

What the Mincian did not sing: Boccaccio's *Olympia* and Virgil's *Aeneid* 6

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ABSTRACT

In the overall production of Giovanni Boccaccio, the *Bucolicum carmen* (1346/7-1367) may be considered his most ambitious poetical work, not only for the adoption of the classical Latin, but also for its allegorical background. In his *Epistola* 23 (1372-74), addressed to Fra Martino da Signa, Boccaccio explicitly declares to have followed Virgil in the composition of his pastoral. Yet, particularly in regard to his fourteenth eclogue *Olympia* (c. 1367), it is striking that Boccaccio goes further the use of Virgil's *Bucolics*, and also borrows material from the Roman's epic, the *Aeneid*. It is interesting to note, too, that this procedure of generic enrichment has an internal function within the dramatic plot of *Olympia*, since Virgil is alluded to in the poem through a fictional disguise – the character Silvius calls him “the Mincian”, and briefly describes him as a shepherd-bard, who once sang about the Elysian Fields (*Olymp.* 159-61). In an attempt to reveal the things unseen by the Mincian, then, the spirit of *Olympia* provides an account of Elysium and the afterlife. Having these considerations in mind, in this paper I engage in a comparative analysis between selected excerpts from Boccaccio's *Olympia* and Virgil's *Aeneid* 6, focusing on both descriptions of Elysium as a special type of *locus amoenus*. I also suggest that the incorporation of epic elements, besides promoting an expansion of the bucolic genre as it was conventionally understood, may be regarded in the context of *Olympia* as an attempt to confront, through the veil of poetical fictions, an Ancient “pagan” and a Christian poet's ideas concerning the afterlife.