autori delle opere stesse, che altrimenti avrebbero dovuto, inverosimilmente, fare un *collage* tenendo davanti allo stesso tempo molti volumi differenti nel momento in cui mettevano insieme la loro storia. Purtroppo i testi intermedi, fossero essi scritti o anche solo esemplari di quel patrimonio della tradizione orale della quale sappiamo assai poco con certezza, sono troppi perché la più convincente, la più documentata, la più intelligente ipotesi che oggi qualsiasi critico possa portare avanti non lasci, in ultima analisi, un fondo di esitazione e di smarrimento nella mente del lettore e dello studioso. Noi abbiamo, oggi, alcuni poemi cortesi in francese o in altre lingue, ma abbiamo anche la sicurezza che dei testi, e non solo quelli la cui esistenza è stata occasionalmente postulata nel corso degli studi per spiegare passaggi e fenomeni che altrimenti risulterebbero indecifrabili, sono andati perduti (come quello “del roi Marc e d'Iseut la blonde” di cui Chrétien si dichiara autore nei primi versi del *Cligès*); abbiamo alcuni cantari scritti dalla metà del Trecento in poi, di cui spesso si continua a discutere l'origine e la datazione, collegate al secolare problema della presunta paternità boccacciana dell'ottava, ma abbiamo anche la sicurezza che cantari e canterini esistevano anche prima, senza poter dire esattamente che cosa fossero i primi o che cosa facessero i secondi. E per quanto riguarda la derivazione diretta del cantare esaminato in questo lavoro da un *Ur-Gherardino* francese del XII secolo, il problema fondamentale rimane quello puntualmente evidenziato dalla stessa Predelli nella conclusione: “Resta . . . il grosso quesito di come un poema dell'ultimo quarto del XII secolo abbia potuto raggiungere senza mutazioni sostanziali—atmeno a livello della *fabula*—la metà del XIV secolo e tornare a galla sulle labbra di un canterino dopo quasi due secoli di silenzio”, mentre dal poco che sappiamo la “diffusione in Italia della materia romanzesca . . . pare dipendere, per lo più, dalle compilazioni prosastiche del XIII secolo” (263).

Non intendiamo tuttavia, con queste parole, avallare l'opinione di A.J. Holden, ricordata dalla Predelli stessa, per il quale “les spéculations de ce genre sont stériles, et ne peuvent aboutir à aucun résultat utile” (82); tali ricerche ci sembrano invece utilissime per l'approfondimento che recano allo studio dei poemi stessi, alla conoscenza del mondo in cui sono stati prodotti e alla genesi di quella civiltà letteraria che segna il passaggio dalla cultura del medioevo latino alle lingue e alle letterature romanze e alla civiltà dell'uomo moderno. E da tale punto di vista non ci possono essere dubbi che il presente volume sia da annoverarsi fra i contributi più validi e fecondi apparsi in questi ultimi anni.

ANTONIO FRANCESCHETTI

Scarborough College, University of Toronto

George W. McClure. *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991. Pp. x, 311.

This study on consolatory literature in the early Renaissance focusses on representative authors from Petrarch to Ficino and covers topics including grief, bereavement, fear, despair, general misfortune, and physical suffering and the types of consolation provided for them. Three chapters are devoted to Petrarch, whereas some minor authors are grouped together in a single chapter. In each instance the writer's works are discussed in chronological order and in relation to the particular biographical and historical context,

so that what emerges is a comprehensive history of the evolution of the consolatory topos. Not restricting himself to thematic content, McClure also examines the type of genres in which the topic was treated: poetry, epistles, dialogues and the like.

What could have resulted in a narrow discussion of a seemingly marginal theme is actually quite far-ranging. For the themes of sorrow and consolation are not taken in isolation; rather they are examined from many perspectives, so that their links with moral philosophy, psychology, and classicism are constantly highlighted. Moreover, McClure raises important issues concerning humanism: the relation of humanist ideas to antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the various proto-Renaissances, for one. Indeed he uses the theme under discussion as a kind of window on humanism and its major components. As he states, "by studying this [consolatory] tradition more closely we can learn much about the psychological functions of rhetoric and philosophy in Renaissance thought" (3).

In the introduction the author reviews all possible strands of thought which had a bearing on the treatment of the theme in the period in question: the ancient philosophy of the Platonic, Stoic, and Peripatetic schools; the classical literature of consolation produced by the rhetoricians and poets, especially the influential contributions by Cicero, Boethius, and Ovid; and the Christian adaptation, which saw human misery as punishment and not just as the random result of fortune, as exemplified by the Fathers of the Church and mediaeval works on pastoral care.

Using this introductory material as a reference point, McClure provides analyses of each of the works of the Renaissance authors, taking into account previous interpretations and also the pertinent contextual data (for which much documentation is provided in the copious notes which fill 110 pages!). In the body of the discussion, he carries out a close comparison of the texts; he is thus able to identify the sources, pinpoint the nuances, assess the innovations, and generally trace the developments in the concept of human grief and the formulation of remedies for it. He concludes each section with a useful summary of the findings.

Petrarch is given most attention not just for his extensive treatment of the topic but also for the distinctive versatility he displays in reaching a "remarkable synthesis of traditions and pieties" (19). McClure examines Petrarch's varied roles, as self-consoler in the *Secretum*, public consoler in the letters, and universal consoler in *De remediis utriusque fortune*, and shows how Petrarch employs the remedies of the love poet, consolations of the philosopher, admonitions of the priest, and the salves of the doctor. Indeed by concentrating on this specific topic and looking closely at some of the more neglected aspects of the texts, he can go beyond the conventional readings. For example, the *Secretum*, usually seen as an autobiography, is for him also a work of consolation. In the letters Petrarch explores the psychology of parental loss and, as McClure deduces, establishes a tradition which continues in the Quattrocento. Finally, Petrarch's most systematic treatment of consolation in *De remediis*, McClure argues, is related to his polemic against the medical doctors who had failed to provide the necessary moral wisdom. Petrarch's response to misery, which is decried in a manner reminiscent of the mediaeval *contemptus mundi*, in essence leads to a Renaissance anthropocentric stress on the dignity of man, and his concept of misery as a psychological condition helps shape early-modern psychology.

By comparison with Petrarch, Salutati is found to be more religious and more social in his approach to the subject. His stress on human ties and free will and his recognition of the therapeutic power of time are identified as the distinctive features of his adaptation of the tradition.

The period 1400-61, dealt with in one of the chapters, is represented by Salutati, G. Manetti, Conversini, and Filelfo who use different genres, including the dialogue, to deal with bereavement, especially parental grief, thus providing a true art of mourning. The "science of consoling" instead is presented in the clerical manuals produced in the 1460s by Matteo Bosso and Nicolaus of Modrus. McClure shows that, no longer satisfied with ascetic Stoic and Christian assumptions, the Quattrocento humanists tended to link consolation to human dignity, to the immortality of the soul, and to the important role of children. On the last issue he wonders "whether humanist ideas of man's dignity and divine image and likeness were eventually transferred to the notion of the child as an image and likeness of the parent. In a word, did the Renaissance theme of the 'dignity of man' promote a greater sense of the 'dignity of the child'?" (111), he asks, raising a hypothesis at the end of his discussion. (In many other instances, he uses a series of questions at the outset, to indicate the approach to be followed in the ensuing discussion.)

The parameters set for his study—Petrarch at the beginning and Ficino at the end—have not been chosen gratuitously. They actually establish a structural balance: at one end is Petrarch's secularized concept of *accidia*; at the other, Ficino's notion of melancholy. But the comparison McClure draws between them reveals a fundamental difference too. As he explains, "whereas Petrarch drew on the sweet sorrow of the poet, Ficino drew on the ecstatic abstraction of the Platonic philosopher" (149) and added the doctrine of communing souls. As a doctor of souls, Ficino fused the medical and Platonic perspectives and gained an influential psychiatric understanding of human despair which was rendered secular, popular, and legitimate. In his letters, philosophical abstracts, and orations Ficino perfected what McClure deems a holistic Platonic medicine of body, spirit, and soul.

The general conclusion reached is that the traditional themes inherited from classical antiquity, patristic texts, and mediaeval writings, were given a new secular direction in the age of humanism and the humanists' interest in despair was part of the lay psychology that constituted an essential aspect of the new moral philosophy. In the final chapter of the book McClure underlines his main arguments and adds references to the legacy established by the consolatory tradition as it was handed down to Cardano, Thomas More, and other authors of Northern Europe, reaching its culminating point with Robert Burton who popularized melancholy as a cultural disease.

This book proves convincingly that the attention given to temporal sorrow was one of the noteworthy aspects of Italian humanist thought. It provides good interpretations of the texts, keen observations on specific parts of them (e.g. the language of shared bereavement in one of Salutati's letters); furthermore, it establishes a veritable taxonomy of consolatory themes, a feature that makes it a very useful reference work.

OLGA ZORZI PUGLIESE

University of Toronto

Rosario Contarino. *Leon Battista Alberti moralista*. Caltanissetta-Roma: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 1991 (Scritture e letture 3). Pp. 249.

Gli studi albertiani che hanno seguito le celebrazioni del cinquecentenario della morte