

Marco Cerocchi. *Funzioni semantiche e metatestuali della musica in Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio*. Firenze: Olschki, 2010. xii-160 pp. con 6 es. mus. n. t. €19. ISBN: 978-88-222-5991-2.

Consisting of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion, this study analyzes the relationship of the “three crowns” to music. Marco Cerocchi’s book is one of several dealing with music, including Francesco Ciabattoni’s recently-released *Dante’s Journey to Polyphony* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). Only one chapter of Cerocchi’s study deals specifically with Boccaccio. However, to get a sense of Cerocchi’s treatment of Boccaccio, an overview of the entire work is necessary.

In the introductory chapter, Cerocchi provides a brief panorama of thirteenth-century music. He begins with the reception of classical theories about music, from Pythagoras to Plato and Aristotle, through Saint Augustine and Boethius. His principal thesis is that the three great Italian authors absorb the traditional teaching that music excites the body and thus inspires irrational emotions. In his first chapter, Cerocchi demonstrates the changes in musical traditions throughout the *Duecento*. He defines traditional medieval music to be the *laude* of the Church, and the para-liturgical music that developed alongside them; but the development of the communes also gave rise to secular music as well. To exemplify the evolution of thirteenth-century music he examines St. Francis’s *Canticle of the Creatures* and Jacopone da Todi’s *Donna de Paradiso*; both were derived from the liturgical and para-liturgical tradition, but Jacopone also includes more secular elements like dialogue. The historical-cultural setting for the following three chapters is that the “three crowns” lived in a time when moral teachings condemned secular music even while secular music became increasingly popular.

In the rest of the work, Cerocchi elaborates on his thesis. For Dante, secular music is risky, as it might cause the listener to deviate from righteousness. As seen throughout his *Commedia*, Dante casts secular music into question (e.g., Casella) but represents ecclesiastical music as laudable. For Petrarch, music is ambivalent; on the one hand, he seems to agree with the traditional condemnation of secular music, while on the other, much of his poetry demonstrates its influence. Indeed, Cerocchi points out that Petrarch was reputed to have a beautiful voice and to be a talented lute player. Each great Italian author, therefore, had to negotiate between the popularity of secular music and the teachings about it.

In the fourth chapter, Cerocchi turns his attention to the presence of music in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. Specifically, he examines the musical interludes in the frame story, which he describes as a type of “soundtrack”

(*colonna sonora*, p. 81) to the narrative events. Through a detailed analysis of the songs in the frame story, Cerocchi demonstrates that Boccaccio rejects the negative spiritual effects of secular music in favor of its psychological impact. It is Cerocchi's opinion that Boccaccio embraces the salubrious effects of secular music: it can restore the body and the soul of the listener. Therefore, while Dante treats secular music as inferior to sacred music and Petrarch has an ambivalent relationship to both, Boccaccio puts them on the same level.

The chapter on Boccaccio is the longest of the study, as it deals with each of the *Decameron's* songs in a detailed manner. Perhaps the strength of Cerocchi's book is his analysis of how each song reflects the psychological state of the *lieta brigata*. From their recent departure from plague-stricken Florence, to their attempts to cheer themselves after the sad stories of Day IV, to their impending return to Florence at the end of their sojourn, the ten storytellers reveal their inner lives through song. Scholars of Boccaccio will probably find his detailed examination of the songs to be of greatest usefulness. But the study is undercut by its simplified presentation of musical history. No mention is made of folk songs or of the other literary/musical movements of medieval Europe. Saint Francis of Assisi and Jacopone da Todi were familiar with the French and Provençal traditions, for example; their works cannot be described as mere developments of the ecclesiastical *laude* and their para-liturgical imitations. Because of this limitation, the work's treatment of the three great authors — Dante in particular — subsequently falls into broad generalities: Dante the moralist, the ambivalent Petrarch and secular Boccaccio. It should go without saying that all three are quite subtle in their masterpieces. When their minor works are figured in, their thoughts on many topics are revealed to be extremely complex. Thus, a more nuanced treatment of the Middle Ages and of the three authors would have resulted in a far stronger work.

FABIAN ALFIE

UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA