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Alison Baird Lovell, *The Shadow of Dante in French Renaissance Lyric: Scève's "Délie"*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2020. xiii + 250 pp. Notes, bibliography and index. \$99.99 U.S. (hb and eb). ISBN 9781501517976.

Review by Jennifer Rushworth, University College London.

The principal argument of this book is that scholarship has overstated the influence of Petrarch on Maurice Scève's *Délie* (1544), at the cost of a concomitant neglect of Dante as a possible source and point of comparison. The laudable aim of Alison Baird Lovell's book, from this perspective, is to redress the balance and to challenge scholarly assumptions, by bringing "the shadow of Dante" in *Délie* into the light. Lovell presents Dante as a shadow for a number of different reasons, acknowledging first that his influence is "rather subtle" (p. 2). The image proves to be further appropriate for Scève since a 1547 edition of the *Commedia* suggests that Dante's own poetry is "shadowed" ("*adumbrato*," "*ombrageuse*," p. 29), in contrast to Petrarch's poetry. Finally, Lovell also notes that the vocabulary of shadows and shades is common to Scève and Dante.

The book is divided into eight chapters and may be considered to be in three parts (this division into parts is my own, although it is implied by the ordering of the chapters). Firstly, we have three chapters that introduce Scève and his relationship to Dante through broader consideration of other contexts and poetic influences, especially the troubadours, courtly love, Marsilio Ficino, and Guido Cavalcanti. Secondly, there is a set of three chapters labelled "Scève and Dante" (chapters four to six), which constitute the heart of the project in their argument for important parallels between these two poets and their works. Finally, there are two chapters on Scève and Petrarch (chapters seven and eight) which aim to contrast the two poets and, in so doing, to highlight further affinities between Scève and Dante.

The first chapter is a kind of extension of the introduction, providing both useful background and compelling evidence of connections between Scève and Dante. Lovell begins by distinguishing medieval and Renaissance love poetry from its Classical precedents, in particular as regards the emergence of "[t]ensions between erotic desire and Christian morality" (p. 23). It is in the way they respond to and resolve such tensions that Lovell will ultimately distinguish Petrarch from Dante and Scève, the former through his renunciation of erotic desire within a religious framework (in Lovell's reading) in contrast to the reconciliation of earthly and divine love achieved by the latter pair.

Lovell goes on to highlight connections between Dante and Scève as perceived by contemporaries of the latter, including two Lyonnese printers of editions of Dante's *Commedia*,

Guillaume Rouillé and Jean de Tournes. Notably, Jean de Tournes's 1547 edition of Dante's *Commedia* is even dedicated to Scève, and Scève is praised as an interpreter of Dante in the preface to that edition. That said, Lovell also acknowledges that Scève was already the dedicatee of Jean de Tournes's *Il Petrarca* from 1545. In addition, Lovell makes much of Charles Fontaine's flattering description of Scève, in a publication of 1577, as "Ce Poëte ayant quasi l'esprit et l'entendement de Dante, Poëte tres-obscur et difficile" (a quotation that provides the title of chapter one). The remainder of this chapter offers brief reflections on Délie's name, identity, and symbolism, a reminder of what we know of Scève's life, and reflections on his position as a precursor within the sixteenth-century French poetic tradition.

In the second chapter, Lovell ambitiously seeks to provide a history of desire in poetry, with a particular focus on the troubadours and the *Roman de la rose*. For Lovell, Scève's *Délie* is both stylistically similar to the troubadours in its noted obscurity (*trobar clus*) and in its adherence to the conventions of what is described here as "courtly love" (though the term is acknowledged to be anachronistic). These conventions are presented as including idealization of the beloved, love as suffering but also a means of improvement (*melhuramen*), the importance of the gaze, a sudden *innamoramento*, and the importance of secrecy. As a result, Scève is even argued to be "a courtly love poet" (p. 73). Scève's poetry is also noted to continue the blending of religious and erotic imagery found in earlier texts, both sacred and profane. Since Jean de Nostredame's *Vies des plus célèbres et anciens poètes provençaux* (1575) is noted to postdate *Délie* by several decades, Lovell persuasively postulates that Scève's knowledge of the troubadours comes via Dante—though also via Petrarch, as well as via commentators on both poets such as Alessandro Vellutello. As a result, it is not clear that Scève's engagement with the troubadours can be adduced to the influence of Dante rather than to that of Petrarch, even if "the way Petrarch used the troubadour material was shaped by Dante's example" (p. 196).

In the third chapter, Lovell continues her history of poetic theories of love by turning to Guido Cavalcanti, particularly as mediated for Scève via Marsilio Ficino's treatise *De amore*, a treatise which also draws on Dante's *Convivio*. Ficino's use of Cavalcanti is surprising, since their views of love are starkly different, the one dark, destructive, and irrational, the other ideal, Neoplatonic, and virtuous. According to Lovell, Dantean love is ultimately more Ficinian than the conception of love held by either Cavalcanti or even Scève. In arguing that Scève retains a degree of Cavalcantian sensuality and the Cavalcantian connection between love and death, Scève feels more Petrarchan to me than Dantean (at least, thinking of the Dante of the *Commedia*), and I would disagree that for Petrarch death "becomes a rhetorical device more than conveying intensity" (p. 98). There is a long history of accusing Petrarchist poetry of being overly rhetorical and lacking in emotional depth. My own view is that some of these criticisms pertain more to highly stylized imitations of Petrarch than to Petrarch himself, that Petrarch's poetic response to the death of Laura cannot be faulted for intensity, and that it is in any case unhelpful to suggest the incompatibility of rhetoric and intensity.

In the first of the three chapters on Scève and Dante (chapter four), Lovell begins by drawing a connection between Scève's *Délie* and the three subjects of vernacular poetry set out by Dante in the *De vulgari eloquentia*: virtue, love, and *salus* (this last translated as "well-being," p. 110). She then proposes connections between *Délie* and Dante's *Vita nuova*, with particular attention to the vision of Love feeding Dante's heart to Beatrice, which she reads as a symbol of sacrifice. A short section considers the stony, hard language and imagery characteristic of Dante's *rime petrose* and

influential on Cavalcanti, Petrarch, and Scève. The final section of this chapter, “Petrarch’s views of Dante,” feels out of place here and more suited to an introductory moment.

Chapter five turns to Dante’s *Commedia* and to an assessment of *Délie*’s spirituality. For Lovell, “in terms of spirituality Scève is closer to Dante than to Petrarch,” even though paradisaical union with the beloved “seems evanescent and chimerical” in *Délie* and, moreover, “spirituality in *Délie* is not exclusively or deeply Christian” (p. 133). Where Scève’s poem differs from the *Commedia*, of course, is in its rearranging of moments from Dante’s work, “without schematic hierarchy” (p. 142), resulting in a greater sense of instability. The chapter ends with consideration of that most famous part of the *Commedia*, *Inferno* 5, suggesting parallels to be found in *Délie* in terms of suffering and adultery. Following on from this, chapter six further addresses conceptions of love shared by Dante and Scève, although here the emphasis is on the compatibility of love and virtue and on the refining of both love and poetry, through the image of purifying flames, in a way that no longer seems to adhere to the previously invoked Cavalcantian view of the fatality of love.

The final two chapters are devoted to emphasizing differences between Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* and *Délie*, in support of the broader argument that there are many more similarities between Scève and Dante—and between Scève’s *Délie* and Dante’s Beatrice—than there are between Scève and Petrarch or between *Délie* and Petrarch’s Laura. Chapter seven also offers an overview of Petrarch and Petrarchism, including in Renaissance French poetry more broadly, as well as further engagement with critics who have read *Délie* in a Petrarchan light. Chapter eight opens with a reading of *Rvf* 1, whose themes of shame and repentance are, for Lovell, not to be found in Scève, “[d]espite the Petrarchan veneer” of “jeunes erreurs” (p. 230; cf. Petrarch’s “giovenile errore”) in the first dizain of *Délie*. Similarly, Lovell argues that dizain 164 and *Rvf* 189 are “quite different” (p. 239), despite their shared imagery of love as shipwreck. The six-page conclusion reiterates “Scève’s *Délie* as a text with a direct poetic filiation to Dante’s works” (p. 245), in an affirmation of “Scève’s Italianism rather than Petrarchism” (p. 246).

There are a number of weaknesses in the book’s argument, particularly as concerns the presence and role of Petrarch. Above all, Lovell’s argument that Scève is more Dantean than Petrarchan is undermined by the admission both that “[t]he relevance of Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* for Scève’s *Délie* is undeniable” (p. 6) and that Dante and Petrarch are not in any straightforward sense opposite or mutually exclusive models. As Lovell writes, “Dante’s writings constitute part of the tapestry of Scavian sources, along with those of Petrarch, who was himself profoundly influenced by Dante” (p. 4). Though less dramatic as an argument, this acknowledgement of “the plurality of sources and traditions in *Délie*” (p. 2) is more accurate and more interesting, and it also makes the inclusion of the troubadours and Cavalcanti in this book more logical. The book’s title with its focus on Dante ultimately does not do justice to this plurality.

In addition, the stark contrast that Lovell sets up between Dante and Petrarch is useful for her analysis of Scève, but limited as an approach to the two Italian poets. In Lovell’s summary of the *Commedia*, “Dante’s pilgrimage culminates in a reunion with [Beatrice] in Paradise” (p. 50), while, in contrast, “In the concluding poem of the *Canzoniere*, canzone 366, Petrarch renounces his love for Laura altogether in a supplication to the Virgin Mary” (p. 26). Neither description is adequate. The former ignores the complexities of the final canti of the *Paradiso*, including Beatrice’s replacement by Saint Bernard and Dante’s farewell prayer to Beatrice in *Paradiso* 31. This account of *Rvf* 366, meanwhile, grants too much certainty and absoluteness to what is after all a prayer, and eschews debates about the potentially cyclical structure of the work as a whole

(noted only in passing on p. 139). Lovell does also momentarily acknowledge that “[t]he conclusion of the *Canzoniere* is Dantesque in certain ways” (p. 181), not in terms of its renunciation of the beloved but rather in its turn to the Virgin Mary, in a further blurring of the contrast otherwise proposed between Dante and Petrarch.

This presentation of Petrarch also discounts the contrary vision of the end of Petrarch’s *Triumph*, where the poet does imagine being reunited with Laura. Lovell makes some mention of the *Triumph*, noting that Petrarch’s *Canzoniere* and *Triumph* were “both widely read in the Renaissance” (p. 1); that “Petrarch considered the *Triumph*...to be his vernacular magnum opus” (p. 129); and that, notwithstanding, “Petrarchism...is generally understood in relation to the *Canzoniere* rather than encompassing the *Triumph*” (p. 192). Lovell also acknowledges the Dantean nature of the *Triumph*, in a move that challenges her otherwise persistent contrast between Petrarch and Dante: “Laura in the *Triumphus eternitatis* [...] is closer to Dante’s divine figure of Beatrice than to Laura in the *Canzoniere*” (p. 202); “Petrarch envisions a reunion with Laura in paradise in the *Triumphus eternitatis*, but does not narrate the scene with Dante’s intensity” (p. 139). The same accusation that Petrarch lacks Dante’s intensity also recurs in relation to the two poets’ use of the word “*ombra*” (see p. 149). Assessments of differences in style between the poets under consideration similarly prove biased against Petrarch, whether in the proposed contrast between “Scève, Cavalcanti, and Dante [who] write mainly with an earnest tone” and “Petrarch’s *Canzoniere*, whose tone is sophisticated, urbane, and elegant” (pp. 105-106), or the later criticism of Laura as “a composite of idealized attributes and abstract symbolism...undeveloped as a literary character” (p. 118). In these accounts of the poetry of Dante and Petrarch, the situation is much more complex than Lovell allows, and greater context and justification should therefore be given for these readings. Likewise, that anti-Petrarchism is itself part of Petrarchism is insufficiently acknowledged in Lovell’s aim to contrast Petrarch and Scève.

This book is undoubtedly the fruit of “*lungo studio*” (long study), to borrow a Dantean phrase from *Inferno* 1 (part of Dante-pilgrim’s address to Virgil). A footnote to the very first sentence proclaims that “This sentence was composed prior to the publication of Michael Giordano’s book, *The Art of Meditation and the Renaissance Love Lyric*” (p. 1 n. 1), a book published in 2010. The third chapter is also indicated as having had an earlier version published in French in 2012. I have been quite clear above about what I consider to be the limitations of this book, in particular its rather rigid presentation of Dante and Petrarch and its indecision as to whether it is arguing for Dante instead of or as well as Petrarch as the key to understanding Scève. I would also add, in terms of the book’s style, that it can rely on quite short sentences and summary accounts of critical positions, again in a way that does not allow for much development or nuance.

Nonetheless, Lovell’s book is important in that it opens up new avenues of research by suggesting both that French poetry of the Renaissance may be less Petrarchan than has been argued and that Dante may have been more present than is suggested by Pietro Bembo’s famous advice to prefer Petrarch to Dante. A logical next step would be to consider not only *Délie*, but also Scève’s *Microcosme*, a work mentioned only in passing by Lovell as recalling Dante’s *Commedia* in its structure, themes, and scope. Yet even then it may be more productive to argue, once more, for a plurality of sources. In sum, Lovell’s reading of Scève and Dante is a demonstration of the necessity of working across languages and across periods, even if such work is susceptible to the risk of an unevenness of insight as regards its range of primary texts.

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