

## Bonafos on Rushworth (2017)

Rushworth, Jennifer. *Petrarch and the Literary Culture of Nineteenth-Century France: Translation, Appropriation, Transformation*. D.S. Brewer, "Medievalism," 2017, pp. x + 322, ISBN 978-1-84384-456-3

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Building on Ève Duperray's examination of the Petrarchan myth in French literature and culture (*L'Or des mots: Une lecture de Pétrarque et du mythe littéraire de Vaucluse des origines à l'orée du XXe siècle: histoire du pétrarquisme en France*, 1997), Jennifer Rushworth's monograph centers on the many French translations and rewritings of Petrarch produced from the late eighteenth through the late nineteenth century. Part of the "Medievalism" series at Boydell & Brewer, this study sets out to interrogate constructions of national versus local identities, a prevalent topic in historical and cultural studies of the past three decades. While Duperray's work constitutes a cultural history of the Petrarchan myth within and beyond literature, Rushworth's study focuses instead on issues of recreation and reception of the Petrarchan corpus, as indicated in the book's subtitle: "translation, appropriation, transformation." These notions lie at the heart of the apt connections that the author makes between the various aspects of the editorial and creative projects of translators and writers alike, weaving together a stimulating case for the permeable frontiers between translation, composition, interpretation, and rewriting, and their literary, political, nationalist, and regionalist ramifications. Combining reception history with literary and translation studies to examine the nineteenth-century French revival of Petrarch—when one might more readily associate such interest with Renaissance literature and culture—this study successfully delineates the ways in which French *littérateurs* read, translated, and presented the Italian poet in an effort to construct a French or Provençal Petrarch. This process obviously meant that their translations of his celebrated Italian and Latin works became selective recreations, and indeed appropriations, turning Petrarch into a "protean figure of contradiction and plurality" (11).

Investigating the literary and editorial strategies that helped to create a Petrarch designed for French audiences and highlighting their promotion of national or local pride, the book is divided into two main sections, the first examining translations of Petrarch and the second looking at the presence of the Petrarchan myth and imaginary in French poetry and novels. It concludes with two appendices in which readers will find additional information on French translations of Petrarch's poetry throughout the period under consideration. In the first section, Rushworth walks her readers through the successive editorial and translation projects of Petrarch's *œuvre*, from the seminal *Mémoires pour la vie de François Pétrarque* (1764–67) by the Abbé de Sade (uncle to the Marquis), which endeavored to identify Petrarch's Laura as Sade's French ancestor, Laure de Noves, up to the 1904 Avignon festivities celebrating the poet's six hundredth birthday. This section's four chapters analyze complete and partial translations of the *Canzoniere*, and selected translations of Petrarch's *Triumphs* and Latin works (selections focusing on autobiographical aspects supporting the claim of an Avignone/French Petrarch), before turning to the vexed issue of the *Sine Nomine* letters and Petrarch's anti-Avignon sentiment. Two more chapters in the second section present readings of Petrarchan references and models in canonical and lesser-known poetic and fictional texts, including works by Rousseau, Sainte-Beuve, Balzac, Gautier, Hugo, Musset, Stendhal, Sand, and Lamartine.

Other important nineteenth-century literary figures considered in the book include Mme de Staël, Mme de Genlis, Chateaubriand, Ferdinand de Gramont (as one important translator of Petrarch), and Frédéric Mistral. For each translator and author, Rushworth makes a strong case for the intersection of the literary and the ideological in translating and rewriting Petrarch: part creation, part criticism, these endeavors sought to define a Petrarchan figure through "a process of refinement, curation, and selection for a specifically French public" (33). By selectively reordering and rewriting texts, the translators' many creative liberties regarding the structural unity of the *Canzoniere*, in particular, produced an aestheticized Petrarch, which helped to shape the proto-Romantic figure prevalent at the time and arguably up to this day, of "Petrarch as a solitary, vernacular, sonnet-writing poet devoted to love and nature alone" (28). While the overall process was one of linguistic, literary, and cultural gallicization of Petrarch, translators vied against one another in reclaiming the Italian poet according to their own nationalist or regionalist biases, attesting that "nineteenth-century French Petrarchism [was] not an easy commodification of past culture, but rather a site of controversy and conflict" (133). In such light, the seemingly innocuous literary projects dedicated to Petrarch therefore become highly charged with ideological resonances and present the poet as a catalyst in a larger nation-building process. In summing up the different national, local, and cultural claims made regarding Petrarch's life connections and ties, the conclusion offers in contrast a stimulating reading of the performative and fluid aspects of identity.

Revealing the blurred lines between translation, literary creation, and criticism, Rushworth's study argues for a deeper historical understanding of reception and inspiration, not only in thematic and formal borrowings, but more crucially, in the

very weaving of the literary fabric of a foreign author. The French projects considered here constituted what could be labeled as “orthocritical” readings of the Petrarchan corpus, shaping it according to literary, aesthetic, cultural, and political preferences. With a few exceptions, nineteenth-century French translators thus created “a less varied Petrarch by choosing to present him as a writer of only one type of poem, the sonnet” (64), and around one theme only, the Laurean cult. While at times one might wish for further insights into the political and ideological culture surrounding these projects as well as additional developments on their wider reception, this volume—whose conceptual framework and conclusions should be of interest to literary and cultural historians alike—provides a persuasive and stimulating inquiry into the transfer of a canonical figure from one literary tradition to another.

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