

BOOK REVIEW

Petrarch and Dante: Anti-Dantism, Metaphysics, Tradition. Edited by Zygmunt G. Barański and Theodore J. Cachey Jr. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009. Pp. vi+414.

The tenth volume in the prestigious William and Katherine Devers Series in Dante Studies consists of a collection of essays devoted to Dante and Petrarch by the most distinguished scholars in the field. The volume is divided into three parts: the relationship between the two poets; the metaphysical implications in their works; and "Tradition," the philological, historical, and cultural issues. Altogether the nine essays extensively explore the relationship between the two Trecento Italian crowns (Boccaccio's writings frequently come under scrutiny as well) and the implication of the presence (hidden or evident) of Dante in Petrarch. This collection clearly shows that many new aspects can be detected in this much-studied and complex relationship.

The first essay, Theodore J. Cachey Jr.'s "Between Petrarch and Dante: Prolegomenon to a Critical Discourse" (3–49), serves as a prologue to the collection, laying down the salient points while taking into account the readings of other contributors. Cachey opens by mentioning a broad range of critical works, from Sapegno and Billanovich to the most recent ones by Michele Feo, Vincenzo Fera, Emilio Pasquini, Enrico Fenzi, and others. The rivalry between Petrarch and Dante is set in the context of fourteenth-century anti-Dantism and examined through every one of Petrarch's allusions concerning his great predecessor. Focusing on the significance of sonnet 189, "Passa la nave mia," the last poem in the Chigiano stage of the *Canzoniere*, Cachey argues that the figure of Ulysses and of the shipwreck appear vital in defining Petrarch's rejection of Dante's ethics and poetics. Petrarch's appropriation of the image of the shipwreck is not an homage to Dante but rather a Stoic acknowledgment of human vulnerability, a

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claim that salvation can come only with the Virgin's help. If Ulysses's shipwreck justifies Dante's journey, Petrarch's antiheroic narrative shows how Dante's Aristotelian-Scholastic ethics of happiness fails. What is involved are two different views of the relationship between the human and the divine and, consequently, between human and divine knowledge.

Zygmunt G. Barański's essay, "Petrarch, Dante, Cavalcanti" (50–113), focuses on Petrarch's strategy of revision and reduction of Dante's already established *auctoritas*. This is clear in Petrarch's goal of presenting an alternative mode of writing vernacular poetry, for which he dismantles the contemporary image of Dante as divine poet of the afterlife, font of wisdom, and disseminator of truths. Barański analyzes *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* 287 ("Sennuccio mio, benché doglioso et solo"), canzone 70 ("Lasso me, ch'i non so in qual parte pieghi"), *Triumphus Cupidinis* 4, and *Familiars* 21.15 layer by layer and shows how Petrarch challenges Dante's contemporary canonization, proposing himself instead as an example of how the modern man and the modern writer ought to behave, combining classical learning with Christian charity. In fact, Petrarch's praise of Dante appears greatly counterbalanced by his criticism of Dante for using a flawed literary model, clothing a noble theme in humble style, choosing exile instead of family duties, and pursuing earthly glory. Dante is reduced to being the poet of the *Petrose*. "By presenting Dante in this manner, Petrarch was able to distract attention from, if not actually to conceal, the influence that the *Vita nova* had undoubtedly exercised over his collection" (85). Dante's transformation of Cavalcanti as the poet of *dulcedo* goes in the same direction, forgetting the philosopher and the poet of death. Barański is well aware of the risk of psychologism run by this reconstruction of Petrarch's attack on Dante, but his argument is strongly supported by well-documented proof and philological analyses.

In "Blinding the Cyclops: Petrarch after Dante" (114–73), Albert Russell Ascoli illustrates the influence the Latin Dante had on Petrarch, something that has been overlooked when tracing similarities between the two poets. The point of departure is Giovanni del Virgilio's epitaph for Dante, which names him as *auctor* and *theologus*. Ascoli analyzes the first of Petrarch's eclogues, *Parthenias*, as well as *Familiars* 10.4, which accompanies and comments on the Latin poem, showing a deep indebtedness to Dante's eclogues. Because Dante made the first serious attempt at writing Virgilian bucolic verses, Petrarch must have looked on him as a model. Moreover, the *Vita nova* appears as the only precedent in creating a self-interpretation and so was undoubtedly a model for *Familiars* 10.4, which interprets *Parthenias*. The issues involved concern questions of Latin versus vernacular literature, the relation of moderns to ancients, literary genre and stylistic register, the practice of self-exegesis, the relation of these two expatriate Florentine writers to Northern Italian humanism, and specific narrative patterns and

topoi (116). Analyzing the references to symbolic rivers and to Polyphemus in both poets, Ascoli dramatizes the conflict between theology and poetry, contending that since Petrarch claims for poetry “an autonomous field of activity, Monicus/Gherardo’s theological purity represents a threat, but also a dialectical pole in relation to which Silvius/Francesco can define himself and his vocation” (141). Dante’s rescue of Virgil is not the same as humanistic resuscitation of the classical past. Ultimately Petrarch prefers to appear as the continuation of Homer rather than Virgil, because no comparison can be made with other contemporary poets.

The part devoted to the metaphysical aspects starts with an essay by Giuseppe Mazzotta, “Petrarch’s Dialogue with Dante” (177–95), which stresses the ambiguity of the relationship between the two poets. This focus is particularly appropriate to Petrarch’s case, given that he is “the poet of contradictions, inconsistencies, and struggles” (177). Petrarch’s great clarity about the novelty of his time and the need for new values causes him to view himself as modern, looking at the world exclusively through the paradigms of modern subjectivity and will. Starting with canzone 70, where Petrarch presents himself as the end point of an ongoing tradition, Mazzotta unpacks the meaning of Petrarch’s silence on Dante, interpreting it as a Socratic question about how much he knew himself and understood his relationship with his predecessor. While he is indebted to Dante for articulating central questions about the subject, memory, desire, time, and transcendence, Petrarch finds a new way of exploring the internal shadows, employing both Ovidian myths and biblical and Christian writings. The *Secretum* is the work where the questions of the constitution of self are pondered; it deals with the will, from which must come any possible intelligibility of self. The silence of Truth in the dialogue is seen by Mazzotta as a “way of resisting the temptations of transforming Truth into a purely rhetorical posture” (188). Among the many references to Dante recognizable in the *Secretum*, Mazzotta underscores the presence of Franciscan spirituality.

In “Petrarch as Metaphysical Poet Who Is Not Dante: Metaphysical Markers at the Beginning of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* (*Rvf* 1–21)” (226–62), Teodolinda Barolini maintains that the fundamental problem of Petrarchan poetry is the metaphysical issue of the one and the many, defined by the concerns of being and time. The argument is proved by a careful analysis of Petrarch’s use of categories that encourage the reader to think abstractly. “Petrarch is interesting precisely because his cast of mind tends towards the abstract, the universal, the numerical, and the metaphysical, while at the same time his desires remain rooted in the particular, the contingent, the immanent, and the physical” (221). Barolini addresses two main issues: first, the duality of multiplicity and unity, which is also a duality of temporality and eternity, or of human and God; and, second, time, which is an agent of multiplicity. Laura herself appears to belong both to

multiplicity and to unity. Barolini asserts that *Ruf* is not erotic poetry but a meditation on mortality; love is the highlighting of time from which only the Virgin can save you.

Christian Moevs, in "Subjectivity and Conversion in Dante and Petrarch" (226–69), shows the Petrarchan creation of a modern subjectivity through the paradigm of conversion. Petrarch's rejection of the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic understanding of the relations linking the individual to God and to the world (an understanding characteristic of Dante) leads Petrarch to construct an autonomous subjective self that has authority in itself. Through the narrative of conversion (never achieved by the Petrarchan narrator) that is deployed in the *Secretum*, in the last poems of *Ruf* (360–66), and here and there in other works, Petrarch builds a subjective self characterized by "difficulty and incoherence of conversion"; "separation of intellect, love and will"; "dualism between the body and the soul, between mind and matter, between heaven and earth"; acedia and anxiety; "alienation or isolation from the world, from others, and from God" (246–49). In the discussion, Moevs makes references to the spiritual tradition and to the modern implication of this important change.

Justin Steinberg's "Dante *Estravagante*, Petrarca *Disperso*, and the Spectre of the Other Woman" (263–89) opens the last part devoted to "Tradition," arguing that "in his innovative methods of collecting and preserving his poetry, Petrarch was influenced by the chaotic transmission of Dante's texts and his experience with the various Dantes" (264). That is to say, the conditions in which Dantean texts circulated led Petrarch to feel the need to re-collect his poems in the form of *canzoniere* in order to avoid the corruption created by oral and nonauthorized written transmissions. The careful preparation of an author's book guarantees his status as an artist. For this purpose, in *Ruf* Petrarch avoids any reference to his *disperse* and the love stories narrated there. While in the Edenic scene and in Beatrice's accusation Dante recollects his past loves, which are also included in *Vita nova*, Petrarch's exclusion of certain episodes from his erotic past from *Ruf* contributes to the purity of the collection and to a more symbolical reading of his experience. It is no accident that in the *disperse* the presence of Dante is more conspicuous than in the *sparse*. Steinberg maintains that in this way Petrarch ensures the strikingly modern autonomy of his work and ensures a vast audience in posterity for the *canzoniere*.

Poetic coronation is perspective from which Sara Sturm-Maddox considers the relationship between the two great poets in "Dante, Petrarch, and the Laurel Crown" (290–319). Albertino Mussato received such a coronation in 1315, but Dante never achieved this success—not just because he was denied it but also because Dante supposed that a reconciliation with his own city would be a prerequisite for such an honor. In fact, when the custom was first revived in Padua for the crowning of Mussato, achieve-

ments in both poetry and civic life were considered essential. Even Petrarch in his *Collatio laureationis* associates great poets with great military leaders or rulers, *cesaribus et poetis*, or, as Dante puts it, *cesare o poeta*. With Boccaccio this twofold requirement for poetic and civic recognition has disappeared, and with it largely the choice between Latin and vernacular poetry as well. Giovanni del Virgilio advocated a crown for Dante, provided he wrote a great Latin poem; for Boccaccio this was not really even a practical option, since Italian had already taken the place of Latin. Petrarch's *Trionfi* occupies the transitional period and is, according to Sturm-Maddox, Petrarch's attempt to establish a close connection between his Latin and his vernacular works.

The Davidic nature of Petrarch's poetry, initially expounded by Mazzotta, is reconsidered in "Places and Times of the Liturgy from Dante to Petrarch" (320–70), in which Ronald L. Martinez discusses the abundance of liturgical references in Petrarch's writings, starting with *Familiare* 6.2, which seems to be modeled on the "stational" liturgies. Clearly Petrarch was involved in liturgical expressions as a writer, since he composed penitential songs; he was also familiar with the Office, which he had to recite daily (his breviary is preserved in the Vatican Library). Martinez explicates a number of passages from the *Sine nomine* in which there are parodic and expressive uses of liturgical allusions. He argues that Petrarch adapts aspects of the liturgy of Advent and of the cross in particular. Behind them Martinez detects the hidden presence of Dante's use of the liturgy in his poems and prose (the *Convivio* in particular). The residue of Dante's former uses is evident in the *Trionfi*, especially in *Triumphus Cupidinis*. Even *Seniles* 7.1 records rhetorical uses of the liturgical texts. The important general role played by liturgical issues in *Ruf*, the organization of which is liturgical, as its 1 + 365 poems represent the calendar year, is evident, but liturgical contexts particularly inform *Ruf* 60–63, 142, 214, 264, and 366 (which Martinez discusses).

I have tried to outline the most significant issues of this seminal volume. Nevertheless, I have but hinted at the richness of these essays that attempt to excavate the extremely complex relationship between two poets, which is also a relationship between two different ways of thinking and two epochs of European culture.

Erminia Ardissino
Università di Torino