Giornale di filosofia, vol. 1/2025 • ISSN 1827-5834 • DOI 10.7413/1827-5834082

Simona Lorenzini

"Et, ben che spesso semplice paura / solare eclypse or squarciar nuvolette / faccia": Giovanni Boccaccio as Natural Thinker

> L'eclisse era un segno del cielo. Un sole malato di peste guardava col suo occhio velato un mondo che aveva iniziato la sua guerra di dissoluzione.
>
> C. Levi, *Cristo si è fermato ad Eboli*

Total solar eclipses are one of the most spectacular natural phenomena visible to the naked eye in the sky. Such eclipses occur when the Moon passes between the Sun and Earth and casts a shadow on Earth that fully or partially blocks the Sun's light[1]. Like comets, meteor showers, and other cosmic events, eclipses were long viewed as harbingers for drastic events and fundamental changes. The wonder, awe, and marvel inspired by eclipses, both solar and lunar, were invoked as omens of impending catastrophe, but also as motivation for scientific knowledge and inquiry. Precisely because of the wonder they cause, eclipses are often associated with the beginnings of science and knowledge[2].

In the *Genealogie deorum gentilium*, Giovanni Boccaccio, the focus of this study, locates the beginning of poetry in humankind's marvel before the mysteries of nature: it is the nature of poetry to unveil and reproduce aesthetically these mysteries, among which there are celestial movements[3]. Ancient European and Asian cultures were aware of the

[1] Cfr. https://science.nasa.gov/eclipses/types/

[2] Cfr. J. Kriesel, *The Marvelous between Dante and Boccaccio*, in "Traditio", vol. 73, 2018, pp. 213-216; A. Cornish, *Dante's Total Eclipse*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation. Total Solar Eclipses in Science, History, Literature, and the Arts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2024, p. 159. On the medieval discourse about the marvelous, cfr. J. Kriesel, *Dante and the Marvelous*, in "Le tre corone. Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio", vol. 8, 2021, pp. 25-55.

[3] Cfr. *Gen*. XIV, vii-viii. On the Aristotelian concepts about the role of marvels for the birth of poetry, cfr. D. Lummus, *Boccaccio's Hellenism and the Foundations of Modernity*, in "Mediaevalia", vol. 33, 2012, pp. 138-140, 164; Id., *Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the* Genealogie deorum gentilium libri, in "Speculum", vol. 87, 2012, pp. 732-734, 738-741.

mechanical and predictable nature of eclipses and did not doubt that they were natural phenomena rationally explicable and easily forecasted by the study of lunar and solar cycles[4]. Despite their predictability, total eclipses have often haunted and captured the creative imagination and the intellectual curiosity of those experiencing them.

According to Aristotle, men began to philosophize because of their wonder. As examples of marvelous things that first ignited philosophical inquiry, Aristotle cites the celestial bodies of the moon and the sun[5]. Thomas Aquinas mentions Aristotle and the solar eclipse's example as motivation for the pursuit of knowledge: "And this desire is one of wonder, and causes inquiry, as is stated in the beginning of the *Metaphysics* (i, 2). For instance, if a man, experiencing the eclipse of the sun, recognizes that it must be due to some cause, and does not yet know what that cause is, he begins to wonder about it, and from wondering proceeds to inquire. This inquiry does not cease until he arrives at a knowledge of the essence of the cause"[6]. Conversely, in Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae*, eclipses are invoked both as threatening and obscure signs that worry the uneducated, and a motivator to search for the natural causes of observable phenomena[7].

Interestingly, the different attitudes toward the eclipse – intellectual curiosity, wonder, and terror – appear in a fragment of the decorative

[4] Cfr. C.P.E. Nothaft, *Pre-Modern Astronomies of Eclipses in the Near-East and Europe*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation*, cit., pp. 54-68; J. Steel, *Solar Eclipses Across Early Asia*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation*, cit., pp. 85-102.

[5] *Met*. I, 2, 982b, 10-15: "For it is owing to their wonder that men both now begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters, e.g. about the phenomena of the moon and those of the sun and of the stars, and about the genesis of the universe. And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of Wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders); therefore, since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently, they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end. […] but as the man is free, we say, who exists for his own sake and not for another's, so we pursue this as the only free science, for it alone exists for its own sake." (R. McKeon (a cura di), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, The Modern Library, New York 2001). On Boccaccio as reader of Aristotle, cfr., for instance, S. Barsella, *I marginalia di Boccaccio all'"Etica Nicomachea" di Aristotele*, in E. Filosa, M. Papio (a cura di), *Boccaccio in America*, Longo Editore, Ravenna 2012, pp. 143-155; M.P. Ellero, *Federigo e il re di Cipro: note su Boccaccio lettore di Aristotele*, in "Modern Language Notes", vol. 129, 2014, pp. 180-191; F. Andrei, *Boccaccio the Philosopher: An Epistemology of the* Decameron, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham (Switzerland) 2017; M. Pascale, *Ira e compassione. Fonti aristotelico-tomiste di* Decameron VIII 7, in G. Frosini (a cura di) *Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2020, pp. 115-128.

[6] As quoted in A. Cornish, *Dante's Total Eclipse*, cit., p. 160. Cfr. also J. Kriesel, *Dante and the Marvelous*, cit., pp. 50-51.

[7] Cfr. Boeth. *Cons*. IV, 5.

border of the now-damaged fresco of the Triumph of Death by Andrea di Cione, known as Orcagna. The fresco was painted right after the Black Death of 1348 in the Church of Santa Croce, in Florence, and likely Boccaccio saw it[8]. Orcagna depicts a solar eclipse in a vignette embedded in the frame: two men gaze at the Sun obscured by the dark disk of the moon as they shield their eyes with one hand. There is also a third man who turns away from the spectacle, holding his hand raised to his right eye. The gesture is more than a conventional expression of wonder as it seems to reveal pain or, better, terror. According to scholars, the fresco's extreme realism is difficult to account for unless Orcagna had observed an actual eclipse[9]. The scene probably preserves Orcagna's observation of the July 7th eclipse in 1339 that Giovanni Villani purports to have foretold future evils for the city of Florence[10].

> Nell'anno MCCCXXXVIIII, a dì VII di luglio, tra·lla nona e '1 vespro scurò il sole nel segno del Cancro più che·lle due parti; ma perché fu dopo il merigge al dicrinare del sole non si mostrò di scurità come fosse notte, ma pure si vide assai tenebroso. E nota, secondo che scrivono gli antichi dottori di strologia, *ogni scurazione del sole nel Cancro, che viene quasi de' cento anni una volta, è di grande significazione di mali a venire al secolo* […] *ma pure, come allora avenne, significò in Firenze e d'attorno fame e mortalità grande, come inanzi leggendo si troverrà*. E per agiunta avenne in Firenze il primo dì d'agosto seguente grandi e disordinate *truoni e baleni*, gittando più folgori in città e in contado di Firenze.[11] (XII, c, 5-20; emphasis added)

> In the year 1339, on the 7th of July, between nones and vespers, more than two thirds of the sun was darkened in the Sign of Cancer. Because this occurred after midday during the setting of the sun, it did not become dark as night, but nonetheless it was difficult to see. And observe that according to the writings of the ancient teachers of astrology, *every darkening of the sun in*

[8] On Orcagna's fresco, cfr. R.J.M. Olson, J.M. Pasachoff, *Comets, Meteors, and Eclipses: Art and Science in Early Renaissance Italy*, in "Meteroritics & Planetary Science", vol. 37, 2002, pp. 1563-1578; Id., (a cura di), *Cosmos. The Art and Science of the Universe*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London 2019, p. 61; A. Smart, *Taddeo Gaddi, Orcagna, and the Eclipses of 1333 and 1339*, in I. Lavin, J. Plummer (a cura di), *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, New York University Press, New York 1977, pp. 403-414.

[9] Cfr. A. Smart, *Taddeo Gaddi*, cit.; R. J. M. Olson, J. M. Pasachoff, *Comets, Meteors*, cit., p. 1571; M. Meiss, *The Great Age of Frescos. Giotto to Pontormo*, G. Braziller in association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1968, pp. 78-84.

[10] On chronicles as important sources for the record of solar eclipses and other celestial phenomena, cfr. G.E.M. Gasper, *"The Face of the World was Wretched, Horrifying, Black, Remarkable". Solar Eclipses in the Middle Ages*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation*, cit., pp. 106-108.

[11] G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, G. Porta (a cura di), vol. 3, Fondazione Pietro Bembo, Parma 1991, pp. 211-212.

> *Cancer, which comes almost once every hundred years, foretells evils that will befall the world* […] But the *eclipse also foretold hunger and great mortality for Florence and its surroundings, as later occurred and as one will find by reading ahead.* And what is more, on the following first of August there were great and unusual storms of *thunder and lightning* in Florence, during which many bolts of lightning struck the city and the contado of Florence.[12]

The eclipse was followed by intense thunderstorms in August and September and, Villani continues accordingly, "tutti furono segni di future mali alla nostra città, come tosto apresso seguirono"[13] ("all these things were signs of coming evils to our city, which soon followed"[14]). One of the devastating events was a bubonic plague that occurred in Florence the following year. The deadly consequences are vividly described by Villani a few chapters later with words that are redolent of the *Decameron*'s introduction:

> E morinne più che il sesto cittadini pure de' migliori e più cari, maschi e femmine, che non rimase famiglia ch'alcuno non ne morisse, e dove due o·ttre e più; e durò quella pestilenza infino al verno vegnente. E più di XV^{m} corpi tra maschi e femmine e fanciulli se ne sepellirono pure nella città, onde la città era tutta piena di pianto e di dolore, e non si intendea apena ad altro, ch'a sopellire morti.[15] (XII, cxiv, 10)

> And more than a sixth of our citizens, even the best and the dearest, men and women, died, so that there was no family that did not lose someone, and some families lost two or three people or more. This pestilence lasted until the following winter and more than fifteen thousand bodies of men, women, and children were buried even in the city, whence the city was full of weeping and mourning, and was occupied with little more than burying the dead.[16]

The Black Death was certainly the most terrible calamity of those times, but before its onset, and even before the earlier plague of 1340, other disasters had taken place in Florence and had been interpreted as signs of God's wrath on the enormity of men's sins. It was in 1333, on November 1st, that the first natural catastrophe struck Florence: a flood that caused massive devastation throughout Tuscany. It became known as *il gran diluvio* and it was associated with the eclipse that appeared earlier in the year, on May 14th. Giovanni Villani describes the flood as follows:

[12] R.I. Diakite, M. T. Sneider (a cura di), *The Eleventh and Twelfth Books of Giovanni Villani's* New Chronicle, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, Berlin/Boston 2022, p. 378.
[13] G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, cit., p. 212.
[14] R.I. Diakite, M.T. Sneider (a cura di), *The Eleventh and Twelfth Books*, cit., p. 378.
[15] G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, cit., p. 226.
[16] R.I. Diakite, M. T. Sneider (a cura di), *The Eleventh and Twelfth Books*, cit., p. 389.

> Nelli anni di Cristo MCCCXXXIII, il dì di calen di novembre, essendo la città di Firenze in grande potenzia, e in felice e buono stato, più che fosse stata dalli anni MCCC in qua, piacque a Dio, come disse per la bocca di Cristo nel suo Evangelio: *"Vigilate, che·nnon sapete il dìe né l'ora del iudicio Dio", il quale volle mandare sopra la nostra città*; onde quello dì de la Tusanti cominciòe a piovere diversamente in Firenze ed intorno al paese e ne 1'alpi e montagne, e così seguì al continuo iiii dì e iiii notti, crescendo la piova isformatamente e oltre a modo usato, che pareano aperte le cataratte del cielo, e con la detta pioggia continuando *grandi e spessi e spaventevoli tuoni e baleni, e caggendo folgori assai; onde tutta gente vivea in grande paura*.[17] (XII, i, 5-15; emphasis added)

> In the year of our Lord 1333, on the first of November, Florence being very powerful and in a good and prosperous state, more than it had been since the year 1300, *it pleased God to visit a punishment upon our city, for as Christ says in His Gospel: "Be vigilant, for you know neither the day nor the hour of God's judgment"*. Thus, on that All Saints' Day it began to rain excessively in Florence, and in the surrounding territory, and in the high peaks and mountains, and so it continued for four days and four nights, the rain ever increasing in an unusual and extraordinary way. It seemed that floodgates had opened in the sky, and along with the said continuous rain, there were great and *frequent and frightening bursts of thunder and lightning and thunderbolts striking, whence everyone was afraid for their lives*.[18]

According to Villani, the year 1300 marked the beginning of Florence's troubles and of the evils for which the great flood had been sent by God as a punishment. The reasons for the flood were debated by natural philosophers, astrologers, and theologians:

> *In Firenze ebbe del detto diluvio grande ammirazione e tremore per tutte genti, dubitando non fosse iudicio di Dio per le nostre peccata*, che poi che bassò il diluvio più dì apresso non finava di piovere con *continui tuoni e baleni molto spaventevoli; per la qual cosa le più delle genti di Firenze ricorsono a la penitenzia e comunicazione, e fu bene fatto per apaciare l'ira di Dio. E di ciò fu fatta quistione a' savi religiosi e maestri in teologia, e simile a' filosofi in natura e a strolaghi, se 'l detto diluvio fosse venuto per corso di natura o per iudicio di Dio*. Per li *astrolaghi naturali* fu risposto, ponendo inanzi la volontà di Dio, che gran parte della cagione fu per lo corso celesto e forti coniunzioni di pianete, assegnandone più ragioni, le quali in parte racconteremo in brieve e al grosso, per meglio fare intendere, in questo modo, cioè che *a dì xiiii del maggio passato fu ecrissi, o vuoli oscurazione di grande parte del sole* nel segno della fine del Tauro casa di Venus con caput Draconis.[19] (XII, ii, 15-20; emphasis added)

[17] G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, cit., pp. 3-4.
[18] R.I. Diakite, M. T. Sneider (a cura di), *The Eleventh and Twelfth Books*, cit., p. 245.
[19] G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, cit., pp. 12-13.

> *In Florence, the flood caused great marvel and fear in all people, who wondered if it might be a judgment of God sent on account of our sins*, since after the flood receded, for several days the rain did not stop, nor did *the continual and very frightening thunder and lightning*; *for this reason, most people in Florence turned to penitence and holy communion, and this was well done to appease the ire of God. And a debate was held about the flood among the wise clerics and masters of theology, and similarly by natural philosophers and astrologers: whether it had come about by natural causes or by the judgment of God. The natural philosophers* responded that while the will of God was most important, much of the cause was due to celestial movements and powerful conjunctions of the planets, assigning a number of reasons to it, which in part we will recount briefly and roughly, to make this better understood. *On the 14th of last May there was an eclipse, or if you will a darkening of most of the sun* at the end of the sign of Taurus, the house of Venus with the caput dragonis.[20]

While the theologians saw in the disaster a judgment upon human sin, the "astrolaghi naturali" pointed to an evil conjunction of the planets that the eclipse of May 1333 seemed to evince. Eclipses, violent thunderstorms, earthquakes, floods, and other disastrous events were interpreted as portents of coming cataclysms for the city of Florence, signs of God's wrath and consequently punishment for sinful behaviors. In the *Decameron* Boccaccio proposes the following explanations of the 1348 plague, the deadly pandemic that scholars have associated with the Triumph of Death painted by Orcagna[21]:

> nella egregia città di Fiorenza, oltre a ogn'altra italica bellissima, pervenne la mortifera pestilenza: la quale per operazion de' corpi superiori o per le nostre inique opere da giusta ira di Dio a nostra correzione mandata sopra i mortali, alquanti anni davanti nelle parti orientali incominciata […] verso l'Occidente miserabilmente s'era ampliata.[22]

> in the illustrious city of Florence, the fairest of all the cities of Italy, there made its appearance that deadly pestilence, which, whether disseminated by the influence of the celestial bodies, or sent upon us mortals by God in His just wrath by way of retribution for our iniquities, had had its origin some years before in the East, whence […] had spread into the West.[23]

Boccaccio refrains from resolving the question about the origin and finality of the plague mentioning as possible explanations both natu-

[20] R.I. Diakite and M. T. Sneider (a cura di), *The Eleventh and Twelfth Books*, cit., p. 251.
[21] Cfr. A. Smart, *Taddeo Gaddi*, cit., p. 407; M. Meiss, *The Great Age of Frescos. Giotto to Pontormo*, cit., p. 80.
[22] G. Boccaccio, *Decameron*, V. Branca (a cura di), Mondadori, Milano 1985.
[23] G. Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, J. M. Rigg (a cura di), Bullan, London 1903.

ral causes (the "operazion de' corpi superiori") and divine punishment ("giusta ira di Dio") and thus allowing us to rethink human relationships with the environment. Using Boccaccio to illuminate an anti-anthropocentric perspective can open new forms of thinking and reading early modern authors as well as prompt us to see that an ecological thought has been present even if only as an unconscious awareness. This study will offer an 'ecological' reading of a Boccaccio's sonnet where 'ecological' means that everything is interconnected.

According to the eco-theorist Timothy Morton, the interconnectedness of all things is what has been denied or repressed in the anthropocentric and destructive desire to master the world. Morton argues that all forms of life are connected in a vast and entangling mesh, and this interconnectedness penetrates all aspects of life. No being, construct, or object can exist independently from this ecological entanglement, Morton claims, nor does "Nature" exist as an entity separate from other elements of life. Realizing this interconnectedness is what Morton calls ecological thought. And this ecological thought has been present all along[24]. By adopting Morton's perspective to read the *Decameron* in terms of ecological awareness, Carin Franzén has argued that from an ecological point of view Boccaccio describes "a vast mesh of interconnections without a definitive center or edge"[25]. By taking the plague as the starting point of the *Decameron*, Boccaccio turns his work into a "loop"[26]. As Morton has pointed out, "ecological awareness is a loop because human interference has a loop form, because ecological and biological systems are loops. And ultimately this is because to exist at all is to assume the form of a loop"[27]. The ways Boccaccio describes forces such as the plague or other disasters (like storms, earthquakes, floods…) could be seen as modes, or *ethe*, of ecological awareness "in the sense that *he* is pointing to the possibility of an interruption of the connections that existence and life are made of, but without unlooping the loop, just twisting it"[28]. And for Boccaccio, this ethos has a poetic and liberating effect as evidenced in a sonnet he

[24] Cfr. T. Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2010, p. 3.
[25] C. Franzén, *Reading Loops with Boccaccio, Freud and Morton*, in "Humanities", vol. 11, n. 30, 2022, p. 5.
[26] In Morton's terms, ecological awareness takes the form of a strange loop "in which two levels that appear utterly separate flip into one another" (T. Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, Columbia University Press, New York 2016, p. 16). A loop can be described as "an open circuit where two terms or phenomena that we usually separate from each other touch or cross one another […] its main work […] is to articulate movements in texts and thinking that harbor difference and connectedness at the same time" (C. Franzén, *Reading Loops*, cit., p. 3).
[27] T. Morton, *Dark Ecology*, cit., p. 160.
[28] C. Franzén, *Reading Loops*, cit., p. 9.

wrote in response to the Forlivese notary and humanist Checco di Meletto Rossi (ca. 1320-1363)[29].

Around 1348, when the Black Death was advancing in Italy, Checco composed a caudate sonnet, "Voglia il ciel, voglia pur seguir l'edicto", that starts a vernacular *tenzone* involving Francesco Petrarca, Boccaccio, Lancillotto Anguissola (?-1353/1364)[30] and Antonio Beccari da Ferrara (1315-1370?)[31]. Facing dreadful, extraordinary, and inexplicable astronomical and natural phenomena, Checco's interlocutors are invited to reflect on the relationship between celestial signs and the sins of men and, therefore, on the question of free will. Should we or should we not fear celestial and natural phenomena that can be interpreted as signs of God's wrath for our sins? All the correspondents support the thesis of human freedom since the stars are powerless in influencing the destiny and the sins of humanity[32]. Petrarca concludes his sonnet by bestowing humans with full responsibility for their destiny as the stars cannot cause any harm to good and wise men. Anguissola insists that it is the strength of human intellect that guides human beings toward peace or damnation even in moments of darkness; men, therefore, should get rid of the habit of ignorance and superstition. Antonio da Ferrara affirms that whoever pays an undue homage to the stars is the man who, to excuse his own sins, unduly imbues the stars with the power to determine his destiny. So, what, then, is Boccaccio's take on the matter?

> L'antico padre, il cui primo delicto
> ne fu cagion di morte et di sospiri,
> puose assai poco modo a i suoi desiri,
> essendo stato pur allor descripto.

[29] On Checco di Meletto Rossi, cfr. the entry *Rossi, Checco di Meletto*, S. Lorenzini (a cura di), in P. Rigo (a cura di), *Dizionario dei Corrispondenti di Petrarca*, Antenore, Padova (forthcoming 2025).

[30] On Lancillotto Anguissola, cfr. V. De Donato, *Lancillotto Anguissola*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1961, pp. 320-321; cfr. also F. A. Gallo, *Antonio da Ferrara, Lancillotto Anguissola e i madrigali trecenteschi*, in "Studi e problemi di critica testuale", vol. 12, 1976, pp. 40-45.

[31] On Antonio Beccari da Ferrara, cfr. L. Bellucci (a cura di), *Rime / Maestro Antonio da Ferrara (Antonio Beccari)*, Commissione per i testi di Lingua, Bologna 1962; Id., *Sul testo delle rime di Maestro Antonio da Ferrara*, in "Studi e problemi di critica testuale", vol. 1, 1970, pp. 5-90; G. Allaire, *Antonio Beccari da Ferrara*, in C. Kleinhenz (a cura di), *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, Routledge, New York 2004, vol. 2, p. 44.

[32] The tenzone has been previously discussed in L. Bellucci, *Sei sonetti per una ecclissi di sole e il problema del libero arbitrio*, in "Studi e problemi di critica testuale", vol. 3, 1971, pp. 56-92. Cfr. also C.F. Blanco Valdés, *Boccaccio y sus contemporáneos: un debate poético*, in M. Brea, E. Corral Diaz, M.A. Pousada Cruz (a cura di), *Parodia y debate metaliterarios en la Edad Media*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2013, pp. 311-314.

Ma quel retroso popol, che d'Egypto
non senza affanni uscì dopo i martiri,
ben che vedesse mille facti miri,
rade volte seguì consiglio dricto.

Per che, se noï da le cose electe
più lontan' siamo, seguitar misura
del ciel men grava a l'anime perfecte.

Et, ben che spesso semplice paura
solare eclypse o squarciar nuvolette
faccia, chi 'l sente poco se ne cura.

Quel che morì per trarne di servaggio
mercé n'avrà per lo cammin selvaggio.[33]

The ancient father, whose original sin was the cause of death and sighs, placed so little restraint upon his desires, even though it was only just established. But that stubborn people, who escaped from Egypt not without suffering after having endured many martyrs, seldom followed the righteous advice despite witnessing a thousand wonders. Wherefore, if we are farther from the chosen ones, following the measure of heaven is less burdensome to perfect souls. And though often a solar eclipse or the tearing of little clouds may cause a natural fear, those who feel it care little. He who died to free us from servitude shall have mercy of us along the savage path.[34]

Unlike the other correspondents, Boccaccio does not look at astronomical and meteorological phenomena to discuss God's displeasure for humankind's sinful behavior. Rather, he writes about natural marvels to reflect on human experiences and feelings along the history of salvation[35]. If the pessimist Antonio da Ferrara portrays the eternal condemnation of the sinner, Boccaccio instead rests on the hope of free salvation thanks to divine mercy. If Anguissola despises the useless terror of fools, Boccaccio empathetically recognizes the fear of natural phenomena as an irrepressible, comprehensible, and transitory feeling. If Petrarca puts man at the center of a providential cosmic harmony, Boccaccio seems to adopt a more historical and worldly stance. Probably not satisfied with the response of his friend (Boccaccio's sonnet is the only one to take for granted the question of free

[33] All the *tenzone*'s quotations are from G. Boccaccio, *Rime*, a cura di R. Leporatti, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2013, pp. 259-263.
[34] My own translation.
[35] For a similar perspective on Boccaccio's *Decameron*, cfr. J. Kriesel, *The Marvelous between Dante and Boccaccio*, cit., p. 243.

will and insists on the extent of God's forgiveness), Checco counters with a second caudate sonnet that returns to the theme of the influence of celestial phenomena. By now adopting a classical rather than a religious perspective, Checco recalls the prodigious events and omens that accompanied Julius Caesar's life as examples of how even a just and strong soul must fear the signs of heaven.

Boccaccio's sonnet stands out for its simplicity and directness of exposition, conveying a variety of feelings. There emerges an affective and participatory attention to the historical Dantesque journey of man ("lo cammin selvaggio")[36] in a sort of eco-natural approach that distinguishes Boccaccio from the other correspondents. In the following pages, I will propose a reading of the sonnet in the light of an ecological awareness by weaving the Christian story of salvation and astrological influences in a loop where both human and nonhuman forces are at play. More particularly, how does Boccaccio use poetic language to portray the ethical relations that link the human and the nonhuman world? How does the poet's imagination become a tool to reconceptualize the relationship between human beings and physical environments and to portray the unpredictable mesh, to use Morton's words, amid natural and human realms? From this perspective, the sonnet voices an art of living in a world of crisis between the hope of salvation granted by God on one hand and the recognition of the fear of natural phenomena as a fleeting and irrelevant feeling on the other hand[37]. Starting with the first sinner, Adam, "L'antico padre"[38], Boccaccio evokes a lineage of sins and sinners that leads the poet to trust in Christ's mercy and benevolence. Thus, Adam and the Hebrews ("Ma quel retroso popol, che d'Egypto / non senza affanni uscì

[36] For the Dantesque tone of the last two lines of the sonnet (*Pd*. XXXI, 85; *If*. I, 93, II, 142, and XXI, 84), cfr. G. Boccaccio, *Rime*, V. Branca (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 5.1, Mondadori, Milano 1992, *ad loc*.

[37] On Boccaccio's view on astrology and astrologers, cfr, for instance, A.E. Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio*, Liviana, Padova, 1967; J. Smarr, *Boccaccio and the Stars: Astrology in the* Teseida, in "Traditio", vol. 35, 1979, pp. 303-332; D. Ruhe, *Boccace astronomien*, in M. Picone, C. Cazalé Bérard (a cura di), *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio. Memoria, scrittura, riscrittura*. Atti del Seminario internazionale di Firenze–Certaldo, Franco Cesati Editore, Firenze 1998, pp. 65-80; D. Lummus, *Boccaccio's Hellenism*, cit.; S. Barsella, *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars. Cosmology and Astrological Influences in* Esposizioni sopra la Comedia VII 1, in "Rivista di letteratura tardogotica e quattrocentesca", vol. 5, 2023, pp. 163-180.

[38] As noted by Branca in his edition of Boccaccio's *Rime*, Dante calls Adam "padre antico" in *Pd*. XXVI, 92 (cfr. G. Boccaccio, *Rime*, cit., *ad loc*.). There are other possible Dantesque allusions in the first quatrain of the sonnet. While the "poco modo" can be an echo of "il trapassar del segno" (*Pd*. XXVI, 117), the fourth line of the sonnet can refer to Adam's short stay in Eden: "Nel monte che si leva più da l'onda, / fu' io, con vita pura e disonesta, / da la prim'ora a quella che seconda, / come 'l sol muta quadra, l'ora sesta" (*Pd*. XXVI, 139-142).

dopo i martiri", ll. 5-6)[39] despite their crimes, were forgiven. If God, in his benevolence, did this with the Chosen people, the more he will do it with us, common human beings. The use of the pronoun "noï" in the first tercet marks the passage from our predecessors to us along the history of salvation. The very remembrance of the first sinners must console us, Boccaccio included, who are far from the chosen people.

The more pessimistic, austere, and detached tone of the other sonnets is replaced by a sense of serenity. This sense of calm is expressed through the naturalistic images and especially the diminutive and colloquial word "nuvolette", which stands in sharp and direct contrast with the scientific and rigorous term "eclypse". The poem seems to shape the association between cosmic phenomena and human feelings intimately, cohering an ecological vision, in which all things are interrelated, in which macrocosmic forces affect microcosmic existence, and vice versa (the affective potential of the diminutive "nuvolette")[40]. We can perceive an interconnectivity in the poem that alludes to a sense of fluidity among all things. The intertwining of thinking and feeling that poetry makes possible allows authors like Boccaccio to enter an eco-critical space that reveals an affective environmental understanding even without the discursive tradition of writing about nature. The two naturalistic images of "solare eclypse" and "squarciar nuvolette" poetically juxtaposed in the same line seem to recall Villani's chronicles where eclipses or other cosmic events, such as the appearance of comets, were often accompanied by terrible thunderstorms, equally omens of terrible events. For Boccaccio, we do not have to fear natural phenomena such as eclipses and thunders since they belong to the natural order of things. While the technical phrase "solare eclypse" traces the astronomical phenomenon of the "scurazione del sole"[41] back to the field of scientific observation and intellectual curi-

[39] Another Dantesque reference, *Pd*. XXXII, 132, as noted in G. Boccaccio, *Rime*, cit., *ad loc.*

[40] On the affective and suggestive function of diminutive forms in Boccaccio, cfr. G. Sciarri, *Analisi lessicale degli alterati con funzione diminutive e della varietà dei loro ruoli all'interno del* Decameron, in G. Frosini (a cura di) *Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni*, cit., pp. 109-123 (with relevant bibliography); and also, G. Boccaccio, *Rime*, cit., p. 9. Vittore Branca describes the diminutive in Boccaccio as a "segno di grazia e di gentilezza visualizzata" (V. Branca, *Boccaccio Medievale*, Sansoni, Firenze 1970, p. 256). In literary criticism, a diminutive form can be interpreted as a linguistic tool that signals a speaker's positive affect, often expressing endearment, familiarity, care, affection, smallness, and sometimes even a sense of protectiveness, thus influencing the reader's emotional connection with the text. Cfr. M. Parzuchowski, K. Bocian, P. Gygax, *Sizing Up Objects: The Effect of Diminutive Forms on Positive Mood, Value, and Size Judgments*, in "Frontiers in Psychology", vol. 7, 2016, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01452; M. Ponsonnet, *A Preliminary Typology of Emotional Connotations in Morphological Diminutives and Augmentatives*, in "Studies in Language", vol. 42, 2018, pp. 17-50.

[41] G. Villani, *Nuova Cronica*, cit., p. 211

osity, the diminutive "nuvolette" mitigates the violent nuance of the verb "squarciar" and, hence, the, according to Boccaccio, unwarranted terror toward "grandi e spessi e spaventevoli tuoni e baleni"[42]. These "facti miri" (l. 7) should cause intellectual inquiry, even pleasure, but not fear[43]. The two images, linked by the alliteration of *s* ("solare … squarciar"), also conjure up the intimate relationship between astrology, meteorology, and poetry[44].

As for the second image, "squarciar nuvolette", the probable Dantesque source "nube che squarciata tona" (*Pd*. XXIII 99) has already been identified by Vittore Branca[45]. However, Boccaccio uses the image of a torn cloud to poetically indicate a thunder also in the *Filocolo*: "a similitudine di squarciata nube quando Giove gitta le sue folgori" (*Fil*. I, 26, 21)[46]; "mirabili corruscazioni e diversi suoni per isquarciate nuvole" (*Fil*. II, 42, 2)[47]; "sentì nella sua camera uno strepito grandissimo, simile a quello che suol fare squarciata nube" (*Fil*. V, 80, 1)[48]. Boccaccio ought, therefore, to have likely thought of the image as poetically functional and evocative. The verb *squarciare* seems to convey the feeling of the natural world, in all its violence and sufferings. Attributing emotions to natural phenomena may highlight the intimate interconnection between the human and natural worlds and evokes a sympathetic imagination[49].

[42] Ivi, p. 4.

[43] According to James Kriesel, in the *Decameron* Boccaccio proposes new views on marvels, "views that celebrated the marvels of this world as things to delight in and laugh at". In this respect, Boccaccio seems to be inspired by medieval theologians such as Hugh of St. Victor (1096-1141) who "explained that God did not make marvels and creation to scare people but to delight them" (J. Kriesel, *The Marvelous between Dante and Boccaccio*, cit., p. 253). Similarly, in the sonnet, solar eclipses and thunderstorms are not described as terrifying events. On the contrary, they are "facti miri", marvels, that can elicit thoughts on human emotions and on our connection with nature and history.

[44] Boccaccio's poetic engagement with astrology and his belief that poetry and astrology are related since they both work toward unveiling and imitating the marvels of nature have been discussed at length. Cfr., for instance, D. Lummus, *Boccaccio's Hellenism*, cit.; S. Barsella, *Natural Asymmetries: Medicine and Poetry in* Decameron VI. 9 and Decameron VIII. 9, in "MLN", vol. 134, 2019, pp. S-56–S-77; Id., *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars*, cit.

[45] G. Boccaccio, *Rime*, cit., *ad loc.*

[46] "As with a cloud that bursts when Jove casts his bolts". The Italian text here and then is from G. Boccaccio, *Filocolo*, A.E. Quaglio (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere*, cit., vol. 1, 1967. The English translations are from G. Boccaccio, *Il Filocolo*, D. Cheney with the collaboration of Thomas G. Bergin (tr. by), Garland Pub., New York 1985.

[47] "marvelous flashes and various resoundings through the broken clouds".

[48] "he heard a great uproar in his chamber, similar to that which a cloudburst is accustomed to make".

[49] Recognizing this sort of eco-consciousness in medieval texts can enhance our understanding of the period. Medieval authors often show a deep perception of natural phenomena as a multivalent signifier of psychological, political, social, or religious meaning (cfr. B. Deen Schildgen, *Reception, Elegy, and Eco-Awareness: Trees in Statius, Boccaccio, and Chaucer*, in "Comparative Literature", vol. 65, n. 1, 2013, pp. 85-99, with an updated bibliography on the topic).

By using a verb that evokes a violent and sudden laceration, Boccaccio becomes a co-sufferer in the feeling of natural phenomena. He links the nonhuman living world to the human, and this context of shared emotions suggests one way that poetry demonstrates how diverse typologies of natural entities cohabit in the same environment. The sonnet engages the poet and the reader with the natural world and reveals the poet's attitude toward a real rather than idealized nature. By using the diminutive "nuvolette", Boccaccio seems to express his own feelings about the immediacy of these phenomena. At the same time, the verb "squarciar" brings to light human emotions in response to weather conditions. More poignantly, the use of "squarciar" admits the suffering of nature, partially recalling the suffering of Christ on the cross and the miraculous and terrifying events that occurred at his death: the sudden darkness, the earthquake, the splits of the rocks, and the laceration of the veil of the Temple[50]. In the sonnet historical memory (the solar eclipse of the XIV century) and liturgical memory (the miraculous solar eclipse associated with the death of Christ) coexist. However, in Boccaccio's sonnet the violent sense embedded in the verb is immediately softened by the diminutive "nuvolette" that transforms the terrifying and unpredictable natural and cosmic phenomena into a more familial and common experience. The diminutive may suggest participation, even consolation. If the image of the eclipse can recall the death of Christ and other calamities such as the plague, the last word of the line, "nuvolette", recontextualizes these events within a familial and more comprehensible sphere. Moreover, the feeling of fear and precarity caused by events like an eclipse is encompassed by the recognition in lines 12 and 14 that this fear is "semplice", namely natural and human, and those who experience it "poco se ne cura*no*" (they care little about it) since this fear is transient. At the moment in which the fall of the first man (l. 1) is redeemed and reconciled by the death of Christ, the "last Adam"[51], in a kind of loop (l. 15), the poetic imagination is linked to Boccaccio's poetic engagement with celestial and natural events. The allusion to cosmical and natural phenomena

[50] In the Gospels, Matthew (27:45), Mark (15:33), and Luke (23:44) describe a darkness that descended over the world when Christ was on the cross. Luke gives the most detailed account: "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour. / And the sun was darkened, and the veil of the temple was rent in the midst". Eclipse became a dominant theme in representations and discussion of the Crucifixion during the Middle Ages. For a summary of the debate about the eclipse at the Crucifixion, see Cornish, *Dante's Total Eclipse*, cit., p. 166.

[51] 1 Corinthians 15:45. Boccaccio's personal meditation on the history of salvation is linked to the biblical example for which "omnis autem homo Adam; sicut in his qui crediderunt omnis homo Christus" ("however, every man is Adam; as in those who believe, every man is Christ"; Augustine, *Enarr. In Ps*. 70, II, 1 (PL 36, 891); my own translation).

is inserted in the never-ending history of humankind as a part of belonging to a larger order of time and place. The words "solare", "squarciar", "servaggio", "selvaggio", are connected by the alliteration of the *s* bringing together astronomical events, natural phenomena, religious history, and human history. The sonnet, thus, conveys the potential for poetry to reveal the hidden connections between the experience of human beings and cosmic and natural events, such as thunderstorms and eclipses.

Among the five correspondents, Boccaccio is the only one to use the specific astronomic term eclipse. This way, Boccaccio strips it of any mythopoetic transfiguration and, by defining it precisely, traces it back to what it really is, an astronomical phenomenon[52]. Beyond the sonnet, Boccaccio mentions the phenomenon of the eclipse in the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*[53]:

> *Guardai 'n alto e vidi le sue spalle*, cioè la sommità quasi, siccome le spalle nostre sono quasi la più alta parte della persona nostra, *Coperte già de' raggi del pianeta*, cioè del sole, il quale è l'uno de' sette pianeti. E per ciò dice del sole, per ciò che esso solo è di sua natura luminoso e ogni altro corpo che luce, o pianeto o stella o qualunque altro, ha da questo la luce, sì come da fonte di quella, sì come per esperienza si vede negli ecclissi lunari. (*Esp*. I, i, 13-14)

> I looked up and saw its shoulders, that is, its summit or the like (since our shoulders are almost at the highest part of our body), already covered by the rays of the planet, the sun, which is one of the seven planets. He mentions the sun here because it alone is luminous by its nature; every other body that shines (planets, stars, etc.) receives light from it, and has it as its source of light, as by experience we know from lunar eclipses.

> e però, intendendosi per la luna, è da sapere la luna di sua natura non avere alcuna luce, sì come noi possiamo vedere negli ecclissi lunari, ne' quali ella, non veduta dal sole per la interposizione del corpo della terra tra 'l sole e lei, rimane un corpo rosso senza alcuna luce. (*Esp*. X, 70-72)

[52] Cfr. "di tenebre lunare el sol traficto" (Checco); "Phebo, che sostenne li martiri / da sua sorella opposta al corso dritto" (Petrarca).

[53] Boccaccio mentions the eclipse in another passage of the *Esposizioni* but this time paraphrasing the Latin phrase *sol deficit*: "sì come santo Agustino dice nel libro VIII *Della città di Dio*, egli fu prencipe de' filosofi ioni, e fu massimamente ammirabile in quanto, essendo da lui compresi i numeri delle regole astrologiche, non solamente conobbe i difetti del sole e della luna, ma ancora gli predisse" (*Esp*. IV, I, 304). "According to the eighth book of St Augustine's City of God, he [Thales] was the head of a group of Ionian philosophers and was highly esteemed for having so thoroughly grasped the mathematics of astronomical patterns that he not only understood solar and lunar eclipses but also was able to predict them". The Italian text is from G. Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la* Comedia *di Dante*, G. Padoan (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere*, cit., vol. 6, Mondadori, Milano 1965. The English translations are from M. Papio (a cura di), *Boccaccio's Expositions on Dante's* Comedy, University of Toronto Press, Toronto–Buffalo, NY 2009.

> Therefore, if we take her [Proserpine] to represent the moon, one must know that the moon, by its very nature, possesses no light of its own, as we can see during lunar eclipses when the Earth's mass, positioned between it and the sun, blocks out the sun's rays and the moon is seen as a red body devoid of light.

Explanations like these ones are not necessarily required by the passage on which Boccaccio is commenting; these digressions remain within the scope of a superficial and external descriptiveness devoid of technical connotations[54]. The distinctive character of the astronomical and scientific notes of the *Esposizioni* goes toward the didactic and explanatory tone of a gloss, which illustrates basic notions to common readers. On the contrary, the phenomenon of the eclipse appears to be noteworthy in the *Filocolo* where Idalogos narrates that he has followed the teaching of his master Calmeta with the intent to build his astronomical knowledge and become an expert in astrology (*Fil.* V, 8, 17-8):

> [Calmeta] cominciò a dire i nuovi mutamenti e gl'inoppinabili corsi della inargentata luna, e qual fosse la cagione del perdere e dell'acquistare chiarezza, e perché tal volta nel suo epiciclo tarda e tal veloce si dimostrasse; e con che ragione il centro del cerchio il suo corpo portante, allora due volte circuisce il differente, il suo centro movente intorno al piccolo cerchio, che 1'equante una; e da che natura potenziata la virtù dell'uno pianeto all'altro portasse, e similmente i suoi dieci vizi, seguendo di Mercurio e di Venere con debito ordine i movimenti. E appresso con dolce nota la dorata casa del sole disegnò tutta, non tacendo dei suoi eclissi e di quelli della luna le cagioni, mostrando come da lui ogni altra stella piglia luce, e così essere necessario, a volere i luoghi di quelle sapere, prima il suo conoscere.

> he began to describe the new motions and the unexpected path of the silvery moon, and its reasons for losing and gaining brightness, and why at some points in its epicycle it is seen to be slow and at some points fast; and by what rationale the center of the circle carrying its weight circles the deferent twice, its center moving inside the little circle, and the equant once; and by what nature is powered the force borne by one planet in relation to another, and similarly its ten weaknesses; and he ran systematically through the motions of Mercury and Venus. And next he described in his sweet style the entire golden house of the sun, and was not silent as regards the causes of its eclipses and those of the moon, showing how every other planet takes its light from it, and so it is necessary if one wants to know the locations of those, first to know the location of it.

[54] Cfr. A.E. Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio*, cit., p. 203.

Here the eclipse serves Boccaccio to connect poetry and astronomy. The astrologer-poet Calmeta sings on his bagpipe the movements of the stars, planets, and spheres, blending scientific notions and mythological fables. After listening to Calmeta's teachings, Idalogos decides to study astrology, not following the Arabs (that is, not in rigorous mathematical terms) but by listening to his teacher's stories[55]. As underlined by Alison Cornish, Boccaccio represents Idalogos's "initiation" into poetry as instruction in astronomy: Calmeta's song, in fact, provides an instance of astrology employed in the service of poetry[56]. A former example of this poetic tradition, or of "astrological poetry" to use Susanna Barsella's phrase[57], is Iopas, the poet who sings for Dido's guests at the end of the first book of the *Aeneid*. Boccaccio mentions Iopas in his comment to the *Comedia* when he wants to distinguish the *canti* of poets like Iopas who used to sing about loftiest things from the banal and trivial canzoni of his times[58]:

> Iopa, sonando la cetera, canta gli errori del sole e della luna e la prima generazione degli uomini e degli altri animali e donde fosse l'origine delle piove e del fuoco e altre simili cose: dal quale atto poté nascere il dirsi che i poetici versi si cantino (*Esp*. I, i, 114).

> We can see evidence of this custom at the end of the first book of Vergil's *Aeneid* where, after the remarkable dinner that Dido prepared for Aeneas, Iopas plays the cithara and sings of the wanderings of the sun and the moon, the first generation of men and animals, the origins of rain and fire, and other similar things. The notion that poetic verses are sung could have come from this practice.

The "errori" sung by Iopa can be the wanderings of the moon and the sun but they can also be a reference to the image of the eclipse. Virgil is more specific than Boccaccio about the themes of Iopas's song. They are the science of the sky and the cosmogonic events:

[55] On Calmeta's astrological teaching see A. Cornish, *"Not like an Arab": Poetry and Astronomy in the Episode of Idalogos in Boccaccio's* Filocolo, in "Annali d'Italianistica", vol. 23, 2005, pp. 55-67.
[56] A. Cornish, *"Not like an Arab"*, cit., p. 65. Calmeta has been identified with the Genoese Andalò del Negro with whom Boccaccio studied in Naples where he became familiar with scientific, astrological, medical, and physical studies. Cfr. A.E. Quaglio, *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio*, cit., pp. 127-206; A. M. Cesari, *Theorica planetarum di Andalò di Negro. Questioni di astronomia. Indagine delle fonti astronomiche nelle opere del Boccaccio. Edizione critica*, in "Physys", vol. 27, 1985, pp. 181-235; D. Lummus, *Boccaccio's Hellenism*, cit., p. 156, n. 56; S. Grossvogel, *Andalò di Negro*, in *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, cit., 31-33; S. Barsella, *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars*, cit., pp. 166-169.
[57] S. Barsella, *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars*, cit., p. 171.
[58] Cfr. A. Cornish, *"Not like an Arab"*, cit., p. 65.

> […] Cithara crinitus Iopas
> personat aurata, docuit quem maximus Atlas.
> Hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores,
> unde hominum genus et pecudes, unde imber et ignes,
> Arcturum pluviasque Hyadas geminosque Triones,
> quid tantum Oceano properent se tinguere soles
> hiberni vel quae tardis mora noctibus obstet. (*Aen*. I, 740-744)

> Long-haired Iopas, once taught by mighty Atlas, makes the hall ring with his golden lyre. He sings of the wandering moon and the sun's toils; whence sprang man and beast, whence rain and fire; of Arcturus, the rainy Hyades and the twin Bears; why wintry suns make such haste to dip themselves in Ocean, or what delay stays the slowly passing nights[59].

The *labores solis* is a poetic image for the eclipse[60] and here Virgil is almost echoing his own words. At the end of the second book of the *Georgics*, Virgil invokes the Muses that they may disclose to him the secrets of the sky, the eclipses, and the phases of the moon[61]:

> Me vero primum dulces ante omnia Musae,
> quarum sacra fero ingenti percussus amore,
> accipiant caelique vias et sidera monstrent,
> defectus solis varios lunaeque labores;
> unde tremor terris, qua vi maria alta tumescant
> obicibus ruptis rursusque in se ipsa residant,
> quid tantum Oceano properent se tinguere soles
> hiberni, vel quae tardis mora noctibus obstet. (*Georg*. II, 475-482)

> But as for me–first may the Muses, sweet beyond compare, whose holy emblems, under the spell of a mighty love, I bear, take me to themselves, and show me heaven's pathways, the stars, the sun's many eclipses, the moon's many labours; whence come tremblings of the earth, the force to make deep seas swell and burst their barriers, then sink back upon themselves; why winter suns hasten so fast to dip in Ocean, or what delays clog the laggard nights[62].

[59] The English translation is from Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, H. Rushton Fairclough (a cura di), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 1916.
[60] For *labores solis* and *defectus solis* as poetic images for the eclipse, cfr. the entries *defectio* (vol. 5.1, col. 289), *defectus* (vol. 5.1, col. 292), *labor* (vol. 7.2, col. 793) and *luna* (vol. 7.2, col. 1831) in *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, https://thesaurus.badw.de/en/tll-digital/tll-open-access.html.
[61] The link between the two Virgilian *loci* is evident: in *Aen*. I, 745-746, the poet repeats verbatim *Georg*. IV, 481-482.
[62] The English translation is from Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, cit.

The image of the eclipse is therefore associated in Virgil with philosophical poetry that sings of cosmological phenomena and the ultimate causes of nature, both through his personal vocation for a cosmic and scientific poetry as well as the image of the mythical singer Iopas. And Boccaccio, no less, uses precisely the image of the eclipse when describing the character of Calmeta in the *Filocolo* as a poet of ancient natural wisdom. In Calmeta's song, myth, legend, and historical facts amalgamate in a poetic form, like in Iopas's one[63].

The eclipse is a poetic image that captures the author and reader emotionally with its ideas of concealment, intimacy, observation, hiding, and revelation. As Aristotle and, in his wake, Thomas Aquinas, recall, what arouses more wonder than celestial phenomena such as a solar eclipse? Wonder, and novelty, can cause terror but also desire for knowledge. And is poetry not, as Boccaccio recalls, "stabilis […] et fixa scientia, eternis fundata atque solidata principiis", "a stable and fixed science founded upon things eternal, and confirmed by original principles" (*Gen*. XIV, iv, 12), whose purpose is to teach virtue and to unveil hidden truth (cfr. *Gen*. XIV, vi, 8)?[64] Boccaccio redefines poetry as a discipline in the field of natural and moral philosophy since it is concerned with natural and moral truths; then it should be called "physiologia aut ethologia", physiology or ethology, "dum eorum fabule naturalia contegunt aut mores", "as the myths embody the truth concerning physical nature or human" (*Gen*. XV, viii, 4)[65]. As pointed out by Gregory Stone, for Boccaccio nature includes both *physis* and *ethos*, whereas physis stands for the physical world, while ethos "concerns the attitudes and practices of humans towards other humans and other things, the values that guide humans in their comportment to-

[63] Cfr. S. Barsella, *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars*, cit., p. 169. As indicated by David Lummus, in the *Genealogies*, Boccaccio places Andalò next to Cicero and Virgil implicitly alluding to the rhetorical and literary quality of his teachings (*Gen*. XV, vi, 4). Cfr. D. Lummus, *Boccaccio's Hellenism*, cit., pp. 119-120.

[64] The Latin quotations are from G. Boccaccio, *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, V. Zaccaria (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere*, cit., voll. 7-8, Mondadori, Milano 1998. The English translations are from C. G. Osgood, *Boccaccio on Poetry*, Liberal Arts Press, New York 1956.

[65] For Boccaccio's understanding of poetry as a special form of natural philosophy cfr. M. Papio, *Boccaccio: Mythographer, Philosopher, Theologians*, in E. Filosa, M. Papio (a cura di), *Boccaccio in America*, cit., pp. 134-138; J. Bartuschat, *I poeti non sono le scimmie dei filosofi: osservazioni sul rapporto tra poesia e filosofia nelle* Genealogie Deorum Gentilium, in "Carte Romanze", vol. 7, 2018, pp. 47-65; S. Barsella, *Natural Asymmetries*, cit., pp. S-76–S-77; Id., *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars*, cit., pp. 173-175, 178-179. On the role of wonders in Boccaccio's works as a way to reflect on the dignity of literature and on the marvel inherent in quotidian and familial experiences, cfr. J. Kriesel, The *Marvelous between Dante and Boccaccio*, cit.

ward the universe"[66]. The transition from physiology and ethology to ecology as a discipline that studies the relationships between living organisms, including humans, and their physical environment, is short[67]. Ecology reveals that all beings are connected in a greater system, and events like eclipses may generate a feeling of connectedness between the celestial and the terrestrial, the natural and the human. Boccaccio's poetry thus seems to entail an ecological awareness in Morton's sense of being aware of the interconnectedness among human beings and other beings, animal, vegetable, or celestial. Historical, spiritual, and cosmic experience are eventually all brought together in an attitude of empathetic participation and calm reassurance. Boccaccio not only understands things but also knows how to smile about them with empathy ("nuvolette").

As Boccaccio reminds us, the subjects of poetry are "the forms, habits, discourse, and actions of all animate things, the courses of heaven and the stars, the shattering force of the winds, the roar and crackling of flames, the thunder of the waves, high mountains and shady groves, and rivers in their courses".[68] Poetic subjects, therefore, are not merely the forms, habits, and actions of human beings but the elements of the entire all animate things ("quorumcunque animantium") together with natural and cosmic phenomena. Therefore, poets could rightly be called apes of nature, and one of poetry's most honorable aspects considers how the poet describes nature in all its elements, performances, and wonders.

[66] G.B. Stone, *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages. On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1998, p. 15.

[67] For a definition of ecology see https://www.esa.org/about/what-does-ecology-have-to-do-with-me/.

[68] Cfr. *Gen*. XIV, xvii, 5: "Si symias dicerent eos esse nature, posset forte equiore animo tolerari, cum pro viribus, quicquid ipsa, quicquid eius opera ratione operantur perpetua, poeta celebri conatur describere carmine. Quod si intueri velint isti, videbunt formas, mores, sermones et actus quorumcunque animantium, celi syderumque meatus, ventorum fragores et impetus, flammarum crepitus, sonoros undarum rumores, montium celsitudines, et nemorum umbras, atque discursus fluminum adeo apte descriptos, ut ea ipsa parvis in licterulis carminum inesse arbitrentur. In hoc ego poetas esse symias confitebor, quod ego honorabilissimum reor opus, in id scilicet arte conari, quod agit natura potentia." ["If they called them apes of nature, the epithet might be less irritating, since the poet tries with all his powers to set forth in noble verse the effects, either of Nature herself, or of her eternal and unalterable operation. If my opponents care to consider it, they will perceive the forms, habits, discourse, and actions of all animate things, the courses of heaven and the stars, the shattering force of the winds, the roar and crackling of flames, the thunder of the waves, high mountains and shady groves, and rivers in their courses-all these will they find so vividly set forth that the very objects will seem actually present in the tiny letters of the written poem. In this sense, I admit, the poets are apes, and I hold it a task full of honor to attempt with art what nature performs in the fullness of her power"].

*

In the present climate, we have likely lost our original and immediate communion with the mysteries of nature. There was, however, a time when we believed in the idea that between us and the cosmic order true communication and closeness existed. Boccaccio – whom I would like to imagine looking at Orcagna's fresco in Santa Croce identifying himself with those that look at the eclipse rather than with the person who is turning his gaze away – shows us that a recovery of the reverence and awe, not the terror, that once characterized our openness to and harmony with nature, is of great value. Because, despite the terror, it is precisely the light and the wonder that emerges beyond the darkness. It is the same darkness that Virginia Woolf describes in her diary of 1927: "suddenly the light went out. We had fallen. It was extinguished. The earth was dead". But then, just as the terror starts spreading among the onlookers, the colors miraculously return: "They came back astonishingly lightly and quickly and beautifully […] at first with a miraculous glittering and ethereality, later normally almost, but with a great sense of relief. It was like a recovery".[69] Because what is essential to remember with all these eclipses, real or fictional, is that the darkness and the terror they bring are, as Boccaccio says, fleeting; eventually they will pass. And, at least, we will still have poetry.

Bibliografia

Allaire G., *Antonio Beccari da Ferrara*, in C. Kleinhenz (a cura di), *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, Routledge, New York 2004, vol. 2, p. 44.

Andrei F., *Boccaccio the Philosopher: An Epistemology of the* Decameron, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham (Switzerland) 2017.

Barsella S., *Boccaccio Reader of the Stars. Cosmology and Astrological Influences in* Esposizioni sopra la Comedia VII 1, in "Rivista di letteratura tardogotica e quattrocentesca", vol. 5, 2023, pp. 163-180.

Id., *Natural Asymmetries: Medicine and Poetry in* Decameron VI. 9 and Decameron VIII. 9, in "MLN", vol. 134, 2019, pp. S-56-S-77.

Id., *I marginalia di Boccaccio all'"Etica Nicomachea" di Aristotele*, in E. Filosa, M. Papio (a cura di), *Boccaccio in America*, Longo Editore, Ravenna 2012, pp. 143-155.

Bartuschat J., *I poeti non sono scimmie dei filosofi: osservazioni sul rapporto tra poesia e filosofia nelle* Genealogie Deorum Gentilium, in "Carte Romanze", vol. 7, 2018, pp. 47-65.

Bellucci L. (a cura di), *Rime / Maestro Antonio da Ferrara (Antonio Beccari)*, Commissione per i testi di Lingua, Bologna 1962.

[69] L. Woolf (a cura di), *A Writer's Diary. Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, The Hogarth Press, London 1975, p. 112.

Id., *Sul testo delle rime di Maestro Antonio da Ferrara*, in "Studi e problemi di critica testuale", vol. 1, 1970, pp. 5-90.
Id., *Sei sonetti per una ecclissi di sole e il problema del libero arbitrio*, in "Studi e problemi di critica testuale", vol. 3, 1971, pp. 56-92.
Blanco Valdés C.F., *Boccaccio y sus contemporáneos: un debate poético*, in M. Brea, E. Corral Diaz, M.A. Pousada Cruz (a cura di), *Parodia y debate metaliterarios en la Edad Media*, Edizioni dell'Orso, Alessandria 2013, pp. 307-323.
Boccaccio G., *The Decameron*, J. M. Rigg (tr. by), Bullan, London 1903.
Id., *Esposizioni sopra la* Comedia *di Dante*, G. Padoan (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, vol. 6, Mondadori, Milano 1965.
Id., *Filocolo*, A.E. Quaglio (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere*, cit., vol. 1, Mondadori, Milano 1967.
Id., *Decameron*, V. Branca (a cura di), Mondadori, Milano 1985.
Id., *Il Filocolo*, D. Cheney with the collaboration of Thomas G. Bergin (tr. by), Garland Pub., New York 1985.
Id., *Rime*, a cura di V. Branca, in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere*, cit., vol. 5.1, Mondadori, Milano 1992.
Id., *Genealogie Deorum Gentilium*, V. Zaccaria (a cura di), in V. Branca (a cura di), *Tutte le opere*, cit., voll. 7-8, Mondadori, Milano 1998.
Id., *Rime*, a cura di R. Leporatti, Edizioni del Galluzzo, Firenze 2013.
Branca V., *Boccaccio Medievale*, Sansoni, Firenze 1970.
Cesari A.M., *Theorica planetarum di Andalò di Negro. Questioni di astronomia. Indagine delle fonti astronomiche nelle opere del Boccaccio. Edizione critica*, in "Physys", vol. 27, 1985, pp. 181-235.
Cornish A., *"Not like an Arab": Poetry and Astronomy in the Episode of Idalogos in Boccaccio's* Filocolo, in "Annali d'Italianistica", vol. 23, 2005, pp. 55-67.
Id., *Dante's Total Eclipse*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation. Total Solar Eclipses in Science, History, Literature, and the Arts*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2024, pp. 157-172.
Deen Schildgen B., *Reception, Elegy, and Eco-Awareness: Trees in Statius, Boccaccio, and Chaucer*, in "Comparative Literature", vol. 65, n. 1, 2013, pp. 85-99.
De Donato V., *Lancillotto Anguissola*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1961, pp. 320-321.
Ellero M.P., *Federigo e il re di Cipro: note su Boccaccio lettore di Aristotele*, in "Modern Language Notes", vol. 129, 2014, pp. 180-191.
Franzén C., *Reading Loops with Boccaccio, Freud and Morton*, in "Humanities", vol. 11, n. 30, 2022, https://doi.org/10.3390/h11010030.
Gallo F.A., *Antonio da Ferrara, Lancillotto Anguissola e i madrigali trecenteschi*, in "Studi e problemi di critica testuale", vol. 12, 1976, pp. 40-45.
Gasper G.E.M., *'The Face of the World was Wretched, Horrifying, Black, Remarkable.' Solar Eclipses in the Middle Ages*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation*, cit., pp. 103-126.
Grossvogel S., *Andalò di Negro*, in *Medieval Italy. An Encyclopedia*, cit., pp. 31-33.
Kriesel J., *The Marvelous between Dante and Boccaccio*, in "Traditio", vol. 73, 2018, pp. 213-254.
Id., *Dante and the Marvelous*, in "Le tre corone. Rivista internazionale di studi su Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio", vol. 8, 2021, pp. 25-55.

Lorenzini S. (a cura di), *Rossi, Checco di Meletto*, in P. Rigo (a cura di), *Dizionario dei Corrispondenti di Petrarca*, Antenore, Padova (forthcoming 2025).
Lummus D., *Boccaccio's Hellenism and the Foundations of Modernity*, in "Mediaevalia", vol. 33, 2012, pp. 101-167.
Id., *Boccaccio's Poetic Anthropology: Allegories of History in the* Genealogie deorum gentilium libri, in "Speculum", vol. 87, 2012, pp. 724-765.
McKeon R. (a cura di), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, The Modern Library, New York 2001.
Meiss M., *The Great Age of Frescos. Giotto to Pontormo*, G. Braziller in association with the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1968.
Morton T., *The Ecological Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2010.
Id., *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence*, Columbia University Press, New York 2016.
Nothaft C.P.E., *Pre-Modern Astronomies of Eclipses in the Near-East and Europe*, in H. C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation*, cit., pp. 54-68.
Olson R.J.M., Pasachoff J. M., *Comets, Meteors, and Eclipses: Art and Science in Early Renaissance Italy*, in "Meteoritics & Planetary Science", vol. 37, 2002, pp. 1563-1578.
Id. (a cura di), *Cosmos. The Art and Science of the Universe*, Reaktion Books Ltd, London 2019.
Osgood C.G., *Boccaccio on Poetry*, Liberal Arts Press, New York 1956.
Papio M., *Boccaccio: Mythographer, Philosopher, Theologians*, in E. Filosa, M. Papio (a cura di), *Boccaccio in America*, cit., pp. 123-142.
Id. (a cura di), *Boccaccio's Expositions on Dante's* Comedy, University of Toronto Press, Toronto-Buffalo 2009.
Parzuchowski M., Bocian K., Gygax P., *Sizing Up Objects: The Effect of Diminutive Forms on Positive Mood, Value, and Size Judgments*, in "Frontiers in Psychology", vol. 7, 2016, https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01452.
Pascale M., *Ira e compassione. Fonti aristotelico-tomiste di* Decameron VIII 7, in G. Frosini (a cura di) *Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni*, Firenze University Press, Firenze 2020, pp. 115-128.
Ponsonnet M., *A Preliminary Typology of Emotional Connotations in Morphological Diminutives and Augmentatives*, in "Studies in Language", vol. 42, 2018, pp. 17-50.
Quaglio A.E., *Scienza e mito nel Boccaccio*, Liviana, Padova, 1967.
Ruhe D., *Boccace astronomien*, in M. Picone, C. Cazalé Bérard (a cura di), *Gli Zibaldoni di Boccaccio. Memoria, scrittura, riscrittura*. Atti del Seminario internazionale di Firenze–Certaldo, Franco Cesati Editore, Firenze 1998, pp. 65-80.
Sciarri G., *Analisi lessicale degli alterati con funzione diminutiva e della varietà dei loro ruoli all'interno del* Decameron, in G. Frosini (a cura di) *Intorno a Boccaccio / Boccaccio e dintorni*, cit., pp. 109-123.
Smarr J., *Boccaccio and the Stars: Astrology in the* Teseida, in "Traditio", vol. 35, 1979, pp. 303-332.
Smart A., *Taddeo Gaddi, Orcagna, and the Eclipses of 1333 and 1339*, in I. Lavin, J. Plummer (a cura di), *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honor of Millard Meiss*, New York University Press, New York 1977, pp. 403-414.
Steel J., *Solar Eclipses Across Early Asia*, in H.C. Lange, T. McLeish (a cura di), *Eclipses and Revelation*, cit., pp. 85-102.

Stone G.B., *The Ethics of Nature in the Middle Ages. On Boccaccio's Poetaphysics*, St. Martin's Press, New York 1998.
Villani G., *Nuova Cronica*, a cura di G. Porta, vol. 3, Fondazione Pietro Bembo, Parma 1991.
Virgil, *Eclogues. Georgics. Aeneid: Books 1-6*, H. Rushton Fairclough (tr. by), Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1916.
Woolf L. (a cura di), *A Writer's Diary. Being Extracts from the Diary of Virginia Woolf*, The Hogarth Press, London 1975.