

**THE INDEBTEDNESS OF
CHAUCER'S WORKS TO THE
ITALIAN WORKS OF BOCCACCIO
(A REVIEW AND SUMMARY)**

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The Indebtedness of Chaucer's Works to the Italian Works of Boccaccio (a Review and Summary) by Hubertis M. Cummings

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BOCCACCIO

(A REVIEW AND SUMMARY)

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A DISSERTATION
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"Amor, che al cor gentil ratto s'apprende."

Dante, *Inferno*. V. 100.

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PREFACE

The present work has developed from a dissertation on *Chaucer's Indebtedness to Boccaccio in Troilus and Criseyde and the Knight's Tale*, which was submitted in April, 1914, to the English Department of Princeton University as the fulfilment of a partial requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The dissertation, never separately published, is now fully incorporated in the present, rather longer, study of the influence of Boccaccio's works over Chaucer's, and herewith makes its first appearance in print, with its earlier crudities, the writer fears, at times all too imperfectly removed.

Very early in my investigation of the Chaucer-Boccaccio problem I perceived to my regret that I should have more to do than to review and summarize. I saw that it would be my duty, also, to challenge several of the results of earlier, and very earnest investigation; but, to weigh very critically the results of other's labours, I soon realized was an inevitable function of scholarship, and so reconciled myself to the rôle of quasi-iconoclast. It was, accordingly, very much in the belief that an absolute truth can no more readily be obtained in the field of scholarship than in the field of philosophy, that the present investigation was undertaken.

And the work was pursued only in the hope that an approximate form of truth might be obtained, which might prove of value to students of Chaucer problems. Were the riddle in the relations existing between Chaucer and Boccaccio capable of one unquestioned solution, that solution would have been determined long ago, for scholars have long employed their wits upon it; and certainly, if the riddle had been only once and for always propounded and then answered immediately and dogmatically, the solution, however interesting it might have been, would have thrown little light upon the genius of Chaucer.

In a word, an immediate solution would have precluded, and still would preclude, its own value. It would aver one of two facts, either that the relations,—whatever they might have been, personal, literary, of friendship or of discipleship,—existing between the two poets were of no real value to Chaucer, or that Chaucer's work, having become too dependent upon those relations, would have no value for us to-day, five centuries after the poet's death. Neither of these facts is admissible. The relations existing between the two poets were of great, although not necessarily of supreme, value to Chaucer; and Chaucer, even the

most arrant of Philistines would admit, is of very considerable value to us!

It has been my effort then in this review to account more definitely than before has been done for the amount of Chaucer's debt to the Italian poet's works; to investigate concretely the differing methods employed by the English poet in his treatment of the *Filostrato* in *Troilus and Criseyde*, and of the *Teseide* in the *Knigh's Tale*; and to explain, so far as is possible, Chaucer's attitude to "Lollius," or, as we know him, Giovanni Boccaccio. I can only hope that future students of Chaucer and his sources may derive some little help from my labours.

It is my cordial desire to thank the many writers, named in the body of my text, for the very great assistance afforded by them to me in my investigation. And my hardly less debt to my friends, Dr. Ernest Francis Amy and Dr. Bernard Levi Jefferson, who, working over their own Chaucerian problems in Princeton, were ever at my side with kindly and helpful suggestions, I would gratefully acknowledge. It is a pleasure, too, to thank Professor Thomas Marc Parrott and Professor Charles Grosvenor Osgood of Princeton University for the ever ready sympathy and excellent counsel they accorded me as a graduate student, and as a student of Chaucer. But greatest thanks are due to Professor Robert Kilburn Root of Princeton, who led my first steps in Chaucerian studies, while I was still an undergraduate at Princeton, and guided me no less solicitously in the writing of the present work, in every act proving himself the best of counselors and friends.

HUBERTIS M. CUMMINGS.

Cincinnati, Ohio, 1916.

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FOREWORD

Frequent references will be made in the following pages to the Italian writings of Giovanni Boccaccio, as found in complete form in the *Moutier* edition, the volumes and contents of which are cited below together with the approximate dates of composition.

Boccaccio, Giovanni: *Opere Volgari*, 17 vols., Florence, 1827-1834.

- I-IV. *Il Decamerone* (1348-1354).
- V. *Il Decamerone* (concluded); *Il Corbaccio* (1354-5).
- VI. *Fiammetta* (about 1338).
- VII-VIII. *Il Filocolo* (after 1338).
- IX. *La Teseide* (before 1341).
- X-XII. *Commento Sopra Dante* (1373).
- XIII. *Il Filostrato* (before 1341).
- XIV. *Amorosa Visione* (about 1338); *Caccia di Diana* (about 1338).
- XV. *Vita di Dante*; *L'Ameto* (1338-1342).
- XVI. *Rime*; *L'Urbano* (1354 or earlier).
- XVII. *Ninfale Fiesolano* (before 1341).

Summaries of the whole or of partial contents of a number of these works will be made from time to time in this dissertation, but without regard to chronological order.

Besides the above Italian works, the following Latin works are ascribed to Boccaccio:

- De Montibus, Sylvis, Lacubus, Fluminibus, Stagnis seu Paludibus.*
- De Casibus Virorum Illustrium.*
- De Mulieribus Claris.*
- De Genealogiis Deorum Gentilium* (1359).

Editions of these works will be cited at such times when references are made to them, but Chaucer's possible use of any one of them will not be made at any time the study of my dissertation.