

Chiecchi, Giuseppe. *Dante, Boccaccio, l'origine: Sei studi e una introduzione*. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2013. 191 pp. ISBN: 9788822262424.

As its title indicates, Giuseppe Chiecchi's volume consists of six studies organized around the topic of origins in the writings of Dante and Boccaccio. Two of the essays were previously published, Chiecchi mentions in the introduction, while the other four were not. By grouping these studies together, Chiecchi stretches the notion of origins, categorizing within it ideas as diverse as biblical narratives from Genesis, the foundation of Florence and family histories. Each of the essays focuses on how one of the two great writers treats the founding mythology in his works. Each chapter can be taken as a free-standing study, but when put together the analyses come together to form a consistent perspective on the topic. In other words, despite the variety of its essays, the volume reads like a well-structured monograph.

The first three essays deal with Dante, and therefore may be of less interest to *Heliotropia's* readership, but nonetheless, they establish the themes of the work as a whole. In the first, Chiecchi discusses Dante's retelling of the biblical stories of the origin of language and the Tower of Babel in *De vulgari eloquentia*. Dante, Chiecchi notes, augments *Genesis* by making recourse to reason: Sacred Scripture relates that Eve spoke first, but it is more reasonable to suppose that Adam spoke earlier; and it is reasonable to suppose that Adam's first word was "God," which in Hebrew is *El*. Similarly, Dante relates the *lingua confusionis* of Babel to the division of labor in his own society, as different types of worker on the tower had different forms of speech; the carpenters had one language, the masons another, and so on, and none of them was intelligible to the others. Thus, on his own authority, Dante fills in the gaps of the biblical narrative with philosophical reasoning.

The following two essays deal with the history of Florence in Dante's corpus. In the second, Chiecchi explores Dante's narration of the city's foundation. Brunetto Latini relates the legend of Catiline taking refuge in Fiesole when he rebelled against Rome. After Rome razed Fiesole, it founded Florence in the river valley below. In the third, Chiecchi discusses Dante's personal and family history as revealed in the discourse with Cacciaguida in *Paradiso* 16. The question of Florence's history, as well as that of the nobility of the Alighieri, are at play in the Circle of Mars. These aspects of history do not lay dormant in the past, but rather are alive in the present for Dante. In the *Commedia* Dante consistently contrasts the nobility of Roman blood in the Florentines to the perfidy of the *Fiesolani*,

and he uses the glorious past of his family to support the project of his *magnum opus*.

The last three essays of the collection are dedicated to Giovanni Boccaccio, building upon the earlier chapters. In Chapter Four, “Le ‘anticaglie’ del *Filocolo*: Fondazioni e metamorfosi,” Chiecchi analyzes the aside comments strewn throughout the *Filocolo* regarding the foundation and history of Fiesole. Boccaccio repeats the legends that Fiesole was the first city founded after Noah’s flood, and that it needed to be rebuilt after the sacking by Totila. Similarly, the following chapter, “Giovanni Boccaccio e l’aition fiesolano” explores Boccaccio’s versions of the founding of Fiesole and Florence in the *Filocolo* and the *Commedia delle ninfe fiorentine*; thus, Chiecchi demonstrates how the legend passes from Brunetto Latini to Dante’s *Commedia* to Boccaccio’s corpus. Lastly, in the sixth chapter, “Da Gannai a Beritola: La rappresentazione della madre nelle opera di Boccaccio,” Chiecchi treats Boccaccio’s family history. In it, he examines the mother-figures in Boccaccio’s works, since Boccaccio almost never speaks of his mother directly. Thus, the latter three chapters form strong parallels with the essays on Dante.

In conclusion, Chiecchi’s work illustrates the importance of history — history as they understood it — for Dante and Boccaccio. History was not merely a series of empty facts and dates, but a precursor to the present, and therefore a necessary means to comprehend current situations. Of course, for Boccaccio Dante was a historical precursor as well. Therefore, Chiecchi adds to the ample critical discourse about the intellectual impact that Dante had on the writer from Certaldo. His volume, in closing, makes a contribution to the criticism of Boccaccio’s literature.

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