

Zitierhinweis

Oliveira e Silva, Paula: review of: Nicholas Mann (ed.), Francesco Petrarca, *My Secret Book*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016, in: *Exemplaria Classica*, 22 (2018), p. 375-378, DOI: 10.33776/ec.v22i0.3535, downloaded from Website

exemplaria
C L A S S I C A
Journal of Classical Philology

copyright

Dieser Beitrag kann vom Nutzer zu eigenen nicht-kommerziellen Zwecken heruntergeladen und/oder ausgedruckt werden. Darüber hinausgehende Nutzungen sind ohne weitere Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber nur im Rahmen der gesetzlichen Schrankenbestimmungen (§§ 44a-63a UrhG) zulässig.

NICHOLAS MANN, (ed., trans.). *Francesco Petrarca. My Secret Book*. The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 72. Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 2016, vii-xvii+283 pp., \$29.95, ISBN 9780-674-003-460.

Under the title *My Secret Book*, this volume published by Nicholas Mann is his own English version of Francesco Petrarch's *De secreto conflictu curarum mearum*. Published in the *I Tatti Renaissance Library* collection, this work follows the model it has established. Thus, it has an introduction, followed by an English translation side by side with the Latin text, notes to the text and to the translation, bibliography and indexes.

It is a careful edition, which benefits from the vast knowledge and erudition of this great scholar, whose area of expertise is the Italian humanism and, specifically, the person and works of Francesco Petrarch, on which he has published many important studies.

In the introduction (pp. vii-xvii) Nicholas Mann begins by considering the aforementioned work by Francesco Petrarch in the context of the author's life and work. He explains that the *Secretum* was written at a time when Petrarch's life was undergoing major changes. On the one hand, his gradual disengagement from the Avignon curia and a life in the rural atmosphere of Vaucluse, which he traded for a life in big cities like Milan and Parma. On the other hand, Mann notes that this work reveals a change in the author's thematic interests and in the characteristics of his literary production. While it was initially marked by an interest in ancient classical authors, it became more focused on Christian-inspired subjects. Then, Mann goes on to provide a short description of the content of each of the three books that make up this work (pp. viii-xiv), highlighting the autobiographical nature of this writing and the literary device used by Petrarch, who writes this work as a fictional dialogue between himself and St. Augustine, in the presence of the Truth. As Nicholas Mann notes, «like most of Petrarch's writings and particularly those in Latin, the *Secretum* contains significant elements of autobiography» (p. viii). According to this scholar, in this work Petrarch seeks to carefully construct the image he will leave to posterity, and the literary devices he uses are aimed at achieving this purpose. For this reason, Petrarch constructs this work using «the literary convention of a fictitious dialogue». This device dates back to Cicero's *Tusculanae Disputationes*, being followed by Augustine in his *Soliloquiorum libri* (a work whose model was at the base of Petrarch's *Secretum*) and is still echoing in Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. All these works and authors were familiar to Petrarch, but the person and work of St. Augustine were particularly dear to him. As Mann

points out (p. ix) these influences, and particularly that of Augustine, are displayed in the *Secretum*. However, the scholar highlights the fact that Augustine appears in the *Secretum* as Petrarch's interlocutor, not to serve as a life model to be achieved, but as someone whose life has taken a course with which Petrarch has certain affinities. In fact, in Augustine's life there were two well-defined moments, which he describes in his *Confessions*: a period in which he lived by carnal pleasures and ambitions, and a second one marked by spiritual purposes. Petrarch was an assiduous reader of the *Confessions* and felt somewhat related to this journey. The *Secretum* is a work written, as Mann points out, in a peculiar moment in Petrarch's life characterised by a shift towards greater spiritual maturity (p. xi). However, as we realise while reading the *Secretum*, in Petrarch there is no harmony between these two forces - flesh and spirit, worldly life and spiritual life. Thus, the dialogue with Augustinus, his fictitious interlocutor, is not conclusive as to persuading Petrarch to effectively convert to higher goods, contrary to what happens with the real Augustine of Hippo, as he describes in the *Confessions*. Therefore, this work by Petrarch has characteristics that differ from those produced according to the aforementioned literary tradition of the Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, which the author uses as an explicit or implicit reference. In the *Secretum*, Petrarch reveals his real state of mind, in an explanatory style that comes close to a psychological, rather than moral or ascetic, description. As Mann shows, there is no desire to assert his fictional interlocutor as a paradigm or reflection of himself. The *Secretum* establishes instead a dialogue about the inner state itself, as Franciscus seeks to recognise, through a process of self-examination, the direction of his natural impulses and instincts and his soul's affection for vices or virtues. The former are analysed in Book I, corresponding to the, also fictitious, first day of dialogue. Mann writes: «the first day of the dialogue is focused on the sufferings of Franciscus, an apparently introspective and self-pitiying sinner, or patient. Augustinus plays the role of his confessor, or therapist, and is in the main morally astringent and very directive (p. viii)». This directive and moralist condition of Augustine's intervention does not, however, bring about the desired conversion in the dialogue, as proven in Book III. In spite of the affinity between Franciscus and Augustinus, there are crucial differences as to the character of the two of them, their state of mind, and above all, the conception of the power of will over the passions of the soul. Book II, as Mann explains, «is more clearly organised around the categories of the cardinal vices (ix)». Lastly, Book III «shows some signs of hate toward the end and comes to no overriding conclusion (ix)». The last book «focuses on what Augustinus calls the two chains that bind Franciscus to his mortal condition: Amor and Gloria (p. x)». Franciscus is confronted with the condition of life after death and, according to Augustine's successive parenetic discourses, he should correct his life. However, Franciscus manages to obtain Augustinus'

permission «to postpone the consideration of the eternal afterlife in order to attend first to the pressing needs of renown in his lifetime (p. x)». At the end of his work, Petrarch intentionally leaves open his own or others' judgement on the perfection of his spirit and the nature of his inner self.

As regards the aspects of textual criticism, in particular the problem of the dating of this work by Petrarch, Nicholas Mann presents, in a synthetic, clear and comprehensive manner, the debate about the date (p. xiv) and the current state of the issue, based mainly in the research work developed by Francisco Rico (p. xv). We should also highlight his interesting interpretation of a set of data that can be deduced on Petrarch's biography and his process of personal maturation, based on the discussion on the problem of the dating of this work (p. xv-xvi).

With regard to the version of the Latin text used in this edition, Nicholas Mann refers that the text that supports it is the one contained in the handwritten copy by Tebaldo della Casa, reference MS Plut. XXVI sin. 9, preserved in the Laurentian Library (p.xiv). In fact, as noted on p. 259, of the set of handwritten copies of this work by Petrarch that have been preserved, this is the most authoritative one and, therefore, the only one that has been subject to systematic studies by specialists. Nicholas Mann shows that, due to this fact «there is no concrete evidence of the various phases of redaction that the scholars have hypothesised on the basis of internal textual evidence» (p.259). Thus, the scholar suggests that further studies should be made based on complete handwritten sources to better understand the internal criticism aspects of Petrarch's *Secretum*. Given that the aforementioned manuscript is the most authoritative one, all the modern editions, including Mann's, as the author refers, are based on it. He then mentions the modern editions he took as reference, all of them Italian editions and translations. Mann points out that his edition was based solely on Italian translations (Carrara, Fenzi and Dotti, in addition to the aforementioned Spanish edition by Rico), excluding the use of English editions. As the editions he used are already extensively annotated, he explains, the annotations published in his edition are deeply rooted in the earlier ones (p. xvi; p. 259). Nicholas Mann's work is a very careful translation into scholarly English. It combines respect for the literalness of the text with an interpretation based on Nicholas Mann's deep knowledge of Petrarch's works and Latin. The result is a text that, like Petrarch's, associates aesthetic beauty with the clarity and fluidity of the thought reflected in the target text. In addition to the aforementioned notes to the text (pp. 261-74), the book includes a short bibliography of selected editions of texts and translations into modern languages of both Petrarch's *Secretum* and some of the author's other works, which are more directly related to this one, as well as studies (pp. 275-77) and, lastly, an index (pp. 279-83). As Mann writes, the *Secretum* «is unparalleled in the fourteenth century as an essay in self-analysis, and in the immediacy of its insights still has the power to move and enlighten us today».

The edition published by Nicholas Mann is an important contribution to allow this work by Petrarch to reach a wide range of readers, in a careful and rigorous edition written in a beautiful scholarly English.

PAULA OLIVEIRA E SILVA
Universidade do Porto
pvsilva@letras.up.pt