space, rather than the disorder and destruction predicted by Vacca.

This volume presents an interesting collection of topics and interpretations of medievalism. It is a Middle Ages, however, that is decidedly confessional, the focus is very much on church, not state. It is also a collection that demonstrates most persuasively the value of ongoing study into our medieval past.

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Eugenio L. Giusti, *Dall'amore cortese alla comprensione. Il viaggio ideologico di Giovanni Boccaccio dalla "Caccia di Diana" al "Decameron"*. Milano: Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto, 1999. Pp. 188.

We gather from the subtitle of this small volume that it joins a classical critical tradition of Boccaccio studies, namely those surveys of the Certaldan's vernacular fiction that proceed from the first work to the *Decameron*, a chronological line pressed into an ascensional axis from minor to major, from ineptitude to perfection. Its paradigm, I suppose, was De Sanctis, whose followers for better and worse have counted among others Gigli, Di Pino, Grabher, Billanovich, Bergin, and Bruni. Although a few have imaginatively broken the mold—Branca with his *Boccaccio medievale*; more recently, Bragantini and Forni with their *Lessico decameroniano*—it has proven persistent. If one is going to “do” Boccaccio, this is the preprogrammed way to proceed.

A fifteen-page opening chapter covers *Caccia di Diana*, *Filostrato*, *Filocolo*, *Teseida*, *Comedia delle ninfe fiorentine*, *Amorosa visione*, and *Ninfale fiesolano*. Its confident concluding paragraph justifies such a condensed treatment of narratives characterized by “ripetitivita’”: “Ritengo quindi di poter con sicurezza affermare che l'autore ed i personaggi di ciascuna delle opere analizzate agiscono secondo schemi e formule a priori appartenenti ad un unico modello ideologico [sic].” The guilty model, Giusti argues, was courtly love as defined by Andreas Capellanus, a belief system that Boccaccio begins to question with the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta* (ch. 2). In its heroine's impractical “scelta ideologico-letteraria” to be a victim, Giusti plausibly sees connections with the *Corbaccio* dreamer; he sets the romance and the *trattato* in a chiasmic relationship that schematizes their continuities as well as their polarities. From here he proceeds to the *Corbaccio* itself (ch. 3), belatedly releasing a statement that clarifies the rather puzzling first part of his book's title. As I understand it, Giusti is suggesting that Boccaccio's protagonists, from *Caccia di Diana* to *Decameron*, gradually become less deluded and more comprehending. Instead of behaving according to rigidly stylized conventions, they learn to interact more sensi-

bly with their surroundings, and they reach the full ideal of "comprensione" in the *Decameron* (chs. 4-5). If Fiammetta in the *Elegia* would rather be a literary character than a living person, and the *Corbaccio* dreamer suffers from a bad case of "incapacità cognitiva," the enlightened *brigata* act out their commitment to responsible life in society by returning from their rustic utopia to the plague-ridden city. Actually, the *Decameron* goes even farther, displaying to its readers not only positive examples of "comprehension" but also that most humane of virtues, "compassion." Giusti ends his study on a moving note of personal engagement with Boccaccio, who speaks to him at the turn of our new millennium with its own Black Death, a world besieged and wounded by Aids.

Giusti's assertions, if cautious, are convincing. Separating out his insights from a heavy overlay of plot summaries and dutiful critical overviews does, however, require some diligent prospecting on the part of the reader. Although he assures us that he is aware of the distinction between author and narrator, he seems to blur the two in his thesis. Is he saying that Boccaccio's characters become progressively more rational, or that Boccaccio himself gets better at defining understandable models of reasonable behavior? Or both? I wish we could hear more original analysis. I wish, too, that we might more often be allowed the enjoyment of a style in Giusti's own voice instead of lingering dissertationese sprinkled with academic jargon that crops up like turnips in a grassy yard.

Giusti's contribution lies in his central chapters, which isolate a segment of the Boccaccian continuum not usually thought of as a unit—the *Elegia*, *Corbaccio*, and *Decameron*. Although in the end he disappointingly waffles (unwilling, perhaps, to challenge the judgment of a critic as imposing as Padoan), his focus assumes a dating of the *Corbaccio* close to the *Decameron* in consonance with the findings of Cassell and Hollander. Whether we agree or not that he traces a great poet's "ideological evolution," Giusti offers a thoughtful dialogue with the most recent Boccaccio scholarship, usefully laid out in a final bibliography.

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***Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare. Four Early Stories of Star-Crossed Love* Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Nicole Prunster. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2000.**

The title of Nicole Prunster's monograph calls attention to the celebrated stories of *Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare*, that is the four Italian and French early versions of the future play. As the author makes clear in her Introduction the never-end-