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*Amorosa Visione: Bilingual Edition* by Giovanni Boccaccio  
(review)

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to the materials investigated should be that of another ill-fitting coat. This review, of course, may be similarly related to *its* subject.

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GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO. *Amorosa Visione: Bilingual Edition*. Trans. Robert Hollander, Timothy Hampton, and Margherita Frankel, Intro. by Vittore Branca. Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1986. Pp. xxix, 255. \$30.00.

Boccaccio's *Amorosa Visione* sees a worldly dreamer-narrator wandering past *triumphs* of Wisdom, Fame, Wealth, Love, and Fortune before discovering his beloved in a *locus amoenus*; there is a surprise ending. The poem, in fifty cantos of terza rima, is not one of Boccaccio's more accomplished performances. Its ambitions are excessive and contradictory: Boccaccio wants to be a dreamer in the French *dits amoureux* style, a disciple of Dante (who is discovered in the *triumph* of Wisdom), a mythographer (some three hundred exemplary figures are included) and an autobiographical apologist who gazes at his avaricious father, bewails his own poverty, and contemplates the possibility of artistic fame. At its worst the poem bogs down in a welter of catalogues and mechanical formulas: Boccaccio as Lydgate. And its brighter moments come almost as an escape from the higher design; the mythographical material on Jove and Juno, for example, accumulates to form a marital drama that has the comic vigor of a *Decameron novella*. For all its apparent shortcomings, however, this Boccaccian text was immensely successful in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; only the *Decameron* proved more popular.

Petrarch, an early admirer, was inspired to compose his own *Trionfi*. The Boccaccian and Petrarchan poems were subsequently often read as two halves of a diptych. They exerted a powerful and widespread influence on the visual arts, on Italian poets, and, directly or indirectly, on foreign authors such as Christine de Pisan, Chaucer, Stephen Hawes, and Queen Elizabeth I.

Medievalists wishing to consider Chaucer in his European setting will find this new bilingual edition of the *Amorosa Visione* extremely useful.

Boccaccio's poem survives in two versions: A (represented by eight manuscripts but not printed until 1818) and B (no manuscripts; *editio princeps* 1521). Version A has been assigned to the period 1342–43, and B (in which A is modestly reworked in the direction of expanded humanist scholarship), to 1355–60. The B text bears some signs of tinkering by its sixteenth-century editor, Girolamo Claricio. Hollander, Hampton, and Frankel juxtapose Branca's edition of B with their own English translation. This translation is excellent and should stand as a model for future parallel editions. It remains faithful not only to the letter of the original but also, as far as possible, to its syntax and prosody. Each translated line attempts to keep in step with the Italian: some lines require only six English syllables; some require fourteen. Such a translation allows the English reader to maintain very close contact with Boccaccio's poem. The translation is accurate, and the text is remarkably free from any kind of error. The publishers and sponsors of this volume are to be congratulated for producing an edition that is twice as attractive as the recent Garland *Filostrato* for less than half the price.

This edition is accompanied by serviceable notes and is prefaced with an introduction by Vittore Branca (translated from his edition of 1974). This tribute to Branca, the greatest Boccaccio scholar of this century, is a generous one since Branca's views on the *Visione* often differ from the published opinions of Hollander. The volume also features an index of names (compiled by Olga Branca) which covers both A and B texts. Italian spellings are retained, and the English reader will need to exercise a little ingenuity in tracking down Hercules, Hero, Homer, and Oedipus (Erocole, Ero, Omero, Edipo). But Chaucerians should find Boccaccio's poem well worth reading. The *Visione* shares a good deal of common ground with the dream poems Chaucer wrote after his first visit to Italy in 1373. In *The House of Fame*, Chaucer struggles, like Boccaccio before him, to sustain a first encounter with Dante within a French-derived dream-vision format. Both poets evolve a technique of describing paintings to narrate the themes of fame, fortune, and disastrous love. Certain key figures receive comparable treatment; both poets shift from a Virgilian to an Ovidian perspective, for example, in the course of narrating the romance of Dido (*AV* 28–29; *HF* 143–467), which quite eclipses the imperial mission of Aeneas. Boccaccio's conflict of loyalties before the two superscribed gateways of *Visione* 2–3 recalls Chaucer's dilemma in *The Parliament of Fowls*, and his subsequent escape from the oppressive and destructive triumphs of Fortune into a *locus amoenus* dominated by a beautiful female figure is again retraced in Chaucer's *Parliament*. The "gran signor" (15.14), who presides over Boccac-

cio's *triumph* of Love finds his counterpart in *The Legend of Good Women*, which, like the Boccaccian *triumph*, mixes first-person involvement in contemporary politics with praise for ancient ladies. In the Boccaccian text, as in all these Chaucerian poems, the narrator hungers perennially for fresh experiences, and yet (unlike the Dantean *pellegrino*) he seems to learn nothing from them. Boccaccio's final, climactic cantos shift us to the climax of *Troilus and Criseyde*, where the impulse to seek virtue through love (sexual satisfaction) is pitted against the conquest of love through virtue (sexual abstinence). The *Visione's* judgment on fame seems, finally, to cast a shadow over the road to Canterbury and the pursuit of vernacular authorship. April brings green grass and a season for fame; September brings Death and Judgment (33.22–27):

It is true that some, more valorous than others,  
 merited fame; yet even if the world endure,  
 their glorious names shall die.  
 For fame is like the grass  
 which Aries pushes forth for you; then,  
 later, Libra arrives and turns it dry and brown.

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E. JANE BURNS. *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1985. Pp. 208. \$22.00.

In *Arthurian Fictions: Rereading the Vulgate Cycle*, E. Jane Burns does just that—reread the Cycle, and her reading is not one which will delight traditionalist critics. What she does is largely reject all previous accounts of the Vulgate Cycle and argue for a completely new interpretation based on the principles of rhetorical ornamentation, specifically that of *repetitio*. The key to the Cycle lies not in allegory or *entrelacement* but in repetition of and variation upon a limited number of narrative structures by which the text is in effect constantly in the process of retelling, actually reproducing itself as *text*. Thus, the purpose of the Vulgate writers was not to legitimize a basically profane story by imposing a loose allegorical frame upon it and pretending to divine or semi-divine authority, but to promote the generation of the text itself and apparently revel in the very act of literary