

Candido, Igor (ed.). *Petrarch and Boccaccio. The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World*. Berlin-Boston: De Gruyter, 2018. IX + 380 pp. ISBN: 978-3-11-042514-7.

Igor Candido has a long-standing relationship with the *tre corone*. In 2012, with Aragno, Candido published his dissertation on Emerson's version of Dante's *Vita nova*; in 2014, with Longo, a monograph on Boccaccio and Apuleius; finally, in 2019, he edited Petrarch's *The Life of Solitude*, for Toronto University Press. *Petrarch and Boccaccio. The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World* is further testament to the editor's commitment to a historiographical and philosophical intersection that is of paramount importance in the development of Italian literature and European culture at large. The book collects seventeen essays written by a *parterre de rois* of specialists in the field. All of the articles are available as open access resources on the website of the publishing house. Although the first six contributions play a significant role in the overall trajectory that Candido is drawing for his volume, they do not directly contribute to the field of Boccaccio studies and will therefore not be considered in the present review for the readers of *Heliotropia*. The book conveniently follows the chronological order of the works considered. Since Candido provides a useful synopsis of each essay in his introduction, I propose a different rearrangement of the contributions that can hopefully help explain the general narrative of *Petrarch and Boccaccio*, especially for those readers who will not read the book in its entirety and will benefit mostly from individual chapters.

A first group of studies is broadly thematic: Candido himself reflects on the topic of conversion in Petrarch's *Secretum* and in *Decameron* 1.1. The litmus test for both comparisons is Dante's *Commedia* and, more specifically for Boccaccio's novella, the two episodes in *Inferno* 27 and *Purgatorio* 5 regarding the Montefeltro family. The topic of conversion works brilliantly for a comparative study of the *tre corone*; it furthermore allows for deep philosophical considerations to better locate Boccaccio in the development of Western thought. As he elaborates, along with De Sanctis and Singleton, on the "sharp dividing line between Dante's and Boccaccio's worlds" (168), Candido argues that: "a study of the term *epochē* from the standpoint of historical semantics, spanning from antiquity to Descartes and then up to Husserl, would prove to be helpful to conceptualize the religious distance between Dante and Boccaccio" (ibid.). Giorgio Ficara has a different take on this thematic approach as he ventures to explore the character archetype of the ideal woman in Petrarch and Boccaccio. Ficara discusses the cultural

changes underpinning the representation of the ideal woman in both writers and underlines the legitimacy of female desire in Boccaccio and his Franco-Ovidian literary affiliations, at least in the first part of his career.

A second group of contributions investigates Boccaccio's masterpiece in terms of structure, with a special concern for the opening and the closing sections. Regn draws from Genette's narratology to speculate on the role of the title and the subtitle as a *locus* of marginality in the book. Regn dwells on the intertextual implications of both "Decameron" and "Principe Galeotto": the former implies a parody of the biblical book of *Genesis* and its commentaries, most prominently Ambrose's *Hexaameron*; the latter is in obvious dialogue with Dante's *Inferno* 5 and the courtly tradition, so vital to Boccaccio's art. A second essay in this group, written by Kabliz, is, in Candido's words, "the first interpretation of Boccaccio's narrative masterpiece through the lens of medieval scholasticism set in the context of its historical continuity into the premodern cultural world" (8). By looking at lexical choices in the Proemio (e.g. "appetito"), the article investigates the anthropological shift between the Augustinian and the Thomistic paradigm of original sin vs. original justice. Such a background fittingly explains Boccaccio's call for a society of mutual support and for an understanding of literature as a provider and, at the same time, a restraining agent of human sinful impulses. In the aptly closing essay, Ferroni moves to the ending of the *Decameron*, as he compares the role of the year 1348 as a structuring principle in Boccaccio's and in Petrarch's respective bodies of work. In the *Decameron*, the horrific events of the Black Death are responsible for the creation of the *brigata*, which acts as a social and diegetic bond at the same time. In the end, however, Boccaccio glosses over the ongoing drama with some brief, ironic remarks. Ferroni claims that in doing so the *Decameron* is following a path of redemption parallel to what we commonly ascribe to Dante's *Commedia* or Petrarch's *RVF*, with the result that "this mild evaporation of the work's end seems to wipe away every trace of its 'horrific beginning'" (365).

A third group of essays centers on Boccaccio's relationship with classical authors. Ciabattini's article provides a monographic case study, dealing with novella 2.6, in which Madonna Beritola is intertextually connected to Ovid's Hecuba and its Dantean mediation. Boccaccio exploits the literary memories of his readers to displace expectations and take surprising twists, as Beritola's happy ending eloquently proves. Petoletti steers the methodological axis of the section to material philology, as he examines two Florentine manuscripts to give an overview of Boccaccio's relationship with classical and medieval traditions. Besides specific examples, the article points out significant differences between Petrarch and Boccaccio in approaching

the classics: the former being more selective, the latter being more of an inclusive and curious bibliophile.

In a fourth group of essays, Cherchi and Mazzotta separately write on Boccaccio's later, Latin magnum opus, the *De genealogia deorum gentilium*. Cherchi surveys the genre of heurematic literature (i.e., texts that celebrate the inventors of the arts) and argues that Boccaccio's work performs a displacement of this genre. The *Genealogia* is indeed "a true epos of the art of interpretation, of the exegetical and hermeneutical labor" (248), in which the interpretative role of history gains importance. This will have momentous ramifications stretching into the Renaissance and even to Vico's *Scienza nuova*. Mazzotta considers instead Petrarch's presence in the *Genealogia*, where he is mentioned twice and with a twofold polemical intention. Besides disagreeing with his friend's political stands, Boccaccio is also distancing himself from Petrarch on an epistemological level, as he expresses the "willed limitation of the authority of his own voice" (278), as opposed to "Petrarch's sense of an omniscient, sovereign voice that transcends and controls the universe of discourse in *On His Own Ignorance*" (279).

Mazzotta's article is a fitting *trait d'union* with the last essay we consider, one that most vigorously addresses the Petrarch/Boccaccio juncture in its critical reception. Although other articles in the edited volume have investigated the subject, Bragantini scrutinizes Boccaccio's epistolary to reject the idea of a passive, younger Boccaccio who obediently subscribes to the views of his illustrious friend Petrarch. Previous scholarship is resoundingly dismissed, for we should not mistake Boccaccio's "malleability — often disguised as self deprecation [*sic*] — for intellectual dependence" (321); indeed, "it is a defect of certain recent scholars to sift tendentiously through the primary bibliography, and to eliminate the secondary altogether, in order to get right to the point" (322).

*Petrarch and Boccaccio. The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World* is the product of seventeen different authors (ten, if we limit ourselves to the section on Boccaccio). They explore a number of works by Boccaccio, in vernacular and in Latin; they adopt a variety of different methodologies, among which narratology, material philology, theories of reception and intertextuality feature dominantly; some articles are monographic in their approach, others attempt a bird's-eye view of Boccaccio's oeuvre. And yet, despite the multiplicity in themes and perspectives, the reader perceives an overarching cohesiveness in the volume. Individual chapters share an awareness of the pivotal roles Petrarch and Boccaccio play in the history of European culture. Candido acknowledges the cultural lineage of *Petrarch*

*and Boccaccio* in the pioneering work of Billanovich, Velli, Ossola and, going back upstream to the father of a historiographical paradigm, Jacob Burckhardt. It is under their aegis that Candido asks, in his brief introduction, the question underpinning the entire book: “what contributions have Petrarch and Boccaccio provided to the formation of the European identity?” (3). *Petrarch and Boccaccio* thus sets itself the ambitious goal of understanding and locating the role that the *due corone* play in shaping a new cultural era, one that unites the classical and medieval tradition during the Renaissance, and up until Descartes. Candido, Kabliz, Mazzotta and Cherchi are among the contributors who engage with the opening question from a more explicitly theoretical standpoint. Hopefully, their insights will provide stimuli for further discussions in which philosophers and historians of philosophy can partake. *Petrarch and Boccaccio* is a step in this direction, and will be of great service to students and scholars alike.

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