

predecessors, as well as between Dante's philosophy and his ancient, late antique, and medieval sources. The notion of love is at the very core of Took's interpretation of Dante, and love coherently informs his analysis of the poet's texts throughout: from its literary and psychological manifestations in Dante's early production, to its political connotation as universal harmony in the treatises, to its theoretical ontological reverberations in the *Commedia*, love represents the ultimate mover in Dante's cosmos, the definitive motive of his literary work, and the final destination of his literary and existential pilgrimage.

The book's intended audience consists primarily of students and scholars but may include other readers interested in the tumultuous life and superb intellectual achievements of one of the greatest poets of all time. A preface, a brief evocative afterword ("A Coruscation of Delight"), a list of abbreviations, four maps detailing Dante's universe and each of its otherworldly realms, a select bibliography (inevitably privileging texts available in English and Italian), and an *index nominum* complete the volume.

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*Love and Sex in the Time of Plague: A Decameron Renaissance.* Guido Ruggiero. I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021. 292 pp. \$49.95.

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Research on emotions and feelings has been steadily flourishing in pre- and early modern studies, with a growing attention to how literary texts construe affects or systems of emotions. In this historical study, Ruggiero aims at reconstructing the cultural world that inhabits the pages of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and in particular how the shared culture of the day imagined and perceived the emotions associated with love and sexual desire. By employing the tools of both archival research and literary criticism, the volume unfolds "a microhistory or microstudy" (207) of these complex emotions as it emerges from the *Decameron's* tales.

Through a careful selection of *novelle*, Ruggiero focuses on the interplay of emotions and reason. He argues that, on one hand, the tales suggest that love and sexual desire could be perceived as dangerous because of their uncontrollable nature; on the other, in the frame story the group of Florentine storytellers presents love as a potentially civilizing emotion when partnered with *virtù*. Ruggiero's analysis demonstrates that for the *brigata* and the tales' characters, *virtù* consists in the ability to display self-control and measured manners. If once it was associated with the violent defense of honor, in the *Decameron*, according to Ruggiero, *virtù* requires reason to prevail over emotion. Through an attentive analysis of the text, the volume convincingly shows how the *Decameron* documents the shift in the meaning attributed to *virtù* that was happening

at the time, a notion that subsequently played a fundamental role in the Italian Renaissance and became pivotal in Machiavelli's *Prince*.

In examining the interaction of emotion and *virtù*/reason, Ruggiero's analysis also highlights the central role played by consensus realities in evaluating the characters' *virtù*. Starting from Stephen Greenblatt's concept of Renaissance self-fashioning, Ruggiero develops the concept of "consensus realities" (a notion already presented in his previous books, especially in *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance* [2007]) defined as "the imagined, but nonetheless very real and very significant, ways of conceptualizing an individual that were shared by the groups that surrounded one in the small, intimate world of the cities of the Rinascimento" (70). In order to reveal the impact of consensus realities in the text and characters' shared perception of love and sexual desire, the analysis focuses on the characters' behavior and reflections in matters of desires, courtship, and sexual interactions.

By often juxtaposing opposite attitudes or outcomes Ruggiero's analysis takes into consideration some of the most famous tales of the *Decameron*: Calandrino's failed attempt at refined love (*Decameron* 9.5), Cimone's transforming love (5.1), Nastagio degli Onesti's response to the beloved's rejection (5.8), Rinieri's punishment of Elena for her mistreatment (8.7), Tancredi's overwhelming emotions and lack of *virtù* vis-à-vis Ghismonda's heroic death (4.1), Lisabetta's consuming love (4.5), Alibech's pleasures in serving God (3.10), and Gualtieri's beastly behavior (10.10). In the conclusion, Alibech's tale is assigned a central position, as Ruggiero argues her role as anti-Eve and the tale's reversal of the Garden of Eden's story. While Ruggiero's argument is congruous with his previous considerations, the conclusion is marred by the misplacement of the story at the numerical center of the *Decameron*.

The volume offers a historical reading of love and sexual desire as it unfolds in Boccaccio's text that will appeal to generalist readers, historians of emotions, social and cultural historians, and scholars of Italian medieval and Renaissance literature. The book is concerned with what the text "says about love and sexual relations as they were imagined, lived, and felt in the shared culture of the day" (4), rather than the literary or philosophical traditions that might have influenced Boccaccio's writing. However, both the notes and the ample bibliography provide the relevant literary scholarship on the *Decameron*'s tales.

*Love and Sex in the Time of the Plague* shows us the trajectory of the meaning assigned to *virtù* and how it morphs in the Italian Renaissance, the essential role played by consensus realities in the construction of individual identities, and finally the nuanced and at time contrasting emotions revolving around love and sex in the *Decameron*.

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