

Viti, Paolo. *L'ascesa al Parnaso. Petrarca e Boccaccio alle origini dell'umanesimo*. Lecce: Milella, 2021.

In the preface to this collection, Paolo Viti explains the importance of Parnassus, the metaphorical myth of how poetry is generated, as essential in the story of how the new humanistic culture came to be. It is under this banner that this venerable authority on Italian humanism unites the essays collected here, previously published at different times and with different purposes between 2013 and 2021. Only a couple of the essays are explicitly focused on poetry, yet all are dedicated to showing the contours of humanism in the works of its two formative protagonists. The first four essays of the volume are on Petrarch; the second four on Boccaccio.

Under the heading of his own words, “*libris satiari nequeo*,” the first chapter puts on display Petrarch’s explicit awareness of his own status as initiator of humanistic studies in Italy, and the size and novelty of his undertaking, which was to bring back studies that had been neglected for so long. The second chapter charts Petrarch’s contribution to literary historiography in his various works and, especially, letters. In the third, our attention is drawn to specific passages from the letters of the *Liber sine nomine* that show how political themes are intertwined with moral ones. Tyranny, for example, is the situation — as in present-day Avignon — in which justice perishes, liberty is absent, and libido rules. The very short fourth chapter sums up the main themes of the humanistic program, so important to the European knowledge revolution, whose roots can be found in Petrarch’s life and works. These are: an emphasis on rhetoric; a recovery and emulation of Greek and Roman civilization; a distancing from and condemnation of the perceived ignorance and neglect of classical heritage in the Middle Ages; and a strong individualism. The matrix is philology: the collection, preservation, and careful critical reading and reconstruction of books, since reliability of texts from the past is the only possible avenue for the restoration of truth.

The first chapter of the second part documents Boccaccio’s explicit awareness, particularly in his letters, of Petrarch’s importance as a founder, “*pater*” and “*preceptor*,” of a new movement. The second chapter traces the development of Boccaccio’s interest in humanism from the *Genealogia deorum gentilium* to the *De casibus virorum illustrium*, *De mulieribus claris* and the letter to Iacopo

Pizzinga, which figures prominently across several chapters in this book. A well-known difference between the two “crowns,” documented here, is Boccaccio’s appreciation of the first one, Dante, as well as his patriotic foregrounding of Florence, evident in his inclusion of Zanobi da Strada as *concivus meus*. The third and fourth of these chapters carefully consider the methodology and the sources of the *De casibus* and *De mulieribus*, noting, among many other things, Boccaccio’s use of poetry as historical source.

Together these essays narrate a triumphal story of how Europe detached itself from medieval ways toward the new, enlightened truth accessible through humanistic studies and methods. Viti’s intimate knowledge of the Latin works, especially letters, from which he picks out for us the most salient or dramatic points, gives this story great texture and detail. Since he amply quotes the original Latin, without translation, it is clear that his intended audience is the one that has kept the humanist program alive until today.

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