

(77, 79). Some statements are vague. Thus Campbell speaks about “the unverifiable results of an 1885 Russian excavation, headstone inscriptions from two Nestorian cemeteries indicated heavy mortalities in 1338/9 from a mysterious and deadly “pestilence” (243). It is unclear what is meant here by “unverifiable results”: the tombstone inscriptions (in Syriac) have been meticulously edited and published by Daniil Chwolson in several volumes, between 1886 and 1897. The author contrasts between “codified, rational and rigid” Roman Law of the Continent and “un-codified, reasonable and flexible” Common Law of England, without clarifying what is meant by these categories (78).

These shortcomings aside, however, the book has much to commend, especially in terms of its conceptual impact. This is the first full-scale attempt to make us rethink the foundations of the “late medieval crisis” in global (or at least, Eurasian) terms. From now on, the story of the Black Death will no longer be considered as “European.” Likewise, environmental historians, so often focusing on one region, will have to appreciate the importance of global environmental history approach. Economic historians of the preindustrial world, so much fixated with institutions, will have to start taking exogenous factors seriously. Perhaps more than anything, this book is an important reminder that the study of the past no longer belongs to a single discipline. Campbell’s brave insights from paleoclimatology and paleogenetics should serve us as a model of how quantitative environmental history should be approached. In this sense, *The Great Transition* is an important milestone in both environmental and economic history.

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GIUSEPPE CHIECCHI, *Nell'arte narrativa di Giovanni Boccaccio*. (Biblioteca di Lettere Italiane: Studi e Testi 76.) Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2017. Paper. Pp. 235. €27. ISBN: 978-88-22264-94-7.
doi:10.1086/703907

The keyword that unlocks this collection of essays appears at once in the title; it is the humble preposition *in*, here crushed together with the article *il*. While creating some awkwardness, this first word also cleverly recalls the use of the same preposition in a famous work of Italian literature, Dante’s *Divine Comedy*: “mi ritrovai *in* una selva oscura.” The dark wood in which Giuseppe Chiecchi finds himself is that of Boccaccio’s oeuvre, which offers infinite pathways to interpretation. An avowed follower of Vittore Branca’s approach to Boccaccio, Chiecchi approaches his analysis with the conviction that close reading, understood here as relentless scrutiny of the texts at hand, will yield patterns of performance and meaning that the author, as an accomplished arborist, has concealed among the trees. In an age in which the application of theoretical templates has undermined the work of close reading and cheapened our scholarly enterprise, there is something abundantly refreshing—and rewarding—about Chiecchi’s approach.

Chiecchi has here published seven essays, touching on several of Boccaccio’s works, though in the end the focus shifts, almost inevitably, to the *Decameron*, to which he dedicates the last four entries. If there is a unifying thread here, it lies perhaps in Boccaccio’s experience of two great cities, Naples and Florence, and how each influenced his narrative choices. This summary is however unfairly reductive of such an abundant, generous volume. Chiecchi is as much a connoisseur of Boccaccio as he is a literary critic; he writes with the authority and sensitivity of someone who has read and thought about Boccaccio as a life’s work. This intimacy brings him to a place of unabashed fandom. By the time he writes, apropos of the novella of Catella (*Dec.* 3.6), that “Boccaccio’s art never ceases to amaze” (“[l]’arte di Boccaccio non cessa di stupire,” 199), the reader nods not just because the claim is objectively true but also because Chiecchi has demonstrated its veracity beyond any doubt.

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In order then, the author addresses the following topics: the function of letter-writing in Boccaccio; the motif of the winter garden in the *Filocolo* and the *Decameron* (10.5) as a key to understanding the evolution of Boccaccio's narrative technique; the *Elegia di madonna Fiammetta*; the novella of Ghismonda (4.1) and its (surprising) relation to the tale of Andreuccio da Perugia (2.5); the debt paid by the novella of Masetto da Lamporecchio (3.1) to the *Novellino*; the story of Ricciardo and Catella (3.6), with particular attention to Fiammetta, its narrator, and the tale's indebtedness to Boccaccio's Neapolitan period; and finally, breathtakingly, the tale of maestro Simone's fecal baptism (8.9). There is far too much here to praise in the space allowed, so I shall limit myself to my favorite moments as enticements to readers who will then discover delights of their own.

The chapter on Boccaccio's epistolography covers both his collection of extant letters and the integration of letters in his literary works, wherein for Chiecchi they occupy a zone of mediation between formal rigidity and narrative economy, between character and author. There are as well some particularly enlightening pages on the famous letter to Francesco de' Bardi and its engagement with Naples. The chapter on the garden motif offers another opportunity for Neapolitan engagement, as it necessarily begins with the *Filocolo*. Chiecchi can pinpoint a problem in the most banal of details; here he exposes the absurdity of the notion that the minimal distance traversed by the *Decameron's brigata* in its escape from Florence should guarantee any sort of protection from the plague, conjuring an explanation. The chapter on the *Elegia* brilliantly highlights its protagonist's own sense of competition with famous literary suicides. Along the way Chiecchi hypothesizes, hilariously, that in her own suicide attempt Fiammetta might have donned very long clothes so that they would catch on her ladder and impede her success. The chapter on Andreuccio and Ghismonda draws attention to the role played by enclosed spaces in both stories, emblematic of Boccaccio's interest in the "narrow field of narration" ("campo stretto della narrazione," 141), first developed in his description of the plague. The chapter on Masetto allows Chiecchi to offer the lovely observation that Boccaccio's narrative art works by "surrendering to the neutrality of events" ("concedersi alla neutralità degli accadimenti," 179), which in Boccaccio's universe do not happen for any reason but simply happen, *naturalmente*. Finally, in the study of maestro Simone Chiecchi offers a witty and thorough linguistic analysis of the story, demonstrating how the use of Florentine jargon functions to introduce the Bolognese Simone to the city. It is the rare moment when literary criticism occasions laughter, but when Chiecchi gets around to discussing the "happily anal phase of Boccaccio's narrative invention" ("fase allegramente anale della invenzione narrativa boccacciana," 214), readers will struggle to restrain themselves.

The study opens with a preface that examines tropes of nudity in Boccaccio and relates them to the hermeneutic process. Chiecchi then invokes Dante's observation, in the *Convivio*, that the search for silver sometimes leads to the discovery of gold, finding in it an apt metaphor of his own experience with Boccaccio. The gold he discovers he then sprinkles all over the pages of this beautiful compilation, with a love for his author that perhaps only Boccaccio could inspire.

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BETSY CHUNKO-DOMINGUEZ, *English Gothic Misericord Carvings: History from the Bottom Up*. (Art and Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance Europe 9.) Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017. Pp. x, 187; many color figures and 1 table. \$129. ISBN: 978-90-04-34118-0. doi:10.1086/703756

The topic of misericord carvings remains, in spite of a growing number of articles and books over the past twenty years or so, a relatively underexplored field. The difficulty of access to these