## What's in a Title

# The Long-debated Question on the Title of Sacchetti's *Novelle*

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#### Abstract

Franco Sacchetti (1332–1400) may be considered Boccaccio's most important follower in the 'golden century' of the Italian literary language, and his Novelle rank among the undisputed classics of early Italian literature. However, with no extant autograph witness, their text must be reconstructed from manuscripts copied almost two centuries after (second half of the sixteenth century). Thus, the authorial form of the collection title has been long disputed, but often with little attention paid to period documentation. This essay attempts to outline the main issues of the discussion, which has been recently reopened with new arguments, and to reassess it in the light of the work's reception history as well as authorial intention.

Despite their great importance as both literary and documentary sources, Franco Sacchetti's short stories have enjoyed spotty philological attention in the last hundred years. Written during the last decade of the fourteenth century, the *Novelle* were not completed by their author, nor licensed for reading outside a private circle of close friends and relatives. Thus, the work was not copied or circulated for many years, until — shortly after the middle of the sixteenth century (Drusi 2012, 43–4) — it was found by the famous Florentine philologist Vincenzio Borghini (1515–1580). Borghini found the only extant witness of Sacchetti's novelle

- 1. As is well known, Sacchetti turned down even some requests by fellow poets to read them, as may be seen from his autograph *Rime* (AGENO 1990, CCCVI a–b). See also DI FRANCIA 1902, 90; and ZACCARELLO 2008a, 15 and n 29.
- 2. The scientific literature on Borghini is impressive: for an introduction, see Folena 1971. For more recent scholarship, see Belloni and Drusi 2002, Woodhouse 2010, and Drusi 2012. H. Wayne Storey's presidential address at STS 2019, published in issue 13.1 of this journal (pp. 1–28), was also dedicated to Borghini.

(possibly, but not necessarily an autograph), and — given its poor conditions: lacero e guasto as he described it (ZACCARELLO 2008a, 107 n6) — prompted its transcription by some professional scribes in two subsequent sessions (during the 1570s). The resulting manuscripts are B and L. Manuscript B was itself heavily damaged and now survives in two sections, both in Florentine libraries (B = Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale [BNCF], VI 112 + Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana [BML], XLII 12). Moreover, unlike what was traditionally believed, the separation of the two parts was almost immediate and was probably carried out to help Borghini and his collaborators to work on Sacchetti's text:

La lettera [Borghini to Giorgio Vasari, 5 August 1564] ci dice che Borghini non si era privato della seconda parte nei primi anni Settanta bensì quasi un decennio prima, e che non fu una separazione casuale ma volontaria: o almeno tale induce a ritenerla il nome di Braccio Ricasoli, che del Borghini fu frequente collaboratore in materia di testi volgari.<sup>3</sup>

The second copy, L (L = BML, XLII 11), was transcribed at a later stage, but some marginalia in Borghini's hand make it clear that it was completed ante 1580, the year of Borghini's death, and again possibly upon his request. But what happened to the damaged original of Sacchetti's text? Though heavily damaged and ultimately lost, the early, possibly autograph artefact must have remained in circulation for some years. Is it possible that it did not attract further attention within or outside Borghini's circle of collaborators? According to a hypothesis I have advanced since 2004, the damaged original may have been transcribed once again, this time by amateur scribes who were interested in the text's content and meaning, rather than in the aesthetic quality of their work. In other words, even though their antegraph must have been damaged even more severely than at the time in which it was used by Borghini's scribes,<sup>4</sup> it is possible that such copisti per

- 3. Drusi 2012, 44. Further examples of codices that were divided to be more manageable by Borghini's équipe are listed at 63-4. In MS BNCF, II II 8, in Borghini's hand, multiple references are made to the two sections (primo / secondo volume): see ZACCARELLO 2014, XLII.
- 4. As may be seen in the further loss of approximately 20 novelle: Borghini's manuscripts have, at least in part, 222 novelle and their numbering reaches 258, a figure that includes those completely lost. The tradition derived from z has 202 tales, even though its readings avoid numbering errors, such as the merging of two novelle that have little in common except the mention of Portovenere: in

bassione (Branca 1961) would have been able to read more carefully and understand parts of the text that were simply overlooked by their "professional" counterparts. We do not have the direct result of this "amateurish" copy (that we may call z), but a large group of shared errors, innovations, and lacunae reveals two direct descendants: the eighteenth-century MS BNCF, II 1 25 (N), which has long been familiar to Sacchetti scholars, and a codex found in a college library at Oxford in the early 2000s (G = Wadham College, A.21.24: see ZACCARELLO 2004 and 2017a).

However, one of the paramount textual amendments that the recent critical edition has drawn from this "new" branch of manuscript transmission is the title: Le Trecento Novelle, rather than the vulgate Il Trecentonovelle. Even before the new witness was discovered and the textual transmission re-assessed, the latter title — though adopted in all editions during the twentieth century — had been widely discussed. Whilst Puccini thinks it may be Sacchetti's own creation, reflecting his "atteggiamento creativo nei confronti della lingua" (2002, 94), Matt believes it is a possible adaptation of the title by which Boccaccio's masterpiece Il Decameron, consisting of a hundred tales, was commonly known in the Renaissance, Il Centonovelle, and argued that "il titolo il Trecento Novelle si debba alla penna di Borghini (o di uno dei suoi collaboratori), che si sarà rifatto al modello" (2004, 115).

It is worth noting that Matt, on top of considering Le Trecento Novelle as the title's only plausible authorial form (and its counterpart as a scribal innovation, as we just read), quotes both variants as two split words: il / le Trecento Novelle, given the presence of the related participle composte in all extant manuscripts, including Borghini's, where the numeral and the noun are also separated by medium/strong punctuation (: or ;). Accordingly, the initial rubric reads in the latter: Proemio del CCC°: novelle, composte per Franco Sacchetti (B) and Proemio del CCC°: novelle; composte per Franco Sacchetti (L), as may be seen in Figures 1–2 (below):

the new edition, they have been numbered 177 and 177bis to avoid disrupting the traditional identification of the tales (ZACCARELLO 2014, 446-51).

<sup>5.</sup> The same tendency to interpret the text may account for some additions and adjustments, so it is very important to assess each of the various paragraphs which are only found in the tradition arising from z on specific linguistic and textual grounds, using the various forms of evidence offered by the two branches of textual transmission to grant or deny validation for those passages; in other words, "nell'accedere alla lezione di G N occorre dunque esercitare una sorta di dubbio metodico, e validarne il responso caso per caso" (ZACCARELLO 2014, XCVI).

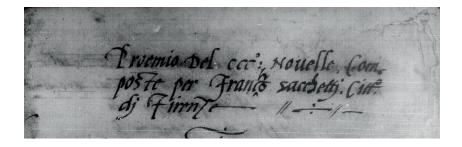
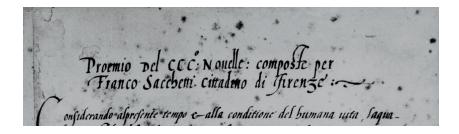
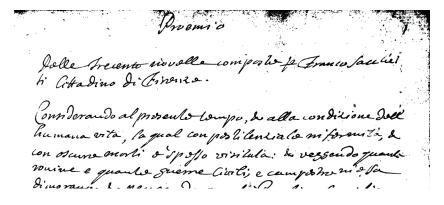


Figure 1. B, f. [1]r.



**Figure 2.** L, f. [1]*r*.

This is consistent with the z-derived tradition, as G reads the same, but with the numeral expressed in letters and in a more linguistically plausible form: Proemio Delle Trecento novelle composte per Franco Sacchetti cittadino di Firenze (see Fig. 3).



**Figure 3.** G, p. [1].

Since B and L seem to introduce a scribal innovation and are both commissioned by Vincenzio Borghini, one could legitimately suspect that the form Il Trecento Novelle (in split words) reflects the latter's own use. However, Borghini consistently uses the linguistically neutral form witnessed by G. Consider the following examples (italics are always mine):

- a) In an autograph list of forms of lexical interest drawn from Sacchetti's work, he writes: "Sopra il secondo volume delle 300 novelle composte da Franco Sacchetti, cominciato alla novella 140" (BNCF, II 11 8, c. 10r, second column).6
- b) In a letter addressed to Duke Cosimo de' Medici, attached to which Borghini sent a small selection of 11 novelle (to be possibly identified with MS BNCF, Filze Rinuccini 22), Borghini writes: "Io mando a V.E. Ill.ma le CCC° novelle di Franco Sacchetti o, per dir meglio, una parte".7
- c) In a list of lexical observations on 14th-century authors, he notes: "Le trecento novelle di Franco Sacchetti, che scrisse intorno al 1400 et è ragionevole scrittore, ma non perfetto, né interamente sicuro" (BNCF, II x 68, f. 2r).
- d) One of Borghini's most famous books on philology and linguistics, the Annotazioni e discorsi sul Decameron (Firenze: Giunti, 1574), presents Sacchetti as an author who wrote "trecento novellette ovvero, per lo più, historie di casi seguiti" (in the previous manuscript version, c. 1572, the mention was clearer: "essendo vicino alla vecchiaia, per suo passatempo scrisse un libro di 300 novelle et più presto historie et casi per la maggior parte veri" (CHIECCHI 2001, 38 and 252 respectively).

To appreciate the examples cited above, it is worth noting that Borghini knew — in all likelihood — that the work was unfinished and Sacchetti must have written a far lesser number of stories: thus, the numeral trecento,

- 6. This example features a very common abbreviation in the initial preposition: "d(e)lle 300 novelle composte", obtained with a short bar across (or beside) the upper side of the d. The lack of a similar one may account for the cited, odd form del in B, L, which may thus have meant to read delle, consistenly with what follows (novelle, composte).
- 7. Drusi 2012, 43 and n9, my italics; the letter is published by Belloni and Drusi 2002, 309; see also Zaccarello 2008b, 181.

as declared in the *Proemio*, should be read as a title rather than in its ordinary, literal meaning.8

So, how and when was the vulgate title (il) Trecentonovelle (in one word) identifying Sacchetti's work established in modern use? In 1927, the great philologist Michele Barbi (1867–1941) — who may well be considered the founder of modern Italian textual scholarship — published the first and most important study on the textual transmission of Sacchetti's tales. Before the retrieval of G, Barbi could read the "non-Borghini" variants only in a much more recent witness, MS BNCF II 1 25 (N), and ended up dismissing the numerous scribal alterations. The result was the appraisal of the sole Borghini tradition for the text's reconstruction: since Barbi's was, at the time, the only in-depth textual study of the complex philological situation, the following editions (starting from Pernicone 1946) all took B as their main source. Thus, the many (non-critical) editions published after it made various kinds of amendments to Pernicone's text but all their curators kept an almost exclusive focus on B as the text's source: E. Li Gotti (Milano: Bompiani, 1946); A. Borlenghi (Milano: Rizzoli, 1957); E. Faccioli (Torino: Einaudi, 1970); A. Lanza (Firenze: Sansoni, 1984); V. Marucci (Roma: Salerno Ed., 1996); D. Puccini (Torino: UTET, 2004). As far as the title is concerned, such orientation meant reading del Trecentonovelle in the initial passage cited above, even though the two components are clearly separated (by punctuation) in both witnesses (see Figures 1–2) and the following participle composte (witnessed by all manuscripts, not only B and L) can only refer to novelle as its "head" (ZACCARELLO 2017b, 136).

Only in 2014 did the critical edition carried out by ZACCARELLO 2014 restore the form Le Trecento Novelle, witnessed by the vast majority of the text's earliest manuscripts. On the ground of the latter, the solution was generally accepted (LORENZI 2014; some scholars, however, have insisted on keeping the vulgate title: notably, Pellegrini 2016, 2017 and the recent volume by CAPPI and Pellegrini 2019). Following several positive reviews and comments on the new edition and particularly on the restored title, deemed "plausibly original" (LORENZI 2016, 402), the authors have published several recent contributions citing the "old" title only and offer-

8. There is one case in which, citing B, Borghini writes del Trecentonovelle, probably because of the visual influence of the antegraph he was transcribing from (in all likelihood, B).

ing no explanation until the cited volume.9 It is also interesting to note that one of its authors, Davide Cappi, delivered a talk (Verona, 15 November 2018) in which he cited multiple sources, drawn from Borghini's autograph documentation, in which the Florentine philologist unquestionably used Le Trecento Novelle to quote Sacchetti's work: e.g., passages c) and d) cited above (p. [4] of the original handout).

I set aside here Pellegrini's essays — they do not even tackle the title problem (nor does the author seem to be aware of the extensive bibliography on the issue) — but call attention only to the chapter that Cappi and Pellegrini dedicate to the issue (2019, 17–19, in a section authored by Davide Cappi): here, the latter initially acknowledges the three arguments in favor of the title Le Trecento Novelle adopted in the new critical edition, namely (1) the agreement with the following composte, witnessed by all MSS;10 (2) the resemblance between the vulgate title and the name Centonovelle, common in the sixteenth century for Boccaccio's Decameron; and (3) the vast predominance of Le Trecento Novelle in Borghini's own autograph use. However, Cappi curiously states that the Florentine philologist "non ha mai dato importanza a un'eventuale scelta fra Il e Le Trecento Novelle" (2019, 17: this is the only time Cappi writes the latter expression in two words, as was in Borghini's usage!) and this would make it more economical to keep the usual title. Yet admitting the textual and linguistic difficulties of Il Trecentonovelle is not a strong argument for keeping the latter form only on the grounds of its current diffusion, especially as the restored analytical form Le Trecento Novelle was far more common until the early twentieth century, as we have seen earlier.

Since we have observed that surviving witnesses are a lot more recent than the period in which the text was put together, what was, then, the most likely authorial form of the title we can conjecture? We can speculate that the lost autograph of Sacchetti's novelle must have looked like his famous preserved autograph (Firenze, BML, Ashburnham 574 = A), containing his rhymes and minor works: just like A, the lost autograph must have been assembled over a long time-span, as was customary for

- 9. See also Corsaro 2015, Del Popolo 2011, Lanza 2010, and Spagnolo 2016 for more positive comments on the textual reconstruction based on the new, non-Borghini codices, even before the critical edition came out.
- 10. Following Puccini 2002, Cappi admits that it is possible to conjecture delle instead of del, but he refrains from doing so as Borghini could never have foreseen such a prominent scribal error (16).

mercantile zibaldoni. 11 Manuscript A was kept within the Sacchetti family for a long time and has a header (dated 1439, a few years after Franco's death): "chiamasi libro delle rime" (my italics; Puccini 2004 publishes the entire rubric). Giovanni Gaetano Bottari, editor of the editio princeps of Sacchetti's novelle, chose a simple title (Novelle) but made an important initial remark about the title he read in B, L (codices he also considered the most important ones). Commenting on the form Trecento Novelle (two words!), he notes "vi s'intende tacitamente soggiunto libro ec. Si dice similmente in sul Cento Novelle; l'Andreuccio del Cento Novelle e sì fatti parlari abbreviati". 12 Admitting the split form as an implicit equivalent of (il) libro delle Trecento Novelle seems to undermine the acceptability of the title that has prevailed in recent times, i.e., the masculine, one-word Trecentonovelle that, even from this standpoint, appears to be an adaptation of the common title used for Boccaccio's Decameron.<sup>13</sup>

All in all, only a small minority of the earliest copies of Sacchetti's short stories bear the vulgate form of the title, adopted only in the last hundred years: (il) Trecentonovelle. The latter seems to be used only by Borghini's scribes, who have a solid reputation for error, arising from distraction and/or misunderstanding.<sup>14</sup> The large prevalence of the type Le Trecento Novelle is confirmed by the work's reception history: One of the most important Renaissance editors of Sacchetti's tales, the Florentine scholar

- 11. On the complex stratification of Sacchetti's autograph MS, see Battaglia RICCI 1990 and PUCCINI 2019.
- 12. SACCHETTI [1724] 1725, 3. Though its frontispiece declares "In Firenze, MDDXXIV" to reduce censorship problems, the edition was actually printed in Naples in 1725. The same editio princeps also reports a quote from the bibliographer Giovanni Cinelli Calvoli (1626-1706) that — although not found in the printed version of his Biblioteca volante: see a useful index to this complex work in Presa 1979 — seems highly significant for our purpose: "Franco Sacchetti di Benci figliuolo fu scrittor di novelle e poeta, delle quali compose un volume, intitolato le Trecento Novelle" (SACCHETTI [1724] 1725, 6, my italics).
- 13. The Decameron's alternate title appears also in some printed editions of Borghini's times, such as Il Decamerone . . . Aggiunteci le annotazioni di tutti quei luoghi che di queste cento novelle da monsig. Bembo, Lyon, G. Rouillio, 1555, or Ragionamento havuto in Lione, da Claudio de Herberè gentil'huomo franzese, & da Alessandro degli Vberti gentil'huomo fiorentino, sopra alcuni luoghi del Cento novelle di Boccaccio, ibidem 1557 (my emphasis; examples found via website http://edit16. iccu.sbn.it/, consulted June 2020).
- 14. Scholars have long observed a variety of mechanical lapses resulting in *lacunae*, anticipations, skips and so forth; see especially Ageno 1958, 226 and Zacca-RELLO 2004, 134-35).

and bibliophile Antonio Giamberti da Sangallo (1551–1636, see MARAC-CHI BIAGIARELLI 1957), copied Sacchetti's novelle a number of times over the course of his life, either as full copies or integrations to the expurgated canon that circulated at the time (the Scelta, a selection of 133 tales — chosen amongst the least explicit and/or controversial for the contemporary readership — plus the Proemio, prepared by Borghini for a publication in print that was never accomplished). <sup>15</sup> In a period where Sacchetti's text was scarcely available, Sangallo was able to do this because he owned two complete codices, which, in his catalogue of his library (now Firenze, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS 2244) he describes as follows: "Delle Trecento Novelle una gran parte di Franco Sachetti Nostro cittadino fiorentino" (n. CXXXIX, c. 54r [num. ant. 99r]) and "Le Trecento Novelle di Franco Sacchetti" (n. CXLVII, c. 57r [num. ant. 105r]: see ZACCARELLO 2014: XX n9 and LXI n54, my italics).<sup>16</sup>

This form of the work's title is confirmed by other prominent stages of Sacchetti's reception history: in the second edition of his Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori (Firenze: Giunti, 1568), Giorgio Vasari acknowledges the many anecdotes he drew from Sacchetti's tales, which were probably brought to his attention by Borghini himself, one of Vasari's close friends and collaborators:

- 15. Whether resulting from a combination of the Scelta and an integration or from a selection, Antonio da Sangallo may be deemed responsible for a number of witnesses of Sacchetti's novelle: I have hypothesized the existence of a Forma Sangallo, modelled on the canon the Florentine bibliophile could reconstruct from his own two copies of Sacchetti's work, each derived from a different stream of textual transmission (ZACCARELLO 2016b). Without citing the latter study, but opposing my reconstruction nonetheless, CAPPI and PELLEGRINI (2019, 142-51) prefer to assume that the entire Sangallo canon is derived from the Borghini codices (B and the Scelta) so that his MSS would then be worthless for any purpose of textual reconstruction.
- 16. I thank Eugenio Salvatore, who pointed me to a letter that Tommaso Bonaventuri wrote to Bottari (23 October 1725), to assist him with the writing of his edition's preface: "Durerò poca fatica a mandarli il pensiero del Borghini sopra il Sacchetti, perché egli se ne sbriga con poche parole, che son queste 'Le trecento Novelle di Franco Sacchetti, che scrive intorno al 1400, ed è ragionevole scrittore, ma non perfetto, né interamente sicuro, può voi dar di molte voci da valersene'. Dell'istesso sentimento mi par di ricordarmi che sia anche il Salviati, il quale credo che dica che dopo la morte del Boccaccio si desse nelle Novelle del Sacchetti, nelle quali si vide subito quanto aveva perduto la nostra lingua" (Roma, Biblioteca dell'Accademia dei Lincei e Corsiniana, MS 44.E.4, c. 105r).

Sacchetti nelle sue Trecento Novelle ne racconta molti e bellissimi [motti su Giotto] (Vasari 1971, 1: 391);

Racconta Franco Sacchetti nelle sue Trecento Novelle per cominciarmi dalle cose che costui [Buffalmacco] fece (VASARI 1971, 1: 451).<sup>17</sup>

Browsing through period sources may grant further examples of how the plural, split form — witnessed by several of the oldest manuscripts — was also the only one used throughout the nineteenth century, as may be seen by the widely circulating edition by Ottavio Gigli, first published in 1860 (after Sacchetti's minor works, 1857) and reprinted many times until well into the 1900s.

Despite several excellent philological contributions (mainly addressing issues in Pernicone's text: Ageno 1957 and 1958) that followed suit, the question of Sacchetti's title remained unchallenged until the early 2000s. However, a reconstruction carried out on the grounds of an overall examination of the manuscript transmission could only result in the validation of the form Le Trecento Novelle, as the title reads in ZACCARELLO 2014, even though I had myself passively inherited the form Il Trecentonovelle in previous essays (e.g., Zaccarello 2004). Explicitly opposing my reconstruction, some scholars have dismissed the contribution of the whole non-Borghini tradition (CAPPI and Pellegrini 2019), in favor of a text closely following the sole B, including the title. Nonetheless, previous essays by Pellegrini (e.g., Pellegrini 2016) adopted the vulgate title with no specific justification, suggesting inertial continuity rather than complete awareness of the problem.<sup>18</sup>

In conclusion, once we take a general look at both the textual transmission and reception histories of Sacchetti's work, the limited support that the vulgate form Il Trecentonovelle has in both makes it difficult to accept it for a new critical edition. Moreover, given the problematic linguistic context of reading witnessed by the Borghini codices (with the lack of coor-

- 17. Art historians have long learned to use Sacchetti's tales as valuable sources of information about artists of his time (Simon 1993 points out that those characters "si muovono in una dimensione spaziotemporale storicamente accertabile" (445). Sacchetti was well acquainted with circles and workshops of contemporary artists thanks to his role as director of the work on several Florentine monuments, such as Orsanmichele (BATTAGLIA RICCI 1990).
- 18. In Pellegrini's essays, not only are the reasons in favor of Le Trecento Novelle not discussed at all, but no mention is made of the dispute between MATT 2004 and Puccini 2002 hinted at near the beginning of this essay.

dination between a hypothetical noun Trecentonovelle and the following participial form *composte*) it is reasonable to conjecture that what B and L read may derive from a missing abbreviation (del or del' = 'delle').

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