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Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio's Filocolo and the Art of Medieval Fiction

Victoria Kirkham

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While still a university student of church law in Naples, Boccaccio completed his *Filocolo*, a monumental romance that retells the famous medieval legend of Florio and Biancifiore. To rescue his source tale from "the fabulous parlance of the ignorant," Boccaccio created a marvelous Gothic literary microcosm, an encyclopedia of vernacular poetics, and the most ambitious prose fiction at that time in any European language.
Fabulous Vernacular: Boccaccio's Filocolo *and the Art of Medieval Fiction* explores how Boccaccio transforms mere "fables" into a poet's high art of "confabulation," forging his own signature devices and pushing the Italian vernacular in imaginative new directions. The first book-length study of the *Filocolo* published outside of Italy, it argues against the older view of the *Filocolo* as a failed early work. It shows how the young author's "little book" is ordered by the principles of hierarchy, symmetry and analogy to echo in design the great medieval Book of the World. With a plot keyed to the liturgy of Pentecost, his romance directly reflects his immersion in canon law. *Fabulous Vernacular* is the first study of Boccaccio to demonstrate these connections and to suggest how his literary practice benefited from legal training, a more positive experience than he admits in his mythic self-portrait. With a range that reaches well beyond the *Filocolo*, Victoria Kirkham inquires into Boccaccio's notions of literary decorum, the creative continuities that unify his corpus, and the new "poetry" that emerges from his engagement with Latin and vernacular authority.
Victoria Kirkham is Professor of Romance Languages, University of Pennsylvania and a former President of the American Boccaccio Association.

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