

# Igor Candido

## Introduction

The second volume of Ernst Cassirer's *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neuen Zeit* (1922) opens with an analysis of the Cartesian problem of the unity of knowledge. For the French philosopher, all the sciences together constitute a single system of human knowledge which does not change, however diverse might be the specific subjects to which it is applied. The argument completely transforms the relationship between the unity and multiplicity of knowledge. This change occurs primarily with respect to natural philosophy, in relation to which Descartes affirms that it would be folly to speculate on the mysteries of nature and on the influence of the celestial spheres over the terrestrial world, on the virtues of the plants, on the movement of the stars and the transformation of metals, without ever having reflected deeply on the correct use of the mind and on the universal concept of knowledge itself: indeed, all other matters are to be considered not in and of themselves, but for that express purpose (*Regulae* I and VIII).<sup>1</sup> In very similar terms, approximately three hundred years prior, Petrarch directed his satire against four Averroist doctors and their natural philosophy in the *De ipsius et multorum ignorantia*: "What use is it, I ask, to know the nature of beasts and birds and fish and snakes, and to ignore or neglect our human nature, the purpose of our birth, or whence we come whither we are bound?"<sup>2</sup> The conceptual affinity is surprising, just as it is fascinating to imagine Descartes as reader not only of Cicero and Augustine but also of the famous Petrarchan invective. In any case, the possible connection certainly did not escape Cassirer, editor along with Paul O. Kristeller and John H. Randall, Jr. of the famous volume *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (1948), in which he records the *De ignorantia* among the fundamental philosophical texts of the new era.<sup>3</sup>

But even more important than the individual passage in itself is the fact of its insertion into a cohesive corpus of texts which reveal the striking modernity of Petrarch's thought. According to a great historian of Humanism, Hans Baron, Petrarch was a sort of Moses figure straddling the Middle Ages and the

---

1 See Ernst Cassirer: *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neuen Zeit*. Berlin: Verlag Bruno Cassirer 1922<sup>3</sup>. Erster Band: p. 442–443.

2 Francesco Petrarca: *Invectives*. Edited and Translated by David Marsh. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2003 (The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 11), p. 239.

3 Francesco Petrarca: *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others*. In: Ernst Cassirer/ Paul O. Kristeller et al.: *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1956, p. 47–133.

Renaissance, able to catch sight of the new Promised Land but unable to set foot in it.<sup>4</sup> Baron's greatest student, Ronald Witt, among the contributors to this volume, instead viewed Petrarch as a third-generation humanist, active after the first pioneering wave of Paduan Humanism which included Lovato dei Lovati and Albertino Mussato, a humanist whose historical role was that of steering the movement toward Christianity from its secular origins through an ideal synthesis of pagan Classicism and new Christian culture.<sup>5</sup> A historical role defined also by spiritual exigencies – whether real or hypothetical matters little – beginning from the refusal to take part in a cultural world with which Petrarch did not wish to identify himself, as testified in the famous letter *Posteritati*, leading to his own internal crisis and his attempt to give unity and coherence to the sparse fragments of the soul, as suggested by the title of the *Canzoniere* itself, *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, and the conclusion of the *Secretum*, which represents the most refined analysis and the most carefully conceived theorization of the crisis transcribed within the poetic collection.

The same argument must be made today for Giovanni Boccaccio, though an important and primarily Italian critical tradition has viewed Boccaccio almost exclusively as a medieval author. Even Erasmus, however – as Ugo Foscolo (*Epoche IV*) reminds us – praised the Latin of the Certaldese as less barbarous, in his mind, than that of Petrarch himself. And if Petrarch – continues Foscolo – earned the gratitude of all Europe as the first restorer of classical literature, to Boccaccio is due at least half of this same praise.<sup>6</sup> With Boccaccio, for the first time in the neo-Latin world, the two great cultures of classical antiquity are experienced and relived in their ideal unity (Vittore Branca).<sup>7</sup> They reveal his interest for mythography and mythopoesis and the resulting fecund intuition for a recuperation of Greek culture, which is at the basis of the successive Ficinian and Florentine Renaissance in the broadest sense. But the proud declaration of pioneering recovery, according to the *Genealogia deorum gentium* (XIV, 7), is in reality the culmination of a cultural process begun in the first years of Boccaccio's education in Naples and which would shape fundamental milestones in his vernacular writing such as the *Filocolo*, the *Filostrato* and the *Teseida*, the *Fiammetta* and the *Decameron*. Of these, the *Decameron* not only embraces wholeheartedly

---

4 See Hans Baron: *Moot Problems of Renaissance Interpretation: An Answer to Wallace K. Ferguson*. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19 (1958), p. 26–34.

5 See Ronald Witt: “*In the Footsteps of the Ancients*”: *The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*. Leiden: Brill 2000 (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, 74), p. 230–291.

6 See Ugo Foscolo: *Saggi di letteratura italiana. Parte prima: Epoche della lingua italiana*. Edited by Cesare Foligno. Florence: Le Monnier 1958, p. 184.

7 See Vittore Branca: *Giovanni Boccaccio. Profilo biografico*. Florence: Sansoni 1977, p. 117.

the classical world but uses it to provide a new representation of reality, able to offer a vision of a world complex in its multiplicity but reduced to unity by the very project of collecting all of reality and recreating it in narrative form within a volume inspired by the Book of the Universe.

If the historical periodizations and readings are different, if diverse are the theoretical, critical or philological approaches that aided the study of Petrarch's and Boccaccio's literary production and culture, central, nonetheless, remains the yet unanswered question of which cultural role the two great *trecentisti* held between the great encyclopedic model of Dante and the idea, already modern, of a new synthesis inside the many-faceted culture within the era of Renaissance humanism. Pioneers in this field of study are Giuseppe Billanovich and Giuseppe Velli, whose respective works have become the benchmark.<sup>8</sup> To the groundbreaking works by these founding fathers we may now add the series *Arezzo e Certaldo* published by Antenore, which dedicates monographic volumes of a comparative bent to the two authors and which describes from diverse hermeneutic perspectives their historical and intellectual relationship: the *grande nodo* (Velli); that is, the most fortunate meeting in all of the Italian literary tradition (Branca).<sup>9</sup> At any rate, the manner by which Petrarch and Boccaccio devised a new point of access to the unity of classical and medieval knowledge by creating an intellectual paradigm markedly different from that of Dante and leading toward a sort of modern consciousness, that which is in many ways already our consciousness, was still to be considered in both its broadest strokes and its most specific nuances, according to interdependent relationships, whether they be historical, philosophical or philological, hermeneutical, critical, or in light of the material culture of the time.

Still unexplored is a theme that flows as an undercurrent beneath many pages of this volume – that of Petrarch's and Boccaccio's influence on the European conscience. What contributions have Petrarch and Boccaccio provided to the formation of the European identity? It scarcely need be remembered that the years in which Petrarch and Boccaccio were active saw the Italian language and its literature become dominant in the European panorama, affirming themselves as direct descendents of the Latin tradition in the context of Romance literatures. So it would remain at least until the end of the sixteenth century, thanks to the cultural identity which was formed above all upon the models offered by Dante,

---

<sup>8</sup> See in particular Giuseppe Billanovich: *Petrarca Letterato. I: Lo scrittoio del Petrarca*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 1995<sup>2</sup> (Storia e Letteratura, 16); Giuseppe Velli: *Petrarca e Boccaccio: Tradizione-memoria-scrittura*. Padua: Antenore 1995<sup>2</sup> (Studi sul Petrarca, 7).

<sup>9</sup> See Vittore Branca: *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul "Decameron"*. Florence: Sansoni 1996, p. 165.

Petrarch and Boccaccio, through the cultural filter of humanism and then of the High Renaissance. This identity of Italian literary civilization has a vocation that is all the more strongly European even while more weakly national (Carlo Ossola).<sup>10</sup> In this way we can better understand Jacob Burckhardt's claim that the Italian humanists, in rediscovering classical antiquity, lay the groundwork for the creation of the modern individual and were therefore to be considered "the first born among the sons of modern Europe."<sup>11</sup> And if the Italian humanists were truly such, then coming just before them, the founding fathers of the modern European spirit who turned their gaze toward antiquity with a perspective not only assimilative, as in the case of Dante, but historical and philological, were precisely Petrarch and Boccaccio. Their intellectual production thus came to constitute the most solid knot in the premodern world to tie the Greco-Roman spirit to the Christian in a new and fertile synthesis, so as to spread their own influence rapidly throughout the various European nations, explored, above all by Petrarch, in the search for manuscripts, texts and witnesses containing traces of their beloved classical *auctores*.

What are the characteristics of this synthesis? It is a question stemming from the history of ideas which has fascinated me for years and which acted as the inspiration for this volume. It became immediately apparent that an undertaking such as this would be far too onerous for the intellectual powers of a single author, and it discouraged the notion of launching an organic research effort on the influence of these authors through the study of the reception of their works. I was persuaded that what was required, instead, was to confront the critical problem according to a perspective that is synchronic and unified in itself, capable of being proven through the attempt to grasp the truly revolutionary aspects of the culture of these two great *trecentisti*, along with – and perhaps even more so – their own heightened awareness of the elements of absolute novelty and clear rupture with respect to their own recent past. In order to attempt a more profound comprehension of this intricate knot of cultural history which inextricably links the Middle Ages with the Renaissance, it was therefore necessary to create a dialogue between experts from diverse and complementary disciplinary fields, who could observe the historical and literary facts independently from the forced relationships existing within a pre-established canon.

---

**10** See Carlo Ossola: *Europa, Europa...* In: Carlo Ossola (ed.): *Europa, miti d'identità*. Venice: Marsilio 2001 (Presente storico, 12), p. xi.

**11** Jacob Burckhardt: *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch*. Edited by Horst Günther. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1989; English translation: *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Translated by Samuel C. G. Middlemore with an Introduction by Peter Burke London: Penguin 1960, p. 98.

The arrangement of the essays collected in the volume attempts, as far as possible, to follow the intellectual and artistic development of the two authors through a reflection on the works in their chronological order and following that particular rhythm which, from the beginning in both cases, alternates seamlessly between the production in Latin and in the vernacular. In Petrarch the former precedes the latter, while in Boccaccio the opposite occurs. The distinction between these two moments is nevertheless one of convenience and does not reflect, as the close ties between the works of one author and the other show, a true subdivision into different phases of activity: that of the humanist intellectual on the one hand and the poet or narrator on the other.

The opening essay (Chapter 1) introduces us to Petrarch's writing desk and library. H. Wayne Storey investigates the macro- and micro-contexts of the relationships among the forms in which knowledge is developed in books that Petrarch owned and that he produced. "For Petrarch not only was the design of the book a reflection of the edition's intellectual structure, it was also an integral part of its systems of meaning, from the clarity of its script to the unified organization of its knowledge in the text and its apparatus and glosses." (p. 17) From this broader perspective, the study analyses Petrarch's most important manuscripts (such as his own 'Virgilio Ambrosiano' [today: Milano Biblioteca Ambrosiana MS A 79 inf. Sala Prefetto 10/27], the rhetorical miscellany Cologny Bodmer 146, the *opera omnia* of Horace contained and glossed in Laurenziano 34.1, and the partial holograph of Petrarch's own *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* in Vaticano Latino 3195), considering the multiple layers of textuality and manuscript production that define and connect intellectual and rhetorical-poetic traditions. In this sophisticated *accessus ad auctorem*, Storey elucidates the new principles that guided Petrarch in the search for, the arrangement, study and annotation of his favourite books and in the establishment of his own library, guiding principles that are useful to keep in mind while reading successive essays and that, in general, help to orient us within the interpretation of the Petrarchan text.

Three essays follow which consider Petrarch's Latin production and the influence that it had respectively on his contemporaries, on the evolution of the humanist movement, and on the history of premodern philosophy. Karl Enenkel's paper (Chapter 2) deals with Petrarch's constructions of the place of writing as a *locus sacer*, especially in the *De vita solitaria*, while providing an analysis of the different features of the sacred place, their symbolical meaning, and the literary traditions on which Petrarch drew. The paper explains the ways in which the construction of the *locus sacer* is connected with the special style of authorship Petrarch had in mind and wished to present to his contemporaries. Place is the only element truly able to legitimate Petrarch's authority by guaranteeing, through his readers, the novelty of the invention and the capacity, on the part

of the writer, to realize his highest creative potential. The choice of a solitary life is therefore explained as a distance, both physical and metaphorical, from the common public, beginning from the moment that Petrarch, like Horace before him, addresses himself to a few carefully selected readers able to appreciate his writing and his lifestyle, which go hand in hand. With this work Petrarch inaugurates a new kind of writer, not tethered to a physical location, and especially not to the *studiolo*, as prescribed by tradition, but free to meditate in communion with nature from which he or she receives inspiration.

The *De vita solitaria* is revealing of one of Petrarch's great achievements according to Ronald Witt (Chapter 3): the Christianization of the humanist movement, which for two generations had thrived in a secular, communal context. Not only did he endeavour to synthesize the study of pagan letters with Christian writings, but using his own life to dramatize his ideas, he envisaged the Christian scholar as celibate and pursuing scholarship in solitude either by himself or together with a small group of like-minded men. The *De ignorantia* is the work in which Petrarch discusses, with the greatest breadth and depth, the problem of the relationship between pagan and Christian education, arguing in favor of Christian love over pagan knowledge. In its Christianized form, Petrarch's version of humanism had an international appeal in the fourteenth century.

Christopher Celenza's paper (Chapter 4) explores Petrarch's conception of and place within the history of philosophy by focusing on notions that have traditionally stood outside the canonical history of philosophy but that fit Petrarch's case well. These include: philosophy as self-scrutiny; philosophy as the creation of a persona; philosophy and exemplarity; and philosophy as dialogue. These notions form Petrarch's idea of philosophy and lie at the center of his polemic treatise *De ignorantia*. By providing a reading of the invective which sets the work in its (ancient and Christian) philosophical context, Celenza shows how Petrarch sets the tone for much of the humanist world to come, when Aristotle is under discussion.

Concluding the first part of the volume are two studies dedicated to Petrarchan vernacular poetry which examine its relation with antecedents of the Dantean model. The objective of Joachim Küpper's contribution (Chapter 5) is to rethink in part the classic assumption of criticism who wishes to find at the heart of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta* a Christianized version of platonic love mediated by the poetic experience of the *Vita nova*. If the figure of the *donna* as angel changes in Petrarch, and her beatific function is reduced, still quite present is the process of spiritualizing the woman and the hypothesis of a final conversion of love from the terrestrial realm to the heavens, as the *canzone alla Vergine* at the conclusion of the work makes clear. But in order to understand the true innovation with respect to the model, which was first initiated by Dante, the scholar proposes "to consider the love concept inherent in the *Canzoniere* as being modeled, at least to a certain

extent, after the theory of love developed within the medical discourse of that age, which became known under the name of *hereos*. Its origins are in part Aristotelian, Galenic and Arabic, and the common denominator of these conceptual sources is what I would schematically term an ‘anthropological materialism.’”

By focusing on the concept of the resurrection of the body and on the relationship between corporeality and language, Manuele Gagnolati and Francesca Southerden (Chapter 6) explore differences within the eschatological imagination in Dante’s *Paradiso* and Petrarch’s *Triumphus Eternitatis*, as well as their different modes of textuality and the linguistic concepts informing them. Their paper, in particular, shows a shift from Dante’s paradoxical way of maintaining the incompatibility of the divine and the lyric while combining them, to Petrarch’s uniquely lyrical eschatology, where the Christian doctrine is adapted to an erotic fantasy that ends up replacing it. “The collective experience of heaven consequently has no place except to validate the supremacy of Laura’s image in relation to Petrarch’s gaze and to the resurrected landscape of his heart, whose affective current is carried by memory into the furthest reaches of Petrarch’s eschatological imagination [...]” (p. 147) This is the very change of relationship which Petrarch establishes with poetic language, and the analysis proposed here is taken up once again in the conclusion of the volume, which tackles the central question of what is the ideological space of vernacular literature in the production of Petrarch and Boccaccio.

My own essay (Chapter 7) serves as a hinge between the two preceding chapters and the two following, and within the volume it acts as a transition between the first part, dedicated primarily to Petrarch, and the second to Boccaccio. In keeping with the two preceding papers, my contribution focuses on Petrarch’s and Boccaccio’s contrastive readings of Dante’s *Comedy*, exploring a consistent set of theological and aesthetic concepts, among which Dante’s ideation and representation of Christian conversion. Close attention is paid in particular to the conclusions of Petrarch’s *Secretum* and Boccaccio’s tale of Ser Cepparello (*Dec.* I, 1), two texts that bear witness to a radical intellectual progression towards the new era of Italian Renaissance humanism. The theme of Francesco’s conversion is read in light of the conclusion of the *Canzoniere*, of the affirmations of the *Secretum*, and of the final verses of the *Triumph*, loci within the Petrarchan macrotext that stand not in contradiction with one another, but instead describe a carefully crafted countersong with respect to the typology of medieval conversion and, more specifically, to the Dantean paradigm of the poem’s journey read as a poetics of conversion (John Freccero).<sup>12</sup> In close continuity with the two successive

---

<sup>12</sup> See John Freccero: *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. Edited by Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1986.

chapters, the reading of the first Decameronian novella as the suspension of judgment concerning the ultimate truths and theological metaphysics in general is completed with those of Gerhard Regn and Andreas Kablitz.

According to Regn (Chapter 8), the incipit of the *Decameron* is, contrary to medieval practices of textual variance, authorized by the author himself and transmits the elementary message of Boccaccio's book of *novelle*: the paratextual formula points to the work's dimension as a parody of the book of Genesis; it announces its counterfactual relationship to the *Comedy*, especially by abrogating Dante's alliance of numerical order and metaphysical significance for the benefit of a contingency compensated by the sophistication of its storytelling. This implies a reassessment of courtly erotic literature; that is, differently from Dante's work, it is free of ethical blemish. The aesthetics of late medieval aristocratic culture is an instrument of self-empowerment for a tentatively postmedieval world, in which merchants and peers walk side by side: Galeotto, who symbolizes literature, is no longer a dubious pimp as he was in Dante, but acts once again as a noble benefactor for the distressed – this is why Boccaccio restores his old title, which Dante had stripped from him: “il libro chiamato *Decameron* cognominato principe Galeotto.” [the book called Decameron, otherwise Prince Galeotto]

Kablitz, as well (Chapter 9), focuses primarily on the *Proemio* which, far from being a purely scholarly rhetorical exercise, establishes the very foundation of the *Decameron's* intellectual profile, and in particular inaugurates its dialogue with scholastic philosophy. The importance of this philosophical framework cannot be underestimated as the *Decameron's* modernity – the author argues – resides within this framework more than in its narrative structures, so that such conceptual conclusions drawn from scholastic anthropology constitute a real turning point in the development of Western thought. To my knowledge, this is the first interpretation of Boccaccio's narrative masterpiece through the lens of medieval scholasticism set in the context of its historical continuity into the premodern cultural world. The surprisingly strict relationship between literature and philosophy is beautifully expressed in the paper's conclusion: “If the poetics of the *Decameron* defines literature as a substitute for rational control of life-threatening emotions, it describes it as well as a means of satisfaction of sensual desires. The secret dialogue of the *Decameron* with scholastic philosophy and theology does not only reveal the highly explosive implications of Thomas Aquinas' reinterpretation of traditional Christian dogma, it also brings about a concept of literature which responds to this redefinition of human nature.” (p. 207)

At the center of the following section is the study of the sources and principal Latin works through which Petrarch and Boccaccio interweave their own (pre)humanistic dialogue with beloved classical authors. In his essay Francesco

Ciabattoni (Chapter 10) analyzes how Boccaccio's intertextual sources for *Decameron* II, 5 and II, 6 – namely Apuleius, Dante and Ovid – create and displace, within the reader, expectations about the tragic ending of the tales. Moving from Giuseppe Velli's notion of literary memory, he then incorporates the results of recent philological research to assess the role of literary models in Boccaccio's compositional strategy; a strategy on which the paper sheds new light by refining our understanding of the writer's complex rhetorical use of parody: "Boccaccio's narrative strategy evokes literary classics in the readers' memory, only to take sudden, displacing turns and avert the expected conclusion. Just as importantly, the responsiveness and interplay among the youths of the *brigata* constitute what Picone calls *mondo commentato* and provide a first layer of hermeneutical and intratextual considerations, while at the same time livening the brigata's overarching tale and making the reading more pleasurable." (p. 223)

After having described the divergent behaviours of Petrarch and Boccaccio in regards to authors of the Latin tradition, the former being more selective while the latter more inclusive, the contribution of Marco Petoletti (Chapter 11) presents the fundamental role Boccaccio played in the transmission of certain texts from classical antiquity and the Latin Middle Ages, with particular attention to the manuscripts within his own library. It takes into consideration, more specifically, the two autograph *zibaldoni*, the one being membranaceous (Florence, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Plut. 29.8 + 33.31) and the other chartaceous (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Banco rari 50), where Boccaccio, over a period of years, copied numerous works whose fortune was often quite limited (one thinks, for instance, of the case of the *Priapea* and other medieval Latin texts, of which the Boccaccian *zibaldoni* are strategic witnesses). The attentive exploration of the texts which Boccaccio copied, studied and utilized is then further enriched by a successful deciphering of the inscription accompanying the portrait of Homer in the Toledan Dante (Archivo y Biblioteca Capitulares, Zelada 104 6), an inscription that until now has remained illegible. Within the inscription Greek and Latin coexist in a strategic synthesis, as in the famous passage from the *Genealogia* (XIV, 7), in which Boccaccio claims for himself the reconstituted linguistic and cultural unity of Greco-Roman antiquity. For the early chronology of the first text contained in the two *zibaldoni* and no less so for methodological reasons (indeed, those same reasons noted with regards to the contribution by Storey), this study should in fact open the volume's section dedicated to Boccaccio. We preferred, instead, to place it in an intermediary position between the papers on the *Decameron* and those on the later Latin works in order to clarify the problem of the classical and medieval sources within the former, and to open the discussion on the latter. This decision enables us to demonstrate the continuity of the author's inspiration and the artificiality of a distinction between the culture of Boccaccio

as narrator in the vernacular and of Boccaccio as erudite scholar who writes in Latin. Likewise, giving priority to the narrative art as a sign of Boccaccio's modernity does not equate to undervaluing the presence in the *Decameron* of classical authors and of the texts copied in the two *zibaldoni*, which are concealed but nevertheless present therein, while they will be plain to see in the erudite Latin works, and above all in the *Genealogia*.

In the first of the two contributions dedicated to the mythographical treatise, Paolo Cherchi (Chapter 12) offers us a new definition of the work and a new reading perspective that takes into account the complexity of a literary and doctrinal design that was wholly ambitious and has never been attempted since. "In order to characterize the *Genealogie* we might define it as a study, indeed a true epos of the art of interpretation, of the exegetical and hermeneutical labours and travails of many generations through the myths, an attempt to understand whether they are pure fantasy, how and when they were formed, what truths they hide, which language they use, and how they are related to history." (p. 248) Alternating with general discussion is the precise vantage point from which Cherchi regards the work and the multifaceted meanings of its myths: the study of the heurematic literary tradition to which Boccaccio, after many centuries of silence, provides a new and original stimulus. These inventors, for Boccaccio, offer a confirmation of the "veracity" of "mythological language": in effect, the inventors die but their creative inventions remain as testimony to their existence. He studies the ideas that have contributed to the progress of human civilization, and inserts their "inventors" into the context of a "genealogy," which renders them "historical". Boccaccio's method was at the source of Renaissance heurematic literature and was vital until the new mode of understanding inventions was profoundly modified by Bacon.

Giuseppe Mazzotta (Chapter 13) studies the intellectual rapport that Boccaccio interweaves with Petrarch during the years that follow their first meeting in 1350: from their initial mutual admiration and Boccaccio's adherence to the Petrarchan cultural project, their relationship is then characterized by a large degree of caution (see also Bragantini's essay) and tends toward a distancing on the part of the younger friend, above all in his writing of the *Genealogia*. For this reason, the paper is largely concerned with this particular text, conceived as a massive encyclopedia of the origins and history of ancient myths. The author carries out this task from two interrelated perspectives. The first is political, namely the political motives of the king in patronizing the work as a strategy of self-legitimation. The second is specifically cultural: with this work Boccaccio articulates his sense of the dangers and difficulties hovering over a modern project that would seek to achieve a unity of knowledge. The second purpose is not Boccaccio's way of indulging in some abstract, merely rhetorical or humanistic exercise. Quite to

the contrary: Mazzotta argues that the *Genealogia*, which features Petrarch as Boccaccio's privileged interlocutor, is meant by Boccaccio as a way of targeting and creating a critical distance from Petrarch's own powerful intellectual project of re-thinking culture for his times and for modernity.

Mazzotta's contribution ushers in the conclusory section of the volume, which extends its comparative gaze to the long-standing fidelity of the two authors to the vernacular language. The final three studies ideologically circumscribe that which Renzo Bragantini defines, with an appropriated formula, as "the space of vernacular literature," of which he proposes an analytical reading beginning with the *Canzoniere* and the *Decameron*, both of which would occupy the two authors up to the final days of their lives. Through a close reading of the epistolary exchanges between Petrarch and Boccaccio, spanning from 1350 to June 1374, just a month before Petrarch's death, Bragantini's paper (Chapter 15) aims to discuss and reconsider recent views of the intellectual relationships between the two great protagonists of the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Challenging the view that presents Boccaccio as totally subjugated to Petrarch, the paper reveals their intellectual relationship to be far more complex and intricate. Whilst Boccaccio undoubtedly perceived the aura of intellectual appeal which Petrarch emanated, he nevertheless preserved his own high intellectual profile, which can be attributed only partially to Petrarch's influence. Even if Boccaccio's attempt to reconcile Petrarch's lesson with that of Dante turned out to be only a partial success, he nevertheless contributed to the foundation of the myth of the Trecento's "three crowns." Last but not least, if Boccaccio agreed with Petrarch's substantial scepticism concerning coeval readership, he faced this problem not only from a different perspective, but also from a divergent position regarding the philosophy of love.

This philosophy is at the heart of Giorgio Ficara's contribution (Chapter 15), which offers us what is, in my opinion, the most subtle analysis of the psychology of love as it is represented by Boccaccio and Petrarch. One will note here the inversion of the typical order of names, thus alluding to a departure from the commonplace view of the *magister-discipulus* relationship; instead the essay maintains the notion, already introduced by Branca and with new arguments by Bragantini, of a circulation of ideas rather than the unidirectional flow of Petrarchan influence.<sup>13</sup> From the rupture of the silence that consecrated the Provençal *dame* emerges the impetus of the woman to speak: the *donna* who is transformed into lover and who expresses the full legitimacy of her desire is the first symptom of the prevalence of natural reality over antiquated abstraction and

---

<sup>13</sup> See Branca: *Boccaccio medievale*, p. 300–332.

leads to some of the most revolutionary pages of the *Decameron*. In this direction, the hypertrophic interior monologue of the first female narrator of Italian literature, the elegiac Fiammetta, is an emblematic culmination not only of Boccaccio's narrative research, but of the prehistory of the novelistic genre as such. A Fiammetta who is closer to Francesco *agens* of the *Canzoniere* than to Laura herself (indeed, the two depictions are often confused), a feminine figure so evanescent as to appear as a sort of return to the typology of the Provençal *donna*. However, the author separates Laura from this characterization almost programmatically by the faithfulness of her presence in the mind of the beloved, as told in the *Canzoniere* which is the history or intimate diary of a passion that never dies.

With Petrarch and Boccaccio we cannot overlook, finally, the dialectic meeting of History and microhistory. The tragic date of 1348 is inscribed within the *Canzoniere* and the *Decameron* in a very different, even oppositional way. Moving from this observation, Giulio Ferroni's paper (Chapter 16) follows the forms and structures that Petrarch and Boccaccio used to probe the meaning of an ending through a problematic interlacing between the conclusion of writing and the anxiety brought about by the conclusion of life. In Petrarch this link appears quite differently in the writing of the *Familiars* and in that of the *Canzoniere*, from the moment that the poetic account, whose true title given by the author as *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, alluding to its incompleteness, declares that writing cannot possibly terminate prior to the conclusion of life. But it is precisely this incompleteness within the soul, with the subsequent contradiction of its oscillating states, that constitutes the greatness of Petrarch's poetry, thus presenting an alternative and certainly more modern response to that quintessentially theological offering from Dante. Yet another alternative to Petrarch, and once again different with respect to the Dantean model, is the way in which the fateful date of 1348 is inscribed on the soil of the Decameronian world; that is, as a sign of the deadly Plague now brought to life in a literary work and in the author's larger project to bring order back to the world. As such, the project presupposes that the representation of the multiplicity of reality is reduced to unity in the form of the Book of the Universe. The same can be said for the self-proclaimed fragmentariness of Petrarch's writing of the *Canzoniere*, which the author attempts to remedy through the process of selecting and organizing the poems therein.

Both of the respective solutions offered by Petrarch and Boccaccio to the dialectic between multiplicity and unity of knowledge in their two vernacular masterworks allude to the creation of a Book of the World for the new era, a literary undertaking that will never abandon them. For this reason, their solutions can

be viewed as trail markers for a philosophical journey that will begin its ripening with Humanism, to be formulated most fully by Descartes.

Igor Candido  
Arts Building, Trinity College Dublin,  
July, 2017

## Bibliography

### Primary Literature

- Petrarca, Francesco: *On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others*. In: Ernst Cassirer/ Paul O. Kristeller et al.: *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1956, p. 47–133.
- Petrarca, Francesco: *Invectives*. Edited and Translated by David Marsh. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 2003 (The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 11).

### Secondary Literature

#### Monographs and Anthologies

- Billanovich, Giuseppe: *Petrarca Letterato. I: Lo scrittoio del Petrarca*. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e letteratura 1995<sup>2</sup> (Storia e letteratura, 16).
- Branca, Vittore: *Branca: Giovanni Boccaccio. Profilo biografico*. Florence: Sansoni 1977.
- Branca, Vittore: *Boccaccio medievale e nuovi studi sul "Decameron"*. Florence: Sansoni 1996.
- Burckhardt, Jacob: *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien: Ein Versuch*. Edited by Horst Günther. Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag 1989; English translation: *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. Translated by S. C. G. Middlemore with an Introduction by Peter Burke. London: Penguin 1960.
- Cassirer, Ernst: *Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philosophie und Wissenschaft der neuen Zeit*. 3 vols. Berlin: Verlag Bruno Cassirer 1922<sup>3</sup>.
- Foscolo, Ugo: *Saggi di letteratura italiana. Parte prima, Epoche della lingua italiana*. Edited by Cesare Foligno. Florence: Le Monnier 1958.
- Freccero, John: *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion*. Edited by Rachel Jacoff. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1986.
- Velli, Giuseppe: *Petrarca e Boccaccio: Tradizione-memoria-scrittura*. Padua: Antenore 1995<sup>2</sup> (Studi sul Petrarca, 7).

## Articles and Papers

Baron, Hans: *Moot Problems of Renaissance Interpretation: An Answer to Wallace K. Ferguson*.  
In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19 (1958), p. 26–34.

Ossola, Carlo: *Europa, Europa...* In: Carlo Ossola (ed.): *Europa, miti d'identità*. Venice: Marsilio  
2001 (Presente storico, 12).