

## Editors' Introduction

On the occasion of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dante's death, this special volume is dedicated to the medieval literary representations of the free will and subjective agency of women in homage to the centrality of female actors in Dante Alighieri's poetic universe. The volume draws its title, "Per acque nitide e tranquille" ["Through Still and Limpid Water"], from the simile that Dante uses to describe his initial glimpse of the first souls he meets in Paradise upon entering the sphere of the Moon. Together, these lunar souls set the stage for Beatrice's long foreshadowed elucidation on the nature of free will and subjective agency:

Quali per vetri trasparenti e tersi,  
o ver per acque nitide e tranquille,  
.....  
vid'io più facce a parlar pronte ...

As through clear, transparent glass  
or through still and limpid water,  
.....  
I saw many faces eager to speak ...  
(*Par.* 3.10-16)

The pilgrim turns around to find the people whose reflections he imagines he is seeing, only to discover, as Beatrice puts it, that his still juvenile intellect has misdirected his steps toward a meaningless void, and away from the reality before him (*Par.* 3.19-29).

Among the faces eager to speak are souls who failed in their vows, yet, being blessed, do not stray in their step. Piccarda Donati immediately frames her story in terms of just will and Divine will, even as she recounts her failure to maintain her sacred vow by submitting to the threat of violence. With one of her male siblings present in *Purgatorio* 24-25, and another ostensibly destined for hell (*Purg.* 24.82-84), Piccarda's subject identity in the *Commedia* is conspicuously framed in terms of her social role as sister to Forese Donati and to Corso Donati. The subject identity of her companion, the empress Costanza, is also explicitly framed in terms of her social role relative to two men in the *Commedia*: here as the mother of the eminent emperor Federico II (present in *Inf.* 10.119 and prominently featured in *Inf.* 13.58-69), and earlier, as grandmother to Manfredi

(*Purg.* 3.112-113). The two women share histories of having been forced into political marriages in violation of their sacred oaths of avowed chastity. Yet, despite their seemingly ancillary identities, Piccarda and Costanza provide the catalyzing premise for Beatrice's dissertation on the *Commedia's* core concern: the complex nature of free will and its role in shaping the fate of the soul.

Free will, pithily defined by Dante's Virgilio as the noble power to guide and constrain the soul's natural inclination and desires (*Purg.* 18.73), holds a place of central concern in the *Commedia*. The foundation for gauging an individual's responsibility for their actions and choices, freedom of the will accounts for the joy and acclaim for doing good, or misery and censure for doing ill. In this context, therefore, recognizing free will also implies acknowledging the agency of a subject capable of moral and ethical self-determination.

The passage chosen for the title of this collection of essays therefore synthesizes the subtle multiplicity of the themes that the volume's contributing authors explore. Primarily, the passage points to the perceptual errancy of the pilgrim who does not initially grasp the reality and legitimacy of female subjects who are prepared and eager to speak and act through their own agency. Here Dante mobilizes the semiology of the Narcissus myth and complex (*Par.* 3.17-20) to underscore the inherent fallacy of the male observer's solipsistic myopia in the presence of voluntarily edifying women. Additionally, by centering water imagery in the sphere of the Moon, this passage serves to evoke the symbolic correlation of lunar and tidal cycles with the natural periodicity of female sexual maturity, the physiological onset of which traditionally initiates women on a path of evolving social identities that prescribe the compass of their civic agency—be it as daughters and sisters, as wives, as widows, as mothers, or eventually as grandmothers.

The essays in this collection draw attention to how the medieval texts they explore articulate models of representation that frame the scope of women's agency based on established social roles, as well as how these texts interrogate or transgress prevailing tropes to advance critical conceptions of the free will and agency of the female subject. The contributors approach the topic from a variety of perspectives with probing queries: How do medieval writers—both male and female—characterize female psychology and the societal roles available to women? What are the criteria for accountability applied to the female subject in these texts? To what extent is the acclaim or censure of the subject's choices and actions transparently

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justifiable by these criteria? How do the literary characterizations of these conventions represent, commend, or even critique the female subject's compliance or contravention? How do medieval writers dramatize potential challenges to established boundaries of gender conventions? The questions that this volume poses pay attention to both creative and critical approaches to treating women's practical and discursive agency in poetry and narrative. In doing so, the volume also interrogates how the field historically dominated by male critics and scholars has shaped the lens through which these literary depictions are received. Throughout the collection, contributors explore how the functions women serve in their social, political, and religious roles correlate to both the literary representations—and corresponding critical reception—of the scope of women's civic engagement and intellectual authority.

Given Dante's assorted representations of the willful agency of women in the *Commedia* in its exploration of the expression of what drives, guides, or hinders even those who make reason subject to desire or capitulate to duress, the central point of departure for this collection is therefore to examine some of the ways Dante and his near contemporaries represent free will and the ethical, intellectual, and poetic authorities of women. The essays in this collection draw inspiration from such authors as Dante, Boccaccio, and Christine de Pizan to focus on stories of unrecognized resilience, transgressive behaviors, and ultimately free will and subjective agency.

### **Background Scholarship**

In the last few years, several critics have approached the issue of women's agency in medieval Italian literature in ways that were not tried before. Marco Grimaldi (*La poesia che cambia*) has recently taken a radical stance against the whole discipline of gender studies and his chapter "Dante e le donne. Contro gli studi di genere" does not render justice to the rich scholarship in and new perspectives on medieval literature that Gender Studies has produced. To Grimaldi's credit, his warning against the risks of presentism and of idealizing Dante's attitude towards women is a call to avoid anachronisms and to apply philology, historicism, and cultural categories sensibly in literary scholarship. However, Grimaldi's immoderate skepticism ("gli 'studi di genere' non riescono a dire nulla di davvero nuovo e di decisivo sulla letteratura medievale e su Dante in particolare"; 60) leaves little room for debate and constructive discourse. One of the earliest Italian scholars to say something new and decisive about

medieval women was Chiara Frugoni. The great medieval historian, who passed away on April 9, 2022, began researching the depictions of women in medieval art as early as 1990, showing how women were regularly portrayed as meek, obedient, and silent—diminutive attributes that emphasized the dominating role of their husbands. In one of her last publications, *Donne medievali*, Frugoni analyzes some famous medieval women—Redegonda, Matilde di Canossa, Pope Joan, Christine de Pizan, and Margherita Datini—whose lives or works are taken as exemplary perspectives on gender dynamics in medieval society. Taking a cue from such historiographic scholarship, we can frame gender discourse in literature within the panorama of predominantly male early writers, prominent exceptions being Christine de Pizan, who wrote in French, and the Compiuta Donzella, whose identity and even gender are debated.

The recent surge in scholarship of critical reflections on how women are represented and allowed or denied agency in literature has taken different shapes and directions, and not necessarily always within the methodological or ideological precincts of a feminist approach. For example, Marguerite Waller—whose untimely death prevented her from contributing to this volume which we dedicate to her—employed a deconstructionist approach (“Sexualities and Knowledges”) to question current ideas of sex and sexuality in Dante’s poem and dismantle other typical binary notions (e.g. corporeal/incorporeal, singular/plural, and male/female linguistic gender) as they have been applied to the *Commedia*.

It is indeed possible to view Dante’s conceptualization of women in the *Commedia* as a unifying framework to be analyzed within the context of redemptive poetics: “in an era characterized by patrilineal authority, the *Comedy* endorses women’s role as active agents in the salvific process” (Diana Glenn, *Dante’s Reforming Mission*, xiii). Elsewhere, Glenn engages with powerful female figures of Dante’s masterwork, showing Francesca’s active upending of traditional gender roles and social norms in medieval Italy: the Riminese noblewoman recounts her adultery focusing on her own bodily desires and voicing her own story, as her lover, Paolo, remains silent (“Francesca da Rimini”).

Dante’s philogynous theology is the object of Raffaele Pinto’s attention: the indictment of men’s repression of women’s sexuality and physical liberty paradoxically becomes, in the *Commedia*, the foundation of women’s personal and literary freedom (Pinto 12). In fact, Pinto includes Petrarch and Boccaccio as important contributors

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to the creation of a western category of women readers, dedicatees, and potential authors of literary works: “le tre italianissime e fiorentine corone [hanno] aperto l’immaginario occidentale alle donne, intese come pubblico privilegiato della letteratura, poesia o romanzo, e quindi, potenzialmente, come autrici loro stesse di scrittura letteraria” (Pinto 10).

While Victoria Kirkham’s 2012 survey of historical women in the *Commedia* examines the numerological significance attached to specific figures and to the conception of the “female” and its role within the Great Chain of Being, Marco Santagata’s posthumously published *Le donne di Dante* is a monumental study of all the female figures, historical and fictional, who surrounded the life of the poet. Chapter 8 of Santagata’s volume is dedicated to the “Nobildonne di cui si parlava a Firenze,” and it includes: Francesca da Rimini, Pia (dei Tolomei or Pia dei Malavolti, as recent scholarship indicates), Cunizza da Romano, and Sapia Senese. Santagata shows Dante’s favorable portrayals of such women as Pia del Malavolti in *Purg.* V: “[a]lla base della decisione di Dante di assumere Pia come personaggio c’è proprio l’oscurità che ne avvolgeva la fine: la fa parlare per fare luce, denunciando la responsabilità del marito” (158). However, Santagata also casts Francesca da Rimini as a “cattiva lettrice” and “donna leggera” for projecting her own fantasies on the texts she has read—the Arthurian romance *Lancelot* and Andreas Cappellanus’ *De amore*—and misunderstands them (152-153). Thus, Santagata states, Dante does not in *Inferno* 5 revile the *Lancelot* (which the poet had praised in *De vulgari eloquentia* I.x.2 as “Arturi regis ambages pulcerrime”), but rather indicts Francesca’s poor approach to the text. If Santagata engages only tangentially with gender studies, *Le donne di Dante* offers an invaluable analysis of historical sources and data, scrutinized with the sharpest literary acuity and the most rigorous scholarship.

Although the Gender Studies approach to Petrarch’s work has been less abundant,<sup>1</sup> it has been very fruitful on Boccaccio’s side. A balanced assessment by Teodolinda Barolini (“The Marquis of Saluzzo”) strives to restore the final tale of the *Decameron* to its rightful owner: the Marquis Gualtieri of Saluzzo. As Boccaccio notes in the rubric of the tale, the story is about him rather than his wife Griselda, who has become the de facto protagonist in subsequent iterations and criticism. According to Barolini, the artificial agency that has been placed upon Griselda’s shoulders is a construction of later readers and may have originated in Petrarch’s reinvention of the

tale as an exemplar of the perfect wife. The Griselda story has continued to inspire writers for centuries, as Janet Smarr shows. Smarr's "Women Rewrite Griselda" examines the rewriting by five female authors, ranging from Christine de Pizan in her 1405 *Livre de la cité des dames* to later reworkings such as that by Louise-Geneviève Gillot de Saintonge, and all the way to the twentieth century, with Agnes Miegel, Caryl Churchill, and Julia Voznesenskaya, showing the long-lasting attractiveness of Boccaccio's core story of the exploited wife. The ethical discourse on gender of the *Decameron* has often been contrasted with the Certaldese's works presenting a strong vision of women: in "Boccaccio and Women," Marilyn Migiel questions whether the *Corbaccio* is a work of extreme misogyny, or a work of exquisite sarcasm against misogynists, while also pointing at the inconsistent positions of the narrator of the *De mulieribus claris*. Migiel continues her reflections in *The Ethical Dimension of the Decameron*, inviting readers to reconsider the gendered approach. The scholar shows the hermeneutical risks of envisioning a purely feminist or purely misogynist Boccaccio in any of his works through our contemporary presentist categories and instead encourages us to renounce the search for a consistent ideology about women in Boccaccio's oeuvre.

Kristina Olson ("The Language of Women") studies the complex dynamics of the gendered vernacular narrative in Dante's *Commedia* and Boccaccio's *Esposizioni sulla Commedia* and *Decameron*. Launching from the feminized image of the "mother tongue," Olson shows how Boccaccio locates his prose works within a new vernacular canon of literature, one that includes Dante and the *stilnovisti* and can hold its own in the newly forming humanist literary canon. Boccaccio was writing at a time when the vernacular as a literary language was in its initial stages and he noted in his *Esposizioni* that Dante's *Commedia* enjoyed limited success, particularly in comparison to Petrarch's Latin works, because it was "hidden in a cloud of female language" that was unintelligible to a broader Latin-reading audience. Such reflections on the gendering of the burgeoning language debate in the fourteenth century invests the vernacular with "maternal" attributes that offered nurturing succor and comfort to Dante in exile. However, they also reveal the perceived threat of "feminizing" its (male) audience. For example, Boccaccio's *Esposizioni* were a failed use of the vernacular because they "vernacularized" (and thus "feminized") an already vernacular text (Dante's *Commedia*). The *Decameron*, on the other hand, succeeded because it took up the baton where Dante had left off

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and moved in a new vernacular literary direction. Still, Boccaccio imagines that detractors will lament his use of the “gossipy” language of the contemporary woman instead of the illustrious language inspired by the classical muses. In the end, Olson argues, women might be the source, and perhaps even the judges, of the written vernacular, but it is still men who are wielding the language and acting as interlocutors and interpreters for their purported female readership.

Boccaccio’s “minor” works have also received continuous critical attention, as exemplified in Elsa Filosa’s *Tre studi sul De mulieribus claris* (2012). Filosa’s monograph focuses on Boccaccio’s treatise on famous women as the first collection of female biographies in the history of Western literature. Filosa shows how this revolutionary work of fiction established new ways of writing women by breaking certain representational idealizations and portraying women with more complex and realistic psychological profiles. Filosa’s article in the present volume continues in the same spirit, viewing Boccaccio’s female characters in *De mulieribus* as marking a cultural shift away from a stereotypical depiction of women, and paving the way to a more nuanced and introspective representation of female literary figures.

A recent book that perhaps best frames the gendered textual relationship of writers and readers in Dante’s time is Elena Lombardi’s *Imagining the Woman Reader in the Age of Dante*. Lombardi shows how in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, female readers went beyond educational and devotional texts, as a result of a general increase in lay literacy and new, more open ideas about the practice of reading. In Dante’s early poems, both men and women play a role; in parallel, the new mixed-gender audience for lyric poetry multiplied possible responses to the texts. While the female addressee of love poems is often considered a mere screen for its male audience, Lombardi views the addressee as a powerful figure with agency, a potential critic of the poet since female readers may also offer criticism of the poems. Several important female readers of the Middle Ages, including Heloise, Alysoun of Bath in the *Canterbury Tales*, and of course, Francesca da Rimini and Boccaccio’s Griselda, find their way into Lombardi’s analysis of the female audience for many late medieval works, a fruitful vantage point from which the author can state that “Boccaccio, in particular in his early work, constructs his relation to his readership as one of lover to beloved, thus realizing in full the suggestions of his lyric predecessors and of Dante” (190).

A notable example of the vibrant currency of contemporary interest in the representation of women in Medieval literature is the project directed by Laura Ingallinella at Wellesley College to create publicly available Wikipedia entries on the women in Dante's *Commedia*. Realized in collaboration with Wiki Education—a non-profit initiative that supports higher-education professionals and students to become Wikipedia editors—the project mobilized undergraduate students of the *Commedia* from Wellesley College working with English translations of the poem to rewrite existing entries or to compose new entries for key characters and themes in the poem, with an explicit focus on the medieval women represented or mentioned by Dante. Ingallinella's team produced over sixteen new or significantly improved entries that drew millions of viewers during the project's period of development and following. In the second year, the program was extended to other topics and characters from the poem based on critical inquiries about the *Commedia* generated by students. Details of the project, including its design, workflow, and goals are available in the forthcoming publication: Laura Ingallinella, "Foul Tales, Public History: Bringing Dante's *Commedia* to Wikipedia," *Bibliotheca Dantesca*, special issue "Dante and the Digital Humanities," eds. Elizabeth Coggeshall and Akash Kumar (vol. 5, 2022).

To conclude this survey, a volume of proceedings is forthcoming, edited by Simona Lorenzini e Deborah Pellegrino (*Women's Agency*), that collects interventions presented on April 23, 2021, at a conference organized by Yale University and Kent State University. All these important works testify to the liveliness and relevance of research in Gender Studies for medieval Italian literature, to which the present collection contributes.

### **Essay Summaries**

This volume includes nine essays that engage the topic from a variety of perspectives. Taking into account literary representations that frame the scope of women's agency that reflect established social roles, the contributing scholars explore critical conceptions of the free will and agency of the female subject in the works of Dante Alighieri and near contemporaries, including Giovanni Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan. Further consideration is given to elements of the representation of women further afield during this period of the fourteenth century. The seasoned and emerging scholars of Medieval Italian Literature whose essays appear in this collection developed



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their contributions during the Dantean year 2021, each reexamining established paradigms of reception and proposing new perspectives.

The opening essay, “Beatrice *ammiraglio*: Master and Commander of Poetic Authority in Dante’s *Commedia*” by Catherine Adoyo revisits how the poet’s representation of Beatrice consistently subverts gendering tropes throughout his body of work and invests the figure of Beatrice with unimpeachable authority rooted in the rhetorical poetic legacy of the Ancient Mediterranean tradition. The study demonstrates how Dante mines the currency of the nautical metaphor as poetic enterprise to clarify the significance of the simile equating Beatrice to an admiral upon her arrival in Terrestrial Paradise. Adoyo observes that while commentary and criticism have traditionally framed Beatrice’s presentation as jarringly masculine and recoiled at its disregard for conventions of the *descriptio mulieris*, especially as object of desire pleasing to the male gaze, that same tradition has failed to discern the intertextual saturation of the poet’s chosen term “ammiraglio” with a poetic convention of the ancient Mediterranean literary tradition. With a singular rhetorical flourish, the term illuminates the compass of Beatrice’s dominion as the arbiter of meaning in Dante’s unprecedented poetics of revelation.

In “The Eloquent Witness: Women’s Testimony and Hermeneutical Insurrection in Dante’s *Commedia*,” Laura Ingallinella reads the *Commedia* through the lens of hermeneutic injustice to illuminate Dante’s poetic challenge to the epistemic exclusion of women’s agency through the voices of Francesca, Pia, Sapia, Piccarda, and Cunizza. Ingallinella is able to show how Dante represents women as knowledgeable witnesses to their own experience of human bonds and divine justice by emphasizing their testimonial authority and juridical power. In doing so, Dante subverts the rhetorical toolkit of courteousness, reticence, and modesty that are traditionally assigned to female eloquence. Dante’s *Commedia* thereby carves a rhetorical space that encompasses several instantiations of gendered hermeneutical defiance.

Sara Diaz interrogates the form and function of female sexual agency within the *Commedia* in “Francesca da Rimini and Beatrice d’Este: Female Desire, Consent, and Coercion in Dante’s *Commedia*.” Focusing on the civic function of marriage as the only morally sanctioned locus for female sexuality, Diaz juxtaposes the sexually transgressive lovers in *Inferno* 5 represented by Francesca da Rimini and the civically exemplary societies represented by the chaste wives of Cacciaguida’s Florence. Underscoring the

misanthropic implications of Francesca's erotic infraction, Diaz argues that Dante's portrayal of Cacciaguida's happy matrons as paragons of wifely virtue aligns their healthy sexual practices with the moral, familial, and civic well-being of his ancestor's bygone utopia in ways that shed light on the anti-social implications of Francesca's erotic subjectivity.

"The Widow's Predicament: Imperatives of Fidelity and Prayer in the *Commedia*" by Christina Lopez examines the salvific potentialities of women in the *Commedia*, and especially widows. On this score, Lopez draws attention to the contrast between the shade of Dido, a widow expressly identified as she who "ruppe fede al cener di Sicheo" (*Inf.* 5.62), and the still-living widows of Nino Visconti (*Purg.* 8) and Forese Donati (*Purg.* 23). Lopez further highlights the significant role of both widows by underscoring the distinction that the poet makes: for while Nino Visconti fears that his remarried wife has forgotten about him completely and does little to advance his progress in Purgatory, Forese credits his wife's constant prayer for his speedy passage through the realm's rehabilitating terraces. Lopez makes the case that the social imperative on widows to seek out new partners does not accommodate the potential to remain spiritually and sexually loyal to their deceased husbands. Lopez thereby contrasts the social norms surrounding widowhood with Dante's treatment of widows, illustrating a crucial component of how the poet represents women in the *Commedia*.

Tonia Bernardi Triggiano's "Dream, Distortion, and Double Take: Dante's Poetics of Redirection" explores how female agents who guide the pilgrim's passage ensure the imperative of redirection in the *Commedia* through overt instruction by correcting the pilgrim's visual and imaginative misperceptions through nocturnal dreams, optical distortion, and gestural double-takes. Starting with Maria, Lucia, and Beatrice—the triad of *donne benedette* who set the pilgrim's journey in motion—Triggiano draws attention to the various roles of women who serve to correct the pilgrim's progress. Examples include how Lucia facilitates the pilgrim's physical relocation, while the *femmina balba*, in her capacity as both subject and object of distortion in the pilgrim's double vision of self-discovery, dramatizes the struggle of deliberation admonished by the *donna santa*. Additional examples include Leah (and Rachel by implication) as marker of re-equilibrated will, as well as Beatrice and Piccarda who collaborate to correct the pilgrim's mistaken perception at the threshold of *Paradiso*.

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In her essay “‘Facce a parlar pronte’: Imagining Gendered Textual Communities in Dante’s *Vita Nova* and Occitan Songbook *H*,” Katherine Travers proposes reading gender as another axis along which the Occitan tradition dialogues with the *Vita Nova*, particularly through the figure of the speaking woman. Placing Dante’s representations of women as readers, recipients, and speakers, in a broader cultural context, Travers compares Dante’s representations of speaking women to those found in an Occitan songbook, known as manuscript *H* (Vatican Latin 3207). This manuscript, made around Padua in the late *Duecento*, was destined for an Italian, *borgnese* readership and contains the single largest extant collection of *trobairitz* (women troubadours)—that is, representations of women who speak. Travers posits that in describing the pilgrim’s perception of the souls encountered in the Sphere of the Moon as immaterial reflections (“specchiati sembianti”; *Par.* 3.20), seen through glass or through water (“per acque nitide”; *Par.* 3.11), Dante provides an analog for our own mediated and partial perception of women readers and poets represented in Italian culture of the late *Duecento*.

Alessandro Vettori’s “Dante, Lady Poverty, and the Donation of Constantine” offers a historical reappraisal of Dante’s critique of the corrupting consequences of the Donation of Constantine in conjunction with the poet’s figurative personification of Francesco d’Assisi’s repudiation of material wealth. Taking into account Dante’s unequivocal condemnation of usury as a cause of moral decay, Vettori underscores the importance of Bernard Clairvaux’s participation as a representative of the austere Cistercians in the *Commedia*’s criticism of the culture of money in certain religious orders. Vettori also discusses how the evocation of Lady Poverty as Francesco’s bride in the poem’s praise of the Saint in *Paradiso* 11 bears strong similarities with the representation of Poverty in the *Sacrum commercium Sancti Francisci cum Domina Paupertate*, a possible source of inspiration in Dante’s portrait of Francesco and his relationship to poverty.

With “*De mulieribus claris*: a New and Humanistic Portrait of Women,” Elsa Filosa presents the first of two essays in this collection that focus on Boccaccio’s representations of women. Filosa elaborates how Giovanni Boccaccio’s *De mulieribus claris*, the first collection of female biographies in the history of Western literature, constitutes a revolutionary work of fiction and a cultural artifact that established new ways of representing women in writing. Filosa further discusses how, compared to the practice of cataloguing brief women’s biographies during the Middle Ages, Boccaccio is the first

European author to portray women realistically in his writings, eschewing idealized profiles or purely figurative representations. In this respect, *De mulieribus* marks a cultural shift away from a stereotypical depiction of women, paving the way for portraying women with greater complexity and nuance in literature.

Viviana Pezzullo’s “Reimagining Griselda: Christine de Pizan’s Rewriting of Boccaccio” is an illuminating comparative reading of a singular iconic character as envisioned by both a male and a female writer. Accepting Giovanna Angeli’s invitation to scholars to further examine Christine de Pizan’s reading of Boccaccio (“La Griselda di Christine de Pizan”, 2015), Pezzullo investigates the character of Griselda both in *La cité des dames* and the *Decameron*, discussing how Christine’s strategic changes to Boccaccio’s source material fosters the former’s agenda of advocating for female agency. While restoring Griselda’s authority, Christine also affirms her own authorship in a male world. Indeed, Christine strips Griselda of the halo of piety that characterized her in Boccaccio’s text and turns her into a symbol of resistance against the abuses men inflict on women. Pezzullo also uses the illuminated manuscript Pal. Lat. 1989 which contains a copy of the *Decameron* to reflect on how the Master of *La Cité des dames* visually represents Griselda’s body which is described differently by Christine and by Boccaccio.

Even as it reflects the continued interest among readers and scholars of Dante and of Medieval Literature to explore the representation of women in increasingly complex and subtle ways, this volume endeavors to cultivate nascent and innovative approaches to reading the representations of women’s agency in the early modern literature of Dante and his near contemporaries. As the readers of Dante continue to become ever more discerning and engagement with Medieval literature gets more sophisticated with respect to current affairs and contemporary issues, this volume ventures to provide a forum for new perspectives on the hermeneutics of representation concerning women in Medieval Literature.

The editors and contributing authors of this collection look forward to welcoming and engaging further critical interrogations of both historical and contemporary receptions of these representations.

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### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> On Petrarch and Gender Studies, in addition to Olson (see below) and Pinto, see the 1994 monograph by Laura L. Estrin and a chapter (“Women of Stone: Gender and Politics in the Petrarchan World”, pp. 17-67) in Aileen Feng’s 2017 *Writing Beloveds*. Conversely, Petrarchism and Renaissance poetry have received much attention in Gender Studies, also thanks to the first women writing in Italian language. In addition to the vast critical literature on Italian women writers, I would recommend Federico Sanguineti, *La storia letteraria in poche righe* for a short and incisive perspective.

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