David Wallace. *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. Pp. xix, 555.

David Wallace finds Chaucer engaged in surprising ideological areas. Wallace's account of Chaucer's polity challenges conventionally evaluative periodisations as well as offering a radically new configuration of Chaucer's involvement with discourses that are generally associated with the Italian Renaissance. Chaucer's reworking of those discourses suggests the ideal of a generously inclusive associational polity in comparison with which the subsequent Renaissance must appear as a dark age of autocratic absolutism. Wallace approaches Chaucer's poetry through a rich blend of Marxist historiography, cultural materialism, and gender studies.

The Chaucer who emerges from Wallace's study found in the polarity of Milan and Florence (represented largely by Petrarch and Boccaccio) a textual and cultural focus for his own location in English culture and politics. Chaucer had a mercantile background, but was employed in a court whose king had increasingly absolutist yearnings. The guild-structure of Chaucer's mercantile world suggested the possibility of a polity that was associational, voluntarist, and multivocal. Wallace shows that Chaucer was politically sophisticated enough to read and understand the cultural semiotics of the republican Florence that he visited in 1373, and to recognize its antithesis in absolutist Lombardy under the Visconti.

The *compagnie* of pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* at once recalls English guild-structure and the voluntary *brigata* of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (which Chaucer had not read). Both texts, Wallace argues, emerge from similar sites of political conflict and aspiration. However, in its striking inclusiveness, Chaucer's associational *compagnie* differs from the Florentine *brigata*; Chaucer's group allows more varied and more distinctive voices to be heard speaking for themselves, and membership is less restricted by class or occupation. Lombardy is always the site of tyranny (or, at least, of absolutism) in Chaucer. Here, Griselda suffers Walter's tyrannical gaze in Boccaccio's vernacular, Petrarch's Latin, and Chaucer's English in *The Clerk's Tale*; here May defeats the male absolutism of January. Albertano of Brescia provides Chaucer with one of his lengthiest arguments against masculine absolutism, the domestic reflex of political tyranny. Chaucer knew Milan, having visited it as a diplomat in 1378, during the reign of Bernabò Visconti.

Wallace argues convincingly that Chaucer's experience of Renaissance Italy and its literature helped shape the discursive tensions and polarities of *The Canterbury Tales*, and that Chaucer is writing out of the same ideological problematics as writers such as Boccaccio and Petrarch. For example, most critics place the first dialogic break in *The Canterbury Tales* at the point when the drunken Miller interrupts Harry Bailey's orderly progression of tale-tellers. Wallace, however, suggests that the first break comes even earlier with *The Knight's Tale*, the *first* of the tales. The loose, as-

sociational structure of the *General Prologue*, Wallace maintains, is contradicted by the Knight's gloomy vision of a dreary absolutism, a drastic reworking of Boccaccio's *Teseida*. Chaucer uses *The Monk's Tale* to align himself with Boccaccio against Petrarch in his treatment of the falls of great men. Like Boccaccio, and unlike Petrarch, Chaucer refuses to locate the problems raised by the fall of princes in a comfortably distant past. Chaucer's tale emphasizes the solitude of tyrants, and their fall as the inevitable consequence of that solitude.

A second thread of Wallace's argument involves Chaucer's persistent gendering of political debate. Theseus' absolutism silences women; Hippolita and Emelye are the pawns of Thesean politics. Apollo's tyranny in *The Manciple's Tale* kills his wife. The silence of the female voice accompanies tyranny in Chaucer and, as Wallace shows, women's rhetoric (usually domestically deployed) is frequently the only corrective to or restraint upon male absolutist aspirations and behaviour. Even Theseus will listen to women if they prostrate themselves before him. Prudence (in *The Tale of Melibee*, based on Albertano of Brescia) persuades her husband to give up thoughts of vengeance on the men who raped her and attacked her daughter. The Wife of Bath rhetorically creates space for herself and her pleasures in the face of male attempts to tyrannize women. In her tale, a woman's discourse outweighs the masculine desire for retributive justice and sovereignty. May uses language to persuade her husband, old January, to interpret what he sees as she wants him to. In a brilliant analysis of the two prologues to *The Legend of Good Women*, Wallace suggests that the later version represents Chaucer's recognition that, with the death of Anne of Bohemia, no female voice remains to intercede with the increasingly tyrannical Richard II, and that the possibility of an associational polity, like that suggested by *The Canterbury Tales*, is no longer available. Interestingly, it is the *poet* who needs feminine intercession in *The Legend*; feminine rhetoric is his only protection against the wrathful God of Love.

Wallace argues convincingly that Chaucer enacts textually the political conflicts that we associate with the Italian Renaissance, and that these conflicts were also firmly rooted in the England of his day. Wallace's tantalizingly brief glances at Lancastrian and sixteenth-century English literature (especially Shakespeare) confirm Chaucer's pessimistic assessment of the possibilities for an associational polity. He suggests that sixteenth-century England had to reject Chaucer in favour of Petrarch (and the aristocratically inclined Boccaccio) because Chaucer's successful union of individual voices within an associational polity was simply too inclusive and voluntarist to suit the aristocratic society of a state with a radically centralizing government. Henry VIII was a more successful tyrant than Richard II. In Wallace's view, a glimpse of the older associational polity appears in the tavern scenes from *Henry IV*, Part 1. But, however much Prince Hal may recognize his need for the associational (if decayed) world of Sir John Falstaff, he will finally reject it. Even at his most involved, Hal looks at Falstaff's world as a rather critical outsider. Peasant entertainment is a source of aristocratic, contemptuous mirth in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Chaucer's countryfolk always get their own back on urban sophisticates. As Wallace shows, this inclusive reciprocity separates him from Shakespeare, and even from Boccaccio whose peasants are regularly fooled and tricked by their more sophisticated superiors, but are never allowed to return the compliment.

A brief review cannot say enough about Wallace's work. Theoretically, he is sophisticated, and deploys theory unobtrusively in a language that is neither obscure nor

rebarbative. The accessibility of Wallace's argument is astonishing. Culturally, the book is extremely rich in its allusiveness. Wallace analyzes material from the arts, law, commerce, and many other areas in support of his thesis. His work draws on the very best of recent scholarship and criticism, and must provide a new direction for how we teach and think about the literature of the *longue durée* from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth. Finally, Wallace is witty... seriously and provocatively entertaining. For example, he argues that Chaucer is the sixth husband in search of whom the Wife of Bath has come on the pilgrimage! Shakespeare, Wallace suggests, casts Chaucer as Bottom the Weaver in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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Francesco Palmario di Ancona. *Rime*. Edizione critica a cura di Nelia Cacace Saxby. Bologna: Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1997 (Collezione di opere inedite o rare pubblicate dalla Commissione per i testi di lingua 151). Pp. xcvi, 175.

Viene alla luce con questo volume un poeta del Quattrocento marco-emiliano finora quasi del tutto sconosciuto, Francesco Palmario di Ancona, laureato *in utroque iure* all'Università di Padova (1434) e poi funzionario alla corte riminese di Sigismondo Malatesta. Le *Rime* di Palmario si conservano in un unico codice alla Bodley Library (Oxford), acquistato nel 1817 in seguito alla vendita della biblioteca dell'abate Luigi Canonici. La curatrice le ha accuratamente trascritte seguendo l'ordine originale del manoscritto e vi ha aggiunto un esteso apparato critico composto di introduzione, note, bibliografia, e indici.

Il lungo saggio introduttivo (ix-xcvi) si divide in quattro diverse sezioni. La prima è un attento e minuzioso studio del codice stesso (ix-xiv). La curatrice ne esamina non solo la grafia, le aggiunte, le annotazioni, e le correzioni, ma anche la carta, le misure, e le filigrane. Riesce così a datarlo tra il 1460-1480 e a concludere, tra l'altro, che questo è "una copia intermedia fra gli originali e la bella copia finale" andati ormai perduti. La seconda sezione sull'autore e le sue rime (xv-lv) ne ricostruisce la figura politico-culturale e la aggancia al suo corpus poetico rivelando i contatti e collegamenti di Palmario non solo con diversi intellettuali del tempo, quali Leonardo Bruni e Biagio Guasconi (fiorentino esiliato ad Ancona), ma anche con figure politiche, quali il cardinale Prospero Colonna e Sigismondo Malatesta, signore di Rimini. Rime politiche, epistolari e amorose si alternano finché Palmario non entra nel servizio del Malatesta; a questo punto la sua vena poetica inizia ad esaltare non solo il nuovo signore, ma anche l'amore di questi per la bella Isotta degli Atti (di cui il Malatesta si era impossessato nel 1446 quando la giovane fanciulla era ancora tredicenne). Funzionario-poeta di Sigismondo, Palmario compone queste rime non solo in voce propria, elogiando l'amore di Sigismondo per Isotta, ma anche in voce di Sigismondo, designando l'amata con l'appellativo "Isotta mia." Benché i richiami, calchi, vocaboli, e temi petrarcheschi abbondino, le rime di Palmario ritengono tuttavia qualcosa di originale nell'espressione di contesti personali e regionali in cui egli opera, come