



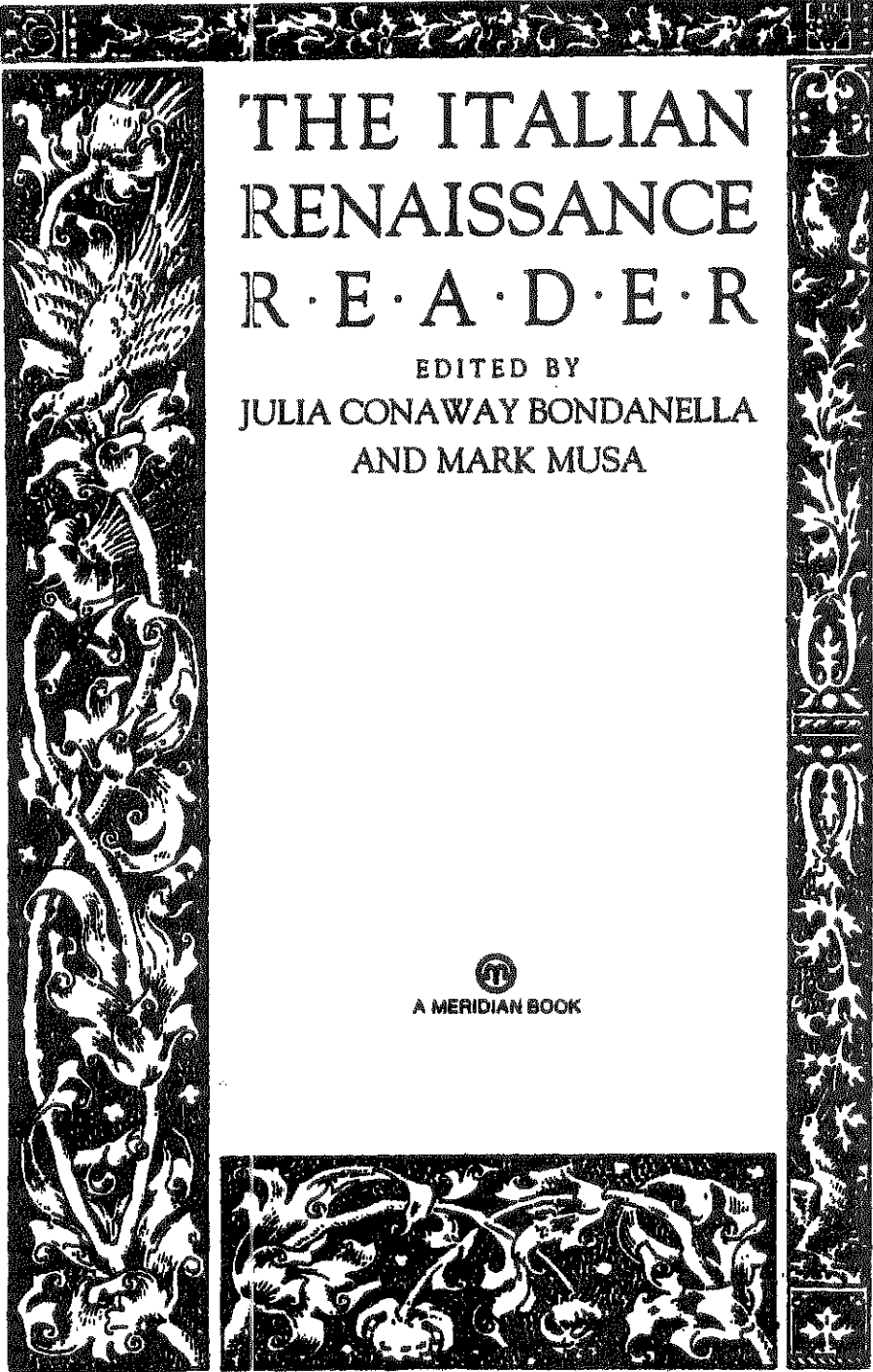
THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE R · E · A · D · E · R

EDITED BY
JULIA CONAWAY BONDANELLA
AND MARK MUSA



A MERIDIAN BOOK



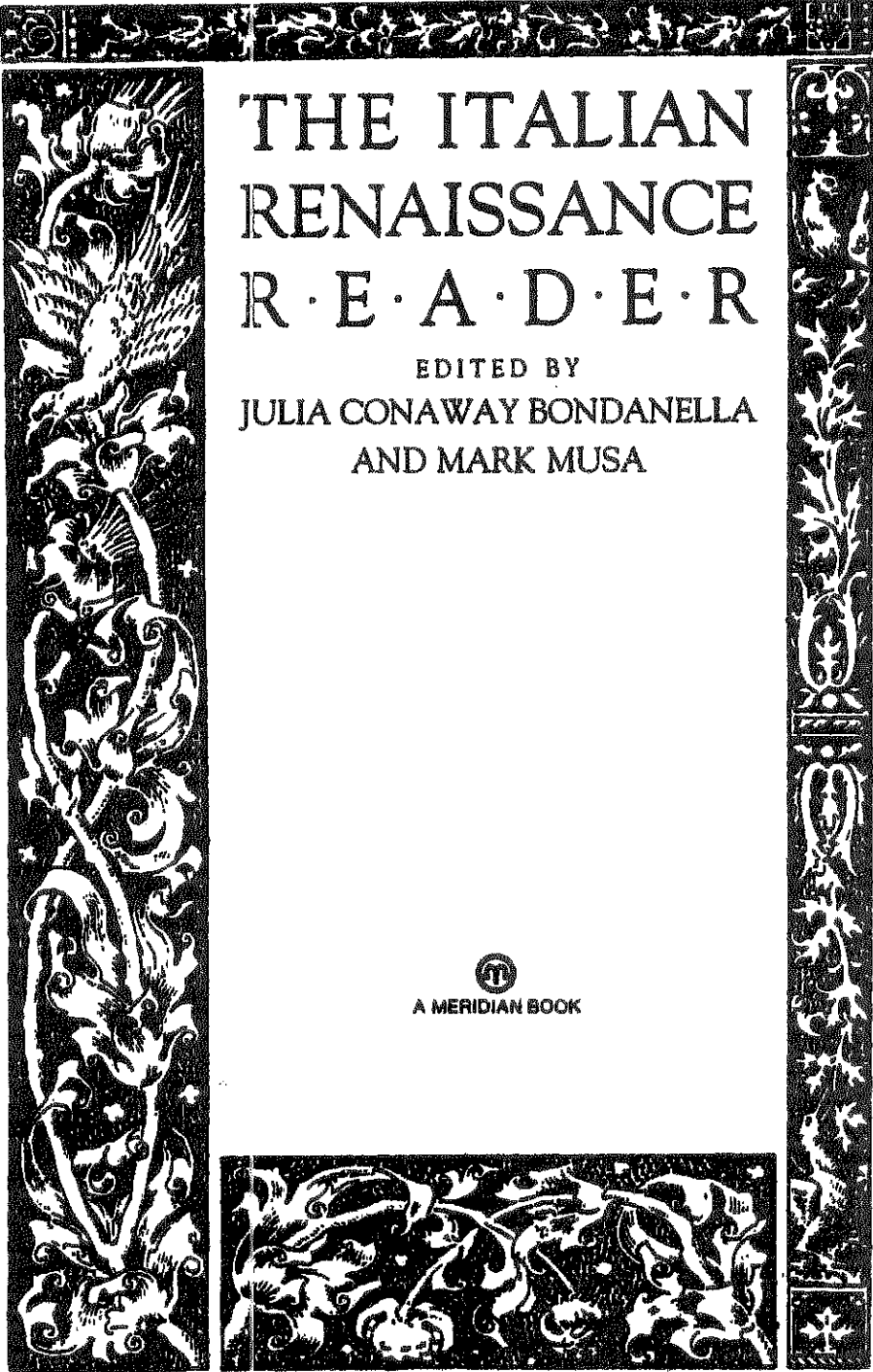


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MERIDIAN

Published by Penguin Group

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Group (Canada), 90 Eglinton Avenue East, Suite 700, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4P 2Y3

(a division of Pearson Penguin Canada Inc.)

Penguin Books Ltd., 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Ireland, 25 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin 2, Ireland (a division of Penguin Books Ltd.)

Penguin Group (Australia), 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

(a division of Pearson Australia Group Pty. Ltd.)

Penguin Books India Pvt. Ltd., 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi - 110 017, India

Penguin Books (NZ), 67 Apollo Drive, Rosedale, North Shore 0632, New Zealand

(a division of Pearson New Zealand Ltd.)

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty.) Ltd., 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank,

Johannesburg 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd., Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Published by Meridian, a member of Penguin Group (USA) Inc.

First Printing, November 1987

30

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REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA REGISTRADA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING IN PUBLICATION DATA

The Italian Renaissance reader.

1. Italian literature—15th century. 2. Italian literature—16th century. 3. Italy—Civilization—1268-1559. 4. Italy—Civilization—1559-1789. 5. Renaissance—Italy. I. Bondanella, Julia Conaway. II. Musa, Mark.

PQ4204.A3183 1987 850'.8 87-15354

ISBN 978-0-452-01013-0

Printed in the United States of America

Designed by Barbara Huntley

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FRANCESCO PETRARCA

in a more tranquil grave
flee from my poor belabored flesh and bones.

And there will come a time, perhaps,
that to the well-known place
the lovely animal returns, and tamed,
and there where she first saw me
that day which now is blessed
she turns her eyes with hope and happiness
in search of me, and—ah, the pity—
to see me there as dust
among the stones, Love will
inspire her and she will sigh
so sweetly she will win for me some mercy
and force open the heavens
drying her eyes there with her lovely veil.

Falling from gracious boughs,
I sweetly call to mind,
were flowers in a rain upon her bosom,
and she was sitting there
humble in such glory
now covered in a shower of love's blooms:
a flower falling on her lap,
some on her golden curls,
like pearls set into gold
they seemed to me that day;
some fell to rest on ground, some on the water,
and some in lovelike wandering
were circling down and saying, "Here Love reigns."

How often I would say
at that time, full of awe,
"She certainly was born up there in Heaven!"
And her divine behavior,
her face and words and her sweet smile
so filled me with forgetfulness
and so divided me
from the true image
that I would sigh and say:
"How and when I did I come here?"—

SELECTED POEMS FROM THE CANZONIERE

thinking I was in Heaven, not where I was;
and since then I have loved
this bank of grass and find peace nowhere else.

If you had all the beauty you desired,
you could with boldness leave
the wood and make your way among mankind.³⁴

From thought to thought, mountain to mountain top
love leads me on; and every trodden path
I find unsuited to a peaceful life.

If on a lonely slope a brook or spring
or a dark vale between two peaks exist,
that is the place my frightened soul takes refuge.

And with Love urging it
it laughs or weeps, now fears and now takes heart,
and my face, following the soul's direction,
clouds up and clears again
never remaining long in one condition:
at such a sight the man who knows such fate
would say, "He burns and his state is uncertain."

In the high mountains and harsh woods I find
some peace; and every habitable place
is for my eyes a mortal enemy.

With every step I take comes a new thought
about my lady which often will turn
to pleasure torment that I bear for her.

And on the verge of changing
the bittersweetness of this life of mine
I say, "Perhaps it is Love saving you
for better days; perhaps,
you're loathsome to yourself but dear to her."
Then to another thought I pass and sigh:
"Now could this be the truth? But how? But when?"

FRANCESCO PETRARCA

Whenever pine or mountain casts its shade
 I sometimes stop, and on the first stone seen
 with all my mind I etch her lovely face;
 returning to reality I find
 my breast softened with pity, and I cry:
 "What have you come to? How far from her you are!"
 But for as long as I
 can hold my wandering mind on the first thought
 and look at her and not think of myself,
 I feel Love so close by,
 my soul is satisfied by its own error;
 in many places I see her, so lovely
 that all I ask is that my error last.

I've seen her many times—now who'll believe me?—
 in the clear water and above green grass,
 alive, and in the trunk of a beech tree,
 and in a cloud of white so shaped that Leda³⁵
 would certainly have said her daughter's beauty
 fades like a star in sunlight next to it.
 The wilder the place is,
 the more barren the shore where I may be,
 the more lovely do my thoughts depict her image;
 but when the truth dispels
 that sweet mistake, right then and there I sit
 down cold as dead stone set on living rock,
 a statue that can think and weep and write.

Up to that mountain which no mountain shades,
 up to the highest and the freest peak,
 I feel my whole desire being drawn.
 Then I begin to measure with my eyes
 my losses, and while weeping I unburden
 the painful cloud that gathers in my heart
 to see and think how much
 air separates me from her lovely face
 always so near but yet so far from me.
 Then softly to myself:
 "How do you know, poor fool? Perhaps out there,
 somewhere, someone is sighing for your absence."
 And with this thought my soul begins to breathe.

SELECTED POEMS FROM THE CANZONIERE

My song, beyond these Alps
 where skies are more serene and happier,
 you'll see me by a running brook once more³⁶
 where you can sense the aura
 distilling from the fresh and fragrant laurel:³⁷
 there is my heart and there is one who steals it;
 what you see here is but the ghost of me.

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If it's not love, then what is it I feel?³⁸
 But if it's love, by God, what is this thing?
 If good, why then the bitter mortal sting?
 If bad, then why is every torment sweet?

If I burn willingly, why weep and grieve?
 And if against my will, what good lamenting?
 O living death, O pleasurable harm,³⁹
 how can you rule me if I not consent?

And if I do consent, it's wrong to grieve.
 Caught in contrasting winds in a frail boat
 on the high seas I am without a helm,

so light of wisdom, so laden of error,
 that I myself do not know what I want,
 and shiver in midsummer, burn in winter.

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I find no peace, and I am not at war,⁴⁰
 I fear and hope, and burn and I am ice;
 I fly above the heavens, and lie on earth,
 and I grasp nothing and embrace the world.