Brief Biography:

Steve Baker is Core Lecturer in the Department of Italian at Columbia University and Managing Editor of "Italian Poetry Review," a plurilingual journal of creativity and criticism. He recently completed a PhD in Italian and Comparative Literature at Columbia University with a dissertation entitled "Political Petrarchism: The Rhetorical Fashioning of Community in Early Modern Italy."

Paper Title:

Political Petrarchism: A Reassessment of a Forgotten Legacy

Paper Abstract:

Much has been made of Petrarch’s momentous discovery of Cicero’s “Ad Atticum,” which marked a turning point in the development of both Petrarch’s thought and the subsequent evolution of Renaissance humanism, but relatively little has been made of Petrarch’s analogous discovery in 1333 of the Roman orator’s famous defense of the poet Archias, the “Pro Archia.” In praising poets for the benefit they bring to the life of the republic by spreading the news of its glory, as well as to its citizens by inspiring and incentivizing them, Cicero’s “Pro Archia” presents the deep affiliation between politics and literary production that Petrarch found extremely suggestive, judging from the level to which so many of the cultural values espoused by this brief text came to permeate his own cultural and political project. The “Pro Archia” resonates in far-ranging ways through Petrarch’s humanistic project, from his coronation address on the Capitoline in 1341 to the last diplomatic orations he gave in Venice in 1373, less than a month before his death. By applying my literary training to a rhetorical analysis some of the many overlooked vestiges of these two bookend moments at the beginning and end of his career, a veritable hinterlands of Petrarchan largely lyrical scholarship, including letters, orations and some of the local chronicles that documented them at the time, this paper aims to introduce long-neglected aspects of Petrarch’s political project to the canonical understanding of Petrarchan humanism.