

2008

Giovanni Boccaccio. *Theseid of the Nuptials of Emilia* (*Teseida delle nozze di Emilia*). Translated and with an introduction by Vincenzo Traversa. *Currents in Comparative Romance Languages and Literatures* 116. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. 595 pp.

Martin G. Eisner

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/heliotropia>

Recommended Citation

Eisner, Martin G. (2008) "Giovanni Boccaccio. *Theseid of the Nuptials of Emilia* (*Teseida delle nozze di Emilia*). Translated and with an introduction by Vincenzo Traversa. *Currents in Comparative Romance Languages and Literatures* 116. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. 595 pp.," *Heliotropia - An online journal of research to Boccaccio scholars*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/heliotropia/vol5/iss1/5>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Heliotropia - An online journal of research to Boccaccio scholars by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

Giovanni Boccaccio. *Theseid of the Nuptials of Emilia (Teseida delle nozze di Emilia)*. Translated and with an introduction by Vincenzo Traversa. *Currents in Comparative Romance Languages and Literatures* 116. New York: Peter Lang, 2002. 595 pp.

This book presents Boccaccio's *Teseida* in an Italian text "taken in its entirety from a paper manuscript of [the translator's] property that is offered, for the first time, to the interest of the public" (35) along with an English translation. It also includes transcriptions and translations of the glosses to Boccaccio's martial epic found in this manuscript. The book is organized with the Italian and English texts presented as successive wholes, a format which suggests that the book is intended to serve two different audiences: *boccaccisti*, on the one hand, who might be interested in the variant readings and unique glosses offered by the manuscript and scholars or students with limited or no Italian, on the other hand, who want to read Boccaccio's complete work in English.

The first group of readers will be disappointed that there is not more information about the manuscript itself. Only after a biographical introduction focused on Boccaccio's experiences in Naples (1–14) and a detailed summary of the poem's action (14–35) is a brief description of the manuscript provided (35), accompanied by Roncaglia's 1941 list of 40 manuscripts (36–37). No attempt is made to describe the relationship of this text to any of those catalogued, nor any of the other 22 codices recorded in Limentani's more recent edition, although the simple presence of the glosses suggests that it belongs to what Battaglia describes as family β . The text appears to be a diplomatic transcription, since elisions are not expanded and no punctuation is introduced, but it is difficult to be certain in the absence of any rationale for the method of transcription or image of the original.

The source of the translation is also confusing. The editor writes that:

this project introduces an Italian text of the *Teseida delle nozze di Emilia* and the English prose translation after consultation of the Codice Laurenziano Doni e Acquisti, 325, edited by Eugenio [*sic*] Roncaglia for the collection "Scrittori d'Italia" of Giuseppe Laterza & Figli, Bari, 1941. Also the edition by Alberto Limentani included in the series "Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio," Mondadori, 1992, was consulted for this purpose. (35)

Experience with the volume leads this reviewer to believe that this means that the translation derives from an eclectic text, not exhaustively transcribed in the book, that is made of parts from Aurelio Roncaglia's and Limentani's editions. When the reading disagrees with Roncaglia's edition

of the autograph, the autograph reading is sometimes put in parentheses, although there is no consistency to these interventions since, at other times, the English translation derives from Roncaglia's or Limentani's edition, although no variant reading has been incorporated into the Italian text.

Like Bernadette Marie McCoy's 1974 translation, not mentioned by the translator, this edition presents each ottava in English prose and includes the glosses after each book. The quality of the translation may be assessed by a comparison of the first sentence of the dedicatory epistle in both English versions¹:

As the past happiness returns to my memory and is the clear reason of deep sorrow for it finds me in the present distress, it is not disagreeable for me, o cruel lady, to recall often to my mind the pleasant image of your great beauty. (Traversa 375)

Although departed joys which return to my memory in my present unhappiness are the unmistakable cause of heavy sorrow, it does not on that account displease me, O cruel lady, to revive in my weary soul from time to time the charming picture of your perfect loveliness. (McCoy 335)

McCoy's translation not only reads more idiomatically (cf. "it is not disagreeable for me," e.g.) but is also more accurate. In Boccaccio, "come che" with the subjunctive normally means "although" ("benché") not "as." The rest of the translation shows similarly infelicitous English formulations and there are also typographical errors that hinder comprehension. The poet asks the Muses, for example, to "lend your divine years to my prayers."

Unlike the text of the poem, the glosses appear to derive exclusively from the unique manuscript. Given the recent critical interest in the commentary tradition (Minnis) and the attention given to Boccaccio's autograph glosses (Hollander, MacGregor, Schnapp), it is disappointing to find so little information about the notes found in this manuscript and to find their transcription to be so confused. The fact that these rubrics are not Boccaccio's should also have been more clearly stated, lest an innocent or

¹ Here is the Italian text in Limentani: "Come che a memoria tornandomi le felicità trapassate, nella miseria vedendomi dov'io sono, mi sieno di grave dolore manifesta cagione, non m'è per tanto discharo il ridurre spesso nella faticata mente, o crudel donna, la piacevole imagine della vostra intera bellezza." Traversa's transcription is as follows: "Come che anmimoria tornandomi le felicità trapassate nela miseria vedendomi dove io sono misieno di grave dolore manifesta chagion non me (*m'è*) pertanto discharo il ridurre (*riducere*) spesso nela faticata mente hocru dele donna la piacevole immagine dela vostra intera bellezza più possente che ilmio proponimento dise edamore giovina donna (*giovane d'anni*) e disenno mifecie..."

careless reader think that they are Boccaccio's own. (The autograph glosses can be found in McCoy's translation.)

The bibliographical "list of suggested works that may give an English reader further help in studying the main ideas of this poem as well as the outlook of Boccaccio's literary development," could be called idiosyncratic. It does not include David Anderson's *Before the Knight's Tale* (1988) nor either of James H. McGregor's book-length studies, *The Image of Antiquity* (1991) and *The Shades of Aeneas* (1991), not to mention other articles in English by Wetherbee, Martinez and others. The book closes with an Index of Names in English, which suggests that the intended audience may in fact be English readers.

The transcription alone could have made a valuable contribution to re-starting the long delayed but necessary re-examination of the *Teseida's* textual tradition, largely abandoned after Doni e Acquisti 325 was identified as Boccaccio's autograph, first by Audin in 1840 and then more definitively by Vandelli in 1929. But the editor does not engage these issues, which were raised as long ago as Contini's 1938 review of Battaglia's edition. By ignoring this critical context, this edition misses an opportunity to put its passion to a productive purpose. Philologically flawed though it is, the book may yet provide some help to those who want to read in English what the Muses, in the words of this translation, "moistened in the sacred font."

MARTIN G. EISNER

DUKE UNIVERSITY