

sources. Thus a prerequisite is the identification of sources, and Deluz provides both a repertory of sources (in a synoptic table, pp. 429–92, which furnishes an extremely useful *instrument de travail*), and an assessment of Mandeville's procedures; this is a valuable first step, but a fuller study, rhetorical and pragmatic, of his compilation and translation techniques might well be very rewarding. Part II sets Mandeville's *Travels* in their intellectual context: a curiosity about the natural and especially the human world, fed by a sense of expanding horizons (the opening-up of Europe, the pioneer journeys of the early missionaries), and then offers a useful repertory of the geographical vocabulary at his disposal, supplemented by more remarkable synoptic tables (pp. 383–98), comparing his lexis to those of comparable contemporaries like Marco Polo. A third section concentrates on the image of the world as promulgated by Mandeville, his conceptual *Mappemonde*; here, the non-specialist might have found it useful to have some maps other than Brunetto Latini's (the Hereford *Mappemonde*, for instance, cited p. 189) with which to compare Mandeville's (pp. 400–1). Mandeville's larger world is one in which distance allows an objective and often critical view of the follies of his own. A final section focuses on reception: the astonishing popularity of the *Travels* (250 manuscripts), its wide diffusion geographical and social, the prestige which it enjoyed, and the evidence of reception furnished by marginal notations and illustrations. (A mild regret: that there are so very few illustrations provided. Again, a full study based on other invaluable synoptic tables (pp. 422–7) would surely be fruitful.)

This work is the fruit of herculean labours, and its main thesis, that the oddly and unjustly neglected Jehan de Mandeville should take his deserved place as a 'scientist' in histories of French literature, is convincingly argued. Has the time not come, in the context of a burgeoning interest in travel narratives, for a new edition of the text to replace M. Letts's unobtainable Hakluyt Society version (London, 1953)?

Oxford

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✠ María Rosa Menocal, *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: from Borges to Boccaccio* (Durham, North Carolina; London: Duke University Press, 1991). 223 pp. ISBN 0-8223-1104-6; 0-8223-1117-8. £33.20 (hard covers); £11.95 (p/b).

A challenging sub-title offers fair warning of contentious matter to follow. The opening paragraphs of Menocal's book neatly encapsulate the dilemma of much post-structuralist scholarship, if this latter term is appropriate for a work which strikes so dismissive an attitude towards the labours of many earlier investigators of mediaeval Italian poetics. Shying self-consciously away from conventional terminology, the author offers her readers not an introduction or a preface, but a prologue in which she casts serious doubts upon the usefulness of such interpretative aids. Her reason is that many, if not most, of the premises and functions of the introduction are 'antithetical to the historical constructs this

book is grounded in'. ('Construct', a favoured term of the author, appears in its singular or plural form no fewer than four times in the first two pages.) Literary history is bunk. Synchrony is all. Did not Borges, after all, learn his trade whilst 'riding back and forth on the trolleys of Buenos Aires sitting next to Dante and his *Commedia*'? But what, I wonder, did Dante make of Borges? Or of the trolleys of Buenos Aires, come to that?

The aggressively polemical tone of the prologue continues to jar in the body of Menocal's book, which is unfortunate, because much of what she has to say is innovative and intelligently argued, even though the headings of her four chapters ('Synchronicity', 'Bondage', 'Faint praise and proper criticism', and 'Blindness'), not to mention their respective sub-titles ('Death and the *Vita nuova*', 'Pellico's Francescas', 'The *miglior fabbri*', 'Alephs and lovers') do not exactly encourage feelings of pleasurable anticipation in the reader.

In the first of her four chapters, Menocal offers a radically new interpretation of the *Vita nuova*. One can readily agree with her assertion that as a description of Dante's encounters with one Bice Portinari, or with any other woman, it is devoid of interest. But there are obvious difficulties in accepting her claim that its fundamental purpose is to chronicle Dante's conversion to a new poetic form, even though earlier investigators like De Robertis had already pointed the way to the text's rich metaliterary values. The death of Beatrice is interpreted by Menocal, in a way that will brook no denial, as the death of the earlier tradition of vernacular poetry as exemplified in the work of Arnaut Daniel, and the commencement of Dante's 'new life' as the poet of the *Commedia*. The *Vita nuova* viewed as a portrait of the artist as a young man is a beguiling concept, but it is one that ultimately dissolves in the crucible of the work's theological imperatives.

The three remaining chapters offer comparably provocative and stimulating reassessments of the rapport between early Italian poetry and Pellico, Pound and Eliot, Petrarch, and of course Borges. Then in a supplementary chapter, described predictably as an Epilogue, Menocal argues that in his choice of *Galeotto* as a secondary title for the *Decameron*, Boccaccio 'is confronting the reader with the dual and inseparable problems of the nature of the text and the nature of its interpretation'. Her arguments, striking and intuitive as they undoubtedly are, would carry rather more weight if her quotations from Boccaccio's text were freer of misprints and omissions, and if less attention were paid to questionable theories. An example of the latter is a footnote on p. 191, where, glossing a reference to Francesca's book-closing in *Inferno* v, she quotes approvingly an unpublished study where the author 'traces the genealogy of a distinct series of women with dropped books', which he interprets as 'emblematic of a post-masturbatory state'.

Menocal has attempted to re-interpret certain texts (rather less familiar nowadays in the case of *Le mie prigioni*) to show their value as keys to an understanding of the poetic imagination in general, and Dante's in particular. There is no doubting the worthiness of such an aim, nor the ingenuity and vigour with which it is pursued in this volume, but the realization that one 'drops the book' feeling

little the wiser leaves in the final analysis a sense of profound disappointment. Which is, I suppose, inevitable.

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Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Petrarch's Genius: Pentimento and Prophecy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991). 225 pp. ISBN 0-520-07293-6. \$34.95.

The author of this study of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* writes as a theologian, and proposes a reading which takes Petrarch's own 'theological' claims for poetry seriously, something which, it would seem, secular students of Petrarch, fascinated by his supposed anticipations of modernity, have failed to do. Regrettably, 'theologians abandoned Petrarch to those scholars who dealt with the ambiguities of life and literature: historians and literary critics'. It could be objected that modern scholarship has given much attention to the strong influence of Augustine on Petrarch. But it is with an 'Augustinian' reading of Petrarch that Dr Boyle takes issue in particular, especially with the view taken by Freccero and others of the *Canzoniere* as reflecting a 'poetics of idolatry'. Petrarch's view of poetry, and indeed of Christianity, was, she maintains, a non-Augustinian, humanistic one. In the *Secretum*, Petrarch is defining his poetics against 'Augustine' (a 'man of straw' or 'devil's advocate') or the ascetic outlook he is taken to represent.

The book, then, is concerned with applying Petrarch's 'humanist poetics' as set out in his Latin writings to the *Canzoniere*, which is in effect read as if it were the *Bucolicum Carmen*. Apollo is a type of Christ and this poetic-prophetic allegory may be related to what is seen as a pervasive use of solar imagery, from the dazzling light of Laura's beauty to such emblems as the phoenix. The 'genius' of the book's title has its origins explored from the Roman natal spirit to Ciceronian *ingenium*, the English 'genius' being used, perhaps misleadingly, to translate both terms, as well as the Italian *ingegno*, thus giving Petrarch's vocabulary a numinous charge which it does not necessarily bear. But what Boyle wants to insist on is Petrarch's belief in vatic inspiration. Love of Laura is the ecstatic love of the spiritually illuminating ideal of poetry and beauty, a love wounded at times by cupidity. Her death represents the dashing of Petrarch's hopes of being a poet with a prophetic message for his contemporaries; but as a heavenly ideal the love of poetry still attracts him in spite of weakness. Petrarch, named 'Franciscus', shares the prophetic ideals of the Franciscan movement: hence he meets Laura in the church of St Clare; her burial in the church of the friars minor, conventuals who persecuted the 'Spirituals', marks the destruction of the poet's hopes for reform in the Church.

This reading has the merit of taking Petrarch's Latin writings on poetry seriously, but a thoroughly allegorical mode of interpretation carries its own risks, including that of arbitrariness. Meanwhile, the polemical nature of the work makes it unbalanced. There is a tendency to undervalue the moral and self-