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What the Mincian Did Not Sing: Boccaccio's *Olympia* and Virgil's *Aeneid* 6

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INTRODUCTION

The devotion of Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375) to Virgil (70?-19 BC) may be attested in a considerable number of the former's writings, from prose to poetry, from vernacular to Latin. Yet, curiously, Boccaccio's treatment of the Roman poet has received relatively little attention from modern scholars. Particularly in regard to the *Buccolicum carmen* (1346/7-1367) – which although a product of a "humble" genre, may be considered one of Boccaccio's finest works, at least according to the criteria of "elevated literature" accepted by the majority of the humanist writers (Bruni 1990: 412) –, the dialogue with Virgil is strongly manifest. Indeed, in his *Epistola* 23 (1372-74), Boccaccio acknowledges taking Virgil's *Eclogues* as the main model for the composition of the *Buccolicum*.[1] By doing so, the poet from Certaldo not only hopes to align himself with the Mantuan, which somehow was already expected, but also to distinguish his own bucolic poetry from that of Petrarch, who in his recent revival of the genre "elevated the style a little higher than is customary" (*Epis.* 23, 1). What Boccaccio does not mention in the epistle, though, is that his use of Virgilian material was not restricted to pastoral. As an example of this, in this paper I shall explore how Boccaccio incorporated elements from Book 6 of Virgil's *Aeneid* into his fourteenth eclogue, *Olympia* (c. 1367), thus promoting the "generic enrichment" (Harrison 2007)[2] of the poem while establishing significant contrasts between "pagan" and Christian eschatological ideas.

At 285 lines, *Olympia* is the longest eclogue of Boccaccio. Like the other fifteen pieces included in the *Buccolicum carmen*, *Olympia* follows the dactylic hexameter pattern, instituted by Virgil as the traditional bucolic meter. The poem adopts the structure of a dialogue, also common to the genre, and introduces four characters (*collocutores*) – Silvius, Camalus, Therapon, and Olympia. Silvius is presented as an old countryman; Camalus and Therapon are probably his two servants (or reluctant colleagues, as briefly suggested by Smarr 1987: 253); and Olympia is the name given to the ghost of Silvius' lost daughter. According to Boccaccio's commentary sent to Martino da Signa (*Epist.* 23), Silvius is a personification of himself, and Olympia, of his beloved daughter Violante, who had died prematurely.[3] The eclogue, thus, would be grounded in an autobiographical experience, although this information seems to play a minor role within the internal framing of the narrative, which rather focuses on the supernatural encounter between the two relatives.

The plot is as follows: at early dawn, the old Silvius wakes up with the birds singing (*Olymp.* 2). Lycus, the dog, seems excited with the visit of a familiar person, so Silvius commands his sleeping servants to go check it outside, in the darkness (vv. 6-7). Therapon, then, comes back terrified, claiming that the whole forest is in flames (vv. 18-22). Silvius quickly urges the boys to run with water, but soon he realizes that the trees were not actually burning, and that the strong light attested by them was of a divine kind (vv. 23-39). In this mysterious atmosphere, Silvius foresees the spirit of his dead daughter, who assures the veracity of his vision (vv. 40-8). At this point, certain that he was not being deceived by love or dreams (v. 49), Silvius starts asking questions to the ghost: where has she been hiding? Who had endowed her with those beautiful garments? What light was that, shining from her eyes? Who were those companions of hers, and how could she grow in such a short period of time (vv. 50-63)? Olympia patiently explains that the "Berecynthian mother" had taken care of her (v. 65), and that her clothes, as well as her shining face, were gifts of "Parthenos" (vv. 66-7). As for her heavenly companions, couldn't Silvius recognize in them the sweet faces of his lost children (v. 72-3)? Delighted with the vision, the father calls them all to go kiss and hug him, and invites them to play the old games and celebrate (v. 74-85). Attending her father's request, Olympia and her siblings sing a song about "Codrus" (v. 91-111). Afterwards, Silvius asks Olympia about her eternal dwellings, and begs her not to leave (vv. 132-57). So, in order to console the miserable old man, Olympia speaks about the many blessings of her home, Elysium (vv. 158-95). The place is ruled by "great Archesilas", who provides the necessary food for those reborn (v. 200-7). By the side of the king are the band of

satyrs and the orders of venerable men. Among these was Olympia's grandfather, "Asylas", who welcomed her and led her to "Parthenos" (vv. 208-48). Finally, Silvius asks Olympia in what kind of activities she and the other children engage in Elysium (v. 262). She tells him that they pick flowers, make wreaths, play in the grass, and sing the merits of Parthenos and her son (vv. 263-8). But how is it possible to reach the heights of Elysium? Helping those in need and following God's guidance, says Olympia, and then she vanishes into thin air (vv. 275-85).

Hence, while depicting a fictional vision that provides a sort of *consolatio* to the mournful father, Boccaccio's *Olympia*, without disregarding the main conventions of an eclogue, also encompasses elements or *topoi* more commonly associated with other poetic genres, such as the elegy and the medieval dream-vision. In this paper, however, I intend to analyse the inclusion of epic material in *Olympia*, particularly focusing on the intertextual relations between the Virgilian and the Boccaccian accounts of Elysium (*Aeneid* 6.637 ff., and *Olympia* 170 ff., respectively). But before I begin this main discussion, I think it might be helpful first to highlight some of the most prominent bucolic elements evoked by Boccaccio in the poem, i.e. his intertexts with Virgil's *Eclogues*, which will make the allusions to the *Aeneid* even more powerful.

THE BUCOLIC TRADITION: *OLYMPIA* AND THE *ECLOGUES*

Let us start with the opening and final descriptions of the skyline in *Olympia*, at the following lines: "bright daylight, announced before, already spreads through the shadows" (Bocc., *Olymp.* 5-6) and "Lucifer arises, and now the sun emerges amidst the shadows" (vv. 284-5).[4] Here the reader notices that Boccaccio's eclogue takes place (unusually) at night, or rather at early dawn, when the sun is just about to rise, bringing forth the first shadows to the earth – a process that will culminate, at the end of the poem, with the appearance of Lucifer, the "morning star". Interestingly, we find that this last image is a subversion of Virgil's concluding *topos*: the formula "we must stop because night is coming on" (Curtius 1990: 90 f.), seen at *Ecl.* 1.82-3, 2.66-7, 6.85-6 and 10.75-7, gives place to the idea that the characters must stop because the sun had arisen and so they must start working. As Smarr (1987: 255) has observed, this movement from darkness to light, in Boccaccio's poem, may suggest the supremacy of the sacred over the secular pastoral.

Boccaccio also emulates the final few verses of *Eclogue* 10. There, as soon as Hesperus comes, casting shadows (*umbra… umbra… umbrae*, Virg., *Ecl.* 1.75-76) over the earth, Virgil's poet feels compelled to stop his song and arise (*surgamus*, *Ecl.* 10.75) – which may be read, allegorically, as an ascent from a low genre towards a higher genre (Mendes 2008: 200). Similarly, at the beginning of *Olympia*, the shepherd Silvius is lying on the soft turf (*ex molli recubans*, *Olymp.* 9; cf. Virg., *Ecl.* 1.1), half-asleep, until Therapon appears hasting the old man to get up (*fac surge*, *Olymp.* 18) and go see the fire burning in the woods. In the context of the *Buccolicum*, this could also be interpreted as a dramatic shift from the bucolic to the visionary, epic mode – but only a momentary shift, since, contrarily to Virgil's *Eclogue* 10, at the end of the Boccaccian poem Silvius will urge his servants to *start* with their work (Bocc., *Olymp.* 284), thus re-establishing the original bucolic setting.

Another *topos* from Virgil's *Eclogues* that can be attested in Boccaccio's fourteenth eclogue is the one of "the world upside down" (Curtius 1990: 94-8). This consists of a sequence of *adynata* or *impossibilia*, which illustrates an absurd, extremely unlikely event or an alteration in the natural course of things. In Virgil, this procedure is famously employed at *Ecl.* 4.18-33, with a positive meaning, to describe the coming of a new Golden Age. In *Olympia*, we find the use of *adynata* in two different contexts: first in a sarcastic remark of Silvius to Camalus (vv. 12-5); then, in Olympia's account of heaven (vv. 181-95, quoted below). In a broader way, the poem itself could be seen as an extensive work upon this figure of speech: the unusual appearance of Olympia inverts the expectations associated with an eclogue, turning the bucolic world "upside down" while promoting the encounter between two opposite realities or traditions – bucolic and epic, but also "pagan" and Christian.

There are, of course, many other allusions to the *Eclogues* in *Olympia*, manipulated at punctual moments of the text, and which contribute to maintain the structural organicity of the poem, as we shall see next.[5]

INCORPORATING THE EPIC: GENERIC ENRICHMENT IN *OLYMPIA*

According to the Greek and Roman system of classifying genres and styles, epic – as well as tragedy – would be considered a high, grandiloquent genre, while bucolic – as well as comedy – would be regarded as a low, humble type of composition.[6] Yet, in my understanding, the coexistence of the epic and the bucolic traditions in *Olympia* does not altogether take place in a hierarchical, but rather in a more horizontal way. Thus instead of an elevation, as one would expect in this case, we would have a lateral *expansion* of the bucolic genre as it is conventionally defined. For even though Boccaccio employs the verb *sublimo* ("elevate") to describe Petrarch's elevation of Virgil's humble style in the epistle cited above (*Epis.* 23, 1), he does so in reference to the abundant (probably excessive, in Boccaccio's view) usage of allegorical meanings enclosed in Petrarch's *Bucolicum*, rather than pointing out an elevation of themes or language. Moreover, it is important to notice that the incorporation of elements from a *guest genre* into a *host genre* (Harrison 2007: 6) is a procedure already recognizable in Virgil's *Eclogues*,[7] so concerning this aspect, too, Boccaccio would be consistently following his chief model.

At any rate, it is fair to admit that the incorporation of epic material into an eclogue makes the difference between the two genres and styles more apparent, but I defend that this difference does not result in a heterogeneous mixture in *Olympia*; on the contrary, it forms – together with the other elegiac, visionary, Dantesque features – a cohesive pattern, and in the end the generic identity of the poem remains clear. As I will try to briefly demonstrate here, this amalgam, rather than revealing the particularities of each code from an outside perspective, brings to light, most vividly, the points of divergence (and convergence) between an ancient "pagan" and a Christian poet's ideas concerning the afterlife. Besides, in my view this process of intergeneric intertextuality has an internal function within the narrative architecture of *Olympia*, since the allusion to the "Mincian" (*Minciades*), in verse 160, will propel most of Silvius' questions and Olympia's reports relating to Elysium:

> *Silv*. Elysium! About this place, the Mincian – I do recall – used to sing with his reed pipe, and there was no one more skilled. Is that place he sang the same as yours? I wish I could know it.
> *Olymp*. Indeed he perceived, with the force of his mind, some great things, and a partial view of the place; but he sang only a few things, if you could see the many blessings the Elysium holds, and how beautiful is the dwelling of the just, the most pleasing to our gods.
> *Silv*. Which mountains does this place encompass? In which region is it set? Tell me what the Mincian did not see, or what he willingly left hidden.
>
> (Bocc., *Olymp.* 159-68)

It is very reasonable to suppose, together with a number of scholars and editors of the *Buccolicum carmen*, that the Mincian cited above corresponds to Virgil.[8] Indeed, it was presumed that the Roman poet was born in the city of Mantua, which is surrounded by the River Mincius, and this idea is supported by a well-known passage of the *Georgics* (Virg., *Georg.* 3.12-15). As we shall see as we proceed, such reference to Virgil will reinforce the assumption that the Elysium alluded to in *Olympia* refers to the one described in the *Aeneid*.

OLYMPIA'S ELYSIUM: A *LOCUS AMOENUS*

The exact meaning and etymology of the Greek adjective *Ēlýsios*, from which the Latin word *Elysium* derives, is uncertain – it is hardly from *ḗlython*, "I went". The first literary description of an Elysium, though, is found in Homer's *Odyssey* (4.561-9), at the moment when Proteus prophesies that Menelaus would not die in Argos, but that instead the immortals would send him to the "Elysian plain" (*ibid.*, v. 563) at the bounds of Earth, "where life is easiest for men" (*ibid.*, v. 564, trans. A. T. Murray). Because he is the son-in-law of Zeus, Menelaus would not be constrained to die and pass through the doors of Hades, but would be translated – like the biblical Enoch (*Gen.* 5.24; *Heb.* 11.5) – to the dwellings of "fair-haired Rhadamanthus" while still alive. In Hesiod, a similar region is described, where certain heroes or demigods are also granted a dwelling of happiness by Zeus, although this one is set in "the Islands of the Blessed beside deep-

eddying Ocean" (Hes., *Op.* 171, trans. Glenn W. Most).[9] Both Homer and Hesiod, thus, place their select heroes' dwelling at a distant point on earth, contrarily to Virgil, who conceives Elysium as a special region of the underworld:

> This at length performed and the task of the goddess fulfilled, they came to a land of joy, the pleasant lawns and happy seats of the Blissful Groves. Here an ampler ether clothes the meads with bright light, and they know their own sun, and stars of their own. Some disport their limbs on the grassy wrestling ground, vie in sports, and grapple on the yellow sand; some tread the rhythm of a dance and chant songs. (…) Others he sees, to right and left, feasting on the sward, and chanting in chorus a joyous paean within a fragrant laurel grove, from where the full flood of Eridanus rolls downward through the forest.
>
> Here is the band of those who suffered wounds, fighting for their country; those who in lifetime were priests and pure, good bards, whose songs were meet for Phoebus; or they who ennobled life by arts discovered and they who by service have won remembrance among men – the brows of all bound with headbands white as snow.
>
> (Virg., *Aen.* 6.637-65)[10]

As for Boccaccio's fourteenth eclogue, even though the author is clearly taking the Elysian fields for the Christian heaven – yet in a veiled, "fabulous" manner –, Olympia's celestial abode is placed, like Dante's earthly paradise (*Pur.* 28), on the top of a remote mountain, "beyond the reach of sickly sheep" (Bocc., *Olymp.* 170). In answer to her father's plea, Olympia narrates, in verses 170-96, a great number of attributes of her Elysium, rendering a vivid image of this idyllic, wondrous landscape:

> *Olymp.* Far off, beyond the reach of sickly sheep, there is a mountain, illuminated with perpetual light, where Phoebus, from the depths of earth, is the first to uprise. On its top lies a forest, with palms so tall that touch the stars; and with cheerful laurels too, enduring cedars, peace-loving olive-trees, very dear to Pallas. Who could describe the variety of flowers, the sweet fragrances brought by the wind to the place? Who could tell of the silvery streams, with their wondrous waters sprinkling all around, bending their sinuous course to and fro among the trees, with a sweet murmur? The place produces golden fruits better than the Hesperides'. Gold-hued birds are there, and goats with golden horns, and gentle deer; lambs are there whose snowy fleeces gleam with yellow gold; and oxen too, and bulls, and fatted heifers, all radiant with gold. There are also tamed lions, and tamed gryphons, both with brilliant golden manes. Our sun is made of gold, our moon of silver, and larger than yours are the stars that shine on us. Eternal spring is never harmed by austral winds there, and a joyous temperature pervades the whole place. Earth's mists, night, and all discordant things are banished. No death awaits the flocks, nor sick old age; heavy cares are absent, so are poverty and suffering. Things wished come spontaneously to us all. What else? The air, so soft, resounds with sweet-toned song. (…) Up there, on a grassy mound, great Archesilas sits, taking care of the flocks and ruling the spheres.
>
> (Bocc., *Olymp.* 170-96, 200-1)

"Perpetual light" (v. 171); "palms so tall that touch the stars" (v. 173); "cheerful laurels" (v. 174); "enduring cedars" (*id.*); "peace-loving olive-trees" (v. 175); "variety of flowers" (v. 176); "sweet fragrances" (vv. 176-7); "silvery streams" (vv. 177-178); "golden fruits" (v. 181); gold-hued and domesticated animals (vv. 182-7); golden sun and silver moon (v. 188); grand, shining stars (v. 189); "eternal spring" (v. 190); "joyous temperature" (v. 191); absence of death, old age, and of "heavy cares" (vv. 193-4); soft, sweet air (v. 196): what else could be expected of such a perfect, miraculous landscape? In composing this idealized scenery, which is at the same time bucolic and divine, Boccaccio gathers a series of elements in order to present a particular vision of nature, shaded and beautiful, surrounded by a gentle spring breeze, and abounding with fruit trees and cool streams. Indeed, many scholars have pointed out, especially in regard to his vernacular

production, that this type of imagery is recurrent in Boccaccio's works, and is part of his vast repertoire of rhetorical and poetical devices.[11]

According to Curtius (1990: 195), the *locus amoenus* as a traditional motif or literary commonplace would only be catalogued by lexicographers and writers of style in the 10th century onwards; nevertheless, it is noteworthy that this practice dates back to the exemplary production of renowned poets such as Homer, Hesiod, Theocritus and Virgil. The last two in particular, through the *Idylls* and the *Eclogues* respectively, would perform a great role in the ulterior dissemination and establishment of the *topos* of the *locus amoenus*, with their many colourful descriptions of meadows and pastures (Curtius 1990: 190). Regarding *Olympia*, it is apparent that Boccaccio takes some elements from the Mincian's eclogues, and more specifically from the generically elevated *Eclogue* 4, into his own portrayal of Elysium – compare e.g. the imagery of the lamb's fleeces at *Ecl.* 4.43-5 with *Olymp.* 183-5, and also the account of the birth of Christ (Codrus) at *Olymp.* 91-3 with the *puer*'s descent from heaven at *Ecl.* 4.7-10. Still, it is in the *Aeneid* (as well as in Dante's *Commedia*) that Boccaccio will find most of the "raw material" for his depiction of the heavenly abodes – which evidently does not exclude the necessity of giving a bucolic treatment to all these pieces too.

First of all we should note that Olympia's Elysium is not susceptible to the contradictions and dualities that permeate and constitute the world of earthly mortals, since there, "[n]o death awaits the flocks, nor sick old age; heavy cares are absent, so are poverty and suffering" (Bocc., *Olymp.* 193-5). This means that the blessed beings who partake of the eternal happiness of the Elysian Fields with Olympia do not know the atrocity of wild animals, famine, the dark night, the cold, or any of these "discordant things" (*ibid.*, v. 192). One may observe that such a marvellous condition reflects more the New Jerusalem of the *Book of Revelation*,[12] than the reality of the shepherds of Virgil's *Eclogues*; for even though these might dwell in amiable places and have some good moments of joy and *otium*, they are still subject to the changing climate and nature's alternations; to physical labours, maladies of all sorts and, finally, to inescapable death. In sum, nothing is taken for granted by them. But the consequent feelings of uncertainty and despair – experienced for example by Meliboeus (Virg., *Ecl.* 1), Corydon (*Ecl.* 2), Moeris (*Ecl.* 9) or Gallus (*Ecl.* 10) – are indeed unimaginable to the inhabitants of Elysium. Even Olympia-Violante and Anchises were once susceptible to this same condition, for only after their bodily deaths were their souls released from pain and labour. Virgil's *Eclogue* 5 somehow pinpoints this same duality, while showing that Daphnis, after suffering a cruel death, was rewarded with eternal felicity in his post-terrestrial afterlife as a constellation. The difference is that in Boccaccio's *Olympia* as in *Aeneid* 6 this eternal felicity takes the form of a more concrete (yet divine) place with concrete (yet divine) attributes; a place that in many ways resembles an earthly *locus amoenus*.

OLYMPIA AND *AENEID* 6.637 FF.

Although located in the underworld, Virgil speaks of Elysium as a "land of joy" (Virg., *Aen.* 6.638), composed of many "pleasant lawns" (*ibid.*, v. 638) and "happy seats" (*ibid.*, v. 639). From this one could surmise a co-relationship between Virgil's subterranean Elysium and both the Homeric and Hesiodic descriptions of the earthly dwellings of the heroes. The parallel becomes even more likely if we note that the Latin adjective *fortunatus*, employed by Virgil as a modifier of *nemus* in verse 639 (*Fortunatorum Nemorum*), is a translation of the Greek *mákar*, so the Latins would refer to the Islands of the Blessed (*makárōn nē̃soi*) as *Fortunatorum Insulae*,[13] or simply as *Insulae Fortunatae*. Consequently we could suppose, following Austin's suggestion (1977: 203), that Virgil drank deeply from Hesiod's source (*Op.* 171), but that in order to shape his description of Elysium as a realm in the underworld rather than a distant place on earth, he used *nemores* ("groves") as a substitute for *nē̃soi* ("islands"). Servius (*ad Aen.* 6.638) also remarks that Virgil is here alluding to those wonderful mythological islands, and he concludes that the Elysian Fields could be indifferently placed in the underworld, in islands, or even on the moon: "the Elysian Fields are located either in hell, in the Blessed Islands, or in the lunar sphere" (Serv., *ad Aen.* 6.640, trans. mine).

Hence, in depicting the pleasant dwellings of Anchises, it is highly acknowledged that Virgil draws mainly from a catalogue of images and vocabulary associated with a type of *locus amoenus* that in many ways resembles Homer's Elysium or Hesiod's Islands of the Blessed. Nonetheless, if we

think about the considerable number of references to lawns, meadows and hills, we could yet regard this same landscape as a highly idealized bucolic field. Following this line of thinking, if on the one hand I postulate that Boccaccio's Elysium brings epic and Christian elements into the eclogue *Olympia*, on the other I would assume that Virgil's Blissful Groves also encompass features from sources as diverse as pastoral, philosophical and cosmological within the epic.[14] In this sense, the comparative analysis of the two poems highlights the intergeneric aspects perceived in Virgil's *Aeneid* too, and more specifically those related to the bucolic elements in Book 6.[15]

Reading Virgil's account of Elysium *vis-à-vis* Boccaccio's I have noticed, for instance, that the mountain is a central component of the setting. To start with, at *Aen.* 6.658 we may observe the occurrence of the adverb *superne* – *inter odoratum lauri nemus, unde superne / plurimus Eridani per silvam volvitur amnis* (Virg., *Aen.* 6.658-9, "within a fragrant laurel grove, from where the full flood of the Eridanus rolls downward through the forest"). The term normally indicates "above" or "from above", a meaning that, in Austin's (1977: 208) view, "is possible here if we imagine the *nemus* to be on a hillside (…), with the river flowing down *per silvam* (659)". Austin is vehemently against the interpretation that the *silva* is separate from the *nemus*, and that it might refer to some forest in the upper world, with *superne* meaning "in the world above" – according to him, this idea is "absurd" (*ibid.*). However, some commentators like Servius (approved by Norden) explain *superne* as *ad superos*, "to the upper world". I tend to agree with Austin, interpreting *superne* as an indication of a hill or mountain within the limits of the underworld itself: on the hillside there would be a grove (*nemus*), where the river Eridanus would probably emerge and then roll downwards, bringing water to the other parts of the forest (*per silvam*).[16] A little further, at lines 676-8, we have the mention of the ridge (*iugum*, v. 676; *summa cacumina*, v. 678) of the hill, from which the Sybil and Aeneas will be able to see the shining fields where Anchises is.[17] Now if we recollect Olympia's narration of her Elysium quoted above (Bocc., *Olymp.* 170-201), we will remember that the same emphasis is put on the mountain – "Far off, beyond the reach of sickly sheep, there is a mountain, illuminated with perpetual light, where Phoebus, from the depths of earth, is the first to uprise" (*ibid.*, v. 170-3).

In both versions of Elysium there is also reference to light (*lumen*) – see *Olymp.* 171 and *Aen.* 6.640-1 ("here an ampler ether clothes the meads with bright light")[18] – as well as to a lawn (*gramineus*) – see *Olymp.* 200-1 ("Up there, on a grassy mound [*in gramineo summo*], great Archesilas sits") and *Aen.* 6.642 ("Some disport their limbs on the grassy wrestling ground [*in gramineis . . . palaestris*]") –, and to a different, exquisite kind of sun and stars – see *Olymp.* 188-9 ("Our sun is made of gold, our moon of silver, and larger than yours are the stars that shine on us") and *Aen.* 6.641 ("and they know their own sun, and stars of their own"). Furthermore, in the two accounts the name of Phoebus Apollo is brought up – see *Olymp.* 172 and *Aen.* 6.662 ("and pure, good bards, whose songs were meet for Phoebus"). Still with regard to these two passages in particular (*Olymp.* 170-201 and *Aen.* 6.637-65), it might be valid to note the two respective occurrences of the adjective *letus/laetus*, "joyous" – see *Olymp.* 174, 191; and *Aen.* 6.638, 657.

Yet other parallels emerge from the confrontation of that same excerpt from the *Aeneid* with other passages from Boccaccio's eclogue, as when Olympia narrates, in verses 263-8, the activities in which she and her heavenly associates engage in Elysium:

> *Olymp.* We children gather flowers, and gird our long hair with the little garlands we make; we wander with joyous dances through the forest, by the springs and sounding rivers; also, while playing in the grass, we happily sing the well-deserved honours of Parthenos, and the praises of her son.
>
> (Bocc., *Olymp.* 263-8)

Like in Virgil's description (see *Aen.* 6.656-9 above), here too the reader may visualize a group of blessed beings happily dancing and singing together as in a choir, amidst the most pleasant meadows and rivers. It is particularly interesting to note that the inhabitants of Virgil's Elysium sing *paeana*, i.e. a hymn addressed to the god Phoebus – "chanting in chorus a joyous paean"

(Virg., *Aen.* 6.657) –,[19] whereas Olympia and the other children sing songs in honour of *Parthenos*, i.e. the Virgin Mary, and her son, Jesus Christ (Bocc., *Olymp.* 267-8).

OLYMPIA *VS.* ANCHISES

But let us move on now in *Aeneid* 6 and go back a little in *Olympia*, in order to compare the encounter between Aeneas and his father with that between Silvius and his daughter. First of all we should remember that contrarily to the Trojan hero, who had actually descended into the underworld, Silvius has a vision of Olympia in a forest, before dawn – and here, too, we might identify a conspicuous case of intertext with Dante's *Commedia*, when the spirit of Virgil appears to the narrator in a *selva oscura* (*Inf.* 1.1-3).

Still, both Aeneas' and Silvius' encounters with the spectre of a beloved, dead relative share some points in common, the most apparent being the fact that the two dialogues take place in a natural type of landscape.

> "Over what lands, what wide seas have you journeyed to my welcome! What dangers have beset you, my son! How I feared the realm of Libya might work you harm!" But he [Aeneas] answered: "Your *image*, father, your sad *image*, meeting me repeatedly, drove me to seek these portals. My ships ride the Tuscan sea. Grant me to clasp your hand, grant me, father, and withdraw not from my embrace!" So he spoke, his face wet with flooding tears. Thrice there he strove to throw his arms about his neck; thrice the *image*, vainly clasped, fled from his hands, even as light winds, and most like a winged *dream*.
>
> (*Aen*. 6.692-702, emphasis mine)

> *Silv.* Maybe I'm still asleep. But I don't think so! This *light*, indeed, is neither flame nor fire. Don't you see the luscious leaves and the green hazel-trees amidst the light, and the vigorous beech-trees too, in every part untouched? Here burns no harmful heat.
>
> (...)
>
> *Olymp.* Hail, my sweet jewel, o dearest father, hail! Don't be afraid, I'm your daughter. How come that you turn your eyes?
>
> *Silv.* I cannot reckon if now I'm awake or fancying *dreams* – I do confess –, for the voice of my daughter and her sweet *image* stand here before me. I'm afraid I'm being deceived, since oftentimes the gods with shadows delude fools. Let's return home!
>
> *Olymp.* Silvius, why do you doubt? Do you really think Olympia would mock her own father, and reveal herself in light without the gods' consent? I've come to soothe your painful tears.
>
> (Bocc., *Olymp.* 27-30, 40-8, emphasis mine)

Aen. 6.679-94 describes the scene where Aeneas and the Sibyl, escorted by the soul of the poet Musaeus (Virg., *Aen.* 6.666-78) – constantly associated with Orpheus (Austin 1977: 210) –, finally find Anchises amidst shining fields (*Aen.* 6.677), deep in a flourishing vale (*ibid.*, v. 679), while he was inspecting the spirits of his future Roman descendants. *Olymp.* 27-48, in turn, narrates how Silvius, soon after being alerted by Therapon, sees a great light in the forest, which makes both servant and master think there is a fire destroying the trees – but afterwards Silvius realizes that the light in issue is "neither flame nor fire" (v. 27), and then he discerns his celestial little daughter. Regarding these two passages, it is interesting to note a parallel between, on the one hand, the contrasting brightness of Virgil's Elysium as a whole in comparison with the darkness of the other infernal regions previously described in the *Aeneid*, as the reiterated use of the term *umbra* reveals,[20] and on the other hand, the heavenly light which emerges in the dark forest of *Olympia*.

I consider the element of light as having a crucial function and effect in both descriptions, since, unlike the other items which make up the setting – the meadows, streams and mountains –, this

has an impalpable and at the same time all-pervading quality that somehow brings an insubstantiality, a divine aura to the places and characters associated with Elysium. In Virgil, this idea of divine brightness is yet more closely linked to that of the pure ether (see *Aen.* 6.640, quoted above), which in Greek mythology was related to the concept of a boundless sky and to the dwelling of the gods.[21] Thence, Virgil provides a supernatural illumination for his underworld Elysium, which allusively reflects the poetical (and cosmological) myths of the upper regions. When it comes to Boccaccio, though, it is hard not to associate the descriptions of light in *Olympia* with those in Dante's *Commedia*, and moreover the encounter between Silvius and the spirit of his daughter with the one between Dante and Beatrice, which takes place in the *Purgatorio*.[22]

Probably another parallel between *Aeneid* 6 and *Olympia* might be identified in the comparison of the passage where Anchises enquires of his son about the troubles he had gone through ("Over what lands, what wide seas have you journeyed to my welcome! What dangers have beset you, my son!" – Virg., *Aen.* 6.692-3) with the one where Silvius, in the following verses of *Olympia*, asks his daughter where she has been kept all that time:

> *Silv.* Now I know: neither love nor *dreams* deceive me.[23] O my dear, my only hope! What god has kept you, daughter? (...) [I]n what haunts have you been kept for such a long day? Tell me, who has given you this shining white dress, entwined with yellow gold? What light is this, not seen before, that sparkles in your eyes? Who are these comrades of yours? It's amazing how much you've grown in such a short period: it seems to me, daughter, that you're ready for a husband!
>
> (Bocc., *Olymp.* 49-51, 58-63, emphasis mine)

Yet at his particular moment, as we may observe, the analogy is not between the lines of the two dead characters, but rather between the speeches of the two fathers: whereas the living Silvius had been worried about the destiny of his daughter in the afterlife, the dead Anchises had been concerned with the possible dangers which his son was enduring on earth.

THE IMAGE OF THE DEAD

Another common feature between the two accounts is the reference to the image or form (*imago*) of both phantoms of Anchises and Olympia, as well as the indication, though in different contexts, of a dream (*somnum*) – see *Olymp.* 42, 43 and 49 above in italics (respectively "dreams" [*somnia*], "image" [*ymago*], and again "dreams" [*somnia*]), and *Aen.* 6.695, 701 and 702 (respectively "image" [*imago*], "image" [*imago*], and "dream" [*somno*]).

Also, in the case of Boccaccio's *Olympia*, initially there is an ambiguity (which afterwards, in verse 49, is dissipated) – typical of the medieval dream-vision genre, but equally found in ancient literature – between what is being dreamt and what is being truly seen; between illusion and reality, impalpable and palpable. And this same contrast is somehow already present in the picture of Aeneas vainly trying to hold his father's ghost, "most like a winged dream" (Virg., *Aen.* 6.702, see also *insomnia* 6.896); in *Olympia*, Silvius too will express his desire to embrace the phantoms of his lost children, but there is no further indication if he succeeds in it or not:

> *Olymp.* Don't you recognize your Marius and Iulius, and their beloved sisters, and all these distinguished faces? This is your beautiful offspring!
>
> *Silv.* My sons' cheeks shadowed with down hindered me from perceiving their familiar faces. Now, give me your hands! Come here, receive my hugs and happy kisses, and let me satisfy my soul!
>
> (Bocc., *Olymp.* 72-7)

In fact, this is a quite interesting passage because we not only discover that Olympia is not alone, but that also she has come with her siblings, i.e. the other children of Silvius who had died as infants. Thus while in the *Aeneid* (6.756-887) Anchises will show to Aeneas the future descendants of Rome in order to inspire courage and the longing for glory in his son – "kindling his soul with longing for the glory that was to be" (Virg., *Aen.* 6.889) –, in Boccaccio's eclogue we have, conversely, Olympia presenting to Silvius the spirits of his lost children – now sweet, heavenly youths – in order to console her father for his temporary loss – temporary because soon Silvius will join the eternal bliss of Elysium, as suggested by Olympia's words: "I part from you for a little while. But soon you will see me again, and by my side you will spend infinite years of happiness" (Bocc., *Olymp.* 153-4). The comparison between the two scenes might be further strengthened by observing that Olympia's remark on Silvius' "beautiful offspring" (*pulchra propago*), in verse 73, echoes Anchises' phrase "Roman offspring" (*Romana propago*) at *Aen.* 6.870, with reference to the dead *iuuenis*, Marcellus.

Perhaps, without neglecting the general context and the poetical purposes of each description, that contrast between Anchises' prophetic vision of Rome, on the one hand, and Olympia's promise of immortal happiness to her father, on the other, suggests a critical difference between the "pagan" and the Christian approaches to the future. In fact, while Virgil emphasizes the human affairs related to the material world – the history of Rome –, Boccaccio privileges the things related to heaven and salvation – the history of the soul. To use Augustine's words, the first poet would be more concerned with the earthly city, and the second, with the heavenly city.[24]

THE TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS

Finally, another fundamental difference between the "pagan" and the Christian value systems, which somehow will also shape the two poetical accounts of Elysium at stake, is brought to light once we compare Anchises' speech on transmigration with Boccaccio's personal idea of a single, perishable bodily existence. Indeed the father of Aeneas, whose account seems to derive from a synthesis of the Stoic doctrine of the *anima mundi* with Platonic and Orphic-Pythagorean theories, suggests that, after death, the spirit gradually purges the contaminations acquired during its bodily imprisonment, and with lapse of time, having drunk the waters of Lethe and forgotten all its past memories, may return to another body:

> "each of us undergoes his own purgatory. Then we are sent to spacious Elysium, a few of us possess the blissful fields. All these that you see, when they have rolled time's wheel through a thousand years, the god summons in vast throng to Lethe's rivers, so that, their memories effaced, they may once more revisit the vault above and conceive the desire to return to the body."
>
> (Virg., *Aen.* 6.743-51)

Thus, considering the structural purpose of the passage above, which anticipates the great procession of Romans and Anchises' prophetical reviews (*Aen.* 6.756 ff.), Virgil ends up transforming Elysium from an ultimate paradise into a resting-stage on the soul's journey (Austin 1977: 220). This idea is not only absent in *Olympia*, but it is also vehemently rejected by Boccaccio in the *Genealogie*, where he calls such an opinion preposterous, *ridicula*, and directly quotes from Virgil.[25]

Nonetheless, I would still say that in *Olympia* Boccaccio tries to focus more on the similarities between Virgilian and Christian views, since both agree that a place of repose would be waiting for the pure, untainted souls. Drawing from the *Aeneid*, one could expect at least a brief allusion to this fundamental difference concerning the future of the soul after death – perhaps Olympia could mention that the Mincian was wrong in supposing that one's spirit might return to a body. On the contrary, this idea is simply omitted in the poem; there is no hint of explicit or veiled attack on it. Hence I believe that *Olympia,* besides promoting the generic enrichment of the eclogue as a whole, offers an amplification, rather than a "correction", of the Virgilian account of the afterlife. In fact, based on the excerpts briefly cited in this paper, I think it was with this purpose of adding

new information that Boccaccio mostly recurred to Dante, i.e. to fill in, with strategic allusions to the *Commedia*, what he possibly regarded as "blank spaces" left in Virgil's description of paradise – the things that the Mincian had not fully grasped, or which he deliberately omitted in his song (*Olymp.* 163-5).[26]

I would finally conclude by saying, in the steps of Kallendorf (1989: 69-70), that the sixth book of the *Aeneid* offered a treasure trove of material for a Christian poet and critic like Boccaccio, who read Virgil essentially through a rhetorical filter. Considering the bigger picture of correspondences and contrasts found between *Aeneid* 6 and *Olympia*, it is clear that Boccaccio, more than emulating the main poetical aspects and pattern of Virgil's description, draws on the Roman's epic to build the narrative arc of the eclogue – after all, as I have briefly pointed out, it is Silvius' first recalling of the Mincian in verse 160 that propels most of Olympia's account of Elysium. But furthermore, Boccaccio also provides an overview of the moral structure of Virgil's Elysian Fields, conceiving it not as an intermediate stage, but rather as the final goal and last dwelling of the blessed souls, the place where they will spend infinite years of joy.

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[1] "The Syracusan poet Theocritus, as we know from the ancients, was the first to devise in Greek poetry the bucolic style, although he did not perceive any meaning beyond the surface of his words. After him Virgil wrote in Latin, but under the surface he hid some meanings, even though he did not want us to always perceive something beyond the names of his characters. After Virgil other poets wrote, but undistinguished ones, with whom we should not occupy ourselves; except my illustrious master Francesco Petrarca, who elevated the style a little higher than is customary, and continuously assigned some meanings to the names of his characters. From these I have followed Virgil, since I did not trouble myself to hide a meaning under each character's name"

(Bocc., *Epistola* 23, 1-2. All the translations of Boccaccio's *Epistle* 23 are mine. I have followed Auzzas' edition [1992]).

[2] "I define 'generic enrichment' as the way in which generically identifiable texts gain literary depth and texture from detailed confrontation with, and consequent inclusion of elements from, texts which appear to belong to other literary genres" (Harrison 2007: 1).

[3] "By Silvius I mean myself, and so I name him because the first idea for this eclogue came to me in a certain forest [*in silva*]. 'Camalus', from the Greek, means *hebes* [= 'dull'] or *torpens* [= 'lazy'] in Latin, because in him are demonstrated the habits of a lazy servant. Of 'Therapon' I do not give you the meaning because I cannot remember it, unless I could revise the book from which I took it; so I beg your indulgence. You know how slippery is human memory, especially that of old men. By Olympia I mean my little daughter, who died at an age in which, as we believe, those who die become citizens of heaven. Thus she, who was named Violante while alive, now that is dead I call 'Olympia', the 'heavenly'" (Bocc., *Epistola* 23, 28).

[4] The translations of Boccaccio's *Olympia* presented in this paper are also mine. I have followed Perini's edition (1994).

[5] See, for instance, invocations to the god Pan (*Olymp.* 23, 77; *Ecl.* 2.31-3, 4.58-9, 5.59, 8.24, 10.26); reference to certain trees as beeches, hazels and oaks (*Olymp.* 28-9, 79, 121; *Ecl.* 1.1, 1.14, 1.17, 2.3, 3.12, 5.3 etc.); reference to some specific mythological and pastoral figures, like Daphnis and Alexis (*Olymp.* 70-1; *Ecl.* 2.1, 2.26, 5.20, 5.25, 5.27 etc.); the mention to instruments such as reed-pipes and flutes (*Olymp.* 85, 113, 118, 160, 215, 218, 244; *Ecl.* 1.10, 2.32, 2.34, 3.13, 3.25, 3.27 etc.); bucolic animals such as goats, sheep, cattle and cows (*Olymp*. 83-4, 108, 137, 183, 185, 193; *Ecl.* 1.9, 1.15, 1.45, 2.41, 3.3, 3.6 etc.); and traditional names of shepherds, like Tityrus and Mopsus (*Olymp.* 125-6; *Ecl.* 1, 5, 3.20, 3.96, 6.4, 8.26, 8.29, 8.55 etc.).

[6] "As regards type, of course it is the humble character. For there are three characters, the humble, the middle, and the grand, all of which we encounter in this poet. For in the *Aeneid* he has the grand, in the *Georgics* the middle, and in the *Bucolics* the humble in accordance with the character of the business and the people; for the people here are rustic, rejoicing in their simplicity, and nothing elevated should be expected from them" (Serv., *ad Buc.* pr. 1, trans. Joseph Farrell, in Stray & Kraus [ed.]).

[7] In Virgil's *Eclogue* 4 "greater" topics suitable for an epic, such as consuls, contemporary politics and prophecy, are treated. In this case, as in *Olympia*, the poet enters the bucolic stage to discourse upon serious matters; the difference is that Virgil assumes a programmatic tone right from the start, openly revealing his ambition to sing of "things somewhat greater" (*Ecl.* 4.1), while Boccaccio subtly camouflages his scheme, choosing to dramatize the same kind of operation. See Virgil, *Ecl.* 4, 1-3: *Sicelides Musae, paulo maiora canamus. / non omnis arbusta iuvant humilesque myricae; / si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae* ("Sicilian Muses, let us sing a somewhat loftier strain. Not everyone do orchards and the lowly tamarisks delight. If our song is of the woodland, let the woods be worthy of a consul", trans. H. R. Fairclough). See also Harrison (2007: 36-44).

[8] See e.g. Chiecchi (1995: 223 ff.), Lidonnici (1914: 341), and Ricci (1965: 682). The name *Minciades* is also alluded to in Boccaccio's eclogue *Saphos* (*Bucc.* 12.67), when the character Aristeus presents a poetic colloquium between Virgil (*Minciades*) and Petrarch (*Silvanus*). For the traditional association between Virgil and the city of Mantua, see also Bocc., *Comm.* 1, *lez.* 2; and *De montibus*… 5.591.

[9] The information in this paragraph – including the reference to Hesiod (but without the quote) – were collected from Stanford's commentary (1996) on *Odyssey* 4.563 ff., and Austin's commentary (1977) on *Aeneid* 6.637-78.

[10] For the translations of the *Aeneid* I have followed Fairclough (1999), taking the liberty to make some small changes in his text.

[11] For bibliographical indications about this topic, see Raja (2003, 11, n. 2).

[12] See *Apocalypsis* 21.4 (*Vulgate*): *et absterget Deus omnem lacrimam ab oculis eorum: et mors ultra non erit, neque luctus, neque clamor, neque dolor erit ultra, quia prima abierunt* ("He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist any more – or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist", trans. *NET Bible*).

[13] See Plautus' *Trinummus* (549-51): *sicut fortunatorum memorant insulas, / quo cuncti qui aetatem egerint caste suam / conueniant* ("just as they speak of the Isles of the Blessed, where / all those come together who have lived their lives morally", trans. Wolfgang de Melo). Austin, 1977: 203; Butler, 1920: 214.

[14] Regarding the use of the syntagm *aeris in campi*, at the final verses of Book 6 (*Aen.* 6.887), Austin (1977: 272-3) suggests that Virgil allusively reflects the cosmological theories of the soul's ascent to heaven. See also Norden (1903) 23 ff.

[15] I have not found any indication of this aspect concerning Virgil's description of the Elysian Fields in particular. Nevertheless, we have studies on bucolic intertexts found in *Aeneid* 8 (see e.g. Apostol's PhD dissertation, 2009). Harrison (2007) also provides some examples of pastoral in epic.

[16] Fairclough (1999) understands *superne* differently, as "upward", and not as "from above", and in a footnote he explains that "[t]he Eridanus or Po has an underground course of about two miles near its source, and so was said to spring from the lower world" (*ibid*.: 578-9, n. 32) – see also *Georg.* 4.372. However, in the context at issue I prefer to regard the *silva* as a forest within the Elysian Fields (or perhaps as the whole Elysium), and consequently in the underworld, not above it, as supported by Austin.

[17] Norden (according to Austin 1977: 212) notes that viewing from a height is a frequent motif in apocalyptic writings; see e.g. Cic. *Rep.* 6.11 (Scipio's dream): *ostendebat . . . Karthaginem de excelso et pleno stellarum illustri et claro quodam loco* ("from a lofty place which was bathed in clear starlight, he pointed out Carthage", trans. Clinton W. Keyes), and Matthew 4.8 (Vulgate): *iterum adsumit eum diabolus in montem excelsum valde et ostendit ei omnia regna mundi et gloriam eorum* ("Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their grandeur", trans. *NET Bible*).

[18] As Austin (1977: 204) points out, *purpureo* in this case does not refer to purple colour, but rather to the bright, dazzling quality of the light, as at *Aen.* 1.590-1, when Venus endows Aeneas with *lumen iuventae purpureum*, "the bright glow of youth", and also at *Ecl.* 9.40, with reference to spring: *hic ver purpureum, varios hic flumina circum / fundit humus flores* ("Here glows the Spring, here earth / beside the streams pours forth a thousand flowers", trans. James Rhoades). In Austin's words, "Elysium has the delight of a bright sparkling day in spring, full of colour and animation" – see Pindar's *Olympian Ode* 2.72-3; Lucian's *Ver. Hist.* 2.12 (on the City of the Blessed). Boccaccio on the other hand uses the same adjective, at *Olymp.* 216, to refer to the purple colour, when describing the heavenly order of venerable men (*Purpureus . . . ordo virum venerabilis*) – here, probably, he was following Dante's description of the mystical procession in the earthly paradise of *Purgatorio* (Canto 29).

[19] See Servius *ad Aen.* 6.657: *paeana proprie Apollinis laudes, quod nunc congruit propter lauri nemus* ("*paeana* are hymns in honour of Apollo – which here is convenient to a laurel-tree wood", trans. mine). See also "*Paean*" in *OLD* 2; Austin (1977: 207); Fletcher (1941: 80); Norden (1903: 292).

[20] Before meeting his father in Elysium, while passing by the Mourning Fields (*lugentes campi*, 6.441), Aeneas recognizes the unfortunate Dido, "a dim form amid the shadows" (*per umbras obscuram,* 6.452-3), and then, bursting into tears, explains to the Carthaginian queen that he was constrained by the gods "to pass through these shades, through lands squalid and forsaken, and through abysmal night" (*ire per umbras*, / *per loca senta situ cogunt noctemque profundam*, 6.461). For a more detailed analysis of the use of the term *umbra* in *Aeneid* 6, see Cardoso (2004: 413-22).

[21] See Homer, *Odyssey* 6.41-6: “So saying, the goddess, flashing-eyed Athene, departed to Olympus, where, they say, is the abode of the gods that stands fast forever. Neither is it shaken by winds nor ever wet with rain, nor does snow fall upon it, but the air [*aíthrē*] is outspread clear and cloudless, and over it hovers a radiant whiteness; here the blessed gods are happy all their days” (trans. A. T. Murray; the insertion in brackets is mine).

[22] See Dante, *Purg.* 31.139-45: “O isplendor di viva luce etterna, // chi palido si fece sotto l’ombra / sì di Parnaso, o bevve in sua cisterna, / che non paresse aver la mente ingombra, // tentando a render te qual tu paresti / là dove armonizzando il ciel t’adombra, / quando ne l’aere aperto ti solvesti?” (“O splendor of the eternal living light! / who that has drunk deep of Parnassus’ waters, / or grown pale in the shadow of its height, // would not, still, feel his burdened genius fail / attempting to describe in any tongue / how you appeared when you put by your veil // in that free air open to heaven and earth / whose harmony is your shining shadowed forth!”; trans. John Ciardi).

[23] Cf. Bocc., *Olymp.* 49 (*Agnosco: nec fallit amor, nec somnia fallunt* [“Now I know: neither love nor dreams deceive me”]) and Virg., *Ecl.* 8.108 (*credimus? an, qui amant, ipsi sibi somnia fingunt?* [“Can I trust my eyes? Or do lovers fashion their own dreams?”, trans. H. R. Fairclough]).

[24] See Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 14.28*: Fecerunt itaque civitates duas amores duo, terrenam scilicet amor sui usque ad contemptum Dei, caelestem vero amor Dei usque ad contemptum sui. Denique illa in se ipsa, haec in Domino gloriatur* (“Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord”, trans. R. W. Dyson).

[25] “There were those who thought that all the spirits of men were created in the beginning at the same time and then bestowed upon men as they were born, and that when upon our deaths they descended to the lower world and were tormented there until they were purged of what they committed in life, and that from there they made the crossing to the Elysian Fields, and from there after one thousand years were led to Mercury to the River Lethe so that when they drank from it they would forget the labors of their present life and thus desire to return to bodies, to which Mercury called them back. Vergil touches upon this laughable theory [*ridiculam opinionem*] best when he says: ‘Each of us endures our own shades. From there we are sent / to wide Elysium, and a few of us hold these happy meadows. / Until the long day of time’s completed orb extracts / the ingrained stain and leaves purified / the ethereal perception and the fire of clear air. / All these, when they have rolled the wheel for a thousand years, / the god calls to the River Lethe in a long column, / now having forgotten as they revisit the upper world / again and renew a desire to return into bodies’” (*Gen. deo.* 2.7.7, trans. Jon Solomon; the insertion in brackets is mine).

[26] Chiecchi (1995: 232), in his comparison between Petrarch’s *Parthenias* and Boccaccio’s *Olympia*, points out that, whereas Petrarch’s eclogue depicts a contrast between the secular poetry of Virgil and Homer, on the one hand, and that of the sacred writings of David, on the other, Boccaccio’s *Olympia* seeks to establish a contrast between Virgil (*Minciades*) and Dante: “Un *certamen* sulla poesia è anche l’egloga *Olimpia*, ove è riproposta la sequenza agonistica degli *auctores*, ancora una volta Virgilio, il *Minciades*, superato da un autore il cui nome tuttavia è marcato per *blanchissement* integrale”. Chiecchi’s interpretation is indeed convincing, especially if we consider all the significant parallels between *Olympia* and Dante’s *Commedia* (mostly the *Purgatorio*). Nevertheless, while Virgil is introduced in the poem “disguised” as *Minciades* – in the same way that Petrarch uses *Parthenias* as a bucolic mask for the Roman poet, and mentions Homer as a foreign singer, though without explicitly naming him –, in *Olympia* there is no indication of the sort which we could relate more directly to Dante “the author”. In my personal view, Chiecchi is right in seeing a *certamen* between two kinds of poetry (Christian and “pagan”), but perhaps he overinterprets when he says: “[l]’identità di Dante risulta per suo trasferimento nel testo che gli appartiene e viene devoluta alla narrazione della vita dei beati effetuata da Olimpia”. I think that the intertextual relationships with the *Commedia*, in *Olympia*, do not necessarily result in a direct identification with Dante the poet.