

Maria Rosa Menocal. *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: From Borges to Boccaccio*. Duke University Press, 1991. 223 pp. \$34.95 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

The reversed chronology in the subtitle of Maria Rosa Menocal's *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth: From Borges to Boccaccio* exemplifies her critical enterprise. Alluding to Borges' essay on Kafka's influence on his predecessors, the reversal suggests how readings of earlier writers are determined by how later poets and critics have constructed them, and hence constructed the diachronic tradition of literary history. Like Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, Menocal's book ends with an author's epilogue; and like her predecessor in resistant reading of Dante, Menocal too argues for the role of the reader's interpretative intentions as a crucial counterbalance to authors, texts, and critics that seek to define correct readings with absolute certainty.

Chapter One wrests Dante's *Vita nuova* from the powerful tradition of professional medievalists, chiefly Charles S. Singleton. This tradition, stressing Dante's difference and distance, has shaped our reading by containing the uncanny "kabbalistic" power of the text. Menocal argues that the *Vita nuova* is not a hermetic allegory, but rather an accessible literary conversion from an exhausted ideology of love literature to a "new life" in which poetry is the proper means to Truth. Dante's turn away from lyric predecessors like Guido Cavalcanti and Arnaut Daniel has, moreover, crucially constructed our reading of their poetry.

Subsequent chapters create an alternative version of literary history shaped not by critics or the linear passage of time, but by "synchrony," Menocal's term for patterns of similar response that align later writers of diverse times and places with one another as they read and rewrite Dante in their own works. The way to understand the living, radical challenge of Dante's union of poetry and Truth, she proposes, is through the failed imitations and resistant appropriations of the poets, rather than through the scholarly accounts of the critics. What is missing from the philologists' version of diachronic literary history is the energy and proximity these poets find and release in their engagements with a writer whose influence has been great, but whose followers have been few.

Chapter Two rereads Pellico's 1832 *Le mie prigioni*, a work usually treated—when treated at all—as a political document of the

Risorgimento. Menocal's effort to recuperate the aesthetic level of the work through a reading of Pellico's engagements with Dante's Francesca raises important questions about canonicity and the contextual reading of literature, in which a canonical work is often read as if it were outside history, and a noncanonical work as if it had no aesthetic dimension, but indeed nothing but historical context.

The third chapter turns to Pound and Eliot in a demonstration of synchrony in action. Menocal's reading of the Pound-Eliot relationship recapitulates, and indeed guides, her reading of Dante's relations to Arnaut Daniel, "il miglior fabbro" of Eliot's dedication of *The Wasteland* to Pound. Further, the readings are influenced by a consciousness of relation between Pound and Menocal herself, both of whom shared the stringent training in Romance philology at the University of Pennsylvania. Pound left without taking a degree; and Menocal takes her own distance in this book.

Chapter Four treats Borges (primarily "The Aleph") and Petrarch as kindred in response to Dante's powerful influence. Across the centuries, both cultivated a willful blindness to Dante. Petrarch becomes a Borgesian reader whose relation to Dante is recuperated because each puts Dante in his debt by causing us to read Dante anew. This also unites them with Pound and Arnaut in an alternative, resistant tradition of response to Dante's influence.

I am sympathetic to the project of defining a model of literary influence that proceeds through interpretation of literary reflections rather than attention to discursive and critical comments, and I find *Writing in Dante's Cult of Truth* a refreshing and often insightful study, with a range most critics would find difficult to match. It is a small criticism of Menocal—but perhaps a large one of our fragmenting habits of academic discipline—that the book is not the polemical challenge Menocal claims. It is a sad commentary on academia if a study that treats works in Spanish, Italian, and English must be considered radically interdisciplinary.

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Massimo Firpo. *Inquisizione romana e controriforma. Studi sul cardinal Giovanni Morone e il suo processo d'eresia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992. 399 pp. L. 40.000.

Massimo Firpo and Dario Marcatto have been highly praised, and justly so, for discovering and publishing the records of the ex-