

HANS GROTE: *Petrarca lesen. Legenda 7*. Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart 2006. ISBN 978-3-7728-2424-1. 194 pp. EUR 39,80.

This small, red (the colour is not unimportant) book invites the reader to enter into the world of Petrarch's (1304–1374) oeuvre, focusing especially on texts other than the *Canzoniere* – his sonnets and love lyrics in Italian. Grote's book is written in a clear, pleasant style, his footnotes are sparse and the bibliography offering further reading is short as well, which tells us that the intended audience consists of general readers rather than Petrarch scholars. Prior to this volume, the *Legenda* series has included similar titles on, for example, Homer and Plato. The title and approach are thus largely dictated by the series and do not refer to Grote's own personal reading experiences.

Grote's book is easy to approach and it has a delightful aim to widen the general view held of this crucial Italian poet and to balance it by giving an overview of Petrarch's various writings. The modern world mainly remembers Petrarch for his relationship with Laura and as a wistful love poet. Instead of discussing Petrarch as a solitary "Herz-Schmerz-Dichter" of unfulfilled, idealised love, Grote introduces him as an aggressive polemicist, politically engaged discussant and moral philosopher – the different roles he was known for in his own age.

Grote's book begins with conventional biographical information about Petrarch's life, mainly constructed from his personal letters that he carefully polished and edited for publication. Thus Grote rightly emphasises their literary character. The discussion then proceeds to Petrarch's works: biographies and historical writings offering portraits of famous ancient men as moral models, epic poetry, Latin tractates on the good life written from a Stoic-Christian perspective, widely-read dialogues that also offered practical wisdom on life, polemical invectives which defended humanistic learning and were directed against scholasticism, mechanical arts and ignorance, large letter collections as a means of self-representation, and, finally, the famous lyrics. Grote gives brief summaries of each individual work and comments on its role in forming and presenting Petrarch's ethical, humanistic and educational ideals. The last section collects together some central philosophical concepts and key issues from the texts, including *fortuna*, *virtus*, *imitatio*, *allegoria* and *studia humanitatis*, and assesses their meaning in Petrarch's thinking.

The book is a good, brief introduction to Petrarch's writings. It does not offer deeper or detailed analyses of the texts but nevertheless nicely summarises their main contents for a general reader. The book discusses texts that have received less scholarly attention and emphasises their meaning in light of Petrarch's ideas about the good life and humanistic education. Grote notes how Petrarch introduced his own persona into the dialogues and other writings. For example, *Secretum*, his trilogy of dialogues, combines intellectual autobiography and literary fiction, and his letters construct an idealised portrait of a cultured, learned humanist. Grote also draws special attention to Petrarch's invectives and verbal attacks written against named opponents, and briefly notes, for example, some words of abuse applied in this connection. Although Petrarch's ethical ideas and political activities are interesting, I would have welcomed "love" among the key terms discussed in the final chapter, since Petrarchan love is world-famous and interestingly equates love and virtue. All in all, Grote's book shows us that our modern world has good reason to remember Petrarch.

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