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The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in
Italy, France, and England (review)

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Migiel's last chapter on domestic violence in the *Decameron* boldly takes up an often neglected issue in criticism of this work, doing so through a detailed reading of a less-known novella, that of Melisso and Giosefo and the Goose Bridge (9.9). Migiel's critical tools, which at this point in her book are surgically precise, skillfully expose the inner workings of the tale, revealing not only its subtle interplay with other tales of the day, but also with Dante and his *Commedia*. Domestic violence, she argues (and she admits to focusing specifically on violence by men on women), should not and cannot be interpreted away by "ironic" readings of the text, but in fact must be responsibly contended with as something that remains part of the fabric of the *Decameron*. Her considerable efforts at making the point serve a more salient purpose: to show how the *Decameron*, whether intentionally or not on the part of Boccaccio, has a built-in check on any move toward female empowerment, rhetorical or otherwise.

On this last point, Migiel is careful to make important qualifications in her book's conclusion. Any message or "knowledge" that we may come away with from our reading of the *Decameron*, and here I suppose we are to assume even her own, is mostly our own responsibility as readers. The complex interplay between many levels of authorial figures in the work eschews the possibility of one unified prescriptive reading, and Migiel's criticism certainly exploits this intertextual dynamic to an almost unprecedented extent. Migiel seems to suggest that such an approach may even allow us to contribute to meanings for which the author himself may not be responsible, perhaps readings he may never have imagined, but which he certainly seems to invite from a (discriminating) readership. It is here that Migiel's reading of this great masterwork, although in some ways troubling in its insistence on a plurality of truths, is most innovatively productive.

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William J. Kennedy. *The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. Pp. xiv + 383.

William J. Kennedy has already made an outstanding mark on the study of Petrarch and Petrarchism, with his 1994 *Authorizing Petrarch*. Although *The Site of Petrarchism* also involves an adept fusion of very close readings of Petrarchan texts with the ways that they were read throughout Europe in the

centuries subsequent to their composition, the previous book concentrated primarily on the ways that Petrarch was located as an authority on which to base a widely divergent series of discourses. This recent study focuses specifically on the translations of, rewritings of, and dialogues with Petrarchan poetry, particularly the sonnet, in the development of national poetry in the three countries in its secondary title. As poetry was integral to the foundational discourses of the nation throughout early modern Europe, Kennedy effects his readings in an erudite and subtly woven context of history, going farther than most literary critics in a genuine engagement with the latter field.

Kennedy begins with a statement of the two premises of his book. "The first is that the Petrarchan sonnet, the most widespread vernacular mode in elite circles of sixteenth-century Europe, provides a site for early modern expressions of national sentiment" (1). He characterizes this premise as uncontroversial, as it is impossible not to recognize in Petrarch's writing the author's "awareness of being Italian" (1). "The second [premise] is that Petrarchism unfolds amid critical commentary appended to early modern printed editions of the *Rime sparse* and that it acquires a protonationalist density through this commentary" (1). He remarks that "this premise requires proof that this book will supply" (1). As in *Authorizing Petrarch*, Kennedy examines the "multiple Petrarchs" who emerge in these commentaries as a grounding authority on a rather extensive range of subjects related to the nation, national identity, national sentiment, and national mores. Far more than a contribution to Petrarch studies, *The Site of Petrarchism* traces the emergence of the different sonnet forms not only in relation to their respective national narratives but also to Italian antecedents. Kennedy displays his very wide reading in the different national traditions: in this reader's view his book is exemplary of comparative literature and also makes significant contributions to the disciplines of all the national traditions he addresses, which unfortunately still tend to remain rather hermetic. Kennedy also displays the critical and theoretical background to enter into and traverse these disciplines.

Addressing Petrarch's own letters of commentary on his work, Kennedy demonstrates that from the beginning the *Rime sparse* offered themselves up to commentary and therefore to multiple interpretations: "[T]hese letters project the site of his work as one of continual displacement" (23). He traces the fifteenth-century Italian transmutation of Petrarch into a supporter of Milanese tyranny in opposition to republican Florence (39–44). What is

striking about Kennedy's readings is that he carefully shows just how the initial Petrarchan text, with its language left mostly intact, may be reinscribed and its meaning redirected according to the ends of the commentators; from a rhetorical perspective, Kennedy does a superb job of revealing the work of polysemy and allegorization in the texts at issue. And he does so, quite impressively, without ever losing sight of the larger historical perspective. For example, he returns to a series of sixteenth-century commentaries that he examined in more detail in *Authorizing Petrarch*, those of Fausto da Longiano, Antonio Brucioli, and Lodovico Castelvetro, who find in Petrarch's Babylonian poems the basis of a proto-Reformist Petrarch. Kennedy might be underestimating the importance of this series of commentaries on his next topics, the French and English rewritings of Petrarch. Given the religious themes in some of the French sonnets, the religious conflicts, the Gallican Reform, and the ultimate transformation toward the end of the sixteenth century of Petrarch, Clément Marot, and Joachim du Bellay into vehicles of Protestantism, it is difficult to imagine that this initially Italian Reformist Petrarch is not the one who also became French and English.

Nonetheless, the chapters on Du Bellay, Marot, Pierre de Ronsard, and other French poets very effectively demonstrate the growth of the idea of a specifically national language in France on the basis of readings and rewritings of Petrarch. Against the Holy Roman Empire and involved in the conflict between Gallicanism and the power of the papacy, Du Bellay in Kennedy's depiction foregrounds national sentiment in his treatment of the rebirth of the French language and its poetry. Although passages in Du Bellay's *Deffence et illustration de la langue française* make this reading an evident one, in the poet's *Olive*, a series of Petrarchan pieces, such an understanding takes some work, which Kennedy carries out. He addresses a relationship that is practically taboo in French studies, that between Du Bellay and Marot, and shows that the former's epitaph to the latter, in which the younger poet reproduces his predecessor's own play on Marot/Maro, ties France to the greatness of Rome in a schema that involves the rise and fall of great civilizations (104–5).

Kennedy's lengthy examination of Sir Philip and Mary Sidney and Mary Wroth (163–232) indicates a finely developed political stance in the work of these poets and theorists: "The concept of nation, state, and liberty inscribed in the Sidneys' work affirms the legitimacy of monarchical power, the effectiveness of an oppositional strategy dominated by the titled nobility, and the

practical agency of the English people as an entity opposed to the powers of Catholic Europe" (164). Petrarchism has here become the occasion for an elaborate theory of the state and its relation to the various sectors of the population. Commenting on what has of course been the largest legacy of Petrarchism, poetic discourses on love, Kennedy remarks on Philip Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella* and Wroth's *Pamphilia and Amphilanthus*: "A striking feature of these sonnets is that their amatory entanglements reflect historical tensions and cultural conflicts in the emerging national sentiment, even though their literary pedigree is predominantly foreign, issuing from the Continental matrix of Italy, France, and Spain, and the papacy that Protestant England sought to define itself against. The contrast is odd" (165). Again, Kennedy's sensitivity to history and its disciplinary specificity adds a too seldom seen and highly valuable dimension to close textual readings.

Kennedy finishes with commentaries on Sidney's *Defence of Poetry* and *Astrophil and Stella*, and Mary Wroth's work. This reader would have liked to have seen some pages on the Petrarchan poetry of Edmund Spenser, as Kennedy specifically credits its origins to Petrarch, Marot, and Du Bellay, and in it one sees the convergence of a number of important "sites" of Petrarchism. But to request that is to expect still more from an already highly rewarding book. A landmark contribution to early modern comparative studies; the relationship of history and literature; and Italian, French, and English literary studies, *The Site of Petrarchism* should be indispensable reading for everyone with an interest in just one of these areas.

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Pietro Gibellini, cur. *Il mito classico nella letteratura italiana. Dal neoclassicismo al decadentismo*. Brescia: Morcelliana, 2003. Pp. 545.

Come annota il curatore Pietro Gibellini nella prefazione al volume (primo ad apparire di una serie di sei), il mito classico attraversa tutta la letteratura europea, in particolare italiana, con alterne fasi di entusiasmo e di critica, di devozione e di scherno. Seguire in letteratura la pista del mito significa indagare come si è abbellito il linguaggio, come sono fiorite le immagini, come si sono rinarrate le favole. Ma significa anche ripercorrere la storia delle idee: questo era l'intento che i contributi al volume (dovuti a Luca Frassinetti, Marina Salvini, Donatella Fedele, Giacomo Prandolini, Lucio Felici, Raffaella