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Galloway, Andrew and R. F. Yeager. *Through a Classical Eye: Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian, and Latin Literature in Honour of Winthrop Wetherbee*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009. Pp. 440. \$80.00 978-0-8020-9917-4. .

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This volume is a celebration of an outstanding medievalist and an opportunity to assess an illustrious discipline, among whose representatives are Curtius, Auerbach, Lewis, and Spitzer. Andrew Galloway defines it "interest in transcultural and transhistorical vision in medieval literature" (3), describing what has been for decades the only approach to medieval literature: solidly grounded upon philology, mediated by contextualization. With innovative contributions from ancillary disciplines such as the history of the book, and the widening of the scholar's geographic horizon, it has offered radically new perspectives; but its method has remained the same, as this book and Wetherbee's work demonstrate. Studying medieval literature implies studying the appropriation of classical tradition; Wetherbee has engrafted on this a practice of close reading reflected in these essays. His approach also enhanced the sense of intellectual community in medieval studies--a community of the living and the dead, of poets and philosophers; the impressive rostrum of scholars gathered here is part of this community.

Joseph Pucci's analysis of Catullus in the Middle Ages challenges the received opinion that Catullus was then forgotten, sidestepping manuscript evidence and applying close reading to Augustine and Venantius Fortunatus. He considers clusters of words around an image applied to erotic desire in Catullus, to spiritual desire in the Christian writers. One might challenge the narrowness of the comparison, a transition without cultural intermediaries: Pucci's instances evoke other associations, from Horace to Hadrian. Yet this close reading, whether or not it proves its point, offers new insights on Christian writing. It is something of a let-down that Pucci should invoke statistics to support his hypothesis: surely the presence of Catullian images in medieval poetry need not be attributed to chance.

Danuta Shanzer explores more esoteric territory with the *Hiperica Famina*, a seventh-century text of Irish origins whose isolation and peculiar linguistic traits make it difficult to insert within a tradition. Shanzer reads it as literature (a controversial term in a medieval context), choosing analytical strategies such as the search for Christian sources to contextualise it. The exercise needs Shanzer's wide-ranging erudition; the result is a dialogue between different traditions, though what is proposed here is a possible but not inevitable reading, especially since the text needs amendments in order to fit the hypothesis. However, this essay sets out guidelines for an overdue analysis of the *Famina*; Shanzer's learning and sure control of sources guarantee the scholarliness of the endeavour, offering an impeccable lesson on manuscript reading.

Jeremy Tambling's contribution engages directly with Wetherbee's interests, discussing Bernardus Silvestris' *Cosmographia*. The starting point is the idea of *silva* (*hyle*), proposing a parallel between the Virgilian Aeneas' descent and the literary descent of vernacular writers. The parallel is extended to *silva* as primordial or unformed matter: Tambling discusses its ontological implications within a wide range of sources, making well-controlled use of criticism (though Derrida sounds out of place). In Dante's case, the stumbling block is that his *selva* is not the lowest point of mankind, but a condition of fallibility from which man emerges through knowledge. Dante himself espouses the notion of creation from unformed matter, rather than creation *ex nihilo*. The dilemma is not of easy solution: Dante describes the four elements as *informati*, though he also speaks of their creation; postulating a descent from Silvestris implies a Neoplatonic outlook. Identifying unformed matter with *hyle* also connotes it negatively, contrasting with the inherent goodness of God's creation. The ambiguity in Dante's theology invites future scholars to look closely at the poet's relation with non-Christian sources.

R. F. Yeager discusses Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*, starting from the absence of the conventional image of the ship in Alain's frequent references to shipwreck. Close reading reveals the rhetorical subtlety at play: more clearly than *silva*, shipwreck is connected with excess and therefore sin. The writer's collocation of the image in oxymoronic contexts highlights Wetherbee's realisation that 'poetic intuition is finally the only means linking philosophy and theology' (97). Yeager's contribution elegantly concludes the first section of the book.

The second section turns its attention to Italy; Rita Copeland analyses Guido Faba's autobiographical preface to his rhetorical treatise, *Rota Nova*. Kantorowicz's clever decoding established how Faba narrates through his fictionalised character his personal ethos, establishing a parallel between autobiographical and written persona in a tradition familiar to the sophists.

Alone among medieval (auto)biographers, Faba revived this tradition: the fact that the revival was unsuccessful (Guido himself abandoned this experiment in his *Summa dictaminis*) is an anticlimax, but the survival of classical tradition may also be a matter of blind alleys.

In Giuseppe Mazzotta's analysis of *Paradiso* XVII-XX, Dante's vision of Europe is read through a tradition ranging from Virgil to Martianus Capella. Mazzotta works on Dante's Neoplatonism to arrive to God as Geometer in the image of the compass (Canto XIX). Thus Mazzotta invites us to consider Dante's discussion of perspective, re-collocating it in the vision of the world expressed in late medieval to early modern thought. It is an impressive feat, very lucidly told. Mazzotta's conclusion deserves to be quoted in full: 'Dante's gaze looks up, and his poetry, which is the very voice of Western spirituality, lays bare the rootedness of every familiar and subjective perspective in the vast latitude of the Earth' (p. 142). Dante's geography also informs Warren Ginsberg's analysis of the river simile in *Inferno* XVI, a watershed between sinners by excess and sinners by malice. This point is marked by a meeting with the sodomites: geometry becomes an emblem of distance and antithesis in an upside-down world. Ginsberg's reading is overwrought, seeking a correspondence between narration, similes, theological substratum and rhetorical devices. Stretching each word and asking it to bear the simultaneous weight of all its connotations, Ginsberg transforms Dante's canto into an exercise in rhetoric. In Petrarch's prologue to *Griselda*, the image becomes an allegory of the double ethical standard between nobles and low-born: Ginsberg's analysis is simplifying, as if Petrarch did not offer the possibilities of exploration of Dante. Equally brief is his analysis of the simile in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*: the Clerk's criticism of the image is paralleled to his envoy, as if he refuted Petrarch's geography and by implication the tale. The short space dedicated to Chaucer does not allow explanation; the whole contribution suffers from this lack of balance.

Teresa Kennedy reads Boccaccio's study of Greek philology as a paradigm of a humanist project. She highlights the role of the Islamic world: 'Orientalism' bridges the gap between medieval and humanist Boccaccio, but also proposes a vision of history connecting the catastrophes of the past to the present collapse of civilization represented by the plague. The interpretation is fascinating, though it is improbable that Boccaccio would contrast the continuity of Greek literature "from the Hellenes to the Moors" (169) with an interruption in the Latin tradition: his perception of the very recent past (see his *Trattatello in laude di Dante*) shows his awareness of the medieval inheritance of the classics. Kennedy notes that for Boccaccio "the past and the present coalesce in a larger reading community" (174), highlighting his role as an intellectual encouraging a community of scholars. Jim Rhodes explores the same theme studying the Saladin in *Decameron*. Boccaccio's strictures against corrupt Christianity appear throughout his work; while western knowledge of Islam increased with the crusades, Boccaccio's spirit of tolerance is noticeably absent in contemporary writing. But the critic also offers a literary context in which the Saladin is a figure of farsightedness and wisdom: Boccaccio's novelty resides in his speaking of Muslim and Jewish as defined by a presence, rather than negatively by their being non-Christian. Rhodes subtly decodes the relevant novellas underlining a link with Boethius' theory of unity.

In the essay concluding the section David Wallace reads the story of *Griselda* through the *Seniles*: in book XVII Petrarch discusses his decision to lift the story from Boccaccio's vernacular to a "stilo alio." The choice of Latin excludes women, the avowed addressees of the *Decameron*, and concentrates on an elite of male readers, making of *Griselda* a tradable commodity in an exclusively male world; the process will be undone by Chaucer. Wallace reads the Petrarch-Boccaccio epistolary exchange as suggestive of homoeroticism, though the allusions highlighted are more suggestive of conventional male love discourse, often appearing in humanist correspondence. The exploration of geography (Petrarch, formerly dependant of the Visconti patronage, is cautious in his treatment of Piedmontese Walter, whom Boccaccio condemns) goes some way towards accounting for the story's ambiguity. The identification of Walter with Visconti, and of Petrarch with Walter, seems built on purpose to explain the story: the essay is a thoughtful reading of the *Griselda* tale and the *Seniles* rather than an attempt to interpret either.

The third section, "England and Beyond," starts with Thomas Stillinger's analysis of the relationship between Clerk and Wife of Bath. Stillinger compares Petrarch and Boccaccio on more traditionally cultural grounds; for the Clerk, Petrarch is "a working literary presence" (227), an acknowledgement of the humanist enterprise he initiated. This introduces a reading of the Clerk's attitude towards the characters of his tale, but Stillinger's themes (the "philological" relation between Clerk and Wife, astrology, the changing name of *Griselda*'s father) are never fully explored: the concluding statement on Chaucer as supremely mediating poet is anticlimactic. Christina von Nolcken considers Chaucer the pilgrim, a class-conscious, ironically supercilious ber-narrator. The Miller challenges class distinctions in his "quitting" of the Knight, and Nolcken links this trait to Lollardy, connecting the Tale with Wyclif's Bible. This is the weak point of the essay, transforming hypothesis to postulate within a paragraph. Chaucer's Miller might contain echoes of the burgeoning Lollard controversy, and the comic character might allude to the desire for social equality; the critic brings a formidable erudition to the aid of her hypothesis. It remains to be seen whether Chaucer's readers would be aware of this multi-layered structure in both tale and narrator. The critic's very careful close reading of the tale makes her (and us) constantly aware of possible pitfalls in her hypothesis. Chaucer is also analysed by Frederic Ahl, who studies wordplay starting from its classical antecedents (and Quintilian's ruling on the point), overlooking modern distaste for the practice, which has influenced the work of literary translators. To forget that in classical and medieval tradition *nomen est omen* is to forget classical belief in words: Chaucerian puns are subtle and require artful decoding, as well as familiarity with classical literature—it is a pleasure for the reader to find how much the choice of a word can reveal. A quasi-Chaucerian pun is the title of Alistair Minnis's contribution, reading Harry Bailly's outburst against the Pardoner against the background of contemporary relic-worship and later denunciations. Satire becomes particularly biting if it concentrates on the uro-genital tract; though much comic literature on the subject has survived, it is difficult to gauge to what an extent Chaucer's contemporaries would take seriously miracles concerning genitalia. The evidence Minnis gathers is impressive (and the critic deserves special praise for carrying his erudition lightly); through it he offers the intriguing hypothesis that the "St Ronyan/Ronyon" mockingly invoked by the Host and the Pardoner may be related to the "phallic saints" of contemporary French tradition. The *Canterbury Tales* are also the subject of Disa Gambera's contribution, reading in Fragment I apertures and wounds as instances of penetration and abjection. This is the one essay in the collection that is

least informed by the perspective indicated by the title of the book: the references to Ovid and Virgil seem rather perfunctory, nor do they offer new insights, and the contribution remains at a rather conventional level of a reading which applies the same metaphor throughout a very articulate text.

Yoshiko Kobayashi's comparison between Ovid and Gower seems more effective. It starts with the image of *flebile carmen* in *Tristia* and *Vox Clamantis*, continuing with an analysis of literary allusions; Ovidian motifs have often been detected in Gower, but Kobayashi interweaves Ovidian and Gowerian quotations to show how the experience of isolation and exile deprives the poets of utterance: writing expresses a desperate desire for ever-frustrated communication, as with the female writers in the *Heroides*. Then the critic's attention turns to the use of mythical similes to align the poet's fate with that of the epic hero: this allows a link between Gower's text and the prophetic voice in Old Testament lamentations--a fascinating instance of cultural syncretism. Reading the same poets, Mara Bulln Fernndez studies Pygmalion as representing the power of the word, if not to create, to modify reality. In the relationship between Pygmalion and Venus, Fernndez reads a celebration of poetic language, articulated in the various medieval versions of the story. The comparison highlights Gower's logocentric preoccupation and his choice of the myth as a reflection of his literary persona.

Thomas Hill briefly engages with "blowing blindness" in *Cleanness*: the angels saving Lot by blinding his enemies evoke medieval folk-belief that blindness could be 'breathed upon' the victim. Hill evokes a wide range of European writing: his quotations transform the essay into a pleasant anthology of variations on this folk-motif. His analysis of liturgical *sufflatio* appears slighter; the result, as the critic himself notes, is an elaborate explanation of a short phrase. More engaging is James's Simpson concluding contribution, discussing idleness as "an essential part of a mental economy" (390), and reading its appearance in *Reason and Sensuality*. Simpson's reading evokes the Chartrian vision, encompassing knowledge of the natural world and knowledge of the self, seeing poetic endeavour as an image of creation. *Reason and Sensuality* is an "idle text": its instructional program is defeated by the encoding narrative, yet activating in the reader participation through its enjoyable idleness. Hermeneutics is allied with manuscript analysis and comparative reading. We are reminded of the necessity of reading texts within contexts, man within cosmos.

Many of the essays engage with the staggeringly intricate continuity of tradition: they reveal a richness of perspective that is the most triumphant vindication of Wetherbee's work. One might wish for tighter editorial control: one writer's Bernardus Silvestris is another's Bernard Silvester, and Ginsberg's Gualtieri becomes Wallace's Walter; the Index excludes fictional characters but includes Dante's Virgil. But this is nitpicking. Normally such collections are consulted rather than read: individual readers will focus on one contribution, overlooking the rest. For the present reader, it has been an exhilarating privilege to read the whole book, an invitation in the community of writers and scholars Wetherbee memorably evoked in his works.