Boccaccio. A Critical Guide to the Complete Works. Edited by Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg and Janet Levarie Smarr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Pp. 555.

Published on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of Giovanni Boccaccio's birth, this superb collection of essays is a learned homage to the Tuscan author, carefully edited by three specialists in Boccaccio studies, Victoria Kirkham, Michael Sherberg and Janet Levarie Smarr. In observance of the subtitle *A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*, the project has brought together thirty renowned scholars, and produced a wealth of contributions on Boccaccio's works, in order to offer students, scholars, teachers and passionate readers a thorough idea of the scope of his artistic talents. As suggested by Janet Levarie Smarr in the Introduction, this critical guide clearly forms a pair with the previous important centenary volume on Petrarch, published in 2009, also by University of Chicago Press, "just as Petrarch and Boccaccio were friends in life" and "Boccaccio in his fifteenth eclogue followed Petrarch as his guide up the mountain of the Muses" (1).

The essays, eschewing chronological order, address instead the full range of Boccaccio's multifaceted experimentation in eleven thematic sections (Part I The Vernacular Master; Part II The Autodidact; Part III Classical Romances; Part IV Allegorical *Terza Rima*; Part V New Pastorals; Part VI Woman and Women; Part VII Devotion to Dante and Petrarch; Part VIII Historian and Humanist; Part IX Geographical Explorations; Part X Miscellanies: Lyrics, Letters, Notebooks; Part XI: Epilogue), whereas the Petrarch volume had only six. This organization highlights the great variety of Boccaccio's prolific work and likewise illustrates how each text was created as the result of a dialogue with both its genre tradition and Boccaccio's own particular innovations. For instance, Boccaccio started writing pastoral verses in both Italian and Latin during his years in Ravenna and Forlì, and continued adding more over the next twenty years. In these projects, Boccaccio not only revived the use of allegory and contributed greatly to the recovery of classical genres, but also began to lead the pastoral genre in the direction of contemporary political and literary commentary. He was moving "toward the creation of an unallegorized pastoral world of sentiments" (11), as we read in the essays of Jane Tylus and Susanna Barsella, whereas the importance of his sources, particularly Ovid alongside Virgil as model for the *Buccolicum carmen*, as David Lummus explains, was never diminished.

The eleven comprehensive sections of this volume cover Boccaccio's various artistic endeavors and regularly emphasize the many interconnections

among all his seminal contributions to various literary genres, especially in regard to his artistic experimentation in both Latin and vernacular. Many of these works could have been arranged just as well under other rubrics (e.g., the *De mulieribus claris* might have appeared in a section on women or in one on humanism), but this volume rejects both strict chronological order and the longstanding tendency to organize his works as either major and minor. This wise decision on the part of the editors amply allows for considerations of Boccaccio's predilection for self-revision and for drawing connections among his many projects, whether in Italian or Latin.

Boccaccio, on account of the wide range and popularity of his writings, has rightly been revered as one of Italian literature's Three Crowns; however, the editors choose here to give relatively less attention to his influence on later writers. Instead, these essays focus more attentively on Boccaccio as an author in his own time, reworking inherited models and articulating his own new visions, all the while balancing the influence of Dante with that of Petrarch. It is well known that Boccaccio continually experimented throughout his life in various directions. He wrote in Latin, as his idol Petrarch did, but, unlike Petrarch, he also recognized the importance of the vernacular favored by Dante, his other idol. A number of the essays — particularly those by Elsa Filosa, Robert Hollander and Giuseppe Mazzotta in Part Seven, and by Roberto Fedi in the textual history of Boccaccio's lyric poetry — attest to the tension between Boccaccio's admiring friendship with Petrarch and his loving reverence for Dante, whom the narrator of the *Amorosa visione* calls "il maestro dal qual io / tengo ogni ben" (6.2–3). However, at the same time as Boccaccio was developing the Italian literary language, he was also immersed in Latin and Greek classical literatures and philosophy, interests that created new pivotal inroads for European through the promotion of Leonzio's translations and lectures on Euripides, Aristotle and Homer during the early 1360s in Florence.

The volume opens with two compelling essays (those of Ronald Martinez and Brian Richardson) on the work to which Boccaccio owes his greatest renown, the *Decameron*. These are followed in Part Two by enlightening studies of commonly overlooked works (by Giuseppe Velli on the *Carmina*, Steven Grossvogel on the *Allegoria mitologica* and Jason Houston on Boccaccio's first four epistles). The volume's emphasis turns then in Part Three to Boccaccio's youthful years in Naples and his early Latin production, introducing the "classical romances" (*Filostrato, Filocolo* and *Teseida*), which are examined respectively by David Wallace, Elissa Weaver and Michael Sherberg. Parts Four and Five consider a challenging decade of Boccaccio's life, beginning with his return to Florence in 1340/41, a period that saw a

new sense of responsibility to the Florentine commune, as is evident in his allegorical works in *terza rima*. Arielle Saiber cleverly examines the *Caccia di Diana*'s numerology and use of the acrostic, while Jonathan Usher provides a thought-provoking discussion of the *Amorosa visione*'s "mural morality" (119).

The collection's sixth section emphasizes Boccaccio's deference to women and his use of the vernacular, which famously opened his works to less educated readers, whether merchants, Latinless readers or women. Because of the inclusion of female narrators, readers and female biographies, his writings would become a crucial model for women's new experiments in their own works, but he also penned the very successful *Corbaccio*, which has often been seen as something quite different. This delicate balance is addresses in the essays by Annelise M. Brody, Letizia Panizza and Deanna Shemek.

Boccaccio's role as an authentic humanist takes center stage in Part Eight, which comprises significant studies by Jon Solomon, Simone Marchesi and Alison Cornish of Boccaccio's lifelong convergence of interests in Latin treatises and *volgarizzamenti*. His visual legacy is a less recognized aspect of Boccaccio's creativity, but Victoria Kirkham amply investigates the authenticity of his drawings and designs in the Epilogue. Therefore, Janet Levarie Smarr comments in the Introduction that perhaps this very experimentalism made Boccaccio's self-assessment of the value of his multidirectional production always uncertain and doubtful.

Parts Nine and Ten examine the geographical and the collected writings that, though issuing from Boccaccio's pen, were never authorially sanctioned. In his "geographical explorations," Boccaccio combines tales of journeys and textual references, literary and fantastic geography, as highlighted by Theodore Cachey and James Coleman, and we see the same omnivorous appreciation the classical and the contemporary world as reflected in the variety of lyric poetry, letters, and notebooks in which Boccaccio copied the texts that fascinated him. The wide-ranging stylistic and topical variety of his interests, and some glimpses into his material life, are offered in Todd Boli's analysis of all the *Epistole* and by Claude Cazalé Bérard considerations of Boccaccio's workbooks, or Zibaldoni, pivotal resources for the study of the contemporary material culture, in which he built his "library and literary laboratory" (18). The last contribution to the volume is aptly devoted to Boccaccio's will, in which Michael Papio offers the first English translation of his will and helpful insights on his life and close circle of associates.

The volume is a valuable and successful critical undertaking that pleases both novice and scholar with its clear and thorough approach to Boccaccio's

opus. Particularly insightful is the analysis of Boccaccio's experimentalism in his literary and scholarly production, which has assured him the role of serving as a foundational model in vernacular prose and his place among Italy's Three Crowns. It thoroughly accomplishes the essential goals that Janet Levarie Smarr set out in the Introduction, the contextualization of Boccaccio as an author in his own time and the demonstration of his central role in the development of the European literary culture, writ large.

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