Bryn Mawr Review of Comparative Literature

Volume 5
Number 1 *Spring 2005*

Article 9

Spring 2005

Review of William Kennedy, The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England.

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William Kennedy, The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. 400 pp. ISBN 0801871441.

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Ten years ago, William Kennedy published *Authorizing Petrarch*, an important book on the rich legacy of Petrarchism in parts of Europe. *The Site of Petrarchism*, the subject of this review, can be seen as both a sequel and a parallel volume to the first. In this immensely erudite book, Kennedy returns to the same settings (Italy, France and England) and reiterates some of the same themes (the importance of commentaries on Petrarch's famed lyric sequence the *Rime sparse*, for example). Here, however, he turns the spotlight on a different set of players who were either absent in the previous volume or played only secondary roles. More importantly, the author focuses his attention on the significance of Petrarchism -- both as practice (the sonnet sequence) and theory (the mediating role of the commentaries) -- as singularly fertile *sites* for constructing national styles and identities.

According to Kennedy, Petrarchism became a singularly suitable medium for national literary discourse because it incorporated both the mother tongue of the vernacular and the father tongue of the ancient classics. This dialectical (and gendered) dynamic would be emulated in different European locations, resulting in the appearance of "multiple Petrarchs" that would become associated with the emergence of particular national styles and identities. Just as in the earlier volume he played with the various connotations of the word "authorizing," here the central conceit -- introduced in the title -- is the repetition of the word "site" and its homonyms "cite" and "sight." These terms will be repeated time and time again in the general headings and subheadings as well as in the discussions throughout the book.

The work is made up of an introduction, a conclusion, and twelve chapters divided into three major sections: "Petrarch and the Site of Petrarchism," "Du Bellay and the Site of Petrarchism in France," "The Sidneys and Wroth: the Site of Petrarchism in England." The first section, particularly the chapter entitled "Petrarch as Commentator: The Search for Italy," will seem the most familiar to students of Petrarchism. Kennedy revisits, for example, Petrarch's ambivalence toward his classical antecedents and his conflicted relationship with Dante. The familiar arguments are enhanced, however, by Kennedy's lively consideration of a variety of topics, including Petrarch's need to

construct a public pan-Italian identity, the inherent theatricality of the poet's project, and the polysemous connotations of "Amor/Roma" boustrophedon (the alternation of the direction a word is written) in the *Rime sparse*. Those two words neatly synthesize a whole range of Petrarch's preoccupations: "Amor" equates Laura, love, laurel, fame, and poetry and "Roma" equates history, Classical greatness, Papacy, Italian prestige and, significantly, the site of his own coronation. Although we have seen much of this before, Kennedy provides a layered sociological, psychological, and historical context. Far from being merely the expression of amatory devotion, Petrarch's language was seen from the beginning as singularly suitable to communicate political national preoccupations.

The title of the second chapter, "Petrarchan Totems and Political Taboos," makes explicit the use of Freudian categories that will constitute one of the important theoretical frameworks for the entire book. Kennedy convincingly suggests that Petrarch's ambivalent attitude toward his native Florence replicates a child's ambivalence toward the paternal object. That is, the city acquires in the *Rime sparse* a totemic status: it is a figure of ancestral origin from which the poet had hoped to receive care and protection but which instead became the source of great pain and rejection. This conflicted love/hate attitude toward his native city made it easier for his commentators to exploit the narrative of the *Rime sparse* to exalt other cities -- such as Milan -- at the expense of Florence, and thus promote regional and patriotic sentiments. Commentators such as Francesco Filelfo, Hieronimo Squarzafico, and Alessandro Vellutello, among others, explore the figurative links between the erotic poetry and regional political attachments, even going so far as to rearrange the chronology of the *Rime sparse* to suit their geopolitical purposes. This identification of political impulses in the poetry by the Italian commentators prepared the ground for Petrarch's language to be repeatedly adopted as the conveyor of political goals, imperial aspirations and national conscience in Italy and beyond.

The chapter "Amor and Patria: Citing Petrarch in Florence and Naples" offers a fascinating account of how Lorenzo de 'Medici "brings Petrarch home" by re-casting him as a specifically Florentine poet, all in order to claim an ancestor with impeccable credentials. For the ambitious Lorenzo, a man with undistinguished actual forebears, Petrarch becomes a totemic figure in his own right. Lorenzo establishes parallels between himself and the "Francesco" in the *Rime sparse,* and "in giving himself to the republic, the speaker (Lorenzo) symbolically enacts the Petrarchan lover's self-abnegation in giving himself wholly to the beloved" (58). In this chapter, as in all others, Kennedy weaves assorted strands into the main argument; and one of the not incidental benefits of Kennedy's book is the expansion of the canon of Petrarchan poets. As just one example, he introduces the reader to the work of Benedetto Gareth known as il Cariteo, a Spaniard in the Aragonese court

in Naples. Cariteo's collection of poetry, *Endimione*, is written in the Petrarchan style but in Italian, not in Spanish as might be expected. This, according to Kennedy, enables the Spanish viceregal court in Naples to insert itself into a new vernacular environment by absorbing what it could from a Northern Italian court culture. Again, the work of Cariteo exemplifies one of the many ways Petrarchism was adapted "to a new site of cultural and political engagement" (73).

The second part of the book focuses on Joachim Du Bellay and his complicated relationship *vis-à-vis* the Petrarchan tradition and contemporaneous French poets such as Antoine Héröet, Clément Marot, and Octovien de Saint-Gelais. Early on in this section, Kennedy tells that us that Du Bellay's life was nearly coterminous with that of the Habsburg emperor and Spanish king, Charles V. It was perhaps inevitable, therefore, that Du Bellay's poetry and his *Deffence et illustration de la langue francoyse* would contain overt figurations of nation and empire. Kennedy gives a succinct but compelling account of the struggle for national identity during Francois I's reign in the shadow of Charles V's "iconic" empire. Interestingly, in the attempt to establish a new vernacular literature for the imperializing Valois culture, the rise of Spanish national identity as manifested in the poetry of Juan Boscán and Garcilaso de la Vega provided an important precedent. In "Totems for Defense: Du Bellay and Marot," Kennedy turns to Freud's discussion of the practice of exogamy in *Totem and Taboo*. According to Kennedy, Du Bellay argued for a program of renewal in literary practice that promoted the exogamic conquest of Italian forms such as the sonnet and the *canzone*. Du Bellay, in essence, places a taboo on endogamic appropriation of French models alone. In addition to preventing poetic "inbreeding," the imitation of foreign models had the added advantage of displacing politically induced rivalries among younger French poets. In this and other chapters, Kennedy provides telling biographical details that highlight class distinctions -- for example, the lower class background of Hughes Salel -- and how these came to bear on poetic practice in France. In the following chapter, he includes an absorbing discussion of how Lyon flourished as an autonomous cosmopolitan environment free from the pressures of the court, thus providing a nurturing environment for poets like Maurice Scève.

Kennedy's nuanced consideration of the personal rivalries that inspired Du Bellay's poetry culminates in the chapter entitled "Mon Semblable, Mon Frere," in which he focuses on the complicated relationship between Du Bellay and Pierre de Ronsard. This is, of course, a topic that has been studied by other critics, but Kennedy frames the question of the two writers' poetic identities (particularly what they owe to Petrarch) again, within the larger issue of patriotic or nationalistic purpose. In *Les regrets* and *Olive*, for example, Du Bellay fantasizes about his relationship with Ronsard in terms

of public and private personae. Du Bellay claims to speak on behalf of a greater corporate entity, i.e. the emergent French nation, whereas Ronsard's poetry is presented as driven by the personal ambition to triumph as premier court poet. Of interest is Kennedy's suggestion that the relationship with Ronsard may have inspired Du Bellay, whose work had initially been addressed to the elite, to embrace a more inclusive national population in the*Deffence*. Ronsard, on the other hand, withdrew from the larger public sphere and concentrated his energies on the elite associated with nobility and monarchy, developing a courtly style that excluded popular or socially marginal elements.

One of the most welcome aspects of Kennedy's first book on Petrarchism was his engagement with women writers in Italy and France. The last section and the conclusion of this volume do not disappoint on this account. In "The Sidneys and Wroth: The Site of Petrarchism in England," he provides a compelling discussion of the "family romance" (Kennedy expressly alludes to Freud's essay bearing that name) represented by the Sidney literary clan. The central player in this section is Mary Wroth, whose *Pamphlia to Amphilanthus* (1621) was the last major Petrarchan sonnet sequence in English. The work is viewed in relationship to the famous members of her family, particularly her uncle Philip Sidney, but also her aunt Mary Sidney, her father Robert Sidney, and her cousin/lover William Herbert. They were all practitioners of Petrarchism in one form or another and were also deeply committed to the development of an exclusive national literary style with a specifically English -- and radically Protestant -- sense of cultural identity. Among other topics, Kennedy considers the paradox implicit in the Sidneys' embrace of foreign models of Petrarchism associated with Catholic Europe. Philip Sidney's and Wroth's Petrarchan sequences -- *Astrophil and Stella* and *Pamphila to Amphilanthus*, respectively -- reveal the family's anxieties surrounding the social advancement of the family, but also their preoccupation with the moral attributes of elite leadership within the process of defining national character.

The chapter entitled "Prosthetic Gods: The Liberties of Astrophil and Pamphilia," exemplifies the most rewarding qualities of Kennedy's volume, but also some of its drawbacks. Here, as in other chapters, he makes remarkable and far-reaching temporal and geographical connections. Thus, a discussion of the concept of liberty and its etymological origins within the context of Sidney's *Astrophil* and Wroth's *Pamphilia* leads to considerations of Mary Sidney's translation of the Psalms and Aemelya Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. The discussion then moves back chronologically to provide a close reading of some of Petrarch's poems and then forward to the work of Italian commentators such as Bernardino Daniello and Sylvano da Venafro, among others. The reader cannot but be dazzled by this dashing and panoramic display of erudition and analytical prowess. At the same time,

some of the analogies that Kennedy presents in passing prove too clever to be convincing. For example, Kennedy invokes Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* to explain Wroth's ambivalence toward her immediate family, suggesting that her famous uncle, Philip Sidney, functioned as a god who represented, in Freud's words, "cultural ideals." Kennedy suggests that Wroth, as heir to such a splendid ancestor, may not have felt entirely legitimate, suffused perhaps with a sense of insufficiency and inferiority, like "a kind of prosthetic God." The Freudian analogy used to describe Wroth's ambivalence toward the trappings of caste and class seems superfluous in this context. In a later chapter, Kennedy provides yet another ingenious but not particularly sustainable analogy between, on the one hand, the same complicated sentiments Wroth displayed toward her family's past and her own particular circumstances and, on the other, the exilic experience of the Puritans.

In the last chapter, "Byblis and the Bible: Incest, Endogamy and Mary Wroth," we are presented with the much more convincing and intriguing proposition that underlying Wroth's poetry there is a narrative of incestuous couplings and endogamy. As he does on several occasions, Kennedy turns to etymology to frame his analysis. "Incest" derives from the Latin *incastus*(unchaste) which is related to *castitas* (chastity) and *castus* (caste). He examines the allusions in Wroth's poetry to the Bible, where unions between close relatives acquire religious value as signs of conversion or renewal. Also pertinent are the references to the Ovidian myth of Byblis and how it manifests itself in the poetry of Petrarch and his followers. Ultimately, all this becomes analogous not only to Wroth's identification with the Sidney caste and status but also to her real-life flirtation with incest when she becomes the lover of her first cousin and the mother of his illegitimate children.

By way of a conclusion, Kennedy provides us with a brief but illuminating consideration of two seventeenth-century women poets who hailed from sites far-flung from the ones he has been studying. One is Catharina Regina von Grieffenberg, whose spiritual sonnets were dedicated to the Protestant cause at a time when Germany was emerging from the Latin cultural hegemony represented by Rome. The other is the celebrated Mexican nun, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who has become the token Hispanic presence for Renaissance critics who otherwise ignore Petrarchism in its Spanish-language manifestations. Much has been written about Sor Juana and Kennedy does not break real new ground here. Nevertheless, he does provide an instructive account of Sor Juana's fascination with Mexican distinctiveness as displayed in her drama and poetry. Her Petrarchism is both an expression of the *criollo*'s nostalgia for a European identity, but also, "the

beginning of a distinctive Spanish-American sentiment free from taboos of the Old World" (261).

The present review of *The Sites of Petrarchism* does not begin to convey the abundance of riches to be found in Kennedy's intensely learned and eloquent book. The book -- and the reader by extension -- will at times become bogged down by the enormity of the subject matter. The site of Petrarchism turns out to be densely populated. Nevertheless, there are many delights to be found within this book's pages, not the least of which is the suspicion that there is a third volume in progress that will bring to light other supporting actors waiting for their star turn on the Petrarchan stage.