Portland State University

PDXScholar

Dissertations and Theses

Dissertations and Theses

8-9-1974

The historical imagination of Francesco Petrarch: a study of poetic truth and historical distortion

Sally Scholz

Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds

Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), and the [Other Italian Language and Literature Commons](#)

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Scholz, Sally, "The historical imagination of Francesco Petrarch: a study of poetic truth and historical distortion" (1974). *Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 2143.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/etd.2141>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Sally Scholz for the Master of Arts in
History presented August 9, 1974.

Title: The Historical Imagination of Francesco Petrarch: A Study of
Poetic Truth and Historical Distortion.

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

Susan Karant-Nunn, Chairman

Michael Reardon

John Lorentz

In the continuing debate among historians over the nature, if
not the actual existence, of the Italian Renaissance, the life of
Francesco Petrarch has played a major role. Petrarch was an out-
spoken critic and commentator on the state of fourteenth-century
society. His opinions have been cited by all scholars interested
in the origins of the "Renaissance Mind."

The concern of this paper will be to discuss the sources,
development, and purpose of Petrarch's historical imagination. By
tracing the course of Petrarch's life I have tried to expose the

the various factors bearing on his psychological development. His "exile" from Italy, early schooling in France and Italy, and political and literary associations provide us with the background. Analysis of Petrarch's literary creations--the books and letters--allow us to see his historical imagination in action.

There are two major methodological problems that the critic must face in this study. This first is that of translations. The English translations of Petrarch's letters and books also must face the problem of distortion of specific words. The letters have also been collected in a manner which reinforces the traditional view of Petrarch as the first humanist. There is a built-in bias toward the ideas earlier generations found most germane to the Medieval-Renaissance distinction.

A second major problem is that of chronology. All of Petrarch's letters, the Africa, The Lives of Illustrious Men, The Secret, the Life of Solitude, and the Triumphs are available only in their final form, endorsed by Petrarch after years of insertions and revision. It is impossible to do a strict evolutionary or linguistic study because the earlier versions are not available. On a general level, however, we can perceive conceptual changes in Petrarch's historical imagination. By using information on dates and insertions, we can observe which subjects were most important at different times in Petrarch's life.

It is my thesis that Petrarch's view of history was essentially romantic. Petrarch used facts and a critical methodology to bolster

an ideal. The re-creation of the Roman spirit in fourteenth-century culture was his goal. Petrarch thus felt justified in remodeling historical facts to serve as examples to his contemporaries. In the "Invective Against a Man who Spoke Ill of Italy" written a year before Petrarch's death, he asks "What is all History but Praise of Rome?" I will take this as the quintessential statement of the function of Petrarch's historical imagination. The key word is "praise" for it reveals the pervasive historical romanticism with which Petrarch approached his subject.

The phrase "historical imagination" does not necessarily imply a romantic vision. Practical solutions can be offered if the world is seen realistically as well as imaginatively. Petrarch, however, identified so completely with his ideal of Rome that concrete applications of Roman precedents to fourteenth-century Italy escaped him. As is evidenced in his works and deeds, from Africa and the Coronation to Cola and Charles IV, the appearance of a classical manner was all important.

Petrarch was both a historian and a poet. His goal was the resurrection of Roman virtue in Trecento society. It was to this end that he incorporated historical facts into his poetic sensibility. Petrarch used his historical imagination as a means of bridging the gap between the real and the ideal in hope of seeing Rome rise again.

THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION OF FRANCESCO PETRARCH:
A STUDY OF POETIC TRUTH AND HISTORICAL DISTORTION

by

SALLY SCHOLZ

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
HISTORY

Portland State University
1974

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

The members of the Committee approve the thesis of
Sally Scholz presented August 9, 1974.

[REDACTED]
Susan Karant-Nunn, Chairman

[REDACTED]
Michael Reardon

[REDACTED]
John Lorentz

APPROVED:

[REDACTED]
Jesse L. Gilmore, Head, Department of History

[REDACTED]
David T. Clark, Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I INTRODUCTION	1
II A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION OF PETRARCH'S HISTORICAL IMAGINATION	12
III CONCLUSION	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	88

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the continuing debate among historians over the nature, if not the actual existence, of the Italian Renaissance, the life of Francesco Petrarch has played a major role. Petrarch was an outspoken critic and commentator on the state of fourteenth century society. His opinions have been cited by all scholars interested in the origins of the "Renaissance Mind." Through the distortion of hindsight, Petrarch can be portrayed as the self-conscious "humanist" who literally "climbed Mont Ventoux in order to open the Renaissance."¹ Scholars have also made Petrarch a cultural half-breed by taking contradictory statements out of context and setting them against one another. Petrarch is then trapped with one foot in the dark age and one in the light so that he "didn't foresee the modern world which began with himself."²

This seeming necessity to conceptualize the flow of time into watertight categories of "Medieval" and "Renaissance" has disconnected the historical Petrarch from the Trecento. He is not allowed to exist in the chaotic movement of his own time but is held static between the waning of the Middle Ages and the dawn of the modern world. This

¹Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," History and Theory, VIII (1969), p. 23.

²John H. Whitfield, Petrarch and the Renaissance (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943), p. 41.

bias defines Petrarch in terms of what is expected of the preceding and succeeding ages. Petrarch's life is then important only in what it was not. What may have been a rhetorical device or an innocent statement becomes a revelation of a "medieval Augustinian conscience" or else of "proto-humanism." The statement that Petrarch "did not set himself the deliberate task of refuting in detail the learning of the Middle Ages" begs the question.³ It relegates Petrarch to a position he could never have imagined. Petrarch did not have an omniscient vision of what the future would bring. He did, however, hope for the "dawn of a new age."⁴ In order to understand Petrarch's expectations, it is necessary to see how he used the past as a model.

The concern of this paper will be to discuss the sources, development, and purpose of Petrarch's historical imagination. That posterity has seen Petrarch as the "first tourist," the "first mountaineer" (i.e. F. Gribble's Early Mountaineers), the "first Italian patriot," and the "Father of Humanism" tells us little about how he saw himself.⁵ This question can be answered only in the context of his life and works. Petrarch's psychological development is central to a definition of him as an historian. An analysis of Petrarch's literary creations will allow us to see the external manifestations of his historical method and imagination.

³Ibid., p. 47.

⁴Morris Bishop, Petrarch and His World (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), p. 179.

⁵Edward H. R. Tatam, Francesco Petrarca (London: Sheldon Press, 1926), p. 302.

It is my thesis that Petrarch's view of history was essentially romantic. Petrarch used facts and a critical methodology to bolster an ideal. The re-creation of the Roman spirit in fourteenth-century culture was his goal. Petrarch thus felt justified in remodeling historical facts to serve as examples to his contemporaries.

Petrarch's view of Roman history was no more romantic than his perception of his own times. In his relation to both the past and the present, Petrarch used history imaginatively. He was not a social reformer, however, because he preferred a life of scholarship to one of social action. Petrarch's ideas about Trecento culture were distorted by his vision of antiquity. As a historian, therefore, Petrarch offered historically impossible solutions.

We would do Petrarch an injustice by defining him as an historian without allowing him to be a poet as well. The term "historical imagination" is to be taken not in reference to the creative ability of a professional historian. Petrarch was, after all, a poet who saw history as subsumed in poetry. There can be little distinction between the historical fact and the poetic construct it built. The end result was not objective presentation of "truth." Petrarch's goal in writing both poetry and history was the moral enlightenment of men. The propagandistic role of both forms is primary. It is important that a

proper distinction be established between a mere philosophical or poetic reflection of the mutability and transience of all things in either a Christian or Lucretian spirit and a cyclical theory that is directly applicable to history.⁶

⁶Frank E. Manual, Shapes of Philosophical History (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), p. 53.

Unfortunately, this is an impossible task with Petrarch. True poetry grew out of history. Petrarch would see no distinction between mere philosophic or poetic reflections and his historical work. Petrarch states in Africa,

The liberties enjoyed by the poet are not as great as most people like to believe. He must first anchor his work on the firmest foundations of truth. Resting on these, he can conceal himself under a colorful and attractive cloud, providing the reader with long and pleasing labor or a search which becomes more demanding the greater the truth, but which becomes sweeter once the truth is uncovered. Whatever, the labor of historians, whatever the cult of virtue and the lessons of life, whatever the study of nature, these are all rightful concerns of the poet, believe me; provided, however, that these things are hidden by an unrecognized covering so that while they are clearly seen elsewhere, they now deceive the eyes by intermittently emerging from and returning to their place of hiding. Whoever invents whatever he writes deserves neither the name of poet nor the prestige of the prophet, but only the title of liar. From this you can glean whatever you seek to know: the extent of our labor, the range of our interests, and the scope of our freedom.⁷

Petrarch lived during a period of cultural transition. He stood between two ages of great contrast. It is not strange that Petrarch is a victim of Medieval and Renaissance stereotypes. He asked for it by leaving such intriguing statements as "Pliny's History of the Romans disappeared in our own times. Our descendants will have no knowledge of the past. I am as if on the frontiers of two peoples, looking forward and backward."⁸ Whether through arrogance or insecurity, Petrarch did have a strong sense of his potential value to history. The constant revision of his letters and other works hints at something

⁷Quoted by Aldo S. Bernardo in Petrarch, Scipio and the Africa (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1962), p. 43.

⁸Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 99.

beyond perfectionism. Petrarch did not write merely to make a name. He wanted to reveal only his best features. Hence, Petrarch misrepresented himself by revising early letters to fit his conception of a mature personality. This does not tell us that Petrarch foresaw the coming cultural revival and structured his appearance to suit it. The need for ego-gratification is common to men of all times. Petrarch was too well known and envied not to be slightly insecure.

Our knowledge of this constant revision leads to both methodological and interpretive problems. The traditional school of Petrarch scholars sought and found consistency in this thought by ignoring its evolution.⁹ James Harvey Robinson's Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters is typical of this outlook. Subtitled "a selection from the correspondence with Boccaccio and other friends, designed to illustrate the beginnings of the Renaissance," the book is organized around a topical rather than a chronological scheme. The chapters entitled "The Father of Humanism" and "Political Opinions" mix letters and miscellaneous statements of Petrarch's youth and old age. In this way Robinson can "prove" almost anything he wants. No change in Petrarch's outlook is allowed because chronology is ignored. Thomas Bergin, another advocate of the "systematic Petrarch," states,

⁹For English works of this group see Pierre de Nolhac's Petrarch and the Ancient World (Boston, 1907); Mario Emilio Cosenza's Francesco Petrarch and the Revolution of Cola de Rienzo (Chicago, 1913); Tatam's Francesco Petrarca; Theodore E. Mommsens' "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages" Speculum, 1942); Whitfield's Petrarch and the Renaissance; and Thomas G. Bergin's Petrarch (New York, 1970).

one cannot speak truly of development in Petrarch; one must take his works en bloc ; there is not a Petrarch of the Canzoniere and a Petrarch of the Africa, so far as any chronological criterion is concerned.¹⁰

Petrarch's life and work have been totally distorted by this assumption of a perfectly ordered system. Consistency seems to be required of all cultural heroes. Anything that does not fit the pattern of coherence is excused as a mental lapse. It is this attitude which led Tatam to call one of Petrarch's most lyrical and sensitive later works, the Triumph of Eternity, a "gradual reversion to the medieval standpoint."¹¹ According to Tatam, Petrarch did not grow out of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance in good chronological order. Petrarch destroyed Tatam's convenient system by responding to the fears, threats, and disappointments which characterized his old age.

The recent work of Carlo Calcaterra, Guido Martellotti, Giuseppe Billanovich, Hans Baron, and Ernest Hatch Wilkins provides an evolutionary interpretation of Petrarch's writing.¹² For them consistency is not a prerequisite to virtue. Carlo Calcaterra's study of the "Secretum crisis," Petrarch's religious "conversion" of 1342-43, has

¹⁰Thomas G. Bergin, Petrarch (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 36.

¹¹Tatam, Francesco Petrarca, p. 118.

¹²See Carlo Calcaterra Nella Selva del Petrarca (Rome, 1942); Guido Martellotti "Linee di sviluppo dell'umanesimo petrarchesco," Studi Petrar-cheschi, II (1949); Giuseppe Billanovich "Nella Biblioteca del Petrarca," Italia Medioevale e Umanistica, III (1960); Hans Baron "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought: Reflections on the State of Petrarch Studies," From Petrarch to Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature (Chicago, 1968); and Ernest Hatch Wilkins The Life of Petrarch (Chicago, 1961).

led to a reappraisal of the early letters. What was once seen as youthful melancholy now becomes a revelation of Petrarch's religiosity. By revising parts of his letters, Petrarch succeeded in confusing generations of scholars.

Theodore Mommsen credited Petrarch with periodizing history into ages of light and dark. Petrarch thus becomes the first "modern" historian to acknowledge the existence of the Middle Ages. Unfortunately, Mommsen's evidence came from an incorrectly dated version of The Lives of Illustrious Men (De Viris Illustribus). Mommsen worked from an early version of the work which included only Roman heroes. This is why he believed that Petrarch had excluded Medieval Christians on principle. The age of darkness was taken as specific reference to what later humanists would see as medieval. Guido Martellotti has shown that the final version of The Lives included both Roman and Medieval figures. After his religious introspection in the 1340's, Petrarch was able to use men of both periods as models. In other words, Petrarch's historical imagination had already expanded beyond Mommsen's finely drawn boundaries.

The textual exegesis of Giuseppe Billanovich has proved that Petrarch's climb of Mont Ventoux in 1336 has little to do with the falsely dated letter of 1352-53.¹³ This letter reflects Petrarch's thoughts ten years after the "Secretum crisis." The "Ascent of Mont

¹³Giuseppe Billanovich, Petrarca Letterato (Rome, 1947), quoted by Hans Baron in "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 18.

Ventoux" symbolizes a spiritual state rather than an actual mountain climb. Billanovich has uncovered Petrarch's attempt to cover his youthful optimism with a more "appropriate" religious concern.

Ernest Hatch Wilkins, the supreme American Petrarchist, provided the most detailed and convincing studies of Petrarch's life and work. In his three biographies, Wilkins recreated Petrarch's life by depending solely on the extant letters and books.¹⁴ Because Wilkins spent years on a minute study of the dates of Petrarch's work, he could decide what the wily author had inserted at a later time. The information supplied by this new approach proves the absurdity of seeking any one "key" to Petrarch's personality.

Petrarch is now finally able to live his inconsistent life without fear of criticism for not reaching "modern" expectations. Hans Baron says of the "Ascent of Mont Ventoux,"

The increasing discovery of classical models for the phrases and literary motifs in Petrarch's letter does not in itself throw any doubt on Petrarch's truthfulness. To make the language and the expressions of recognized literary models one's own and to clothe experiences from one's own life in an inherited guise is the very heart of the humanistic program of rhetorical culture. To some extent, our judgment of how far Petrarch may have gone in outright deception while invoking God and everything sacred to him as witness does not depend on what we regard as proper and usual in rhetorically minded authors, but on our total vision of Petrarch's personality and piety. It is therefore bound up with the future development of our views of Petrarch.¹⁵

¹⁴Ernest Hatch Wilkins, The Life of Petrarch; Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1958); Petrarch's Later Years (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1959).

¹⁵Baron, "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 19.

In discussing Petrarch's historical imagination I have tried to follow the methodological guidelines set out by Quentin Skinner in his "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas." Skinner points out the philosophical weaknesses of two common methods of intellectual history. I have already mentioned that taking a document out of context may lead to the "mythology of coherence."¹⁶ Another danger in viewing the text as autonomous is a concern with "timeless questions."¹⁷ In this way Petrarch, the "Father of Humanism," can be forced to comment on topics which are relevant only to a generation of historians who have already lived through the Renaissance.

The second method discussed by Skinner is intellectual biography. Here the text is analyzed with reference to its political, economic, and social situation. The problem lies in the assumption that there is a causal connection between internal expression and external factors. Moreover, as Skinner says,

The 'context' mistakenly gets treated as the determinant of what is said. It needs rather to be treated as an ultimate framework for helping to decide what conventionally recognizable meanings, in a society of that kind, it might in principle have been possible for someone to have intended to communicate.¹⁸

Skinner advocates the critics entry into the linguistic context as the only solution. The rhetorical intention of the author can be determined only by studying the language as it was used. Unfortunately, this thesis is already on the other side of this fine line. The

¹⁶ Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," p. 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

English translations of Petrarch's letters and books not only must face the problem of distortion of specific words. The letters have also been collected in a manner which reinforces the traditional view of Petrarch as the first humanist. There is a built in bias toward the ideas earlier generations found most germane to the Medieval-Renaissance distinction.

A second major problem for the critic is that of chronology. All of Petrarch's letters, the Africa, The Lives of Illustrious Men, The Secret, the Life of Solitude, and the Triumphs are available only in their final form, endorsed by Petrarch after years of insertions and revision. The darker moods of old age had colored all Petrarch's work but creates an interpretive problem mainly in the early letters and sonnets.¹⁹ It is impossible to do a strict evolutionary or linguistic study because Africa and The Lives are given only in secondary sources and the other works only in translation. On a general level, however, we can perceive conceptual changes in Petrarch's historical imagination. By using Wilkins' information on dates and insertions, we can observe which subjects were most important at different times in Petrarch's life.

The greatest difficulty comes in discerning Petrarch's intention. Even a catalogue of words common to the time cannot reveal the linguistic assumptions behind a phrase. It is not only a problem of rhetoric in everyday conversation, but of "rhetoric" as the study and use of classical style and quotations to add a spark to ethical

¹⁹Baron, "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 16.

imperatives. We know that Petrarch often quoted Cicero out of context to make a point. However, we cannot determine how Petrarch expected his reader to respond. It is even more difficult to envision the reader's actual response to the rhetorical model. Even if twentieth-century assumptions and expectations could be washed out, we could not use social context alone to "grasp the intended illocutionary force."²⁰

My dependence on translations and secondary sources will necessarily limit the scope of this paper. The discussion of Petrarch's psychological development will be both tentative and incomplete. I will attempt, however, to discern changes in Petrarch's historical imagination by placing him in the context of his life and work as it is known to me. A causal connection between events and actions, between words and deeds, is not to be assumed. At most, I can hint at contributing factors.

²⁰Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," p. 46.

CHAPTER II

A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE EVOLUTION OF PETRARCH'S HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

Francesco Petrarch was born in the small Italian city of Arezzo in 1304. Petrarch's father was a native Florentine exiled with Dante and other White Guelphs in 1302. The political triumph of the Black Guelphs led to the removal of the notary's family to Avignon, the current seat of the Holy See. Many Italians, including Petrarch, referred to this seventy year "visit" of the Popes as the "Babylonian Captivity." The new papal city of Avignon, however, provided more security and intellectual stimulation than any place in Italy.

The baronial warfare of the Colonna and Orsini families left Rome in anarchy from the mid-thirteenth century. Since 1240 the Popes had rarely resided in Rome. The sojourn in Lyons had shown that a Pope could continue his functions outside Italy.²¹ The stormy relationship of Boniface VIII and Phillip the Fair of France revealed the danger of dependence on any one prince. The city of Avignon formed an enclave in the Comtat-Venaissin, near to but not within France. The Angevin rulers of Naples, the Popes' strongest Italian allies, actually owned the city.²² Avignon was ensured of rapid communication

²¹Daniel Waley, Later Medieval Europe (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1964), p. 116.

²²Guillaume Mollat, The Popes at Avignon (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd., 1963), p. XIX.

with Italy by land and sea routes. Its location also removed the Popes from the direct pressures of French and Italian enemies.

As the Popes' residence, Avignon became by default the spiritual and cultural center of the Christian world. European princes, prelates, diplomats, and men of letters flocked to Avignon to conduct the business of the Holy See. It was in the midst of this intra-European forum that Petrarch received his early education, doubtless a different one than he would have enjoyed in a small Italian republic. Petrarch took advantage of the intellectual assets of Avignon in the formative period of his youth, yet from the beginning directed his most virulent prose at the unlucky city.

Unholy Babylon, thou Hell on earth, thou sink of iniquity, thou cesspool of the world! There is neither faith, nor charity, nor religion, nor fear of God, nor shame, nor truth, nor holiness, albeit the residence within its walls of the supreme pontiff should have made of it a shrine and the very stronghold of religion. . . . Of all the cities that I know, its stench is the worst. What dishonor to see it suddenly become the capital of the world, when it should be the least of all cities.²³

Petrarch's contact with the papal library, a progressive literary circle, and the benefits of curial patronage provided the best educational possibilities available. He refused to acknowledge this real situation, however, preferring to condemn the new "capital of the world" on spiritual grounds. For ten centuries Rome had been the head of the Church and Empire. Petrarch did not allow fourteenth-century spiritual and political realities to influence the basis of his historical outlook.

²³Ibid., p. 252.

There was unlimited opportunity for employment in Avignon to men with education. Petrarch's father provided the best education money could buy in the hope his son would become a lawyer. It was the classical authors, however, who entranced the young scholar.

From my early youth when other boys were studying only in Prosper and Aesop, I gave myself wholly to Cicero, whether through natural sympathy or at the suggestion of my father, who always held that author in highest veneration and who would himself have attained some high reputation if domestic cares had not occupied his noble intelligence . . . That love for Cicero increased day by day, and my father, amazed, encouraged my immature propensity through paternal affection. And I, dodging no labor that might aid my purpose, breaking the rind began to savor the taste of the fruit, and couldn't be restrained from study.²⁴

When Petrarch was twelve his father sent him off to study law at Montpellier. From there he moved in 1320 to the University of Bologna, the greatest center of legal studies in Europe. Here Petrarch was first exposed to poems written in the living speech of Tuscany, the "sweet new style" of Dante.²⁵ Petrarch carried with him to Italy the heritage of the lyric poetry of Provencal and Languedoc. His earliest literary creations were lyric poems in Italian modeled on French tradition and the "Dolce Stil Nuovo." It would not be long, however, before Petrarch condemned these poems as "trifles." Because of his exposure to classical poetry Petrarch denied that the vulgare possessed the necessary decorum and seriousness to deal with weighty matters.

²⁴Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 21, Seniles XVI, 1 (1374).

²⁵Wilkins, The Life of Petrarch, p. 7.

Petrarch's early interest in Latin Classics gained momentum during his legal studies. The legal curriculum demanded reading of the Roman historians, jurists, and poets. The more Petrarch read of Roman law and history the more disgusted he became with the concerns of contemporary lawyers.

The greatest part of our legists, who care nothing for knowing about the origins of law and about the founders of jurisprudence, and have no other preoccupation than to gain as much as they can from their profession and are content to learn whatever is written in the law about contracts, judgments or wills, and it never occurs to them that the knowledge of arts and of origins, and of literature would be of the greatest practical use for their profession.²⁶

Petrarch was fascinated with the spirit behind the law, with Roman history rather than current application of Roman law. The mundane orientation of the legal curriculum could only increase Petrarch's sense of distance from historical Rome. His interest in the origins of law led Petrarch into the study of history through literature and jurisprudence.

Only a year away from receiving the doctorate of law, Petrarch abruptly abandoned his legal studies immediately after his father's death in 1326. He returned to Avignon and resumed his reading of ancient history. During this period he first saw Laura. While she did not affect his historical sense, Laura did become the central figure of Petrarch's love poems on which his early reputation was based.

There is no clear connection between Petrarch and the Curia before 1330. The conflict between Pope John XII and Louis of Bavaria

²⁶Quoted by Peter Burke in The Renaissance Sense of the Past (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p. 33.

for supremacy in Italy and the debate with the Spiritual Franciscans over poverty were only two of the issues occupying the papacy in the 1320's. Petrarch was not involved in these disputes. Living off his inheritance, Petrarch continued his study of classical literature. It was the contrast between the glories of Rome and the contemporary situation which inspired Petrarch to begin a major work on the miserable conditions of life in Avignon.²⁷ Petrarch's lack of interest in the political problems of the papacy is revealed in this unfinished treatise. To write a "tragedy" on the subject of the "Babylonian Captivity" shows that Petrarch was obsessed with what had been irrevocably lost rather than with what the past could offer the present.

In 1330 Petrarch became reacquainted with Giacomo Colonna, earlier his fellow student at Bologna. It was through Colonna's personal recommendation that Petrarch came into the service of his first patron, Cardinal Giovanni Colonna. Officially Petrarch was called "capellanus continuus commensalis" but his ecclesiastical duties were only honorary. Petrarch functioned primarily as a table companion and resident scholar in the cardinal's entourage.²⁸

The patronage of the Colonna family also gained Petrarch admittance to the growing library of Pope John XXII. Besides the

²⁷Ernest Hatch Wilkins, "Works that Petrarch Thought of Writing," Speculum, XXXV (October, 1960), p. 367.

²⁸Bishop, Petrarch and His World, p. 89.

study of cannon law, John ordered copies, made at his own expense, of classical authors. The first extant catalogue of the papal library, made in 1339, lists two thousand volumes of ancient philosophy, science, and history alone.²⁹

The Colonna family also had a private library, augmented during the cardinal's frequent travels in France and Italy. Landolfo Colonna, the uncle of Giovanni, moved from Chartres to Avignon in 1328, bringing with him a fine copy of Livy's History [of Rome] from the Founding of the City. Petrarch compared this copy to an earlier edition of Livy which he had been editing. It was in the First and Third Decades that Petrarch found the history of Rome's expansion and her fight to the death with Carthage. He would embellish this account in Africa and The Lives of Illustrious Men.³⁰

The substance of Petrarch's early reading on Rome is important in establishing the sources of his historical imagination. The religious significance of The Secret is also set off by determining the extent of Petrarch's knowledge of the Christian Fathers before 1341-42. In an effort to untangle the mystery, Pierre de Nolhac, Berthold Ullman, and Guiseppe Billanovich have studied a marginal notation concerning Petrarch's earliest collection of books. A list of his "specially prized books," dating from 1333, reveals a

²⁹S. Harrison Thomson, Europe in Renaissance and Reformation (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963), p. 2.

³⁰Guiseppe Billanovich, "Petrarch and the Textual Tradition of Livy," Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute, XIV (1951), p. 172.

predominance of classical over Christian authors.³¹ Cicero, Seneca, Aristotle, Suetonius, Sallust, Livy, and Virgil take precedence over Augustine and other Church Fathers. This list has been used by various scholars to "prove" that Petrarch's early readings were biased toward the pagans and that he turned later to Christian scholars.

Billanovich has discovered that Petrarch bought a copy of the City of God in 1325 and received Augustine's Confessions as a gift in 1333.³² Mere ownership does not prove that these books were more important to Petrarch than the poetry and history of ancient Rome. However, Africa and The Lives of Illustrious Men, the major works of these years, both celebrate the virtues of republican, pre-Christian Rome. It is still impossible to assert that Petrarch practiced any lasting discrimination against the Christian Fathers. More revealing than ownership of certain types of books is Petrarch's shift from lyric Italian poetry to the epic Latin style of Africa. Petrarch's nearly exclusive concern with classical antiquity is shown by his growing interest in the Latin language. By exerting himself on the reconstruction of great classical works Petrarch developed a rigorous philological and rhetorical instinct for words and phrases of the ancients. Petrarch felt it necessary to write in Latin because the language reflected not only a style of literature but the concrete reality of the Roman culture. An intimate knowledge of Virgil, Livy, and Cicero implanted

³¹Berthold L. Ullman, "Petrarch's Favorite Books," in Studies in the Italian Renaissance (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1955), p. 118.

³²Billanovich, "Petrarch and the Textual Tradition of Livy," p. 193.

a picture of Rome in Petrarch's mind. Especially in his early years, Petrarch's vision of Rome was more important to his historical imagination than knowledge of the Christian Fathers or Trecento culture.

Petrarch visited Rome for the first time in 1337. Cardinal Colonna responded to Petrarch's interest in Roman culture by granting him leave to explore the "Queen of Cities." The ruins provided Petrarch with visual evidence of the truth of the ancient's words. Using a twelfth century guidebook of the historico-legendary topography of Rome, the Wonders of the City of Rome, Petrarch walked the city and wrote to Colonna.

Sitting at the Bath of Diocletian, as when we had clambered on the walls of the crumbly city, we had the broken ruins under our eyes. We talked long of the city's history. We seemed to be divided; you seemed better informed in modern, I in ancient history. (Let us call ancient whatever preceded the celebration and veneration of Christ's name in Rome, modern everything from then to our own time.)³³

This letter was the inspiration for Theodore Mommsen's classic study "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages." Mommsen perceives a new "humanist" periodization of history. He gives Petrarch credit for destroying the medieval idea of the continuity of Rome, from pagan through thirteen Christian centuries. "Antiquity, so long considered as the 'Dark Age' now became the time of 'light' which had to be restored. The era following antiquity on the other hand,

³³Francesco Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, selected and trans. by Morris Bishop (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 66, Familiares VI, 2 (1338).

was submerged in obscurity."³⁴ Mommsen denies that Petrarch's categories might be only a convenient label. He asserts that Petrarch limited ancient history to pagan Rome on principle, the obvious value judgment being a condemnation of the medieval, Christian era.

Petrarch's vision of Rome is chronologically inconsistent. We cannot accept Mommsen's idea of a new "humanist" periodization of history because Petrarch did not set up an absolute standard. He endorsed the idea of continuity in condemning the Avignon Popes for breaking with medieval spiritual tradition. He also criticized Charles IV for refusing the responsibilities inherent in the Caesarean Imperium. On the other hand, Africa, The Lives of Illustrious Men, and Coronation Oration show Petrarch's strong sense of discontinuity between the past and the present. The periodization of history depended on Petrarch's immediate emotional and rhetorical needs. His realism in historical method and detail was always combined with an over-riding romantic ideal.

On returning to Avignon Petrarch escaped the hateful city and with Colonna funds established himself on a small farm at nearby Vaucluse. In this rural hideaway Petrarch worked on his first collection of poems and spent leisurely hours "visiting" with friends both alive and dead. In a letter to Giacomo Colonna in 1338 he explained the joys of Vaucluse with the company of his "secret friends."

³⁴Theodore E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages," in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. by Eugene F. Rice (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 118.

They come to me from every century and every land, illustrious in speech, in mind, and in the arts of war and peace. Only a corner of my house they ask. They heed my every summons: at my call they are with me, ever welcome while they stay, ready to go, if I wish, and to return . . . When I am bowed with sorrow they restore me; when I meet with Fortune's favor, they restrain my pride, reminding me that the days of life are fleeting. The humblest shelter is to them a mansion where, trembling they may linger, till the clouds are gone, and till the Muses rule again.³⁵

It is obvious that Petrarch does not fit into the Christian ascetic tradition of the religious contemplative. Dedication to literary rather than spiritual scholarship creates Petrarch's need for solitude. Petrarch seems to be aware of no conflict between secular learning and solitude; retirement means only detachment from humanity, the uncultured mob, and not from books. He admits that "isolation without literature is exile, prison, and torture; supply literature and it becomes your country, freedom, and delight."³⁶ In stark contrast to the civic humanism of the Quattrocento, Petrarch did not define freedom and liberty in political terms. In escaping from the political and social realities of the Italian city-states Petrarch gained a secure leisure. He also removed himself from any possible understanding of current politics. The effects of this isolation of Petrarch's historical imagination will be shown later.

It must also be remembered that Petrarch's unearned ecclesiastical income allowed him to celebrate the virtues of rural living without

³⁵Francesco Petrarch, Petrarch at Vaucluse: Letters in Verse and Prose, selected and trans. by Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 9, Epistolae Metricae I, 6.

³⁶Francesco Petrarch, The Life of Solitude, trans. by Jacob Zeitlin (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1924), p. 131.

being a farmer. Petrarch's ecclesiastical appointments constituted the main source of his livelihood. Ernest Hatch Wilkins speculates that Petrarch did not take even the minor orders. He was able to hold benefices only because the theoretical requirements were rarely enforced.³⁷ Petrarch never accepted any duties which would have interfered with his literary pursuits, but he valued the income as a means of attaining freedom to work. At various times in his life Petrarch held benefices in Lombez, Pisa, Parma, and Padua.

In 1338 Petrarch conceived the idea of the Africa, his first major work dealing exclusively with Roman history. Africa is a poetic interpretation of Scipio's conquest of Carthage in 202 B.C. Petrarch developed the theme of an epic struggle of two civilizations for control of the world, emphasizing the place of Scipio as the Roman man of action and military hero.

Africa was structured as an epic meant to reveal the birth, death, and resurrection of Rome. It was, however, also a fictional biography since the role Scipio plays carries him through all eras of pagan, Christian, and modern time. Petrarch wrote Africa as a glorification of Roman history in order to wake up the unworthy and un-Roman men of his time. To give his contemporaries a sense of what had been lost and what must be rebuilt, Petrarch distorted the conventional boundaries of history to suit his purpose.

³⁷Ernest Hatch Wilkins, Studies in the Life and Work of Petrarch (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1955), p. 3.

Petrarch's historical sources were Cicero's Dream of Scipio, Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio, and Livy's History of the Punic Wars.³⁸ Petrarch granted Scipio a far more critical role in the drama than Livy. To give the events epic proportions it was necessary to embellish the hero's personality with mythical qualities.

Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus the Elder exemplified the pagan and military virtues of the Roman Republic. Petrarch, however, credited him with both the immediate salvation of the state and with prophesying the establishment of Rome as the capital city of Christianity. Scipio is to Petrarch both an historic and poetic figure. His personality as developed by Petrarch symbolizes the moral state of Rome as well as a unique historical personality of the Republican era. Inasmuch as the intent of Africa is to inspire heroic action in present-day Italy, Petrarch allows Scipio to comment on Roman history through the centuries. His words break down the pagan-Christian historical distinction and cause Petrarch to say, "Oh, remarkable words worthy not so much of a young military leader, as of an elder or a lofty poet, or a distinguished philosopher, or even an apostle."³⁹ It is the duty of an historian to transform men by means of the "burning" power of words. Scipio's eloquence is one of Petrarch's methods to make the now absent Roman heritage come alive in the present.

While Scipio is the hero of Africa, it is important to note any reference Petrarch makes to Caesar so that a comparison can be drawn

³⁸Bernardo, Petrarch, Scipio, and the Africa, p. 163.

³⁹Ibid., p. 61.

between his youthful and mature historical outlook. The subject of Africa is Republican Rome and its struggle with Carthage. This is a change from the medieval conception of the Roman Empire as the "Monarchy established under Caesar, extended under Augustus, restored under Trajan, justified under Constantine, set in order by Justinian, consolidated under Theodosius and strengthened anew under Charlemagne."⁴⁰ However, the dividing line between the political institutions of Republican and Imperial Rome is not so clear in Petrarch's mind. Hans Baron points out that Caesar is bitterly censured in Africa for "turning his ever victorious hands against the flesh and blood of his own commonwealth."⁴¹ Yet Petrarch condemns that very commonwealth for not allowing Scipio independent and unlimited leadership, forcing him to share his power with other citizens.

It would be most fair to say that at this early date there was no contest between Scipio and Caesar's political methods. Scipio was the Roman hero because Petrarch as yet knew little of Caesar's personality and the figure of Scipio offered him greater poetic and moral possibilities. The discovery of the historical Caesar through the personal reminiscences of Cicero would take place only after Petrarch recovered the Letters to Atticus in 1345.

Petrarch's conviction that Italy enjoyed the special favor of God led to his destruction of the boundaries of history in order to demonstrate the continuity of Rome's divinely ordained rule. The

⁴⁰Hans Baron, The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), p. 154.

⁴¹Baron, "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 34.

precepts and personages of the pagan era fuse with those of the Christian in an incongruous fashion.

When David was born Rome was born; then it was that Aeneas came from Troy to Italy, which was the origin of the most noble Roman city even as the written word bears witness. Evident enough therefore is the divine election of the Roman Empire by the birth of the holy city, which was contemporaneous with the root of the race from which Mary springs.⁴²

A scene in Heaven before the throne of Jove-Jehovah reiterates this theme.

I will put on flesh, descend to earth, accept the burdens of humanity, and suffer a shameful death. Rome will be my Holy City and I shall come soon so captured am I by a placid Virgin, so allured by her breasts filled with sacred milk.⁴³

By adding facets of Jove's personality to the Christian God, Petrarch creates a sense of continuity of religious tradition while still allowing the pagans to be non-Christian in chronological time. In Petrarch's mind, it is only the gap in historical time which separates him from the ancients. Mere difference in religious rituals was no obstacle to men who shared the common wisdom of the ages.

To prove the divine ordination of the Roman Empire Petrarch uses the concept of continuity in an un-medieval way. Where medieval Christians connected themselves with Rome through a politico-religious continuum, Petrarch stressed the spiritual proximity of pagans and early Christians.

⁴²Quoted by James Harvey Robinson in Petrarch: The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1914), p. 98.

⁴³Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 178.

Petrarch shifts ground again in his discussion of the lack of political continuity between ancient and modern Rome. In order to slight his un-Roman age Petrarch now separates Roman virtus from the succeeding period of foreign barbarism.

The scepter and the dignity of the Empire, won by us with so much sweat--foreigners will steal it, men of Spanish or African origin. Who can bear this rise of the scum of the earth to this highest dignity--of people who were spared by the sword for ignominious survival? . . . The Empire will always be called Romanum Imperium; but the Roman will not always hold the reins . . . In the end, the power will fall to the North.⁴⁴

It is clear that Petrarch draws no constant line between the ancient and modern periods. Even Roman history is distorted to suit Petrarch's needs. The Roman Republic and Roman Empire are used interchangeably because they both embody partial ideals of Petrarch's vision.

The transformative power of poetry lies in its ability to create truth through illusion. Petrarch used the distortive power of poetic symbols to inspire ethical action in history. In the introduction to Africa Petrarch admits "the role of true poetry is to take the very stuff of history and philosophy and recast it within a delightful and colorful cloud and thereby transform it into a goad to virtue."⁴⁵

In his first Eclogue Petrarch distinguishes between the poetry of Africa and religious poetry by opposing the epics of Homer and Virgil to the rhymes of David. David "makes frequent references to

⁴⁴Quoted by Mommsen in "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages," p. 118.

⁴⁵Quoted by Bernardo in Petrarch, Scipio, and the Africa, p. 7.

the citizens and walls of the little Jerusalem and never wanders from there and is always ready with tears and breathes too hoarsely in his breast."⁴⁶ Homer and Virgil, on the other hand, "sing of Rome, Troy, the battles of kings; the power of grief and love and wrath, the spirit that rules the waves and the winds and the stars."⁴⁷ Religious poetry in general was limited by its other-worldly concerns. Thus to Petrarch's mind the merging of pagan and Christian truth in the manner of Africa was the stuff of great poetry.

The dedication of Africa to Posterity reveals better than any other early document the psychological state of the youthful Petrarch. Scipio's companion, the poet Ennius, foretells the future role of Petrarch in upholding the Roman heritage during their double "coronation" on the Capitoline.

I seem to see a young man born in the land of the Etruscans who will retell your exploits like a second Ennius . . . He will stay the fleeing Muses with his songs; he will prolong our life on earth. I love him for his services to us. He will be inspired not by force, money, fear, hate, ambition but only by admiration for our great deeds, by love of truth.⁴⁸

The idea that artists, thinkers, and writers could stand together with men of action in Heaven is reflected in the end of Africa. The double coronation of Scipio and Ennius show the equal importance of the poet to posterity as the medium through which the actions of

⁴⁶Aldo S. Bernardo, "Petrarch's Attitude Toward Dante," *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, LXX (June, 1955), p. 202.

⁴⁷Quoted by Bernardo in "Petrarch's Attitude Toward Dante," p. 202.

⁴⁸Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 178.

individuals enter the historical tradition. Petrarch did not merely allow the prediction of Ennius to stand but barges back through time to announce:

Ennius stood at Scipio's right, also crowned with the laurel, and as cultivator of studies and of divine poetry enjoyed a similar triumph as his great patron. After these, many others followed in eager striving. I myself after fifteen hundred years, have attempted to climb the thorny path and to follow the rare footsteps of my predecessors but with inferior power, imitating the great triumphs of ancient heroes, lest the predictions of the Greek bard should have been in vain.⁴⁹

Petrarch had done his duty by writing Africa. However, he was hesitant to release his book to scholarly friends, much less the general public. Petrarch feared it would have no effect on his dark and barren times. "My fate is to live amid varied and confusing storms. But for you, perhaps, if as I hope and wish, you [Africa] will live long after me, there will be a better age. This sleep of forgetfulness will not last forever."⁵⁰ Petrarch hated the "barbarians" control of current Roman politics less than their disregard for poets and men of letters. Africa would not be revered in the unscholarly present. It would be the future age which would judge the merit of his work. The dedication to Posterity reads,

Do thou, my Africa, remember to keep my name fresh. Thanks to thee may fame visit my tomb and honor attend my ashes. Life will be sweeter to me among such a people, my glory will defy the grave. Traverse, unknown, the succession of heedless generations, lodging only with some rare, humble friend until the new age shall come. Then assume a new youth when the light

⁴⁹Quoted by Bernardo in Petrarch, Scipio, and the Africa, p. 43.

⁵⁰Quoted by Mommsen in "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages," p. 127.

kind to poets shall shine and an age shall dawn to bless and favor all good men.⁵¹

The Lives of Illustrious Men, begun in 1338 and greatly modified between 1351 and 1353, is Petrarch's attempt at biography as history. In the preface Petrarch gives a succinct definition of the task of an historian. "Indeed if I am not mistaken it is the fruitful task of the historian to make known that which the reader should imitate and which he should avoid so that of these two a number of illustrious examples are available."⁵²

Here as in the Africa, Petrarch assumes that the persuasive power of the historian comes from the eloquence of his speech and the choice of his models. Petrarch remarks in Familiar Letters I, 9

How much eloquence can accomplish in the shaping of human life is known both from reading in many authors and from the experience of everyday life. How great is the number of those we recognize in our own day to whom even examples of virtue were of no help, who have been aroused and turned suddenly from a most wicked manner of life to a perfectly ordered one simply by the sound of others' voices.⁵³

The purpose of The Lives was to show, by extolling virtue and glory, that the undisputed greatness of Rome rested basically on the actions of its great men. Petrarch was specifically concerned with the actions of "illustrious" men rather than accidents of fortune. He condemns

⁵¹Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 179.

⁵²Quoted by Theodore E. Mommsen in "The Sala Virorum Illustrium," in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, ed. by Eugene F. Rice (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1959), p. 174.

⁵³Quoted by Jerrold E. Siegel in Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 34.

his own age for an atrophy of will, the results of which are evident in the current political situation.

I thank our princes who save me--feeble and desirous of quiet--from such effort, for they furnish material not for history but for satire. And if I know some who of late have been remarkably successful, all their victories were gained either through good luck or the inertia of their enemies, and there was no glory or virtue involved at all.⁵⁴

Petrarch sees human initiated action as the driving force of history. The idea that "illustrious men" could make history was highly secular. Petrarch breaks with medieval tradition according to which all history is ruled over by God.⁵⁵ The Lives of Illustrious Men was Petrarch's first celebration of individual personality. The Deeds of Caesar (De Gestis Caesaris) written in Petrarch's old age, would be his supreme example of this genre.

The importance of The Lives to Petrarch scholarship centers on the chronology and persons of the 1338 as compared to the later plan. Through a false reading of Pierre de Nolhac, Theodore Mommsen assumed that what was originally conceived as a biography of "all the illustrious men of all countries and ages" became in time condensed to a consideration of Roman heroes alone.⁵⁶ Nolhac thought The Lives celebrated the lives of Roman heroes from King Romulus to Emperor Titus in the final version. However, the work of Carlo Calcaterra

⁵⁴Quoted by Mommsen in "The Sala Virorum Illustrium," p. 136.

⁵⁵Bernardo, Petrarch, Scipio, and the Africa, p. 58.

⁵⁶Quoted by Mommsen in "The Sala Virorum Illustrium," p. 172.

and Guido Martellotti on the 1351-53 revision shows that the biographies of Adam, Noah, Nimrod, Ninus, Semiramis, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses were added later to those of the Romans.⁵⁷ It is therefore through or in response to the religious introspection of the Secretum period that the Biblical heroes came into their own. This discovery of the revision of The Lives of Illustrious Men to include religious figures shows a broadening of Petrarch's historical imagination. The addition of Biblical heroes to a formerly Roman scenario reveals Petrarch's willingness to shift the boundaries of historical time. Mommsen's concept of ages of darkness and light did not exist absolutely in Petrarch's mind.

In his early years Petrarch's reputation depended primarily on his Italian love poems. The author wished instead to win glory through his Latin works, Africa and The Lives. His reading of the ancients acquainted Petrarch with the long-lost tradition of the laurel crown, a custom of honoring poets which had been discontinued for twelve hundred years. In the days of Imperial Rome there had been held on the Capitoline, once every five years, a multiple contest that included a prize for poetry.⁵⁸ The Italian poet Mussato had been crowned with the laurel in Padua in the early fourteenth century, but Petrarch, in line with his poetic and historical sensibility, believed Rome alone could crown a worthy poet. In not too subtle letters to King Robert of Naples and the Colonna family, Petrarch hinted that

⁵⁷Referred to in Baron's "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 25.

⁵⁸Wilkins, The Life of Petrarch, p. 24.

the revival of this custom would help bring back the glories of old Rome by inspiring epic poetry, his Africa being a prime example.

Much to his surprise Petrarch received simultaneous invitations for a coronation from both Paris and Rome on September 1, 1340.

Writing to Cardinal Colonna Petrarch justifies his choice of Rome.

The charm of novelty urges me toward Paris and reverence for antiquity toward Rome, on the one hand my friend, on the other my fatherland. One thing that weighs with me is that the King of Naples, who is in Italy, is the one man whose judgment as to my worthiness I should be content to accept.⁵⁹

Petrarch always enjoyed the praise lavished on him by Robert the Wise of Naples, chief of the Guelphs and the Papacy's main ally in Italy. At one time he even considered writing a treatise devoted to Robert's resurrection of the classical tradition in the court of Naples.⁶⁰ Robert did, in fact, cultivate a scholarly revival by supporting the University of Naples. Aided by Arab and Greek translators, Robert collected a private library and wrote a treatise advocating evangelical poverty.⁶¹ Robert, however, hardly deserved Petrarch's epitaph of a "second Plato of the intellect."⁶² As a patron of the arts, Robert hoped his sponsorship of Petrarch would draw the poet to a permanent residence at his court.

Before visiting Rome in April of 1341, Petrarch traveled to Naples to receive a three day "oral examination" from the king, who

⁵⁹Petrarch, Petrarch at Vaucluse, p. 26, Familiars IV, 4.

⁶⁰Wilkins, "Works that Petrarch Thought of Writing," p. 564.

⁶¹Tatam, Francesco Petrarca, p. 106.

⁶²Quoted by Tatam in Francesco Petrarca, p. 104, Familiars V, 1 (1343).

pronounced him fit to wear the crown. In a letter to Robert Petrarch acknowledges the historical importance of the revival of the crowning of poets.

In this restoration of the custom of the laurel--not merely intermitted for many ages, but altogether forgotten while very different cares and studies prevailed in the Republic--you have been the general, and I the common soldier. I know men of the highest gifts, both in Italy and abroad, who have only been deterred from the attempt by its long disuse and by the suspicion attaching to novelty; and I trust--now they have laid the peril on my shoulders--that they will shortly follow in my wake and pluck the Roman laurel by rivalry in study. Who can deny, or fear to commence the march under the auspices of Robert? It is a delight to be the first in such an army, of which I should think it not inglorious to be the last. I confess that I should have been unequal to the burden, had not your favor given me strength and courage.⁶³

It had been a dry age for scholars in general and poets in particular. The Africa was written with youthful enthusiasm and arrogance. In the same positive spirit Petrarch defended poetry in his Epistolae Metricae II, 2.

You call us mad? Well our madness is divine. Dreaming is the singers right. Only when it soars can the soul, escaping mortality, sing of exalted things, leaving the vulgar mob far below its feet. You would drive us from your cities; but we love the woodland solitude! Who will remain to teach you the ideals of the past, valid for the future? If poets were mute, man would be mute also, and virtue would hide unknown, lovely only to itself, and all the great past would vanish, and even the fundamentals of our language! True, Aquinas warns that praise of poets will bring worthless ones to the fore. But that is the common case; it is no argument against the sublimity of the great, such as Vergil, who hide sublime truths under a deceptive clarity.⁶⁴

⁶³Ibid., p. 154, Familiares IV, 7 (1341).

⁶⁴Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 260, (1345).

Here is Petrarch's strongest statement on the power of the poetic word. In asserting the aim of poetry as teaching and persuading, Petrarch denied the medieval definition of poetry as mere decoration. The triumph of virtue could become a reality because poets were able to reveal truth in a pleasing and inspiring manner.

Petrarch was crowned on the Capitoline on April 8, 1341 and his Coronation Oration is an unrevised statement of the poetic theory and patriotism of his early years. He admits to the crowd

As we all read and know, there was an age that was happier for poets, an age when they were held in the highest honor, first in Greece and then in Italy, especially when Caesar Augustus held imperial sway, under whom there flourished excellent poets, Virgil, Varius, Ovid, Horace, and many others.⁶⁵

Petrarch uses the fact of the twelve-hundred-year break between the last and his present coronation to imply that there were no medieval poets of sufficient valor and style to win the crown. He thus sees himself as the logical-chronological successor to Homer and Virgil.

I finally decided to come to Rome--why I ask you if not for the very reason that Virgil says 'Vicit Amor Patriae.' I was much moved to this decision by a certain affection and reverence of those ancient poets who flourished in this very city, who lived here, who are buried here.⁶⁶

Ignoring the fact that Rome the fourteenth-century city could not possibly be compared to Rome or the Empire of antiquity, Petrarch views the revival of this custom as a logical recognition of Rome's continuing greatness. "I am moved also by the hope that, if God wills,

⁶⁵ Francesco Petrarch, The Coronation Oration, trans. by Ernest Hatch Wilkins in Studies in the Life and Work of Petrarch (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1955), p. 305.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 305.

I may renew in the now aged Republic, a beauteous custom of its flourishing youth."⁶⁷ In asking himself a rhetorical question, Petrarch gives an indication why this event is so important to him. "Do you not see what a task you have undertaken in attempting to attain the lonely steeps of Parnassus and the inaccessible grove of the Muses?"⁶⁸ Yes, he does see, but a "sweet longing urges me upwards over the lonely slopes of Parnassus" where hopefully he may come to rest with the great classical poets.⁶⁹

To reach the level of the poets of antiquity Petrarch imitated them as closely as his imagination allowed. The structure and style of Africa was so "epic" that contemporaries considered it a cultural "artifact" before it was even finished. The Scipio that Petrarch carefully developed was still only a poet's hero. The popular culture had no knowledge or interest in such a mythical personality. It is doubtful that many people took notice of Petrarch's coronation. The ceremony that was to symbolize the dawn of a new literary age did, however, have a powerful effect on Cola di Rienzo, a man whose political romanticism tied him closely to Petrarch. The style and emotion of the Coronation Oration alienates it from fourteenth century culture. Petrarch in fact directed it at his spiritual comrades Cicero, Virgil, and Homer. The workings of Petrarch's historical imagination had again bridged the gap between the real and the ideal.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 305.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 304.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 304.

Petrarch began work on The Secret (Secretum) in October of 1342 and completed it by March of 1343. It was his first major work after the Coronation Oration and stands in marked contrast to all his earlier work. Petrarch's bold optimism and imaginative identification with antiquity are negated. Here for the first time we see Petrarch's insecurity expressed in a religious context. Juxtaposed to Africa, The Lives, and the Coronation Oration the "Secretum crisis" reveals Petrarch's spiritual introspection. It is an important psychological record precisely because it followed a period of Petrarch's greatest optimism and creativity. We do not know, however, the exact cause of his religious interest.

Petrarch wrote The Secret in the form of a dialogue between himself and Augustine. Petrarch had acquired the City of God and Confessions in his youth. Augustine's theology was not his major concern. Petrarch instead emphasized with the "paradigmatic quality of the Saint's own experience of wandering ambivalence, psychic division, and ultimate resolution of his conflict."⁷⁰ Where classical authors influenced Petrarch's historical outlook, the conversion of Augustine became a model for his spiritual development. Petrarch states the importance of the Confessions at a turning point in his life.

I would have you know that book was the means of introducing me to the whole of sacred literature, which in my arrogant youth, with a young man's insolence--as I now see--at the suggestion of the devil, I had avoided as low and unequal to secular writings--

⁷⁰ Charles Trinkhaus, In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought (London: Constable and Co., 1970), I, 14.

so great was my love of the latter and contempt of the former, and so false my estimate of myself. That book so radically changed me. I do not say that I abandoned my early vices but that henceforth I neither despised nor hated sacred letters. Nay, their rude simplicity soothed me and drew my unwilling eyes and ears towards them. In short I began to love and admire them and to draw fewer flowers, perhaps, but more fruit from them than from those I had formerly so loved. It would have been strange for a Christian to have been in no wise changed by the eloquence of Augustine when, as he records, the 'Hortensius' of Cicero had so changed him.⁷¹

The main content of the crisis which took written form in The Secret is Petrarch's denial of the value of classical studies. We shall see, however, that Petrarch adopts a Christian tone only for a short time.

The central dialogue of The Secret concerns Augustine's attack and Petrarch's vehement defense of the two finest passions of his nature, love and glory. A condemning Augustine states,

Not being contented with your duty of every day you have let your thoughts run on ages of time and given yourself up to dreams of fame among those who come after. And in pursuit of this end, putting your hand to greater tasks, you entered on writing a history from the time of King Romulus to that of Emperor Titus, an enormous enterprise that would swallow up an immensity of time and labor. Then, without waiting till this was finished, goaded by the pricks of your ambition for glory, you sailed off in your poetical barque towards Africa. Throw to the winds those great loads of histories; the deeds of Romans have been celebrated quite enough by others and are known by their own fame. Get out of Africa and leave it to its possessors.⁷²

This criticism strikes the heart of Petrarch's personal beliefs.

Augustine condemns Petrarch's interest in ancient history and literature. Moreover, Petrarch's spiritual conscience denies that poetry

⁷¹Quoted by Tatam in Francesco Petrarca, p. 236, Seniles VIII, 6 (1367).

⁷²Francesco Petrarca, Petrarch's Secret, trans. by William H. Draper (London: Chatto and Windus, 1911), p. 169.

can have any active meaning in human history.

Petrarch protests that Africa is his prize and claim to eternal fame. This gives Augustine an opening to reflect on the mortality of all human creations.

First there is the death of those with whom one has passed one's life; and that forgetfulness which is the common bane of old age; then there is the rising fame, ever growing greater of new men; Think, too, how fickle is the judgment of the multitude. In your own Africa you call this, elegantly enough, the second death. And then consider the perishing of books for even though that perishing may appear so much more delayed as books outlast monuments, nevertheless it is sooner or later inevitable. When your books perish you shall perish too; this is the third death to be endured.⁷³

These words constitute a devastating attack on Petrarch's professional goals. However, he did not believe his writings would not outlive him. The "Secretum crisis" did not radically change Petrarch's life. He continued to use Christian models but did not give up his literary leisure for a monastic retirement. A spiritual revaluation of Petrarch's priorities was a necessary response, modifying his youthful egoism.

Petrarch discovered a codex containing Cicero's Letters to Atticus, Brutus, and Quintus while visiting Verona in 1345. The recovery of this long-lost source challenged Petrarch's opinion of Cicero and inspired the collection of his own letters. Petrarch learned of the private lives of ancient Romans in these letters which "threw a flood of light on the struggle between Caesar and Pompey and upon the personal character of Cicero himself."⁷⁴

⁷³Ibid., p. 180.

⁷⁴Tatam, Francesco Petrarca, p. 350.

Sometime between 1345 and 1350 Petrarch began collecting and editing his private letters. Cicero and Seneca were the models by which Petrarch charted his own development. Petrarch was intent on presenting himself in progress toward a virtuous goal. Constant revision of the letters eliminated any matters which could damage Petrarch's reputation. He suggests,

In the ordering of these letters I took account not of the subjects but of the time of writing. Except for the last few, written to illustrious men of old, which I brought together in one place because of their unity of character, almost all the letters appear in the order in which they were written. Thus the reader, if he is at all curious about it, may follow my own progress and understand the course of my life. . . . Now to thee, worthy reader, whoever thou art, I beg and pray, by our common zeal for learning, by thy care for thine own fame, be not afflicted by the variety of my subjects or my humble style.⁷⁵

Petrarch goes beyond mere explanation in addressing an assumed future reader. He sought notice only of the progress in his life. Letters reflecting immature views were changed to match his later experience. Exposure to the personal character of Cicero in the Letters to Atticus made Petrarch very conscious of the damage done by the written word.

Petrarch responded to the Letters to Atticus by sending two letters to "Cicero in Hades." For the first time Petrarch recognized the difference between Cicero the Orator and Cicero the political chameleon and civic philosopher. Petrarch was horrified with the new historical person he discovered. In anger and dismay Petrarch

⁷⁵Petrarch, Letters From Petrarch, p. 212, Familiars XXIV, 13 (1361).

refused to accept Cicero's words. Only by reading between the lines and attributing hidden meaning to simple statements did Petrarch maintain his bias.

In the Middle Ages the moral philosophy and the platonic overlay of Macrobius in his Commentary on Scipio's Dream turned Cicero into a contemplative philosopher. As Hans Baron points out, Macrobius' aim was "To Prove that Cicero, in spite of his championship of active political life, had already known that religious contemplation was on a higher plane."⁷⁶ Another medieval source was the adaptation of On Public Office as a guide for the use of clerics and laymen by Saint Ambrose.⁷⁷

However much Petrarch was awed by Cicero's golden eloquence, common sense, and moral wisdom, Cicero's civic spirit was incomprehensible to him. The cultured man of letters had been pulled into the fires of the Civil Wars by what Petrarch considered skewed priorities. He asks

Why did you choose to involve yourself in so many vain contentions and unprofitable quarrels? Why did you abandon the retirement proper to your age, profession, and fortune? What false dazzle of glory led you, an old man, to implicate yourself in the wars of the young? What tempted you to dealings that brought you to a death unworthy of a philosopher? How much better it would have been for you, the philosopher, to have grown old in country peace, meditating on the eternal life, not on this transitory existence. How much better if you had never held the fasces of power, never longed for triumphs, never corrupted your spirit with any Catalines.⁷⁸

⁷⁶Hans Baron, "Cicero and the Civic Spirit in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXII (1938), p. 77.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 79.

⁷⁸Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 207, Familiares XXIV, 3 (1345).

The great historical interest of Petrarch's relation to Cicero in Baron's words, "lies in the fact that it allows us to see so clearly the unconscious connection between the way of life of the humanist literati and the monarchical interpretation of Roman history."⁷⁹

The "Letter to Cicero in Hades" shows Petrarch to be a partisan of Caesar. He does not admit any glory in civic service, emphasizing instead the trials and danger. Petrarch sought freedom from the anxieties of the republican forum and therefore advocated quiet retreat from public involvement. Petrarch knew Cicero only as a philosopher and his exemplar. Cicero's heroic response to the Cataline Conspiracy was, to Petrarch, a corruption of the philosophic spirit. It is Cicero's mixing of literary and political culture that irks Petrarch. It was an old Cicero who entered Republican office, giving up his scholarly solitude when he should have known better.

Cicero's Letters to Atticus revealed a petty bitterness and a vast amount of mundane concerns in his life. Petrarch had not seen these things in the brilliant public orations of Cicero. These letters brought into clear focus the personalities, including strengths and weaknesses, of Cicero and Caesar. Petrarch, therefore, like Cicero, fluctuated between love of Caesar's power and person and hatred of his tyranny. The mythical name of Caesar was already well established in the Middle Ages. Petrarch was unable to perceive Caesar merely as an often vicious political animal, the man Cicero

⁷⁹Baron, The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance, p. 122.

responded to. Friedrich Gundolf admits,

No doubt Petrarch, too, intoxicated himself with the past glory of the old republic and wept with Ciceronian eyes over its fall: but these were not political tears for the downfall of an ideal but an aesthetic melancholy among ruins--not an expression of his bitter grief over an impotent deed, but rather his almost voluptuous sense of distance and transience.⁸⁰

The contrast is great between the historical Republican and Imperial Rome, the Rome of Scipio and Caesar in Petrarch's terms. Yet Petrarch's praise of both eras is not inconsistent. The political institutions of a republic and an empire differed far more than the spirit of the great men who directed them. Cicero wasted his life in trying to save the already dying state. This is why Petrarch dondemns him for attempting to salvage Scipio's republic.

I omit your treatment of Julius Caesar, whose well-tested clemency set free even those who assailed him. I say nothing of Pompey the Great, with whom, it seemed you were on such a friendly footing. But what frenzy provoked you against Mark Anthony? Love of the republic, I suppose you would say, but you admit that the republic had already totally collapsed. And if fidelity to the State and love of liberty impelled you, why were you so familiar with Augustus?⁸¹

Many of these are the same questions Boccaccio and other Italian friends would ask Petrarch after his move to Milan. It is natural that he asked them of his own exemplar.

Petrarch's second letter to Cicero takes a more apologetic tone.

If you will permit my frankness, Cicero, you lived as a man, you spoke as an orator, you wrote as a philosopher! It was your life that I censured, not your mind, not your tongue. I admire your mind, I am bewitched by your tongue. And in your life I

⁸⁰Friedrich Gundolf, The Mantle of Caesar (New York: Vanguard Press, 1928), p. 126.

⁸¹Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 207.

ask only constancy and that taste for quiet which is proper to the practice of philosophy, and withdrawal from civil strife, when only liberty was dead and buried and the republic tearfully interred.⁸²

Petrarch's view of Cicero is completely romantic. He had evidence of the historical reality of Cicero's life. Yet he still distinguishes between the positive contribution of Cicero's philosophy and his fatal political actions. Cicero's words bewitched Petrarch. The golden speech of the orator was acceptable. However, Petrarch continued to censure Cicero's life by ignoring historical fact.

The discovery of the Letters to Atticus was of great importance to the development of civic humanism. Petrarch's Cicero was not accepted in the fifteenth century but the same documents were used to celebrate Cicero's active life. Petrarch understood the disturbing evidence introduced in these letters and realized a debate would arise between supporters of the contemplative scholar and those of the active citizen. Petrarch in fact advises a "fanatic admirer" of Cicero to

remember that they are things concerning which no unbiased judgment can be formed, by you or anyone else, without a careful reading of the entire correspondence of Cicero, which suggested this controversy.⁸³

Besides Cicero, Petrarch wrote to Seneca, Varro, Quintillian, Livy, Horace, Virgil, and Homer. The Letters to the Ancients offers us a unique perception of the spiritual communion which tied Petrarch to the great men, now dead, of a great age, now gone. He says,

⁸²Ibid., p. 210, Familiaries XXIV, 4 (1345).

⁸³Ibid., p. 203, Familiaries XXIV, 2 (1352).

"Friendship binds me to the names and ashes of the illustrious dead of every age, no less effectively than if they were alive."⁸⁴

Petrarch was aware of the enigmatic quality of his letters. The concluding sentences often find him realizing they were not deliverable. Immediately the tone and tense switch from a communication between contemporaries to a statement of fact from the "land of the living."⁸⁵ Petrarch's Letters to the Ancients are attempts to escape out of cultural barrenness into a more comfortable and productive climate. In his "Letter to Livy" Petrarch concludes, "For this especial reason I render thee thanks; that thou didst so frequently cause me to forget the present evils and transfer me to happier times."⁸⁶ Unfortunately, this illusion can only last a short time and Petrarch sees that he is still trapped.

For a long time I have been talking to you just as if you were present; but now the strong illusion fades away, and I realize how far you are from me. There comes over me a fear that you will scarcely care, down in the shades, to read the many things I have written here.⁸⁷

The Letters to the Ancients are a rhetorical innovation in the history of literary style. To Petrarch they were also one way to overcome gaps in historical time by flights of poetic imagination.

⁸⁴Francesco Petrarch, Petrarch's Letters to Classical Authors, trans. by Mario Emilio Cosenza (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1910), p. 113.

⁸⁵Quoted by Peter Burke in The Renaissance Sense of the Past, p. 22.

⁸⁶Petrarch, Petrarch's Letters to Classical Authors, p. 100.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 156, "Letter to Homer."

Life in Avignon was intolerable to Petrarch during the time of Pope Clement VI. The building of a huge palace to house the pope, curia, and multitudes of relatives was the surest indication that the Holy See was not about to return to Rome. The situation in Italy worsened rapidly just before mid-century. Bernabo Visconti attempted to carve out a state in northern Italy aided by Pope Benedict's policy of appeasement. Clement VI resumed a warlike policy against the Visconti and drained papal resources already depleted by loans to England and France. Petrarch comments to Stefano Colonna on the reigning chaos in Italy.

Cisalpine Gaul, indeed all that lies between the Alps, the Apennines, the Rubicon--the boundary of ancient Italy--all this vast region is oppressed by an undying tyranny and that part of it that looks to the west has become--oh hateful fortune--a thoroughfare for transalpine tyrants. So it is, therefore, that nowhere in this region can you find a place where a lover of virtue and of tranquility may live in quietness. Tuscany today, her footsteps faltering between a doubtful liberty and a dreaded servitude, knows not what her fate is to be.⁸⁸

Petrarch did not see the Italian situation as a territorial struggle between tyrannies and republics. "A lover of virtue and tranquility," Petrarch advocated an end to political disorder by any means.

Petrarch and most Italians regarded the Avignon Popes with extreme suspicion. All popes from Clement V to Urban V were French, as were 113 of 134 cardinals chosen by them. In response to the scandalous financial practices and divisive Italian policy of the papacy Petrarch wrote his Letters Without Names (Sine Nomine). Most

⁸⁸Petrarch, Petrarch at Vaucluse, p. 98, Familiares XV, 7 (1352).

of the nineteen were without specific addressees. Because of their blatant political and anti-clerical tone they were closeted until Petrarch's death. The introduction spells out this necessity.

I have brought together in one collection several letters written to my friends for diverse motives and at different times, from fear that being scattered about, they might become a blot on the entire body of my letters and so render them hateful to the enemies of truth. They will be released after I am gone for what difference will it make then how it irritates them?⁸⁹

The Letters Without Names went only to close friends whose sympathy with Petrarch's views was assumed. They were accompanied by a plea to read and return them to the writer's safe-keeping. Petrarch knew well enough that the "enemies of truth" controlled the ecclesiastical income he depended upon.

One of the main targets of Petrarch's diatribes was Clement VI. Clement set up the most magnificent court of the "Babylonian Captivity," squandering wealth on the papal palace and the purchase of the city of Avignon from Naples in 1348. Petrarch's characterization of the pope was not subtle.

Here in Avignon is Nimrod [Pope Clement VI, who was fond of hunting], builder of turrets, and at the same time sower of dread; here there is Semiramis [Viscountess Cecilia of Turenne, the mistress of the Pontiff], armed with a quiver.⁹⁰

Petrarch was not an activist or a political pamphleteer. It was natural, however, that he express his frustrations to friends in a

⁸⁹Quoted by John E. Wrigley, "A Papal Secret Known to Petrarch," Speculum, XXXIX (October, 1964), p. 615.

⁹⁰Quoted by Mario Emilio Cosenza in Francesco Petrarch and the Revolution of Cola di Rienzo (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1913), p. 145, Sine Nomine VIII (1351-52).

manner that could bring no retaliation.

Petrarch wrote the Life of Solitude in 1346 as a gift for his dear friend Phillipe de Cabassoles, Bishop of Cavaillon. A compendium of personalities whose love of solitude brought them virtue and glory, the Life of Solitude is called the "major document of Petrarch's later humanism" by Hans Baron.⁹¹

The stated goal of the work was to prove that scholarly withdrawal was more virtuous and productive than the active life. Petrarch's ideal is not ascetic. He states "let man's leisure be modest and gentle, not rude; let his solitude be tranquil, not savage; in short, let it be solitude and not barbarism."⁹² The search for God is only secondary to Petrarch. The fruits of the scholarly life are not a peaceful contemplation of the spirit but an active part in the restoration of ancient wisdom.

To move about at will and converse with all the glorious men of the past, to lose consciousness of those who work evil in the present; sometimes to rise, with thoughts that are lifted above yourself, to the ethereal region, to meditate on what goes on there and by meditation to inflame your desire, and in turn to encourage and admonish yourself with a fervent spirit as though with the power of burning words--these are not the least important fruits of the solitary life. Let me not pass over in silence, however, the more obvious pleasures: to devote oneself to reading and writing, alternately finding employment and relief in each, to read what our forerunners have written and to write what later generations may wish to read to pay to posterity the debt which we cannot pay to the dead for the gift of their writings.⁹³

⁹¹Hans Baron, "Petrarch: His Inner Struggles and the Humanistic Discovery of Man," in Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson, ed. by J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 35.

⁹²Petrarch, Life of Solitude, p. 162.

⁹³Ibid., p. 150.

Central to Petrarch's presentation of the life of solitude is an unspoken conflict between the active and contemplative life. Petrarch once considered writing a companion volume on the virtues of the active life. He could have used the heroes of the Life of Solitude to justify civic involvement. It is after all, hard to picture Julius and Augustus Caesar, Pompey, Alexander, and Cicero as celebrants of withdrawal from society. Petrarch ignores the Scipio of his Africa and makes him argue for a truth he would not have accepted. Scipio, junior and senior, the two thunderbolts of war became, in the Life of Solitude, contented beachcombers. Petrarch says

Oh excellent spectacle, transcending the pomp and scepters of all kings, to see such men, the preservers of the State, the liberators of the citizens, the defenders of Italy, the conquerors of nations, their task successfully performed, the victorious people dismissed free and rejoicing . . . their triumphal habit put off, strolling alone, at leisure, and unconscious of depressing cares, over the hills and along the shore, and often picking up little shells or sea pebbles of different sorts, both black and white.⁹⁴

In an equally blatant distortion of Cicero's personality, Petrarch condemns Cicero's plea for civic responsibility. Petrarch admits,

Although he affirms that the active life is more profitable to the State, which is a measure even I will not deny, he admits that the retired life is safer and easier, less burdensome and vexatious than other modes of life, and therefore he not only sanctions it for those who have some fair reason for embracing it, but especially commends it to those who excel in intellect and learning.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 288.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 278.

Petrarch conveniently forgets that it is a Cicero exiled from public office who writes this lament from enforced solitude. Petrarch ignores the historical Cicero on principle. He knew that the orator belonged in the forum. Petrarch asserted, however, that Cicero's eloquence should only have been used for philosophic ends.

The mixture of Biblical and Roman heroes in the Life of Solitude is not a fusion of pagan and Christian philosophy by Petrarch. Petrarch condemns modern barbarians with wise words, both pagan and Christian. The instability of Italian politics, the devastation of the Hundred Years War, and Emperor Charles IV's lack of spirit kept the Christian world from winning back the holy lands. Petrarch admonishes contemporary rulers

If Julius Caesar should come back today from the lower regions, bringing with him his former spirit and power and if, living in Rome he should acknowledge the name of Christ, as he doubtless would, do you think that he would any longer suffer the Egyptian thief to possess Jerusalem, Judea, Syrian, Egypt, and Alexandria?⁹⁶

Petrarch uses Caesar as a rhetorical model. Knowing that the name of Caesar implied the qualities of strength and will to power, Petrarch assumes the reader will contrast this to the modern lack of initiative.

Petrarch's interest in political affairs is related to his historical concern with the heroes of Rome who led her to greatness. His political ideals were not based on workable theories drawn from Roman history. Petrarch had naive faith in the power of individual political action to transform reality.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 246.

Cola di Rienzo was an ambitious young notary, well-read in the traditions of Rome and eloquent in his call for the reinstatement of a true republic. Cola lived in an antiquarian fantasy in order to escape mundane notarial activities. On May 19, 1347, supported by "legions of the Roman people," he took control of Rome. In Cola's short-lived republic an antiquarian climate permeated the city's government. It found expression in Cola's assumption of the title "Tribunus Augustus" and his bathing in the font commonly believed to have been used to cure Constantine of leprosy.⁹⁷

Cola restored order to the city, created a popular militia, instituted strict tax collections and a social welfare program, and called an Italian parliament to consider reunion of the Empire.⁹⁸ Clement VI, however, saw the danger in Cola's usurpation of power without papal permission. Cola aggravated the situation by declaring he was acting under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. He also described Clement as a "madman and insane, suspect of schism and heresy."⁹⁹

Petrarch on the other hand, was immediately taken with Cola's statement of purpose. He admits, "I was especially enamoured of his virtue; I applauded his design and admired his spirit; I congratulated

⁹⁷Robert Weiss, The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), p. 41.

⁹⁸Bishop, Petrarch and His World, p. 260.

⁹⁹Quoted by Mollat in The Popes at Avignon, p. 148.

Italy and anticipated a restoration of dominion to the mother city and peace for the whole world."¹⁰⁰

Petrarch places Cola in direct succession to the long line of Roman civil and military heroes. Here, as elsewhere, Petrarch uses historical facts rhetorically:

O thou younger Brutus, keep ever before thine eyes the example of the first Brutus. He was consul; thou art tribune. If we should compare the two offices, it would be found that the Consuls performed acts hostile to the welfare of the Roman plebs, but the Tribunes were always and constantly the defenders of the people. . . . Hail then our Camillus, our Brutus, our Romulus! The present age owes it to thee that it will die in liberty; to thee posterity will owe that it is conceived in liberty.¹⁰¹

The revolution of Cola is the sole example of Petrarch's support of a republican regime. This is the first and only time Petrarch applies the Roman language of liberty to fourteenth-century history. In addressing the Roman People, he goes so far as to condemn his patrons, the Colonna, for their oppression.

Drive from your hearts the ill-deserved love which through a long subjection, you may have conceived for your tyrants Oh illustrious citizens, you have been living as slaves, you whom all the nations were wont to serve. Though kings were wont to kneel at your feet, you have been passive beneath the tyranny of a few men, strangers and lords of foreign lands who have falsely declared themselves Romans.¹⁰²

Cola's pretentious statements gave Petrarch a sense of security. His use of the traditional gestures of antiquity was as important to

¹⁰⁰Quoted by Robinson in Petrarch, p. 343, Familiares XIII, 6 (1352).

¹⁰¹Quoted by Cosenza in Petrarch and the Revolution of Cola, p. 35.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 19.

Petrarch's historical imagination as it was to Cola's ego. The Church did not appreciate Cola's intent to "begin anew the annals of Rome."¹⁰³ The papacy demanded an oath of fealty and Cola refused to give one. Following a loss of confidence by his nobles and a mental breakdown, Cola was deposed in December of 1347. Petrarch commented immediately,

I fear that thou no longer, as formerly, lovest the whole people but only the worst element. Shall the world behold thee, who hast been the leader of patriots, become the accomplice of reprobates? Glory is immortal; immortal, too, is infamy. If Cola has no thought for his own reputation, let him at least think of Petrarch's. Cola must know what a storm hangs over Petrarch, what a crowd of reproachers will assail him if Cola falls.¹⁰⁴

Cola's sudden demise shocked Petrarch, who had no knowledge of the difficulties attending the creation of a new republic. Petrarch had imaginatively envisioned himself as the poet laureate of the resurrected Rome. However, he places the blame less on Cola than the wickedness of his times. He says in a letter "To the Roman People, urging them to intervene in Rienzo's trial,"

The supreme crime with which he is charged and which merits expiation on the scaffold is that he dared affirm that the Roman Empire is still at Rome, and in possession of the Roman people. Oh impious age! Oh preposterous jealousy, malevolence unprecedented.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³Quoted by Robinson in Petrarch, p. 341, Epistolae Variae XLVIII (1347).

¹⁰⁴Quoted by Cozenza in Petrarch and the Revolution of Cola, p. 187.

¹⁰⁵Quoted by Robinson in Petrarch, p. 349.

The political fragmentation of fourteenth-century Italy makes it impossible to conceive of a ruler strong enough to weld the broken empire back together. It was Cola who was impious in his belief that the pacification of the city of Rome could be extended to the whole world.

After the failure of Cola, Petrarch again advocates monarchical over republican institutions. The tone of Petrarch's utterances on Caesar is transformed. In Letters Without Names, IV, Petrarch admits, "It is a positive fact that, even after the tyranny of Julius Caesar (or monarchy if we so prefer), the Roman emperors sought sanction for their deeds either from the senate or from the Roman people."¹⁰⁶

In 1348 the Black Plague swept through Europe, killing half the population of Avignon alone. Laura was only one of many who died. Petrarch complains "I am not mourning some slight distress but that dreadful year 1348 which not merely robbed us of our friends, but robbed the whole world of its people."¹⁰⁷ The melancholy Triumph of Death emphasizes the swift and unexpected blow of Fortune. In a voice reminiscent of Augustine in The Secret, Petrarch inquires,

Where now are their riches? Where their honors now?
Where now their gems and scepters, and their crowns,
their miters, and the purple they had worn?
Wretched who sets his hopes on mortal things--
Yet who does not? and if he finds himself
deluded at the last, it is but just.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Quoted by Cosenza in Petrarch and the Revolution of Cola, p. 282 (1352).

¹⁰⁷Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 73, Familiars VIII, 7 (1349).

¹⁰⁸Francesco Petrarch, The Triumphs of Petrarch, trans. by Ernest Hatch Wilkins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), p. 56.

The Triumph of Fame is an encyclopedic procession of Christian, classical, and modern figures who won eternal glory through military or literary skills. First in line were Petrarch's two favorite heroes.

At her [Fame] right hand, where first I bent my eyes
 were Scipio and Caesar; but which one
 was closer to her I could not discern.¹⁰⁹

In this final version of the Triumph of Fame, Scipio and Caesar stand equidistant from the goddess. Guido Martellotti has shown, however, that "in the first draft of the Trionfo della Fama written shortly after 1350, Caesar obscures Scipio's figure because he stands resplendent at Fame's right, whereas Scipio is merely one in a crowd led by Augustus and Drusus."¹¹⁰ We have seen Petrarch use both Scipio and Caesar as historical models. Cola's failure and Petrarch's loss of faith in republics in general explain the priority of Caesar in 1350.

Petrarch shows his poor opinion of the "modern" age by listing only two medieval heroes, King Arthur and Duke Godfrey.

Few men, if any, saw I after them
 rise to high fame, if I be not deceived
 either through arts of peace or arts of war.¹¹¹

The "Ascent of Mont Ventoux," Familiar Letters IV, 1 is dated by Petrarch "on the twenty-sixth of April 1336." It is not probable that this long letter was written the day of the exhausting climb. The "Ascent" reiterates the themes of the "Secretum crisis" of 1342-43.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 74.

¹¹⁰Quoted by Baron in "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 29.

¹¹¹Petrarch, The Triumphs of Petrarch, p. 84.

Billanovich asserts that Petrarch chose the year 1336 for its symbolic value. In this year Petrarch would have been exactly the age of Augustine at the time of his conversion.¹¹²

Petrarch's brother Gherardo, a Carthusian monk, is his companion. With little trouble the monk climbs directly to the top of the peak while Petrarch "wandered through valleys, looking for the longer and easier path and stumbling only into longer difficulties."¹¹³ On attaining the summit, Petrarch pauses to reflect on his wicked life. He realizes that it is ten years to the day since he left school in Bologna, and he is still almost as corrupt as in his youth. As he was about to start his descent, despairing over his lack of progress, Petrarch fatefully looked into Augustine's Confessions.

It is a little book of smallest size but full of infinite sweetness. I opened it with the intention of reading whatever might occur to me first: nothing, indeed, but pious and devout sentences could come to hand. I happened to hit upon the tenth book of the work. My brother stood beside me, intently expecting to hear something from Augustine on my mouth. I ask God to be my witness and my brother who was with me: Where I fixed my eyes first, it was written: 'And men go to admire the high mountains, the vast floods of the sea, the huge streams of the rivers, the circumference of the ocean, and the revolutions of the stars--and desert themselves.'¹¹⁴

Petrarch believed that Augustine's words were meant for him alone, directed at his degenerate spiritual state. Petrarch decided to internalize this admonition and dedicate himself to religious concerns.

¹¹²Referred to in Baron, "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 18.

¹¹³Francesco Petrarch, "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux," in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller and John Herman Randall, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 39.

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 44.

The actual climb, however, directly preceded Petrarch's initial work on Africa and The Lives of Illustrious Men. The spiritual "ascent" of Mont Ventoux is an outgrowth of the "Secretum crisis." This was the first time that Christian guilt-pangs had any real effect on Petrarch's life.

In 1351 Petrarch prepared to leave Avignon and Vaucluse forever. He sent messengers to Italy to get information on possible residences. His final destination undecided, Petrarch stopped first in Milan in 1353. He received an invitation from Archbishop Giovanni Visconti and stayed in the Lombard capital for eight productive years. Petrarch's choice dismayed both his friends and subsequent biographers. His self-professed love of solitude and hatred of tyrannies should have led him last of all to Milan. Bergin remarks, "The largest city in Italy seemed a rather inappropriate residence for a hermit, the Visconti were despots, and their southward drive had already made them enemies of the Florentine Republic."¹¹⁵

In 1352 Petrarch declined an invitation, issued at Boccaccio's urging, to settle in Florence. Although Petrarch occasionally called it his "Patria," "he seems never to have forgiven Florence for the exile of his parents and confiscation of his patrimony."¹¹⁶ Petrarch wanted to ensure his literary freedom and easily ignored the criticisms of his republican friends.

¹¹⁵Bergin, Petrarch, p. 81.

¹¹⁶Wilkins, Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan, p. 4.

Petrarch was supported by so-called tyrants throughout his life. His admittedly close friends Robert of Naples, Azzo da Corregio, and Jacopo da Carrara were not renowned in the Trecento as civil libertarians. Giovanni Visconti promised and provided Petrarch with solitude in the midst of the expanding city-state. Petrarch nevertheless felt obligated to occasionally accept diplomatic missions on behalf of his patrons. To Boccaccio, his most concerned friend, Petrarch justified his residence.

Wherever I may be, I shall try to keep my thought free, even though I may have to submit to superiors with regard to my body and external circumstance--Whether submitting to one person, as I do, or to many, as do you. I think it is easier to bear one man's authority than that of a tyrannical populace.¹¹⁷

A further comment on Petrarch's state of mind is his letter to the Genoise Doge in 1352. An autocratic regime had been established in Genoa after a long period of civil war. Petrarch endorsed this solution. "Eventually, warned by these evils you took refuge in the help provided by the rule of one just leader, which is the best condition for the commonwealth beyond any doubt."¹¹⁸

Charles IV of Bohemia was elected Holy Roman Emperor in 1346 after the deposition of Louis of Bavaria. Once again the papacy had an ally in Italy. Learning from past mistakes the popes supported Charles only on condition that he

annul Henry VII's proceedings against Robert of Anjou, Rome and Florence, revoke all acts of Louis of Bavaria and respect

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Quoted by Baron in "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 36, Familiars XIV, 5.

golden mean, measuring his opportunities in the light of his resources, eminently cautious, his feet firmly planted in the soil of reality."¹²² Charles answered Petrarch's letter very practically, pointing out that the policies of Scipio and Caesar offered no guide to fourteenth-century politics. The desperate condition of Italy made effective imperial action all but impossible, and the size of a reconstituted Empire would make it ungovernable.¹²³

Between October of 1354 and June of 1355 Charles was in Italy on invitation from Pope Clement VI to receive the imperial crown. Petrarch met with Charles in Mantua and recorded the conversation with great enthusiasm and no little imagination. Petrarch advised Charles on future political actions and naturally talked about his own "modest" talents.

The imperial conversation descended to an everyday level, he even asked me about some small works of my own, especially about the one I have entitled De Viris Illustribus. I told him that it was unfinished and that I needed more leisure time to complete it. When he asked me to send him a copy later, I answered with the frankness I commonly use towards eminent men. (It is natural but it seems to be increasing with time, and will be gigantic when old age arrives.) 'I promise you a copy,' I said, 'if your virtue persists and my life too.' He was surprised and asked my meaning. 'As far as I am concerned,' I said, 'I need a lifetime to write such a big book, for it is very hard to treat great matters in a small space. And as for you, Emperor, you will be worthy to receive a book with such a title if you are to be numbered among the illustrious men not by wide reputation or any meaningless diadems, but by your deeds and by

¹²²C. C. Bayley, "Petrarch, Charles IV, and the 'Renavatio Imperii,'" Speculum, XVII (July, 1942), p. 326.

¹²³Wilkins, Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan, p. 44.

nobility of spirit, and if you so live that posterity may read of you as you read of the great ancients.'¹²⁴

Much to Petrarch's dismay, the coronation of Charles in Rome did not lead to his doing great deeds in Italy. In agreement with his promise to Clement Charles withdrew immediately to Germany. Petrarch writes to Charles in Prague.

If your grandfather and father should meet you on the Alps, what do you think they would say to you? I believe you can hear them speaking, even though they are not there: 'Most nobly hast thou wrought, oh great Caesar, in thy long-delayed entrance into Italy and thy hasty retreat! Thou bringest with thee crowns of iron and of gold and the sterile name of empire; thou mayest be called Emperor of the Romans--thou art in truth king of Bohemia and nothing more.'¹²⁵

Charles had accepted the title of Emperor in order to gain papal support and Italian revenue. He wanted no outside interference in German politics and thus had no intention of costly involvement in Italy. Petrarch did not understand Charles' motives. A romantic idealist, Petrarch would not have changed the style of his appeals even with knowledge of the facts.

Charles continued his correspondence with Petrarch but no longer asked him for political advice. The growth of Prague as a cultural center and the need of a "star" name induced Charles to ask Petrarch to move to his court.¹²⁶ Petrarch refused but did provide the Emperor with important evidence of forgery in two documents supposedly written by Caesar and Nero. These forgeries produced by

¹²⁴Quoted by Bergin in Petrarch, p. 85, Familiars XIX, 2 (1354).

¹²⁵Quoted by Wilkins in Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan, p. 98, Familiars XIX, 12, (1355).

¹²⁶Bayley, "Petrarch, Charles IV, and the 'Renavatio Imperii,'" p. 334.

Rudolf VI of Austria would have exempted certain territories from Charles' rule. The simplicity with which Petrarch dissects the documents reveals both a critical mind and a great familiarity with the cultural and legal traditions of Rome. Petrarch's intimate knowledge of the form of ancient Latin let him discount authenticity on style alone.

The date of the document is clearly false. It does not indicate the exact day, nor the consuls in office. Only an idiot would say 'given at Rome on Friday in the first year of our reign' without adding the month and the day. What shepherd, what ploughman would write like this--let alone the man who had, besides his other great deeds, reformed the calendar. Then he says 'of our reign,' which is so far from the truth as to arouse indignation as well as laughter. For, as you have heard, Caesar wished to be called 'general,' 'pontifex,' and 'dictator'--never 'king.' We read that Rome in earliest times had seven kings. Those who wished to become kings after this were put to the sword or thrown from the rock on the Capitol hill. I admit that Caesar was suspected of wishing to be king--but only by his enemies. He was too prudent and too careful of his reputation to take a title which would have made him infamous. He would no more call himself a 'king' than 'buffoon,' 'adulterer,' or 'pimp.' In fact he was even less likely to allow it, for while the other names are shameful and filthy, that of 'king' was odious, dangerous and intolerable at Rome.¹²⁷

Petrarch's sensitivity to style and linguistic evolution must not be equated with his historical awareness. This statement is proof that Petrarch could be a critical philologist when he wanted to be. However, he was rarely asked to do such practical work. In most instances, Petrarch's didactic goals demanded that he stretch his historical sense by using facts rhetorically.

¹²⁷Quoted by Burke in The Renaissance Sense of the Past, p. 53, Seniles XVI, 5 (1361).

Petrarch's only other contact with Charles was in 1367. The Emperor accompanied Urban V on the papacy's return to Rome from Avignon. Petrarch was overjoyed and thought the Christian Empire had been reinstated. The revival of the classical model did not stand. Within three years the pope had returned to Avignon and Charles was again in Prague.

In 1361 Petrarch decided to make a collection of his later letters, The Letters of Old Age (Seniles). Just as he had closed the Familiar Letters with letters to ancient men, Petrarch ended these with the "Letter to Posterity."¹²⁸ This letter revives one of Petrarch's favorite themes, his shift from profane to sacred literature. He comments

My mind was rather well balanced than keen, adept for every good and wholesome study, but especially inclined to moral philosophy and poetry. I neglected poetry in the course of time, finding my pleasure in sacred literature wherein I discovered a hidden sweetness which I had previously despised, and I came to regard poetry as merely decorative.¹²⁹

Here for the first time Petrarch accepted a medieval definition of poetry as ornamentation. As we shall see, this denigration of poetry extended beyond Petrarch's personal work. It was his justification to Boccaccio for indifference to Dante's Divine Comedy.

Petrarch explained his love for Latin literary and historical works in terms of the poverty of his age.

¹²⁸Wilkins, The Life of Petrarch, p. 246.

¹²⁹Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 5, "Epistle to Posterity," (1355).

I devoted myself, though not exclusively, to the study of ancient times, since I always disliked our own period; so that, if it hadn't been for the love of those dear to me, I should have preferred being born in any other age, forgetting this one; and I always tried to transport myself mentally to other times. Thus I have delighted in the historians, though troubled by their disagreements. In case of doubt I decided either according to verisimilitude or the authority of the writer.¹³⁰

The Letters of Old Age was dedicated to Francesco Nelli, a Florentine man of letters and friend of Boccaccio and Petrarch. By 1374 it consisted of seventeen books, containing a total of 127 letters on a great variety of topics.¹³¹ In a letter to Boccaccio in 1365 Petrarch utilized the tools of philology to verify historical evidence. In his attempt to discover the age of the city of Pavia, Petrarch finds that it cannot be dated earlier than the Second Punic War. "Even in connection with that period Livy only mentions the river and not the town. However, the similarity of the names--the river 'Ticinus' and the town 'Ticinium'--might easily lead to the confusion of one with the other."¹³²

Petrarch always considered himself the most orthodox of Christians, but he refused to accept the "prophetic revelation" attributed to Virgil in the Middle Ages. He was equally suspicious of Christian miracles. Morris Bishop only slightly overstates the case when he sees Petrarch blaming the stigmata of Saint Francis on "auto-suggestion or traumatic psychosis."¹³³ In Letters of Old Age VIII, 3 Petrarch suggests

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 7.

¹³¹Wilkins, The Life of Petrarch, p. 246.

¹³²Quoted by Robinson in Petrarch, p. 322, Seniles V, 1.

¹³³Bishop, Petrarch and His World, p. 354.

His meditation on Christ's death was so intense, his mind was so occupied with it, that it seemed to him that he was crucified with our Lord. Thus the force of that thought could pass from his mind to his body and leave the visible traces impressed upon it.¹³⁴

Petrarch's two letters to Nelli reflect the continuing debate between his love for the ancients and its conflict with Christian truth. The work of Billanovich and Ullman has cast doubt on the author's contention that his youth was devoted to the classics alone. On this assumption, Petrarch asserted that his Augustine-styled religious "conversion" of 1342 introduced him to sacred literature. Petrarch says

Let me speak of myself and my new but serious enthusiasm, which turns my thoughts and my writings, to sacred literature. Let the supercilious laugh, who are revolted by the austerity of bold words, as the modest garb of a chaste matron repels those who are used to the flattering colors of light women. I think that the Muses and Apollo will not merely grant me permission, they will applaud that after giving my youth to studies proper to that age, I should devote my riper years to more important matters.¹³⁵

We would not deny that The Secret and the "Ascent of Mont Ventoux" are the results of this devotion. Petrarch, however, concludes this same letter in a different tone.

But although I put the Christian writers first, I do not reject the others. (Jerome said he did so, but it seems to me from the imitative style of his writing that he actually approved them.) I seem able to love both groups at once, provided that I consciously distinguish between those I prefer for style and those I prefer for substance.¹³⁶

¹³⁴Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 354, Seniles VIII, 3 (1367).

¹³⁵Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 190, Familiares XXI, 10 (1358).

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 191.

The mixture of Christians and classical figures in The Lives of Illustrious Men, the Life of Solitude and the Triumphs is evidence that Petrarch loved both groups simultaneously if not equally.

Petrarch implies that the classical authors should be imitated solely for their style. They lacked the Christian religion which alone could give true "substance" to scholarship. As often as not, however, Petrarch does not consciously distinguish between the two groups on these terms. Petrarch pleads in vain that he no longer passionately loves or reads the ancients. We find him defending the Christian implications of Cicero's beliefs in 1358.

I am not afraid of being considered a poor Christian by declaring myself so much a Ciceronian. To my knowledge, Cicero never wrote one word that would conflict with the principles proclaimed by Christ. If perchance his works contain anything contrary to Christ's doctrine, that one fact would be sufficient to destroy my belief in Cicero, and in Aristotle, too, and in Plato. . . . Cicero frequently makes mention of the gods, following the custom of his times. He devotes an entire volume it is true, to a discussion of the nature of the gods. If you read beneath the surface, however, you will be convinced that he does not so much pay honor to this throng of gods with their empty names, but rather exposes them to ridicule. Where he seriously expresses his own opinion Cicero asserts that there is but one God and He is the Prince and Ruler of the universe. . . . Christ is my God; Cicero on the other hand is the prince of the language I use. I grant you that these ideas are widely separated, but I deny that they are at conflict with one another. Christ is the Word, and the Virtue, and the Wisdom of God the Father. Cicero has written much on the speech of men, on the virtues of men, and on the wisdom of men--statements that are true and therefore surely acceptable to the God of truth.¹³⁷

Petrarch is at his unhistorical best in this statement. He must read hidden meaning into Cicero's words to prove him a pagan in name only.

¹³⁷Petrarch, Petrarch's Letters to Classical Authors, p. 18, Familiares XXI, 10 (1358).

In other instances Petrarch refused to condemn the ancients because they were born into an age ignorant of the true religion. Here he asserts that their wisdom and common sense did not conflict with the ethical precepts of Christianity. Petrarch was only the first of many scholars to deny that pagan literature was dangerous to Christian belief. Cicero's fusion of eloquence and wisdom was a positive guide to virtue, one of the many routes acceptable to the God of truth.

Petrarch used Latin exclusively in his major works. He refused to use Italian even in everyday letters to friends. A serious subject demanded suitable expression. Petrarch believed that the Latin language embodied the virtue of Roman civilization. In his old age, Petrarch finally revealed his antipathy toward Dante and the vernacular. Responding to questions from Boccaccio, Petrarch confirms the superiority of the Latin tongue and thus indirectly criticizes Dante's purpose and style.

Latin is of course the loftier language, but it has been so developed by ancient geniuses that neither we nor anyone else can add much of anything to it. The vulgar tongue, however, has only recently been formulated. It has been mishandled by many and tended by only a few; rough as it is, it could be much beautified and enriched, I am sure. Inspired by this hope and filled with youthful ardor, I once began a magnum opus in Italian. I laid the foundations, as of a building, and collected the lime, stone, and wood. And then I observed our age, the mother of pride and sloth, and I began to reflect sourly on the power of the smug critics and on their charming pronunciations, such that they mutilate whatever they read. Hearing their performances again, I thought and concluded that my structure would be swallowed in soft mud and quicksand; I should see myself and all my work mangled by the mob. . . . I no longer regard them as mine but rather the property of the general public.

I shall take care that my major works shall not be similarly lacerated.¹³⁸

The most succinct statement of the conflict between Latin and the vernacular is given in Familiar Letters XXI, 15. Boccaccio, overwhelmed by the poetic genius of Dante, had written to ask why Petrarch did not own a copy of the Divine Comedy in his youth. Petrarch's response reveals more than a distaste for Tuscan speech.

Such was my self-confidence and enthusiasm that I deemed my own powers quite sufficient, without any mortal aid, to produce an original of my own. It is for others to judge whether I was right in this. But I must add that if anything should be discovered in my Italian writings resembling, or even identical with, what has been said by him or others, it cannot be attributed to a secret or unconscious imitation.¹³⁹

Petrarch goes on to give Dante, the "prince of our vernacular," another backhanded compliment.

What probability is there that I should be jealous of a writer who devoted his whole life to those things which with me were but the flower and first-fruits of my youth. What to him was, if not his only occupation, certainly the supreme object of his life, to me was mere sport, a pastime, the first essay of my powers.¹⁴⁰

Petrarch believed that because the Divine Comedy was written in Italian it was directed to the common herd. The high-flown Latin in his Africa would be appreciated only by the truly knowledgeable.

Far from desiring such popular recognition, I congratulate myself, on the contrary, that, along with Virgil and Homer, I am free from it, in as much as I fully realize how little the plaudits of the unschooled multitude weigh with scholars.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 244-45, Seniles V, 2 (1364).

¹³⁹Quoted by Robinson in Petrarch, p. 183 (1359).

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 186.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 183.

Petrarch spent long years revising Africa and heard much negative comment from contemporaries on its style. To rationalize this, Petrarch admitted that Africa was less popular than the Divine Comedy only because its purpose was too lofty.

Petrarch gladly admitted his conscious imitation of the ancients. "I have read Vergil, Horace, Livy, Cicero not once but a thousand times, not hastily but dwelling on them. They are not only in my mind but in my marrow; they are part of myself."¹⁴² A similarity of goals removed the ancient poets from competition with Petrarch. Dante stood in too close proximity, however, and had to be dealt with on a different level. Petrarch did not like the religious orientation of the Divine Comedy. In his thinking, great poetry should be written in Latin and deal with human problems. Petrarch did not admit he was jealous of Dante's popularity. He criticized his own Italian poetry as a "mere sport," implying that, unlike Dante's, his mature work was truly substantial.

In 1361 Petrarch began The Deeds of Caesar. Originally one of the 24 Roman biographies of The Lives, Petrarch later considered it a separate work.¹⁴³ The failure of Cola's republican revolt and a renewed concern with the Roman Empire through the office of Emperor Charles IV led to Petrarch's late interest in Caesar. Friedrich Gundolf comments,

¹⁴²Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 373, Familiars XXII, 2 (1359).

¹⁴³Wilkins, Petrarch's Later Years, p. 287.

Caesar was unquestionably esthetically broader and richer, historically more decisive and more comprehensive, more immense in his mere volume of deeds and their scope, the degree of his greatness and, at least for the age in which Petrarch grew to manhood, more celebrated, more glorious than Scipio.¹⁴⁴

The Deeds of Caesar is a critical compilation from Caesar's Commentaries on the Gallic Wars, Suetonius and other Latin historians.

That Petrarch did not attribute divine origins and legendary heroics to Caesar probably grew out of his understanding of the sources.

The Commentaries are the memoirs of a commander, and the Letters to Atticus are Cicero's perceptions of Caesar's political ambitions.

It was the personality of Caesar that intrigued Petrarch, not his office or the founding of the Empire. These had been central to the medieval perception of Caesar. Gundolf asserts that

The fame of Caesar in the modern sense begins in this biography; it is no longer associated with a sacred office or an allegorical significance, or a magical sound, but with the knowledge of great deeds, and the emulation of high manhood.¹⁴⁵

The shift from Caesar as tyrant to Caesar as hero is evident in The Deeds, the letters to Charles IV, and in an inserted portion of The Secret. Brutus, who had served Petrarch as a model of republican virtue, now became one of the "traitorous heads of that conspiracy for whom Caesar's inexhaustible munificence proved too small to satisfy their rapacity."¹⁴⁶ Petrarch's religious crisis of the 1340's played a part in changing his attitude toward Caesar. Baron states, "The

¹⁴⁴Gundolf, The Mantle of Caesar, p. 130.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁴⁶Petrarch, Petrarch's Secret, p. 95.

De Civitate Dei had tried to expose the vicious note of egoistic ambition and thirst for glory in those who resisted and killed Caesar."¹⁴⁷ Petrarch's view of Caesar gradually changed through his readings of the Commentaries and the Letters to Atticus, both of which had been lost in the Middle Ages. A letter of 1367, however, still reflects Petrarch's consciousness of the dual role Caesar could be made to play. "You remember the story of Cassius, one of the audacious murderers of Julius Caesar. (I won't call him impious and criminal, to avoid involvement in a question that is still in dispute.)"¹⁴⁸ The Quattrocento condemned Petrarch's adulation of Caesar as medieval, just as they did his characterization of Cicero. However, Petrarch is no longer blinded by medieval legends. He stands with the Cicero of the Letters to Atticus, awed by the brilliance of Caesar's form, the victorious conqueror, orator, and author.

In 1367 in response to an "attack" by four Venetian Aristotelians, Petrarch wrote the treatise, "On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others." Hans Nachod remarks,

He was then the most renowned scholar and moral philosopher of his age in the entire Western world. It came therefore as a severe blow to him to learn of a disparaging comment on his importance pronounced by persons he believed to be his friends and admirers.¹⁴⁹

The treatise was not composed in anger but after a years' reflection on his friends' "short final sentence: I am a good man without

¹⁴⁷Baron, "The Evolution of Petrarch's Thought," p. 36.

¹⁴⁸Petrarch, Letters from Petrarch, p. 258, Seniles VIII, 3.

¹⁴⁹Francesco Petrarch, "On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others," in The Renaissance Philosophy of Man, ed. by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 28.

They used to raise an Aristotelian problem or a question concerning animals. Then I was either silent or made a joke or began another subject. Sometimes I smiled and asked how on earth Aristotle could have known something for which there is no reason and which cannot be proved by experience. They were amazed and felt angry at me in silence. They looked at me as though I were a blasphemer to require anything beyond his authority in order to believe it. Thus we clearly ceased to be philosophers and eager lovers of wisdom and became Aristotelians.¹⁵³

Petrarch saw a difference between true lovers of wisdom such as Plato and Cicero, and Aristotle, the most influential philosopher of his age. This discontinuity was based primarily on linguistic structure. Petrarch only knew the medieval version of Aristotle based on Arabic translations. It was Aristotle's "loss of eloquence" which separated him from his historical compatriot Plato.¹⁵⁴ Petrarch says

Aristotle teaches what virtue is, I do not deny that; but his lesson lacks the words that sting and set afire and urge toward love of virtue and hatred of vice or, at any rate, does not have enough of such power. He who looks for that will find it in our Latin writers, especially in Cicero and Seneca.¹⁵⁵

Petrarch used Augustine to prove Plato's superiority over Aristotle in all matters, especially in religious knowledge. Petrarch concludes his treatise not by questioning the philosophical assumptions of his Aristotelian friends but by justifying the superior wisdom of Plato and Cicero, his models.

Of Plato, Augustine does not in the least doubt that he would have become a Christian if he had come to life again in Augustine's time or had foreseen the future while he lived. Augustine relates also that in his time most of the Platonists had

¹⁵³Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁵⁴Nancy Struever, The Language of History in the Renaissance (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 95.

¹⁵⁵Petrarch, "On His Own Ignorance," p. 103.

become Christians and he himself can be supposed to belong to their number. If this fundamental stands, in what way is Ciceronian eloquence opposed to Christian dogma?¹⁵⁶

It was on Plato's account that Petrarch attempted to master the Greek language. He failed and although he owned a number of medieval translations, most of Plato remained "dumb" to him.

In 1367 Pope Urban V returned the papacy to Rome. Urban had been elected in 1362 and immediately set about reforming the Curia. He sent prelates in Avignon back to the benefices from which they had absented themselves. He enforced simplicity of dress, patronized artists and men of letters, and supported the universities of Bologna, Orleans, Orvieto, Toulouse, and Paris.¹⁵⁷ Urban said a reunion of the Roman and Eastern Church would be possible only if the Holy See returned to Rome.¹⁵⁸

The French cardinals did not approve of Urban's decision. Their hostility to Italy increased in the intense heat of Viterbo with no fine French wines to sustain them. The Vatican palace was in disrepair, and the "unhealthy air" of Rome caused several cardinals to start back to France almost on arrival.¹⁵⁹ The worst problem were the mercenaries who overran Italy and had to be bought off yearly. Urban was also forced to sign a humiliating treaty with Bernabo Visconti, a man he had earlier condemned as a heretic.

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁵⁷Wilkins, Petrarch's Later Years, p. 54.

¹⁵⁸Mollat, The Popes at Avignon, p. 156.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 155.

Petrarch was overjoyed by Urban's triumphant entry into Rome. He was too ill to accept the Pope's invitation to join his court. Rumors of recurrent anarchy in Rome and physical attacks on members of the Curia led Petrarch to write, hoping to convince Urban to stay. It was already too late, however, as the Pope had fled to France. Urban excused himself by saying he must return to where he could mediate the continuing struggle between France and England.¹⁶⁰ Petrarch's unfinished letter had personified Italy speaking to Urban of her ills.

I was wounded with mortal sores; you came to bathe my wounds and began to pour in oil and wine. And then, before my wounds were bound up or the balm had touched them, you left me. You had begun to cut away the rotten flesh with the steel, and then, cutting deeper, you perhaps found parts that might have been healed.¹⁶¹

Petrarch spent the last four years of his life in Arqua writing letters to friends about his gradually failing health and his continuing literary work. His last major works, the Triumph of Time and the Triumph of Eternity were reflections proper to old age. Petrarch's theme is that the triumph of Time can only be destructive; that all mortal creations fall before it. Petrarch recalls the triumphant procession of Fame:

I saw folk moving onward quietly,
free from the fear of Time and of his rage,
Historians and poets guarding them.
Chiefly of these the sun was envious:
for they, escaping from the common cage,
had mounted upward, into soaring flight.¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁶¹Quoted by Wilkins in Petrarch's Later Years, p. 133, *Variae* 3, (1370).

¹⁶²Petrarch, The Triumphs of Petrarch, p. 99.

Petrarch would not allow Time a complete triumph. The function of poets and historians is to keep alive the memory of things past. His own death creeping ever closer, Petrarch again proclaims that his words will live on.

Petrarch wrote the Triumph of Eternity during the last four months of his life. Time's victory over Fame is refuted in Eternity where the human frame of reference is left behind.

Greatly I marveled, seeing time itself
 come to an end, that ne'er before had ceased,
 But had been wont in its course to change all things.
 Past, Present, Future: these I saw combined
 in a single term, and that unchangeable:
 No swiftness now, as there had been before.
 As on an empty plain I now could see
 no 'shall be' or 'has been,' 'ne'er' or 'before'
 or 'after,' filling life with doubtfulness.¹⁶³

The idea of an endless present undoubtedly appealed to Petrarch. His celebration of love and glory would stand unquestioned. Posterity was to Petrarch a "literary" Heaven. He reflects further on this state.

Future and Past, like hills that hid our view,
 are levelled now, and nothing still remains
 whereupon hope or memory may lean,
 Their variation leading men astray,
 thinking 'What have I been?' 'What shall I be?'
 as if their lives were but an empty game.
 The years no longer in their hands will hold
 the governance of fame: the glorious
 will glorious be to all eternity.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 110.

Petrarch did not turn to the solace of religion in his final years. The Triumph of Eternity does not uphold Augustine's condemnation of the "City of Man." Petrarch will have eternal fame because of his poetic and historical creations. He does not leave the world behind but carries his work beyond the ravages of Time into the light of Posterity.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

By tracing the course of Petrarch's life I have tried to expose the various factors bearing on his psychological development. His "exile" from Italy, early schooling in France and Italy, and political and literary associations provide us with the background. Analysis of Petrarch's literary creations--the books and letters--allow us to see his historical imagination in action.

Petrarch gave us many opinions on a wide variety of subjects and it is out of these that we must cull his purpose. He did not write to an adoring public. He responded to questions of his intimate literary circle, but it was to the "duties" of a poet, historian, and moral philosopher that he directed his energy. "Dreaming is the Singer's right" and it was toward didactic not aesthetic ends that his writing was directed.

To separate Petrarch from the medieval historiographic tradition we must follow him out of the "City of God" into the secular realm. In the "Invective Against a Man who Spoke Evil of Italy" written a year before Petrarch's death, he asks "What is all History but Praise of Rome."¹⁶⁵ I will take this as the quintessential statement of the

¹⁶⁵Quoted by Beryl Smalley in English Friars and Antiquity (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), p. 292.

function of Petrarch's historical imagination. The key word is "praise" for it reveals the pervasive historical romanticism with which Petrarch approached his subject. The phrase "historical imagination" does not necessarily imply a romantic vision. Practical solutions can be offered if the world is seen realistically as well as imaginatively. If this is to be, as Myron Gilmore points out, "History has to be more imitated than admired."¹⁶⁶ Petrarch, however, identified so completely with his ideal of Rome that concrete applications of Roman precedents to fourteenth-century Italy escaped him. As is evidenced in his works and deeds, from Africa and the Coronation to Cola and Charles IV, the appearance of a classical manner was all important. In Friedrich Gundolf's terms the "classical gesture" was the panacea. It was as if, specifically, the revival of the crowning of a poet laureate would usher in another age of epic poetry. The romantic flaw in this approach is stated to Petrarch by Charles IV who politely but pointedly denied that having the title Emperor of the Romans would make his task any easier.

In order to set off Petrarch's romantic vision of history I shall contrast it to his methodology. Clearly there is no reason to assume that since Petrarch had many "humanist tools" at hand that he necessarily should have used them in a consistent manner.

¹⁶⁶Myron P. Gilmore, "The Renaissance Conceptions of the Lessons of History," in Facets of the Renaissance, ed. by William H. Werkmeister, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), p. 90.

Peter Burke, in his excellent essay The Renaissance Sense of the Past, offers three distinguishing factors between Medieval and Renaissance historical perspective. It is a sense of anachronism, an awareness of evidence, and an interest in causation which defines the advance of historical method in the Renaissance.¹⁶⁷

In terms of these isolated concepts, it is evident that Petrarch cannot be called an historical innocent. His strong curiosity about the Roman past led him ever deeper into the literature, history, and letters left behind by the ancients. Revelling in the glorious words and deeds of the Romans, Petrarch admits, "I gave myself wholly to Cicero."¹⁶⁸ Petrarch's sense of historical distance, critical use of sources, and concern with the power of individual personality grew out of his need to "praise" the Roman heritage. Any methodological advances over his predecessors were not directed toward a transcendent historical standard. Petrarch's use of historical evidence developed out of a desire to provide the most certain and convincing facts to bolster his ideal.

Antiquity, for Petrarch, was an ideal society from which to gather the basic knowledge needed by men to achieve proper virtuousness. Because history offered proven examples of superior morality, it was the duty of the historian to sift out and record with the fire of a great rhetorician, the examples men should follow.

¹⁶⁷Peter Burke, The Renaissance Sense of the Past, p. 1.

¹⁶⁸Quoted by Bishop in Petrarch and His World, p. 21, Seniles XVI, 1.

Petrarch saw the past as qualitatively different from the present. His sense of anachronism was grounded on the dissimilarity in the cultural content of the "ancient" and "modern" ages. Livy and Cicero could not have any knowledge of Christianity. Petrarch's appreciation of this fact is seen in his pity for their birth in an "ill-fated" age. To be critical of their ignorance would be an historical fallacy.

Petrarch's sense of anachronism was closely connected with his awareness of evidence. It was because of the many linguistic anachronisms that Petrarch told Charles IV the "Caesarean privilege" was a forgery.¹⁶⁹ Petrarch's "association" with Rome depended solely on the words of ancient authors. His familiarity with classical Latin usage allowed him to establish the cultural context of the forgery.

Petrarch never directly criticized the theological interpretation of history. His celebration of the personality is, however, an implicit comment on the medieval orientation. We cannot attribute a conscious cyclical theory to Petrarch but his historical perspective is not strictly providential. The importance of the individual personality in determining history is evidenced by The Lives of Illustrious Men. Scipio and Hannibal, Caesar and Pompey were not mere actors in a historical drama. Responding to individual ambitions and goals, they initiated action which involved the greatest civilizations of the day. Petrarch's relations to Cola, Charles IV, and Pope

¹⁶⁹Burke, The Renaissance Sense of the Past, p. 51.

Urban V also suggest that men in the real world had the same potential to direct future events.

Petrarch's concern with the passage of time is the supreme factor in distinguishing his historical imagination from the medieval. Peter Burke states, "It may be relevant that much medieval history was written by the monks, and that monks were professionally concerned, one might say, with the timeless."¹⁷⁰

An indication of the necessary relation of history to the temporal is Petrarch's view of the law. Petrarch denied the ahistorical medieval perception of law as an abstract truth existing above time. Developing in response to concrete needs, the law had a history. Petrarch advocated a study of the origins of law and the founders of jurisprudence as a practical aid to the historical knowledge of both past and present.

An obsession with the passage of time confirms the essential romanticism of Petrarch's historical outlook. "Time" was not merely one of two abstract dimensions used to place man in the continuum of history. Petrarch did not believe that human action moved forward through an "objective" reality. The Triumph of Time reveals a destructive cosmic force, personified to the extent that it actually takes revenge on humanity.

Bergin attributes a "cult of memory approaching the morbid" to Petrarch.¹⁷¹ The overwhelming memory of the "golden age" of antiquity made Petrarch conscious of the movement of time. This

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷¹Bergin, Petrarch, p. 170.

movement was negative and destructive precisely because it separated Petrarch from his truest friends. Tied to the "land of the living" Petrarch exercised his historical imagination to bridge the gap of chronological time. In distinguishing cultural from historical time Petrarch could escape the confines of his era and communicate directly with Livy and Cicero. Petrarch's "Letter to the Ancient" were both historically romantic and historically real. He wrote in the present tense, emphasizing the spiritual reality of the intellectual relation. Yet, since the letters are "sent" from the "land of the living," they acknowledge a difference between the past and the present. The sense of anachronism is ever present and a poignant reminder of the distinction between the real and the ideal.

It will now be necessary to isolate the historical sources out of which Petrarch's romantic memories grew. In saying "What is all History but praise of Rome," Petrarch intended to inspire an appreciation of the antique heritage in his contemporaries. In his critique of fourteenth-century society, "Rome," defined as a vague spiritual force, was Petrarch's main tool. Transcending both time and fact, "Roman civilization" incorporated both Petrarch's positive view of the past and his negative response to the present.

Petrarch had a preconceived notion of "Rome" and the components of the "classical heritage" long before he visited Italy in 1337. This vision, founded on the Latin readings of his youth, would only grow broader in subsequent years. Virgil, Livy, and Cicero were personifications of the Roman spirit. Petrarch perceived Rome directly through their "eyes." The ruins of Rome were only secondary evidences

of a great civilization. More immediate were the written words of ancient authors for it was through them that antiquity lived again in Petrarch's mind.

There is no use in asking whether Petrarch's "Rome" was a republic or an empire, pagan or Christian. Because Rome was a myth, existing outside historical time, it was both and neither. Just as Petrarch's Scipio and Caesar never existed in real life, Roman civilization was a historico-mythical state created for didactic ends. "Rome" was a romantic memory rising from readings alone. The "monuments" of this epic age of great poets, philosophers, and military heroes, however, left a visible imprint on historical development. The "Antique Heritage" consisted of the words of classical authors passed on to posterity. In transmitting classical genius the words themselves carried a living body of wisdom useful to all ages.

As often as not, Petrarch defined the "Antique Heritage" in negative terms. It was everything that the modern age was not. True poetry, spirituality, philosophy, and government were best described in comparison. The present fad of bad poetry, the corruption of the Church and removal of the Holy See to Avignon, Aristotelianism, and the perversion of the Holy Roman Empire into a territorial German state all symbolized a cultural degeneration. Because Petrarch's culture contained little of value, "Rome" shone more brightly. It was by default, as it were, that historical Rome gained mythical qualities. Everything Roman was to Petrarch necessarily "True," "Good," and "Beautiful."

The sense of distance from and longing for a lost era was a factor uncommon in the medieval historical imagination. Petrarch, however, was not a constructive thinker, offering no practical methods for remedying the current situation. Directing his sensual recollections to a bygone age, Petrarch refused to deal with social problems on a concrete level. His admonitions to Cola, Charles IV, and the popes focus on the past. Either out of frustration or an inability to recognize fourteenth-century realities, Petrarch advocated reforms that could only be gestures at changing society. Since he had no grasp of what Rome or the Trecento really was, Petrarch refused to accept Cicero's "new" personality as revealed in the Letters to Atticus. Similarly, he did not comprehend how Germany could be more important to Charles than Italy. Petrarch's historical awareness was limited on principle. Truth was acceptable only if new facts coincided with his preconceived beliefs. Petrarch would only admit that Cicero was not being true to himself and that Charles was no emperor of Romans, only King of Bohemia.

Petrarch wore the same romantic "blindness" when viewing the situation of the "Babylonian Captivity." His criticisms of Avignon were based on a spiritual tradition not on political realities. The popes could not survive amidst the baronial conflicts in Rome and that is why they moved to Avignon. Petrarch naively assumed that a spiritual transformation would result from a simple geographic relocation. Chaos would disappear and purity would reappear with the return of the Holy See to Rome.

One strain of Petrarch's historical romanticism would be specifically incorporated into fifteenth-century humanism. It was the belief in the power of the written word to effect real change. The "Classical Revival" necessitated the development of a rhetorical culture. The initial assumption was that antiquity could provide already perfect models for action which need only be copied. However, eloquence was the most powerful force behind action. The creative power of rhetoric lay, in fact, in adding fire to moral imperatives. The belief in the capacity of eloquence to transform words into deeds is evident in the humanist identification of rhetoric and moral philosophy. Paul Oskar Kristeller points out that the primary humanist criticism of medieval philosophy was not directed at its content but its form. "Their main charges are against the bad Latin style of the medieval authors, against their ignorance of ancient history and literature, and against their concern for supposedly useless questions."¹⁷² Petrarch believed eloquence was necessary to express wisdom. He accepted the classical dictum that the art of oratory embraced the whole realm of human knowledge, including moral philosophy and history. What has been seen as a degeneration of philosophy into a purely grammatical concern may well have grown out of Petrarch's blind adulation of Cicero's "golden tongue."

Petrarch's sense of his potential use to future historical development comes out of this optimistic faith in rhetoric. The

¹⁷²Paul Oskar Kristeller, Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains, Harper Torchbooks (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1961), p. 101.

scholar's duty was to revive and pass on ancient wisdom. The Coronation Oration shows Petrarch felt he had rejoined the flow of history and could bring not empty words but the active spirit of ancient genius to posterity. The prediction of Ennius in the Africa also reflects Petrarch's belief in the constructive power of words. Poetry, after all, was the medium through which "virtue" transcended death and reentered the cultural tradition.

Petrarch realized he was not a "man of action" but believed he could have an equally great effect on history as a poet. In Sonnet XXXII Petrarch says,

If love or death rend me not asunder,
 If I can free me from my binding trap,
 The yarn I have for spinning, it may hap,
 Will give the century a cause for wonder.
 The ancient and the new I plan to plunder
 And make two truths so neatly overlap
 That--dare I say it?--such a mighty clap
 I'll make that even in Rome you'll hear it thunder.¹⁷³

It is only with the dawn of a new age sympathetic to poets and scholars that this synthesis can take place. The dedication of Africa to Posterity epitomizes Petrarch's attempt to transcend the present. Writing an epic modeled on the Virgilian tradition, Petrarch hoped his fame would be carried into the future on the Africa. Posterity, in the sense most often used by Petrarch, does not refer to a specific historical time. It is a romantic vision, a promise not unlike Heaven, that the virtue of the past will be sometime rewarded. Yet, like

¹⁷³ Francesco Petrarch, The Sonnets of Petrarch, ed. and trans. by Thomas G. Bergin (New York: Heritage Press, 1966), p. 38, (1326-36).

Petrarch's vision of Rome, Posterity was grounded in history. The present would pass away and Posterity would become an eternal present. In the words of the Triumph of Eternity "Future and Past, like hills that hid our view, are levelled now."

Caught in the present Petrarch used his historical imagination to transport himself through time in both directions. That he is still read now, in "Posterity," justifies his faith in the lasting power of beautiful words. Petrarch's claim to immortality stands in Sonnet LXXXIII. "Only the poet's pure immortal plan outwits the swift mortality of man."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 93, (1337-41).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Auerbach, Erich. Literary Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and in the Middle Ages. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

Baron, Hans. "Cicero and the Civic Spirit in the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance." Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, XXII (1938), 84-89.

_____. The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1966.

_____. "Franciscan Poverty and Civic Wealth in the Rise of Humanistic Thought." Speculum, XIII (January, 1938), 1-38.

_____. From Petrarch to Bruni: Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

_____. "Petrarch: His Inner Struggles and the Humanistic Discovery of Man." Florilegium Historiale: Essays presented to Wallace K. Ferguson. Edited by J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Bayley, C. C. "Petrarch, Charles IV, and the 'Renavatio Imperii.'" Speculum, XVII (July, 1942), 323-41.

Bergin, Thomas G. Petrarch. New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1970.

Bernardo, Aldo S. Petrarch, Scipio, and the Africa. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1962.

_____. "Petrarch's Attitude toward Dante." Publications of the Modern Language Association, LXX (June, 1955), 488-517.

Billanovich, Giuseppe. "Petrarch and the Textual Tradition of Livy." Journal of the Warburg and Courauld Institute, XIV (1951), 137-208.

Bishop, Morris. Petrarch and His World. London: Chatto and Windus, 1964.

Burke, Peter. The Renaissance Sense of the Past. London: Edward Arnold, 1969.

- Colish, Marcia L. The Mirror of Language: A Study of the Medieval Theory of Knowledge. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968.
- Cosenza, Mario Emilio. Francesco Petrarch and the Revolution of Cola di Rienzo. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1913.
- Davis, Charles Till. Dante and the Idea of Rome. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957.
- Ferguson, Wallace K. Europe in Transition: 1300-1520. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1962.
- Gilmore, Myron P. "The Renaissance Conceptions of the Lessons of History." Facets of the Renaissance. Edited by William H. Werkmeister. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1959.
- Gundolf, Friedrich. The Mantle of Caesar. New York: Vanguard Press, 1928.
- Holmes, George. The Florentine Enlightenment. New York: Pegasus, 1969.
- Kristeller, Paul Oskar. Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic and Humanist Strains. Harper Torchbooks. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1961.
- Mommsen, Theodore E. "An Introduction to Petrarch's Sonnets and Songs." Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Edited by Eugene F. Rice. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1959.
- _____. "Petrarch's Conception of the Dark Ages." Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Edited by Eugene F. Rice. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1959.
- _____. "The Sala Virorum Illustrium." Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Edited by Eugene F. Rice. Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1959.
- Nolhac, Pierre de. Petrarch and the Ancient World. Edited by Lewis Einstein. Boston: D. B. Updike, 1907.
- Petrarch, Francesco. "The Ascent of Mont Ventoux." The Renaissance Philosophy of Man. Edited by Ernst Cassirer, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall, Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948.

- Struever, Nancy. The Language of History in the Renaissance. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1970.
- Tatam, Edward H. R. Francesco Petrarca. London: Sheldon Press, 1926.
- Thomson, S. Harrison. Europe in Renaissance and Reformation. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963.
- Trinkhaus, Charles. In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought. vol. I. London: Constable and Co., 1970.
- Ullman, Berthold L. Studies in the Italian Renaissance. Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1955.
- Waley, Daniel. Later Medieval Europe. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1964.
- Weiss, Roberto. The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity. New York: Humanities Press, 1969.
- Whitfield, John H. Petrarch and the Renaissance. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943.
- Wilkins, Ernest Hatch. The Life of Petrarch. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- _____. Petrarch's Correspondence. Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1960.
- _____. Petrarch's Eight Years in Milan. Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1958.
- _____. Petrarch's Later Years. Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1959.
- _____. Studies in the Life and Work of Petrarch. Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1955.
- _____. "Works that Petrarch Thought of Writing." Speculum, XXXV (October, 1960), 563-71.
- Wrigley, John E. "A Papal Secret Known to Petrarch." Speculum, XXXIX (October, 1964), 613-34.
- Zimmerman, To C. Price. "Confessions and Autobiography in the Early Renaissance." Renaissance: Studies in Honor of Hans Baron. Edited by Anthony Mulho and John A. Tedeschi. Deklab: Northern Illinois Press, 1971.