

Carol Falvo Heffernan. *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio*. Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2009. Pp. 151. £45. ISBN: 978-1843842019.

K. P. Clarke. *Chaucer and Italian Textuality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. 256. \$110. ISBN: 978-0199607778.

David Wallace's *Chaucerian Polity* (1997) describes Chaucer's "encounters with the great Trecento authors" and — alongside the work of Piero Boitani and Nick Havely — defined a field. *Chaucerian Polity* was immediately followed by Warren Ginsburg's *Chaucer's Italian Tradition* (2002) and Robert Edwards' *Chaucer and Boccaccio: Antiquity and Modernity* (2002). Carol Falvo Heffernan's *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio* (2009) and K. P. Clarke's *Chaucer and Italian Textuality* (2011) remind Chaucerians and Italianists alike that there is still much more to say about the relationship between Chaucer and Boccaccio specifically, and Chaucer and Italian literary practices more broadly. Heffernan defines an elusive medieval genre — the comedy — and describes Chaucer's and Boccaccio's likely shared theory of the ethics and the form of the comic in order to close any remaining distance between these two authors. K. P. Clarke expands the definition of Italian by looking beyond the "three crowns" and also broadens the definition of text as he incorporates margins, glosses and commentaries in his account of reception. By foregrounding the material work, Clarke transforms our collective sense of the range of Chaucer's encounter with the books of Italian humanism as he challenges commonplace assumptions regarding the relationship between text and commentary, and of Latin and vernacular. Heffernan and Clarke claim critical territory by identifying specific approaches: Heffernan is interested in genre and Clarke in the whole book.

Aside from a shared interest in tracing the relationship between English and Italian literary authors and cultures, these monographs also share an impulse to return to older and formerly unproductive lines of inquiry. In Chapter One, "The Comic Inheritance of Boccaccio and Chaucer," Heffernan revisits Edmond Faral's neglected theory, articulated in 1924, about the relationship between the comic genre of fabliau and Latin elegiac comedy. One of the best sections of Chapter One, "Chaucer and Ovid: The Latin and Vernacular *Heroides*," of K. P. Clarke's book expands upon Sanford Meech's observation, made in 1930, that *The Legend of Good Women* reveals a baffling Chaucerian awareness of the work of the minor Florentine notary Filippo Ceffi. Clarke, like Heffernan, transforms an observation with the status of a footnote into an opportunity to complicate literary history. For example, Meech's surprise regarding Chaucer's unlikely interest in Ceffi becomes, for Clarke, an opportunity to redefine

Chaucer's experience of the private libraries of Florence's mercantile classes as well as an occasion for imagining a Chaucerian imitation of Florentine (as opposed to French and moralizing) habits of translating Ovid. These books tactfully navigate the problem of owing too much to the work of Boitani, Havelly and Wallace by reviving alternate sources of critical inspiration. By turning to what now counts as antique scholarship, Heffernan and Clarke, additionally, compel Chaucer's readers to discard any lingering caution regarding the propriety of discussing Chaucer and the Italians without recourse to French intermediaries.

At first glance, Heffernan's book seems the more immediately useful because it establishes a canonical focus (Chaucer *and* Boccaccio). She opens the book by entertaining the possibility that Chaucer may have been known in Italy long before the nineteenth century, hoping to establish that the traffic of influence might extend in both directions. But this engaging section, much like the rest of the book, suffers from a reliance on tantalizing suggestion accompanied by a dearth of actual proof; indeed, Heffernan cannot make substantive claims about knowledge of Chaucer as a poet in Italy prior to the sixteenth century. Heffernan settles for establishing parallels between Chaucer's and Boccaccio's careers, educations and milieus rather than describing new relationships between them or their texts in her introduction ("Introductory Matters") and across her chapters. Heffernan describes Boccaccio's influence on Chaucer exclusively as she makes the case — in Chapters Three, "Parallel Comic Tales in the *Decameron* and the *Canterbury Tales*," and Four, "Antifraternal Satire in Boccaccio and Chaucer" — that Chaucer echoes the *Decameron* in his *Canterbury* fabliaux. In Chapter Three, the claim that the *Decameron* supplies analogues for Chaucer's fabliaux relies on similarity of detail and a theory of "memorial borrowing" (52). Chaucer must have read and remembered the *Decameron* well enough to reiterate its narrative details. Chapter Four describes Dante's and Boccaccio's anti-fraternal satire, but transitions into a discussion of Chaucer's critique of preaching even though Chaucer fixates on the Pardoner, a persona who is not a friar. The argument rests almost entirely on the suggestion that a Londoner, Chaucer, shares the anti-fraternal sentiments of celebrated urban Italian poets. In Chapter Five, "Adding Comedy: Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*," Heffernan revisits the already well-established relationship between Boccaccio's *Filostrato* and Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Heffernan extends the discussion temporally so as to include Shakespeare's revision of Chaucer's *Troilus*, while offering little in the way of a new direction in the traffic of influence between England and Italy.

Although the book is not entirely successful, Heffernan points to a real gap in medieval literary scholarship. Henry Ansgar Kelly's influential works on tragedy, which span Italian and English traditions, have traced the transformation of an antique dramatic genre into a medieval narrative genre. Myriad studies of Boethius and his influence have also provided an apparatus for describing medieval tragedy across Latin and vernacular traditions. Heffernan finds herself making a case for comedy by suggesting that it is the opposite of tragedy: comedy narrates the "movement from bad to good" (35) circumstances. Heffernan encourages other scholars to take comedy more seriously and to provide a more powerful historicized explanation for the fact that Chaucer and Boccaccio are funny. Defining a comic common ground might help to make better sense of the narrowly defined comic genres of fabliau and satire, and Heffernan searches for a way to describe comedy generously so that it might be capable of describing fabliaux and Dante's *Commedia*. The desire for the comic makes sense of the progress of the monograph, which begins by positing a shared Italian and English familiarity with handbooks of rhetoric and composition from Donatus, Geoffrey of Vinsauf and Matthew of Vendôme. For Heffernan, the Latin grammarians' views on the comic are instrumental to the discovery of a shared formula and ethic between Italian *novelle* and English fabliaux. *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio* may be largely unconvincing when it claims the likelihood of direct borrowing and shared origin but it is also likely to be influential because it highlights the odd absence of theoretical and historical apparatus for describing comedy and the comic.

K. P. Clarke is the more cautious scholar and he points to resonances rather than influence or direct borrowing even as he supplies more serious evidence derived from an admirable intimacy with the polyglot manuscripts of both the English and Italian traditions. In *Chaucer and Italian Textuality*, Clarke incorporates paratextual material into the discussion of Latin and vernacular reading and writing and, in so doing, issues a reminder that a text is never encountered in isolation. Because he is so alert to the conditions of the reception of a text, he can also re-read passages from familiar narratives — and he reads Chaucer particularly well — in order to demonstrate that they reflect upon the conditions of medieval reading and composition. For example, in Chapter Three, "Reading Boccaccio in the Fourteenth Century," Clarke explains that the Mannelli Codex, once considered the best text of the *Decameron*, includes a mercantile reader's affective and vernacular response to the final tale of the *Decameron*. As he annotates the text, the reader of the Mannelli codex invents a more verbal, even obscene Griselda whose opposition to Gualtieri's cruelty emerges from Boccaccio's writing about women encountered else-

where in the Mannelli manuscript. In Chapter Four, “Chaucer as Glossator?,” Clarke explains that the Wife of Bath’s description of walking “up and down” reflects upon the spatial organization of a manuscript page. The word “glossing” and the references to glossing and walking “up and down” eroticize the act of attempting to exert masculine control over a text and over women figured as texts. The book is satisfying, in part, because it introduces new material in the form of glosses and commentaries in order to interpret hyper-canonical texts without the customary delay between codicological discovery and literary interpretation.

Although Chapter One, “Chaucer and Ovid: The Latin and Vernacular *Heroides*,” introduces readers both to the medieval reception of Ovid generally and the influence of Filippo Ceffi’s translation specifically, most of the book focuses on the likely textual encounters between Boccaccio and his readers and Boccaccio and Chaucer. Chapter Two, “Boccaccio as Glossator,” makes the case that Chaucer’s *The Knight’s Tale* borrows from Boccaccio’s gloss to the *Teseida* as well as his translation of the *Teseida* without disregarding Chaucer’s knowledge of Statius’ Latin *Thebaid*. In the course of making his argument, Clarke also revises expectations of the gloss, usually understood as an apparatus that legitimizes or classicizes a vernacular performance, by demonstrating that Boccaccio’s glosses are intended to act as a genuinely helpful guide for the reader. Chapter Three, “Reading Boccaccio,” explains what the “earliest copies of the *Decameron* look like” and how this might “have affected Chaucer’s encounter with that text” (95). Chapter Four, “Chaucer as Glossator?,” reflects upon the likelihood that Chaucer too may have glossed his vernacular works. Equally important, the chapter revises expectations of the relationship between text and gloss by demonstrating that the Latin glosses to *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue* actually support and authenticate the Wife’s opposition to textual authority rather than subvert what little authority she might have. The later chapters make the case for a necessary attentiveness to each and every relationship between text and margin. Commentaries and glosses cannot be generalized since they are capable of revealing a desire to aid the reader as much as a desire to elevate the vernacular poet, or a desire to sympathize with the subversive persona rather than to undermine her.

Because he is so careful to provide a background for textual transmission in the course of making an argument about a specific manuscript, Clarke’s must rely on the reader’s willingness and capacity to visualize the organization of a book or a page or even both at once. This is particularly necessary when he asks readers to imagine “The *Decameron* in Parts” and “Boccaccio *Visualizzando*” in Chapter Three. While I am exceptionally sympathetic to the challenges facing authors who wish to reproduce im-

ages, the absence of reproductions of manuscript pages can be problematic for a book that intends to alert scholars to the constant presence of the textual margins or more unusual forms of textual circulation. Clarke's argument about Filippo Ceffi's *Eroidi* in Chapter One, for example, rests partially on the unusual features of the bilingual partial copy in the Beinecke library, in which Ceffi's translation wraps around the Latin text. Clarke claims that the manuscript's organization suggests that readers wished to read both texts in parallel. But the suggestion that these are parallel texts requires an interpretative leap since it reads *as if* the vernacular translation might simply act as aid to Ovid's Latin. To be fair, K. P. Clarke footnotes a digital facsimile available online, and he does his very best to repair visual absence with vivid verbal description elsewhere. Additionally, Clarke includes two appendices recreating relevant glosses that he hopes will be an impetus for further discussion: Appendix 1 reproduces interpretative glosses associated with *Decameron* X.10 in the Mannelli codex and Appendix 2 usefully collates the Hengwrt and Ellesmere glosses to *The Clerk's Tale* and *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. But many of Clarke's arguments might have been more accessible and convincing if Clarke had permitted his readers the occasional visual access to the margins of books he himself knows so well.

Clarke's *Chaucer and Italian Textuality* traffics in detail, where Heffernan's *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio* rests on general knowledge of Chaucer's familiarity with Italian texts and authors. Clarke's work is the more affectively and intellectually powerful, especially because its attentiveness to the margins revises relationships between reader and author and between readers. Nevertheless, both works are useful to scholars looking for guides as they navigate the rich intersections between English poetry and Italian traditions. Heffernan's *Comedy in Chaucer and Boccaccio* suggests that the field is rich enough to be the launching pad for a more systematic engagement with the history of genre. Clarke's *Chaucer and Italian Textuality* reveals how the study of material texts might transform the study of reception, and offers an important corrective for English scholars who may have defined Italian and even Italian humanism too narrowly. Although Heffernan's title and intention appears to allude to the desires of Chaucerians and Italianists simultaneously, Clarke ultimately makes the better case that Chaucerians must continue to engage with Italian texts, manuscripts, and cultures. His arguments about Chaucer seem new, because he engages in depth with the work of Italianists who have painstakingly documented the reception of Boccaccio's manuscripts. Clarke's accomplishments testify to the intellectual possibilities offered by theoretical renewal — his book combines traditional codicology with mate-

rial scholarship's fascination with paratexts — and in-depth exchange across disciplines usually divided by language and affiliation.

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