

silenzio, per s/coprirlo con parole» (31).

Chapter II, «L'allegoria», begins with a review of the major critical voices of the last fifty years who confirm Dante's «profonda convinzione cristiana», for it is upon this foundation that the author justifies Dante's use of allegory. Chapter III, «L'attraversamento della menzogna», illustrates the necessary undoing («superamento») of what the author considers «la metafora-concetto-chiave» of the *Commedia*, «la menzogna» which comes to represent all language. To prove her thesis Carugati focuses on: 1) the addresses to the reader viewed as «indicazioni metanarrative di un "attraversamento" scritturario»; 2) the figure of Virgil as «"la parola ornata", la fittività ... abbandonata per un silenzio»; 3) a rhetorical reading of the «folle volo» of Ulysses. In Chapter IV, «Menzogna e follia. L'Ulisse», Ulysses' folly, as well as Dante's is shown to be a folly of words. Ulysses is described as an «errante fabbricatore di menzogne» (110), and Dante as a «frodolente pellegrino» (87), both captains on a voyage of knowledge destined to drown by the weight of the words that once propelled them. Chapter V, «La visione mancata», and the Conclusion return to the initial, contradictory definition of «mystikos» in discussing the third *cantica* where «visione e accecamento si toccano» (134), language is «vittoriosamente sconfitta» (124) and the faith that led our poet to such artistic heights «soffoca, zittisce il libero espandersi della parola, la immobilizza nel silenzio» (145).

This book is an insightful reflection on the mystical element of the *Commedia's* language. However, although the author borrows from Dante's definition of allegory as «verità sotto bella menzogna» (*Convivio*, 2.1), it seems to me that she stretches «menzogna» to a point that the poet probably never intended. Her study has the merit of treating the silence of the mystics in Dante in a disciplined, scholarly manner. This reader would have preferred a more precise analysis of the nature of the other term in her title, «menzogna», with its related concepts of «genius» and «imagination» — topics too crucial to be summarily dismissed in Dante studies.

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María Rosa Menocal, *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: From Borges to Boccaccio*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, 223 pp.

This study examines Dante's influence on Silvio Pellico, Pound, T.S. Eliot, Borges, Petrarca, and Boccaccio. The first chapter offers a reading of the *Vita Nuova*, which in Menocal's eyes represents «Dante's most excruciatingly naked vision of the relationship between Poetry and Truth» (6). The second chapter analyzes the reworking of the Paolo and Francesca

episode in Pellico's now forgotten *Le mie prigioni*. The third chapter explores the ramifications of Eliot's characterization of Pound as the «miglior fabbro» in the dedication to «The Waste Land». The fourth chapter examines two famous instances of conspicuous silence towards Dante, Borges' «The Aleph», and poem 80 of the *Canzoniere*. The last chapter investigates the subversive aspects to Boccaccio's subtitle for the *Decameron*, the «Galeotto».

In her Preface, Menocal outlines two «renegade» models for her study, the concept of synchronicity (adopted from Jung by way of the rock star Sting) and kabbalism. Arguing that an insistence on diachronic methods «distorts» examinations of literary relations, she argues for analyses based on «the orderings of personal histories» (3). This posture, which results in greater sensitivity to the productive capacities of texts, is a particularly interesting move in the case of Dante, who is all too often treated as a cultural authority whose text is more prescriptive than suggestive. Less persuasive, however, is Menocal's use of kabbalism. The author states that her use of the term is «very simple and limited: the kabbala is the master text, the writing of the universe, the telling of the history in the cosmos» (4). Synchronicity and kabbala, she argues, describe the «often uncanny relationship between self and universe, a relationship in which the universe speaks — at times indecipherably — to that soul which has become a central character» (5). Neither of these accounts is very clear. Her invocation of a kabbalistic model is largely confined to the first chapter, where kabbala is used as a metaphor applied so vaguely that there is a real lack of analytic power. At times, «kabbala» seems to be a convenient phrase invoked to evade argument. In practice Menocal tends to draw more extensively on Harold Bloom's analysis of intertextual relations: throughout the book Menocal presents ambiguous or hostile poetic relations as instances of «strong» readings aimed at unsettling father figures.

The third chapter, which Menocal herself offers as central to the study, exemplifies the strengths and pitfalls of her synchronic method. Its basic assertion, that the quotation from Dante with which Eliot dedicates «The Waste Land» to Pound is ambivalent, is promising; the argument is unconvincing. Menocal examines *Purgatorio* 26 wherein Dante meets Arnaut Daniel, and she argues that Dante's attitude toward his predecessor is disparaging. In doing so, she notes that critics have accepted Dante's words at face value. If this is the case, what would lead her to believe that Eliot would have seen deprecation in «il miglior fabbro» and employed it ironically against Pound? The question is less whether Dante is himself ironic than whether he was taken to be ironic by Eliot. (The difficulty of settling the play of irony is expressed — perhaps unconsciously — by one of Menocal's footnotes, in which she thanks Barbara Smith «for noting that with verbal delivery alone one can completely modify apparent meaning» [103]. Is Menocal ironic here? Surely a literary critic need not be told that language has a rhetorical dimension). Later, Menocal cites religious and poetic attitudes struck by Eliot much later in life and reads them back into

the 1921 poem. Synchronic thinking further allows her to ask, late in the chapter, «Does it really matter how conscious Eliot might or might not have been of his immensely significant repetition of the same word [sic]?» (125). One might think, without being a slave to positivist fact, that it does. In a book that celebrates the power of «the orderings of personal histories», it seems fair to expect that such a personal point — what Eliot might have thought of Pound in 1921, in all the messy complexity that such a question entails — would be given more weight. History may be a nightmare from which Menocal wishes to escape, but its claims on writers and on critics, while they ought to be tempered, cannot be shrugged off so easily.

The method sketched by Menocal is well suited to register the uncanny repetitions in texts and idiosyncratic orderings that writers construct among texts. But often this heightened sensitivity to similarities and echoes is accompanied by less attentiveness to differences and to evidence that counters the main assertion. Such weaknesses are evident in Menocal's reading of the *Vita Nuova*. For Menocal this text constitutes Dante's «manifesto of literary conversion», and she illustrates this by tracing Dante's transcendence of his troubador models. The crucial moment of conversion comes in chapter 26 of the *Vita Nuova*, the point at which, according to Menocal, Dante dispenses with any formal commentary. This claim is made possible by an account of Dante's self-commentary that is full of inaccuracies. In Menocal's eyes the «divisioni» amount to little more than a «primitive explication de texte», a «mechanical scholastic enterprise» (30), a «pseudoscientific explication» (36) which merely points out the obvious. While it is true, as Menocal observes, that Dante admits that the meaning of the dream described in the third chapter is now apparent even to «li più semplici», elsewhere in the *Vita nuova* these «primitive» expositions are clearly aimed at helping «chi volesse sottilmente considerare». In fact, Dante does not so much eliminate the «divisioni» as insert them at the end of the prose sections that accompany each poem in the *Vita nuova*. Other points in the analysis suggest a more general lack of familiarity with commentary: Menocal points out that Boccaccio's disdain for these «highly formal and starkly positivistic glosses» (31) is evidenced in his relegation of them to the margins, an observation which overlooks the conventional placement of commentary in medieval manuscripts.

Putting the synchronic and the diachronic back together again — once they have been so powerfully severed by various formalisms — is, as Fredric Jameson suggested in *The Prison House of Language* (1972), very hard to do. Menocal draws together a collection of texts that have a powerful message for linear literary histories, but whether that message is to disregard history altogether is not clear. Reconsidering literary history is a worthy project, but one that this book does not do justice to.

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