

INTRODUCTION

TOWARDS A NEW APPROACH OF PETRARCH'S RECEPTION IN THE RENAISSANCE—THE 'INDEPENDENT READER'

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If a single writer has played a constitutive part in the formation of the intellectual culture of the Early Modern Period in Western Europe, this is certainly true for Francis Petrarch. From 1366 on, his Italian and Latin works have been omnipresent in European libraries, either in manuscript or in printed editions. Already during his lifetime commentaries on his writings have been written in order to 'guide' readers through the various literary and philosophical levels of his oeuvre.

This massive presence of his works, read and questioned in various ways from the 14th century onwards yet always responding to the changing conventions of interpretation, brings about the tantalizing question *how* Petrarch's writings were understood, read and used by readers and writers in the Renaissance and the Early Modern Period, and *why* this 'reading reception' evolved in this particular, often 'unorthodox', way, thus opening up new interpretative paths for generations to come.

As part of Petrarch's 700th anniversary, celebrated in numerous exhibitions, conferences and colloquia all over Europe in 2004, the moment seemed to be appropriate to organize a two-day colloquium in Leiden (2–3 December 2004) so as to bring together various scholars involved in research on Petrarch or (later) authors whose works reflect a reading of the Italian humanist and poet. In this way we wanted to start a critical and fresh re-evaluation of the striking impact Petrarch exerted on intellectuals from the Early Modern Period, and this, now, by focusing on Petrarch's readers, both contemporary and posthumous.

It may be a somewhat surprising observation that at present, despite a long and rich tradition of scholarship all over Europe and despite the renewed impulse given to it by the Petrarch commemorations

of 1974,¹ we are far from having a clear picture of the way in which the reception of Petrarch actually worked. Partly, this may be due to the sheer quantity of his reception, and partly to the explicit and massive self-presentation of the ‘father of Humanism’. For almost all of his writings are characterised by an unusually strong and expressive autobiographical drive. To modern readers, it may seem that this expressive autobiographical self-presentation must have left little room for ‘alternative’ interpretations: the author made perfectly clear what he stood for and what his opinions were. In this respect, he was even hailed to be the ‘first modern man’ in the sense that he was the first writer who can be regarded as an ‘individual’ in modern terms. It is somewhat difficult to imagine that earlier readers, from the 14th to the 16th century, did not ‘understand’ these clear self-expressions or have understood them in a way very much different from the ‘author’s intention’. However, it is especially this peculiarity which makes Petrarch an interesting test-case for modern reception theory.

Modern reception theory (‘Rezeptionsästhetik’, ‘Wirkungsästhetik’) was founded at the end of the 1960s by German scholars such as Wolfgang Iser and Hans Robert Jauß as an inspiring antidote for sometimes all too authoritative, all too hierarchical and exclusive readings of ‘text-immanent’ scholars such as Emil Staiger and Wolfgang Kaiser.² The healthy and challenging provocation of traditional text-

¹ Whereas the commemoration of 1904 saw the birth of the ‘Commissione per l’Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Francesco Petrarca’ and started the production of numerous important critical editions, scholarship from 1974 onwards turned to a new inventory and study of manuscripts. Parallel to this the Italian, French and German scholarly tradition—initiated and continued by scholars such as Dario Cecchetti, Giuseppe Billanovich, Aldo Scaglione, Pierre Vianey, Marius Pieri, Franco Simone, Paul Piur, Konrad Burdach, Nicolas Mann and Joseph Burney Trapp—gave new impetus to investigate Petrarch’s influence on their ‘national’ cultural heritage. A good impression of the 1974 *status quaestionis* in Petrarch-scholarship can be found in Scaglione A. (ed.), *Francis Petrarch, Six Centuries Later. A Symposium* (Chapel Hill-Chicago: 1975). On the French tradition, see now Balsamo J., “«Nous l’avons tous admiré, et imité: non sans cause». Pétrarque en France à la Renaissance: un livre, un modèle, un mythe”, in Balsamo J. (ed.), *Les poètes français de la Renaissance et Pétrarque* (Genève: 2004) 13–32 (esp. 13–14).

² Iser W., *Die Appellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Texte* (Konstanz: 1970); id., *Der implizite Leser* (Munich: 1972); id., *Der Akt des Lesens* (Munich: 1976); Jauß H.R., *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft* (Konstanz: 1967); id., *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1970); id., *Kleine Apologie der ästhetischen Erfahrung* (Konstanz: 1972); id., *Ästhetische Erfahrung und liter-*

interpretations consists in the hypothesis that the meaning of a given text is formed only by the process of reading. In their theory, Iser and Jauß tried to define the interplay between the effect of a text ('Textwirkung') and the activity of a reader ('Leseraktivität') and to describe the 'part' of the reader in the process of reception ('Leseranteile'). In doing so, Iser developed theoretical concepts such as the 'implicit reader' ('der implizite Leser'),³ 'Leerstelle', 'Realisation', 'Unbestimmtheit',⁴ 'Wirkungspotential' etc.

It is a very important achievement of the 'Rezeptionsästhetik' to have drawn attention to the reader who was all too long neglected by scholarship. In this light, it is sometimes a little disappointing that the theory produced fewer results on the level of detailed empirical research than one would have hoped for. One of the reasons may be that the above mentioned central notions turned out to be difficult to use because their definitions are partly unclear, partly somewhat inadequate. For instance, it is hard to define what exactly is meant by the 'implicit reader' or what exactly would be a 'Leerstelle' ('empty place'). It does not clarify much when Iser identifies the 'implicit reader' with the complex and vague notion of the „Wirkungsstruktur des Textes“.⁵ As Matthias Richter states in his evaluation of the 'Rezeptionsästhetik' (1996): "Die genaue Erforschung der Leseprozesse im Umkreis sozial-, medien- und geschlechterspezifischer Fragestellungen hat in den vergangenen Jahren überhaupt erst eingesetzt."⁶

There are, moreover, a couple of other problems which make it difficult to transfer the theory of the 'Rezeptionsästhetik' into the practice of the study of literature. One of them is that Iser in fact moved in the direction of traditional text-interpretations by explaining the reception processes by certain qualities of the text ('Wirkungspotential'). In other words, it is somehow due to the text itself that readers interpret it in the way they do. 'Competent readers' will

arische Hermeneutik (Frankfurt a.M.: 1982); id., *Die Theorie der Rezeption—Rückschau auf ihre unbekannte Vorgeschichte* (Konstanz: 1987); Link H., *Rezeptionsforschung* (Stuttgart: 1976); Müller J.E., *Literaturwissenschaftliche Rezeptionstheorien und empirische Rezeptionsforschung* (Frankfurt a.M.-Bern: 1981).

³ See Iser, *Der implizite Leser*.

⁴ See Iser, *Die Apellstruktur der Texte. Unbestimmtheit als Wirkungsbedingung literarischer Texte*.

⁵ Iser, *Der implizite Leser* 60.

⁶ Richter M., "Wirkungsästhetik", in Arnold H.L. – Detering H., *Grundzüge der Literaturwissenschaft* (Munich: 2001 [4th edition]) 516–535 (esp. 520).

understand the text in a 'competent' way and it is the text, organised by the author, which 'guides' them in their 'competent' reading.

Another problem is that especially Iser, but also others, have limited the interest of the 'Rezeptionsästhetik' to a certain group of texts, namely fictional texts.⁷ According to Iser, only fictional texts have the special quality that enables readers of various historical epochs to put into the text-interpretation their own experience. Only fictional texts provide the 'Leerstellen' and 'Unbestimmtheiten' as indispensable predispositions for differing and interesting interpretations. Here, once again, Iser focuses more on the qualities of texts than on the readers themselves.

In our view, the study of the reception of texts should be based on different points of departure. The focus on the reader is too precious to bring it down to certain qualities of the author-texts or to a certain group of texts, or even worse to a kind of author's intention. If this should be taken into account for reception studies in general, it is especially relevant for reception studies concerning the Early Modern Period. In our view, the early modern interpreter *acted much more independently from the text and the author's intention* than Iser's 'Rezeptionsästhetik' suggests. Therefore, it is better to avoid (vaguely defined) notions for qualities of the text, such as 'impliziter Leser',⁸ 'Leerstelle', 'Wirkungspotential' or 'Textwirkung'. They do not really help us to understand the process of reading and interpretation.

Furthermore, it does not make sense to limit our interest to 'fictional' texts or to ascribe the quality of poly-interpretability exclusively to them. In the Early Modern Period there was no clear distinction between 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' literature. For instance, a historiographical text had, in this respect, essentially no different status than an epic text. Therefore, with respect to early modern literature, the notions 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' hardly form a sound basis. Petrarch, in fact, provides an interesting test-case, since he wrote 'fictional' (e.g. *Canzoniere*) as well as 'non-fictional' texts (e.g.

⁷ See for example Iser, *Der Akt des Lesens* passim.

⁸ Ansgar Nünning proposed in a paper published in 1993 to dismiss the notion of the 'impliziter Leser'. See Nünning A., "Renaissance eines anthropomorphen Passepartouts oder Nachruf auf ein literarisches Phantom? Überlegungen und Alternativen zum Konzept des 'implied author'", *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 67 (1993) 1–25.

treatises, historiography, autobiography, private prose-letters). From the case studies collected in this book, it appears that with respect to the poly-interpretability in the process of reception there is no essential difference between 'fictional' and 'non-fictional' texts. Early Modern readers have connected both texts to their 'Erfahrungswirklichkeit' ('experience') and to other systems of interpretation and use in various and remarkably different ways.

In which way could one thus adequately understand the various interpretations and uses of Petrarch's works? First of all, they cannot be reduced simply to an individual basis, nor do they occur in an indefinite number and variety, nor is their structure based on mere coincidence. The intellectuals who dealt with the works of Petrarch acted in various intellectual discourses which reflect certain paradigm's, focuses, interests, needs, rhetorics, text genres, experiences ('Erfahrungswirklichkeit') and, not to forget, a certain 'Weltanschauung'. For example, an Italian courtier of the style of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* would read the *Canzoniere* or the treatise *De remediis utriusque fortune* in a different way from a Lutheran citizen of a German town; a Latin humanist would interpret Petrarch's *De vita solitaria* differently from an adherent of the Netherlandish *Devotio Moderna*.⁹ As Marc Laureys expounded in his study on Giovanni Cavallini and as has been analysed by Ugo Dotti, contemporary intellectuals, both in Avignon and at the Imperial Court in Prague, adapted Petrarch's political message in different ways and according to their own needs and expectations. In his paper on the reading of Petrarch's *Rime* in 16th-century France, Jean Balsamo discerns certain types of reading: 'royal readings', 'protestant readings' and 'political readings'.

In our view, Michel Foucault's historical discourse analysis¹⁰ could provide an extremely useful tool for defining the process of early modern text-reception in a more adequate way. If the Early Modern readers were largely independent from Petrarch's author's intention and from specific qualities of his texts, they did not act independently from the various intellectual and artistic discourses in which their activity took place.

⁹ Cf. Enenkel K.A.E., "Der andere Petrarca: Francesco Petrarca's *De vita solitaria* und die *devotio moderna*", *Quaerendo* 17 (1987) 137–147.

¹⁰ Foucault M., *Archäologie des Wissens* (Frankfurt a.M.: 1973, originally in French Paris: 1969).

It is striking to observe how far removed the various discourses in which readers from the Early Modern Period interpreted Petrarch's works are from Petrarch's 'author's intention'. The readers' interpretations and uses also cannot be explained by 'Leerstellen', 'Unbestimmtheiten' etc. They differ remarkably from Petrarch's aims and interests and from the structure of his texts as well. In some cases, the reading is even a 'Kontrafaktur', a correction and contradiction of the text.

A striking example of this process of interpretation is the German edition of Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortune*, illustrated by the famous 'Petrarch Master' ('Petrarca-Meister') and analysed here in two studies by Karl Enenkel and Reindert Falkenburg. Enenkel's close analysis of the relationship of text and image brings to light that the illustrations do not just render Petrarch's textual argument in a pictorial form, but transfer the text into very different and often contradicting discourses. The stunning images of the 'Petrarch Master' transform the Stoic-Christian manual for meditation, for example, into the discourses of Lutheran polemics, of the satirical book of Folly (*Narrenschiff*), of a practical guidebook teaching how to act successfully in the material world ('praktisches Weltbemeisterungsbuch'), of fundamental Christian ethical criticism ('Sittenkritik') or harsh social criticism (against the German nobility). Enenkel demonstrates that the 'Diskursverlagerungen' of the Petrarch Master are not to be explained by certain qualities of Petrarch's text, but by adaptations to the need of Petrarch's users in early 16th-century Germany. Reindert Falkenburg discusses the creative re-readings of the Petrarch-Master by a close analysis of his inner-pictorial rhetoric and by his use of intriguing speculative imagery.

The remarkable independence of the Early Modern interpretations from the author's intention and the structure of the text is also true for Petrarch's contemporaries and close friends. Jan Papy demonstrates that even Petrarch's closest friend, his 'Socrates', Lodewijk Heyligen or Ludovicus Sanctus, who was Petrarch's first literary critic and the executor of his literary will, acted in very different intellectual discourses, thus producing different readings and interpretations from the start. This is also true, as Ursula Kocher expounds, for another "ungleiche Freundschaft", between Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, and, moreover, it works also the other way round. When Petrarch 'translated' Boccaccio's novella of Griseldis into Latin (*Griseldis historia*), he in fact transferred it into a totally different discourse with

an entirely different narrative structure and a fundamentally different ethical outlook.

Similarly, Bart Van den Bossche's study of Pietro Bembo's striking presence—and equally puzzling absence!—in some of Castiglione's books of the *Book of the Courtier*, sheds a new light on the creative potential of Petrarchism in Italian humanism and on its various 'readings', whereas Dóra Bobory's analysis of Petrarch's horoscope made by Gerolamo Cardano demonstrates the remarkable results the transposition of historiographical texts (Petrarch's biographies) into another discourse (horoscopes) can inspire. Joachim Du Bellay's intriguing readings of Petrarch, discussed here by Reinier Leushuis and Dina De Rentiis, are yet other examples for the remarkable independence of the Early Modern reader. The same goes *mutatis mutandis* for Jan van der Noot's *Theatre* of 1568, a highly creative translation and illustration of Petrarch's canzone *In Morte di Madonna Laura*, closely studied here by Paul Smith.

If all this, however, does not give the impression of being new, but rather to follow in the footsteps of traditional comparative literature, a discipline which in the case of Petrarch has been extremely rich, it remains to be clarified in which way the approach presented in this book differs from recent scholarship on the reception of Petrarch.

A short look at recent scholarship, especially the one presenting itself at the various conferences commemorating Petrarch, reveals how the traditional hierarchical and 'authorial' approach remains common practice. A striking example is the volume *Petrarca e la cultura europea* from 1997,¹¹ in which articles are devoted to Bernardo Lapini da Montalcino's 15th-century allegorical commentary on Petrarch's *Trionfi*,¹² on "Ronsard imitateur infidèle de Pétrarque"¹³ or to the "Presenza del Petrarca nella letteratura francese" (Lionello Sozzi, pp. 243–262). However important and revealing these studies may be—all of them detailed and elucidating on various aspects

¹¹ Rotondi Secchi Tarugi L. (ed.), *Petrarca e la cultura europea*, Istituto di Studi Umanistici Francesco Petrarca: Mentis Itinerarium—Caleidoscopio, VII (Milan: 1997).

¹² Eric Haywood, "'Inter urinas liber factus est': il commento dell'Ilicino ai *Trionfi* del Petrarca", in *Petrarca e la cultura europea* 139–159.

¹³ By Yvonne Bellenger, *Petrarca e la cultura europea* 223–242.

of Petrarch's influence—they neglect to highlight the 'active' and in fact independent role of the reader.

In a similar vein, a respectable number of collective volumes and exhibition catalogues have appeared which offer insights into the influence of Petrarch on humanism,¹⁴ into Petrarchism,¹⁵ and into the transmission and presence of Petrarch's works.¹⁶ Yet, if monographs such as Monica Berté's *Jean de Hesdin e Francesco Petrarca* open up aspects of the 'reading reception' of (some of) Petrarch's works,¹⁷ and if various papers at the conferences devoted to Petrarch, either in the past or in the framework of the commemorative festivities of 2004, deal with certain readers or 'national' receptions of Petrarch's works in Europe in general,¹⁸ in France,¹⁹ Germany,²⁰ Portugal,²¹

¹⁴ Two international conferences, both of them held in 2004, deserve special attention: first, *Petrarca e il Rinascimento*, was held in Calcutta at the Jadavpur University, Centre for Advanced Studies in English—Istituto Italiano di Cultura di New Delhi, from 14 to 16 October 2004. Second, *Petrarca, l'Umanesimo e la civiltà europea*, was held at Florence from 5 to December 2004. Here one paper touches, albeit indirectly, on the theme of the reader: Francisco Rico's contribution on 'Petrarca ed Erasmo'.

¹⁵ In 2004, two major conferences were devoted to this theme: *Il Petrarchismo: un modello di poesia per l'Europa*. Convegno internazionale di studi, Bologna, 6–9 ottobre 2004, organized by the Dipartimento di Italianistica of the Università di Bologna; and *Petrarca y el petrarquismo en Europa y América*. Jornadas Internacionales, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la UNAM, Ciudad de México (18–23 October 2004).

¹⁶ Exhibition catalogues such as Aurnhammer A. (ed.), *Petrarca in Deutschland, Ausstellung zum 700. Geburtstag (20. Juli 2004)* (Heidelberg: 2004); *Petrarca nel tempo. Tradizione lettori e immagini delle opere*. Catalogo della mostra (Arezzo, Sottoc chiesa di San Francesco, 22 novembre 2003–27 gennaio 2004).

¹⁷ Published as volume 6 in 2004 in the series *Quaderni di Filologia Medievale e Umanistica* at Messina.

¹⁸ Blanc P. (ed.), *Dynamique d'une expansion culturelle. Pétrarque en Europe XIV^e–XX^e siècle. Actes du XXVI^e congrès international du CEFI, Turin et Chambéry, 11–15 décembre 1995. A la mémoire de Franco Simone* (Paris: 2001).

¹⁹ *La postérité répond à Pétrarque. Sept siècles de fortune Pétrarquienne en France, Sœur latine et seconde patrie du poète*, Avignon, 22–23–24 janvier 2004. Some titles of the papers read might be revealing examples of the approach defined by us as traditional "reception history": Jean Balsamo, "Premier cercle de réception pétrarquienne en France entre 1535 et 1545"; Romana Brovia, "La fortune du *De remediis* en France, du XIV^e au XVI^e siècle"; François Fabre, "Pétrarque poète chrétien? La critique de l'Africa par Jean Gerson"; Yves Hersant, "Un adversaire de Pétrarque: Giordano Bruno"; Pierre Laurens, "Pétrarque, Montaigne, Chateaubriand".

²⁰ *Mondo tedesco in Petrarca—Petrarca nel mondo tedesco*. XXVII Simposio Internazionale di Studi Italo-Tedesco, Merano, 22–23 November 2004 and *Petrarca in Deutschland. Seine Wirkung in Literatur, Kunst und Musik*, Internationales Kolloquium Freiburg im Breisgau, 26.–29. September 2004.

²¹ *O Petrarquismo entre Portugal e a Itália*. Segundo Encontro de Italianística, Instituto de Estudos Italianos 75 anos—Petrarca 700 años, Coimbra, 4–5 March 2004.

Croatia,²² or even outside Europe,²³ a determined focus on the independent reader remains lacking. Examples are as numerous as telling: at an international conference, organised at Warsaw University from 27–30 May 2004 and devoted to *La tradizione del Petrarca e l'unità della cultura europea*, lectures were delivered on, for example, “L’influsso del Petrarchismo sull’ elegia neolatina” (by Grazyna Urban-Godziek, Cracow) or on “Gli inizi della fortuna di Griselda petrarchesca in Polonia” (by Grzegorz Franczak, Venice).²⁴

It is our hope that this collective volume, starting from the idea of the ‘independent reader’, might inspire a new approach to Petrarch’s reception in the Renaissance and the Early Modern Period. For, if Petrarch already during his lifetime could proudly boast that he was read by a large audience, this book intends to shed a new light on the reading processes from the 14th to the 16th century, its creative re-readings, and its stunning transpositions of Petrarch’s text into new literary and artistic discourses. Even if we know that, again, this new light will be insufficient since ‘Pétrarque continue à nous échapper par le jeu de ses multiples représentations’,²⁵ we hope that it will inspire fruitful re-readings of the creative Petrarch-readings of the past.

²² *Petrarca e il Petrarchismo nella letteratura croata*, Split, 27–29 September 2004.

²³ The conference *Petrarca nel mondo*, organised at Incisa in Val d’Arno (19–20 June 2004), is a striking example. Next to Petrarch’s influence in various European countries, non-European countries have equally been discussed. Tadahiko Wada presented a paper on “La fortuna del Petrarca in Giappone”, Harry Wayne Storey on “Petrarca in America”, and Anna Bujatti on “Petrarca in Cina”.

²⁴ A similar focus was used by an international conference *Petrarca v strednej Európe – Petrarca nella Mitteleuropa*, held at Nitra from 22 to 23 October 2004.

²⁵ Mann N., *Pétrarque: Les voyages de l’esprit. Quatre études* (Grenoble: 2004) 111.

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