

**Boccaccio and His World:
Proceedings of the Third Triennial Meeting of the American
Boccaccio Association, Duke University, Sept.-Oct. 2016**

The essays in this volume offer a wide range of new perspectives on Boccaccio's work, its historical time and place, and its legacy. These thirteen contributions, presented by scholars at different stages of their careers, provide insights into his vernacular and Latin writings. While the *Decameron* is highlighted, readers will find commentary also on the *Fiammetta*, *Filostrato*, *Corbaccio*, *De casibus*, and other works, including his efforts as a copyist and creator of literary canons. In addition, scholars review carefully the events of his day and his contemporaries, and trace out the ways that his influence has touched writers of our time. The authors presented their initial ideas, as the sub-title notes, at the ABA triennial meeting in the fall of 2016 and then revised their papers for this volume. We have divided the volume into three sections: Literary Contexts; Historical Contexts; and Boccaccio and the Roles of Women and conclude the volume with an epilogue on paleopathology applied to Boccaccio's *novelle* and his own death.

The first section, Literary Contexts, opens with Corrado Bologna's magisterial account of the way Boccaccio shaped the modern canon of literature. Bologna, one of the conference's keynote speakers, recounts how *il nostro* carefully chose to copy certain writings of Dante and Petrarch in order to showcase not only their genius but also to place himself into the formation of this literary history. By these efforts, Boccaccio revitalizes ancient genres, such as bucolic poetry, in a contemporary form. He therefore establishes Dante, Petrarch and himself as inheritors and re-creators of Virgilian poetry, creating the first historiographical lineage between antiquity and modernity. Bologna insightfully reviews the pieces of this lineage, tying together the Toledan, Riccardian, and Chigian manuscripts.

Roberto Risso next focuses on the manner in which Boccaccio artfully employs letter-writing as a narrative feature in his vernacular writings from the *Fiammetta* to the *Corbaccio*. Letters offer another means of narrative reality, in which they represent, within the text, both communication

through language and the conveyors of their authors' personalities. Irene Cappelletti examines how the structure of the *Purgatorio* informs the *Decameron* Introduction to Day 1 and a series of ballads. In addition, she reveals the manner in which the thematic structure of the first nine days relates to the design of Dante's work. Completing this section, Alberto Gelmi analyzes the *Filostrato* by returning to the theme of epistolarity, with the book as a type of love-letter to the author's beloved, even as the choice of his story, that of a lusty widow who betrays her labile lover, is an odd one to achieve his aim. Gelmi studies the rhetorical features of the letters the two exchange and finds intentionally incongruous elements that bring to light the hidden character behind their personalities.

The next five essays of the volume address the various historical contexts of Boccaccio's life and work. William Caferro shows the significance of Boccaccio's public service during the war between Florence and Milan in the early 1350s. Studying archival records, Caferro demonstrates that *il nostro* was a well-connected citizen of means, and that the Florentine government could blur the boundaries between official and personal responsibilities in creating alliances against their Visconti adversaries. Elsa Filosa then examines the life of one of Boccaccio's closest friends, Pino de' Rossi, who was also active in the Florentine government before his exile in 1360 for participating in an attempted coup d'état. Filosa carefully traces the lineage and reach of the de' Rossi family in the Santo Spirito neighborhood, shedding new light on Boccaccio's famous letter of consolation to Pino in 1362. The next essay by Federico Canaccini addresses an earlier period of Boccaccio's life, his youthful sojourn in Naples. Canaccini focuses on the influential work of the Dominican theologian Giovanni Regina, who was active in the court of Robert of Anjou during the time of Boccaccio's residence, from the late 1320s to the mid-1340s, when Boccaccio was also pursuing a degree in canon law.

Julianna Van Visco's study focuses on an area of great economic and social importance, the wool industry, in relation to the *Decameron's* storytelling. Visco demonstrates how finely attuned Boccaccio was to the nuances of wool production and used this knowledge to develop his narrative technique in *Dec. 7.3*. In the final essay of this section, Christina McGrath leads readers to consider the complex *fortuna* of the *Decameron* during the sixteenth century. She compares two editions, the *Deputati* (led by Vincenzo Borghini) of 1573 and that of Lionardo Salviati of 1582. Each editor, she argues, attempted to please both Inquisitorial suspicions and the Tuscan fervor of Cosimo I, and the result are texts that contain their own historical originality.

The third section of the volume, *Boccaccio and the Roles of Women*, begins with an authoritative study by another keynote speaker of the conference, Janet Smarr. Smarr's "Women Rewrite Griselda" observes the adaptations of the Griselda story, *Dec. 10.10*, by female authors from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. For these writers, she notes, Griselda is not an allegory of patient virtue, but "a woman first and foremost," and the three twentieth-century authors — Agnes Miegel in German, Caryl Churchill in English, and Julia Voznesenskaya in Russian — are keen to point out the tale's more problematic aspects for their contemporary audiences. Gur Zak takes up the story of Ghismonda, the daughter of Tancredi (*Dec. 4.1*) and compares the account of her love for Guiscardo with Petrarch's retellings of the love between Massinissa and Sophonisba. His essay uses these stories to address the differences in the two humanists' tragic sensibilities: while Petrarch studies how tragedy illustrates the individual's relation to the self, Boccaccio focuses on the broader social interactions, on the individual's relation to others. In her study of the *De casibus virorum illustrium*, Marilyn Migiel examines the work's complex narrative engagement with its readers. She analyzes the narrator's misogynistic statements to showcase how Boccaccio would undermine the narrator's authority and create a test of the reader's acumen.

The volume closes, in its Epilogue, with a co-authored study of Boccaccian paleopathology, in other words, with an essay on scientific investigations into the author's work and death. The *studiosi* examine four different texts, including a description of his own senectitude and conclude that he most likely succumbed to liver failure.

All told, these essays provide innovative and authoritative insights that aid our understanding of Boccaccio's life and times. The editors of this volume are pleased to present the contributions of these scholars to a wider public as a sign of the successful tradition of the American Boccaccio Association triennial conferences.

TIMOTHY KIRCHER

GUILFORD COLLEGE