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Giovanni Boccaccio. *Life of Dante*. J. G. Nichols, trans. (100 Pages.) London: Hesperus Press, 2002. xvii + 91 pp. £5.99 / $12.00.

This new English translation, by J. S. Nichols, of Boccaccio's biography of Dante is a very welcome publication, providing as it does an affordable and attractive paperback edition which will be of interest to the general and specialist reader alike. The book forms part of the interesting new "100 Pages" series published by Hesperus Press, which is dedicated to presenting "short classic works" which are "unjustly neglected or simply little known in the English-speaking world." To this end, Hesperus has commissioned new translations of the texts, and proclaims a "completely fresh editorial approach," which denudes the text of extraneous critical material in order to facilitate an original encounter between modern reader and the classic text.[1] Instead of the standard introduction which might be expected in a modern re-issue of a historical text, each work is introduced by a major literary figure who provides a personalized response to the text. Hesperus Press's aim in re-presenting classic texts in order to make them accessible to a contemporary, non-scholarly audience is laudable, but, as I will show in this review, such an approach creates some significant problems for the more specialized reader. I hope that my discussion of these problems will go some way towards rectifying this situation for Boccaccio scholars with regard to this volume.

It is worth considering briefly the history of the title of Boccaccio's biography of Dante, since this may illuminate some of the ways in which this text has been variously presented to and understood by its reading publics since its composition. The first redaction of this text is thought to have been composed sometime between 1350 and 1355, and Boccaccio initially gave it a Latin title: *DE ORIGINE, VITA, STUDIIS ET MORIBUS VIRI CLARISSIMI DANTIS ALIGERII FLORENTINI, POETE ILLUSTRIS, ET DE OPERIBUS COMPOSITIS AB EODEM, INCIPIT FELICITER*.[2] Boccaccio's text has been preserved in an autograph manuscript,[3] where it introduces an anthology of Dante's vernacular writings, and thus it can be shown that Boccaccio probably conceived of his Life as an introduction to Dante's work, rather than as a free-standing, independent work.[4] Boccaccio then revised the text twice more during the 1360s, and these subsequent redactions are known as the *Compendia*. Probably as a result of the influence of Petrarch, Boccaccio removed the Latin title and those statements which framed Dante's intellectual contribution as a "proto"-humanist for

[1] "The reader will be encouraged to discover the greatest European and American writers through short significant works, each around 100 pages in length. Notes will be kept to a minimum and pruned of all intrusive critical comment." The full mission statement may be found at http://www.hesperuspress.com/aboutus/default.asp.

[2] All references to the original text are taken from the critical edition established by Pier Giorgio Ricci, *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, 10 vols (Milano: Mondadori, 1964–98), III, 423–538 (p. 437). The textual history of the *Trattatello* is discussed in the notes to Ricci's edition: *Tutte le opere*, III, pp. 848–56; there is a summary in English of recent literature on its textual history in Vincenzo Zin Bollettino's English translation, *The Life of Dante (Trattatello in laude di Dante)*, Garland Library of Medieval Literature, Series B, 40 (New York & London: Garland, 1990), pp. xxi–xxvii.

[3] Toledo, Biblioteca Capitular, 104.6. For the foliation and full description of this ms., see http://dobc.unipv.it/~finaz/caronte/vitanova/schede/To.php.

[4] See Zin Bollettino, p. xxiv.

the second (and shortest) version of the biography[5]; rather than stressing Dante's classical learning, the new text presented instead a popular Life of a poet of the people, with all the inferred inferiority of status that this might suggest.[6] The third redaction restored some elements from the first with some rewriting, and is though to be the final, definitive, version. Given the involved textual history of this text (and the undeniable unwieldiness of its first title), it is generally referred to as either the *Vita di Dante*, or the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, after Boccaccio's own description of it in the *Esposizioni* ("scrissi in sua laude un trattatello").[7]

In English, the *Trattatello* has always been characterized as a "Life," and thus its connotations as a "treatise in praise of Dante" have escaped the Anglophone reading public. There was particular interest in this work around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when four translations of the *Trattatello* were published in Great Britain and America within six years of each other. The first (partial) English translation of the text, by Philip H. Wicksteed, appeared in 1898; this was followed in 1900 by a translation by G. R. Carpenter in a deluxe edition for the Grolier Club, and in 1901 by another new translation by James Robinson Smith. Wicksteed then revised his provisional translation of the text, and in 1904 published a new version.[8] No further translations of Boccaccio's text appeared until almost a century later, with Vincenzo Zin Bollettino's 1990 translation. This was followed in 2002 by J. S. Nichols's translation. Bollettino's translation is aimed squarely at the academic user, and is accompanied by a substantial scholarly apparatus, while, as previously mentioned, Nichols's translation is an avowedly non-academic edition aimed at an interested but non-specialist audience.

Although Hesperus Press claims to have stripped out extraneous critical matter, the *Life of Dante* contains a considerable amount of paratextual material: the volume comprises a short Foreword by A. N. Wilson (pp. vii–x); a translator's Introduction by J. G. Nichols (pp. xi–xvi); an acknowledgments page (of which more later); a prefatory poem, "Dante Speaks," attributed here to Boccaccio (p. 3); the *Life* itself, divided into seventeen chapters, each with introductory rubric (pp. 5–78); short notes to the text (p. 79); and a novella from the *Decameron*, the tale of Guido Cavalcanti (*Dec*. VI.9) (pp. 85–91). The volume concludes with short biographical details on Boccaccio and J. G. Nichols. Unfortunately, the suspicion persists that some of this material, and in particular the novella, was included only to bulk up the page count to make it nearer the requisite one hundred pages.

Wilson's Foreword is thoughtful and interesting, and makes a sophisticated argument that links Boccaccio's *Trattatello* to the fundamental idea of the palinode in Dante's writ-

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[5] Todd Boli makes a strong argument that the *Trattatello* was in fact conceived as a defence of Dante in Petrarchan terms in his article "Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, or *Dante Resartus*," *Renaissance Quarterly* 41 (1988): 389–412.

[6] "Elogio popolare di un poeta popolare" (Ricci, *Note*, 428).

[7] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Esposizioni sopra la Comedia*, Giorgio Padoan, ed. in *Tutte le opere*, VI (1965), *Accessus*, 36 (p. 8).

[8] The editions are as follows: *A Provisional Translation of the Early Lives of Dante and of His Poetical Correspondence with Giovanni del Virgilio*, Philip H. Wicksteed, trans. (Hull: Elsom & Co., 1898); *A Translation of Giovanni Boccaccio's Life of Dante, with an Introduction and a Note on the Portraits of Dante*, G. R. Carpenter, trans. (New York: The Grolier Club of the City of New York, 1900); *The Earliest Lives of Dante*, James Robinson Smith, trans. (New York: Holt, 1901); *The Early Lives of Dante*, Philip H. Wicksteed, trans. (London: Moring, 1904). Two further American editions of Wicksteed's translation were also published later: *The Life of Dante, translated by Philip Henry Wicksteed* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1904), and *The Life of Dante: Giovanni Boccaccio's Encomium on Dante or "Trattatello in laude di Dante"* (San Francisco: John Henry Nash, 1922). Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult the 1900 translation by Carpenter for this article.

ing. He shows that the *Life of Dante* is primarily a non-realistic biography, a work that attempts to explore the key elements of Dante's life through the "emblematic uses he makes of them in his poetry."[9] Unfortunately, this reading of the *Trattatello* is immediately contradicted by the translator's own introduction, which assesses the text in generalized terms of modern biography rather than as a specific document of Boccaccio's engagement with Dante, or even as a medieval text. The shortcomings of Nichols's approach are evident when he considers the misogynist digression that occurs at §§52–59 in the Italian text:

> This biography is not faultless, and the section most open to criticism is the long attack on marriage in the third chapter. […] [W]hatever we may think of his opinions, they are artistically out of place here, particularly since he admits he has no knowledge that Dante suffered the woes he mentions. […] In the end, however, this lengthy diatribe reveals too much about Boccaccio and quite possibly nothing about Dante.

Such a reading makes the misogynist digression nothing more than a manifestation of Boccaccio's supposed bigotry against women. In fact, it is far more likely that the misogynist digression is an example of Boccaccio's deploying the antifeminist *topos* at an appropriate point in his treatise; I would contend that it is an example of a contextually appropriate generic reference rather than a personal opinion. Overall, Nichols focuses on a literal, "realistic" reading, rather than seeing the text in terms of its literary sources and analogues, but happily, this misapprehension does not affect the high quality of the translation itself.

Before proceeding to my discussion of the translation itself, it is necessary to say something about the almost total lack of critical information regarding the source texts. No critical details of the source text used for the translation are provided, beyond the reference to the edition used.[10] In fact, that edition reproduces the text established by Pier Giorgio Ricci for the 1974 Mondadori critical edition. Both editions provide the full text of the first two redactions of the *Trattatello*, and the textual variants for the third; it is therefore by no means clear from Nichols' notes which version has been translated for the Hesperus volume. Some detective work has been necessary to establish which of the three versions of the *Trattatello* form the basis for this translation, and in fact, it can be confirmed that this is a translation of the first and longest redaction of the *Trattatello*, like its other English predecessors. It would surely have made more sense to have cited the critical edition for the Mondadori edition as the basis for the translation, rather than a later paperback edition.

Nowhere in the Hesperus edition is there any evidence that the *Trattatello* was substantially reworked twice by Boccaccio. For a text with such a complex compositional history, this is a grave oversight. Given that the likely readership for this book will probably be university students of Dante or Boccaccio in the English-speaking world, the omission of this information effectively removes both the key facts regarding the composition process of this text, and the question of the changing cultural perceptions of the importance of Dante and his works in the literary generation which followed him.

The lack of critical information extends to the other two Boccaccio texts translated in this book: the poem "Dante Speaks" and novella VI.9 from the *Decameron*. On the Acknowledgments page, the poem is shown to be taken from a seriously outdated edition,

[9] Nichols, p. ix.
[10] "This translation of *Life of Dante* is taken from the edition of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, edited by Luigi Sasso (Garzanti, Milan, 1995)" (Nichols, p. xvii).

Giosuè Carducci's 1862 anthology, *Rime di M. Cino da Pistoia e d'altri del secolo XIV*.[11] The first appearance of this poem is in a 1477 Venetian incunabula edition of Dante's works (which also includes Boccaccio's *Trattatello*), and its inclusion here is certainly justifiable in terms of the publishing history of the text. However, it again would have been worth the editor consulting the critical edition of Boccaccio's *Rime*, where it is shown that it is highly doubtful that Boccaccio composed this poem.[12]

Likewise, the source text cited for the *Decameron* novella is the Mursia paperback edited by Cesare Segre, the text of which precedes the Branca critical edition.[13] The novella itself is heavily edited at the beginning and the end, with the introductory rubric and frame-story silently excised. The justification for the inclusion of this novella can be found in the translator's introduction: "Boccaccio was a literary genius. His most famous work is of course the *Decameron*, whose quality is well exemplified by that story which sparkles with the wit and presence of mind of Dante's best friend, Guido Cavalcanti (see page 81)."[14]

One curiosity in the Hesperus edition is the division of the text into seventeen chapters and the insertion of chapter titles, neither of which features appears in the critical Italian text. In fact, this editorial intervention is found in every previous English translation of the text that I have consulted, and can be traced back to the source text for Wicksteed's 1898 *Provisional Translation of the Early Lives of Dante*, the Macrì-Leone edition of the *Vita di Dante*, which is divided into chapters with titles.[15] The modern critical editions of the *Trattatello* no longer divide the text into chapters, and instead present it as continuous prose. (This is also the case in Sasso's edition, the source text for Nichols's translation.) The editorial decision to ignore the structure of the established critical Italian edition in favour of the textual tradition of the English *Lives* is, however, understandable, as the division into chapters allows a certain ease of manoeuvring through the text, albeit at the expense of its authenticity. A note explaining the reasoning behind this decision to modify the structure of the source Italian text might have been useful.[16]

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The second part of this review will be dedicated to a comparison of Nichols' translation with three previous English translations. I have selected three key types of passage to com-

[11] *Rime di M. Cino da Pistoia e d'altri del secolo XIV*, ed. by Giosuè Carducci, *Classici italiani*, series 3, 76 (Istituto Editoriale Italiano, Milan, no date).

[12] The poem is number 32 in the "Parte seconda" of the *Rime* (p. 112). Branca comments: "Questa nobile prosopea di Dante il Carducci immaginò fosse scritta 'o sotto un ritratto del poeta o per mandare innanzi alla Commedia'; e difatti appare la prima volta anonima nell'edizione dantesca vendeliana del 1477 e poi attribuita al B. nella stampa del Dolce (1555), assai noto per falsificazioni e attribuzioni facilone. Alcune forme non sono fiorentine (p. es. Matregna)" (*Rime*, Vittore Branca, ed, in *Tutte le opere*, vol. V.i [1992]: 321). For a description of the Venetian edition, see the *Gesamtkatalog der Wiegendrucke*, 7964.

[13] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, Cesare Segre, ed. (Milano: Mursia, 1966). The Hesperus volume cites the 1987 reprint.

[14] Nichols, p. xiii.

[15] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Vita di Dante Alighieri, poeta fiorentino*, Francesco Macrì-Leone, ed. (Florence: Sansoni, 1888).

[16] The presence of the chapter titles in the earlier English translations is a result of their reliance on Macrì-Leone's edition as a source text; less understandable, perhaps, is their presence in Bollettino's supposedly academic edition, which was translated from Ricci's critical edition. It is interesting to note that Bollettino claims to reproduce that text faithfully, yet does not see fit to acknowledge the editorial impositions of the chapter divisions and headings: "I have scrupulously followed Pier Giorgio Ricci's edition of the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*, Volume III of *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio* (Verona [*sic*]: Mondadori, 1965), never making important word substitutions or radically altering the punctuation, although I have occasionally modified the syntax" (p. xlvii).

pare, in order to gain an overview of the various translators' treatment of different registers and style: firstly, an example of high-register, rhetorical writing; secondly, an example of middle-register, narrative writing; and thirdly, a more anecdotal passage, which includes direct reported speech. In addition, I have also compared the various translators' treatment of the Latin passages in the text.

The first passage is taken from the proemial section of the text, where the author attacks the city of Florence's iniquity for having exiled Dante:

> Oh scellerato pensiero, oh disonesta opera, oh miserabile esemplo e di futura ruina manifesto argomento! In luogo di quegli, ingiusta e furiosa dannazione, perpetuo sbandimento, alienazione de' paterni beni, e, se fare si fosse potuto, maculazione della gloriosissima fama, con false colpe gli fur donate. Delle quali cose le recenti orme della sua fuga e l'ossa nelle altrui terre sepulte e la sparta prole per l'altrui case, alquante ancora ne fanno chiare. Se a tutte l'altre iniquità fiorentine fosse possibile il nascondersi agli occhi di Dio, che veggono tutto, non dovrebbe questa una bastare a provocare sopra sé la sua ira? Certo sì. Chi in contrario sia esaltato, giudico che sia onesto il tacere[17] (§§5–6).

James Robinson Smith (1901):

> O iniquitous design! O shameless deed! O wretched example, clear proof of ruin to come! Instead of these rewards there was meted to him an unjust and bitter condemnation, perpetual banishment with alienation of his paternal goods, and, could it have been effected, the profanation of his glorious renown by false charges. The recent traces of his flight, his bones buried in an alien land, and his children scattered in the houses of others, still in part bear witness to these things. If all the other iniquities of Florence could be hidden from the all-seeing eyes of God, should not this one suffice to provoke his wrath upon her? Yea, in truth. Of him who, on the other hand, may be exalted, I deem it fitting to be silent (p. 10).

Philip H. Wicksteed (1904):

> Oh thought of infamy, oh shameful deed, oh miserable example, open proof of ruin to come! Instead of these rewards were meted out to him unjust and rabid condemnation, perpetual exile, alienation of his paternal goods, and, had it been possible, the tainting of his most glorious name by false accusations. Which things, in some part, the fresh footprints of his flight, his bones buried in an alien city and his children scattered in alien homes, still clearly shew to us. If all the other wrongs Florence hath wrought could be hidden from the all-seeing eyes of God, would not this one suffice to call down his wrath upon her? Yea, verily! But who hath counterwise been exalted, I hold it seemly to leave in silence (p. 3).

Vincenzo Zin Bollettino (1990):

> But, o wicked thought! O shameful deed! O miserable example, notorious proof of ruin to come! Instead of giving him these rewards, his fellow citizens handed him an unfair and violent condemnation: perpetual exile with loss of his family goods and, if it had been possible, the sullying of his illustrious name by false accusations. Witness to these deeds is partly borne out by the footprints of his recent flight, his bones which are buried in an alien place, and his children, who are scattered in the houses of others. Even if all the other

[17] All citations from the *Trattatello* in the main text are taken from the Mondadori critical edition; I reproduce the Macrì-Leone text (source text for the early translations) in the footnotes. The English translations are then presented in order according to their date of composition. Macrì-Leone reads: "Oh scelerato pensiero, oh disonesta opera, oh miserabile esemplo, di futura ruina manifesto argomento! In luogo di quelli, ingiusta e furiosa dannazione, perpetuo sbandimento e alienazione de' paterni beni, e, se far si fusse potuto, maculazione della gloriosissima fama con false colpe gli fur donate. Delle quali cose le ricenti orme della sua fuga e l'ossa nell'altrui terre sepulte e la sparta prole per l'altrui case, alquante ancora ne fanno chiare. Se a tutte l'altre iniquità fiorentine fusse possibile il nascondersi agli occhi di Dio che veggono tutto, non dovrebbe questa una bastare a provocare sopra sè la sua ira? Certo sì. Chi in contrario sia esaltato, giudico che sia onesto il tacere" (pp. 5–6).

> sins of Florence could be hidden from the eyes of God, Who sees all, would this one not bring down His wrath upon her? Indeed it would. I consider it proper to pass over in silence the reverse case of those who have been wrongly exalted (pp. 4–5).

J. G. Nichols (2002):

> Oh, what a horrible thought, infamous deed, wretched example, manifest sign of ruin to come! In place of reward, he suffered an unjust and hasty sentence, perpetual banishment, the alienation of his family estate, and, if such a thing could have been accomplished, the staining of his glorious fame by false accusations. To this the fresh traces of his wanderings, his bones buried in another country, his children scattered in others' houses, still in part bear witness. If all the other iniquities of Florence could be concealed from the all-seeing eyes of God, would this not alone suffice to draw down upon it His wrath? Yes, indeed! Of those who, on the other hand, have been exalted, I judge that it is better to remain silent (p. 6).

Smith's translation is clear and readable, but does not always follow the Italian original very closely (e.g., his translation of "scelerato pensiero" as "iniquitous design").[18] The archaic "Yea" provides a rhetorical flourish which may serve to highlight the historic distance between source text and translator. Wicksteed's translation is perhaps more "accurate" in terms of its lexis (e.g., "thought of infamy" for "scelerato pensiero"; "footprints" for "orme"), and he follows closely the syntax of the Italian text. The historicizing tone is much more evident in this passage than in Robinson, for example, with the use of "Yea, verily" for the emphatic "Certo sì." Overall, this translation is more accurate and more nuanced in terms of its vocabulary and fidelity to the source text, but the use of archaic British English makes its meaning much less clear to the modern reader. Bollettino's translation is strong in terms of its updating of the language, as can be seen, for example, in his rendering of "alienazione de' paterni beni" as "loss of his family goods," rather than the more opaque "alienation of paternal goods" seen in the previous translations. This sympathetic updating of the language makes the text very much more readable, and allows better transmission of the meaning. Nichols's treatment of the passage is also clear and readable, and succeeds in following Boccaccio's text quite closely. The rhythm of his opening sentence is interesting, and he seems to be attempting to go beyond a literal rendering in order to create a certain rhetorical effect; likewise his final sentence is, I believe, the most elegant translation of Boccaccio's original of all the examples discussed. Lexically, his choice of "alienation of his family estate" is less clear than Bollettino's solution for the same phrase; his choice of "staining" for "maculazione" is closer literally to the Italian, but is arguably less effective than Bollettino's "sullying."

The second passage to be considered is taken from the prelude to the misogynist invective, where Boccaccio invents details of the trials of Dante's married life according to misogynist *topoi*. I have selected this section primarily because it is an example of Boccaccio's medium-register narrative writing, containing a long sentence which is syntactically alien to English style:

> Ora, quanto alla nuova donna piace, è con costoro [his learned friends], e quel tempo, che ella vuole tolto da così celebre compagnia, gli conviene ascoltare i feminili ragionamenti, e quegli, se non vuol crescer la noia, contra il suo piacere non solamente acconsentir, ma lodare. Egli, costumato, quante volte la volgar turba gli rincresceva, di ritrarsi in alcuna solitaria parte e, quivi speculando, vedere quale spirito muovo il cielo, onde venga la vita agli animali che sono in terra, quali sieno le cagioni delle cose, o premeditare alcune invenzioni peregrine o alcune cose comporre, le quali appo li futuri facessero lui morto viver per fama;

[18] It should be noted that Smith was aware of Wicksteed's provisional translation of 1898: "For the rendering of certain words and phrases I am indebted to the translation of […] portions of the Boccaccio life by Mr. P. H. Wicksteed" (Smith, p. 6).

ora non solamente dalle contemplazioni dolci è tolto quante volte voglia ne viene alla nuova donna, ma gli conviene essere accompagnato di compagnia male a così fatte cose disposta (§§50–51).[19]

Smith:

But now he is bound to withdraw from this illustrious company whenever his new lady wishes him to listen to the talk of such women as she chooses, with whom he must not only agree against his pleasure, but whom he must praise, if he would not add to his troubles. It had been his custom, whenever the vulgar crowd wearied him, to retire to some solitary spot, and there in speculation to discover what spirit moves the heavens, whence comes life to animals, what are the causes of things; to forecast strange inventions or compose something that should make him live after death among future generations. But now not only is he drawn from these sweet contemplations as often as it pleases his new lady, but he must consort with company ill fitted for such things (p. 23).

Wicksteed:

Now he may be with these only so much as his new lady chooses; and what seasons it is her will shall be withdrawn from so illustrious companionship, he must bestow on female chatter, which, if he will not increase his woes, he must not only endure but must extol. He who was wont, when weary of the vulgar herd, to withdraw into some solitary place, and there consider in his speculations what spirit moveth the heaven, whence cometh life to the animals that are on earth, what are the causes of things; or to rehearse some rare invention, or compose some poem, which shall make him though dead yet live by fame amongst the folk that are to come; must now not only leave these sweet contemplations as often as the whim seizes his new lady, but must submit to company that ill sorts with such like things (pp. 23–24).

Bollettino:

But now he could be with those illustrious persons only when and if it pleased his new lady. And whenever his new lady wanted him to leave this prestigious company he had to listen to female talk; and if he did not wish to add to his troubles, against his will he had to not only agree with this chatter, but even praise it. He was accustomed, every time the conversation of the vulgar crowd annoyed him, to retire to some solitary place and there to consider in his speculations what spirit moves the heavens, where life comes from in the animals that are on earth, what the causes of things are, or how to predict some rare inventions, or to compose some poems that would make him, when dead, live by fame among the people still destined to be born. But now not only did he have to leave these serene contemplations every time the whim seized his new lady, but he had to consort with companions who were ill-disposed toward such things (p. 15).

J. G. Nichols:

But now he could be with them only so long as it pleased his bride, and whenever she wished to withdraw him from such high company, he was obliged to spend his time listening to womanish conversation which, if he wanted to avoid further annoyance, he had, against his will, not only to agree but to praise. He was accustomed, whenever the vulgar crowd wearied him, to withdraw into some solitary place, and there to speculate what spirit moves the heavens, whence comes the life of all creatures on earth, and what are the causes of things, or brood over strange ideas, or compose verses whose fame should after

[19]"Ora, quanto alla nuova donna piace, è con costoro, e quel tempo ch'ella vuole tolto da così celebre compagnia, gli conviene ascoltare li femminili ragionamenti, e quelli, se non vuol crescere la noia, contro il suo piacere non solamente acconsentire, ma lodare. Egli, costumato, quante volte la volgar turba gli rincresceva, di ritrarsi in alcuna solitaria parte, e quivi speculando, vedere quale spirito muova il cielo, onde venga la vita agli animali che sono in terra, quali sieno le cagioni delle cose; o premeditare alcune invenzioni peregrine o alcune cose comporre, le quali appo li futuri facessero lui morto vivere per fama; ora non solamente dalle contemplazioni dolci è tolto quante volte voglia ne viene alla nuova donna, ma gli conviene essere accompagnato da compagnia male a così fatte cose disposta" (Macrì-Leone, pp. 20–21).

> his death make him live to posterity. But now he was not only deprived of all this pleasant contemplation at the whim of his bride, but he had to keep company with those who are ill-suited to such things (p. 19).

The main problem with Smith's translation is the tense in which it is written: the Italian source text is written in the historic present, but this temporal usage cannot be produced by the present tense in English, and thus creates here a certain discontinuity. The use of the present tense in this translation thus adds an unexpected note of immediacy to Dante's travails, which is a literary effect probably not sought by Boccaccio in the original. The shortcomings of following the Italian tenses instead of tailoring the target text to English usage is perhaps most apparent in the second and third sentences, which make a clumsy leap from the imperfect ("It had been his custom…") to the present "But now not only is he drawn…"). Wicksteed's translation preserves the same problematic present tense, and again demonstrates his ornate and historicizing style with constructions such as "what seasons it is her will," "he who was wont," and archaic forms such as "moveth" and "cometh." Fortunately, in his 1990 translation Bollettino rectifies the tense problem. The historic present is now rendered with a past tense, preserving the present tense only in the clauses that deal with Dante's meditation on eternal philosophical questions. Perhaps because Bollettino is writing in more enlightened times, his writing is slightly less disparaging of "women's things" than the previous ones, as can be seen when he renders "i feminili ragionamenti" as "female talk" rather than Wicksteed's "female chatter." Overall, this translation conveys a measured formality through its updated language and style. Finally, Nichols provides another notably clear and fluent translation, which reads in a more natural and unforced way: his phrasing tends to be more concise than that of Bollettino (e.g., compare his "whenever the vulgar crowd wearied him" to Bollettino's "every time the conversation of the vulgar crowd annoyed him"), and, again, his lexical choices clarify the meaning for a modern audience. This can be seen, for example, in his choice of "bride" for "nuova donna," instead of the literal translation of "new lady" favoured by the previous translators. Although a construction such as "new lady" suggests a link to the courtly literary traditions in which Boccaccio was working, in the twenty-first century, the use of "lady" might be seen as containing overtones of a rather dated attitude towards women (with a possible further negative implication that Beatrice has thus become the "old lady"!); the choice of "bride" neatly avoids this.

The third passage is an example of a completely different register and literary style. Here Boccaccio recounts an anecdote about Dante and the women of Verona, a story which is surely apocryphal, and probably invented by Boccaccio himself, given its similarity in form and punch-line to the novellas of the *beffa* in the *Decameron*. Boccaccio is describing Dante's physical appearance, and specifically his ruddy skin and curly beard:

> Per la qual cosa avvenne un giorno in Verona, essendo già divulgata per tutto la fama delle sue opere, e massimamente quella parte della sua *Comedia*, la quale egli intitola *Inferno*, e esso conosciuto da molti e uomini e donne, che, passando egli davanti ad una porta dove più donne sedevano, una di quelle pianamente, non però tanto che bene da lui e da chi con lui era non fosse udita, disse a l'altre: — Donne, vedete colui che va ne l'inferno, e torna quando gli piace, e qua su reca novelle di coloro che là giù sono? — Alla quale una dell'altre rispose semplicemente: — In verità tu dèi dir vero: non vedi tu come egli ha la barba crespa e il color bruno per lo caldo e per lo fummo che è là giù? — Le quali parole udendo egli dir dietro a sé, e conoscendo che da pura credenza delle donne venivano,

piacendogli, e quasi contento che esse in cotale oppinione fossero, sorridendo alquanto, passò avanti (§§113).[20]

Smith:

And thus it chanced one day in Verona, when the fame of his works had spread everywhere, particularly that part of his *Commedia* entitled the *Inferno*, and when he was known by sight to many, both men and women, that, as he was passing before a doorway where sat a group of women, one of them softly said to the others, — but not so softly but that she was distinctly heard by Dante and such as accompanied him — 'Do you see the man who goes down into hell and returns when he pleases, and brings back tidings of them that are below?' To which one of the others naïvely answered, 'You must indeed say true. Do you not see how his beard is crisped, and his color darkened, by the heat and the smoke down there?' Hearing these words spoken behind him, and knowing they came from the innocent belief of the women, he was pleased, and smiling a little as if content that they should hold such an opinion, he passed on (pp. 42–43).

Wicksteed:

Hence it chanced one day in Verona (when the fame of his works had spread abroad everywhere, and especially that part of his Comedy which he entitles Hell; and when he himself was known by sight to many, both men and women), that as he passed by a gateway where sat a group of women, one of them said to the others, softly, yet so that she was heard well enough by him and his company: 'Do you see the man who goes to Hell, and comes again, at his pleasure; and brings tidings up here of them that be below?' To the which one of the others answered in all good faith: 'In truth it must needs as thou sayest. See'st thou not how his beard is crisped and his skin darkened by the heat and smoke that are there below? And hearing these words spoken behind him and perceiving that they sprang from the perfect belief of the women, he was pleased, and as though content that they should be of such opinion, he passed on, smiling a little (pp. 53–54).

Bollettino:

It so happened one day in Verona, when the fame of his writing had already spread everywhere, and especially that part of his *Comedy* which he titled *Hell*, and he was easily recognized by many men and women, that as he was passing by a doorway where several women were sitting, one of them said quietly to the others (but not so quietly that she was not heard clearly by Dante and his companions): "Ladies, do you see that man there who goes down into Hell, and comes back whenever he wants to, and brings back news of all those who are down under there?" One of the others answered this with great simplicity: "Indeed, you must be telling the truth. Don't you see how his beard is singed and his complexion darkened by the heat and the smoke that are down there?" Dante, hearing these words behind him, and knowing that they were spoken by naive women in perfectly good faith, was pleased that they should have such a high opinion of him, and, smiling a bit, proceeded on his way (p. 31).

J. G. Nichols (2002):

It happened one day at Verona — when the fame of his works was already widely spread, and especially of that part of his *Comedy* which he calls the *Inferno*, and when he was known by many, both men and women — that, passing before a door where many women

[20] Macrì-Leone: "Per la qual cosa avvenne un giorno in Verona (essendo già divulgata per tutto la fama delle sue opere, e massimamente quella parte della sua Commedia, la quale egli intitola Inferno, e esso conosciuto da molti e uomini e donne), che passando egli davanti a una porta dove più donne sedevano, una di quelle pianamente, non però tanto che bene da lui e da chi con lui non fosse udita, disse all'altre donne: Vedete colui che va nell'inferno, e torna quando gli piace, e quassù reca novelle di coloro che laggiù sono? Alla quale una dell'altre rispose semplicemente: In verità tu dèi dir vero; non vedi tu com'egli ha la barba crespa e 'l color bruno per lo caldo e per lo fummo che è laggiù? Le quali parole udendo egli dir drieto a sé, e conoscendo che da pura credenza delle donne veniano, piacendogli, e quasi contento ch'esse in cotale opinione fossero, sorridendo alquanto, passò avanti" (p. 43).

> were sitting, one of them said softly to the others (but not so softly that she was not clearly heard by him and by his companion), 'Do you see the man who goes to hell, and returns when he pleases, and brings back news of those who are below?' To this one of the others responded naively, 'Indeed, you must be speaking the truth. Don't you see how his beard is crisped and his complexion browned by the heat and smoke that is below?' Hearing these words said behind him, and knowing that they came from the women's simple belief, he was pleased, and passed on, smiling a little, as if content that they thought this (pp. 40–41).

As has been noted in the previous examples, of the two earlier translations, Smith is notably more readable than Wicksteed. Smith's rendition of the dialogue is rather stilted, but Wicksteed's historicized language actually works quite well in this context. His use of the second-person form "thou," and constructions such as "them that be below," or "see'st," suggests British dialect forms, and is a suitably equivalent way of rendering the speech of these presumably non-lettered women of Verona.

In his translation, Bollettino amplifies the meaning of Boccaccio's original through some subtle additions: in the final sentence, "donne" is rendered by "naive women," thereby overdetermining the meaning of Boccaccio's phrase, which is already expressed by the phrase "da pura credenza." Likewise, he introduces the idea of the women's "high opinion" of Dante — and thus a value judgement of his worth — to the original Italian which merely suggests that this was their belief. The effect of these interventions is interesting, as it creates a portrait of a rather more malicious and self-regarding Dante than that described by Boccaccio. Nichols's translation is again admirably readable and clear. His punctuation is logical and helpful, with good use of brackets and dashes to break up Boccaccio's many-claused sentences, and the reported speech is presented in a naturalistic way.

Finally, I would like to consider how the various English translators have confronted the problem of the Latin passages in this text. There are two principal Latin passages in the *Trattatello*: the first is Giovanni del Virgilio's epitaph on the death of Dante, and the second is the so-called first attempt at the *Commedia* in Latin.

> Theologus Dantes, nullius dogmatis expers,
> quod foveat claro phylosophya sinu:
> gloria musarum, vulgo gratissimus auctor,
> hic iacet, et fama pulsat utrumque polum:
> qui loca defunctis gladiis regnumque gemellis
> distribuit, laycis rhetoricisque modis.
> Pascua Pyeriis demum resonabat avenis;
> Amtropos heu letum livida rupit opus.
> Huic ingrata tulit tristem Florentia fructum,
> exilium, vati patria cruda suo.
> Quem pia Guidonis gremio Ravenna Novelli
> gaudet honorati continuisse ducis,
> mille trecentenis ter septem Numinis annis,
> ad sua septembris ydibus astra redit (§91).[21]
>
> Ultima regna canam, fluvido contermina mundo,
> spiritibus quae lata patent, quae premia solvunt
> pro meritis cuicunque suis, etc (§192).[22]

[21] I have not reproduced the Macrì-Leone Latin text here as there are only minor orthographic differences between it and the Latin text in Ricci's critical edition.

[22] Macrì-Leone reads "fluido" for "fluvido." These lines, which I believe were written by Boccaccio himself, are a key text of his literary biography of Dante, and can also be found in his early Latin epistolary exercise, the *Lettera di Ilaro*, and in the *Esposizioni* (*Accessus* 75). An English translation of the *Lettera di Ilaro*

For the modern reader, the classical references may be hard to understand without explanatory notes, and so I will also take into account any further information offered by the translators. Smith avoids the problem entirely by presenting the two texts in Latin only, with no English translation. Wicksteed reproduces the Latin texts within the main text, with an English translation in a footnote:

> Theologic Dante, a stranger to no teaching that philosophy may cherish in her illustrious bosom; glory of the Muses, author most acceptable to the commonalty; lieth here, and smiteth either pole wirh [*sic*] his fame; who assigned their places to the dead, and their jurisdictions to the twin swords, in laic and rhetoric modes. And lastly with Pierian pipe he was making the pasture lands resound; black Atropos, alas, broke off the work of joy. For him ungrateful Florence bore the dismal fruit of exile, harsh fatherland to her own bard. But Ravenna's piety rejoices to have gathered him into the bosom of Guido Novello, her illustrious chief. In one thousand, three hundred and three times seven years of the Deity, he went back, on September's Ides, to his own stars (p. 42).[23]
>
> The furthest realms I sing, conterminous with the flowing universe, stretching afar for spirits, paying the rewards to each after his merits, etc (p. 94).

This translation works well as a crib to the Latin text, as Wicksteed preserves the clauses of the original. Likewise, he tends to try to keep the lexical items as close to the Latin as possible (e.g., contermina | conterminous), with the disadvantage that the meaning of these words might not be so readily understood by the classically-untrained. Another disadvantage of this rigorously scholarly translation is the absence of explanation of the classical references. In his book, Bollettino takes the opposite approach, and integrates the translated Latin text into his English text, with no indication that this passage was originally in Latin:

> Here lies Dante theologian to whom no
> doctrine which Philosophy cherishes
> in her illustrious bosom was unknown;
> The glory of the Muses and author most accepted
> by the people lies here; his fame touches
> both poles. He assigned places to the dead
> and a kingdom for the two monarchies;
> in the popular style and in high rhetoric
> he sang of pastures with the Pierian pipe.
> But, alas, livid Atropos interrupted his work of joy,
> To him ungrateful Florence offered the dismal
> fruit of exile, harsh fatherland to
> her own poet. Pious Ravenna rejoices for
> having gathered him into the bosom of
> her illustrious lord, Guido Novello. On the
> Ides of September, in the 1321st year
> of our Lord, he went back to his native stars (pp. 25–26).
>
> I shall sing of the farthest realms coterminous with the moving universe
> Stretching wide for spirits, where each one receives
> Rewards according to his merits, etc (p. 52).

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is provided in Wicksteed's *The Early Lives of Dante* (pp. 147–51), and an Italian one in Padoan, *Il lungo cammino del "Poema sacro." Studi danteschi* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), pp. 13–17.

[23] Wicksteed also provides a short explanatory note: "The 'twin swords' are the temporal and spiritual powers. The reference is to the DE MONARCHIA."

Compared to Wicksteed, this version is much more readable and accessible for a modern readership. Bollettino moves away from a literal rendition of the Latin phrases and vocabulary to a simpler and less convoluted prose style. I say prose style advisedly, as this is basically a prose translation in which the clauses seem to have been randomly broken up to impersonate the layout of verse on the page. (This presentation of the poem has led also to an editorial oversight: the text preceding the poem mentions "the fourteen lines," but Bollettino's translation is seventeen lines long!) There are no explanatory notes to this passage. The Latin "beginning" of the *Commedia* is offered both in Latin and its English translation and, unlike Wicksteed who prefers the present tense, Bollettino uses the future "I shall sing" for "canam."

Nichols' translation of the Latin texts follows the typographical form of the original: set in italic type and fourteen lines long:

> *Dante, well-versed in all theology,*
> *All wisdom fostered by philosophy,*
> *The Muses' joy, yet pleasing to the crowd,*
> *Lies here: his high repute spreads far and wide.*
> *He placed the dead precisely with twin swords:*
> *Our common tongue and high-resounding words.*
> *The pastures echoed to his rustic oat,*
> *Until black Atropos cut his thread short.*
> *Ungrateful Florence, harsh to her own son,*
> *Sent him to exile, never to return:*
> *Kind Ravenna is happy that he stayed*
> *Under the aegis of her honoured lord.*
> *In the year thirteen twenty-one he was*
> *Borne back in glory to his native stars* (p. 33).

> I sing of those most distant realms which border on the world of the River of the Dead, spacious realms which lie open to souls and reward them all according to their merit... (p. 79)

Nichols's choices are particularly interesting here. Unlike the previous two translators, he alone privileges form over content, and preserves the strict fourteen-line verse form. He thus attempts to find an approximation of the Latin verse eulogy in English, and does so by writing in free verse couplets. An equivalent formality for Giovanni del Virgilio's epitaph is here achieved through metrical and rhyme constraints: while not using full rhyme-words, Nichols still creates a formal structure through the repetition of the last consonant of each line (e.g., "theology/philosophy"; "swords/words"). If this choice sometimes has the unfortunate effect of unintentional banality ("The pastures echoed to his rustic oat | Until black Atropos cut his thread short"), this is due more to the effect of the couplet which has been debased by centuries of popular doggerel. In modern English, the form is most commonly met these days in sentimental or humorous exercises in the greeting-card genre. This notwithstanding, Nichols's aim and technical achievement for this passage are to be commended. Although deceptively simple, the vocabulary he chooses is historically and technically correct: the aforementioned "rustic oat," which sounds so peculiar out of context, is in fact, highly appropriate: one of the definitions for "oat" in the OED is "a shepherd's pipe made of a straw from an oat-plant," and is a seventeenth-century poetical usage. The "rustic oat," in fact, corresponds well to the Latin "Pascua Pyeriis" ("Pyeriis" referring to the Muses), and thus alludes to Dante's mastery of the Latin eclogue, the genre used in his poetical correspondence with Giovanni del Virgilio himself. Like Wicksteed and Bollettino, Nichols chooses to end his poem with the word "stars," in the same

way that Dante ends each canticle of the *Commedia*. The English translators thus signal a textual link to the *Commedia* which is absent in Giovanni del Virgilio's poetic epitaph.

Nichols's translation of the Latin "beginning" of the *Commedia* reads elegantly, although it is separated from the main text and appears only as an endnote. Unfortunately, it contains a serious error in the translation of "fluvido" as the "River of the Dead"; "fluvidus" ("flowing") is an adjective, and does not occur as a noun, nor is it used metonymically for a river, in either classical or medieval Latin.[24] This error aside, Nichols's translation is by far the most evocative and elegant of the three; his solution of "spacious realms which lie open to souls" is very much better than either Wicksteed's "stretching afar" or Bollettino's "stretching wide for spirits." The error in translation mentioned above is particularly surprising as Nichols is also a professional Latin-English translator, and in fact has also recently translated Petrarch's *Secretum* into English for Hesperus Press.

The analysis of the Latin passages shows that Nichols's work as a translator is of an entirely different order to that of the previous English translators of the *Trattatello*, Wicksteed, Smith, and Bollettino. The earlier translators are primarily scholars of Dante or Boccaccio, and so produce a text which tends to serve their needs: chief amongst this seems to be a desire to produce an English version which closely replicates the syntax and vocabulary of Boccaccio, so as to be instantly relatable to the original Italian text. Their translations also form part of a wider scholarly project: in the case of the editions of Wicksteed and Smith, the *Life of Dante* forms part of a collection of other contemporary biographies of Dante, while Bollettino has produced a scholarly translation with extensive critical apparatus. Nichols's translation is the only one written by a professional translator, and I believe that this accounts for the superiority of his translation in certain places, most notably in the translation of the Latin poetic eulogy. For the most part, the four translations under discussion are similar in great part, with only the slightest variations in language which can be explained by the respective linguistic contexts in which they were produced: two British English translations (Wicksteed 1904 and Nichols 2002) and two American English (Smith 1900 and Bollettino 1990). The translated *Trattatello* itself remains largely stable, and does not show the signs of datedness and unfashionability which can be observed in, say, translations of the *Decameron* over the same period. If Nichols's translation stands out, it is because one can often trace the reasoning behind his choices as translator, and he therefore deserves extra credit for attempting to go beyond a simple, literal rendering of the source language, and to convey other elements of the text which are more resistant to the translation operation. A downside of this translation is that the paratextual material that accompanies this text is of very little use for the scholarly reader. I have attempted to rectify this situation in this review by providing a summary of the complex textual tradition of this text, and information on the source texts used for the English translation. For further information, the scholarly user is thus directed back to the two explicitly academic editions of the *Trattatello*: those who can read Italian should of course go to the Mondadori critical edition, while Vincenzo Zin Bollettino's translation provides extensive English-language notes to the text and background information.

In conclusion, Nichols should not be judged on the shortcomings of the edition, but rather, on the quality of his translation. For this, he scores very highly: the translation is clear and readable, often poetic, and generally very accurate. The book itself is inexpensive, attractively produced, and should become required reading for students of Boccaccio and Dante, and those interested in the development of biography as a literary form.

GUYDA ARMSTRONG

[24] I am very grateful to Justine Wolfenden for her help regarding the Latin texts.