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-

ing debate about the origins of Shakespeare's most famous drama finds scholars in agreement on essentially four names: Masuccio Salernitano, Luigi Da Porto, Matteo Bandello and the French author Pierre Boaistuau. In this fine volume, published by the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies of Victoria University, readers will find annotated translations into modern English of the four tales and a scholarly Introduction by Nicole Prunster.

As the author's preface states the four versions "have been selected because they constitute the main stream, as it were, of the story's evolution toward the tragedy's definitive literary realization." The author's goal is not to compare these stories with Shakespeare's play; that is left to a different kind of scholarly work or to the reader. Rather Prunster's book aims at offering the possibility of reading in English all four versions of these fascinating stories of "star-crossed love." The book is divided into an Introduction that traces the lives and works of the four authors and then reflects on "the evolution of the *Romeo and Juliet* tale" (6) followed by the annotated translations. The idea of collecting these versions and translating them into English represents a welcome addition for students and scholars of English literature as well, especially those who are not familiar with renaissance French and Italian. This book will also prove useful for general classes of renaissance literature in translation, for history of theater classes, as well as for interdisciplinary courses on renaissance culture that deal with the transmission of texts.

The first translation is from the thirty-third novella of the only known literary work by Masuccio Salernitano *Il Novellino*. The protagonists are named Mariotto and Ganozza and the story is set in Siena and Alexandria, while the time is only vaguely referred to as "non è già gran tempo" (not long ago). Masuccio's tale ends tragically with Ganozza's death in a convent, after learning of the conviction of her lover. The subsequent version by Luigi Da Porto is much more developed and is entitled *La Giulietta*. The story is set in Verona during the rule of Bartolomeo della Scala and the names of the rival families are already Montecchi and Cappelletti. Bandello's longer yet version of the story, focuses upon the development of the characters and psychological analysis, while adding vivid descriptions of the city and its customs. Finally Pierre Boaistuau included the tale in his collection named *Histoires tragiques* published in 1559. His version is clearly taken from Bandello whose authorship is recognized only in the *editio princeps* of 1559; while in the second edition, published that same year, Bandello's name disappears. As Prunster makes clear in her Introduction "What seems indisputable in the evolutionary line which leads from Masuccio to Shakespeare is the intermediary role played by Pierre Boaistuau's "Histoire troisieme de deux amans, dont l'un mourut de venin, l'autre de tristess", closely based as it is on Bandello's tale" (7). The only significant change in the French version focuses on how Juliet decides to die, stabbing herself to death instead of passing away overcome by grief, as in the earlier versions.

The translation does not aim to provide a philologically correct critical edition but it is accurate, based on very good editions of Italian and French texts and is highly

readable. Prunster's work has taken into account the critical tradition of studies on Shakespeare's sources to which she refers while reconstructing the fascinating story of the circulation of the *Juliet and Romeo* tale in Europe. In the last part of the informative Introduction Prunster engages in an interesting discussion of the literary influences on Da Porto and Bandello's tales. While the influence of the *Decameron* has been well recognized, the author tries to establish some less obvious ties to Dante's *Commedia* and especially to his *Vita Nuova*. In the concluding lines she suggests that Da Porto, Bandello and his imitator Boaistuau "with their introduction of Bartolomeo della Scala and their various embedded Dantesque references, wish to elevate the love of Romeo and Juliet to the ranks of Dante's love for Beatrice"(15). To a degree, then, the author suggests that Shakespeare celebrated drama could be more indebted to Dante's work than is generally realized; this suggestion may well add some new excitement to the scholarly debates about Shakespeare's star crossed lovers and these translations will serve all lovers of Shakespeare who seek a better understanding for his famous tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*.

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