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*Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* ed. by Piero Boitani  
(review)

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recognition of how these ultimate “de-composing” processes may reflect certain linguistic theories and controversies of Chaucer’s own time: Ockham, in this respect, counterbalances Borges.

This is a reading of the poem then, that does ample justice both to its modern appeal and to its medieval filiations. The complexity of Chaucer’s approach to his subject—the “wide oscillation,” if not conflict, in his attitude toward glory and fame—is for the most part scrupulously assessed. I think, however, that there is some tendency—perhaps in the interests of linking Chaucer more closely with the Italian avant-garde—to overstress the “triumphal” nature of the representation of the poets on their pillars in Fame’s hall (pp. 129, 172–73). Chaucer’s comparison of these figures “en masse to rooks’ nests” (*HF* 1514–16) suggests to my mind a concept of tradition that is not *wholly* harmonious or celebratory.

Boitani’s prose throughout carries conviction and often achieves striking precision. There are some slips in syntactic and prepositional usage which an alert editor ought surely to have picked up, but these are neither frequent nor seriously misleading (and it is perhaps no more than fitting that a book on such a subject should conclude with an anacoluthon). In general, the presentation is worthy of the quality of the argument, and the ideas are made accessible without oversimplification. The book as a whole offers lively stimuli and constructive clues for those who have newly stumbled into Chaucer’s *Domus Dedali*, as well as for experienced labyrinthophiles.

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PIERO BOITANI, ed. *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Pp. xii, 313. \$49.50.

The original essay collection has in recent years assumed an ever more important role in scholarship, almost completely displacing its progenitor, the *festschrift*, often challenging the periodical, and even vying with the single-author work for the professor’s ever less meaningful book money. Even more than the reprint collection, it depends for its success on its scholar-editor, on his insight in choosing the topic, and on his thorough

appreciation of the work being done in the field. In this regard Boitani is impeccable: he fully understands the richness and centrality of his topic, a topic heretofore fractioned, perhaps because of the range of expertise it demands; and he has brought together an array of scholars all of whom ably present and advance their particular subjects. The result is a book wholly integrated by its topic and yet enriched by the diverse approaches of its individual contributors.

The first three essays—John Lerner’s “Chaucer’s Italy,” Janet Coleman’s “English Culture in the Fourteenth Century,” and Wendy Child’s “Anglo-Italian Contacts”—are fine examples of background studies, artfully avoiding meaningless enthusiasm by almost flawlessly selecting specific yet representative material. Such careful selection implies thoughtful and thorough control, and this is evidenced by the range and judiciousness of Coleman’s overview and, even more strikingly, by the insight and information of Child’s essay, certainly the best short work on this highly complex topic.

The two essays that follow—J. A. W. Bennet’s “Chaucer, Dante, and Boccaccio” (a slightly altered reprint of a 1976 lecture) and Boitani’s “What Dante Meant to Chaucer”—use a method (Lowes’ *in vacuo* “linked atoms”) and a tone (approaching Danteolatry) that may be open to question. Both essays, however, are masterful examples of their kind.

Significantly, the seven remaining essays focus on aspects of the Chaucer-Boccaccio relationship. Three of these—David Wallace’s “Chaucer and Boccaccio’s Early Writings,” Barry Windeatt’s “Chaucer and the *Filostrato*,” and Robin Kirkpatrick’s “The Wake of the *Commedia*: Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* and Boccaccio’s *Decameron*”—should certainly be included among the essential articles on their respective subjects. While only slightly less impressive, Boitani’s “Style, Iconography and Narrative: The Lesson of the *Teseida*” succeeds in reflecting that scholar’s past work on Boccaccio (1977) and on the narrative genre (1982). The remaining articles—Kirkpatrick’s study of the Griselda story, Havely’s informative “Chaucer, Boccaccio and the Friars,” and Godman’s careful look at the pertinence of Boccaccio’s Latin works—attest not only to this increased interest in Boccaccio but also to the variety of approaches it can take. Finishing off the volume is Giaccherini’s excellent bibliography, a boon to anyone venturing into this subtle, stimulating world.

In both topic and treatment *Chaucer and the Italian Trecento* is an important book. Boitani’s overall direction and the generally high quality of the essays (especially those of Childs, Wallace, Windeatt, and

Kirkpatrick) have come together to give us an integrated work of unusual scope and variety. Indeed, it comes very close to being a model of the original essay collection.

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DAVID BURNLEY, *A Guide to Chaucer's Language*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983. Pp. xvi, 264. \$22.50.

The writer of a new guide on this subject has a choice: he can attempt a comprehensive synthesis, or he can select a more limited number of topics, explain their basic principles, and then show how those principles can be used in the study of Chaucer. Since Burnley's intention is to encourage his readers to ask the right questions, he chooses mainly the latter course. The topics chosen are of two kinds; in the earlier part of the book he aims to equip the reader to interpret the text and in the latter part to place Chaucer's language in its broader contemporary context.

The purpose of chapter 1 is to show the significance of some of the differences between Chaucerian and Modern English grammar, and it includes a useful flow chart explaining the complex distinction between *ye* and *thou*. In the following two chapters, tense, verbal aspect, and negation are singled out for special treatment, while chapter 4, "Textual Coherence," deals with standard devices of linkage and with scribal punctuation. Chapter 5, which begins part 2 of the book, assesses the regional and dialectal status of late-fourteenth-century London English.

Throughout Burnley correctly accepts as a fact that Chaucer wrote in regular iambics, but, in view of the long history of controversy on this question, it would have been an advantage to have the reasons and evidence stated. It is not sufficient to point to the Hengwrt-Ellesmere scribe's usage for final *-e*, for that scribe's usage, though doubtless similar to Chaucer's, is clearly his own and disagrees with Chaucer's metrical practice for certain forms like *bise*, and *-e(n)* in preterite plural endings. The final proof for iambics must surely come from the many ways in which Chaucer availed himself of variants to fit the meter. Examples of these are given in various other connections, but they are not directed at this specific