

CHAPTER II

THE DEFENSE OF ALLEGORY

In Chapter I we saw that virtually every humanist of the fourteenth century was attacked for the immorality of his literary activity.

Gerson himself had studied classical literature, and continued to quote from it during and after the Quarrel of the Roman. Yet in that Quarrel Gerson condemns literature which is not explicitly moral. It seems clear then that Gerson did not think such studies a danger to his own salvation. Yet, as I will show in a later chapter, Gerson cannot be considered a humanist, in spite of his interest in classical style. I shall also attempt to show that the French humanist defenders of the Roman could have easily been suspected, and not without reason, of questionable or "immoral" behavior and attitudes in the same way as were the earlier humanists we have already looked at. Therefore, I shall show, there was good reason for Gerson's believing that, as pursued by the humanist defenders of the Roman, studies of the Roman and of works similar to it in the absence of a literal Christian moral sense, might well

be harmful to them and to others. It is not necessary to assume--though it is no doubt true as well--that Gerson was just reacting to the fact that earlier humanists had a somewhat questionable moral reputation. No doubt the humanist movement was in sufficiently bad odor among theologians for the suspicions of someone like Gerson to have been aroused in any case. But the little that is known about the attitudes and behavior of the circle of humanists around the Col brothers and Jean de Montreuil is enough to have made Gerson feel uneasy.

The main point of Gerson's and Christine de Pisan's denunciation of the Roman and its defense had become an attack on the validity of studying through allegorical interpretation poems which are not moral in a literal sense. Rather than sticking to an attack on the Roman alone they raise their criticisms to a general principle. This fact is important. It shows that the attack on the Roman was in reality a much broader assault. By implication at least it would certainly include Latin poetry. I believe that it was intended to do so.

It is understandable therefore that the defenders of the Roman could not concentrate upon a defense of the Roman alone. Their appeal to read the poem as a "fiction," according to the characters' natures, is more a defense of

a theory of interpretation than of one poem. Both opponents of the Roman and its defenders agree that the question of allegory is the main point in dispute in the Quarrel. The defense of allegorical interpretation is also the central point in the fourteenth century defenses of poetry by other humanists. The study of classical poetry was constantly under attack as dangerous to morality, as we have seen. The constant response from the humanist camp was a defense of the benefit to be derived from an allegorical reading of poetry.

In this present chapter I will examine the earlier humanists and establish this striking similarity between their defenses of poetry and the arguments of the Roman's defenders.

1. Albertino Mussato

Mussato, the inaugurator of the tradition of Humanist defenses of poetry, is also the originator of many of the arguments used in later defenses. In Epistola IV Mussato states the essential justification for allegorizing classical poetry. He argues that through the poets God spoke truths allegorically akin to those he revealed in Scripture:

Haec fuit a summo demissa scientia Caelo [i.e. Poesis,
l. 41]

Cum simul excelto jus habet illa Deo.
Quae Genesis planis memorat primordia verbis,
Nigmate majori mystica Musa docet.
Quid movisse Jovi quondam fera bella Gigantes
Adstructam Caelo quam Babylona, fuit?
Confudit linguas Deus hic, qui fulmina jecit,
Qui Deus est nobis, Juppiter ille fuit.¹

He continues that Jove's revenge upon Lycaon is the pagan way of showing God's punishment of Lucifer, as in holy writings (ll. 53-56).

Poetry was written by Moses and is in the New Testament as well because the astonishment it stimulates attracts the attentive mind more. In fact, the whole Bible is poetry:

Allicit attentas magis admiratio mentes,
Et juvat insertis fabula culta jocis.
Numen ad Hebraeos per vasta pericula Ductor
Dicitur hexametro conciliasse pede.
Si Bene dispicias, quod scripsit Apocalis illa
Per varias formas, tota Poesis erat.
Agnus adoranti tabula candente ponitur,
Interina quod mens intueatur habet. (ll. 59-66)

Poetry was once another Philosophy or way to truth, that is, and those who cannot "see" or understand poetry lack reason, for in it God reveals his truth to the attentive:

Hi ratione carent, quibus est invisita Poesis,
Altera quae quondam Philosophia fuit. (ll. 67-68)

¹ Graevius, ed., ll. 45-52, col. 41.

Therefore poetry benefits those who study it from earliest youth:

Quo magis hanc [Poesis] primis artem scruteris ab annis,
Splendidior tanto nobilitate sua est. (ll. 71-72)²

Fundamentally these same arguments are repeated in Ep. VII. The first poets, he now asserts, were theologians, and taught their people that a God existed (ll. 15-16). These early poets were the "vessels," or instruments of God in their time:

Hique alio dici coeperunt nomine Vates.
Quisquis erat Vates, Vas erat ille Dei. (ll. 19-20)

²I would emend the last word to "es." Lines 69-70 are corrupt, it seems, but appear to attack theologians as critics of poetry: "Forsan Aristotelis si non videre volumen,/Carmen cur de se jure querantur habent." It is unlikely, however, that they can mean what Curtius suggests: "Die Poesis darf also als Philosophie gelten [ll. 67-68] und vermag den Aristoteles zu ersetzen" (Curtius, p. 222; emphasis added). Emending "Carmen" to "Carmina," with Graevius, the lines may mean something like: "if they do not see Aristotle's book they have a reason to attack poetry ("carmina")"; that is, the critics of poetry--identified with Scholastics, or worshippers of Aristotle--recognize philosophy only where they see the works of the master, or quotations from them. Dazzi's translation is more literal, but doesn't seem to make much sense in the context: "Forse se non hanno visto il libro d'Aristotele,/hanno in se a buon diritto di che lagnarsi della poesia" (Il Mussato preumanista, p. 189). Anyway, as Ep. XVIII shows, Mussato's verse is frequently unclear.

This early (i.e. pagan) poetry should be studied by Christians, since it was once a Theology:

Illa igitur nobis stat contemplanda Poesis,
Altera quae quondam Theologia fuit. (ll. 21-22)

"Joannes de Viguntia" should not abhor the figmenta of the poets, Mussato continues. All the Bible is full of "figments," and thus is Poetry (ll. 23-30). Allegorical or "mystical" writing, "Quum secus intendit, quam sua verba sonet" (l. 34)³ sharpens the mind, as he has said before. Christ spoke in "enigmas," or poetic fictions (ll. 37-38). In fact poetry was invented in schools of Philosophy as especially suitable to teach dogmas (ll. 41-44).

Mussato does admit that there are and were sinful poets. The ancients called certain camp-followers "poets" because of their gestures and dances, like the present-day mummers who make faces. These men laugh at different fictions and are laughed at themselves, and they puff up their trifles with lasciviousness. It is said they were brought by Scipio from Carthage. Such poets are therefore to be avoided. Augustine rejects them. They stimulate

³This is the traditional definition of allegory: "alieniloquium." See Isidore of Seville, Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum Libri XX, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911; repr. 1966), I.xxxvii.22.

laughter, but move men to sin. This kind of acting-- "feigning"⁴ or acting out what is being sung--is wrong. Mussato does not so "feign," or approve of these things, however. Nor is he ashamed to tell what Poetry has really done (ll. 59-79).

Mussato's last poem (Ep. XVIII) appears to be unfinished.⁵ It is basically a long illustration of the theological truths contained in classical myths and poetry, and of the citation and use of poetry in the Bible and by holy men. Mussato does not retreat an inch from his position that poetry is divine in origin. To this poem he⁶ appends a prose letter in which he attempts to refute Giovannino da Mantova's Thomistic objections to poetry point by point.⁷

⁴I translate "feign" to try to give the several connotations of the Latin fingere used here by Mussato. Of course Mussato does not want to include poetic figmenta or fictiones (from the same root) in his criticism.

⁵Even admitting a lacuna or two, it simply does not cover the same points as does the prose letter appended to it in Graevius' edition. Perhaps, however, it was not meant to, although this is what the rubric, "Responsiva novem rationibus ad singula," implies.

⁶Presumably this letter is by Mussato, as all have taken it to be. The original manuscript might make this clear.

⁷See Curtius, pp. 223 ff.

2. Petrarch

Petrarch's letter to his brother Gherardo (Fam. X, 4) picks up most of Mussato's main arguments. With Petrarch they then become common to the whole humanist tradition of the defense of poetry.

Petrarch explicitly calls his literary technique "allegory":

. . . theologie guidem minime adversa poetica est. Miraris? parum abest quin dicam theologiam poeticam esse de Deo: Cristum modo leonem modo agnum modo vermem dici, quid nisi poeticum est? mille talia in Scripturis Sacris invenies que persequi longum est. Quid vero aliud parabole Salvatoris in Evangelio sonant, nisi sermonem a sensibus alienum sive, ut uno verbo exprimam, alieniloquium, quam allegoriam usitatori vocabulo nuncupamus?⁸

And allegory, says Petrarch, is the essence of poetry:

"Atqui ex huiusce sermonis genere poetica omnis intexta est." After discussing the poetry in the Bible, the theological nature of poetry, and the citations of the classics by the Church fathers, Petrarch concluding with an appeal to his brother to accept truth in whatever form it comes:

Noli itaque, frater, horrere quod Cristo amicissimis ac sanctissimis viris placuisse cognoscis; sensibus intende, qui si veri salubresque sunt, quolibet stilo

⁸Petrarch, Fam. X, 4, ed. Rossi, II, p. 301, 11. 7-15.

illos amplectere. Laudare dapem fictilibus appositam, eandem in auro fastidire, aut dementis aut ypocrite est. Avari est aurum sitire, non posse pati pusilli animi est; non fit auro melior cibus certe, nec deterior. Profecto autem sicut aurum sic carmen in suo genere nobilius non nego, quanto scilicet rectiora sunt que ad regulam fiunt, quam que temere. Non quod ideo carmen expetendum censeam, ne spernendum quidem. (ll. 67-77)

Petrarch admits that he had explained all this "pro stili excusatione" (l. 77), to justify his using a classical style and form for a Christian purpose. And, indeed, his Bucolicum Carmen is perhaps a better defense of poetry than his theoretical arguments. Mussato had never really met the objections raised by "Joannes de Viguntia" to his "priapeian" verse. When questioned about its propriety the earlier humanist had launched into a lofty but abstract defense of poetic activity in general, as though it were poetry which was under attack. In fact "Joannes de Viguntia" and Giovannino da Mantova really attacked not poetry itself but Mussato's specific practice and his equation of poetic truth with theological and Christian truth.

Petrarch gives an extended concrete example of poetry which is classical in form and style, moral but non-Christian in its literal meaning but thoroughly Christian in content, in the Bucolicum Carmen. The first Bucolic, of which this letter gives Petrarch's allegorization, is in fact almost a continuation of the first part of the letter,

a kind of defense of the practice of poetry. In it "Silvius" (Petrarch) justifies his pursuit of a career in poetry to "Monicus" (Gherardo) who argues for the life of the cloister.

This explicit defense of poetry by means of the theory of moral allegory is new to Petrarch's writing at this point. Of course, the theory of allegorical interpretation of the classics was very old, and Petrarch had referred to it before. In a well-known passage in his Coronation Oration Petrarch sets forth the same ideas in discussing the poet's profession:

Scire decet preclarissimi viri poete officium atque professionem quam multi immo fere omnes opinantur. Nam ut eleganter ait lactantius institutionum libro p.^o nesciunt qui sit poetice licentie modus quousque progredi fingendo liceat cum officium poete in eo sit ut ea que vere gesta sunt in alia specie obliquis figurationibus cum decore aliquo conversa traducat. . . . Hec lactantius hinc est quod macrobius super VI. de republica secundo comentario ait his verbis Et hoc esse volunt quod homerus divinarum omnium inventionum fons et origo sub poetici nube figmenti verum sapientibus intelligi dedit, Iovem cum diis ceteris id est stellis profectum in oceanum ethiopibus tum ad epulas invitantibus per quam ymaginem fabulosam homerum significasse volunt hauriri de humore nutrimenta sideribus. . . . Longum esset per cuncta discurrere sed si tempus non deforet nec vererer auribus vestris inferre fastidium possem facile demonstrare poetas sub velamine figmentorum nunc fisica nunc moralia nunc hystorias comprehendisse ut verum fiat quod sepe dicere soleo. Inter poete et ystorici et philosophi seu moralis seu naturalis officium hoc interesse quod inter nubilosum et serenum celum interest cum utrobique

eadem sit claritas in subiecto sed pro captu spectatum diversa. Eo tamen dulcior fit poesis quo laboriosius quesita veritas magis atque magis inventa dulcescit. . . .⁹

Here Petrarch addresses an audience of admirers of poetry. He takes no pains at all to systematically defend the study of poetry, precisely because he does not feel it to be under attack. He confines himself to outlining some ancient and well-accepted ideas and definitions.

Petrarch's most famous and most extended defense of poetry is that in the Invective contra Medicum. In Book I, the earliest part of the work (written shortly after 1351, i.e. two years or so after Fam. X, 4),¹⁰ Petrarch returns to the allegorical defense of poetic activity. He quotes the same passage from Lactantius' Institutes and continues

. . . poete, inquam, studium est veritatem rerum pulcris velaminibus adornare, ut vulgus insulsum, cuius tu pars ultima es, lateat, ingeniosis autem studioisque lectoribus et quesitu difficilior et dulcior sit inventu. (ll. 403-06)

⁹Petrarch, "Collatio edita per clarissimum poetam franciscum petrarcam florentinum rome in capitolio tempore laureationis sue," in Scritti Inediti di Francesco Petrarca. Pubblicati ed Illustrati da Attilo Hortis (Trieste, 1874), pp. 320-21; English translation in Ernest Hatch Wilkins, Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch (Cambridge, Ma: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1955), pp. 306-07.

¹⁰See note 38 to Chapter I above.

Since poets record the fame of the virtuous, virtue therefore has need of poetry to perpetuate its memory "quorum [i.e. of the poets] adminiculo ipsa etiam virtus eget, non equidem in se ipsa, sed in eo quod habet cum tempore et cum oblivione certamen" (ll. 419-21).

The third book of the Invective contains several lengthy elaborations on the subject of poetic obscurity. This marks a shift in emphasis from Petrarch's earlier defenses of poetry, and from Mussato's writings as well. This shift in emphasis is away from merely establishing the fact of poetic moral allegory, to defending it in spite of its relative inaccessibility to the readers. It corresponds to a shift in the grounds on which poetry is being attacked.

The Medicus (whose writing was the occasion for Petrarch's essay) has apparently restated his grounds for attacking poetry. He derides the usefulness of poetry¹¹ and tries to minimize its importance relative to science (ll. 143 ff.) and the Liberal Arts (ll. 107 ff.). But the grounds for these depreciations of poetry are clearly moral, and morality is the real essence of the Doctor's

¹¹Petrarch, Invective, III, ll. 48 ff.; 57-58; 68-83; ed. Ricci, pp. 59-60.

attack. The Doctor: (1) attacks the poets as enemies of the true faith (ll. 24-26); (2) says that the end of poetry is mulcendo fallere (ll. 48-55); and (3) cites some examples (esp. Boethius and the scenicis meretriculas again) of poetry being attacked as immoral.

Is it possible that the Doctor is unaware of the ubiquitous medieval tradition of moral allegory as applied to classical poetry? I believe this is impossible. Petrarch clearly believes it, too, for he does not spend a single line in Book III of the Invective outlining the theory of allegory, as he did in the much earlier Book I.

Instead Petrarch spends much of the last section of the Book III dealing with the Doctor's objections concerning poetic obscurity. This is evidently the main point of the Doctor's attack. For, a moralist might argue, if classical poetry is too difficult to understand or to allegorize in a moral way, and if it is unchristian in a literal sense, then in fact moral benefit will be derived from it only by the relatively few very sophisticated readers. The less apt will be reading essentially only immoral verse.

This is the central point made by both Gerson and Christine de Pisan. They do not deny that a moral interpretation may be read into the Roman. They merely assert that

most readers will not do so. They imply therefore that to trot out the allegorical defense as though it will in fact be used by readers is simply dishonest.

In this way, Gerson and Christine de Pisan also place the major emphasis of their attack upon the question of "poetic obscurity." For our purposes, this makes Petrarch's defense of poetic obscurity even more significant. For it became a central point in the tradition of defenses of poetry, and also influenced the defenders of the Roman, whose writings stand squarely within this tradition.

Petrarch's response to the Doctor's accusation begins at l. 357:

Superest ut illi calumnie respondeam, qua obscuris
delectari arquor, quasi notitiam rerum vulgo invidens
debilioris ingenii. . . .

After refuting the charge of envy by citing the virtues of the Latin poets, Petrarch reveals his rationale for poetic obscurity:

Quod si forte stilus insuetis videatur occultior,
non ea invidia est, sed intentioris animi stimulus,
et exercitii nobilioris occasio. (ll. 377-79)

This argument is nothing new in itself. What distinguishes it here is the space Petrarch devotes to it. Philosophers, beginning with Aristotle, Plato, and Heraclitus, are famous for their obscurity, he says (ll. 379-82). But the greatest

justification for poetic obscurity is sacred scripture
itself:

Quid sermo ipse divinum . . .? Quam in multis obscurus
atque perplexus est! cum prolatus sis ab eo Spiritu
qui homines ipsos mundumque creaverat, nedum, si vellet,
et verba nova reperire, et repertis clarioribus uti
posset? (ll. 382-86)

Petrarch continues with several quotations which show the
difficulties and the delight which St. Augustine found in
the obscurity of the scriptures (ll. 392-95; 396-99; 400-
05). St. Gregory is called to witness as well (ll. 405-
11).

This is how Petrarch refutes the criticism leveled
at poetry--that it will be misread by its audience. If
the scriptures which are for everyone are obscure, then why
cannot poetry, which is not for the many but for the few
alone, be obscure as well?

Que, si de scripturis illis recte discuntur [the quota-
tions from Augustine and Gregory], que sunt omnibus
proposite, quanto rectius de illis que paucissimis?
(ll. 413-14)

In Petrarch's day the knowledge of classical literature
was in fact restricted to "the few"--to men of very sophis-
ticated education. This does not mean, however, that the
same argument, advanced several decades later by the defen-
ders of the Roman and explicitly rejected by Gerson, had
the same validity in their time. The vernacular Roman was

accessible to a much broader audience. And by 1400 knowledge of the classics was beginning to spread in translation beyond the circles of "the few" highly educated readers.

Petrarch makes much of this point, that poetry is not for the many. It is good, he says, that it deters those who are not suited to study, those who consider the delight of the mind and fame to be of no profit. The study of poetry is for the learned (ll. 419-31):

Hec est quidem vera rei ratio, . . . quia nullum fallere, paucis placere propositum est. Pauci autem docti. (ll. 431-34)

The inaccessibility of poetry to the ignorant is good:

Noli igitur stilum reprobare ingenio pervium, memorie habilem ignorantieque terribilem. Nam et sanctum canibus dare et ante porcos proicere margaritas divino etiam eloquio prohibemur. . . . (ll. 439-42, referring to Matt. 7:6)

Petrarch follows this defense of poetic obscurity with a reaffirmation of Mussato's contention that poets were the first theologians. Though not Christian, they achieved as much knowledge of truth as they could and are rather to be admired than condemned. Again following Mussato, Petrarch claims that the poets were even monotheists, though this was not believed in their day (ll. 448-66). They did not declare this openly, either perhaps from fear or from some special knowledge they had at the

time; if from fear, they should not be condemned, since even the Apostles knew fear (ll. 478-83).

The poets achieved as much truth as was granted to men before Christ's revelation. They should be read and respected for the similarities to Christian theology and morality in their works rather than shunned because of the differences, because of what they could not possibly know at their time.

By introducing this argument Petrarch moves the topic under discussion away from the effect of poetry upon the readers, and back to the nature of poetry itself in the abstract.

Petrarch's other writings on poetry reiterate the main ideas sketched more fully here. The main points he adds to the tradition of defense of poetry, therefore, are: (1) explicit reliance on the theory of allegory to justify and praise the study of poetry; and (2) justification of poetic obscurity because of the restricted interest in, and access to, poetry. In addition Petrarch reaffirms the lofty claims Mussato had made for poetic truth. He is more moderate than his predecessor in admitting that poets have erred and particularly in omitting the claim that the poets' myths more or less reiterate the same truths without

revelation as were revealed in the Old Testament. Petrarch's arguments lead to essentially the same conclusion, however.

3. Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte.

Since all the rest of the humanist defenses of poetry of the fourteenth century stand in the tradition begun by Mussato and whose main source was Petrarch,¹² I will only note significant additions to or changes in this tradition in the later defenses. In connection with the defense of the study of poetry through both allegory and the justification of poetic obscurity, however, a few words should be said about Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte. Pietro was one of the major influences upon Boccaccio's influential defense of poetry in Genealogia Deorum Gentilium XIV-XV. Pietro's "in defensione et laude poesis" is dated 2 February 1372, on the occasion of his commenting to Boccaccio upon a MS of the Genealogia the latter had sent him.

It is clear that Pietro, though a jurist (and thus from a class of men sometimes found among the detractors of poetry), has been won over to the humanist side. At the same time, there is evidence of some remaining

¹² See Chapter One.

disagreement between him and Boccaccio on the question of the compatibility of Christianity and the study of classical poetry.

On the one hand, Pietro expresses delight with the

Genealogia:

Qui magnetinis quodam modo allectibus statim attraxit, dulciter pavit et mirabiliter me refecit cum sint in illo sensuum varietates floride et poetice fictiones, artificiosa textura reducta ad historie veritatem, et perinde tam grandis instructionis quam inexplebilis materia voluptatis.¹³

In his own style Pietro freely intermixes scriptural and classical quotations for moral effect (in ll. 35-43 he quotes or echoes I John, Psalms, II Kings, Job, Isidore, and two passages from Vergil). The Genealogia will be of use to Doctors of Theology, and to preachers (no doubt to Latin preachers) as well:

Et iam ipsum apud plerosque magistros sacre pagine et doctores ac peritos et studiosos alios amabiliter introduxi [i.e. the Genealogia], qui gratissime susceperunt et pro re studiosa et pretiosa valde viderunt, inter alia predicentes . . . quod erit adhuc valde predicabilis liber iste. (ll. 89-94)

Telling Boccaccio that he has already given a copy of the Genealogia to a theological library, he even calls it a "holy book":

¹³Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte, "In defensione et laude poesis," ed. Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte," ll. 79-83, p. 48.

Qua de re disposui et sponendi illum facere studiosius exemplari et in armario Sancti Dominici de Neapoli predicatorum ordinis alligatum catenula inter alios sacros libros . . . collocare. (ll. 94-98)

Pietro then proceeds to explain how he has justified the study of poetry to a young Doctor of Theology who had attacked it. In doing so, Pietro has recourse to the theory of allegory, and cites the church Fathers on the subject in a (by now thoroughly familiar) way. St. Paul quoted, read, and taught the poets (ll. 183-207). Christ himself quoted Terence, and clearly God had put that verse into Terence's mouth so Christ could cite it (ll. 236-39).

Beyond this, almost every book of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, uses poetic fictions, not the prophetic books alone.

Ut enim omittam parabolam lignorum ad vineam et mulieres sedentes deplorantes Adonidem et pleraque, ad id alia multa sunt in sacro eloquio que vix ad litteram et textualem sensum possunt intelligendo salvari. Unde quod littera occidat apostolus profitetur. (ll. 222-26)

According to Pietro his forceful arguments vanquished the ingorant young theologian. But Boccaccio's whole book will now be able to persuade such men "poetas poesimque tueri."

Thus far Pietro seems to be in agreement with Boccaccio and the humanist position. But the last part of his essay (really a letter to Boccaccio) shows that he is still conscious of some kind of contradiction between

humanist studies such as the Genealogia and sacred works.

I will quote this passage in full:

Verum ne titubet liber tuus meo ductu meaque fiducia iniussu tuo sacrum illud armarium introire et codicibus divinis sociari; presertim vinctus catenula, reputans se propterea non sacris initiari studiis, sed carceri mancipari: et proinde, velut Cerberus olim Plutonis a domo Thesei manu tractus, cum ad hostium venit, emicantis ab intus catholice lucis impatiens terramque intuens modeste vel pervicaciter, reluctetur intrare et cassatis vinculis vectorem retrahat et gradu moveat labascentem. Queso ut ipsi animos provoces, et confortes quod securus adeat, securus accedat et lubens tam sacris voluminibus se conjungat et viris tam precepis fideliter pareat et familiariter obsequatur: presto semper et preparatus assistat, vocatus festinet, interrogatus respondeat, nunc servus pascat, nunc demulceat iocose animos pro cuiuslibet appetitu et temporum intervallis; si frequentatus fuerit, non gravetur; si pertractatus fuerit, non lassetur; si omissus fuerit, non indignetur; si denique sacris libris revolvendis intendant, otium sibi prestari putet et quietis alterne spatium indulgeri; si subito repetatur, surgat alacrior; et ut concludam breviter, officiosissimus obsecundet. (ll. 259-76)

Pietro admonishes the Genealogia, which he has caused to be copied and deposited along with other sacred books in the library of St. Dominic of Naples, not to feel frightened and strange chained up with "codicibus divinis," with books which are "emicantis ab intus catholice lucis." That is, here Pietro clearly implies that the Genealogia, which he has so recently praised for its usefulness to preachers and theologians, is not such a work! In fact, he compares it to Cerberus, a creature of darkness and ignorance (i.e. the darkness of paganism, or spiritual

darkness). The Genealogia will somehow feel alien and apart from sacred works.

Boccaccio recognizes this contradiction in Pietro's letter. To him this is evidence that Pietro still is not firmly convinced of the compatibility of a Christian life with the study of pagan poetry. In his response to Pietro Boccaccio takes great pains to correct Pietro's opinion at considerable length. Pietro obviously thinks the Genealogia "quasi a sacrosancta religione alienus horreat sacra" (l. 115). But Boccaccio disagrees. Though the subject of his book is matter alien to Christianity, the book attacks these things and espouses Christianity:

. . . ex quibus percipi potest, nullo eum sacrarum rerum seu librorum terreri, aut consortium et amicitiam spernere iure debere, uti merito horrebat lucem Cerberus tenebris assuetus continuis, et sic reor suasionem aliquam [i.e. Pietro's admonishments to the Genealogia] minime indigere. (ll. 119-22)

Pietro had admonished the Genealogia not to feel ill at ease among the truths shining like lights from the sacred books in the library. Pietro, that is, was conscious of a certain contradiction between the Genealogia and "sacred" books. Along with the usefulness of the book, which he praises, he also notes its novelty (earlier in his letter Pietro compares the Genealogia with the Divine Comedy, another novel work in its time which proved valuable to

masters and students; see ll. 83-87).

Now in one sense there was not, at that time, anything new at all about a book which gave Christian interpretations to pagan myths. There were many such books; Pietro himself mentions Fulgentius'¹⁴ (ll. 154-55).

Pietro can only be referring to a present, concrete situation. Many men will react like the "young theologian." Regardless of the long tradition of moralizing classical myths, men will look askance on such a work being produced now. What men? Who else but the critics of the humanist profession, the detractors of poetry, who, as we have seen, harried every humanist of the time?

Not only will other men think there is some contradiction between the Genealogia and sacred writings. Pietro feels there is, too. No doubt this was at least partially because of his profession. As Billanovich notes, lawyers and jurists were generally numbered among the critics or opponents of the new classical style rather than

¹⁴Technically, Fulgentius' work is a philosophic interpretation compatible with Christianity; that is, Christianity is not explicitly mentioned. In this respect it is similar to Boethius' Consolation. I am indebted to Professor John Hollander of Princeton University for pointing out this distinction to me.

among its defenders.¹⁵

In sum, I believe that we are not mistaken in seeing in this disagreement between Boccaccio and Pietro a reflection of the attacks on humanist studies of the time, and the sensitivity to them among humanists like Boccaccio.

Boccaccio's firmness and care in rejecting Pietro's comparison of the Genealogia to Cerberus shows that he considers it important for every defender of poetry and of humanist activity¹⁶ to be very clear concerning the absolute compatibility of classical studies with Christianity. Boccaccio is no doubt solidier on this point because he is a professional humanist, whereas Pietro is merely an admirer. In fact Boccaccio insists upon correcting Pietro precisely because he recognizes that his Genealogia is likely to have a rough time at the hands of ignorant men who attack poetry:

¹⁵Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte," p. 4 and p. 20. Nicolas de Clamanges and Jean de Montreuil refer to juristic criticism of humanist studies. Petrarch's Invective criticizes the professions generally as denigrating any pursuit which does not avow gain as its end; Boccaccio does likewise.

¹⁶As Billanovich points out (op. cit.) Pietro was an admirer of Petrarch's.

Scis enim, perspicacissime vir, quot sunt undique morsores operum et potissime celebrium, eo quod paucis sit grata poesis, non culpa sua sed aspernantium ignavia.¹⁷

By comparing the Genealogia to Cerberus Pietro puts the responsibility for the criticism which it will receive upon the work itself. In contrast, Boccaccio blames the ignorance of the critics for any forthcoming criticism.

This disagreement between the professional humanist and the amateur and "convert" to humanism, mirroring the contemporary struggle between the pro- and the anti-humanist (or pro- and anti-poetry) forces, is reflected in Boccaccio's lengthy defense of Petrarch in the last part of his reply to Pietro. At the end of his letter, Pietro asks Boccaccio to get Petrarch to publish his Africa. He then criticizes Petrarch for his attack on the "moderns" in Sen. V.2, since Petrarch is himself a "modern" and has received greater praise from them than Terence, Vergil, Jerome and others did in their time (ll. 277 to end).

Billanovich notes that criticism of Petrarch from

¹⁷ Boccaccio, letter "Epistolam tuam" to Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte, ed. Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte," ll. 106-08, p. 62.

within the camp of his followers seems to have been virtually non-existent.¹⁸ Boccaccio takes Pietro's criticisms of Petrarch very seriously and reserves the latter part of his reply to refuting them in detail. He attributes Petrarch's unwillingness to publish the Africa to the constant attack upon him by the envious and the ignorant. Boccaccio then lists Petrarch's struggles with his opponents at length: the Invective; Sen. II.1; the essay "de Ignorantia sui et multorum" (as Boccaccio calls it, l. 166). Boccaccio says that the attacks on Petrarch and those on his poetry are one and the same:

Et sic, ne per cuncta discurram, oportuit eum sepiissime fatigare calamum in sui suorumque carminum defensionem adversus plerosque Cisalpinos Gallos et alios. (ll. 172-74)

Now old, Petrarch is reluctant to waste any more time in these defenses, preferring to spend his final years in study (ll. 174-83). As for his letter Sen. V.2, Boccaccio tries to make the case that Petrarch does not in fact attack "modern men" at all. Rather, he is only admonishing Boccaccio himself, to whom the letter is addressed (ll. 191-214) and really attacks only the ignorant, arrogant detractors of his activities like the theologian

¹⁸Billanovich, "Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte," p. 22.

Pietro referred to:

Infinite sunt ignorantes et ob ignorantiam arrogantes, et tu inter alios unum, ut scribis, pridie retudisti: et bene sapientum est ignorantium luce veritatis abstergere tenebras; et quod tibi verbo licuit, et preceptorum meo litteris licitum est. Et sic, ubicunque vel quandocunque tales titulos legeris [i.e. the title of the letter Pietro referred to, 'Contra ignorantiam atque arrogantiam modernorum'], adversus tales scriptos arbitrari debeas credo, non adversus te vel tibi similes, qui gnari estis et mites. (ll. 216-22)

In summary, Boccaccio's exchange with Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte shows the following things:

1. The major defense of poetic studies and practice is once more the theory of allegory. In the elaboration of this theory the humanist defenders have by now a long list of traditional quotations for their use. Pietro adds a few new sources to the tradition through his influence upon Boccaccio's defense in the Gen. deor. XIV-XV.¹⁹

2. The question of "poetic obscurity," or, to put it another way, the question as to why men of considerable formal education, such as Doctors of theology, could fail to "understand" poetic fictions as moral, is solved easily by the practicing humanists such as Boccaccio, Petrarch, and (later) Salutati. Those unable to understand

¹⁹Ibid.

such works are merely ignorant, or learned only in a one-sided manner, arrogantly condemning what they cannot understand.

However, amateur enthusiasts of poetic study like Pietro appear to take a more conciliatory position. Though an admirer of Petrarch's, Pietro does not form part of his closely-organized campaign to spread the acceptability of the humanist style.²⁰ He is more patient in trying to win over, rather than just to refute, the young theologian. He is critical of Petrarch's sharp attacks on "moderns" (clearly not, as Boccaccio lamely tries to say, meant only to chastize Boccaccio himself). Last he remains conscious of something of a gap between sacred letters and Boccaccio's seemingly traditional and, to modern scholars, thoroughly "medieval" work. Pietro knew it would not be received as being so 'traditional' when published; that it would be viewed critically in some quarters as a new and dangerous attempt by an aggressive humanism to advance itself by cloaking itself in Christian morality.

The lines drawn between the defenders of poetry and its critics were much sharper than Pietro realized. Boccaccio was more aware of this. He strove to erase from

²⁰Ibid., pp. 3-4; 20.

Pietro's mind the slightest inconstancy to the humanist position. Apparently Boccaccio felt that the figure of the great Florentine poet must be defended at all costs. Criticism of Petrarch could all too easily be turned into criticism of the humanist movement which he virtually embodied.

4. Stefano de Colonna

Stefano defends his eagerness to read Apuleius by elaborately demonstrating his familiarity with the theory of allegory:

Et si ad vanitatem, curiositatemque, quas contemnere plurimum astruis, non advertero, affectum temperem meum, metaphoricum insectans sensum illius. . . . At hoc temperamentum ut impossibile improbes, ac si rejecta cortice, dulcis nucleus, quem arida testa celat, sumendus non fuerit, vel si sumi non possit, ridiculum dictum esset? Subtus amara folia dulcia latent poma, an non legenda odio foliorum? . . . Haud aliter de Apuleii libro dicere velim. Curiosam forte & fabulosam continet & lascivam, sub qua, veluti ut sub virentium & luxuriantium foliorum umbraculis, gratissimus fructus absconditur, profunda & altissima iacet sententia, quae summo studio, meliori ingenio, tot conatu, maximo ocio, multoque sudandi tempore haurienda foret.²¹

Stefano cites the example of Virgil's sixth eclogue prophesying the coming of Christ under cover of fable.

²¹"Stephanus Columna, Simoni Electo Mediolanensi, s.," in Francisci Petrarchae . . . Opera (1581), p. 1119. See note 44 to Chapter I above.

Reading such poetry is a profitable use of his time since he will seek, not the fables themselves, but the philosophy and wisdom contained in them:

Sane hoc in studio non tempus perditur, sed colligitur, & servatur. Nam fictum haud ambigo, nec fucum amplector, sed philosophantium veras cum ratione insector sententias, & variis cuniculis usque pene ad centrum terrae descendens, cupidus sub mundi machina, auri venas exquiro. Quod cum in parte fecisse rebar, cum a te de aureo asino Apuleii librum, quem sic apud quoddam intitulum asseris, obtinere potuissem, non equidem perscrutaturus fabulas, sed illius antiqui Poetae adepturus philosophiam, haud aliter, quam sub sterquilinio margaritas. Et quanquam plurimos huius aevi delectent, me autem non alliciunt curiosae Poetarum fabulae, praeter illa, quandoque mercede & acceptat studiendi remissione, quae omnibus danda est iubente Quintiliano, quem mecum Satyrizas, non solum quia nulla res est, quae perfecte possit continuum laborem, atque ea quoque quae sensu & anima carent, ut servare vim suam possunt, velut quiete alterna retenduntur. Et quod studium dicendi voluntate, quae cogi non potest, constat, in illis [i.e. the *fabulae*, subject of the previous sentence] attaediatum ingenium, velut quodam in ludo recreetur. Solent enim & plus virium afferre, ad discendum consequendumque boni viri notitiam, renovati ac recentes, & acriorem animum facere, qui fere necessitatibus repugnat, ut quid ergo satura tua adversus me clamat? Cur invehit?, etc.²²

Stefano, interestingly, calls Apuleius a "poet," although the Golden Ass is in prose. It is really to the fable, the obscure and not obviously moral "letter" of the text, that the detractors of poetry object. Here again is a

²²Ibid., pp. 1119-20. In addition to Matt. 12.46, Stefano quotes from Quintilian, Insts. 1, 3, 8 and 1, 3, 9 in this passage.

reminder that the attack on "poetry" is really an attack on classical studies, on humanist activity itself, in general.

Stefano also puts forth a new justification of fable: it revivifies the tired mind by its variety. There is an advantage in deriving truth from poetic fiction rather than from more orthodox sources. Stefano attempts to give Simon an example of this a little further on. In an incredibly florid sentence he states that knowledge of the true good is obtained more readily from eloquent and pleasing scripta than from rude and dull works:

Fauni licentiam obsecro, sagax venator, unde commodius, actiusque vernantia, & rosida prata, florida (inquam) ac virentia lustra ferarum, & pressa vestigia odora, vi canum exquirat, & ipsam insequitur bellvam: ac facilius capitur praeda, quam per saltus, & aspera, densaque nemora dumis, sic per lepida scripta, fragantis styli perfusa rore, summa rerum inventione conserta, ac lenocinio adulta verborum, & contra aestum incandescentis ingenii virum, cum quodam animi fervore quaerentis fabularum, quemadmodum quibusdam reclinatoris, intermixta umbris, quam per inculta, insulsa & scabrea, nullo colore nitentia, aut ordine redimita, ad veri boni scientiam pervenitur, quod ut ais duce natura perquirimus, & e caelo praeventi gratia reperimus, proinde iam te poenituisse intelligam, inter illos me annumerasse, qui virtuose vivere recusantes, beate vivere volunt. (p. 1120)

Stefano goes on to cite Augustine and other Church Fathers who studied and made use of the poets yet did not live wrongly. This is the end of the first part of Stefano's letter, his reply to the "priest" rather than to

the doctor in Simon. The rest of the letter does not concern us, being an elaborate reply to Simon's contention that "variety in appetite is unhealthy." Simon is really concerned with Stefano's ability or inability to truly profit from reading Apuleius, and not with condemning Apuleius himself, though he phrases his attack in such a way that it appears to be directed at the classical works themselves (see Chapter II). For this reason Stefano can easily counter with the by now familiar humanist rejoinder: the theory of allegory, the Church Fathers who read and quoted the classics, and so forth.

However, the specific circumstances of his debate force Stephano to introduce some innovations into his defense as well. Unlike Petrarch or Boccaccio, Stephano is in no position to claim that only "ignorant" men will misunderstand the classical work. Judging from the tone of his letter Stephano is less well read in the classics than Simon, his critic. Of course, Stefano promises at first to put himself under the tutelage of the holy Nicolaus de Sicilia, as Simon suggests. However, he further justifies the use of poetic fable by saying that it makes study more delightful. This in itself is nothing new: Petrarch had said it before. But in implying that the other ways to truth are dull and dry, "inculta insulsa

& scabrea, nullo colore nitentia, aut ordine redimita [i.e. scripta]," he is implicitly criticizing the literary merits of sacred writings.

Perhaps he is thinking primarily of contemporary theologians only. However this relative depreciation of the literary merit of sacred writings, implicit from the beginning in the pursuit of classical, pagan style, is a consistent theme in fourteenth century humanist writing. Petrarch struggled with it at times, as when he says, at the end of Book III of the Invective, that he had "turned away" from pagan writing in his old age.²³ By the beginning of the fifteenth century however it becomes explicit, as we shall see in the case of Francesco da Fiano.

5. Boccaccio

Boccaccio's defense of poetry at the end of the Genealogia becomes the principal source for all subsequent humanist defenses. The longest sustained defense of poetry composed during the century, its author was one whose classical learning was second only to Petrarch's until well after 1400, one who, like his beloved preceptor, attained world-wide fame within a few years of his death. As a compendium of arguments in defense of humanist studies

²³Petrarch, Invective, III, ll. 534-38, ed. Ricci, p. 74.

it was an invaluable work of reference and storehouse of citations for later and lesser humanists in subsequent decades.

Once again, the principal defense of poetry in this classic work is the allegorical approach to reading it. This is referred to several times in the "Preface" to the work (which was probably written after completion of the main body of the work and can thus be considered part of the defense of poetry itself):²⁴

At the same time you desire an explanation of the meaning which various eminent men have perceived beneath the surface of these myths. . . .

You added a further request, that I explain the meaning which wise men had hidden under this cover of absurd tales, on the ground that his renowned Majesty thought it a stupid notion for men learned in nearly every doctrine to spend time and labor merely telling stories which are untrue and have only a literal meaning. . . . to arrange the members [of his present work] in any order, I must proceed to tear the hidden significations from their tough sheathing, and I promise to do so, though not to the last detail of the authors, original intentions. . . .

It is therefore my plan of interpretation first to write what I learn from the Ancients, and when they fail me, or I find them inexplicit, to set down my own opinion. This I shall do with perfect freedom of mind, so that men who are ignorant, and fastidiously despise the poets, whom they do not understand, may see that the poets, though not Catholics, were so gifted with intelligence that no product of human genius was

²⁴Osgood, pp. 143-44.

ever more skilfully enveloped in fiction, nor more beautifully adorned with exquisite language than theirs. Whence it is clear that they were richly imbued with secular wisdom not often found in their jealous accusers. And these interpretations will enable you to see not only the art of the ancient poets, and the consanguinity and relations of the false gods, but certain natural truths, hidden with an art that will surprise you. . . . (pp. 3; 5; 11; 12)

For "interpretations" Boccaccio's word in the last passage is enucleationibus--the discovery of the true nucleus of meaning beneath the shell of poetic fiction.²⁵

In Book XIV Boccaccio organizes his defense of poetry in general. Book XV is largely concerned with the work at hand, though certain general points are also made. In Chapters I through V of Book XIV, the detractors of poetry are listed and their arguments outlined. In Chapters VI through X, Boccaccio makes his major response that poetry is to be read allegorically.

Chapter VI: "Poetry is a Useful Art." Boccaccio admits that some poets are bad, but avers this does not mean poetry itself is bad.

Chapter VII: "The Definition of Poetry, Its Origin, and Function." Poetry "veils truth in a fair and fitting garment of fiction" (p. 39). Poetry is inspired by God.

²⁵Boccaccio, Genealogie I, ed. Romano I, p. 8, l. 33.

Rhetoric and Poetry are distinguished: ". . . among the disguises of fiction rhetoric has no part, for whatever is composed as under a veil, and thus exquisitely wrought, is poetry and poetry alone" (p. 42).

Chapter VIII: "Where Poetry First Dawned Upon the World." Here Boccaccio traces the origins of poetry to the Hebrews, Babylonians, and Greeks. Musaeus, Linus, and Orpheus were the first poets. "To strengthen the authority of these songs [in praise of God], they enclosed the high mysteries of things divine in a covering of words, with the intention that the adorable majesty of such things should not become an object of too common knowledge, and thus fall into contempt" (p. 44).

Chapter IX: "It is Rather Useful Than Damnable to Compose Stories." "Fables" or fiction are explained as non-literal meanings. "Some writers have framed this definition of fiction [fabula]: Fiction is a form of discourse which, under guise of invention, illustrates or proves an idea; and, as its superficial aspect is removed, the meaning of the author is clear. The Bible uses fictions, and poetic and Biblical fictions are similar, "but what the poet calls fable or fiction our theologians have named figure" (p. 49). Jesus used poetry, but called it "parable" or "exemplum" (p. 50). Fiction soothes the mind:

"such then is the power of fiction that it pleases the unlearned by its external appearance, and exercises the minds of the learned with its hidden truth; and thus both are edified and delighted with one and the same perusal" (p. 51).

Chapter X: "It is a Fool's Notion the Poets Convey No Meaning Beneath the Surface of Their Fictions." Examples are given from classical poets, and from Dante and Petrarch. "Then let the babblers stop their nonsense, and silence their pride if they can; for one can never escape the conviction that great men, nursed with the milk of the Muses, brought up in the very home of philosophy, and disciplined in sacred studies, have laid away the very deepest meaning in their poems . . ." (p. 54).

In short, Boccaccio gives an encyclopedic account and defense of the theory of poetic fiction. He cites compendiously most of the authorities which his own studies, the works of Petrarch (and through him Mussato), and Pietro Piccolo da Monteforte had brought to his notice.

Immediately after his defense of allegory, Boccaccio deals with the concomitant objection that poetry is too obscure. Here he relies upon the theory outlined by Augustine. Poetic obscurity is used that the truth so veiled

may not be cheapened, and that it be held so much the more precious because of the difficulty required in obtaining it --all arguments advanced by Petrarch as well.

Chapter XII: "The Obscurity of Poetry is Not Just Cause for Condemning it." He stresses the similarities between scripture and the allegorical interpretation of it, and poetry:

. . . I will not bore my opponents by again urging them to regard the obscurities of poetry as Augustine regards the obscurities of Holy Writ. Rather I wish that they would . . . consider . . . how, if this is true of sacred literature addressed to all nations, in far greater measure it is true of poetry, which is addressed to the few. . . . I could have urged them in a sentence to put off the old mind, and put on a new and noble; then will that which now seems to them obscure look familiar and open. (p. 61)

Here Boccaccio urges the similarity between the allegorical method of scriptural exegesis and the method of allegorically interpreting classical poetry in order to press a dramatically bold claim. For if a learned man be a good Christian and therefore able to understand the allegorical mysteries of the Old and New Testaments, then he ought also to be able to understand the allegories of the poets. In this way Boccaccio is able to insinuate that a person who cannot see that poetry must be read in a sense other than literal may well be reading the Bible as well like the Hebrews, with eyes that see only the Letter That Kills.

This is an aggressive position, not a defensive one. In Boccaccio's words humanism begins the counterattack against its opponents. Not admitting the question: What is wrong with the admirers of pagan poetry? he sets forth its converse: What is wrong with those "learned" men who do not see the truths when veiled in this familiar way?

Boccaccio elaborates this point in Chapter XIII, "Poets Are Not Liars." Poetic fictions are mainly rather incredible, so that they could scarcely be taken for assertions:

I had supposed that a lie was a certain very close counterfeit of the truth which served to destroy the true and substitute the false. . . . Poetic fiction has nothing in common with any variety of falsehood, for it is not a poet's purpose to deceive anybody with his inventions; furthermore poetic fiction differs from a lie in that in most instances it bears not only no close resemblance to the literal truth but no resemblance at all; on the contrary, it is quite out of harmony and agreement with the literal truth. (p. 63)

According to the function of the poet which Boccaccio has already set out, "clearly poets are not constrained by this bond to employ literal truth on the surface of their inventions" (p. 63).

So a poet, however he may sacrifice the literal truth in invention, does not incur the ignominy of a liar, since he discharges his very proper function not to deceive, but only by way of inventions. (p. 64)

Pagan poets did say things which were false, of course, but

they did so because they had not been accorded the light of the Christian revelation. Therefore they should not be blamed. "And if pagan poets wrote not the whole truth concerning the true God, though they thought they did, such ignorance is an acceptable excuse and they ought not to be called liars" (p. 66). Boccaccio concludes this chapter with a discussion of Vergil's fourfold purpose in writing the Aeneid, the second of these purposes being taken from Fulgentius' de Vergiliana Continentia. In the following chapters Boccaccio condemns the arrogance of those who, failing to understand poetic fiction, condemn it, and praises the philosophic function of poetry.

I think the outline of Boccaccio's argument presented above is sufficient to show that: (1) Boccaccio's first line of defense of poetry is the theory of allegory; (2) he justifies poetic obscurity by comparing it to the obscurity of the Bible, and therefore allowing no excuse for the arrogant who, failing to understand it, condemn the poets and not their own ignorance; (3) he examines the concept of poetic fiction more closely and concludes that it is not necessary for poets to use the literal truth on the surface of their works.

6. Salutati

It would be easy to show how Salutati relies upon the allegorical theory to defend poetry in his disputes with Zonarini, Giovanni de Samminiato, Pellegrino Zambecari, and Johannes Dominici. However, as Hunt has pointed out,²⁶ Salutati's arguments remain remarkably constant throughout his life. Salutati's longest sustained defense of poetry is in Book I of his de laboribus Herculis. After condemning ignorant detractors of poetry, having showed that the Greeks admired and honored poets in spite of Plato, Salutati turns to the "office" of poetry itself. The Church Fathers used poetry:

Unum tamen poetice laudem dicere non omittam, quod non solum gentiles, qui tam plano supinoque errore de suis diis, qui vel homines fuerant vel quos demones fuisse constat, tenebantur, poeticam receperunt, sed etiam sacrarum litterarum autores, cum quibus, imo per quos, omnium consensu sancti spiritus et ineffabilis trinitatis numen mirabiliter loquebatur, poetice locutionis velamine divinitatis vera misteria retulerunt.²⁷

Salutati compares Genesis I, as a holy work which must be interpreted allegorically, to poetry:

²⁶Hunt, ed., p. ix.

²⁷Salutati, de lab. Herculis, ed. Ullman, I, p. 8, ll. 18-26.

. . . oportet hec omnia non secundum litteram intelligi sed alterius sensus ministerio declarari, ut apertum sit divinam scripturam totam plenam esse locutionibus quas ipsos poetas cernimus usurpasse. (p. 9, ll. 11-14)

After discussing the moral function of poetry and the fact that poets use "one word for another," "one thing for another" (p. 11, ll. 13-15), and other forms of "alieniloquium," Salutati generalizes:

Sed omnium poetarum una singularis et precipua intentio est, ut per illa que narrant, sive fabula sit sive apologus sive etiam comicum argumentum, penitus aliud intelligatur in sensu quam percipiatur auditu. (p. 12, ll. 11-15)

Salutati gives several examples of the possible meanings of the "bough" in Aeneid VI. 136, and then states:

Nam et omne quod didiceris verum mox aliam suggerit veritatem. Et impossibile creaturis est tantum percipisse vel nosse quod ulterius non valeant proficisci. (p. 11, ll. 25-29)

Each truth suggests another, and there is no end to this; one can always go further in interpreting these myths.

The significance of Salutati's treatment of allegory here is: (1) he firmly states that allegory is the essence of poetry; (2) he understands allegory in a very broad sense--for him it is essentially any figurative use of language where one thing is used for another.

This last point is important. It is the basis for Salutati's argument that the allegory of the poets

and that of the holy spirit in the scriptures is essentially of the same kind. Salutati tries to give a more elaborate and convincing explanation of Boccaccio's bold innovation.

This similarity is further explored a little later on:

. . . poete, sive fabulas inserant sive puram rerum gestarum afferant veritatem, quod est proprium atque perpetuum divine scripture, per illa volunt medullitus aliud aliquid quod naturam, mores, aut vera gesta respiciat designare. Sacrarum autem litterarum contextus aliquando future significat, . . . [examples given from the Bible of Abraham's offering to sacrifice Isaac being a foreshadowing of God's sacrifice of Christ; of the death of Pharoah in the Red Sea foreshadowing the defeat of the Devil and his hordes, etc.].

Secularia vero poemata non futura sed potius iam gesta significant, . . . Et sicubi forte dicatur verum aliquid, ut multi cogitant, divanasse, [i.e. Vergil in the Aeneid], non fuit illa Maronis intentio sed dei revelantis etiam per gentiles misteria sua et vis erumpentis etiam inter mendacia veritatis. (pp. 13-14, ll. 24-29; 9-10; 25-28)

Salutati advances many other arguments in defense of poetry besides these. But at the heart of all of them is the contention that poetry is essentially figurative or allegorical in basically the same way (with the secondary differences he admits above) as the scriptures. He meets the Aristotelians on their own grounds by admitting Aristotle's definition of poetry and assimilating it to his own, stressing the figurativis locutionibus (p. 14, l. 31). The Bible is the best poem, though not in metre in Latin (p. 16, ll. 4-6). In showing that poetry is the sum of the Trivium and the Quadrivium, Salutati again

stresses the fact that "vero officium poetarum est per unam rem aliud designare . . ." (p. 19, ll. 20-21). Poetry doesn't teach anything peculiar to itself, but perfects those things which other arts teach by its figurative speech (p. 21, ll. 14-19).

Salutati advances the allegorical theory in defense of poetry in one further way. After a lengthy discussion of the celestial harmonies to be found in poetic meters, Salutati admits that the classical poets may not have been aware of them when they used them. That is, he admits that deviates from ancient authority, and defends his doing so. Not novelty, he argues, but error alone should be blamed:

Quod autem inventores carminum hec respexerint, sicut non negaverim, ita non audeam affirmare. . . . Verumtamen si taliter obloquentes reminisci voluerint verissime sententie conceptumque communi locutione proverbium secum meditari, quod experientia fecit artem, non mordebunt illos qui circa repertos effectus latere plurimum artis aut dicendo deprehenderint aut deprehendendo satergerint edocere. . . . Nimis etenim arida foret cuiuslibet artis speculatio si que ex arte dicta sunt adeo simpliciter posteritas recepisset quod nichil in eis duceret speculandum nisi quod inventores ipsi potuerint vel voluerint declarare. (p. 34, ll. 14-16; p. 35, ll. 2-7, 12-17)

Ut iam desinant si forsam aliquid inter hec nostra compererint que aut nova sint aut inaudita cum legerint videantur, cessetque omnis hac de novitate calumnia, sed potius que male posita sunt adhibitis rationibus reprehendant. (p. 35, ll. 21-25)

In Chapter X Salutati elaborates on the virtues of inventing new allegories. He expects many to attack him

for his findings:

Nonnullos futuros arbitror qui me per novarum allegoriarum copiam gradientem et que iam posui queque posthac traditurus sum non mediocriter mirabuntur, quosdamque mordaciter reprehensuros. (p. 45, ll. 24-27)

He admits that lesser men should not disagree with greater authorities without reason. But, if it were wrong to invent new allegories, Fulgentius had erred, as had many doctors of the church who constantly invented new interpretations of biblical passages though others had already preceded them (p. 46, ll. 2-10). New allegories are permissible if for the good of all. The inventions of the poets are for all posterity.

Non igitur moleste ferant . . . si conamur et nos prodesse posteris et que sub fictionum integumentis abdita sunt in splendorem alicuius veritatis studemus eruere. . . . Sed fas est . . . et licitum nobis, qui iam diu studiis huiusmodi delectati non nichil et percepimus et tenemus, imitatione maiorum aut omnino novum aut aliter ab eis aliquid invenire, in hoc, ni fallor, omnibus profuturi, quod, si aliquid intactum ab aliis exponemus, facilius poterunt studiosi in melioris explanationis claritudinem pertransire; sin autem tractata per alios aliter forsitan exposuero, iudicent inter nos et illos priores atque meliores liberrime, sicut volunt. Nam tametsi pudor si declarata per alios imperfectius quam illi fecerint explanare, michi tamen forte gratias agent quos ita nostra legere continget quod illa non videant. (p. 46, ll. 20-24, l. 27 - p. 47, l. 8)

The identification of poetic and scriptural allegory is set forth more boldly than ever.

Early on, in Chapter II, Salutati had quoted for

discussion Aristotle's definition of poetry:

. . . possumus cum Aristotile diffinire poesim esse
 potentiam considerantem laudationes et vituperationes
 prout metris et figurativis locutionibus concinuntur.
 (p. 14, ll. 29-31)

Towards the end of Book I, Salutati gives his own defini-
 tion of the poet:

Est igitur poeta vir optimus laudandi vituperandique
 peritus metrico figurativoque sermone sub alicuius
 narrationis misterio vera recondens. (p. 63, ll. 19-
 22)

Here Salutati conflates Aristotle with Cicero's definition
 of the orator. What is original to Salutati in this defini-
 tion is clearly the last part, "sub alicuius narrationis
 misterio vera recondens." In commenting upon this defini-
 tion at the very end of Book I Salutati leaves us with
 little doubt that allegory is the central characteristic
 of poetry:

Et cum in prima verborum fronte tum vera proferantur,
 ut semper in divina scriptura, tum falsa, sicut apud
 litterarum secularium poetas sepius reperitur, id tamen
 quod sub figmento relinquatur intelligendum omnino sit
 verum, aut saltem pro vero receptum apud omnes gentes
 seu quamlibet philosophorum heresim vel hominum nationem.

It is not necessary to poetry that it be literally true, so
 long as it is true, or has been taken as true, allegorically.

7. Francesco da Fiano

By the beginning of the fifteenth century the

influence of humanism was spreading rapidly in Italy. Salutati, an old man at the time of his de laboribus Herculis, did not hesitate to justify the invention of new allegories and, towards the end of Book I, to defend poetry, even though the truths lying beneath its surface were not always Christian truths (see quotation above). As Baron (after von Martin) notes, Salutati "who, with advancing age grew constantly more Christian-minded, grew more and more extreme in his defense of antiquity" (that is, adds Baron, "in the defense of ancient poetry and the Greek and Latin poets," not otherwise).²⁸

Francesco da Fiano's tract of about 1404 gives evidence of a yet bolder approach. It would be idle to try to "prove" that Francesco uses the argument that poetry is allegorical as his primary defense. Almost the whole of his defense is an exhaustive outline of the theory of allegory, which Francesco draws from the "defense" tradition. He begins from Salutati's position and advances it, pointing out passages which are not literally true even in sacred writing. Not only is the Bible allegorical, but it has other similarities with classical poetry as well. For example, it contains poetic metamorphoses such as that of

²⁸Baron, Crisis (rev. ed.), p. 299, note.

Lot's wife and the representations of the evangelists by animals.²⁹

More boldly still, Francesco criticizes St. Gregory for his attempts at poetry. In Gregory's poetry, according to Francesco, there is an allegorical meaning not only in passages which are not true on the surface but even in those which are. The classical poets differ in their poetic practice. They veil truth beneath "fabulari nube" (p. 307, l. 1), that is, beneath a false literal sense. When they do relate the naked truth, they do not put any allegorical meaning beneath it. But St. Gregory does:

Quippe ut, cum ipsius Gregorii venia et pace sic scripserim, veritatem, que sua stat immobilis firmitate, et que, prout gesta res est, narratur, cuiuscunque alterius intelligentie umbrare colore, quia ex hoc in auditorum animis potius propositi dissuasio quam persuasio faciliter nascitur, et si fortasse non in eo aut in sacris eulogiis, tamen apud doctissimos rhetores est in arte dicendi vitium. (p. 307, ll. 7-10)

Francesco agrees not to pursue the matter further, certain that Gregory meant well (p. 307, ll. 23 ff.), and out of respect for him and for other theologians. Yet here for the first time in a defense of poetry a humanist does not shrink to apply classical rhetorical standards to sacred works and find the latter wanting in comparison.

²⁹Francesco da Fiano, "Il 'Contra Oblocutores . . .'," ed. Taù, section 14, pp. 304-05.

Francesco hints at the same thing somewhat later. He juxtaposes quotations from the Bible (Wisdom 1,7) and Vergil, stating that Vergil says the same thing as the Biblical passage, "sed stilo longe politiore" (p. 319). As we shall see, he came to hold even more critical opinions about the style of sacred writings later on.

8. French Humanists

We have established that the defenses of poetry composed by fourteenth-century Italian humanists relied principally upon the theory of allegory to justify their study of pagan material. The same is true of two of the French humanists who were more closely connected with the Quarrel of the Roman. Nicolas de Gonesse's "Collatio" has already been considered in the present chapter. It is strictly derivative of Boccaccio's Genealogia defense which, as we have seen, itself relies primarily upon the theory of allegory.

Jean de Montreuil was one of the participants in the Quarrel of the Roman. We have seen that he defended the Roman by appealing to the need to read this work allegorically. Jean was also the author of a letter which

is "consacrée à la défense de la Poésie."³⁰ This is the letter "Auffugiente michi," No. 102 in Ornato's edition.

Ornato has suggested that this letter may have even been composed around the same time as the Quarrel of the Roman. The recipient is clearly a lawyer. Possibly, therefore, he was the same lawyer involved in the Quarrel of the Roman, the recipient of Jean's letters "Quo magis" and "Etsi facundissimus."³¹ Ornato points out that during the years 1396 to 1407 (the termini of this letter) the works of Boccaccio were enjoying wide popularity in the court circles in which the debate over the Roman raged. Laurent de Premierfait was involved in translating the De casibus, while Christine de Pisan herself was using the De claris mulieribus as the major source for her Livre de la Cité des dames.³²

Jean's letter consists in great part of a literal transcription of a passage from Boccaccio's defense of poetry in Genealogie XIV, where Boccaccio explains that

³⁰Ornato, Jean Muret, p. 138. Ornato, "Per la fortuna," is a special study of this letter. See note 22 to Chapter I above.

³¹Ornato, "Per la fortuna," p. 263 and note 1.

³²Ibid., p. 265.

poetry should "velamento fabuloso atque decenti veritatem contegere."³³ Jean concludes that this evidence ought to convince "vos, obiurgatores et carptores poetarum, ab eorum [i.e. the poets] damnatione atque vituperio revocasse."³⁴

These two documents show that there was considerable interest in the question of the defense of poetry in France at exactly the same time as: (1) the same questions were being debated hotly by humanists in Italy (Salutati, Francesco da Fiano, Leonardo Bruni); and (2) Gerson and Christine (and perhaps others) were attacking the propriety of reading the Roman and of interpreting it allegorically.

In conclusion, our research has reached the following results:

1. The main argument in defense of the Roman is its allegorical nature. This is the justification advanced by the defenders of the Roman, Pierre Col and Jean de Montreuil.

2. In defense of their activity, the main argument advanced by humanist defenders of poetry, both earlier than

³³Montreuil, "Auffugienti michi," ed. Ornato, No. 102, ll. 51-52, p. 143; cf. *ibid.*, p. 144, note 9, and Boccaccio, Genealogia XIV, 7, ed. Romano II, p. 699, ll. 31-32.

³⁴Ed. Ornato, p. 144, ll. 61-62.

and contemporaneous with the Quarrel, is also the theory of allegory.

3. This is because the issue is the same: Whether literature which is not Christian and moral in a literal sense should be read. This is the similarity which ties classical poetry and the Roman together (Gerson compares the Roman with Ovid).

4. The Quarrel of the Roman is contemporaneous with an intense literary battle in Italy between defenders of humanist activity and its detractors. From 1398 (Malatesta's overthrowing the statue of Vergil and Salutati's letter) to Salutati's death in 1406, document after document reflects this struggle. The struggle appears to have been more or less won in Italy with the accession of Pope Innocent VII.

Close literary relations existed between the three centers of humanist activity at the time: Italy, Avignon, and Paris. It is highly likely therefore that the defenders and the attackers of the Roman in Paris would have been aware of this controversy.

5. The defenders of poetry throughout the century were very sensitive to the objections to poetic obscurity, the difficulty of transcending the non-Christian "literal" sense, the seemingly impious and immoral myths which pervade

classical poetry. Their defenses typically devote much space to justifying poetic obscurity. One of the most influential works of the fourteenth-century humanists, Boccaccio's Genealogie, is principally a justification on Christian grounds of the study of classical poetry. It cannot be a coincidence that the humanist concern with poetic obscurity is the same concern voiced by Gerson and Christine de Pisan, the opponents of the Roman de la Rose.