CHAPTER 5

Garland and Mosaic in Literary Humanism

Triumph and Laureation

The coming chapters will consider the ‘ornament of antiquity’—by this meaning what is ‘ornamental’ about antiquity—how it can valorise or illustrate praise. We look first at the association of poetry and praise, which develops from medieval and late antique poetry to the triumphal themes prominent in Humanist poetics.¹ The triumph which promises the “eternity” of fame and the recovery of the past signals the association of ornament with temporality which we noted in Bruni. This is explored through Petrarch’s use of the laurel. We then consider the use of ornatus mundi topoi by fifteenth century Humanists and see how they promoted an increasingly rhetorical understanding of ornament, with its basis in universal ordering treated in conventional terms. As the volume of ancient texts grows and questions about their imitation dominate poetics, ornament becomes increasingly focused on the stylistic surface at the expense of the profound relation between involucrum and doctrinal or ‘mysterious’ content. In Petrarch, the sermo ornatus of poetry is the allegory that creates wonders but also the style founded on imitation and the ‘absorption’ of classical sources.² This appears in Humanist discussions of varietas.

Petrarch and Triumph

The centrality of praise and fame to poetry appears in the interest in poetic coronation or laureation in Trecento poets.³ Boccaccio spoke of poetry as granting immortal fame and his Trattatello in laude di Dante opens with the forms of honour bestowed by the ancients: deification, marble statue, great

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² For Petrarch’s discussions of imitation using the bee topos and the family resemblances, see Familiares 1.8; XXII.19.

³ See Boccaccio, Trattatello in laude di Dante in Opere in versi, Corbaccio, Trattatello in laude di Dante, Prose latine, epistole, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci (Ricciardi: Milan, 1965), 622, on poetic coronation, supposedly established by Solon.
tombs, triumphal arch, laurel crown. The theme of poetic coronation also leads Boccaccio into a history of poetry. The *Raccolta aragonese*, the anthology of Tuscan poetry attributed to Poliziano and Lorenzo de’ Medici, opens with a similar *laus* of the Olympic Games, the Roman triumph and related “mirabilissimi ornamenti”—triumphal car and arch, marble trophies, theatres, statues, palms, coronae, funeral orations which, like poetry, celebrate fame and ‘praise’.

Dante aspired to coronation by Apollo in *Paradiso* 1.13–15 and echoed Statius on the twin laurels of poet and emperor which flourish in rivalry. He opens *Paradiso* xxv.1–9 with his longing to be crowned in the Baptistery of Florence. Giovanni del Virgilio proposed crowning Dante in Bologna if he would write in Latin; Antonio Pucci described the poet wearing the laurel crown at his funeral in 1321.

The Trecento poetic coronations start with that of Albertino Mussato in 1315 by the bishop and rector of the University of Padua, for his *Ecerinis*, a tragedy based on Seneca, on the fame and fall of Ezzelino da Romano. The putative

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4 Ibid., 565. On poetic immortality, see Boccaccio, *Genealogie deorum gentilium libri* xiv.4, ed. Vincenzo Romano (Bari: Laterza, 1951), 11, 689: “Nam ut liquido constat, fere immor-talita sunt, cum nomine componentis carmina poetarum”.
5 *Trattatello*, 613 ff.
8 Boccaccio, *Trattatello*, 612, notes Dante’s longing for a Florentine laureation.
9 For Dante’s correspondence with del Virgilio on the proposed coronation, see Trapp, “*Owl’s Ivy*”, 238; Ernest Wilkins, “The Coronation of Petrarch” in *The Making of the ‘Canzoniere’ and other studies* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1951), 9–69, 23. Posthumous Florentine laureations were awarded to Bruni and Carlo Marsuppini, whose tombs face each other in Santa Croce. The tomb typology shared in the later Quattrocento and early Cinquecento by rulers, captains and Humanists also evokes the triumph as prize of generals and poets.
10 Trapp, “*Owl’s Ivy*”, 237, notes the triumphal character of the festival; Wilkins, “Coronation”, 21–23, sees the elements of the academic *conventus* in Mussato’s laureation. On Mussato