

## SUMMARY

### THE MEANINGS AND FUNCTIONS OF BOCCACCIO'S *DECAMERON* GARDENS

This research project starts from some questions that *Decameron* scholars have tried to answer to: what is the function of the garden / *locus amoenus* in the literary work? Are these simple rhetorical tools or are they elements that the author introduces to communicate his own poetic conception? Starting from reading the text - from the observation of the natural and/or artificial elements of the various landscape compositions, from their arrangement and from the actions performed within them - the investigation attempts to motivate the reasons which lead us to believe that such places don't have only an aesthetic value, but they are the spaces chosen by the author to express reflections of a metaliterary nature. The author's decision to place the gardens in the frame of the work is a sign that highlights the importance attributed to them: *Foreword*, *Introductions* and *Conclusions* are the spaces where the author expresses his own idea of literature. Within the frame moves the happy brigade that leaves Florence, where the plague rages, to reason in the gardens which are perceived as closed, reserved spaces, far from being just a refuge or places of escape, they are the heart of the main story where the ten narrators reproduce the literary game conducted by the author in the frame of the book. Leaving the troubled city and entering an ideal dimension coincides with the transition from the degraded word (the laughter and mottos that accompany the tragic sequences of the plague-stricken city) to the ornate and saving word, capable of provoking pleasure (*delectare*) and providing useful advice, to teach (*prodesse*), according to the precepts of Horace's *ars poetica*. The place of this new idea of making literature is the garden / *locus amoenus*; the same author declares it in the *Conclusions*: «Appresso assai ben si può cognoscere queste cose non nella chiesa, [...] né ancora nelle scuole de' filosofanti, dove l'onestà non meno che in altra parte è richesta, dette sono, né tra' cherici né tra' filosofi in alcun luogo, ma ne' giardini»<sup>1</sup>. The garden becomes the propelling center of a pleasant literature, bearer of secular and humanistic values of control of reality and passions through the exercise of intelligence and above all the use of the ornamented word. Starting from the text reading, from the observation of the natural and/or artificial elements and their arrangement, it has been ascertained that these spaces are chosen by the author to express the reflections of a meta-literary nature and are firmly connected to the project of the book and to the poetic conception underlying the masterpiece, as the author himself reveals in the *Conclusions*. Precisely for this reason, Boccaccio carefully selects the traditional material to create the gardens of the frame and the stories. If on the one hand Boccaccio takes up some motifs from the garden of the *locus amoenus* and/or the courtly

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<sup>1</sup> *Dec. Concl, dell'Autore*, 7 (afterwards one can know these things very well not in the church, [...] nor in the schools of philosophers, where honesty is rich no less than in other places, they are said, nor among «cherici nor among philosophers in any place, but in the gardens).

*vergier*, (the image of a refined, aristocratic and cultured microcosm, an exclusive world reserved for a specific social group made up of nobles and aristocrats) from the other, the constantly evoked archetype is the earthly Paradise. The motif of the garden, superimposed on that of the *locus amoenus*, conceived as a separate space, a happy place where nature and culture meet, is linked to the great theme of Nostalgia for Paradise and yearning for the Golden Age. Boccaccio, as Dante had already done in Canto XXVIII of *Purgatory*, identifies the earthly Paradise with Parnassus: «Quelli ch'anticamente poetaro / l'età de l'oro e suo stato felice, / forse in Parnaso esto loco sognaro»<sup>2</sup>. The conquest of Eden coincides with the reappropriation of poetry and rationality. And it is highly significant that the daily ritual of the coronation of the queen and the king on duty is inserted within these places; a gesture inaugurated in the Introduction to the first day with explicit allusions to the rite the great poets were celebrated with. Boccaccio repropose a theme dear to Petrarch and which had been revisited in various areas of the *Comedy* starting from canto XXVII of *Purgatory*, where the agents, before entering Eden, is symbolically crowned by Virgil («per ch'io te sovra te corono e mitrio»)<sup>3</sup>. This game alluding to the *Comedy* and in general to the earthly Paradise is not only played in the frame, but in all the gardens described in the stories. In general, even if the representations of these places arise from literary suggestions of various kinds, classical (above all by Ovid), biblical and medieval (we recall the recovery of many details taken from the *Roman de la Rose*) and iconographic<sup>4</sup>, what remains constant in all the places described is the presence of explicit and constant references to the earthly Paradise; Boccaccio re-proposes Dante's Eden and the motif of the paradisiacal garden in various forms, however depriving it of the otherworldly dimension. Our author re-reads the first three chapters of *Genesis* from a different perspective, placing in the center of those events the question related to the role of the linguistic expression of thought and communication which are the basis of making literature. Therefore, behind every decameron garden, it is possible to glimpse the image of the earthly paradise, so much so that in every garden there is at least one of those symbolic elements of the earthly paradise, even if the symbolism of those elements acquires a new meaning in the secular context. That exclusive world is not reserved, as happened in the courtly tradition, to the aristocratic class, but is open above all to those who are capable of loving, subjecting their passions to the use of intelligence, and to those who manage to extricate themselves from various situations through the use of the word and rationality. In this regard, it is indicative that the motif of the garden runs through the whole work and becomes the space where the characters participate in

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<sup>2</sup> *Purg.* XXVIII, 139-141 (Those who formerly poet / the golden age and its happy state, / perhaps in Parnassus this place dreamed).

<sup>3</sup> *Purg.* XXVII, 142 (Therefore, I crown you and I miter you).

<sup>4</sup> L. Battagli Ricci, *Ragionare nel giardino. Boccaccio e i cicli pittorici del Trionfo della Morte*, Roma, Ed Salerno, 2000, p. 98.

the novelistic game of the author and narrators, showing that they are «latori di una dotazione ludica naturale che, educata, li può portare vicino alla paradigmatica maestria dei narratori della cornice»<sup>5</sup>, to the point that some of them are symbolically crowned by the author, whether they are exemplary like Andreuola or anti-exemplary like Beatrice and Lidia.

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<sup>5</sup> M. Picone, *Gioco e/o letteratura*, in M. Picone, *Boccaccio e la codificazione della novella. Letture del «Decameron»*, Ravenna, Longo editore, 2008, p.62 (bearers of a natural ludic endowment which, educated, can bring them close to paradigmatic mastery of the narrators of the frame).