

REVIEWS

My Secret Book. Francesco Petrarca.

Ed. and trans. Nicholas Mann. The I Tatti Renaissance Library 72. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016. xviii + 284 pp. \$29.95.

As a work of autobiography—or, rather, of literary self-fashioning—Petrarch's *Secretum* evokes many comparisons but admits few equals. As Pierre-Louis Ginguené (1748–1816) memorably observed, “neither Augustine, nor Montaigne, nor even . . . Rousseau revealed more ingeniously their inner selves, nor made more frankly the confession of their weaknesses” (*Histoire littéraire d'Italie*, 14 vols. [1811–35], 2:452–53).

Generally thought to have been composed in three phases between 1347 and 1353, the *Secretum* dramatizes the moral doubts engendered by Petrarch's pursuit of literary fame and his unrequited love for Laura. Though he had often addressed these themes in the *Canzoniere* and in letters to his friends, nowhere else in his works did he treat them with such un pitying honesty, with such penetrating insight, or with such intellectual uncertainty. Turning to the theology of Saint Augustine and the Platonized Stoicism of Cicero, he failed to find a satisfactory solution to his cares in either and, in veering between the two, revealed not only the profundity of his learning but also the anxieties of influence by which his fecund mind was plagued.

The dialogue begins with Petrarch's literary alter ego Franciscus meditating on the inevitability of death. As he is tormenting himself with these unhappy thoughts, however, the figure of Truth appears before him. With gleaming eyes, she tells him that his sorrow is the result of an improper affection for mortal things. Exhorting him to turn his gaze heavenward, she invites “Augustinus”—that is, Saint Augustine—to help cure the sickness of his soul. Three days of intense discussion follow. On the first day, Augustine asserts that Franciscus does not, in fact, want to be happy. Still blind to his true nature, he continues to chase after the fleeting and insubstantial blandishments of the temporal world, unaware that, in doing so, he is only exacerbating his own misery. If he is ever to be well, Augustinus tells him, he must first meditate more carefully on death—the surest way of grasping that true happiness is only found in the company of God after death.

Seeing that Franciscus is still unconvinced, Augustinus tries a different approach on the second day. Far from leading a blameless life of spiritual reflection, Augustinus argues, Franciscus's worldliness is evident from his sins. Though he cannot be accused of gluttony, anger, or envy, he is certainly guilty of pride, avarice, lust, and *accidia*. Treating these more as aberrant states of mind than as perverse forms of action, Augustinus then attempts to correct the mistaken beliefs on which each depends. Since Franciscus is tied to the world more by the “chains” of *amor* and *gloria* than by anything else, however, it is upon these that Augustinus concentrates in the final day's discussion. In an uncompromising exchange, Augustinus convinces Franciscus that his

love for Laura is nothing more than foolish idolatry. But with the pursuit of fame, the saint is less successful. Though Augustinus maintains that the notion of literary immortality is misguided, he reluctantly gives Franciscus permission to put off the care of his soul until he has completed the works he has already begun.

Although the *Secretum* has not wanted for editions or translations, Nicholas Mann is to be applauded for having produced a volume that at last does full justice both to the elegance of Petrarch's prose and to the sophistication of his thought. The Latin text is commendable. Taking Enrico Carrara's 1955 edition as his basis, Mann has incorporated both the emendations suggested by Antonietta Bufano and the divisions proposed by Ugo Dotti—thus guaranteeing that Petrarch's words are presented in as reliable and convenient a fashion as possible. The translation, however, is truly wonderful. Guided by the Italian versions of Carrara, Dotti, and Fenzi, Mann has combined an elegant, flowing style with an unparalleled textual fidelity. No praise is high enough either for its accuracy or for its grace. It is a work of art in itself.

The introduction provides the reader with a superlative *entrée* to the work. After a brief discussion of Petrarch's life in the 1340s and 1350s, it then offers a masterful summary of the work's contents, and an authoritative overview of debates about the *Secretum's* composition and meaning. The notes to the translation are careful, but never obtrusive. In addition to highlighting Petrarch's many allusions to classical and patristic works, they illuminate the more obscure parts of the text, explain particular lexical choices, and provide a helpful guide to Latin terms that may be unfamiliar to a non-specialist readership. There are, perhaps, a few points about which more could have been said. It might, for example, have been interesting to note that Petrarch can only have picked up the word *interblandiar* (46)—which he also used (in various forms) in the dedicatory letter to *De Vita Solitaria* and at *Fam.* 3.18.2, 6.3.2, 7.12.4, 12.5.4—from Augustine, *Conf.* 9.12, since it occurs nowhere else. But this is a counsel of perfection. There can be no doubt that Mann's volume is a jewel in the crown of Petrarchan scholarship. It deserves to be cherished by readers for generations to come.

Alexander Lee, *University of Warwick*
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Le "metamorfosi" del Sannazaro. Carmelo Salemme.

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The Neapolitan poet Jacopo Sannazaro (1458–1530), or, to use his Latin name, Actius Sincerus Sannazarus, is principally known for his great work *Arcadia*, a long pastoral romance in prose and verse, which had a profound influence on the development of that genre in European literature during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The never-never land that he invented lived on in later imitations by such poets as Lope de