

fall 1982

Boccaccio newsletter

Elissa Weaver, U. of Chicago, president
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The regional representatives are appointed by the president. They are responsible for organizing meetings in their respective areas and also for gathering and forwarding material for the ABA Newsletter to the editors.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Annual meeting of the ABA will be held, as usual, in conjunction with the Annual meeting of the MLA, this year, in Los Angeles. We will have an executive committee meeting (the 28th), a general meeting of members and two sessions devoted to Boccaccio (the 29th, please consult the MLA program or the section of this Newsletter devoted to meetings for details). I would like to invite all members interested in proposing and discussing Association business to attend the committee meeting. It is scheduled for Dec. 28 at 5:15, but since that is the time of the Dante Society Cash Bar, I would like to reschedule it for 6 p.m., and I ask that members of the executive committee and others who would like to attend meet me at the Dante Society Cash Bar at 6 p.m. We will find a convenient place to meet at that time and will adjourn by 6:45 to allow time to get to 7 p.m. meetings. It is important that we meet before the general meeting in order to discuss the agenda.

The first Boccaccio session (1:45, Dec. 29th, Studio, Hilton) will begin with the Annual general meeting of the ABA. After the meeting there will be three papers which represent a comparative approach to the Decameron. The second session, immediately following the first (3:30, Dec. 29th, Studio, Hilton) consists of four papers which address issues of a theoretical nature that regard especially the Decameron framing tale, but also the stories. The program is an excellent one which I sincerely hope you will attend.

The second session will be followed by the American Boccaccio Association reception. We have again decided, as we did last year, that our money is better spent on providing the drinks than on reserving a cash bar at the Hilton. The reception will be held in my suite at the Baltimore (pending confirmation of my reservation by the MLA Housing Office). The place will be announced at the meetings and sessions. We hope you will attend all of our functions and that you will bring with you interested and interesting colleagues and friends.

Our membership and our activities have been steadily increasing, and we have some rather ambitious plans for the future which we will discuss in Los Angeles. Our funds are still very limited and, as you know, derive exclusively from your dues. Those of you who have forgotten to pay 1982 dues please do so as soon as possible; 1983 dues are payable at the time of the annual meeting (remember that our year runs from one to the next annual meeting). A form has been provided for your convenience on the final page of the Newsletter.

Thank you for electing me to serve you for two years. I have appointed Angelo Mazzocco to act as vice-president until the December meeting when we will hold an election for the office. I look forward to seeing you in Los Angeles. If you would like to contact me before the December meeting, please write to me c/o Department of Romance Languages, U. of Chicago, 1050 E. 59th St., Chicago 60637 or call me at home (312-667-4081) before December 7th.

Buone feste!



Elissa Weaver

1982 MEETINGS not included in spring Newsletter

- May 31 LEARNED SOCIETIES CONFERENCE 1982. U. of Ottawa
Two papers were devoted to Boccaccio:
Giuliana Sanguinetti Katz, U. of Toronto, "Il tema dell'infanzia nel Boccaccio."
Lisa Muto, McGill U., "La novella portante del Decameron: la parabola del piacere."
- October 14-16 INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM under the auspices of the Canadian Society for Italian Studies. McGill University. Origins, Codification and Diffusion of a Medieval Genre: NOVELLA.
Papers were devoted to theoretical problems and the medieval narrative tradition, to Boccaccio and the novella tradition, to the tradition in Renaissance Europe, especially in Italy and in France, but also in England. Distinguished participants were from Italy and France as well as Canada and the U.S.
- November 4-6 MIDWEST MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION. Cincinnati.
Boccaccio Session sponsored by the ABA. Susan Noakes, U. of Kansas, Chairperson
Janet Smarr, U. of Illinois/Urbana, "More than Meets the Eye: Reading The Decameron"
Discussant: Glending Olson, Cleveland State U.
Tibor Wlassics, U. of Virginia, "Boccaccio's Optics: Narratio Discreta in The Decameron."
Discussant: Rebecca J. West, U. of Chicago

MMLA (Cont.)

Victoria Kirkham, U. of Pennsylvania, "The Word, The Flesh, and The Decameron."

Discussant: W. Keith Percival, U. of Kansas

Wayne Storey, U of Virginia, "Parodic Structures in 'Alibech and Rustico.'"

Discussant: SunHee Kim Gertz, U. of Chicago

December 28-29 MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING. Los Angeles.

December 28

10:15 a.m. 120. Chaucer: The Life and the Literary Scene.

Galeria, Biltmore. The second paper concerns Boccaccio:

"Chaucer, Boccaccio, London, Florence," John M. Ganim, UC Riverside.

7:00 p.m. 312. The Language of Literature and Referential Languages II.

Boston, Hilton. Program arranged by the Division on Comparative Studies in Medieval Literature. Presiding: Judson B. Allen, U. of Florida.

1. "Law and Rhetoric in the Decameron," Giuseppe Mazzotta, Cornell U.

2. "The Perils and Profits of Language: Dante's Descent on Geryon,"

Susan J. Noakes, U. of Kansas.

December 29

1:45 p.m. 511. Annual Meeting of the American Boccaccio Association I.

Studio, Hilton. Presiding: Elissa B. Weaver, U. of Chicago, President; Angelo Mazzocco, Mt. Holyoke C., Vice-President; and Paolo Giordano, Rosary C., Secretary-Treasurer.

A business meeting will precede the program.

1. "The Meanings of a Storm: Boccaccio and Rabelais," Marcel Tetel, Duke U.

2. "Boccaccio's Story of L'usignolo in Seventeenth-Century Spain," Nancy D'Antuono, Notre Dame U.

3. "Dal fabliau alla novella Boccacciana," Michelangelo Picone, McGill U.

3:30 p.m. 557. Annual Meeting of the American Boccaccio Association II.*

Studio, Hilton. Presiding: Antonio Francescheti, Scarborough C., U. of Toronto.

1. "The Male Narrators in the Decameron Reconsidered," Victoria Kirkham, U. of Pennsylvania.

2. "A Woman's Place in the Decameron," Joy Potter, U. of Texas, Austin.

3. "What Makes Short Stories Long? Some Examples from the Decameron," Thomas M. Leitch, Yale U.

5:30 AMERICAN BOCCACCIO ASSOCIATION RECEPTION

Place to be announced at ABA meetings.

7:15 600. The Novella: Tradition, Continuity, and Innovation in Texts of Boccaccio and Cervantes, Goethe and Kleist.

Wilshire E, Hilton. A Special Session; Discussion Leader:

Karl-Ludwig Selig, Columbia U.

Panelists: Giuseppe Mazzotta, Cornell U., John H. E. Paine, Belmont C.

Also of interest to Boccaccio scholars are two sessions devoted to the Italian Renaissance novella: Dec. 28, 10:15 a.m. 133. Problems in the Renaissance Novella, Detriot, Hilton. Joy Potter, presiding, and panelists Salvatore di Maria, Lynne Lawner, and Marga Cottino-Jones; and Dec. 29, 9 p.m. 638. the program of the Annual Meeting of the National Italian Honor Society. Studio, Hilton, paper by Marga Cottino-Jones.

Please consult the MLA Program for more specific information.

* title of the fourth paper, by Prof. Wlassics, U. of Virginia, will be announced at the business meeting

BOCCACCIANA

Bibliography

- Bondanella, Peter and Musa, Mark, The Decameron, New American Library, Mentor edition (a new, complete translation), 1982.
- Olson, Glending. Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages, Cornell University Press, 1982; two chapters on the Decameron frame and early attitudes toward it as a work of recreation.
- Potter, Joy Hambuechen, Five Frames for the Decameron, Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Stewart, Pamela. "La Novella di Madonna Oretta e le due parti del Decameron," Yearbook of Italian Studies 1973/1975, pp. 27-40.
- _____. "Boccaccio e la tradizione retorica: la definizione della novella come genere letterario," Stanford Italian Review (Spring, 1979); pp. 67-74.

Works in Progress

- Carroll, Linda. revised version of "Boccaccio and Ruzante: The Author Defends Himself," to be submitted for journal publication.
- Kleinhenz, Christopher, section on "Italian Lyric Poetry" for the Dictionary of the Middle Ages (Charles Scribner's Sons).
- Lampe, David. "'A Feast of Entertainment: Food and Feasts in The Decameron." (delivered twice as a paper; in the process of revision for eventual publication).
- Schettino, Franca. preparing a study on Boccaccio and literary story-telling in Europe of the Middle Ages and a book-length study of the Elegia di Madonna Fiametta. She will teach a special course on Boccaccio as part of a Medieval Semester program at USC, fall 1982.
- Smarr, Janet. "Chaucer and the Decameron: Some New Connections;" concerns the "Merchant's Tale" and Dec. VII,9 (submitted for publication).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The ETRUSCAN FOUNDATION in Siena offers archeological and architectural tours. Next summer the tour will be on the Tuscany of Dante and Boccaccio. For information write to the Foundation's U.S. address: 45 Edgemere Rd., Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan 48236.

The NEWBERRY LIBRARY, 60 W. Walton St., Chicago, IL 60610, announces:

"Changing Perspectives on Women in the Renaissance," The Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies, May 20-21, 1983. For further information, contact Mary Beth Rose, Newberry Library (tel. 943-9090, ext. 268 or 271).

Ecole des Chartes Exchange Fellowship. The French Cultural Services, through the Newberry Renaissance Center--Ecole des Chartes Exchange Fellowship offers tuition, a stipend and one-way transportation for an American graduate student at a Midwest university to study for the academic year 1983-84 at the Ecole des Chartes in Paris. Apply to the Newberry. Deadline January 1, 1983.

Summer Institute in Archival Sciences (June 20 - July 30, 1983). The institute will be led by Prof. Armando Petrucci, Director of the Institute of Paleography, U. of Rome, assisted by Prof. Franca Nardelli. Intensive training in the reading, transcribing, and editing of Italian vernacular MSS (1300-1650) and orientation in the organization of Italian archives, libraries, and MS collections. The course will be conducted in Italian. Fellowships are available for full-time faculty members in American institutions of higher learning, and faculty, research scholars, and advanced graduate students at universities affiliated with either the Newberry Center for Renaissance Studies or the Folger Institute for Renaissance and 18th c. Studies. Deadline March 15, 1983. Apply to the Newberry Library Center for Renaissance Studies.

The NEWBERRY LIBRARY sponsors many Renaissance programs throughout the year and fellowships are available for short and long term projects. For information write to John Tedeschi, Director, Renaissance Center, Newberry Library.

BOOK REVIEW

Thomas G. Bergin, Boccaccio, New York: Viking Press, 1981. Pp. 392.

Thomas Bergin tells us in his introduction to Boccaccio that he wrote it for one reason and two audiences. "The raison d'être of my book is simply to present the author and survey his achievement and not to record the views of scholars over the centuries or to advance original critical theories." As implied by this modest statement, the primary recipients in Bergin's double public are to be non-specialists, since for them there "is not currently available in English an introductory study of the great friend of Petrarch and admirer of Dante, in which the facts of his life and the nature of his poems, romances, and Latin works are systematically set forth." But if Boccaccio was designed particularly for the generalist, its author hopes also to reach scholars in the field, bringing them useful material in "handbook" form.

Bergin's volume answers his description on all counts. Much of its appeal stems from the fact that one poet here encounters another in collegial kinship, bringing to life the "kind and unpretentious man" who was "Certaldo's gifted son" and elegantly recapturing the vitality of his creative imagination. So, unlike "the sage of Vaucluse," Boccaccio emerges in Bergin's portrait, largely through welcome reference to his relatively inaccessible Latin epistles and eclogues, as a figure who strove for recognition through patronage, but suffered recurring disappointments because he never quite managed to time his travels or poetic tributes (and diatribes) in rhythms synchronized with the rapidly shifting political events that variously intertwined the Kingdom of Naples and Tuscan territories. Such humanly understandable aspirations are, however, downplayed in this account, which stresses over "Johannes Tranquillitatum's" tendencies in the direction of "fair weather friend" his vigor and versatility in the sphere of poetry. That activity, according to the biographer, betrays a personality of sentimental and romantic bent.

After an introductory chapter on historical background, Bergin proceeds in the next to survey the facts and persons in Boccaccio's life. Special prominence goes to Fiammeta, "croce e delizia of the poet's young manhood." There follow ten chapters devoted one by one to his works of Italian fiction starting from Diana's Hunt, then the Rhymes, and his two writings of Dante; next come five chapters on the Latin works, and last, fifty pages on the Decameron--substan-

tially more than for anything else. A bibliography and index complete the book. Bergin's arrangement of material adheres to traditional critical categories rather than the year-by-year progression of Vittore Branca's Profilo biografico. So he separates vernacular works from Latin, and by reserving final place of honor for the Decameron, reiterates the familiar dichotomy of a Boccaccio minore-maggiore.

These divisions are indicative of what Bergin has to say as interpreter. True to his prefatory statement, he neither attempts to review Boccaccio's fortuna, especially its current status, or to offer an original approach. In a vein often reminiscent of Francesco de Sanctis, he gives us rather a charming picture of the 'old Boccaccio.' So we are told that the encyclopedic Christian epic, Filocolo, was written "to please the fair sex . . . not for the learned or serious-minded." Similarly, "the Filostrato is firmly fixed in the tradition of courtly love;" and the Teseida's regrettable hybridism "has its roots in the author's appreciation of the sensual charms of the fair sex and of the irresistible powers of sensual love." Boccaccio's weakness for the "lovelies" finds consistent fictional replication in the animating spirit of the Decameron, where the story of Filippo Balducci (Intro. IV) is taken as it literally stands for an emblematic statement of the entire work's polemical thrust, a "recognition of the power of nature sweeping aside the barriers of human reason." If this conventional Boccaccio remains one who in his youthful fiction irreverently disregards reason to serve sensuality, a stance he would later soberly renege, he is likewise fractured à la Croce by scholarly vs. artistic inclinations. The former replaced the latter when it came to composing the "creaking" Teseida and its glosses ("scaffolding of erudition"), and that same prosaic side of Boccaccio's personality must also be held responsible for his Amorosa visione with its distressing "glut" of catalogues. It is the artist, on the other hand, who supervenes to save the Nymph Song of Fiesole: "In no other work of Boccaccio does the scholar so unobtrusively collaborate with the creative writer." This split, we deduce, leads to the most serious esthetic weaknesses in Boccaccio's fiction and the consequent impossibility of satisfactorily interpreting it because except where the pedant was able to keep still, we are faced with an irresolvable dissidence between "pattern" and "substance."

Not surprisingly, Bergin's 'old Boccaccio' is more autobio-

graphical than most today would have him. In chapter two after translating—and beautifully so—Boccaccio's description of his enamored (Filoc. I, 1), he chooses to call it "poetic truth as valid as the encounter of the nine-year old Dante with his Beatitudine or the shameless trick that love played on the unsuspecting Francis in Avignon Good Friday of 1327." That comparative assessment of love's pounce on John in Naples leads us to expect similarly judicious skepticism concerning Boccaccio's subsequent fictional statements about his private life, but Bergin seems not to have been persuaded by Billanovich, Branca, and others. Clearly aware of their arguments, he still cannot abandon the notion of a "Boccaccio confessionals." Thus in connection with the Flagia di Madonna Fiametta he states, "We do not, for all the efforts of recent scholars, have evidence firm enough either to accept or deny the autobiographical thesis." The Corbaccio, too, an "strabillous and cautionary tale," he deemed to have been motivated by personal experience. While Bergin's bibliography lists scholars active today, in his text he disregards or rejects those whose views go against the tradition, and his failure to come to fair terms with them is the most disappointing aspect of this study.

Dated points of view aside, Boccaccio contains some factual errors. Reference is twice made to the Amorosa visione (pp. 69, 107) when the Comedia delle Ninfe Fiorentine is intended. We are told (p. 74) that Florio and Biancifiore, protagonists of the Filocolo, are born in Seville (their birth actually takes place in Marmorina); we read (p. 87) that three of the questioni d'amore will be developed in the Decameron (only two are); and Alleiram (Filoc. V, 24) has unaccountably become Alleira (p. 82). The source for the Filosttrato is said, on Boccaccio's own admission, to be Benoit de Sainte Maure, but its Tuscan narrator speaks only of "le storie antiche," laying claim, if anything, to classical rather than medieval prototypes. Ser Cepparello is not Florentine (p. 250, 296); nor is Alatiel (p. 302) violated nine times in the course of her Mediterranean odyssey (1); at the close of the second day in the Decameron it is Pampinea, not Emilia, who sings (p. 302). Finally, discussing the Decameron's conclusion, Bergin lapses into an old editorial trap when he transforms "Eva femina and Cristo maschio" into "Adam male and Eva female." (p. 326).

These oversights pale when one considers the imposing body of material covered in this energetic compendium. Although no mention is made of the Zibaldoni or the library bequeathed to Santo Spirito,

everything Boccaccio wrote is otherwise included and for the most part superbly summarized. In these lively, witty synopses, punctuated with lyric epithets and delightfully perceptive personal insights, lies the beauty of Bergin's Boccaccio. For readability it soars above the awkward English version of Branca's Boccaccio medievale (Boccaccio: The Man and his Work, tr. Richard Monges and Dennis J. McAuliffe, [New York, 1976]).

Complementing the summaries are occasional passages in translation, so masterfully rendered as to make one wish for more. The longest is of the letter written to Petrarch's son-in-law, Francesco da Brossano, given in its entirety, "a moving self-portrait of the weary old scholar, composed as he is about to join his departed master, dated from Certaldo, Nov. 3 (1374)." Others are extended passages from the Tenth and Fourteenth Eclogues, Filippa da Catania's life from the De casibus; an excerpt on Venus from the Genealogia; the first part of the gloss attached to Mars at Teseida VII, 30; and a few octaves from the Filosttrato and Ninfale fiesolano. In spite of an effort to achieve even treatment, one senses that Bergin didn't particularly care for some of his required reading, especially the Teseida and Amorosa visione. By contrast, the Filosttrato, Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine, Ninfale fiesolano, and Pastoral Song sparked more obvious and understandable interest, yielding the most engaging portions of his book. Least successful is the opening chapter, an uninviting prelude devoted to 14th century European and Italian historical background. Largely based on older sources, it is one of those unfortunate overviews for which there exists no real public, being at once too superficial for the specialist and inadequately developed for the generalist. Bergin is at his best when ranging on literary turf, and for most of the rest of the book that is happily where he stays, engaged in dialogue with a fellow poet whose epitaph, as movingly translated by the biographer, may fittingly close these remarks: "Under this stone lie the bones and ashes of John; his spirit stands in the presence of God, adorned with the merits his mortal labors on earth have earned him. Boccaccio sired him; his native fatherland was Certaldo; he cherished the nourishing Muses."

(1) See, e.g., Vittore Branca, "Beckmesser legge il Decameron," Stimmen der Romania. Festschrift fur W. Theodor Elwert zum 70. Geburtstag, B. Heyman Verlag, 1980.

Victoria Kirkham
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CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEWSLETTER

1. Works in Progress:

2. Announcements:

3. Boccaccio Bibliography:

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