

Francis Petrarch Six Centuries
Later:
A Symposium

Aldo Scaglione, ed.
Chapel Hill, North Carolina
Studies in Romance Languages 3 (1975)

Petrarch: The German Connection

Frank L. Borchardt

pp. 418-31

Petrarch, alive and dead, has had no more ardent suitor than Germany. From the fervent appeals to settle in the court of the German Emperor to the extravagant affection heaped upon him by modern German scholars, Petrarch, his influence, and his reputation have had a consistent and enthusiastic welcome in the barbaric north. The suit seems, however, to have been largely one-sided, and in recent times its ardor has raised more than one scholarly eyebrow. In a broader perspective the affair is but a single episode in the long history of German infatuation with the south. The hidden roots of that history lie deep in the Great Migrations and the visible fruits were consistently spectacular, like Theodoric's brilliant court at Ravenna, Charlemagne's Roman coronation, and Otto III's attempt at world government in a restored *Roma aurea*. That the fruits were spectacular does not mean that they were consistently sweet, that they necessarily represented the happiest developments of Italian or German history. However that may be, German and Italian history were tied together by an especially close bond for well over a thousand years. The focus of the relationship was, from the first Germanic kingdom in Italy to the expulsion of Austria after World War I, the monarchy. Translated into the terms of the Middle Ages that means, the Empire. And it is the Empire that lies at the focal point of Petrarch's German connection in his lifetime.

Even Petrarch's early visit to *Germania dura*¹ (in the spring and summer of 1333), well before his correspondence with the emperor and his court, reveals an imperial aspect. The possibility of finding Roman antiquities drew him to Cologne and Aachen.² At Cologne he was told stories of the deeds of Marcus Agrippa and Drusus Germanicus, at Aachen marvelous stories about Charlemagne. The symbolic identity of ancient Roman and medieval German empire was, of course, taken for granted in Petrarch's day. One of the Charlemagne stories deals with the emperor's strange attachment to a dead beloved. She had, it turns out, concealed a magic ring under her tongue. The emperor's counselor, the Archbishop of Cologne, discovered it and discarded it in a nearby eddy. Charlemagne was thereupon revolted at the corpse, but loved no place on earth dearer than the spot at which the ring had been cast into the waters. There indeed he built his palace and church, there he lies

¹ As he regularly called Germany, e.g., Domenico Rossetti, ed., *Francisci Petrarcae Poemata Minora*, 3 vols. (Milan, 1829-1834), III, 78 [henceforth "Rossetti"].

² Paul Piur and Konrad Burdach, eds., *Petrarcas Briefwechsel mit deutschen Zeitgenossen*, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, V (Berlin, 1933), pp. 168-9 [henceforth PBW].

buried, and there he ordered his successors to be crowned "as long as the German hand guides the reins of the Imperium Romanum" (PBW, pp. 162-64).³

This story, curiously enough, entered German literary tradition not in the native telling—for example, of Jansen Enikel (fl. 1276), some version of which Petrarch probably heard at Aachen—but in Petrarch's version. So great was his authority in Germany. Even in 1333, long before he reached the height of his fame, he was known and respected in Cologne (PBW, p. xxiii). His reports about that city too left a mark on German literary tradition. At the Rhine he had observed women conjuring the river with herbs in what he recognized to be a most ancient popular ritual (PBW, p. 169). Knowledge of it in Germany comes from no other source but Petrarch. The learned had every opportunity to verify his descriptions, but, as it seems, they never bothered. They were content to note that Petrarch had observed it, and hence it must be so.⁴ Elsewhere Petrarch writes that he had heard of a woman in Lower Germany who concluded thirty years of life without ever having taken any food at all. He admits that it is a bit beyond belief.⁵ All of this seems to represent the scattered beginnings of a project—like many of those of Petrarch, unfinished—meant to describe and interpret for civilized Italy the customs of the peoples of the barbaric north.⁶

The contrast between barbaric and Italian was as characteristic of the relations between Germany and Italy as the discussion of imperial prerogatives. When Petrarch had good words for Germany they were generally not for German ears. In the same letter which described the ancient popular ritual, Petrarch wrote his friend, Giovanni Cardinal Colonna, of his own surprise at the culture, the beauty of the city, the seriousness of the men, the elegance of the matrons (PBW, p. 168f.):

Mirum in terra barbarica quanta civitas, que urbis species, que virorum gravitas que munditie matronarum....

³ Cf. Gaston Paris, *Histoire poétique de Charlemagne*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1905), pp. 382ff.

⁴ Hartmann Schedel, *Buch der Croniken (1493)*; facs. rpt. Munich, 1965), fol. XCIr.

⁵ Francesco Petrarca, *Rerum Memorandarum Libri*, ed. Giuseppe Billanovich (Florence, n.d. [1943]), p. 271.

⁶ Konrad Burdach et al., *Aus Petrarca's ältestem deutschen Schülerkreis*, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, IV (Berlin, 1929), p. 66.

And the sight of the women conjuring the Rhine moved him to exclaim:

Dii boni! que forma! quis habitus!

In his dejection at Italian anarchy Petrarch even went so far once as to cite Lucan (*Pharsalia*, VII, 432f.) to the effect that Freedom had abandoned Italy and retreated beyond the Rhine to be enjoyed by Germans.⁷ In general, however, his words about Germany were as harsh as he considered its climate to be.⁸ To be sure, a summer heat-wave as he left Cologne, 30 July 1333, made him wonder what happened to all those miserable "alpinas nives ac frigora Rheni" (PBW, p. 170) Virgil talked about in the *Eclogues* (X, 47). His experience notwithstanding, Germany was and remained the "fera Theutoniae tellus," the home of the "tedesco furor," the "tedesca rabbia."⁹ Barbaric is the most recurrent attribute attached to things German. It is much to Petrarch's credit that he refused to transfer his animosity to his German correspondents.

The unhappy political condition of his beloved Italy moved Petrarch to initiate a correspondence with the emperor. With the failure of Cola di Rienzo's Roman revolution yet another possibility for order and unity had collapsed, and Petrarch's hopes for Italy had once more been disappointed. Early in 1350 or 1351 Petrarch wrote to Prague urging Charles IV to turn his attentions to Italy (PBW, pp. 1, 7-8). It was actually an open letter, a political broadside, and the emperor had no real need to answer it. Furthermore, the pacification of Italy was the last project on which the emperor intended to squander his resources. He was far too astute to be lured by that can of worms but was flattered by the attentions of the most famous man of learning in Europe. And so he responded in an elegant letter, citing Livy and Terence and declining Petrarch's proposals (PBW, pp. 12-16). One manuscript tradition and internal stylistic evidence suggest that the letter was written—one assumes, reluctantly—by Cola di Rienzo, at the time an honored prisoner and guest at the imperial court. Petrarch wrote again, not in response to this letter which took three years to reach him, but on the occasion of a shift in political sentiment in Italy, which Petrarch deemed favorable to imperial intervention (PBW, pp. 17-20). The letter is filled with high

⁷ Ibid., p. 146.

⁸ Rossetti, II, 72.

⁹ Ibid., p. 68; Petrarch, *Sonnets and Songs*, trans. Anna Maria Armi (New York, 1968), pp. 40 and 204.

pathos. Petrarch prays, begs, implores the emperor to undertake actions "for the honor of the Empire, for the salvation of Italy, for the consolation of the city of Rome, thy utterly abandoned bride," etc. We know nothing of a response on the part of Charles. Only one further letter to Petrarch survives over Charles' signature, and it is a decade later (1361/2), being a third invitation to Petrarch to sojourn in Prague. It opens: "Honorabilis vir, deuote karissime" (PBW, pp. 134-6).

Charles IV was one of the first modern northern monarchs to discern the political advantage of intellectual and artistic patronage. His court at Prague was by far the most splendid in the north after Avignon. The paintings of the Bohemian School, the architecture and sculpture of the Parler brothers, and the miniatures of Johannes von Neumarkt's Prayer Book alone indicate a modest but noteworthy concentration of genius in the Prague of Charles IV. Add to that the scholars called to the new university and the artists and artisans summoned with the Parler brothers to the construction of the new cathedral, and the era in Prague deserves to be called a "renaissance" with or without Italian connections. But Italian connections there were, with Cola in Prague after the failure of the Roman coup (1350-52) and Petrarch there a few years later (1356).¹⁰ Charles earnestly tried to bring Petrarch to Prague permanently as the crowning jewel, presenting him with a golden goblet by way of persuasion (PBW, pp. 129-31). Petrarch appears to have been moved by the offer and certainly contemplated another visit to Prague but, finally, was not to be persuaded. He met with the emperor at Udine and Padua in 1368, and thereafter all traces of contact between Petrarch and Prague vanish. Perhaps the poet despaired of the restoration of Roman grandeur at the hands of the German "Realpolitiker."

But in the time between the first and last contact, a cordial relationship had been established between Petrarch and Prague. A correspondence of some thirty-six letters survives including letters to or from the emperor's chancellor Johannes von Neumarkt, Empress Anna, and Ernst, the Archbishop of Prague. The tenor of the correspondence, especially between Petrarch and Johannes von Neumarkt is particularly pleasant and revealing. Von Neumarkt approaches Petrarch humbly, Petrarch responds magnanimously (PBW, pp. 21-25). Thereafter von Neumarkt took particular pleasure in designating himself "a pupil of Petrarch" (PBW, p. lxiv). And Petrarch returned the favor by praising Neumarkt's pen as an eloquent witness

¹⁰ Paul Piur, *Cola di Rienzo: Darstellung seines Lebens und seines Geistes* (Vienna, 1931), p. 160; Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch* (Chicago and London, 1963), pp. 152f. [henceforth "Wilkins"].

to "transalpine fertility" (PBW, pp. 94-97). The loyal pupil asked the master for his best known works, once for *De viris illustribus*. A few years later (1361) the poet sent his friend a presentation copy of the *Bucolicum Carmen*. The chancellor was delighted and, scholar that he was, asked Petrarch for a commentary (PBW, pp. 145-6). On the occasion of another invitation to court he asked Petrarch to bring along a copy of his in fact not yet finished *Remedia utriusque fortunae* (PBW, pp. 137-9). These letters Johannes incorporated into the formulary of the imperial chancery.

The young empress, Anna von Schweidnitz, had, as it seems, written Petrarch personally to inform him of the birth of a daughter. Petrarch responded on 23 May 1358 with a splendid letter congratulating the empress and consoling her for the birth of a daughter with a catalogue of famous women: Minerva, mistress of the arts among the ancient Romans; Isis who first gave the Egyptians letters; Sappho. "I pass over the Sibyls, those divine women who knew the future and were complicit in the divine wisdom." And so on through the great queens of history, Orithia of the Amazons, Penthesilea, Semiramis of the Assyrians, Thamiris of the Scythians, Cleopatra, Zenobia, and up to "our own times" ("apud nos") Countess Mathilda, who controlled a great part of Italy (PBW, pp. 75-86). The letter must have provided great comfort to the disappointment Anna must have been made to feel for failing to provide an heir.¹¹

The year before (1357) Petrarch had been made Count Palatine by the emperor. The document must have been impressive, it covers three pages of print in a modern edition and had a great gold seal attached to it (PBW, pp. 221-4). Petrarch accepted the title but at first declined to accept the gold seal, returning it to the chancellor as a sign of his esteem. In the letter covering the return, he described the seal in some detail, revealing his clear, if reluctant understanding that Charles was King of Bohemia as well as Roman Emperor. However, he took genuine satisfaction in the seal's motto, Aurea Roma. Eventually, however, he accepted the gold seal as well (PBW, pp. 59-62, 72-4). The designation as Count Palatine was largely honorific, but it did carry the authority to name certain judges and to confer legitimacy on bastards. He once made use of the second power and the beneficiary won a court case on the basis of Petrarch's action.¹²

¹¹ Wilkins, p. 160.

¹² Ibid., p. 240.

In other legal matter Petrarch was called upon for an opinion on the authenticity of the privileges purportedly granted by Julius Caesar and Nero to Austria (PBW, pp. 114-123). Nothing reveals more clearly the abyss between north and south in Petrarch's time and the bridge that Charles and his court provided. The privileges were, of course, forgeries, but Petrarch recognized them to be recent forgeries. Modern documentary study confirms his findings. The forgers were living in the Middle Ages and were wholly without the historical perspective to notice that Julius Caesar was not likely to employ "Augustus" as an honorific. Petrarch naturally had that perspective. The court at Prague had enough sense to consult Petrarch on the matter. It could not have been expected to explode the forgeries itself, for it governed lands in which anachronism was a way of life, and forgeries supported countless legal structures. Petrarch's opinion is not an unequivocal indication that he himself had made recognition of anachronism a principle of his historical understanding; after all, he clearly considered Charles IV a successor of Augustus (PBW, p. 185). But it does indicate that he was en route to the principle which would separate Italian humanistic historiography from its medieval precursor and its popular competitors at home and abroad.

It was, no doubt, Petrarch's veneration for Roman Antiquity that led him to reject the forgery with quite as much annoyance as his affidavit reveals. And the same veneration underlies the genuine affection he felt for the imperial chancellor. He clearly regarded Neumarkt's concern for style and respect for learning as good omens for the cult of Roman antiquity in the north. He explicitly congratulates Neumarkt for his linguistic purifications in the imperial registry (PBW, p. 91). This activity of Neumarkt is one considered to have had the widest possible ramifications. The chancellor compiled two formularies which contained letters out of the Petrarch correspondence. These were meant as models for the conduct of the epistolary business of the empire. It was during his tenure that the chancery began to turn attention to the vernacular in at least a portion of its transactions. The authority of the imperial chancery would, of course, make its practice the criterion of correct style in other German chanceries as well, for example, in the Saxon and Thuringian chanceries, on the language of which Luther would, one hundred and fifty years later, base the standard German of his Bible translation.

This conjecture has been the subject of enormous controversy.¹³ There are indeed several missing links between the Prague formularies of the 1360's and the usage of the Saxon chanceries in the 1520's. But not many. And there are striking similarities in phonology. Johannes von Neumarkt and his pupils were clearly writing Early New High German at a time when older forms of the language were still in wide use. The one significant document written directly in the tradition of the linguistic reforms of the chancery was the *Ackermann aus Böhmen* (The Ploughman from Bohemia) by Johannes von Tepl, a pupil of von Neumarkt's. Explicit humanistic content was detected in this work, and Petrarch received credit for the new spirit.¹⁴ This conjecture became the subject of even greater controversy and the howls of the medievalists have often seemed to drown out rational discourse on the question of the German reception of the Italian Renaissance.¹⁵

Before turning to that chapter of the history of Petrarch in Germany, let us look to the evidence of his presence in Germany where there can be no dispute. Manuscripts of Petrarch's works—more the Latin than the Italian—found their way in considerable numbers into the libraries of the southern and eastern territories of the Empire even in the poet's lifetime and not long thereafter.¹⁶ One hears tell of a "cult of Petrarch," and intimate connections between the court of Jost of Moravia (1375-1411) and the first generation of Petrarch's students.¹⁷ The last fine medieval poet of Germany and its first modern composer, Oswald von Wolkenstein (1377-1445), cites Petrarch by name and in an offhand fashion that transparently reveals the Italian poet's unquestioned authority.¹⁸ Oswald clearly knew Petrarch's work and expected of his readers and listeners both the recognition and respect due to an auctor. At the Council of Constance (1414-1417), which Oswald attended in the court of Emperor Sigismund, Petrarch's name and works were

¹³ Adolf Bach, *Geschichte der deutschen Sprache*, 7th ed. (Heidelberg, 1961), pp. 195-8.

¹⁴ Karl Otto Brogsitter, *Das hohe Geistergespräch* (Diss. Bonn, 1957), p. 208.

¹⁵ Cf. the bibliographical survey in James E. Engel, *Renaissance, Humanismus, Reformation*, Handbuch der deutschen Literaturgeschichte, 2. Abt. Bibliographien, IV (Bern and Munich, 1969), pp. 32-34.

¹⁶ Konrad Burdach, *Vorspiel* I, 2, *Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, Buchreihe, II (Halle, 1925), pp. 57f. [henceforth "Vorspiel"].

¹⁷ Idem, "Zur Kenntnis altdeutscher Handschriften und zur Geschichte altdeutscher Literatur und Kunst," *Centralblatt für Bibliothekswesen*, VIII (1891), 477-80.

¹⁸ Karl Kurt Klein, ed., *Die Lieder Oswalds von Wolkenstein*, *Altdeutsche Textbibliothek*, No. 55 (Tübingen, 1962), p. 27.

repeatedly on the lips of the Germans.¹⁹ The most important German propagandist at the Council, Dietrich von Niem (1340/ 45-1418) is in conscious and profound debt to Petrarch. He competed with Bruni and Poggio for advancement in curial service, and knew the Italian scene intimately. To be sure, his was not a humanistic and literary interest, but rather a political one. Nonetheless since he was a popular and widely read journalist he provided a broad conduit for the fame of Petrarch among the Germans.²⁰ As early as 1432 Petrarch's telling of the Griselda story appeared in a German version by one Erhart Gross. The adaptation was quite popular, as was Gross who wrote edifying works for the consumption of the pious citizens of Nürnberg.²¹

At the court of the Countess Palatine of the Rhine, Mechthild (1418/9-1482), literary endeavors of all kinds were encouraged, predominantly the revival of the great literature of the Middle High German flowering, but also of the New Learning.²² Nicolas von Wyle's pioneering *Translatzen* contains a German rendering of two dialogues from Petrarch's *Remedia utriusque fortunae* dedicated to Mechthild (1469).²³ And he was apparently only one of several translators patronized by the countess for the purpose of making the new Italian literature available to the readers of the German vernacular. A translator of Boccaccio, Heinrich Steinhöwel also turned his hand to the Griselda fable, and his version saw print at least three times in the fifteenth century (1473 and 1482).²⁴ Albrecht von Eyb further advanced the fame of Petrarch with German translations of his views on marriage in the *Ehebüchlein* (printed 1472) and numerous extracts from Petrarch in an

¹⁹ Heinrich Finke et al., eds., *Acta Concilii Constanciensis*, 4 vols. (Münster, 1896-1928), II, 277f

²⁰ Hermann Heimpel, *Dietrich von Niem*, Veröffentlichungen der historischen Kommission des Provinzialinstituts für Westf. Landes- und Volkskunde, Westfälische Biographien, II (Münster, 1932), pp. 30, 159, 171-1-4; Alfons Lhotsky and Karl Pivec, eds., *Dietrich von Nieheim: Viridarium imperatorum et Regum Romanorum*, MGH, Staatsschriften des späten Mittelalters, V, 1 (Stuttgart, 1956), pp. xiv and 8.

²¹ Hans Rupprich, *Die deutsche Literatur vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Barock*, 2 vols., Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart, eds. Helmut de Boor and Richard Newald, IV (Munich, 1970-73), I, 570.

²² Vorspiel, pp. 80-83.

²³ Adalbert von Keller, ed., *Translationen von Niclas von Wyle*, Bibliothek des literarischen Vereins in Stuttgart, LVII (1861; rpt. Hildesheim, 1967), pp. 314-324.

²⁴ Frederick R. Goff, *Incunabula in American Libraries: A third Census* (New York, 1964), p. 478, nos. P-403-5.

extremely convenient handbook on rhetoric, the *Margarita poetica* (fifteen editions between 1472 and 1503).²⁵

When humanism struck permanent roots in Germany, around the middle of the fifteenth century, the spirit of Petrarch was, as one might expect, on the scene. The first generation of German humanists studied in Italy among the second generation of Petrarch's pupils. Sigismund Gossenbrot (1417-1493), a patrician of Augsburg, regularly cited Petrarch in his correspondence as though he were a classical authority.²⁶ In fact, Petrarch had become so in Germany. Gossenbrot's sons bragged back and forth in their correspondence on the availability of Petrarch's works in such centers of enlightenment as Augsburg. Although far more modern, gracious, and witty models were available to them—Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini and Poggio Bracciolini—they kept Petrarch as their master: "Der eigentliche Meister dieser Schüler ist Petrarcha."²⁷ The important libraries, at first personal collections of humanistically inclined Germans, naturally contain a representative sampling of the works of Petrarch. Hieronymus Münzer (1437-1508) bound his copies of Petrarch's *Epistolae familiares* and the *Remedia* with works of Reuchlin, Valla, Sabellico, Baptista Mantuanus, and Ficino to make a splendid humanistic miscellany.²⁸ The incredibly industrious copiers and collectors, Hermann and Hartmann Schedel of Nürnberg, gathered or themselves transcribed no fewer than ten Petrarch manuscripts. And Hermann went to the trouble of compiling an index for an early print of Petrarch's *Rerum memorandarum liber*.²⁹ By the end of the fifteenth century, perfectly conventional histories list the death of Petrarch as an event fully as noteworthy as any political catastrophe.³⁰ Perhaps the simplest and clearest indication of Petrarch's patronage over German humanism is Rudolph Agricola (1443-86). On the hundredth anniversary of his death Agricola wrote the first

²⁵ Joseph Anthony Hiller, *Albrecht von Eyb: Medieval Moralist*, The Catholic University of America Studies in German, XIII (Washington, 1939), pp. 69-73; 133-4.

²⁶ Hartmut Boockmann, *Laurentius Blumenau*, Göppinger Bausteine zur Geschichtswissenschaft, XXXVII (Göttingen, Berlin, and Frankfurt, 1965), p. 228.

²⁷ Paul Joachimsohn[sic], *Die humanistische Geschichtschreibung in Deutschland. Die Anfänge: Sigismund Meisterlin* (Bonn, 1895), pp. 18f.

²⁸ E. P. Goldschmidt, *Hieronymus Münzer und seine Bibliothek*, Studies of the Warburg Institute, IV (London, 1938), p. 145.

²⁹ Richard Stauber, *Die Schedelsche Bibliothek*, Studien und Darstellungen aus dem Gebiete der Geschichte, VI, 2/3 (1908; rpt. Niewkoop, 1969), pp. 111-116, 199.

³⁰ Johannes Pistorius, ed., *Illustrium veterum scriptorum... Tomus unus*, (Frankfurt, 1583), p. 842.

biography of Petrarch not by the pen of an Italian. Its unifying motif: nothing can be considered more appropriate of man than to know man.³¹

The fifteenth century laid such a firm foundation for the veneration of Petrarch that not even the Reformation could shake his towering authority. For his secret attack on the curia he was numbered among the "witnesses to the truth" by the uncompromising reformer, Mathias Illyricus Flacius.³² In the seventeenth century, Petrarch was held up for imitation by the most influential of Baroque literary theorists in Germany, Martin Opitz.³³ Thereafter his name was attached, for better or worse, to the fate of "Petrarchism," until what appears to have been his final rescue by Jacob Burckhardt.

By far the most important manifestation of Germany's affection for Italy in the last century or so is the simultaneous discovery in 1860 by Jacob Burckhardt and Georg Voigt of the golden age of Italian cultural history, the Renaissance. Their discovery inaugurated an epoch in the German courtship of Italy. Scholarship provided the setting; the Renaissance dispute provided the excuse.

One trend in the revisions of Burckhardt—these, after all, constitute the Renaissance dispute—expressed profound distress at the secular-pagan facets of Burckhardt's insight. The scholars representing this trend, Heinrich Thode among the earliest, cast about for alternatives. They eventually threw the origins of the Renaissance back to the religious upheavals of the early thirteenth century and connected the Renaissance with the rise of the burgher class for which the medieval social universe had no room. Francis of Assisi became the patron saint of the competing theory, followed hard upon by Joachim of Fiore. The Spirituals contributed the ideological evidence with their doctrines of renewal and rebirth; the Observants contributed the sociological evidence with their settlements in the cities. This theory of the Renaissance was and is the occasion of intense partisanship. In Germany, the adherents rallied around Konrad Burdach, about whose scholarly head a storm of controversy has ever since raged.

In general, Burdach's perspective conformed with Thode's. They both saw the Renaissance as a broad intellectual and artistic revolution

³¹ Heinz Otto Burger, *Renaissance, Humanismus, Reformation: Deutsche Literatur im europäischen Kontext*, Frankfurter Beiträge zur Germanistik, VII (Bad Homburg, 1969), pp. 191f.

³² Paul Piur, *Petrarcas "Buch ohne Namen" und die päpstliche Kurie*, Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte, Buchreihe, VI (Halle, 1925), p. [xl].

³³ Gerhart Hoffmeister, *Petrarkistische Lyrik* (Stuttgart, 1973), pp. 65ff.

with sources in the spiritual life of the High Middle Ages, particularly of heretics and religious radicals. Burdach's researches and those of his pupil, Paul Piur, concentrated for years on the person of Cola di Rienzo, resulting in the monumental publication of the correspondence and an important biography by Piur. Burdach and Piur detected in Cola a combination of Spiritualist and antiquarian sentiments that seemed to them quintessentially characteristic of the Renaissance. It was by way of Cola that Burdach and Piur came to Petrarch, whose Renaissance credentials they never for a moment doubted.

Their studies of Cola and Petrarch eventually turned to the defense of one argument: that the early Italian Renaissance received immediate and enthusiastic welcome at the imperial court at Prague and thereupon exerted profound influence on adjacent lands, particularly on the development of the Early New High German literary language. As to the truth of the first part of the argument there can be no doubt. The emperor, the empress, the chancellor, and the archbishop all fell under the spell of the new style or at least of the men who proclaimed it. It is even defensible to maintain that in the case of Charles the influence went deeper than style alone. Petrarch's views on the position of history with rhetoric and poetry in humane letters clearly moved Charles to assign the composition of a history of his kingdom to a renowned Italian traveller, Johannes of Marignola, and perhaps also moved him to compose his own biography.³⁴ The fact that both works bear more the stamp of the Middle Ages than of the Renaissance is witness only to the transitional character of the Prague flowering.

The influence of Petrarch beyond Prague also cannot be doubted. In a few cases, such as the court of Jost of Moravia, the influence may even have been humanistic. But this is the weak point in the Burdach-Piur thesis and fundamentally contradicts their own broad view of the Renaissance. Implicit in the argument is the attempt to identify Petrarch wholly with humanism, and humanism wholly with the Renaissance. Petrarch was indeed influential in the north beyond Prague. But both in Prague and beyond one aspect of his influence was not humanistic but moralistic. It was felt that he conformed with the sentiments of late medieval morality and in truth he did. The reception of Petrarch in these circumstances implies nothing in the way of a reception of humanism. If the impact of Petrarch on Prague had been -exclusively

³⁴ Paul Joachimsen, *Geschichtsauffassung und Geschichtschreibung in Deutschland unter dem Einfluss des Humanismus*, Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance, VI (Berlin and Leipzig, 1910), pp. 15-18.

humanistic, one would expect the flight of Prague's German scholars to Leipzig to have meant a great infusion of humanism into Saxony. There is no evidence whatsoever to this effect. In fact, later in the fifteenth century, Leipzig was notorious for its hostility to humanism. To be sure, when and where the north was ready for humanism, the orthodox moralism of Petrarch did nothing to hinder its acceptance and may have encouraged it. But the two aspects of Petrarch's reception must not be confused.

Even the acceptance of humanistic views on history need not imply an infusion of humanism. The Bohemian history of Johannes of Marignola and Charles' autobiography are cases in point. Dietrich von Niem—a thoroughly unreconstructed medieval Latinist—depended heavily on Petrarch (and Boccaccio, incidentally) for his view of history and historical argument. This view is radically new in Germany, has analogues in only one or two Latin and vernacular chroniclers of the time, and anticipates in detail the nationalistic history of the German humanists of the later fifteenth and early sixteenth century.³⁵ In this case, the reception of Petrarch is not humanistic, at least not in style, but very clearly innovative and a sign of Renaissance activity in the broad sense of Burdach and Piur.

The third point, Petrarch's impact on the development of the Early New High German literary language requires a great deal more proof than Burdach, Piur, and the other disciples were able to supply. What they did prove beyond doubt was the possibility of such influence. The close comparative study of the German prose of Neumarkt and his successors and the Latin and Italian texts of the early humanists available to him and his school has never been undertaken to anyone's satisfaction. This failure has led some scholars to deny Prague any important place at all in the development of Early New High German.³⁶ This position, however, represents an excess far more unreasonable than any ever committed by the school of Burdach whose *prima facie* case has never been overturned. Early New High German is, generally speaking, easily accessible to anyone who commands the modern language. Neumarkt's German prose and that of his successors is clearly Early New High German. Far later texts—Oswald von Wolkenstein, for example, but actually the bulk of fifteenth-century German

³⁵ Frank L. Borchart, *German Antiquity in Renaissance Myth* (Baltimore and London, 1971), pp. 288-92 and esp. 297.

³⁶ Cf. fn. 13 above.

literature—require linguistic training in Middle High German. The Prague circle may simply have anticipated developments in the language without influencing them. Although possible, this hardly seems likely and the burden of proof clearly lies with those who would defend the likelihood.

For some reason I do not fully understand, Burdach's position tends to disturb the scholarly equanimity of his critics. The reactions have ranged between rage, not altogether dignified dismissal, and a haughty condescension that indicates an inability to approach the man's work free of bias. Karl Brandi created a straw man superficially resembling Burdach's Rienzo and proceeded to tear him to shreds.³⁷ The genuinely fine historian Paul Joachimsen actually called upon Burdach to stop publishing texts and instead to compose a comprehensive theory³⁸—as though humane letters had too many texts and too few comprehensive theories. Wallace K. Ferguson's treatment of the Burdach thesis in his essential historiography of the Renaissance dispute is inexplicably one-sided and tends toward innuendo.³⁹ He ignores Burdach's herculean efforts at balance and restraint, and most mysteriously, passes over in absolute silence Burdach's resolution to the Renaissance dispute: "Denn das Mittelalter war viel humanistischer, die Renaissance viel mittelalterlicher, als das allgemeine gelehrte Bewusstsein annimmt."⁴⁰ It is, after all, much the same conclusion Ferguson reached twenty years later.⁴¹

Whether or not one concurs with the Burdach thesis, whether or not one sympathizes with his critics, his life's work guaranteed Petrarch and his friends a permanent place in the discussion of German intellectual life at the end of the Middle Ages. It is now only by sleight-of-hand that one can avoid the Italians. The reception and naturalization of high culture from abroad is one of the oldest and noblest characteristics of German history. Germans do not always think so, and their neighbors do not always (or even often) believe it. But from Boniface to grand

³⁷ Karl Brandi, "Renaissance und Reformation: Wertungen und Umwertungen," *Preussische Jahrbücher*, CC (1925), 120-135; rpt. under the title *Renaissance: Zwei Beiträge*, Reihe Libelli, CLXXVI (Darmstadt, 1967), pp. 34f., which I consulted.

³⁸ Paul Joachimsen, "Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation," *Historische Vierteljahrschrift*, XX (1920/21), 426-70; rpt. Reihe Libelli, L (Darmstadt, 1959), pp. 61f.

³⁹ *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 306-311.

⁴⁰ Konrad Burdach, *Rienzo und die geistige Wandlung seiner Zeit*, Briefwechsel des Coladi Rienzo, I, Vom Mittelalter zur Reformation, II, 1 (Berlin, 1913-1928), pp. viiiif.

⁴¹ Op. cit., p. 397.

opera it has been so. In this context the wooing of Petrarch is actually nothing extraordinary. Whether Petrarch wooed meant Petrarch won is beside the point. To the point is the very fact of the authority of the poet in Germany and the attempt of the Germans to come to terms with it.

Petrarch thought Italy well provided that the Alps stood between it and the German fury. They were, however, not high enough to keep either Petrarch or his works from crossing over, there to be greeted not by fury but by a great embrace.