

Fosca Mariani Zini. *L'économie des passions: Essai sur le Décaméron de Boccace.*

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Fosca Mariani Zini interprets Boccaccio's *Decameron* essentially as an oeuvre of philosophy. In doing so she follows a trend in recent scholarship on Boccaccio that, while not prevalent, has already reached a critical number of followers especially among German-speaking scholars such as Kurt Flasch, Ruedi Imbach, and Thomas Ricklin. Zini considers the reflections of the *brigata* as an effective synthesis of courtly themes and scholastic academic discussions driven by the impetus the plague gave to peoples' minds. By hiding allegoric truths and worldly wisdom under the veil of his novels, Boccaccio fulfills the poetic concept he developed in the *Genealogia Deorum Gentilium* and the *Esposizioni sopra la comedia di Dante*. According to Boccaccio's concept of the *fable*, novels represent the true nature of things more accurately than mere philosophical argumentation. Boccaccio thus opted for this narrative genre for wrapping and packaging a lesson on his own philosophical approach on how to deal with the passions and how to implement them in the right way — the economy of the passions, or *l'économie des passions*.

Taking the Aristotelian enthymeme τὸ μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἥττον as a starting point, Mariani Zini supposes that at least large portions of the *Decameron* consist of Boccaccio's attempt to come to terms with the stoic philosophy of the ἀδιάφορα, or *indifferentia* (on the basis of what he could read in Seneca and Cicero) against the backdrop of the self-centeredness emerging after the plague and furthered by the vibrant mercantile society of Florence. According to the interpretation suggested by Zini, Boccaccio deals in his *Decameron* with the establishing of a new ethics founded exactly on those goods that the Stoics considered as preferable (προηγμένα, *producta*), but not as necessary must-haves. Finally, Zini localizes in the tenth book of the *Decameron* Boccaccio's attempt to answer the question, if under the new ethical values provoked by the plague — with the *amor sui* (the love of self) prevailing — magnanimity still exists, and if so, in which way and form? (It is quite clear that Boccaccio treats the concept of *magnanimity* in the last book of the *Decameron*, for he states himself in the heading of the book that the following is dedicated to the *spiriti magni*, who acted in “a liberal or magnificent way [*liberamente o vero magnificamente*].”)

Zini first takes under consideration the meaning of a magnanimous act in the different historical stages of Stoic thinking: with relation to the external, preferable goods, it ranges in the history of Stoic philosophy up to Thomas Aquinas, from disregard and contempt to indifference. She comes to the conclusion that the new way of magnanimity Boccaccio proposes under the impression of the plague and its influence on the Florentine society consists in the expropriation of the self, by renouncing every single interest, desire, and need. The magnanimous self, which steps back behind his or her personality, gains not only an

indispensable independence from the external goods, but also the complete *Gelassenheit* (Zini makes use of the German word), or the calmness of his or her soul. As a consequence, the virtue of magnanimity develops up to the magnificence mentioned by Boccaccio at the beginning of the tenth book and even to sincere generosity and largesse in the case of Griselda. What at first glance seems like giving up in the confrontation with the forces of destiny and surrendering to seemingly inevitable external circumstances, in Boccaccio's developed Stoic philosophy actually becomes a positive attitude, which allows its bearer to escape in an entirely logical, sovereign way the dictates of self-interest and self-centeredness. Only by relinquishing his or her own interests — this is Boccaccio's philosophical quintessence, according to Zini — is the expropriated and free self capable of gaining the necessary sovereignty with regard to the economy of passions, against the backdrop of the postplague mercantile society in Florence, which is directed by the love of self. This interpretation of the philosophical contents of Boccaccio's *Decameron* is convincing to me, and even if one were to disagree, Mariani Zini's erudite *L'économie des passions* would still be very much worth reading and discussing.

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