

*Dante e Boccaccio: Lectura Dantis Scaligera 2004–2005 in Memoria di Vittore Branca.* A cura di Ennio Sandal. Roma-Padova: Editrice Antenore, 2006. 238 pp.

The eight lectures incorporated in this compact but handsome volume pay highly personal, deeply felt, and invariably apt tributes to the late Vittore Branca, who died on May 28, 2004. As detailed by each essay's author, Branca's seminal interpretations of Boccaccio influenced the way most Italianists in the twentieth century viewed and taught the Certaldese writer. As elaborated by Branca's protégés and disciples, that influence will indubitably continue for decades to come.

Therefore, in the style of *Dante e Boccaccio*, this review begins with a personal homage to Professor Branca. When Maristella de Panizza Lorch first introduced Branca to me in her Barnard College office in the 1980's, he was already a legendary figure in Italian letters. While his *Boccaccio medievale* certainly influenced how I taught the *Decameron* to undergraduate students, I hesitated for a moment when he expressed interest in how I introduced Italian literature to American students. Then I shared how his greatest pedagogical influence on me had resulted from a newspaper article he had written in the 1970's arguing that courses introducing Italian belles-lettres should break with the traditional, strictly chronological approach in order to facilitate enthusiasm and learning among the rising generation. Why not start with modern Italian, so much more accessible to students, and proceed in reverse chronological order? Starting with the archaic prose and metrical challenges of Dante's *Vita nova*, he postulated, would likely challenge even the most dedicated high school or university student. Why not begin with easier-to-read twentieth-century prose and then move, for example, to nineteenth-century *novelle*, an eighteenth-century comedy, and so on.

By following Branca's suggestion, I discovered that my "Introduzione alla Letteratura Italiana" became one of the most popular courses I taught over a three-decade career. We often started with Primo Levi's haunting *Se questo è un uomo*, whose chapter devoted to Dante's Ulysses episode fostered phenomenal interest in the Florentine poet. From there we turned to a selection of Giovanni Verga's short stories and then to a Goldoni comedy. By the time we finished *La Locandiera*, the students were hooked, the deadline for dropping classes was passed, and it was time to turn to poetry. After a section on figures of speech, meter, verse form, and rhyme, we ended the semester much better prepared for tackling the *Vita nova*. Many students were "hooked" and could hardly wait to register for the course devoted solely to Dante's *Commedia*. Branca was delighted that an article

written for the *Corriere della Sera* would have had such a pedagogical impact across the Atlantic. I was grateful to be able to thank him in person.

In the “Premessa” to *Dante e Boccaccio*, Ennio Sandal clarifies that the volume is the ninth edition of the *Lecturae Dantis scaligerae* and consists of an octet of essays first presented at the *Centro scaligero degli studi danteschi di Verona* during the academic year 2004–2005. This particular series distinguishes itself not by focusing on the interpretations of single cantos of the *Commedia* but on a selected annual theme. Given that Boccaccio was, for the recently departed Branca, the major focus of his scholarship, it was deemed fitting that these particular lectures highlight Boccaccio’s relationship to Dante. The titles of the eight *lecturae* reveal the specific topics addressed.

Armando Balduino, in “Vittore Branca e il ‘suo’ autore,” starts out by stating the obvious: Branca was “il massimo fra gli interpreti [del Boccaccio] del Novecento” (5). Balduino then goes on to explain that Branca’s approach relied not so much on fashionable, fleeting, or far-flung literary theories (“non sulle teorie”) but on textual restoration and close reading (“il tenace lavoro volto al restauro testuale ... e insieme, quello di una minuziosa, capillare esegesi,” 8).

Lucia Battaglia Ricci, in “Il culto per Dante, l’amicizia con Petrarca: Giovanni Boccaccio,” ascribes to Branca the “totale revisione degli studi su Boccaccio” as well as the “rilancio dell’interesse critico per Boccaccio” (21). She then addresses the complex literary relationship between the “three crowns” (Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio). Petrarch denied Dante’s influence, and yet the *Canzoniere* continually echoes Dante’s lyrical production. While many scholars see the Petrarch-Boccaccio connection primarily in terms of “un maestro e un discepolo” (27), Battaglia Ricci postulates that their relations were “più complessi di quanto di solito si immagini tra i due scrittori” (30). Their cultural and literary exchanges, including the sharing of books, was never one-way, never a “scambio ... a senso unico” (32). For example, while Petrarch often gave counsel to his Certaldese friend, it must be recalled that Boccaccio donated a series of key books to Petrarch, including Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, passages from Varro’s *De lingua latina*, a copy of Dante’s *Commedia*, and a Latin translation of the *Iliad*.

Attilio Bettinzoli’s “Occasioni dantesche nel *Decameron*” takes up the subject of his previously published dissertation: the presence of Dante (thematically, imagistically, textually) in Boccaccio’s *opus magnum*. The essay’s strength lies in its succinctness, as Bettinzoli reviews not only familiar territory (e.g., the architectonic parallels between 100 cantos and 100 *novelle* as well as Boccaccio’s blatant parodies of *stilnovismo*) but also

some of the myriad textual citations of the *Commedia's* poetry in the *Decameron's* prose (e.g., Dante's description of the Terrestrial Paradise in *Purgatorio* 28 and Boccaccio's introduction to Day 5 of the *Decameron*).

Giuseppe Chiecchi, in "Dante e Boccaccio secondo Vincenzo Borghini," forms an excellent segue to Bettinzoli's approach by reviewing the annotations of Borghini (1515–1580) concerning Boccaccio's citations of Dante's text. Writing in the sixteenth century, the Florentine Borghini listed not only characters who are referenced by both Dante and Boccaccio (e.g., Michele Scott, Guglielmo Borsiere, Giotto, and Filippo Argenti) but also shared morphological practices: "la condivisione morfologica di enclitiche e proclitiche e di impieghi lessicali," which together fashion a "segno visibile della comune genitura linguistica" (95–96).

Carlo Delcorno's "Gli scritti danteschi del Boccaccio" concentrates on the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, with its "lunga digressione sull'origine e sulla natura della poesia" (111) and the *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia di Dante*, whose "maggior pregio . . . è proprio nella stratificazione di diversi sistemi di lettura" (116). It is in the *Esposizioni* that Boccaccio displays not only his erudition concerning contemporary customs and mythological fables but also his knowledge of church doctrine, religion, and allegory.

From this reviewer's point of view, Simonetta Mazzoni Pernizzi, in "Giovanni Boccaccio e la cultura francese: il caso del *Corbaccio*," provides the most original contribution of the volume. She argues persuasively that the *Corbaccio* should not be considered "bifronte" – having "soltanto due livelli stilistici, o due linguaggi" (141). Rather than seeing the work in terms of "cortesia" and "anticortesia," Mazzoni Pernizzi argues for its acceptance as "un'opera splendida per scintillante poliedricità, un'incredibile performance creativa veramente trascinate per il suo estremo e assoluto sperimentalismo" (ibid.). She emphasizes throughout the essay the profound French influence on Boccaccio's cultural formation. She ties his early works (e.g., the *Filostrato*, the *Filocolo*, and the *Teseida*) to celebrated French works: "il *Roman de Troie* di Benoît di Sainte-Maure, *Floire et Blancheflor*, il *Roman de Thèbes*" (142). There follows a review of Boccaccio's *fortuna* in France and Europe, where "nel primo quarto del XV secolo il Boccaccio è visto soprattutto come moralista, come erudito maestro di morale che riflette sui grandi temi della vita, della morte, dell'incostanza del destino" (146).

In a second essay, entitled "Le donne del *Decameron*," Lucia Battaglia Ricci outlines the differences between Dante's ideal woman (i.e., Beatrice) and Boccaccio's widely varying portrayals of women "dalle donne cortesi della giovanile *Caccia di Diana* alla terribile vedova del tardo *Corbaccio*, dalla iterata presenza della stessa donna – Fiammetta – in tante opere

della gioventú alla galleria di figure femminili del *De claris mulieribus*" (167). She comments incisively on the different images of Boccaccio's women: from the *donna-madre* (in the *Ninfale fiesolano*) to the *donna come autrice* (in the *Elegia di Madonna Fiammetta*) to the *Decameron's* seven female narrators to the woman extraordinaire Griselda, whose story of patience closes the one hundred tales.

Manlio Pastore Stocchi concludes the essays with "Firenze di Dante, Firenze di Boccaccio." In his unrevised and rather colloquial discourse, he underscores that, of the three crowns of fourteenth-century Florence, "Petrarca è il poeta che nella sua lingua poetica meno risente dell'origine fiorentina" (214). Why? Because Petrarch sought to be the most "Latinated" of the three, the one most likely to avoid any "inflexione troppo apertamente fiorentinesca" (ibid.). Dante, on the other hand, often calls to our attention his own Florentine origins. That city, however, at least as presented in the *Commedia*, is one created or described after the poet's exile and before the fictive date of the poem (1300); it is mainly the Florence of the last quarter of the thirteenth century, a city of the past, a city of immense factional strife. Pastore Stocchi regards Boccaccio, therefore, as the most balanced presenter of Florence and consequently "il piú fiorentino ... delle tre corone" (222). Why? Because in his biography there is no event that places him in conflict, linguistically or politically, with the city. His Florence appears the most diverse, as the *Decameron* takes place (as per its introduction) during the plague of 1348, while many of its *novelle* recall a somewhat idealized pre-plague city. Boccaccio's Florence is deemed the most realistic also because it is seen through a mercantile lens. Consequently it is the most contemporary, up-to-date depiction.

An "Indice dei nomi" and an "Indice dei manoscritti" round out the volume. In the name index, one discovers a subtle but fitting tribute to Branca: his name vies with Petrarch's for the highest number of references. (Citations to the name of Dante and Boccaccio, it must be noted, are excluded from the index.) One cannot help but believe that the manuscript index is also an appropriate honoring of Branca, who spent so much of his life searching out, identifying, and making excellent use of such vital primary resources. Ultimately, this book is a testimony not only to Branca's tremendous erudition and generosity of spirit but also to Boccaccio's wide-ranging writings and encyclopedic mind.

MADISON U. SOWELL

SOUTHERN VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY