Nardo di Cione (died 1366), detail showing Dante, and perhaps Boccaccio and Petrarch, centre to left, in the group of the blessed. From the Last Judgement fresco in the Cappella Strozzi, Santa Maria Novella, Florence.
Chaucer and
the Italian Trecento

EDITED BY
PIERO BOITANI

Cambridge University Press

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To the memory of Jack Bennett
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Preface

In a very particular way, this book is the child of J. A. W. Bennett, who had felt the need of it for many years. We wish he could have seen it in print and the least we can do is to dedicate it to his memory.

I think I am interpreting the feelings of all contributors in thanking Patrick Boyde, Derek Brewer, Helen Cooper, Peter Dronke, Jill Mann, Nicholas Mann, Derek Pearsall, Eric Stanley and J. B. Trapp for the assistance they have given us at the various stages of work on our essays. Finally, I wish to thank the President and Fellows of the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei for granting us permission to reprint J. A. W. Bennett’s essay.

Rome, March 1982

PIERO BOITANI
Note on the Texts

Chaucer's works are quoted from F. N. Robinson's edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd edn. (London, 1957). Different readings of single words or punctuation have at times been chosen by contributors. The text of Dante's Divina Commedia is that edited by G. Petrocchi (Milan, 1966–7). Other works by Dante are quoted from Le Opere di Dante, Testo Critico della Società Dantesca Italiana (Florence, 1921). We have used the Mondadori edition of Tutte le Opere di Giovanni Boccaccio, general editor V. Branca (Milan 1967–) whenever possible. Other editions of works by Boccaccio and the editions of Petrarch and all other authors are quoted in the notes. References to the classics, unless otherwise specified, are to the Loeb edition.

Note on the Illustrations

The illustrations that have been chosen for this book are particularly relevant to our subject. Those on the jacket reproduce two pieces of sculpture. One is a detail from the tomb of Giovanni da Legnano by Pier Paolo delle Masgne (1386?), now in the Museo Civico, Bologna. It shows clerks listening to a lecture presumably being given by Giovanni himself. Giovanni is the 'Lynyan' mentioned by Chaucer's Oxford Clerk in one breath with Petrarch. He 'enlumyned al Ytaile' 'of philosophie, / Or lawe, or oother art particular' (Prologue to the Clerk's Tale, 31–5). The second piece of sculpture is the equestrian statue of Bernabò Visconti, from his tomb (1370) by Bonino da Campione, in the Castello Sforzesco, Milan. It is emblematic of the celebration of secular rulers in fourteenth-century Italy. Medieval knight and Roman emperor merge into one image. Chaucer, who went
Note on the Illustrations

to Milan to negotiate with Bernabò in 1378, celebrated him as ‘god of delit, and scourge of Lumbardeye’ in the Monk’s Tale (2399–406).

The frontispiece shows Dante, and perhaps Boccaccio and Petrarch, in the group of the blessed, from the Last Judgement fresco in the Cappella Strozzi, Santa Maria Novella, Florence. In his Commentarii, Ghiberti attributes this fresco to Nardo di Cione alone, who died in 1366. In the Lives, Vasari maintains that it is the work of Nardo’s younger brother, Andrea di Cione, called ‘Orcagna’, in collaboration with his brother ‘Bernardo’ or ‘Leonardo’. Nothing is known of Orcagna after 1368. In any case the fresco would have been painted before Chaucer’s visit to Florence in 1372–3, and he might have seen it. Here (from centre to left) Dante and two characters who have been traditionally identified as Boccaccio and Petrarch, are celebrated together – a sign of the fact that they might have already been associated as the greatest ‘Florentine’ men of letters by the 1360s, when Boccaccio and Petrarch were still alive. (Reproduced by permission of Alinari.)