



The Representation of Petrarch in the Eighteenth-century *Encyclopédie*

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Abstract: The colossal project of the *Encyclopédie* (1751-1772), directed by Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, aimed to create, as Voltaire contends, “a repository of all sciences and arts,” therefore establishing itself as the point of reference for literature, sciences, arts and crafts. This pretentious ambition contrasts in direct proportion with the peripheral depiction of Francis Petrarch. Although they acknowledge Petrarch’s poetic talent and innovation, the authors of the *Encyclopédie* confine the Tuscan poet within the French poetical tradition. This gesture of appropriating what is exterior to the French image can be partly justified by the objective of the *encyclopédistes* to design a venue where a homogenous French identity can emerge. This paper attempts to track—by exploring various articles in the *Encyclopédie* along with their ramifications in other published works of the period—the ambivalent reception and portrayal of the Italian poet and humanist.

In his historical account of Louis XIV’s reign, *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1751), Voltaire depicts the *Encyclopédie*, published between 1751 and 1772 under the direction of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert, as “le dépôt de toutes les sciences et de tous les arts, tous poussés aussi loin que l’industrie humaine a pu aller” (300; “the repository of all sciences and arts, all pursued as far as human ingenuity could reach”).¹ Encompassing seventy-two thousand articles, with more than two hundred contributors, the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, “ouvrage immense et immortel,” in Voltaire’s characterization, aimed to chart and challenge through hybridization of genres, text, and image the frontiers of knowledge, as well as create an inventory of the important themes and prominent figures that influenced the artistic, scientific, political, and economical spheres.

How is Francis Petrarch, the Italian scholar, poet, and humanist, represented in this work of reference which epitomizes the quest for knowledge of the *philosophes des lumières*? Since there is a digitally published form of the *Encyclopédie* online, my initial answer to this question was mediated by a computerized search engine. After typing Petrarch in the search form, I was able to retrieve the number of occurrences within the context of different articles in which Petrarch’s name appeared. The image of the Tuscan poet, in the context of the Enlightenment, is peripheral. There is no entry (article) entitled “Petrarch.” This fact could be justified by the choice of a thematic organizing principle, rather than an indexical collection of definitions or names—a criterion that differentiates it

from the dictionary. Petrarch's name occurs thirty-two times in a total of eighteen articles. Some of the entries, such as "Poète" or "Poète couronné" simply cite the poet's name accompanied by short explanatory phrases, whereas other entries such as the articles "Troubadours" and "Fontaine de Vaucluse" present rather more extensive commentaries on the poet. These articles seem to illustrate an attempt to situate Petrarch within the French poetical tradition.

Louis de Jaucourt (1704-1779), an author also known as the chevalier de Jaucourt, is considered one of the most prolific authors of the *Encyclopédie*, responsible for writing, without pay, eighteen thousand articles, about twenty-five percent of the *Encyclopédie*. He was even nicknamed as "l'esclave de l'*Encyclopédie*." Although his training was in medicine, he wrote articles on economics and politics, as well as on the arts. J-J. Weiss notes his reflections in *Le Dictionnaire biographique Michaud* (1858), relating to de Jaucourt's writing style and his erudite spirit:

Les écrits du chevalier de Jaucourt, dit Palissot, se font lire avec intérêt; son style est simple, naturel, facile, et ne manque ni de correction, ni d'élégance : mais ce qui caractérise surtout ses productions, c'est que l'honnête homme n'est jamais éclipsé par l'auteur; il fait aimer la vertu en imprimant à ses moindres ouvrages le caractère d'une âme droite et sensible. Jaucourt possédait la plupart des langues modernes, et les parlait avec beaucoup de facilité.

The writings of the chevalier de Jaucourt, says Palissot, are read [*se font lire*] with interest; his style is simple, natural, easygoing, and lacks neither correctness nor elegance: but what characterizes his works above all is that the honest man is never eclipsed by the author; he exalts virtue by engraving in its smallest works the character of a fair and sensitive soul. Jaucourt mastered the majority of the modern languages and spoke them with much ease.

In the article "Poésie provençale," the chevalier de Jaucourt does not hesitate to confer on Petrarch a central place among the Italian poets, while also adding that if Provençal poets claimed all that he had borrowed from them, his style would be significantly less elaborate: "Il est certain que Pétrarque, un des principaux et des grands auteurs italiens, seroit moins riche, si les poètes provençaux revendiquoient tout ce qu'il a emprunté d'eux" ("Petrarch, one of the main and great Italian authors, would certainly be poorer, if the Provençal poets claimed all that he borrowed from them.")² The author of another article of the *Encyclopédie*, "Troubadours ou Trombadours," whose name is not specified in the article, echoes a similar view. Although he acknowledges the poetic genius of Petrarch and Dante, whom he calls "les vraies fontaines de la poésie italienne," the author, citing Honoré Boucher, adds that these fountains have their source in Provençal poetry, whose lead figure is the twelfth-century troubadour, Arnaut Daniel, inventor of the sestina and praised by Dante as one of the masters of the lyric of love (Pound 26). Moreover, the author avers that Petrarch learned his craft of rhyming ("*art de rimer*") in Provence, emphasizing that his style was molded by Provençal poetry: "ce fut en Provence que Pétrarque apprit l'art de rimer,

qu'il pratiqua & qu'il enseigna ensuite en Italie" ("It was in Provence where Petrarch learned the art of rhyming, which he used and then taught in Italy").

While the articles mentioned above belong to the categories of the arts, the article on the "Fontaine de Vaucluse" is classified as geographical. In some respects, it is an odd section in which to situate Petrarch, all the more so if one takes into account the fact that it is the most extensive article of the *Encyclopédie* on Petrarch. This technique of interweaving discourses, of inserting commentaries which do not necessarily bear a direct relation to the category proposed, was widely used by the writers of the *Encyclopédie*, resulting not only in the creation of the surprise element and blurring of the frontiers between genres, but also in reflecting the complexity of this enterprise, of this *statue colossale*, as Diderot's visual metaphor describes the *Encyclopédie*. The chevalier de Jaucourt begins his essay with an idyllic description of the landscape which shelters the fountain of Vaucluse:

Cette fontaine sort d'un antre très-vaste, au pié d'un rocher d'une grande hauteur, coupé à plomb comme un mur. Cet antre, où la main de l'homme n'a point été employée, paroît avoir cent piés de large sur environ autant de profondeur. On peut dire que c'est une double caverne dont l'extérieure a plus de soixante piés d'élévation sous l'arc qui en forme l'entrée, & l'intérieure en a presque la moitié. C'est de cette seconde caverne que sort la fontaine de Vaucluse, avec une telle abondance, que des sa source elle porte le nom de rivière, & est assez près de là navigable pour de petits bateaux...

This fountain emerges from a vast cave, at the foot of a tall cliff, steep as a wall. This cave, untouched by human hand, seemed to be one hundred feet in width by almost the same size in depth. One might say that it is a double cavern whose exterior is more than sixty feet tall covered by an arch which serves as entrance and whose interior is almost half the size. It is from this second cavern that the Vaucluse fountain emerges with such abundance, that, right from its source, it bears the name of a river and, quite close to it, is navigable for small boats.

After a beautiful but succinct description of the topography, de Jaucourt takes an abrupt turn and introduces a short biographical note on Petrarch, followed by a poetical depiction of the fountain of Vaucluse, narrative which contrasts with the arid discourse expected in a scientific article. Petrarch was eight years old when his family moved to Provence and settled near Avignon in Carpentras. Between the ages of twenty-two and thirty-three, he lived mostly in Avignon, and when he was thirty-three years old he moved to Vaucluse—at the source of Sorgue River—a place charged with significations, as it is there where his gaze met that of his beloved Laura.

The structural layout of the article, which starts with the description of the landscape and the introduction of the poet within those geographical parameters, may indicate that the poet's ultimate point of reference is not in himself but in the place where he met Laura. Vaucluse is not only the space where love springs, but it is the signifier, a germinator of significations, since Petrarch composes his rhymes inspired by the sight of this landscape

harboring the bittersweet memories of his beloved Laura. The emphasis seems to lie on the space rather than the lovers or their love.

To illustrate the description of the fountain, de Jaucourt reproduces the first stanza of Petrarch's canzone 126,³ one of the twenty-nine *canzoni* of *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*:

Chiare fresche, e dolci acque, Ove le belle membra Pose colci, che sola à me par donna; Gentil Ramo, ove piacque (Con sospir mi rimembra) A'lei di fare al ben fianco colonna; Herba, e fior, che la gonna Leggiadra ricoverse Con l'Angelico seno; Aer sacro sereno, Ou'amor co begli occhi il cor m'aperse; Date udienza insieme Alle dolenti mie parole estreme.

Petrarch's canzone, which invokes memories of the beloved, who dwells in a perfect symbiosis with nature, is then followed by Voltaire's "imitation libre et pleine de graces," as the chevalier de Jaucourt describes it. Voltaire's translation is in verse and uses cross rhyme throughout his translation rather than keeping with Petrarch's envelope rhyme of the quatrains. Voltaire's version is much longer, almost double the size of Petrarch's poem. This version, with its orthographical particularities, is reproduced from the online site of the *Encyclopédie*:

Claire fontaine, onde aimable, onde pure, Où la beauté qui consume mon coeur, Seule beauté qui soit dans la nature, Des feux du jour évitoit la chaleur; Arbre heureux, dont le feuillage Agité par les zéphirs, La couvrit de son ombrage, Qui rappelez mes soupirs, En rappelant son image! Ornemens de ces bords, & filles du matin, Vous dont je suis jaloux, vous moins brillantes qu'elle, Fleurs qu'elle embellissoit, quand vous touchiez son sein! Rossignols dont la voix est moins douce & moins belle! Air devenu plus pur! Adorable séjour, Immortalisé par ses charmes. Lieux dangereux & chers, où de ses tendres armes L'amour a blessé tous mes sens; Ecoutez mes derniers accens; Recevez mes dernieres larmes.

Clear fountain, lovely wave, pure wave, / Where beauty which consumes my heart, / Sole beauty of nature, / escaping the heat of the day's blaze; / Fortunate tree, whose leaves / rustled by zephyrs, / Sheltered her under its shade, / You, who remind me my sorrows / By reminding me her image! / Adornments of these banks and daughters of morning, / You whom I envy, you, less bright than she, / Flowers she embellished, when you touched her bosom! / Nightingales whose voice is less charming and less beautiful! Air more pure! Lovely abode, / Immortalized by her charms. / Dangerous and dear dwellings, where from her tender arms / love wounded all my senses / Listen to my final uttering; Receive my final tears.

This French translation first appeared in Voltaire's *Essais sur les mœurs* (II), where he attributes Petrarch's fame primarily to his love for Laura, not to Petrarch's intellectual genius. "S'il n'avait point aimé il serait beaucoup moins connu" (59), writes the philosopher, who, even though he translates the first stanza of Petrarch's canzone, admits that he does not hold its author in high regard. In one of his letters to the comte d'Argental, Voltaire expresses his admiration for the abbé de Sade, Jacques-François de Sade, Marquis

de Sade's uncle and mentor, who wrote an extensive biographical work on Petrarch in 1764, *Mémoires pour la vie de François Pétrarque*. His work influenced the spreading of different nuances of Petrarchisms in Europe. Edoardo Zuccato in *The Revival of Petrarch in Eighteenth-century England* (2005) notes the influences of French classicist thought on the abbé de Sade's technique of editing Petrarch's poems:

... he translated freely and took the liberty of improving and amending the original when necessary. He left out the obscurest texts, such as some canzone and sonnets, and he suppressed some quatrains and single lines here and there. Sade's taste was that of eighteenth-century French classicism and, in most cases, his versions are a sort of free paraphrase of the original. He disliked the "Metaphysical" elements in Petrarch, such as puns, antitheses and hyperboles and he omitted most of them (30).

Voltaire's rewriting of the canzone is followed by Mme Deshoulières's poem, which, according to de Jaucourt, is equally or more esthetically refined than Petrarch's canzone:

Le reste de l'ode de Pétrarque est également agréable; mais quoique charmante, je ne trouve point qu'elle surpasse en coloris cette tendresse langoureuse, cette mélancolie d'amour, et cette vivacité de sentiments qui règnent avec tant d'art, de finesse et de naïveté, dans la description poétique de la même fontaine par madame Deshoulières.

The rest of Petrarch's ode is equally beautiful; but even though charming, I do not think that it exceeds in color this languorous sentiment, this melancholy of love, and this vivacity of feelings which prevail with so much skill, finesse, and naïveté, in the poetical description of the same fountain by Madame Deshoulières.

Despite the anachronism, since Mme Deshoulières (1638-1694), short appellation for Antoinette du Ligier de la Garde Deshoulières, lived long after Petrarch, the chevalier de Jaucourt postures the Tuscan poet in a rather peripheral position in comparison to the renowned French poetess, member of two academies, Ricovrati of Padua and the Academy of Aries, considered the tenth muse in the French poetical hierarchy. Mme Deshoulières, born in a wealthy Parisian family, visited Vaucluse, the scene of Petrarch's great inspiration. She is cited by Voltaire among the "bons auteurs" in the article "Auteurs" which he wrote for the *Encyclopédie*. De Jaucourt reproduces Madame Deshoulières's entire poem and justifies his choice by saying that only what is redundant, indirectly referring to Petrarch's poem, has to be cut out from a work: "Que j'aie tort ou raison, je vais transcrire ici cette description sans aucun retranchement. Ce ne sont que les choses ennuyeuses qu'il faut élaguer dans un ouvrage" ("Whether wrong or right, I will transcribe here this description without any restraint. Only dull things have to be pruned out in a work"). Madame Deshoulières's poem is an ode to the inspirational love of Petrarch and Laura, reiterating the myth of the lovers, thus adding to Petrarch's glory.

The ode traces back to an immemorial time of a blissful period situated in the picturesque space of Vaucluse, which, in the poetess's view, owes its significance to the two

lovers. Instead of glorifying the space, the speaker gazes upon the past and relives the memories still lingering in the air. The landscape proper renders the poetess indifferent and her consciousness is entranced in a reverie state which brings on the scene the feelings, unaltered by time, of the two legendary lovers:

Je regarde indifféremment Les plus brillantes eaux, la plus verte prairie; ... A tout autre plaisir mon esprit se refuse, Et si vous me forcez à parler de Vaucluse, Mon coeur tout seul en parlera. ... Je ne vous ferai voir dans ces aimables lieux, Que Laure tendrement aimée, Et Pétrarque victorieux. Aussi bien de Vaucluse ils font encore la gloire; Le tems qui détruit tout, respecte leurs plaisirs;

I am watching impassively / The brightest waters, the greenest meadow; / ... From quite another pleasure my spirit refrains / And if you compel me to speak of Vaucluse, / My heart alone will speak about it ... / I will not reveal you in these lovely places, / Anything but Laura tenderly loved / and Petrarch triumphant. / They bestow such glory to Vaucluse; / Time which destroys everything, respects their love.

Madame Deshoulières does not focus on the physical location which in her view is a barren, insignificant sign devoid of the love that charges it with meaning: “Tout ce qu’a de charmant leur beauté naturelle, Ne peut m’occuper un moment. Les restes précieux d’une flamme si belle / Font de mon jeune cœur le seul amusement” (“All the charm their natural beauty holds / Cannot captivate me for an instant / Cherished traces of such a beautiful passion / Are my young heart’s sole delight”). The poetess transposes herself mentally in that memorable time, while physically dwelling in the mythical space of Vaucluse, hoping that she, too, would find a kindred love to Laura’s. The chevalier de Jaucourt’s gesture of truncating Petrarch’s poem, in an attempt to rearrange the canon, positioning the French authors in the center, is subverted by the content and the Petrarchan style of Madame Deshoulières’s poem, which in fact reiterates Petrarch’s fame.

The ambivalent position in regards to Petrarch is revealed in the contradictory stances expressed by the philosophers. We mentioned Voltaire’s position, equivocal as well, in that even though he does not foster a keen admiration for Petrarch, he recognizes his genius and translates a stanza of his poem. On the other hand, Jean-Jacques Rousseau does not hide his fondness of Petrarch. The exergue of *La nouvelle Héloïse* quotes one of Petrarch’s sonnets, dedicated to Laura’s death (“Non la connobe il mondo, mentre l’ebbe: / Connobill’ io ch’ a pianger qui rimasi”) and the protagonists use excerpts from Petrarchan sonnets in their passionate letters, expressing their innermost feelings, thus infusing them with Petrarchan virtue. In her article “Le mythe littéraire de Vaucluse,” Ève Duperray notes the following: “Dans *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, les mentions du *Canzoniere* sont autant de repères de la nature pétrarquiste de l’amour de Saint-Preux et Julie. La quête de la vertu transfigure ce qui aurait pu être une aventure bourgeoise ou libertine” (422) (“In *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the references to *Canzoniere* are as many clues of the Petrarchan nature of the love between Saint-Preux and Julie. The quest for virtue transforms all that could have been a bourgeois or libertine adventure”).

Another admirer of Petrarch is Abbé Roman, Jean-Joseph-Thérèse Roman, an acquaintance of Jean le Rond d'Alembert, one of the key figures of the *Encyclopédie*. Born in Avignon in 1726, a passionate admirer of Petrarch, Abbé Roman dedicates to his icon an extensive work entitled: *Le Génie du Pétrarque, ou Imitation en vers François de ses plus belles poésies, précédé de la Vie de cet homme célèbre, dont les actions et les écrits font une des plus singulières époques de l'histoire et de la littérature modernes* ("The Genius of Petrarch, or Imitation in French rhymes of his most beautiful poems, preceded by the Life of this famous man, whose actions and writings make up one of the most unique periods of modern history and literature). In Abbé Roman's view one has to read Petrarch in the original language to be able to appreciate his lyrical genius:

Si vous aviez lu Pétrarque dans sa langue, votre oreille auroit été flattée par la douce harmonie des vers, votre esprit étonné par l'élévation et la nouveauté des idées, votre cœur aurait été touché par la délicatesse des sentiments, votre imagination charmée par l'abondance et la vivacité des images (Giraud 385).

If you had read Petrarch in his language, your ear would have been flattered by the sweet harmony of lyrics, your mind astonished by the loftiness and novelty of ideas, your heart would have been touched by the delicacy of feelings, your imagination charmed by the abundance and liveliness of images.

Abbé Roman reproaches his poetic hero for what Abbé de Sade could not stand either: the rhetorical figures that render Petrarch's poetry complex, since they invoke a dimension that extends beyond the classical bounds—the hyperbole and the antithesis, among other stylistic figures, that dissociate him from the simple classic style. This concept affects Abbé Roman's translation which is rather an adapted rewriting in Yves Giraud's view: "Roman va s'inspirer de Pétrarque, reprenant un thème, un mouvement d'ensemble, des tournures, des termes sans craindre de s'en écarter parfois, sans viser la relative exactitude dont se targue l'abbé de Sade" (386) ("Roman will draw his inspiration from Petrarch, borrowing a theme, an overall trend, figures of speech, expressions without fearing to, at times, stray from them, without aiming for the relative precision the abbé de Sade boasts about").

Abbé Roman is not among the authors in the *Encyclopédie*, but the example of his admiration for Petrarch reflects the ambivalence of the eighteenth-century philosophers towards the Tuscan poet. On one hand, Petrarch's lyric, belonging to the courtly paradigm, was seen as defying the classical ideals that animated the spirit of the *encyclopédistes*, for whom the clarity of style and precision inspired by the primacy of reason over imagination is the common denominator. On the other hand, the project of the *Encyclopédie*, which began as a translation from Ephraim Chambers's *Cyclopaedia*, rapidly became a "French" project, meant to enrich and help shape the consciousness of what it meant to be French, without casting aside, but in fact embracing, the contradictions that this image entails. In his study *The Site of Petrarchism*, William J. Kennedy attributes in part the heterogeneous reception of Petrarch to his early commentators, who lent their political views and projected them onto the poet. An example of such commentaries is found in Alessandro Vellutello's edition (1525) which circulated in France and was used by the abbé de Sade as the material

from which he translated Petrarch's poems. Vellutello divided Petrarch's poems into three parts, having them correspond chronologically to Petrarch's life. The first two parts are *In vita di Laura* and *In morte di Laura*, the poet's beloved being the point of reference. The third part, *Terza parte*, represents a collection of the political and moral poems, in which Vellutello casts his interpretation of Petrarch's political allegiances. Kennedy notes the effects of this rearrangement and its reverberation for posterity:

The sheer bulk of Vellutello's newly constructed *Terza Parte* (Third Part) of Petrarch's *Rime sparse* throws into bold relief the concerns of Petrarch's poetry about national consciousness and the workings of tyranny and empire, and it testifies to the totemic power of these motifs and to their integration with the rest of his poetry. Alerted to the disposition of these motifs in a reconstituted *Rime sparse*, later poets and commentators would approach Petrarch with a heightened social, cultural, political, and historical awareness of their own national sentiments (53)

This gesture of appropriating what would be considered outside the French paradigm, justified by the search for a national sense and image, is inspired, in part, by Petrarch's writing in the vernacular and is influenced by the poet's early critics and commentators. Knowing that the abbé de Sade, responsible for translating and publishing many of Petrarch's poems, used Vellutello's codex as his original helps shed some light on the reasoning behind the choice to project Petrarch somewhat peripherally in the *Encyclopédie*. Although the tribute paid to the Provençal poets is legitimate and well founded, as even Petrarch calls Arnaut Daniel a "gran maestro d'amor" ("a great master of love"), the attempt to restrict the poet's work to its source of inspiration and place it in a dependent position reveals an attempt on the part of the *encyclopédistes* to enclose the Tuscan poet, who wrote his *Rime sparse* in Italian, within the framework of French lyrical tradition.

¹ Translations throughout are mine.

² The quotes from *L'Encyclopédie*, reproduced in their original orthography, are extracted from the digital version of The ARTFL Project, site hosted by the University of Chicago, <http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu>.

³ In the encyclopedic article, this canzone is positioned as number 14, whereas in recent editions, in keeping with Vaticano Latino 3195's order, Petrarch's last manuscript, the canzone is numbered as 126. This is possible since, as is the case with the work on Petrarch of the abbé de Sade, the version widely used was Vellutello's edition: he did not follow Petrarch's last manuscript's order, but created his own rearrangement of the *Canzoniere*. It is important also to note that between 1669 and 1816 there was no complete translation of the *Canzoniere* in French (Giraud 383).



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