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“Ov’ancor le sirene uson cantare”^{*}
Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Silva cadens*
(*Buccolicum carmen* 5)

Although Boccaccio’s *Buccolicum carmen* is a highly neglected field of research, the political commitment of the so-called Neapolitan Eclogues (*Bucc. carm.* 3–6), displaying a radical change, the *inocerenza politico-morale* in Vittore Branca’s formulation, has triggered quite many controversies. On the one hand, in Eclogue 3 (*Faunus*) Boccaccio committed himself to the Hungarian king Lewis the Great, who had launched a campaign against the Kingdom of Naples upon the bestial murder of his brother, Andrew of Hungary. On the other hand, Eclogue 4 (*Dorus*) already describes the hardships encountered by Louis of Taranto, Joanna’s new husband, fleeing from Naples to escape the Hungarian troops. Eclogue 5 (*Silva cadens*) bemoans the fall of Naples, while Eclogue 6 (*Alcestus*) celebrates Louis of Taranto, who had returned to Naples following the sudden homecoming of the Hungarian king. According to the compact summary of Vittore Branca, the tone of the Neapolitan Eclogues gradually turns from an invective into a palinode, an elegy, and a paean: *Dall’invettiva volge succesivamente alla palinodia, all’elegia, al peana*.¹ In Branca’s view, Boccaccio

^{*} The author’s research was supported by the Bolyai János Research Grant of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

¹ “Lungo un tempo che è difficile fissare, il Boccaccio passa in questi componimenti da posizioni favorevoli a re Luigi d’Ungheria e da accuse per Giovanna e i Taranto (III, nella duplice redazione) a deprecazioni sulla ferocia ungherese e sulla misera fine di Carlo di Durazzo, a giudizi benevoli per Luigi di Taranto e i suoi seguaci, a rimpianti del buon tempo antico di Roberto, a esaltazioni dei sovrani e dell’Acciaiuoli (IV, V, VI). Dall’invettiva volge successivamente alla palinodia, all’elegia, al peana.” BRANCA, V.: *Boccaccio. Profilo biografico*. Firenze 1977, 76. In the latest handbook on Boccaccio, D. Lummus refers to this compact formulation of Branca, however, somewhat imprecisely: “Vittore Branca has pointed out that the invective of the fourth eclogue turns into the elegy of the fifth, *Silva cadens* («Falling Forest»), and the paean of the sixth, *Alcestus*.” LUMMUS, D.: *The Changing Landscape of the Self*. In KIRKHAM, V. – SHERBERG, M. – SMARR, J. L. (eds.): *Boccaccio. A Critical Guide to the Complete Works*. Chicago and London 2013, 158. In fact, in BRANCA’S interpretation, Eclogue 3 is the anti-Neapolitan

may have informed himself better on the events in Naples after the completion of the *Faunus* favouring the Hungarians, or he may simply have adjusted himself to the changes of Florentine politics, or perhaps he began to hope for the support of the Neapolitan court and mainly of Acciaiuoli.² All of the above could be quite understandable, and it is also a fact that the rash execution of Charles of Durazzo had turned the public opinion against the initially sympathetic Hungarian king not only in Naples, but in the whole of Italy, too. However, it should be kept in mind that the poet closed the collection of 16 eclogues only in 1366, almost twenty years after the events in Naples. Thus, Boccaccio, who often amended and altered his texts, would have had plenty of opportunities to eliminate or at least soften the political and moral incoherence of the Neapolitan Eclogues.³ The fact that the *Silva cadens* has received little attention even in the few works dealing with the *Buccolicum carmen* in detail may also be the result of this indeterminacy of the interpretation. In his still indispensable handbook E. Carrara only just mentions this cold and lengthy (*fredda e prolissa*) eclogue, in which the changed political views of the poet (*il mutato animo del Boccaccio*) are reflected.⁴ G. Lidonici, who analyses the

invective, 4 is the palinode, 5 the elegy, and 6 the paeon. Similarly PERINI, G. B.: *Buccolicum carmen*, Introduzione. In BRANCA, V. (ed.): *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio. V/2*. Milano 1994, 696.

² “è evidente che il Boccaccio rivedeva e rettificava i suoi giudizi; sia per un miglior conoscenza dei fatti, sia in armonia alla politica fiorentina, sia in fine per le sue mai nascoste simpatie e – perché no? – speranze rivolte alla Corte angioina e all’Acciaiuoli...” BRANCA (n. 1) 76. note 36. For the sake of interest let us mention that the scholars writing about the *Buccolicum Carmen* in the patriotic atmosphere of Hungary celebrating its millennium (1896) have sharply criticized Boccaccio’s Neapolitan Eclogues. In L. KROPF’s view, Boccaccio was a common turncoat and a political weathercock (“egészen közönséges köpönyegforgató volt és politikai szélkakas”). Az aversai gyilkosság [The Murder in Aversa] 1–4. *Erdélyi Múzeum* 13 (1896) 265. A. RADÓ is somewhat more understanding. According to him, Boccaccio soon began to sing another tune after the Hungarian troops had invaded Naples and news of the devastation by foreigners came from here and there: his patriotic sentiment superseded his feeling for justice and in his fifth eclogue he bemoaned the grim fate of the regions ravaged by the Hungarians (“De Boccaccio csakhamar más hírt kezdett pengetni. Midőn a magyar sereg előzönlötte Nápolyt, midőn innen is, onnan is az idegenek okozta pusztulásról érkezett hír: a hazafias érzés erősebb lett benne az igazságéretetnél és V. eclogájában siratta a magyarok dúlta vidékek gyászos végétét.”). *Az olasz irodalom története [A History of Italian Literature] I–II*. Budapest 1896, I, 200.

³ “Il *Buccolicum carmen*, quale noi lo leggiamo nell’autografo Riccardiano, e infatti un testo omogeneo, che riferisce i sentimenti e le opinioni del Boccaccio dopo il ’62. RICCI, P. G.: Per la cronologia del „*Buccolicum carmen*”. In RICCI, P. G.: *Studi sulla vita e le opere del Boccaccio*. Milano-Napoli 1985, 51.

⁴ CARRARA, E.: *La poesia pastorale*. Milano 1909, 114.

Neapolitan Eclogues in detail, also stresses the monotony of the eclogue, which thus does not deserve to be treated in further detail, but which faithfully reflects the poet's shock at the devastation of Naples.⁵

It is known that Boccaccio whiled in Forlì in 1347, at the time of the revenge campaign of the Hungarian king Lewis the Great, and that Francesco Ordelaffi, his patron there, joined the Hungarian troops crossing Italy. In the eclogue he was given the name Faunus for his passion for hunting and his bravery, and Lewis the Great appears in the mask of Tytirus, the noblest shepherd, who sets out from the Danube to punish the she-wolf and the yellowish lions:

Sed postquam Tytirus ista
cognovit de rupe cava que terminat Hystrum,
flevit et innumeros secum de vallibus altis
Danubii vocitare canes durosque bubulcos
infrendens cepit; linquensque armenta suosque
saltus infandam tendit discernere silvam,
atque lupam captare petit flavosque leones
ut penas tribuat meritis: nam frater Alexis
Tytirus iste fuit. (3. 95–103)

The hint at Joanna and the conspirators is unmistakable. The atmosphere of the eclogue is cheerful in spite of the epic subject matter, and, in accordance with Boccaccio's conception of the genre opposing Petrarch's highly sublime eclogues, it is more than once comic: his mother or wife (in other interpretations, the town of Forlì or the Church), the worrying Testilis, desperately tries to hold Faunus back, but as a wise shepherd, Palemon, remarks, who could bridle the adventurous spirit of young men. It is women who should guard the house, *sedeant in limine matres* (122). Formulations taken from Roman comedy are not rare in the dialogues: *parvi pendis* (3),⁶ *auribus accipe voces* (8),⁷ *aperi percepta* (11), *nostin* (36).⁸ There are also numerous examples for the parody of epic formulas. Pamphylus orders Palemon to stop his swine-herd by subverting the expression *siste gradum* well-known from the *Aeneid*,⁹ and at the same time

⁵ BOCCACCIO, G.: *Il „Buccolicum carmen”*. Trascritto di su l'autografo Riccardiano e illustrato per cura di G. LIDONICCI. Città di Castello 1914, 198.

⁶ Plautus, *Rud.* 650; Terence, *Heaut.* 715; *Hec.* 513.

⁷ Plautus, *Cas.* 879; *Men.* 4; *Trin.* 828; Terence, *Hec.* 363.

⁸ Plautus, *Truc.* 743.

⁹ Vergil, *Aen.* 6. 465.

parodying Horace's famous spring ode (*Diffugere nives, redeunt iam gramina campis...*):¹⁰ *I, siste sues, ne gramina campis evellant rostris.* (5–6).¹¹ The murder of Andrew, however, is narrated in an all the more gloomy, almost Dantesque tone by another figure, Meris: the uncautious young man, while leading the herd confided to his care, fearlessly entered the pitchdark living quarters of wild animals and stumbled upon a frightfully furious pregnant she-wolf, who immediately sprang at him, sinking her teeth into his throat in a rage, so that Alexis, i.e. Andrew, met Adonis' fate on the hidden path of the wilderness:

Ast moriens silvas iuveni commisit Alexi,
qui cautus modicum dum armenta per arva trahebat
in gravidam tum forte lupam rabieque tremendam
incidit, inpavidus nullo cum lumine lustrum
ingrediens; cuius surgens sevissima guctur
dentibus invasit, potuit neque ab inde revelli
donec et occulto spirasset tramite vita.
Hoc fertur. Plerique volunt quod silva leones
nutriat hec dirasque feras, quibus ipse severus
occurrans venans mortem suscepit Adonis.¹² (3. 82–91)

The description raising Andrew to the rank of the mythological hero of pastoral poetry refers to Joanna's debauchery and profligate lifestyle unmistakably: not only is *lupa* ambiguous, but the forest hiding place, *lustrum*, can also mean a brothel.

This troubled and sinister tone then becomes dominant in Eclogue 4 entitled *Dorus*, which describes the flight of Louis of Taranto and his loyal courtman,

¹⁰ *Carm.* 4.7.

¹¹ It should be noted that although Vergil's influence can be detected throughout the poem, we cannot wholly agree with G. Resta's view, according to which Boccaccio's work – besides his competition with Petrarch – is characterized by the consequent evocation, moreover the meticulous reproduction of the Vergilian model: "più appariscente sarà l'insistito richiamo all'esempio virgiliano tradotto in una puntigliosa riproduzione di schemi, formule, tipologie, nel consapevole, coerente ed approfondito intento di instaurare in area neolatina un 'codice' retorico bucolico modellato sullo exemplar virgiliano." RESTA, G.: *Codice bucolico boccacciano*. In *I classici nel medioevo e nell'umanesimo. Miscellanea filologica*. Genova 1975, 71. Similarly L. PAOLETTI on the *Faunus*: "un pastiche di modelli ed echi diversi, dominati alla sovrabbondante presenza di Virgilio, e, con frequenza meno vistosa, di Ovidio." Virgilio e Boccaccio. In CHEVALIER, R. (ed.): *Présence de Virgile*. [Actes du Colloque des 9, 11 et 12 Décembre 1976 (Paris E. N. S.)] Tours–Paris 1978, 249–263.

¹² Adonis is a genitive here, cf. PERINI (n. 1) 944.

Niccolò Acciaiuoli, from Naples to Tuscany. The change of tone is well-reflected by the fact that according to the author, Dorus, the bucolic name of Louis of Taranto in Eclogue 4, means *bitter* in Greek,¹³ while in Eclogue 6 he bears the name Alcestus. Here, Boccaccio obviously alludes to Alcestis, who had been brought back from the underworld, yet, he goes on to give the etymology of the name: *alce* means *virtus*, and *estus* means *vehemence (fervor)*.¹⁴ Even more astounding is the sudden transformation of the Hungarian King Lewis. The good Tytirus of the *Faunus*, the fearless and just leader of all honest shepherds now appears as the savage Polyphemus: he strips off the bark of fruit trees with his bare nails, stains the clear spring water with blood, snaps the branches of trees with his teeth, and destroys even the colourfully feathered birds with a hoarse cry:

Exuit infaustos ungues truculentior angue
frendens, et pomis foliis et cortice nudat
fructeta, et vitreos perturbans sanguine fontes,
dentibus infringens ramos pictasque volucres
murmure disperdens claustrisque repagula frangens;
omne pecus mungit, decerpit, vellera tondet,
absorbet natos, miseris eviscerat agnas:
si peiora nequit, rescindit cornua tauris. (4. 76–83)

In Eclogue 5 Calcidia already bemoans this wasted, ravaged grove that had no equal in the whole world. A more thorough analysis of the text and the allusions of *Silva cadens*, however, reveals that the elegiac-idealizing traits of the image of Naples are in fact highly relative.

From the jut of Sicily, wandering in the flowery meadows of Cape Pelorus (*florida rura Pelori*, 6), the narrator of the eclogue, Caliopus, not only hears but also sees Calcidia, the personification of Naples, bemoaning the ruin of the city on the sea-shore. From here he hurries on – another epic formula – *celeri*

¹³ “Quarte egloge titulus est Dorus hanc ob causam: tractatur enim in ea de fuga Lodovici regis Sicilie; et quoniam liquisse proprium regnum eidem regi amarissimum credendum est, ut satis in processu egloge percipitur, ab amaritudine eam denominavi, nam grece «doris», «amaritudo» latine sonat.” *Epist.* XXIII. The source of this misunderstanding is the attributive phrase *Doris amara* (5) “sea of bitter water” in Vergil’s Eclogue 10, cf. PERINI (n. 1) 947.

¹⁴ “Sexta egloga Alcestus dicitur, eo quod de reditu regis prefati in regnum proprium loquatur, quem regem ego hic ‘Alcestum’ voco, ut per hoc nomen sentiat quoniam circa extremum tempus vite sue optimi regis virtuosus mores assumpserat: et Alcestus dicitur ab ‘alce’, quod est ‘virtus’, et ‘estus’, quod est ‘fervor.’” *Epist.* XXIII.

passu (127)¹⁵ to the Neapolitan Pamphylus, who is obviously far away from Naples, since he is singing about his beloved city free from care, unaware of the mournful events, as the opening lines show.¹⁶ Thus, Boccaccio suspends spatial distances in a tale-like manner, as Perini has pointed out.¹⁷ T. Leuker seeks to confute Perini's interpretation, according to him, the *netta dimensione metageografica* does not exist. Based on Servius he argues that the syrenes first inhabited Cape Pelorus, then the island of Capri. In Leuker's opinion Calcidia took refuge from the political turbulences of Naples at Parthenope's former whereabouts, thus the phrase *in litore Parthenopis* (26–27) would refer to Cape Pelorus.¹⁸ However, this interpretation is forced under several aspects. Firstly, a similar suspension of spatial distances can also be observed elsewhere, so in Eclogue 4. Dorus and Phytias, i.e. the escaping Louis and his escort come to the humble cave of a shepherd called Montanus somewhere in Tuscany. Phytias comforts the still fearful prince: they are safe here, since, from the height of the hill, one can overlook the plain of Pisa, the grazing herds on the slopes of Tuscany, the distant Alps, the Rhône valley, and even the scarlet birettas of the cardinals residing in Avignon can be clearly discerned:

Si potius nil, Dore, petis, quid summere differs
 oblatum? Spectare potes de vertice campos
 alpheos tuscosque greges alpesque remotas
 et liturum saltus, Rhodanum rubrosque galeros

¹⁵ Ovid, *Fasti* 2. 205.

¹⁶ "Pamphyle, tu placidos tecum meditaris amores / Calcidie, viridi recubans in gramine solus; / ipsa dolens deflet miseris quas nescio silvas." (5. 1–3)

¹⁷ "C'è nell'egloga una netta dimensione metageografica se dalla Sicilia (*sicilidum* per il classico *Sicelidum*; *Pelori*) Calipo può udire i lamenti di Calcidia/Napoli, e se alla fine (127 sg.) può andare «di corsa» da Panfilo che è un «napoletano» ben lontano da Napoli (come autorizza a credere la spiegazione a Martino) e verosimilmente in Firenze. Non è solo questione di visione unitaria del Regno angioino, di continuità tra Sicilia e Napoli (v. a. III 69) ma di poetico annullamento delle distanze, di contiguità affettiva alle sciagure della *silva cadens*." PERINI (n. 1) 955.

¹⁸ "Contrariamente a quanto sostiene Giorgio Bernardi Perini, ultimo editore del *Buccolicum carmen*, questa spiaggia non è quella napoletana, lontanissima dai «boschi siciliani», bensì quella del capo del Peloro: anch'essa, in effetti, può essere chiamata 'spiaggia di Partenope', giacché le sirene, a dire di Servio, vi erano vissute prima di trasferirsi all'isola di Capri. Secondo lo scenario immaginato da Boccaccio, Calcidia, scacciata dal suo nido dai turbini politici che agitavano Napoli all'inizio del 1348, si era rifugiata presso la prima dimora italcica di Partenope, la sirena considerata 'napoletana' per la leggenda che situa la sua tomba sul territorio della città." LEUKER, T.: Due maestri del Boccaccio. Il papagallo e la fenice nel ritratto allegorico della Napoli di Roberto d'Angiò. (*Buccolicum carmen* V 28–68) *Studi sul Boccaccio* 35 (2007) 148 f.

metiri ac egram mentem revocare quiete.
Montani laudanda fides. I, summe. Quid obstat? (4. 16–21)

On the other hand, nothing in the text of the eclogue implies that Calcidia would be leaving the Neapolitan sea-shore:

Illa diu postquam faunos nymphasque vocavit
in cassum, pectusque manu pulsavit et ora,
vocibus assiduis syrene in litore fractis
Parthenopis residens misere singultibus inquit... (5. 24–27)

This is not only significant concerning Boccaccio's poetic devices. The parallel to the closing scene of Petrarch's eclogue entitled *Argus* is conspicuous. There, two of the three characters of the eclogue escape from the devastated forest after the terrible storm hitting Naples, which symbolizes the political crisis leading to Andrew's murder, when the *lacrimabilis arbor* (18), the slender cypress representing Andrew, had been rooted out: Silvius (Petrarch), leaves for Tuscany, Phitias (Barbato da Sulmona) for his hometown. Only the narrator, Ydeus (the Neapolitan Giovanni Barrili) stays at the storm-struck sea-shore, grieving alone:

His dictis, abeunt; patrii Sulmonis ad arva
Contendit Phitias, silvas petit alter etruscas;
Solus ego afflicto merens in litore mansi. (2. 122–124)

It only emerges from this extremely powerful closure that the narration beginning with the presentation of the idyllic circumstances in Naples, continuing with the description of the storm, then with Silvius' and Phitias' epicedium to King Robert is all related here at the sea-shore. Therefore, Boccaccio inverts the basic situation found in Petrarch's thematically similar poem: here, the narrator is Caliopus fleeing from Naples, while the city is bemoaned by Calcidia, who stays at the sea-shore. The deliberate nature of the allusion is hardly questionable, as it is well-known that Boccaccio altered his views on the genre due to his master's Eclogue *Argus*, which was circulated as a separate poem, as proven by the first and the second, final version of the *Faunus*.¹⁹

¹⁹ On this see MARTELOTTI, G.: Dalla tenzone al carme bucolico; La riscoperta dello stile bucolico (da Dante a Boccaccio). In BOSCO, U. (ed.): *Dante e Boccaccio e altri scrittori dall'umanesimo al romanticismo*. Firenze 1983, 71–89; 91–106.

However, the *Silva cadens* evokes the *Argus* in terms of a *Kontrastimitation* not only in its form, but also in its content.

To our knowledge, research has focused one-sidedly on the dramatic description of the devastation and has not recognized the negative or at least ambivalent traits of the figure and the mourning song of Calcidia. Leuker only relies on Servius' explanation, but seems to neglect the chapter on syrenes in the *Genealogia deorum*. At the beginning of this chapter Boccaccio does in fact quote the passage from Servius that Leuker uses, however, with reference to other authorities as Ovid, Pliny and Leonzio Pilato, he believes that they are five, not three, and based on Pliny he names Naples as their home (*Sirenum sedes*). More importantly, in accordance with Palaephatus and Pilato, he traces the origin of the legend of the syrenes back to the characteristic practices of prostitutes, who seduced their victims with their sweet words (*blanda facundia*).²⁰ It is for this reason that Caliope is considered to be their mother. Boccaccio paraphrases her name with the attributive phrase *bona sonoritas* in Latin, with the same phrase he uses in his letter to Martino da Signa for the main figure of the *Silva cadens*.²¹ Moreover, he even explains the name of Parthenope on the basis of the guiles of experienced courtesans, as they used to imitate the bashful behaviour of virgins or respectable matrons. Let us note that Boccaccio drew a rather negative image of Naples as the last home of the syrenes in Sonnet 48 of his *Rime*, which deserves to be quoted in full length:

²⁰ "Eas preterea dicit Servius iuxta Pelorum Sycilie promontorium primo, deinde ad Capream insulam secessisse. Plinius vero dicit, Neapolim Calchidiensium, et ipsam Parthenopem a tumulo Syrenis appellatam. Et sic iam quinque Syrenas habemus. Deinde paulo post dicit idem Plinius: Nuceria, Surrentum cum promontorio Minerve, Syrenum quondam etc. (...) Palefatus ante alios in libro Incredibilium scribit has meretrices fuisse, solitas decipere navigantes. Et Leontius asserit vetustissima haberi fama apud Etholos prima Grecorum fuisse meretricia, et tantum lenocinio facundie valuisse, ut fere omnem Achayam in suam vertissent predam; et ex hoc arbitrari fabule originis Syrenarum locum fuisse concessum. Et sic illis Etholie fluvius pater est dictus, eo quod eum penes primo sua scelesta cepere servitia; et ut intelligamus per labentem fluvium patrem, lascivam et effluentem concupiscentiam meretricum. Quibus ob blandam fere omnium facundiam Caliope, id est bona sonoritas, mater ascribitur. Demum prima vocatur Parthenopia a parthenos, quod est virgo. Consuevere quidem meretrices docte volentes externos irretire, virginum seu pudicarum matronarum mores fingere, oculos scilicet in terram deicere, verba pauca facere, erubescere, tactum fugere, petulcis etiam gesticulationibus ludere, et huiusmodi, ut ex his arbitrentur insipidi hostem honestatis hospitem esse, et incognitum appetant, quod erat cognitum fugiendum." *Genealogia* VII. Cap. XX.

²¹ "Pro Caliope ego intelligo aliquem optime recitantem damna desolate civitatis, nam «caliope» grece, «bona sonoritas» est latine, que bona sonoritas in aliquo esse non potest nisi debito ordine dicenda dicantur." *Epist.* XXIII.

Dice con meco l’anima tal volta:
„Come potevi tu già mai sperare
che dove Bacco può quel che vuol fare,
e Cerere v’abbonda in copia molta,

e dove fu Partenopè sepolta,
ov’ancor le sirene uson cantare,
amor, fede, onestà potesse stare
o fosse alcuna sanità²² raccolta?

E s’tu ’l vedevi, come t’occuparo
i fals’occhi di questa, che non t’ama,
e la qual tu con tanta fede segui?

Destati omai, e fuggi il lito avaro,
fuggi colei che la tua morte brama.
Che fai? che pensi? ché non ti dilegui?”

Parthenope is thus the city tempting with abundance and rapture, but threatening with fraudulency, volatility and deadly danger, where fidelity and honesty cannot exist. This image is conspicuously reminiscent of the one emerging from Petrarch’s letters on Naples. The lack of *amor, fede, onestà* evokes the characterization given by Petrarch in his letter to Giovanni Colonna: *nulla pietas, nulla veritas, nulla fides*.²³ In the latest edition of the *Rime* Branca notes the allusion to the *Aeneid* (*Heu fuge crudeles terras, fuge litus avarum*, 3. 44),²⁴

²² The latest editor of the *Rime*, V. Branca, rightly rejects Massera’s earlier conjecture: “sanità in senso traslato: di senno, di mente, d’animo e di costumi. Non sembra quindi necessario correggere col Massera santità o tautologico o eccessivo.” *Rime* a cura di V. Branca con Appendice degli Argomenti e Rubriche dantesche a cura di Giorgio Padoan. In: *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, a cura di V. BRANCA. V/1. Milano 1994, 298.

²³ *Fam.* V. 3. 8. Cf. Cicero, *Laelius de amicitia* 15. “Haec enim est tyrannorum vita nimirum, in qua nulla fides, nulla caritas, nulla stabilis benivolentiae potest esse fiducia, omnia semper suspecta atque sollicita, nullus locus amicitiae.” On this parallel and on the figure of Joanna of Naples in Petrarch’s letters see LOKAJ, R. J.: La Cleopatra neapoletana: Giovanna d’Angiò nelle Familiars di Petrarca. *GSLI* 127 (2000) 487.

²⁴ LOKAJ (n. 23) 507 duly noted that, to Petrarch, Robert’s death and the accession of Joanna, who is represented as Cleopatra and is never mentioned by name because of his hatred for her, also meant the break of the connection between classical antiquity and the present: “sotto Giovanna cessano tutti i legami fra la classicità e la contemporaneità. La dolcezza, la sapienza, insomma, la grandezza del mondo antico non era più in grado di frenare il corso degli eventi,

but fails to record that this quotation can also be found in another letter by Petrarch describing the ruin of Naples with shocking images.²⁵

Whether we take Petrarch's influence into consideration in case of the sonnet or not, the image of Naples in the *Silva cadens* is similarly vexing. Calcidia bemoaning her fate at the sea-shore is not exactly attractive, and it should be noted that the word *syrene* only appears here in the *Buccolicum carmen*. Her mourning song is by no means characterized by the *bona sonoritas: vocibus assiduis syrene in litore fractis / Parthenopis residens misere singultibus inquit* (26–27). The attributive phrase *fracta vox*, meaning not so much a broken or faint, but rather a distorted, inarticulate voice, is very rare in classical poetry, and appears mostly in connection with the Bacchanalian frenzy, e.g. in Juvenal's Satire 2: *hic turpis Cybele est, et fracta voce loquendi / libertas* (111–112). It can also be found in the description of the cult of Bacchus by Paulinus Nolanus: *Euhoe, Bacchi sonum fractis imitantur anhelii vocibus* (19. 281–282). This frantic lamentation begins with a peculiar catalogue of forests: not even in the Ausonian fields had there ever been a more beautiful or mightier forest than that of Naples:

Non fuit ausonicis campis, me iudice, silva hac
letior aut maior, nulla atque capacior evi.
Hec fagis celum tangebatur et ylice multa,
quercubus insignis, viridi spectandaque lauro
ac cedro crebra, funesta et pulchra cupressu.
Non adeo quondam formosa Libistridos ursis
horrida, cui cessit magnorum Ercinia nutrix
silvestrumque boum gelido sub cardine celi,
Ydaque iudicio Paridis memoranda puellis,
bebritumve nemus cessit cessitque erimantum. (5. 28–37)

This opening description does not lack sinister allusions: besides the beeches, oaks and cedars, the woods of Naples was adorned with a funereal cypress:

di proteggere Napoli dal proprio annichilamento. Giovanna aveva spezzato una volta per tutte ogni speranza umanistica di suggerire alla sacra linfa dell'antichità, sia cristiana, sia classica."

²⁵ "Sed de his hactenus; nam et tragicum opus est et multa super his inter obstinatos cives verba iam perdidit. Minime vero mirabere amicos tuos, tanto avaritiae premio proposito, in ea urbe victos esse, in qua hominem innoxium occidere ludus est; quam licet unam ex omnibus Virgilius 'dulcem' vocet, non inique tamen, ut nunc est, Bistoniam notasset infamia: Heu fuge crudeles terras, fuge litus avarum." *Fam.* V. 6. 6.

funesta pulchra cupressu (31), and this is a clear allusion to Petrarch's eclogue *Argus*, where Andrew is symbolized by a cypress torn out by the raging storm.²⁶ Even more baffling is the continuation: not even the monstrous, bear-inhabited forest of Libistridos, or the Hercynian forest with its huge bisons, or Mount Ida, memorable to maiden for the judgement of Paris, or else the famous woods of Erymanthus and Bebrycia, so Calcidia, were quite as beautiful. This list is hardly accidental, as Boccaccio gives a short description of all these forests in his scholarly treatise *De montibus, silvis, fontibus, lacubus, fluminibus, stagnis seu paludibus et de diversis nominibus maris*. We would look for the forest of Libistridos – based on the text this form is used as a nominative – in the classical authors in vain: Boccaccio probably misunderstood the verse in the *Aeneid* in which Euander offers the weary Aeneas a Libyan bearskin in his humble abode: *stratis foliis et pelle Libystidis ursae* (8. 367–368).²⁷ He may have known the far from idyllic and friendly Hercynian forest from Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*.²⁸ However, this forest was introduced to Roman poetry only later by Claudian, who was one of Petrarch's and Boccaccio's favourite poets, already because they believed him to have been a born Florentine.²⁹ The allusion to Claudian is also strengthened by a textual correspondence: *sub cardine celi*.³⁰ An eerie description of the Hercynian forest is to be found in Book 1 of the *De consulatu Stilichonis*: Stilicho's campaign will bring such peace to the wild Germanic tribes that it will be safe to hunt even in the gloomy silence of the Hercynian forest, and the Romans will be able to axe down the wild groves surrounded by ancient beliefs and the oaks venerated as Barbarian gods:

²⁶ *corrui et colles concussit et arva cupressus* (11).

²⁷ PERINI (n. 1) 956–957. “LIBYSTRIS silva est, ut quidam dicunt, Thessalie, alii vero illam apud Bistonas esse confirmant; que, etsi molorum animalium altris sit, ursos tamen pregrandes alit et validos.” *De montibus* II. (*De silvis*)

²⁸ “ERICINIA multis silvis nomen est, sed maior atque notior ea est quam apud Germanos etiam Greci veteres cognovere eamque dixere Oriciniam. Huius quidem latitudo novem dierum iter expedito homini patet. Oritur autem ab Helvetiorum et Nemetum atque Turiacorum finibus et recta Danubii fluminis regione ad fines Dacorum et Anartium usque contingit. Inde se sinistrorsum flectens propter immensam sui magnitudinem multarum gentium fines attingit et cum .XL. dierum in longitudinem eius progressus factus sit, nemo tamen ex Germanis est qui se audisse aliquem ad eius devenisse finem dicat, aut quo sub celo oriatur seu potius finiatur acceperit. Multa quidem in ea ferarum sunt genera, cum quibus pro gloria robusti iuvenes silve propinqui exercentur.” *De montibus* II. (*De silvis*)

²⁹ “conterraneus meus”: Petrarch, *Sen.* VII. 1. 138.

³⁰ *In Rufin.* 2. 274.

ut procul Hercyniae per vasta silentia silvae
 venari tuto liceat, lucosque vetusta
 religione truces et robur numinis instar
 barbarici nostrae feriant impune bipennes. (1. 228–231)

However, the woods of Bithynian Bebrycia are no less eerie: as Boccaccio also writes based on the story of the Argonauts, the king of the forest, Amycus, murdered all his guests, until he found his equal in Polydeuces.³¹ In the *Thebaid* of Statius, whom Boccaccio knew very well, Tydeus remarks before he embarks on a legation: I would rather travel to the wild Sarmatians or to the bloody-handed keeper of the Bebrycian grove: *melius legatus adissem / Sauromatas rabidos servatoremque cruentum / Bebrycii nemoris*.³² The ominous woods of the Arcadian Erymanthus, the *monstrifer Erymanthus* of Statius,³³ is well-known: it was from here that Heracles brought the Erymanthian boar as his fourth labour,³⁴ but according to the story well known from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, it was also here that Arcas almost killed her mother, Callisto.³⁵ These are the woods, then, that could not match the beautiful place whose fall Calcidia bemoans. The view that her mourning song would be no more than the sentimental evocation of the ancient splendour of Naples (*calde rievocazioni dell'antico splendore*), as propounded earlier by Lidonici, and recently by Leuker (*l'idillio protetto e custodito da Titiro*), is therefore in need of revision.³⁶ Rather, it reflects the poet's ambivalent attitude towards the city.

In this sinister forest, only Tytirus, i.e. Robert the Wise, was capable of ensuring a peacefulness similar to that of the Golden Age, as a culture hero: he was the first to pass laws conceived with scholarly thoroughness that benefited both the herd and the grove:

³¹ "BEBRYACUM nemus in Bithinia est, in quo aiunt quondam Amycom Bebryciorum regem consuetum vim hospitibus inferre, quam cum in eodem Polluci a Colchide redeunti facere conaretur, a Polluce occisus est." *De montibus* II. (*De silvis*)

³² *Theb.* 3. 351–353.

³³ *Theb.* 4. 298.

³⁴ "ERIMANTUS mons in Arcadie finibus constitutus est, in quo Hercules aprum cuncta vastantem vivum cepit eumque Euristeo detulit regi." *De montibus* I.

³⁵ *Met.* 2. 496–504. Cf. *Genealogia* V. Cap. XLIX. (*De Arcade XV filio secundi Iovis, qui genuit Yonium.*)

³⁶ LIDONICCI (n. 5) 198. LEUKER (n. 18) 149. Let us note that the German scholar quotes Calcidia's song with the omission of the part containing the forest similes.

ille est
qui primus pecori leges nemorique salubres
carmine cantavit, quarum nec clarior usquam
copia docta fuit legum nec prisca tulere
secula maiores, auro dum floruit etas
sanguine... (5. 57–62)

Again, the similarity to the description of the rule of Robert the Wise in Petrarch's eclogue *Argus* is conspicuous. The model for the figure of Argus was not so much offered by Ovid, but rather by Claudian. In Book 1 of the *De consulatu Stilichonis* Claudian compares the Vandal general to the hundred-eyed Argus and the hundred-armed Briareus, as only heroic work and ceaseless action undisturbed by weariness or the cloud of dream, keeping everything in hand and before the eye could save the empire from falling apart.³⁷ Petrarch's Argus does not only have a hundred eyes as sharp as a lynx's, but also a hundred delicate ears (referring to Robert's proficiency in jurisprudence according to the author of *Cod.* 33),³⁸ he is familiar with a hundred arts, his hundred arms and hundred hands reveal his extraordinary activity, his only, i.e. not deceitful tongue vests him with Orphean power, by which he can even rule over rocks and wild beasts, and he can root out ash trees. The contemporaneous commentator explained these last lines very wittfully, namely that he could deliver people's souls from the evil rooted in them:³⁹

Pastorum rex Argus erat, cui lumina centum
Lincea, cui centum vigiles cum sensibus aures,
Centum artes, centumque manus, centumque lacerti,
Lingua sed una fuit, cum qua rupesque ferasque
Flecteret et fixas terre divelleret ornos.
Ille diu clarus silvis, perque omnia notus,

³⁷ “quae brachia centum, / quis Briareus aliis numero crescente lacertis / tot simul obiectis posset conflare rebus: / evitare dolos; veteres firmare cohortes, / explorare novas; duplices disponere classes, / quae fruges aut bella ferant; aulaeque tumultum / et Romae lenire famem? quot nube soporis / immunes oculi per tot discurrere partes, / tot loca sufficerent et tam longinqua tueri? / Argum fama canit centeno lumine cinctum / corporis excubiis unam servasse iuencam!” (l. 303–313).

³⁸ “cui centum vigiles cum sensibus aures, quia omnia audita et lecta iura rome intelligebat.” AVENA, A.: *Il Bucolicum carmen e i suoi commenti inediti*. Padova 1906, 184.

³⁹ “ET DIVELLERET ORNOS, idest ipsas arbores fixas terre; idest omnes malas radices fixa sin animo hominum eradicabat et divellebat.” AVENA (n. 38) 184.

Pascua, formosis cantatus ubique puellis,
Mille greges niveos pascens per mille recessus. (2. 107–114)

Thus, the image taken from Claudian not only lends epic pomp to the *epicedium* bemoaning the king, but also describes his rule as a constant and heroic struggle for the preservation of the idyllic circumstances of the blissful grove. The last sentence of Boccaccio's passage quoted above – *auro dum floruit etas / sanguine*, where, in accordance with Perini, *sanguine* can hardly be anything but an *ablativus originis*⁴⁰ – implies even stronger than Petrarch's text that Calcidia is by no means talking about the rebirth of the mythical Golden Age, but of the Augustan Golden Age, of the rule evoking the strict legislative activity of the princeps. With the death of Robert the Wise, however, law and order disintegrated, and the campaign of the Hungarian king reached Naples as a divine punishment.

It fits in with the negative traits of Calcidia's figure and song that Pamphylus, who learns about her laments from Caliopus, comes to the scornful conclusion that the nymph believes to be able to annul the outrageous crime of Andrew's murder and the inevitable divine punishment with her tears:

Heu miser, heu, video que sit sibi causa doloris:
indignum facinus lacrimis revocare putabat,
previsum dudum superis et pensa sororum.
Errat stulta nimis: celo parere necesse est. (5. 120–123)⁴¹

Let us note that Dorus, i.e. Louis of Taranto himself also confesses to this crime in Eclogue 4, which is generally interpreted as the palinode of the *Faunus*:

Post hunc miserandus Alexis
qui, gregibus nimium durus silvisque molestus
imperitans, abiit crudeli funere pulsus.
Munere post Phytie pulchra est michi iuncta Liquoris,
et sub me septas Argi tenuere nepotes,
quas inter clarosque lacus pecorosaque tempe
calcidici veteres silvam posuere coloni

⁴⁰ PERINI (n. 1) 598.

⁴¹ Cf. Petrarch, *Argus* 53–57. “Sed ferre necesse est. / Hec est vita hominum, Phitia; sic leta dolendis / Alternat fortuna ferox. Eat ordine mundus / Antiquo; nobis rerum experientia prosit: / Quo grex cumque miser ruerit, consistere pulcrum est.”

a Cumis, qua nulla prior dum floruit; in qua
 dum nos iurgantes pueros agitaret Erinis,
 ecce celer quondam patriis Poliphemus ab arvis
 progenitus nostris et nostro sanguine, ripis
 altus in extremis Hystri, puto, lacte ferino,
 quo iaculo incertum, certo mutilatus ab ictu
 parte sui, iusta rabie succensus et ira ... (4. 53–66)

Montanus, who gives him shelter and listens to his story, plays the same role in the *Dorus* as Pamphylus in the *Silva cadens*. Both are characteristic representatives of the bucolic *otium*, and both listen to the stories of the arriving persons with considerable reserve. As Pamphylus asks Caliopus with some irony at the end of the eclogue whether he at least tried to cheer up the lamenting syrene with kind words (upon which Caliopus is not ashamed to admit that he did not, for fear that Poliphemus would turn up), Montanus also asks, feigning ignorance, where the dauntless Neapolitan heroes were when the wild Poliphemus appeared:

Quid Paphus, queso, cui centum brachia, centum
 fama refert oculos, cui tanta licentia fandi
 in superos hominesque fuit? Non cuspidē lata
 occurrit monstro? Quid tunc furibundus Asylas?
 quid pecudum custos Phorbas? quid Damon amicus?
 quid tu? quid Phytias? quid Pamphylus atque Molorcus?
 ac alii tecum tangentes alta boatu
 sydera, iactantes vario sermone palestras
 atque pedum cursus, cestus et fortia facta? (4. 116–124)

The sarcastic tone of the passage is not only due to the fact that the heroes can only – unscrupulously – boast with their sports achievements, but also to the epic names of the Neapolitan noblemen (the Etruscan *fortis Asilas* is a hero in the *Aeneid*, and Molorchus, who hospitably received Hercules in Nemea, appears in Statius' *Thebaid*), as well as the epic *clausulae*: *cuspidē lata, fortia facta*.⁴² Thus, besides this tragically ironic praise of the Neapolitan *silva*, subverting the bucolic idyll, these eclogues do not lack the overt invective, often parodying the sublime epic formulas, and this is given voice to exactly by

⁴² PERINI (n. 1) 953.

the characters viewing the events from the outside. Based on the above, the least one can say is that Boccaccio was by no means prejudiced concerning the internal affairs of the state in which he had spent the most beautiful years of his youth.⁴³ We can agree with D. Lummus' statement: the ravaged forest is not merely the allegory of political events, but also of the decadent morals of the city.⁴⁴ However, the Neapolitan Eclogues do not only form a coherent whole from the political-moral viewpoint, but they organically fit into the composition of the *Buccolicum carmen*.

As Christine Ratkowitsch has shown in a study neglected by research on Boccaccio for no obvious reason,⁴⁵ the structure of the *Buccolicum carmen* can be divided into three large units corresponding to the three major parts of human life – thus yielding Boccaccio's intellectual-spiritual biography –, and to the activities related to them according to the medieval conception: youth is connected with love, i.e. the *vita voluptuosa*, adulthood with the assertion of the self, the *vita activa*, and old age with the *vita contemplativa* devoted to contemplation. The *vita activa* is the subject of the unit formed by Eclogues 3 to 9. Thus, the descriptions in the sometimes tragically ironic, sometimes bitterly sarcastic eclogues on the struggle for power and wealth, on the changes in Naples and Florence do not abound with disharmonic elements by chance. The expectant tone of Eclogue 6, *Alcestus*, celebrating Louis of Taranto's return, is not only undermined by the troubling closure of the poem,⁴⁶ but much rather by Eclogue 8 entitled *Midas*, whose excessively greedy title figure, Niccolò Acciaiuoli, acquired immense power in Naples as Louis of

⁴³ On the image of Naples in Boccaccio's works see recently: MOROSINI, R.: La 'bona sonoritas' di Caliope: Boccaccio a Napoli, la polifonia di Partenope e i silenzi dell'Acciaiuoli. In G. ALFANO, G. – D'URSO, T. – PERICCIOLI SAGGESE, A. (eds.): *Boccaccio Angioino. Materiali per la storia di Napoli nel Trecento*. Bruxelles 2012, 69–87.

⁴⁴ "The pastoral landscape's destruction recalls more than just the political exile and dispossession of the king; it evokes a decadent moral state as well." LUMMUS (n. 1) 163.

⁴⁵ RATKOWITSCH, CHR.: Mittelalterliches in der Hirtendichtung des Giovanni Boccaccio. *WS* 113 (2000) 301–334. It is peculiar that this excellent study is not mentioned even in the overview of the latest, not exactly vast literature on the *Buccolicum carmen*: LORENZINI, S.: Rassegna di studi sul Boccaccio bucolico. *Studi sul Boccaccio* 38 (2010) 153–165.

⁴⁶ "Amphibolie kennzeichnet aber auch das Ende der Ekloge, wo die positive Stimmung durch aufkommenden Lärm plötzlich wieder in Furcht und Schrecken umschlägt (6, 159–166). Ob damit bloß die kurzfristigen Wirren nach Louis' Rückkehr gemeint sind oder sich bereits der Zug Karls IV. nach Italien ankündigt, der in 7 und 9 thematisiert wird, bleibt für die eigentliche Aussage belanglos: Dieser bedrückende Schluß zeigt nochmals, daß die auf der politischen Karriere fußende *vita activa* stets von Unheil bedroht ist und daher nicht zum wahren Ziel führen kann." RATKOWITSCH (n. 45) 316.

Taranto's supporter. The shepherds talk about him again in an invective tone, as someone who laboured ardently to marry Joanna and her lover for the sake of the solidification of his own power. In this eclogue, Damon from Naples tells the Florentine Phytias, personifying Boccaccio, about Acciaiuoli's misdeeds, upon which Phytias remarks: no-one can come to behold high ranks without the will of the just Lord: *nemo, nisi Iuppiter equus / iusserit, in celsos usquam conscendet honores* (63–64). He refers to a shepherd called Amintas, probably to be equated with Ovid, or maybe with Dante, as the ultimate authority, who sang about the volatility and the vicissitudes of the world at his older age:

Sepe vices rerum verti cantabat Amintas
iam senior! Lacrimas mecum mors equa resolvet. (8. 74–75)

In this earthly world exposed to perpetual change,⁴⁷ idyllic conditions can inevitably only be realized temporarily and in an odd manner, as in the case of Parthenope, flourishing under Robert the Wise, but changing into the dark forest of ostentatious pomp, dirty intrigues and bestial murders after his death.

When emphasizing the evanescent and futile nature of the earthly Golden Age, Boccaccio draws on the tradition leading back to the ancient Christian writers that related the classical descriptions of the Golden Age, especially the motifs of Vergil's Eclogue 4, to eschatology and reserved it for the description of the heavenly paradise. Already Lactantius believed that everything the pagan poets sang about Saturn's kingdom could only be fulfilled after the *apocalypsis*: ... *denique tum fiet illa quae poetae aureis temporibus facta esse iam Saturno regnante dixerunt*.⁴⁸

Such descriptions of really Golden Age conditions also appear in Boccaccio, but only in the third part of the collection devoted to the *vita contemplativa*, so in Eclogue 14, which the aging poet devoted to the memory of his prematurely deceased daughter, Violante. The girl, who partakes of eternal bliss, and has transubstantiated to Olympia, appears to his old father at night to comfort him with the detailed description of the wonderful forest inhabited by those who have obtained salvation. On this mountain, the palms and cedars reach up to the stars, the creeks are as if they were made of silver, it is inhabited by

⁴⁷ Even if LUMMUS' assumption that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the most important model of the *Buccolicum carmen* appears debatable, perpetual change and transformation is doubtlessly the determining motif of the collection, a "story of transformation": LUMMUS (n. 1) 159.

⁴⁸ *Div. Inst.* 7. 24. 9.

golden horned deers, golden feathered birds and golden griffins.⁴⁹ However, at the very beginning of her account, Violante says that this wonderful land is inaccessible to sinned lambs: *est in secessu pecori mons inuius egro, / lumine perpetuo clarus* (170–171). This indestructible Golden Age world serves as a counterpart of the Neapolitan Golden Age bemoaned in the mourning song of the *Silva cadens*, all the more highlighting its – as we hope to have shown – sinister, troubling and fated nature.

⁴⁹ On the *Olympia* see CARRARA, E.: *Un oltretomba bucolico*. Bologna 1899.; ZABUGHIN, V.: *L'oltretomba classico medievale dantesco nel medioevo*. Roma 1922, 57–62. CHECCHI, G.: Per l'interpretazione dell'egloga *Olympia* di Giovanni Boccaccio. *Studi sul Boccaccio* 23 (1995) 219–244.