Giovanni Boccaccio played a pivotal role in the extraordinary emergence of the Italian literary tradition in the fourteenth century, not only as author of the *Decameron* but also as scribe of Dante, Petrarch, and Cavalcanti. Using a single codex written entirely in Boccaccio's hand, Martin Eisner brings together material philology and literary history to reveal the multiple ways Boccaccio authorizes this vernacular literary tradition. Each chapter offers a novel interpretation of Boccaccio as a biographer, storyteller, editor, and scribe, who constructs arguments, composes narratives, compiles texts, and manipulates material forms to legitimize and advance a vernacular literary canon. Situating these philological activities in the context of Boccaccio's broader reflections on poetry in the *Decameron* and the *Genealogies of the Gentile Gods*, the book produces a new portrait of Boccaccio that integrates his vernacular and Latin works, while also providing a new context for understanding his fictions.

**Martin Eisner** is Assistant Professor of Italian Studies at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
This series of critical books seeks to cover the whole area of literature written in the major medieval languages – the main European vernaculars, and medieval Latin and Greek – during the period c. 1100–1500. Its chief aim is to publish and stimulate fresh scholarship and criticism on medieval literature, special emphasis being placed on understanding major works of poetry, prose, and drama in relation to the contemporary culture and learning which fostered them.

Recent titles in the series
Mary Carruthers (ed.) Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages
Katharine Breen Imagining an English Reading Public, 1150–1400
Antony J. Hasler Court Poetry in Late Medieval England and Scotland: Allegories of Authority
Shannon Gayk Image, Text, and Religious Reform in Fifteenth-Century England
Lisa H. Cooper Artisans and Narrative Craft in Late-Medieval England
Alison Cornish Vernacular Translation in Dante’s Italy: Illiterate Literature
Jane Gilbert Living Death in Medieval French and English Literature
Jessica Rosenfeld Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle
Michael Van Dussen From England to Bohemia: Heresy and Communication in the Later Middle Ages
Martin Eisner Boccaccio and the Invention of Italian Literature: Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the Authority of the Vernacular

A complete list of titles in the series can be found at the end of the volume.
Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04166-0 - Boccaccio and the Invention of Italian Literature: Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the Authority of the Vernacular
Martin Eisner
Frontmatter
More information
BOCCACCIO AND THE INVENTION OF ITALIAN LITERATURE

Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the Authority of the Vernacular

MARTIN EISNER
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York
Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.
It furthers the University’s mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107041660

© Martin Eisner 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2013
Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data
Eisner, Martin, 1978–
Boccaccio and the invention of Italian literature : Dante, Petrarch, Cavalcanti, and the authority of the vernacular / Martin Eisner.
pages cm. – (Cambridge Studies In Medieval Literature)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-1-107-04166-0 (hardback)
1. Boccaccio, Giovanni, 1313-1375 – Criticism and interpretation. 2. Italian literature – To 1400 – History and criticism. 1. Title.
PQ4284.5.E37 2013
858'.109 – dc23 2013009538
ISBN 978-1-107-04166-0 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of
URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication,
and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain,
accurate or appropriate.
When we concentrate on a material object, whatever its situation, the very act of attention may lead to our involuntarily sinking into the history of that object. Novices must learn to skim over matter if they want matter to stay at the exact level of the moment. Transparent things, through which the past shines!

—Vladimir Nabokov, *Transparent Things*
Contents

List of figures and tables  page x
Acknowledgments  xii
List of abbreviations for frequently cited works  xiv

Introduction: Boccaccio between Dante and Petrarch: Cultivating vernacular literary community in the Chigi Codex  1

1 Dante’s dirty feet and the limping republic: Boccaccio’s defense of literature in the Vita di Dante  29

2 Dante’s shame and Boccaccio’s paratextual praise: Editing the Vita nuova, Commedia, and canzoni distese  50

3 The making of Petrarch’s vernacular Book of Fragments (Fragmentorum liber)  74

4 The inventive scribe: Glossing Cavalcanti in the Chigi and Decameron  6.9  95

Epilogue: The allegory of the vernacular: Boccaccio’s Esposizioni and Petrarch’s Griselda  113

Notes  117
Bibliography  196
Index  233
Figures and tables

Figures

1 Boccaccio’s transcription of *Ytalie iam certus honos*, addressed to Petrarch, in Chigi l. v 176, c. 34r. Reproduced by permission Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved, © 2013 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

2 Boccaccio’s transcription of Giovanni del Virgilio’s *Theologus Dantes* in the *Vita di Dante*, Chigi l. v 176, c. 6r. Reproduced by permission Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved, © 2013 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

3 End of the *Vita di Dante* and beginning of the *Vita nuova* with Boccaccio’s editorial note to the *Vita nuova* in Chigi l. v 176, 13r. Reproduced by permission Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved, © 2013 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

4 Boccaccio’s transcription of *Quomodo sedet* in Chigi l. v 176, c. 24r. Reproduced by permission Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved, © 2013 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

5 Boccaccio’s transcription of Petrarch’s *Voi ch’ascoltate (Ref i)* with the variant “amore” instead of “errore” at the beginning the third line of the transcription after the rubric. Chigi l. v 176, c. 43 v. Reproduced by permission Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved, © 2013 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.

6 Boccaccio’s transcription of Cavalcanti’s *Donna mi prega* surrounded by Dino del Garbo’s Latin commentary in Chigi l. v 176, c. 29r. Reproduced by permission Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, with all rights reserved, © 2013 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.
List of figures and tables

Tables

1 Contents of current Chigi l. v 176 2
2 Transformations of Chigi Codex: three stages 12
3 Dante’s canzoni distese, with Barbi’s numbers in parentheses 69
4 Contents of Petrarch’s Fragmentorum liber 77
This book began as a conversation with Teodolinda Barolini in front of Columbia University’s Hamilton Hall about how to write a dissertation that would not exclude any of the tre corone; I have finished with a book that includes four of them. I am grateful to Teo for all of her help and guidance, without which this book would be much poorer, as these notes can only partially reflect. In various ways that are similarly impossible to cite properly, conversations with Roberto Dainotto, Andrew Piper, Marc Schachter, and Saskia Ziolkowski also contributed to crafting this book’s arguments.

I thank the Fulbright Program, American Philosophical Society, and the Arts and Sciences Research Council of Duke University for valuable assistance that allowed me to complete the research for this study in libraries and archives throughout Italy. The Interlibrary Loan office at Duke proved intrepid in the face of my myriad, complex requests. A semester at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton provided me with a rich intellectual community in which to refine many of the core ideas that inform this study and I am especially grateful to the medieval community there, led by Caroline Walker Bynum.

In its final stages, two punctilious and cogent readers, Albert Ascoli and Zygmunt Baranski, provided comments and suggestions that vastly improved the book. This study also benefited from a Mellon Faculty Book Workshop, sponsored by the Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University, which brought together the collective wisdom and varied perspectives of Albert Ascoli, Ian Baucom, Chris Celenza, Roberto Dainotto, Valeria Finucci, Michael Hardt, Timothy Kircher, Shayne LeGassie, John Martin, Helen Solterer, Fiona Somerset, Ron Witt, and Jessica Wolfe. I thank them all for helping to make the manuscript a better book. I was also fortunate to have my editor at Cambridge University Press, Linda Bree, participate in the workshop; in addition to shepherding the book through the publication process, she proved a model reader. I am also grateful to Alastair Minnis for including the book in his remarkable series.
Acknowledgments

My family has shaped me more than I can recognize, let alone acknowledge, but I place here a loving thank you to my mother, Barbara Elser, and my late father, Francis Eisner, for all of the opportunities they provided.

My greatest debt is to my wife, Saskia, who not only improved countless drafts, but also literally created time for me to work on this book, a miraculous feat especially after the arrival of our daughter, Nola. Saskia, writing these acknowledgments means it really is done. I dedicate this book to you.
Abbreviations for frequently cited works

Boccaccio


Dec. Decameron
Ep. Epistole
Esp. Esposizioni
Gen. Genealogie deorum gentilium
Vita Vita di Dante
De Vita De Vita Petrarchi

Petrarch

Fam. Familiares
Sen. Seniles
Epyst. Epistole metriche
Ruf Rerum vulgari fragmenta

Dante

Inf. Inferno
Purg. Purgatorio
Par. Paradiso
VN Vita nuova
Conv. Convivio
Epist. Epistles
DVE De vulgari eloquentia

xiv