron* manuscripts that most count (chronologically P, B and Mn), Branca intuited more than half a century ago that P represented the text in its first complete form. Since then he has steadily pressed forward his research, accumulating evidence to clarify their relationships: Mn is not a copy of B, as was long thought, but a collateral version; P represents Boccaccio in a more scholastic phase of his writing, closely bound to literary models, while in B he often relaxes into colloquialisms that add local color and greater expressive range to the stories. Of the many philologists who have entered “la selva del *Decameron*” since the turn of the twentieth century — some for a lot of bruising and scratches — only Vittore Branca has ridden out with colors flying high and a whole bag of trophies from the quest.

Along the way, joint adventures as well as legendary clashes in singular combat have assured the *Decameron* continuing attention. For Branca, Boccaccio has been a subject of study over six decades. The same year as his first book, *Il cantare trecentesco e il Boccaccio del “Filostrato” e del “Teseida”* (Florence: Sansoni, 1936), he published in *La Rassegna* the article that would be the nucleus for his second, *Linee di una storia della critica al “Decameron”*. *Con bibliografia boccacesca completamente aggiornata* (Milan-Genoa-Rome-Naples: Società Anonima Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1939), and on this groundwork he constructed a major new edition of the *Decameron* (1950–51).²² Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, an American scholar had been simultaneously preparing his own edition of Boccaccio’s one hundred tales. The war disrupted both projects, but Branca scooped Charles S. Singleton, whose Laterza edition didn’t see print until 1955. Back in Italy, Branca and Ricci announced Hamilton 90 as the autograph, another blow to Singleton, who had judged B “the most authoritative... *the* manuscript on which my own critical edition was to be based.” In what he calls “the greatest irony of a scholar’s life,” he had not realized that the manuscript he judged best was, in fact, Boccaccio’s own. Branca meanwhile pushed forward with ever greater vigor: he had already started to map the diffusion of the *Decameron* across Europe and catalogue the manuscripts (*Studi di filologia italiana*, 1950; updated in *Tradizione delle opere I*, 1958); in 1956 he threw down a gauntlet with *Boccaccio medievale*, a seminal collection of essays whose title proclaims their polemical intent (against the likes of De Sanctis and Singleton, post-Romantic partisans of an iconoclastic Renaissance poet)²³; he produced in 1960 a second edition of the *Decameron*, again with Le Monnier in Florence (reprinted in 1965); in 1966 he engineered a magnificent three-volume *Decameron* lavishly illustrated in full color, a prelude to his catalogued corpus of nearly 8,000 images of the Certaldan’s works, *Boccaccio visualizzato: Narrare per parole e per immagini fra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, 3 vols. (Turin: Einaudi, 1999); in 1967 he brought out Boccaccio’s *Profilo biografico* as preface to volume I in *Tutte le opere*, the definitive modern series he had undertaken with Mondadori of Milan (complete in all ten volumes as of 1998). As crowning tributes to the autograph that had vanished but not disappeared, he produced a facsimile and coupled it with a new critical edition: *Decameron. Facsimile dell’autografo conservato nel codice Hamilton 90 della Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz di Berlino* (Florence: Alinari, 1976); *Decameron. Edizione critica secondo l’autografo hamiltoniano* (Florence: Accademia della Crusca, 1976).

Back in Baltimore, to vindicate his own long years of painstaking efforts, Singleton organized a stellar team — Franca Petrucci, Armando Petrucci, Giancarlo Savino, and Martino Mardersteig — to prepare a diplomatic edition of Hamilton 90, handsomely reproduced with color facsimile pages of the manuscript and its witty autograph catchword illustrations,

Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron: Edizione diplomatico-interpretativa dell'autografo Hamilton 90*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). In his Preface, he conspicuously refused to cite Branca at all, eliciting the latter's predictably disdainful response in review pages of *Studi sul Boccaccio* (which Branca had founded in 1963): diplomatic editions were a thing of the past; this one was a useless anachronism and total waste of money.²⁴ Professor Singleton's compatriots, however, passed a more favorable judgment on the book, honored in 1977 with the Medieval Academy of America's prized Haskins Medal.²⁵ Singleton, in fact, who later published his adaptation of John Payne's Victorian translation of the *Decameron*, luxuriously printed and case-bound in three volumes (Berkeley: University of California, 1982), refused ever to speak Branca's name in print (and even took pride in that stubborn silence).²⁶ Branca preferred liberally to quote his American antagonist, the better to undercut him with punctilious, withering criticism.²⁷ Their transatlantic dueling gave rise to an anecdote I recall hearing from a fellow student at Johns Hopkins. As the story went, Branca and Singleton found themselves together for the first time at a conference. One approached the other to introduce himself, but the second cut him off in mid-sentence:

"Lei, professore, non mi conosce..."

"... e non me ne lamento!"

If rivalry can fuel scholarly activity, so *a fortiori* do cooperative endeavors. Exemplary of such cooperation is the "imposing diptych"²⁸ by Maurizio Vitale and Vittore Branca, *Il capolavoro del Boccaccio e due diverse redazioni*. Published under the aegis of the venerable Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti as the one-hundredth title in its "Memorie" series, begun in 1840, this collaboration joins two giants in the Italian intellectual community and brings the history of the *Decameron* text to its current state of the question. The "two redactions" of the book's title are P and B, compared in their variants (Branca) and analyzed linguistically (Vitale).

Vitale, who held the *cattedra* of Storia della Lingua at the Università Statale of Milan from 1957 to 1992, explains his aim at the outset of volume I, *La riscrittura del "Decameron". I mutamenti linguistici*: "esaminare minutamente le correzioni di lingua del Boccaccio e, per meglio valutarne il valore, raffrontare le diverse forme [in P, B] con gli usi linguistici due-tre-centeschi" (3). After brief "Preliminari," two chapters isolate variants not attributable to Boccaccio: "L'azione del copista," which aims to lift the "veil" of Capponi's idiosyncrasies as scribe, and "Varianti linguisticamente adiafore," which separates from the mix variants that oscillate between P and B, hence do not permit generalizing. The next two chapters offer Vitale's central findings on "L'azione del Boccaccio." Final pages, "La 'ratio' correttoria," synthesize this pair of core chapters, which posit two types of interventions in B, "L'appianamento sull'uso corrente" and "La coloritura dotta, idiomatica, espressivistica." Each chapter (unnumbered) proceeds step by step through parallel subdivisions, outlined at the beginning — "Nell'ambito fonetico," "Nell'ambito morfologico," "Nell'ambito sintattico," "Nell'ambito del lessico," "Nell'ambito topologico." For each variant, Vitale defines a historical linguistic context with reference first to other writers, then to Boccaccio's own works, and finally, he closes the entry with an analytical conclusion. An extensive preliminary bibliography followed by a table of 112 *Auctores* cited, as well as an "Indice delle voci e delle cose notevoli" at the end complete this readily navigable volume.

Vitale's mountain of evidence "minutely examined" confirms Branca's thesis of two authorial redactions of the *Decameron* twenty years apart. At each stage the linguist documents how the *novelle* correspond to usage in contemporary vernacular texts. Changes between the two redactions reveal how, on the one hand, the author moved away from an earlier more formal mode characterized by classical or Latinizing prose structures to a later more relaxed, personal style mirroring lively current usage ("l'appianamento sull'uso corrente"); while on the other hand, "Boccaccio's action" produced changes that run counter to such linguistic flattening and endow B with greater "coloritura formale, idiomatica, espressivistica." In other words, Boccaccio's "corrective tendencies" run in two roughly opposite directions — (a) toward popular usage and (b) away from it.

For example, in a morphological shift illustrating what I call (a), "il gru" (P) becomes "la gru" (B). Latin had allowed either masculine or feminine. Dante, too, used it both ways: "e come i gru van cantando lor lai (*Inf.* 5.46), but cf. *Purg.* 26.43, "poi come grue." By the later Trecento, however, when Boccaccio was retouching B, the feminine form was usual, as in Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle* 45.1, "come la gru quando per l'aere vola." Or again, P makes "amore" in the tale of Federigo degli Alberighi feminine: "E per ciò ti priego, non per l'amore che tu mi porti, a la qual tu di niente sé tenuto, ma per la tua nobiltà." As such it is a learned Provençalism, but the masculine gender would come to prevail in Italian, hence we find in B: "non per l'amore che tu mi porti, al quale tu di niente sé tenuto" (1: 148–50). Discussing changes along the (b) vector, Vitale gives as an example "quistione" (P) > "questione" (B), the latter being the etymological "higher" form. In usage the two spellings of "question" wavered. Both appear in the *Novellino*, in Brunetto Latini's *Rettorica*, in the *Cronica* of Dino Campana, and in Giovanni Villani's *Cronica*. In both versions of the *Decameron*, however, except for this one isolated instance (at X.8.105), it is otherwise always "quistione" (seventeen times, not counting forms such as "quistionar," "quistionando"). Why is this one exception significant? Vitale concludes, "Si ha allora in questo caso, per amore di varietà, un singolo passaggio da una forma popolare e corrente a una forma viva e linguisticamente più eletta." Puzzlingly, the very next entry shows just the reverse: "rovescio" > "rivescio," again a single case (VIII.9.92) but a shift from "una forma corrente a un popolarismo toscano" (1: 332–34). We must remember, Vitale more than once reminds us, good writers are not mechanically consistent.

What counts is not every vibration of the oscilloscope needle, rather the broad patterns and overall drift. Working through many thousands of textual examples on his synchronic and diachronic grid, Vitale conducts his examination of Boccaccio's two redactions with all the skills and caution learned from probing other famously revised Italian classics — Petrarca's *Canzoniere*, Leopardi's *Operette morali*, Manzoni's *Promessi sposi*. This latest project, which generates a thesaurus of Trecento usage both in prose and poetry usable like a dictionary from the Index, benefits from a whole new battery of electronic texts. Thirty years ago concordances existed for the *Commedia*, *Canzoniere*, and *Decameron*; now the range of titles available is widely representative. Among Vitale's e-*Auctores* are Dante in *Vita nuova*, *Rime*, *Convivio*, and *Commedia*; Cecco Angiolieri, Pietro Bembo, the vernacular Boccaccio complete, Caterina da Siena, Dante da Maiano, Guido Cavalcanti, Fazio degli Uberti, Giordano da Pisa, Brunetto Latini, Jacopo Passavanti, Marco Polo, Franco Sacchetti, and all three Villani.²⁹

Volume II, *Variazioni stilistiche e narrative*, opens to a “Nota preliminare” (bibliography of Branca’s publications, beginning with an article in *Studi sul Boccaccio* 13 of 1981–82, on Paris Ms. Ital. 482 as an early authorial redaction). Then in several pages of “Premises” Branca announces his intentions eventually to publish the *Decameron* in its two redactions, as he did the *Amorosa visione*. “Variazioni narrative e stilistiche fra le due redazioni,” followed by a discursive “Esame delle tipologie narrative” comprise the body of the book. The list of variants, indicative not exhaustive (Branca reckons the total at around 6,000), proceeds story by story with reference to paragraph divisions. For example, Proemio 9: “alle donne” > “alle vaghe donne”; I Intro. 8: “pestilenzia” > “pestilenza”; III.10.1: “Rustico romito insegna” > “Rustico monaco insegna”; III.10.8: “demonio” > “dimonio.” The final chapter rationalizes a selection of variants in B, showing how they are best explained as Boccaccio’s own improvements on P, not scribal slips or idiosyncratic alterations. For instance, at II.6.25–26 P reads: “alle loro castella n’andarono,” while B has: “alle loro castella se ne salirono.” Branca notes, “Poiché le castella dei Malaspini erano sui colli sembra più proprio e congruente all’azione salirono: si evita anche così la ripetizione di *andarono* ricorso poche parole innanzi.” These lists of variants are offered as an interim sampling (“come provvisoria anticipazione”) of the double edition Branca plans. Meanwhile, groundwork continues on preparing a critical edition of P, necessary to purge the text of contamination that crept in with Capponi’s transcription.

As they sound Boccaccio’s style at two moments in his career, Vitale and Branca make us realize how even with the best tools of philology and technology a great author’s art, constantly evolving, eludes easy capture, all the more so at a time when the vernacular language was still so unstable and no two copies of any text were ever exactly the same. Writers in the modern age of print have more control over their work; different versions are more distinct. In the manuscript era an author would typically keep a master copy (“copia-madre,” “copia di servizio”), which he could modify at will and make available to professional scribes, friends, disciples, and admirers so they could have their own copies. Since the mother-copy was constantly changing, and whoever transcribed from it per force introduced further changes, there was never a “definitive” edition, unique and approved by the author. The text was in constant flux. Boccaccio’s own habit of endlessly revising has left its mark in the various redactions of his *Teseida*, *Ameto*, *Amorosa visione*, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, *De mulieribus claris*, and *Genealogie deorum gentilium*. Probably, as Branca believes, more stages of the *Decameron* will emerge from the texts that survive, many in partial form — a single *novella*, a small anthology, or other sorts of excerpts. A structural mosaic that could circulate whole or in parts, the book appealed to readers at all social levels, who used and transcribed it as they saw fit. Non-professional scribes copied the book piecemeal, so it usually took more than one person to finish, and every new scribe had his own peculiarities. P, B and Mn are among the few *Decameron* manuscripts all in the same hand. The more we know of its tradition, the more complex its text, which in Branca’s words reflects “i momenti e i movimenti vitali che un genio del diverso e del continuo rinnovamento, come il Boccaccio, vuole far vivere e parlare nel suo capolavoro.”³⁰ We should scrap the idea of working toward one single canonically “critical” edition and look forward instead to reading the *Decameron* in the “historical and genetic” reconstructions of its growth as a living organism.

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- ¹ It has been widely adopted as the standard for “Dantes” from Charles S. Singleton’s *The Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970–75) to Anna Maria Chiavacci Leonardi’s *Commedia* (Milan: Mondadori, 1991–97).
- ² Vittore Branca, “Per il testo del *Decameron*. La prima diffusione del *Decameron*. I, Composizione dell’opera e testimonianze fino alla morte del Boccaccio; II, La tradizione manoscritta,” *Studi di filologia italiana* 8 (1950): 29–143; “Per il testo del *Decameron*. Testimonianze della tradizione volgata,” *Studi di filologia italiana* 11 (1953): 163–243; successively updated in Branca, *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio I. Un primo elenco dei codici e tre studi* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1958), 1–118; further amplified in *Tradizione delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio II. Un secondo elenco di manoscritti e studi sul testo del “Decameron” con due appendici* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1991), 71–146. Branca’s lists include approximately another 80 manuscripts that are lost.
- ³ Vittore Branca dubbed the *Decameron* the “merchants’ epic” in “L’epopea dei mercanti,” *Lettere italiane* 8 (1956): 9–33, which became part of his seminal *Boccaccio medievale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1956), chap. 3, “L’epopea mercantile.” On the Italian business community’s role as readers, publicists, and copyists of the *Decameron*, see also Branca, “Prima diffusione,” in *Tradizione delle opere II*, 147–201.
- ⁴ Leonardo Salviati’s edition of 1582 is another notorious for its censorship, although Salviati himself was a staunch defender of Boccaccio’s prose and a founding member of the Accademia della Crusca. The history of *Decameron* reception generally was sketched by Vittore Branca, *Linee di una storia della critica al “Decameron.” Con bibliografia boccaccesca completamente aggiornata* (Milan-Genoa-Rome-Naples: Società Anonima Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1939). See more recently, Giuseppe Chiecchi and Luciano Troisio, *Il Decameron sequestrato: le tre edizioni censurate nel Cinquecento* (Milano: Unicopli, 1984).
- ⁵ For a description of Mn, see Branca’s *Tradizione delle opere II*, 76–78. Stefano Carrai quotes extensively the Deputies’ reasons for privileging Mn in “Di chi sono le postille recenziatori nel codice Mannelli?” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 30 (2002): 159–68.
- ⁶ Lacking a date, place, or publisher, this extremely rare incunable is known from its colophon “Deo Gratias.” It inaugurates the printed history of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* in Alberto Bachi della Lega, *Serie delle Edizioni delle opere di Giovanni Boccaccio latine, volgari, tradotte e trasformate* (1875; rpt. Bologna: Forni, 1967), 31. Bachi della Lega thought the “Deo Gratias” *Decameron* derived from the Manelli manuscript, but that view changed after the Hamilton codex reached Berlin, where German scholars ascertained its importance in the manuscript tradition and suggested that the *editio princeps* had been copied from B. See Vittore Branca’s “Nota al Testo” in his reprint of the 1960 *Decameron* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1965), xxxvii, citing Oskar Hecker’s article of 1895, “Der Deo Gratias - Druck des *Decameron*.” More systematic comparisons have led to the conclusion that there is a textual relationship between “Deo Gratias” and B, but it may run in the opposite direction of what had long been believed. The former, unreliable for its many printer’s errors, may have been used to reconstruct the latter in passages where the ink had faded. See Vittore Branca and Lucia Nadin, “La stampa ‘Deo Gratias’ del *Decameron* e il suo carattere contaminato,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 8 (1974): 1–77.
- ⁷ For a description of B, see Branca, *Tradizione delle opere II*, 211–62. A condensed history of its provenance appears in Vittore Branca and Pier Giorgio Ricci, *Un autografo del Decameron (Codice Hamilton 90)* (Florence: Olschki, 1962), 17–23.
- ⁸ Except for a nine-year period at Harvard (1948–57), Singleton taught at the Johns Hopkins University from 1939 until his death in 1985. For his teaching philosophy as recalled by former students and a list of his publications, see *Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio: Studies in the Italian Trecento in Honor of Charles S. Singleton*, eds. Aldo S. Bernardo and Anthony L. Pellegrini (Binghamton, N.Y.: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983), xvii–xxviii. See further the *Lectura Dantis* tribute delivered at the University of Virginia in 1988 by Franco Fido to commemorate Singleton’s innovative and influential contributions as a Dantist: http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Italian_Studies/LD/numbers/04/fido.html.

- ⁹ Christopher Kleinhenz, "Michele Barbi (1867–1941)," in *Medieval Scholarship: Biographical Studies on the Formation of a Discipline*, ed. Helen Damico with Donald Fennema and Karmen Lenz (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1998), vol. 2, *Literature and Philology*, 325–38. Early in his career Barbi had been a librarian at the Laurenziana. From 1923 until his retirement in 1937 he held the chair of Italian literature at the Istituto Superiore di Magistero at the University of Florence. The principles he espoused find expression in his monumental *La nuova filologia e l'edizione dei nostri scrittori da Dante al Manzoni* (Florence: Sansoni, 1938).
- ¹⁰ For a printed version, see Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron: Edizione diplomatico-interpretativa dell'autografo Hamilton 90*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), x: "È lui, e non dei primi, ma piuttosto degli ultimi anni." Exactly the same account returns at the end of the commentary volume in Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron. The John Payne Translation*, rev. and ed. Charles S. Singleton, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3: 927–28.
- ¹¹ Alberto Chiari, "Un autografo del *Decameron*?" *La Fiera Letteraria*, 11 July, 1948. Giuseppe Vandelli, one of Boccaccio's most important early twentieth-century editors, had also examined the Berlin manuscript according to Chiari and concurred with Barbi in judging it autograph.
- ¹² Barbi's article, *Studi di filologia italiana* 1 (1927): 9–68, republished in his *La nuova filologia* of 1938 (see above, n. 9), argued a fundamental principle praised by Branca as the most important contribution to the history of the *Decameron* text in the first half of the twentieth century, namely that a single codex, no matter how authoritative, could not substitute for study of the manuscript tradition in all its breadth (*Decameron*, 1965, xliii).
- ¹³ See Branca's "Storia del codice" in Branca and Ricci, *Un autografo del Decameron*, 8. As Branca points out, Barbi attacked Aldo Francesco Massèra's edition of the *Decameron* (Bari, 1927), based on the Berlin manuscript. Massèra proclaimed its supreme authority, but he did not think it autograph.
- ¹⁴ Alberto Chiari, "Ancora sull'autografia del codice berlinese del *Decameron*," *Convivium*, n.s. 23 (1955): 352ff.; and *Indagini e letture*, 3rd ser., (Florence: Le Monnier, 1961), 337–51.
- ¹⁵ Three quires are missing from the manuscript, including the first. The manuscript is, however, complete at the end, where there is no sign of the author's name. There and within the text Boccaccio always refers to himself as "the author." Absence of any authorial signature may have been part of Boccaccio's game as narrator for this book "senza titolo." For Boccaccio's signature habits, see Victoria Kirkham, "Johannes de Certaldo: La firma dell'autore," 455–68, in *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio: Memoria, scrittura, riscrittura. Atti del Seminario internazionale di Firenze-Certaldo (26–28 aprile 1996)*, eds. Michelangelo Picone and Claude Casalé Bérard (Florence: Franco Cesati Editore, 1998); republished in expanded form with many other examples of signatures in medieval literature, in Kirkham, *Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio's Filocolo and the Art of Medieval Fiction* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), chap. 2, "Signed Pieces," 76–134.
- ¹⁶ Branca asserted the "primary importance" of Hamilton 90 when he first edited the text in 1950–51. In a note added to the first reprint, he lists the spate of fifties' editions and offers brief critical assessments of their soundness. See Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Florence: Le Monnier, 1960), rpt. 1965, lvii–lxi.
- ¹⁷ When Hamilton 90 made a second trip to Italy, to the Marciana Library in Venice after the war, Branca's first-hand inspection of the manuscript convinced him that it was, in fact, autograph. He tells the story in Branca and Ricci, *Un autografo del Decameron*, 9–10.
- ¹⁸ Branca and Ricci, *Un autografo del Decameron*, 8: "sono fraintendimenti talmente grossolani, insomma bestialità così enormi da sembrare veramente inammissibili in una trascrizione autografa."
- ¹⁹ As Branca has strongly argued (*Decameron*, 1965, xl), the tendency of scholars to privilege or "fetishize" one manuscript or another — for four hundred years Mn and then since the late nineteenth century B — has weighed on the textual tradition of the *Decameron* like a "lead cape," preventing the kind of broadly based reconstruction that was really needed. This had also been Barbi's position. See above, n. 12.

- ²⁰ For a description of P, see Branca, *Tradizione delle opere* II, 108–10. The drawings and text together are discussed by Maria Grazia Ciardi Dupré dal Poggetto and Vittore Branca in “Boccaccio ‘visualizzato’ dal Boccaccio,” “I. ‘Corpus’ dei disegni e cod. Parigino It. 482,” by Ciardi, who reviews Boccaccio’s known activity as artist and formally attributes this cycle to him, “II. Possibile identificazione nel Parigino I. 482 di una redazione del *Decameron* anteriore all’autografo degli anni Settanta,” by Branca, *Studi sul Boccaccio* 22 (1994): 197–235 and figs. 1–48.
- ²¹ “Era un copista non di professione ma ‘di passione,’” as Branca writes in the second volume here under review, 8.
- ²² Branca’s publications on the *Decameron* actually begin one year before his first book, with his review of Giuseppe Petronio’s *Il Decamerone. Saggio critico* (Bari: Laterza, 1935), reconsidered in Petronio’s personal retrospective, *I miei Decamerone* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1989). See further *Bibliografia degli scritti di Vittore Branca in occasione dell’ottantesimo compleanno*, eds. Giovannina Reinisch Sullam, Paola Rigo, Bianca Maria Da Rif, and Maria Grazia Pensa (Florence: Olschki, 1994).
- ²³ For Branca’s work on the diffusion of the *Decameron*, see above, n. 2. Vittore Branca, *Boccaccio medievale* (Florence: Sansoni, 1956), has since been revised in numerous editions and translated into languages throughout the world. Singleton liked to speak of Boccaccio in class by quoting De Sanctis quoting Petrarch, “Qui come venn’io o quando?” He agreed with the nineteenth-century Neapolitan literary historian, who saw in Boccaccio’s *Decameron* “il medio evo non solo negato, ma canzonato” in his essay, “Decamerone.” See Francesco De Sanctis, *Storia della letteratura italiana*, ed. Paolo Arcari, 2 vols. (Milano: Treves, 1925), 1: 227. Cf. Charles S. Singleton, “On ‘Meaning’ in the *Decameron*,” *Italica* 21 (1944): 117–24.
- ²⁴ Vittore Branca, review of *Decameron. Edizione diplomatico-interpretativa dell’autografo Hamilton 90*, ed. Charles S. Singleton, *Studi sul Boccaccio* 8 (1974): 321–29. As Branca points out, Armando Petrucci and Savino, in discussions appended to the text, *did* cite Branca and Ricci’s highly relevant 1962 monograph on Hamilton 90.
- ²⁵ The Haskins Medal, first given in 1940, is awarded annually “for a distinguished book in medieval studies.” It is named after the American historian Charles Homer Haskins, a founder of the Medieval Academy of America.
- ²⁶ Singleton’s silence on Branca in his *Decameron* translation is not so obvious because he cites no one else either. Preserving personal teaching notes, his volume of commentary makes bibliographic reference only to one source, his own commentary on Dante, 3: 803 (see above, n. 1).
- ²⁷ For example, of the American scholar’s 1955 Laterza *Decameron* Branca concluded: “Poco o nulla si può dunque profittare dell’enorme lavoro del Singleton.” See his “Nota per la ristampa,” lx (*Decameron*, 1965), which contrasts all the positive reviews of his fifties’ edition with a lineup of negative opinions on Singleton’s.
- ²⁸ The Judging Committee for the Istituto Veneto deemed this project an “imponente dittico,” vii.
- ²⁹ Many of the “Auctores” are cited from LIZ, or *Letteratura Italiana Zanichelli*. CD-Rom, 3rd ed., ed. Pasquale Stoppelli and Eugenio Picchi (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1997), and ATL, or *Archivio della tradizione lirica da Petrarca a Marino*, ed. Amedeo Quondam (Rome: Lexis, 1997).
- ³⁰ For the inadequacy of conventional philology in dealing with Boccaccio, see Vittore Branca, “Ancora su una redazione del *Decameron*,” *Studi sul Boccaccio* 26 (1998): 3–97, and esp. 8–9, 32.