Melancholy and the modern consciousness of Francesco Petrarca: A close reading of melancholy, *acedia*, and love-sickness in the *Secretum*, *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae* and *Canzoniere*.

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August 2008

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Italian Studies.

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-66945-7
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-66945-7

Acknowledgments

My most sincere and heartfelt appreciation, I reserve for Francesco Borghesi, to whose guidance and encouragement this project's conception and birth are owed. It is fitting next to recognize Eugenio Bolongaro, Lucienne Kroha and Maria Predelli for their critical perspectives and constructive feedback about this work more globally, and Maria Cecilia Bertolani, Massimo Lollini, and Lino Pertile in whom I found willing readers of my abstract and initial ideas. Thanks also to Keira Travis for her pertinent reading suggestions and general counsel at an early stage of my research. Finally, no small amount of gratitude is to be conferred upon my dear colleagues at McGill University for their unending moral support, stimulating intellectual exchange, daily comforting presence, and faithful attention; I here mention only Claudio Clivio, Serena Convito – in whose care I found unexpected sustenance -, Cristiana Furlan, Genevieve St-Jean, and Blythe Warns. A special thank you I grant to Marco Della Motta for his more pronounced assistance in the final stages and compilation of my work.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations - and discrepancies therein and more generally - are only and entirely my own.

To my sister, who indirectly sparked my interest in *melancholia* and to my brothers who more than once in some way prevented me from falling subject to it myself, I dedicate a large portion of this work, with love.

Abstract

The most important classical Greek heroes were believed to suffer from a physical, mental, and spiritual illness shown negatively to alter their general state of being. Attributed to an excess of black bile in the body, the earliest documented form of this ailment came to be known as "melancholy;" paramount among its effects was the emergence of a severely split being sincerely pursuing Virtue, yet markedly susceptible to the Passions that threatened to veer him off his course.

In the Middle Ages, traces of melancholy are found in the sin of *acedia* still today considered a rather "medieval" vice. Globally defined as a state of "general apathy," *acedia* was believed more egregiously to affect solitary religious figures devoted to prayer. The dawn of Humanism in Western Europe, however, saw this notion extended to the more general scholar, and featured as (arguably) its first protagonist, 14th-century humanist Francesco Petrarca.

The manifestations of this malady pervade his *oeuvre* as a whole: repeatedly in his immense repertoire, Petrarch – at least in his proliferation of an artistic or lyrical "io" or self – surfaces as a fragmented if not strictly binary figure both tormented by his incumbent passions and resolutely determined to overcome them. Petrarch's often autobiographical figures are ruled by conflicting inner forces which leave them paralysed, indecisive, and helpless before Fortune, in a new position foreshadowing the anthropocentric and, to a degree, "bipartite" "modernity" soon to flood the continent.

Through a close reading of three of his most celebrated texts – the *Secretum, De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae,* and the *Canzoniere,* this study will seek to posit Petrarch as a fundamentally melancholic and "*accidioso*" writer whose condition of internal and social rupture more generally speaks to the emerging "crisis of modernity" which he perhaps first sets to the center stage of his period.

Résumé

Les plus importants héros de l'âge Classique, l'on nous enseigne, souffraient d'une maladie assommante physique, mentale et spirituelle attribuée à un excès corporel de bile noire et à laquelle l'on a donné le nom de « mélancolie ». Parmi ses nombreuses effets fut la véritable division qu'elle provoquait dans ses sujet à la fois à la poursuite du « bien » mais fatalement attirés par les Passions qui leur empêchait de l'atteindre.

Au Moyen-âge, l'on retrouve des traces de cette mélancolie dans le péché de l'acédie encore aujourd'hui considéré un vice distinctivement médiéval. À l'époque, l'on croyait les hommes religieux plus susceptibles aux tourments de ce vice fortement associé avec l'apathie général. L'humanisme occidental fait de lui, cependant, une condition de l'Intellectuel le premier vrai représentant littéraire desquels fut François Pétrarque au 14^{ième} siècle.

Cette maladie et ses conséquences sur le poète se manifestent partout dans son œuvre. À maintes reprises dans sa construction d'un « je » littéraire l'on sent la scission d'un auteur tourmenté par ses désirs mondains mais non moins résolu à les vaincre. Ses figures souvent autobiographiques sont gouvernées, intérieurement, par des forces opposées l'une à l'autre qui les laissent paralysées, indécises et désespérées face à la Fortune, dans une position « bipartite » aux talons de la « modernité » à suivre dans les prochains siècles.

À travers une lecture-proche de trois de ses plus célèbres textes – le *Secretum*, le *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunae* et le *Canzoniere* - cet essai se donne le devoir de présenter Pétrarque en tant qu'écrivain « accidique » et « mélancolique » la condition de « rupture » intérieure et sociale duquel signale plus généralement la crise de la modernité qu'il a été parmi les premiers à explorer et à mettre en scène à son époque.

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Introduction

Born in 1304 and writing from as early as 1327 and until his death in 1374, Francesco Petrarca is still today considered a father of Italian literature – one of three "corone della letteratura italiana" who would inspire countless future generations of poets both in Italy and outside it. Indeed, his monumental influence mainly – but not exclusively – on "love poetry" as perhaps most famously manifested in the Italian cinquecento works of Pietro Bembo is felt internationally: Pierre de Ronsard and Sir Philip Sidney are only two among several by now literary greats to have largely modeled their 16th-cenutry respective French and English poetry on Petrarch's vernacular verse and, more particularly, on his *Canzoniere* – beyond any doubt his most celebrated work. Despite his widespread popularity among later humanist poets, however, many readers have come to view 14th-century Petrarch as a traditionally medieval poet with an only budding modern sensibility. It seems natural to peg him as such: contemporary to Giovanni Boccaccio and only one generation junior to Dante Alighieri, Petrarch would have grappled and dealt with many of the same historical, political, social, theological, and philosophical issues central to their own arguably more classifiably medieval works in a similarly "medieval" fashion.

Perhaps more interesting to contemporary readers, though, are the various ways in which even Petrarch's earliest works resound with the anxiety, despondency, paralysis of the will, and inner conflict ironically symptomatic of the *medieval* sin of *acedia* but much more characteristic of a rather *modern* consciousness. Ascribing to and afflicted by this ecclesiastic form of the much older medicinal concept of "melancholy" (dating, in fact, to Antiquity and to the treatises of Galen and Hippocrates), Petrarch emerges, in his larger *oeuvre*, significantly, as a problematically bipartite figure; the bipolarity and fundamental indifference persistent in his works more even than their manifestation of his relatively new introspective focus on himself point to the beginnings of Humanism and to a growing literary importance of the condition of the

"modern man". It is precisely the presence of this modern condition in Petrarch's works and the mental, spiritual, and physical illness at its root that lie at the heart of this study; looking closely at three of Petrarch's best-known works – the *Secretum*, the *De Remediis utriusque fortunae*, and the *Canzoniere* -, I hope to explore the rich relationship between Petrarch's medieval "melancholy" and the modernity it engenders.

In what remains of the introduction, I will briefly present the major schools of thought on Petrarch and their contending views of his purported modernity. I will also outline the major academic researches conducted about melancholy and its several variants. Describing, then, Petrarch's life and times, I will point to some of the socio-historical conditions and biographical events that may have caused his personal melancholy or inspired him to write about it more generally. My first chapter will examine melancholy more specifically, providing a survey of its interpretations and near-analogue manifestations from early philosophical and scientific treatment to its later religious variations in the Middle Ages, when Catholic dogma deemed *acedia* – in many ways melancholy's spiritual "daughter" - a cardinal sin. In the chapters to follow, I will apply a melancholic lens to the three Petrarchan works listed above respectively, moving from the spiritual to the secular and, finally, to the sublime facets of melancholy. In the *Secretum,* as I will argue, Petrarch reveals his implicit melancholy by explicitly writing about and dealing with the *acedia* that plagues his character Franciscus. In the *De Remediis utrisuque fortunae*, his remedy book for prosperity and adversity, Petrarch's melancholy, rather than being associated with religion, is of a more social nature: what concerns Petrarch the most here is man's often contradictory interaction with the world surrounding him; what he hopes to do is effectively to describe man's behaviour and propose written solutions to better human existence. In the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch's melancholy takes the form of an intensely-felt love-sickness for Laura, the muse of his major poetry. Common to all three works, however, is the self-interest and self-

reflexiveness that in my opinion at least begins to tear Petrarch away from the Middle Ages and signals *his* melancholy as the eventual and unavoidable universal condition of the budding modern man.

Undeniably, Petrarch, both historically and literarily, remains a medieval figure. The socio-political and historical backdrop for his works will be discussed in some detail shortly; when considering his specifically literary heritage, it may be best, for the purpose of this study, merely to point to the exhaustive work done by a host of noteworthy scholars on the matter. Rosanna Bettarini and Paolo Trovato, to name only two, have traced both implicit and explicit references to and echoes of Dante – probably beginning to write his *Commedia* in the year of Petrarch's birth - in Petrarch's works.[1] In her book *Il corpo glorioso*, Maria Cecilia Bertolani examines Petrarch's reappropriation, in his *Trionfi*, of the common medieval *topos* of the "viaggio onirico" or, roughly, a "journey in a dreamland" in non-waking time[2]. Ugo Dotti, in his commentary on the *Rime sparse* outlines and explains Petrarch's recurrent debt to Arnaut Daniel and other Provencal troubadours in his description, ostensibly still rooted in the courtly tradition, of his muse, Laura, and of the emotions she inspires within him.[3] Medieval, too, is Petrarch's insistent adherence to and fascination with Church doctrine and theology against the increasing secularization of his society; his particular fondness for Augustinian philosophy and his various attempts to reconcile it with pagan Platonic ideas – "modern" as they may be and especially as they become treated by the later neoplatonists - have been treated at great length by Enrico Fenzi not only in his Italian translations of and commentaries to the *Secretum* and the *De ignorantia*,

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[1] Rosanna Bettarini, *Lacrime e inchiostro nel* Canzoniere *di Petrarca* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1998); Paolo Trovato, *Dante in Petrarca. Per un inventario dei dantismi nei* Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta (Firenze: L.S. Olschki editore, 1979).

[2] Maria Cecilia Bertolani, *Il corpo glorioso. Studi sui* Trionfi *del Petrarca* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2001).

[3] Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Roma: Donzelli editore, 1996).

but also in a recently published series of essays on a number of Petrarch's major works.[4] These authors and several others left unnamed have in their various enterprises set out firmly to situate Petrarch in his fourteenth century duly to portray him as a veritable product of his times – the Middle Ages.

Still others and, in fact, some of the above-mentioned among them, have made equally important contributions to Petrarchan scholarship by analysing the "newness" that suggests his groundbreaking humanism. Ugo Dotti and Nicholas Mann in their respective ways are each major proponents of Petrarch's modernity. In his books *Petrarca civile: Alle origini dell'intellettuale moderno* and *Petrarca e la scoperta della coscienza moderna*, Dotti points to and discusses three key components of modernity in Petrarch: a noteworthy "progetto di autoformazione umana" or the distinct creation of personal identity in Petrarch's poetry and his emphasis on the self, an "impegno civile" or a strongly felt need and determination to write *for* the public even when writing *about* himself, and a poetic experimentalism – to an extent - that sets him apart from Dante and his other literary predecessors and contemporaries or near-contemporaries.[5] Nicholas Mann's examination of Petrarch, in turn, pivots on the recognition and appreciation of the writer's many facets – poet, public and ecclesiastic figure, philosopher, father, and good friend - and of his fresh and unique ability simultaneously to sustain and nurture all of them.[6] Of great purport to both critics in asserting Petrarch's modernity, furthermore, is the self-consciousness that permits him to situate himself, as an individual, within the larger society to which he belongs; equally important to both, moreover, is his remarkable philosophical ambivalence, and the precarious position he knowingly and voluntarily assumes between past and

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[4] Francesco Petrarca, *Secretum*, ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milano: Mursia editore, 1992); Francesco Petrarca, *De ignorantia,* ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milano: Mursia editore, 1999); see also Enrico Fenzi, "Platone, Agostino, Petrarca," in *Saggi Petrarcheschi* (Firenze: Cadmo editore, 2003) 519-552.

[5] Ugo Dotti, *Petrarca civile. Alle origini dell'intellettuale moderno* (Roma: Donzelli editore, 2001) 40.

[6] Nicholas Mann, *Petrarch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

emerging present values, between solitude and public office, between the compulsion to observe tradition and the urge to set new trends.

These same themes are taken up by Marco Ariani and Marco Santagata in their several Petrarchan studies. More notably, in his chapter appearing in Salerno editrice's *Storia della letteratura italiana*[7] and in its later expansion into the book *Petrarca,*[8] Ariani at great length treats both Petrarch's blatant obsession with autoanalysis and with the construction of his poetic "io," and his consistent attempts to collapse classical authority and vulgar culture. He also heavily emphasizes Petrarch's state of exile not only from his native Arezzo (and his father's native Florence) but also, and more importantly, from the world in general. Petrarch, as a "figura dell'intellettuale *déraciné*," or a figure of the uprooted intellectual, Ariani argues, is one of the first, in his constant ambition to produce "more vast works, that look to the past and to the future rather than to the present," to lead the way to the Humanism of the Renaissance courts.[9] Ariani, like Marco Santagata, another notable Petrarchist, also finds one of the strongest indications of Petrarch's modernity in the often contradictory and binary nature of the poet's works; never before Petrarch had such clear literary oppositions successfully poetically coexisted in a holistic and meticulously organized ensemble.

This latter idea is indeed the very crux of Santagata's study *I frammenti dell'anima. Storia e racconto nel* Canzoniere *di Petrarca.*[10] There, Santagata insists upon Petrarch's determination to collect the "fragments" of his anxious and tortured soul into an organic whole that reflects, to the best of its abilities, his inner state of being. Santagata underlines the diffuse

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[7] Marco Ariani, "Francesco Petrarca," *Storia della letteratura italiana,* dir. Enrico Malato, vol. 2, *Il Trecento* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1995) 601-726.

[8] Marco Ariani, *Petrarca* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1999).

[9] "opere di respiro più vasto, che guard[a]no al passato e al futuro piuttosto che al presente," Ariani, "Francesco Petrarca" 602.

[10] Marco Santagata, *I frammenti dell'anima. Storia e racconto nel* Canzoniere *di Petrarca* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1992).

dispersion of Petrarch's ideas and attitudes throughout his life's work and identifies the poet's need to give them an everlasting voice a process of internal "training" that previews the self-consciousness of the modern man.[11] Petrarch's project of classical poetic "renewal" is of no smaller significance to Santagata who views the poet's efforts at reviving ancient texts as a prefiguring of the Renaissance's rediscovery of the Classics.

The observations of the above scholars were preceded and undoubtedly influenced by Carlo Calcaterra's 1942 collection of essays on Petrarch, *Nella selva del Petrarca.* Though Calcaterra there refrains from making any out-and-out judgments on Petrarch's modern attitude (and at times, in fact, argues against it), he recognizes in the philosopher-poet an internal battle, a multiplicity of emotions, and a series of "discordanze e contraddizioni" – discordances and contradictions - that signal the *acedia* and illness of the soul that make of Petrarch "a veiled but now explicit upholder of the distressing doubt of the modern man, almost a precursor to Descartes or to Hamlet."[12] It is this very reflection that lies at the heart of this, my much later study.

"Melancholy" has been a topic of literary, philosophical, and medical interest since Antiquity and finds its earliest veritable expression in the 5th-century BC scientific works of Hippocrates and, perhaps more notably, in Galen's 2nd-century AD medicinal treatises and physiological "handbooks." From then onward, it has been characterized in a series of closely-related ways and has evolved from an originally assumed strictly physical illness (rooted in the theory of the "four humours") to a medieval spiritual condition increasingly to become, in the twentieth century, linked to mental disease, depression, and insanity. My later treatment and discussion of melancholy, though infinitely less comprehensive, will be based on the works of

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[11] Santagata 39, 49.

[12] "un assertore ora esplicito velato dell'angoscioso dubbio moderno, quasi un preannunziatore di Cartesio o di Amleto, " Carlo Calcaterra, *Nella selva del Petrarca* (Bologna: Editore Licino Cappelli, 1942) 2.

scholars who have analysed its literary presence and importance throughout the centuries. Most notable is the 1964 examination of melancholy by Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, and Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy*,[13] still today seen as the first point of reference on the subject. In this detailed study, Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl trace the concept of melancholy back to its earliest origins and discuss it in the context of literature, philosophy, religion, and art. Reinhard Kuhn takes up a similarly ambitious project in his book *The Demon of Noontide.*[14] There he sets out to examine medieval, Renaissance, Romantic, and Modernist variations of melancholy – *acedia*, *ennui*, and madness – through the literature of each respective period. Laurent Cantagrel does the same, stopping at Romanticism, in his *De la maladie à l'écriture. Genèse de la mélancolie romantique*,[15] as does Jean Starobinsky, stopping at the beginning of the twentieth century, in *Histoire du traitement de la mélancolie des origines à 1900.*[16] Stanley Jackson takes a more clinical approach to its description in his *Melancholia and Depression: from Hippocratic times to modern times.*[17]

Though less broad in scope, the works of Gianni Celati,[18] Massimo Ciavolella,[19] Vanna Gentili,[20] and Giorgio Agamben[21] are of no smaller contribution to my understanding and assimilation of "melancholy" in its diverse forms, representations, and manifestations. Of

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[13] Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky, Fritz Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy. Studies in the History of Natural Philosophy, Religion, and Art* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1964).
[14] Reinhard Kuhn, *The Demon of Noontide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).
[15] Laurent Cantagrel, *De la maladie à l'écriture. Genèse de la mélancolie romantique* (Tubingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2004).

[16] Jean Starobinski, *Histoire du traitement de la mélancolie des origines à 1900* (Switzerland : J.R. Greigy S.A, 1960).
[17] Stanley Jackson, *Melancholia and Depression: from Hippocratic times to modern times* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).
[18] Gianni Celati, *Finzioni occidentali. Fabulazione, comicità e scrittura* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1975).
[19] Massimo Ciavolella, *La malattia d'amore dall'Antichità al Medioevo* (Roma: Bulzoni editore, 1976).
[20] Vanna Gentili, *La recita della follia: funzioni dell'insania nel teatro dell'età di Shakespeare* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1978).
[21] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanze. La parola e il fantasma nella cultura occidentale* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1977).

particular note, furthermore, are the various studies carried out specifically on the history and evolution of the medieval capital sin of *acedia* and its analogue (or quasi-analogue) *tristitia.* Siegfried Wenzel's *The sin of sloth; Acedia in medieval thought and literature*[22] is probably the best-known and most comprehensive extant research on the ecclesiastical and, later, secular, development of *acedia* in the western world. Gabriel Bunge's work similarly traces *acedia* from its treatment by the Desert Fathers through its expansion at the hands of the Church Fathers, and into a more modern situation,[23] while Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio's edited collection of essays *I sette vizi capitali*[24] presents *acedia* in the larger context of the other medieval capital sins. Though it does not thoroughly address *acedia* explicitly, Silvia Vegetti Finzi's collection *Storia delle passioni*[25] indirectly frames *acedia* within a more ample discourse on the passions of the soul and in this way assists in putting it into a helpfully more general perspective.

Though Petrarch's brand of "melancholy" is not directly or deliberately treated by all of the above authors, their works shed an important light on his physical, spiritual, and mental condition. Before his melancholy or his modernity can in any substantial way be addressed, however, it is necessary to depict the socio-historical, political, religious, and artistic background of his work and upbringing. Raffaello Ramat[26], Giuseppe Galasso[27], and Ernest Hatch Wilkins[28] are only a few among the many to have elaborately retraced the life and times of Petrarch in this way immensely contributing to any subsequent study of his literature.

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[22] Siegfried Wenzel, *The sin of sloth; Acedia in medieval thought and literature* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967).
[23] Gabriel Bunge, *Akèdia : la doctrine spirituelle d'Évagre le Pontique sur l'Acédie*, trans. Adalbert de Vogüé (Bégrolles-en-Mauges : Abbaye de Bellefontaine,1991).
[24] Carla Casagrande e Silvana Vecchio, *I sette vizi capitali: storia del peccato nel Medioevo*(Torino: G. Einaudi editore, 2000).
[25] *Storia delle passioni*, ed. Silvia Vegetti Finzi (Roma: Laterza, 1995).
[26] See Rafaello Ramat, introduzione, *Rime e Trionfi. Con il Rimario* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1957).
[27] See Giuseppe Galasso, "La crisi del mondo comunale," *Storia della letterature italiana,* ed. Enrico Malato, vol. 2, *Il Trecento* (Roma: Salerno editrice, 1995) 5-47.
[28] Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Vita del Petrarca e "La formazione del* Canzoniere, ed. Remo Ceserani (Milano: Feltrinelli editore, 1964).

The Italian Trecento is still today recognised as a period of "battles and contrasts, of not only diverse but opposing ideological cultural positions"[29] that not only brought about substantial political, religious, and social reform, but that also considerably polemicized conventional late medieval literature. Indeed, from 1302 (two years before Petrarca's birth) to 1377 (three years after his death), the region today considered "Italy" suffered severe political pluralism felt not only in the long-persisting North-South division, but in the disunity present on a smaller scale in both respective halves. While the South played host to the contrasting Latin and Catalan factions, the North witnessed the rupture between Church and Empire so fundamental to Italian medieval history and literature and most graphically displayed in the insistent hostility between internally fragmented Guelph supporters of the Papacy and Ghibelline supporters of the Empire[30].

The Holy Roman Empire's growing disregard for long-kept traditions of the Papacy did nothing to assuage Italy's political unrest. In 1327, Ludwig of Bavaria, enemy of the Italian allied-Hapsburgs, controversially seized imperial power at Rome against the wishes of Pope Giovanni XXII, excommunicating the latter and creating more tension not only between Italy and Austria, but within the Italian peninsula and, still more importantly, within the once glorious Holy Roman Capital. From 1344 until his death ten years later, Cola di Rienzo, notary, renowned orator, and good friend to both Giovanni Colonna and Petrarch himself, would initiate a project of "universal civil and religious renewal for Rome ... [imagining] a national confederation with Rome at its head" that, despite his most sincere and passionate efforts, would remain inconclusive[31]. Not even Charles IV's later reign begun in 1355 succeeded in resolving Italy's various socio-political dilemmas. It would be impossible here to document the complexity of

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[29] Dotti calls the Italian Trecento a period of "lotte e contrasti, di posizioni ideologiche culturali non solo diverse ma opposte," Ugo Dotti, *Petrarca e la scoperta della coscienza moderna* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978) 10.
[30] Galasso 7, 11.
[31] "*renovatio* universale romana civile e religiosa ... [immaginando] una confederazione nazionale con a capo Roma," Ramat 10.

Italy's and Europe's late medieval political systems: it might suffice to recall, to be brief, that the late Trecento stands out as a hallmark of socio-political turbulence in Italy and testifies to the civil strife which left her fractioned, weak, and susceptible to still more internal division.

It seems natural that such political tension should be accompanied, complemented, and enhanced by the crisis of the Catholic Church – or the shift of the papacy to Avignon from Rome – begun in 1305 and enduring until the Great Western Schism of 1378. The initial displacement of the seat of the papal court officially signaled for Italy the politico-religious crisis that saw its medieval society increasingly dispersed for lack of a strong central point of reference[32] and that significantly complicated the role of the Church and the way in which it came to be viewed by medieval communities. On the one hand, the distancing of the Papacy from Rome indirectly led to the secularization of the Italian State: especially in the second half of the fourteenth century, "the Church increasingly becomes a hierarchical, beaurocratic, and fiscal structure"[33] on the other hand, despite this new economic rather than faith-based approach to religion, the Church managed to retain a priori the faith of the believers of the community it aimed to save[34]. Still, though the Church maintained its place at the heart of a communal medieval value-system, it came paradoxically to be viewed not only as a *spiritual* axis, but also – and just as frequently and intensely – as a fundamentally problematic *political* institution. Now dualistic, the Church seemed simultaneously to promote austere religious contemplation and active participation in public and political affairs – two realms until then dissociated and, indeed, at complete odds with each other. This strange duplicity, though datable to the early years of the Trecento, would only reach its apex in the 1378 Western Schism and in the unconventional coexistence, at that time, of

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[32] Galasso 27.
[33] "[l]a Chiesa diventa sempre più una struttura gerarchizzata, burocratizzata, fiscale,"Galasso 39.
[34] "la fiducia aprioristica dei fedeli quali comunità salvifica," Galasso 39.

two papal courts – the one at Avignon, the other at Rome – each trying to affirm its independence from and superiority over the other.

The divisive spirit of Petrarch's time was equally manifest in the social conditions in which he and his contemporaries lived. Due largely to ongoing conflicts between warring political parties and to the secularization of the State, pre-communal, communal, seigniorial, monarchic, oligarchic, and feudal social systems rubbed elbows in the close-quartered Italy of the Trecento.[35] Of course, and of note, the late Middle Ages ushered in the urbanization of society and the creation and early development of the mercantile middle class (born of a precedent feudal model)[36]. Still, a plurality of improbably reconcilable social structures continued to coexist at least until the end of the fifteenth century, further testifying to the Italian Trecento's general state of crisis or, as Giuseppe Galasso and Raffaello Ramat suggest, to its overarching politico-religious and socio-economic instability.

Italy was particularly and profoundly struck, moreover, by the "famines, epidemics, earthquakes, [and] other natural and social calamities"[37] spread widely throughout Europe at the time, and having lasting demographic consequences on the country: "In the south of the continent, in Sicily and in Sardinia, in the roman countryside, in the tuscan maremma, [and] in other south-central zones, though perhaps less so than elsewhere in Lombardy, the abandonment of tens of city centers, and especially of certain cities in particular, only partly compensated by the growth of the population from the outside, became widely diffused."[38] Of no small mention, furthermore, is the spreading of the Black Plague throughout Europe at the beginning of the

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[35] Galasso 27.
[36] Dotti, *Scoperta* 9.
[37] "carestie, epidemie, terremoti, altre calamità naturali e sociali," Galasso 16.
[38] "Nel mezzogiorno continentale, in Sicilia e in Sardegna, nella campagna romana, nella maremma toscana, in altre zone centro-settentironali, benché meno forse che altrove in Lombardia, fu diffuso il fenomeno dell'abbandono di decine di centri abitati, solo in parte compensato dagli incrementi della popolazione di altri, e specialmente di alcune città," Galasso 16-17.

fourteenth century which in turn decimated a large part of Italy's remaining population. It comes as no surprise that the Plague should have a devastating effect on Italy's considerably primitive economic society still most reliant on human labour as a primary resource; even less surprising that it should open Petrarch's and his contemporaries' eyes to the fragility of human life and to the necessity of social and spiritual renewal. The Plague, perhaps even more than the "carestie" and "epidemie" of which Galasso writes, inspired in poets, artists, and the general population alike a kind of Christian reflection "on the precariousness and unhappiness of the human condition, on the divine chastisement reserved for humankind, perpetually victim of and fragile before the temptation of sin."[39] In its complete ravaging of Europe, the Plague brought to the forefront of human and artistic consideration, in other words, not only the fragmentation of the period, but also, and much more promisingly, its budding penchant for all-around renewal.

This period also saw the crossroads and overlapping of Thomistic and Augustinian theology and philosophy – a particularly important development for artists at the time. The supremacy of Thomistic-Aristotelian (and, later, Scholastic) thought over Augustinian-Platonic thought – or vice-versa – was of great debate from the end of the thirteenth century throughout the fourteenth and until the Renaissance's more marked penchant toward the latter. The Middle Ages often saw the intellect and the will, rather than as two codependent components essential to understanding God, as philosophical tenets in opposition, and generally privileged the former to the latter. In the first case, intellect or a priori understanding of God was deemed required to make real and full contact with Him; in the second, an obstinate will to understand Him was thought to be enough to bring about the beatific vision that would lead to religious revelation and

[39] "sulla precarietà e l'infelicità della condizione umana, sul castigo divino riservato a un'umanità sempre vittima del peccato e fragile dinanzi alle sue tentazioni," Galasso 39.

comprehension.[40] Though it is not my purpose here to outline the many complexities of such an important debate, it is nevertheless noteworthy to acknowledge its existence and its crucial importance to intellectuals of Petrarch's period and, more pointedly, to Petrarch himself.

It is in the midst of such political, social, religious and philosophical turmoil that Petrarch writes. Intent on expounding the pluralism of his time, he composes his major works in ecclesiastic and classical Latin as well as in the Italian vernacular on the rise at the time which, indeed, he helped render more fashionable. Artistically thriving on the most important social problems of his period, Petrarch displays in the bulk of his works "the preoccupation, the *curiositas*, the search for new points of reference, the return to the real *patres*" characteristic of the spirit of the Italian Trecento, in a new, rather modern, and experimental voice all his own.[41] His literary project as an *ensemble* reads not only as a deliberate effort faithfully to depict his social conditions, but as a fresh attempt at "renewal" that tries successfully to reconcile past and present, the traditional and the avant-garde.

Francesco Petrarca – or, as he would come to be known in his contemporary academic circles, Franciscus Petracchi[42] – was born into a long line of notaries on July 20th, 1304 at Arezzo. From his very birth, it seems, life presented itself as a constant journey to Petrarch who experienced youth through old age in a series of brief stays in various cities of northern Italy and

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[40] For more on this debate and on the various other theological and philosophical positions and tenets in circulation among intellectuals at the time, see Maria Cecilia Bertolani's *Petrarca e la visione dell'eterno* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2005). Here, in her first chapter, Bertolani more particularly discusses the medieval theological necessity of understanding God in order fully to associate with him as a creature made in his image. Contrary to St. Thomas, who insisted that the will to know God was contingent on the intellect's ability to recognize this as the ultimate "good" or the ultimate end, Duns Scoto, Bertolani chronicles, in tandem with the Franciscan and Augustinian orders of his time, placed more stock in the will itself (and independent of intellect) as the primary means of reaching God. Further discussing the works of Oberman, William of Ockham, Saint Guillaume de Thierry and others, Bertolani writes of the ultimate abandonment of Thomistic thought: gradually, over time, the road of "love" – associated primarily with abstract will - was preferred to the road of "contemplation" – associated with Thomistic rational intellect – as the way of coming to recognize oneself in God (25-55).

[41] "l'inquietudine, la *curiositas*, la ricerca di nuovi riferimenti, il ritorno ai veri *patres*," Ariani, "Francesco Petrarca" 604-605.

[42] Wilkins, *Vita* 19.

Provence. Already having moved from his native Arezzo to Incisa and then to Pisa, after living only four years at Carpentras, the young Francesco, then twelve years old, was sent by his father to the University of Montpellier to begin the legal studies he would pursue four more years later in Bologna. As Ernest Hatch Wilkins writes, however, despite his father's ambitions of a "legal" life for his son, "legal practice, with its petty details and opportunities for dishonesty, was unbearably repugnant to [Francesco]"[43] who, following his father's example, had since his earliest youth demonstrated a keen interest in the writings, among others, of Virgil and Cicero, embarking on a project of classical learning that would persist throughout his life and reach important heights with his discovery of Seneca and Heraclitus.[44] Leaving the law behind, Petrarch returned to Avignon with his brother Gherardo in April of 1326, seven years after the death of their mother, Eletta Cangiani, and dedicated several of the next years of his life to classical study and to the preparation of the first critical edition of Tito Livio's *Ab urbe condita libri.*[45] It is here in Avignon, furthermore, that on April 6th, 1327 at the church of Santa Chiara, Francesco first laid eyes on his lifelong muse, the Laura who would come to inspire at least two of his most famous works: the *Canzoniere* and the *Trionfi.*

The next eleven years of Petrarch's life accurately convey the frenetic pace of his undertakings in general. He spent from 1333-1337 constantly traveling throughout northern Europe, beyond even Provence and Italy, meeting with important historical figures and discovering still more classical texts – Saint Augustine's *Confessions* among them – which would remain precious to him until his death. It was most likely in or around 1333 that Dionigi da Borgo San Sepolcro, a monk of the Augustinian order, gave Petrarch a small copy of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* – a text which, by his own account as repeatedly recorded in his

[43] Ernest Hatch Wilkins, *Life of Petrarch* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) 7.
[44] Marcel Françon, "Petrarch, Disciple of Heraclitus", *Speculum* 11 (1936): 265-271, 265.
[45] Wilkins, *Vita* 32.

Familiari, would never leave his side - and introduced him to the theological teachings of the early Church father. The *Confessions* would accompany him on his ascent of Mont Ventoux only three years later, probably in the spring of 1336: a spiritual journey and life-altering event for Petrarch which in several important ways indicates an early instance of Petrarch's growing modern sensibility.[46]

These were years of noteworthy social, intellectual, artistic, and religious development[47] during which he simultaneously embarked upon an ecclesiastic career and refined his poetic and artistic skill. As Wilkins writes:

> By the end of this period Petrarch was in his early thirties and a marked man in Avignon. He was indeed a man of impressive personality, handsome and strong. He was an easy talker, had traveled widely, and was highly intelligent, well informed, even learned. He was uniquely gifted as a writer of Italian verse. He was much concerned about public affairs, especially about the continued absence of both Pope and Emperor from Rome. He stood well in papal circles. Above all, he was a friendly man, possessed already of cherished friends, and quite ready to admit new friends into their company.[48]

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[46] In his book *Petrarca e il Ventoso,* Bortolo Martinelli writes of Petrarch's trek to the summit of Mont Ventoux, accompanied only by his brother Gherardo and Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, as a moment of spiritual growth catalysed by Petrarch's forced confrontation with his passions and with his subsequent need simultaneously to consider his various conflicting emotions: his engagement with the world, his desire for Laura, his compulsion for divine purification, the fragility of the flesh, the vulnerability of the soul, and the transience of life. These, Martinelli suggests, are themes which would recurrently resurface in Petrarch's larger *oeuvre*- "il cosiddetto tema del dissidio o 'dualismo' dell'anima del poeta, di netta estrazione romantica, per cui il Petrarca appare diviso fino alle fine dei suoi giorni tra due opposte esigenze, il mondo e la donna, da una parte, e il desiderio di purificazione e di ascesi, dall'altra, senza mai risolversi con fermo proposito per una delle due, per manifesto difetto di volontà" (Bortolo Martinelli, *Petrarca e il Ventoso* (Bergamo: Minerva Italica, 1977) 149-215, 149-150). See also: *Familiari* IV.I (in Francesco Petrarca, *Le familiari*, ed. Ugo Dotti, 2 vol, (Roma: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1991).

[47] Santagata 17.

[48] Wilkins, *Life* 17.

It is during these very years, moreover, that Petrarch begins to compose and collect the poems that would later form the corpus of his *Canzoniere* and the letters that would constitute his *Familiari.*

Despite his public activity and strong civil commitments, Petrarch nevertheless in these years and in many more to come remained remarkably drawn to a solitary life of contemplation. Especially when faced with the decline of his beloved Rome as he saw it early in 1337 under the custody of the Colonna family, Petrarch deemed such retreat from society not only ideal but indeed necessary to any constructive attempts at both spiritual and urban renewal. According to Marco Ariani, "the vision of the ruins [of the Rome he meets with here] convinces him of the urgency of civil and cultural redemption for both Rome itself and for Italy: the dream of a restoration which would fulfil his need to explore to solve political and civil problems by way of his literature."[49] Petrarch was unable to *write* such literature, however, at Avignon which continued to represent for him, "crowds, clamor, confusion, elegance, demands upon his time, knowledge of unworthy doings in the papal court."[50] Instead, he decided later that same year to retire to his newly acquired house in Vaucluse, a place which would become most dear to him and which, contrary to the bustle of Avignon, would come to symbolize for the young poet not only "a poetic caprice or a private refuge from a private preoccupation ... [but also or] rather, metaphorically and mythically, the point of departure for the exploration of humanity as much in its interiority as in its social aspects."[51] Vaucluse would become for Petrarch the beloved and

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[49] " la visione delle rovine [di Roma che conosce qui] lo convince dell'urgenza di un riscatto morale, civile e culturale dell'Urbe e dell'Italia: il sogno di una *restauratio* che appaghi il suo bisogno di mettere alla prova la letteratura con le necessità politiche e civili del tempo," Ariani, "Francesco Petrarca" 611.

[50] Wilkins, *Life* 17.

[51] "un vezzo poetico o il privato rifugio di un inquietudine privata ... [ma anche o] piuttosto, metaforicamente e miticamente, il punto di partenza per l'esplorazione dell'umano tanto nella sua interiorità quanto nei suoi aspetti sociali," Ugo Dotti, *Petrarca civile. Alle origini dell'intellettuale moderno* 76.

often returned-to seat of poetic reflection that permitted him from a safe and healthy distance to observe not only man and society, but himself.

In the close to forty remaining years of his life, Petrarch witnessed and veritably lived through the darkest depravities of his time and the most important events of his personal and political career: while at Parma, he first met with the Plague that would kill some of his dearest family members and friends, among them, Laura, in 1348, and his own son Giovanni, in 1361; it is also here that he survived the earthquakes that devastated northern Italy n 1349.[52]

It is in this general context that Petrarch develops his essentially autobiographic artistic project. The product of such an unconventional childhood living in such dissonant times, it is no surprise that Petrarch should increasingly fall victim to the *acedia* or torpor of the soul that colours a large part of his works from the *Canzoniere* to his late magnum opus, *De Remediis utriusque fortunae.*

[52] Wilkins, *Vita* 116.

Chapter I: Melancholy and *acedia*: A historical and thematic survey

Retiens moi si tu peux refermer la blessure
Qui me tient à la vie et le mal qu'on se fait
Et les coups de couteaux qui transpercent et les plaies
Du silence et la nuit qui fait pleurer mon âme
Et la mélancolie, dis moi quand ça finit,
Les pouvoirs et les vents
Qui me poussent et qui m'attirent
Quand le coeur ne ressent que l'envie d'en finir
Dis quel est le chemin?
La vierge ou la putain?

-Damien Saez, "Marie ou Marilyn," *Debbie* (France, 2004).

The *acedia* at the heart of Petrarch's major works finds its roots in the humoural illnesses of the Ancients. Before tracing its antique lineage, though, it will be necessary to outline the major proponents of this specifically medieval sin from its earliest literary treatment and in the larger context of the Middle Ages. By the time Petrarch begins writing in the 14th century, *acedia* – or *accidia* to him and his contemporaries - had already been obdurately reexamined as a theological concept by saints, Church fathers, and desert monks, centuries earlier. It had several times altered in meaning, representation, and relevance to man, finally to become a rather universally felt "human" condition not only inherent to monastic men, as was originally believed, but predatory also to the common man- a conglomerate vice of both the body and the soul. As Giorgio Agamben points out early in his *Stanze,* the early Church fathers considered it the worst and the most difficultly remediable of the deadly sins, the poetic importance of which significantly increased precisely during Petrarch's lifetime after the diffusion of the Black Plague in Europe:

> During the whole of the Middle Ages, a scourge worse than the plague that infested the castles, villas, and palaces of the cities of the world fell on the dwellings of spiritual life, penetrated the cells and cloisters

> of monasteries, the Thebaid of the hermits, the convents of recluses. *Acedia* (sloth), *tristitia* (sorrow), *taedium vitae* (weariness, loathing of life), and desidia (idleness) are the names the church fathers gave to the death this sin induced in the soul; and although its desolate effigy occupies the fifth position in the lists of the *Summae virtuteum et vitiorum* (Summa of virtues and vices), in the miniatures of manuscripts, and in the popular representations of the seven capital sins, an ancient hermeneutic tradition considered it the most lethal of the vices, the only one for which no pardon was possible.[53]

By the account of the early Church fathers, *acedia*, a certain "death of the soul" or a "muting sadness, ... a spiritual voicelessness, a veritable 'extinction' of the soul's 'voice'"[54] was the most difficult sin to overcome; once conquered and vanquished, however, it left its former victims immune to all the others and free from spiritual corruption.[55] Associated with a host of other religious concepts, it is its very complexity and plurality that initially seem to make it of interest to readers of Petrarch's own fragmented verse and prose.

Ostensibly the first extensively and objectively to present this concept was fourth-century Evagrius Ponticus who, in his various religious treatises, conjectured the sin as one of eight "evil

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[53] Agamben 5: "Per tutto il medioevo, un flagello peggiore della peste che infesta i castelli, le ville e i palazzi delle città del mondo si abbatte sulle dimore della vita spirituale, penetra nelle celle e nei chiostri dei monasteri, nelle tebaidi degli eremiti, nelle trappe dei reclusi. *Acedia, tristitia, taedium vitae, desidia* sono i nomi che i padri della Chiesa danno alla morte che esso introduce nell'anima; e benché negli elenchi delle *Summae virtutum et vitiorum*, nelle miniature dei manoscritti e nelle rappresentazioni popolari dei sette peccati capitali, la sua desolata effigie figuri al quinto posto, un'antica tradizione ermeneutica ne fa il più letale dei vizi, l'unico per il quale non vi sia alcun perdono possibile" as translated by Ronald L. Martinez, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 3. See also Kuhn 64: "It was not until Petrarch and the advent of the Renaissance that *acedia* was secularized and became a universal plague."

[54] Straobinski, *Histoire* 31: He calls *acedia* a "tristesse qui rend muet, ... une aphonie spirituelle, [une] véritable 'extinction de voix' de l'âme. »

[55] Kuhn 44: Kuhn here makes reference to Evagrius' much earlier idea that *acedia*, when overcome, was replaced by joy in such a way that it came to be viewed not only as the most despicable Christian sin, but as the progenitor of the greatest Christian virtue.

thoughts" – later formally to become the original catalogue of deadly sins – against which the Christian monk battled. Evagrius' concept of *acedia*, though the first out-and-out description of its kind, has its own rich history. He for a time dedicated himself to the ascetic monasticism of the Egyptian desert and drew his analysis of *acedia* from his own experience and from the teachings of his "desert fathers" Nilus and Scete. Combining their thought with scriptural passages – namely Psalms 90 and 118 in the original *Septuagint*- and with Stoic philosophy, he presented *acedia* as an exclusively spiritual rather than bodily sin afflicting the desert monk around the noon hour. It was then, he claims, when the sun was at its peak in the sky, that they were assaulted by the "noontide demon" that poisoned their minds (and their wills) with unhealthy thoughts and caused them to grow listless.[56] Secluded in their cells, the monks, watching the seemingly immobile sun in the sky, gradually lost focus on prayer and fell subject to the other thoughts – mostly fleshly temptations – wearing away at their souls.

This "religious boredom," or the "temptation of getting bored with the religious life and the cell … and [the urge of] the monk to flee the cell or to forsake the religious life entirely,"[57] is ostensibly an illness of the "passions" and derives from the opposition of vice and virtue basic not only to Stoicism, but to later manifestations and interpretations of *acedia* wherein the passions play a greater role.[58] Evagrius' monk is in search of uninterrupted contemplation of God. His inner peace, however, is occasionally disturbed by "evil thoughts". As Wenzel points out, "Behind this spiritual ideal [of thinking of God without interruption] … lies the concept of

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[56] A series of proverbs on listlessness (prov. 55, 56) are explicitly presented following a section on "sleepiness" (46, 48-50) and are later followed by a section on "sluggishness" (93) most succinctly in Evagrius' *Ad Monachos* which, by Jeremy Driscoll's account, reads as a condensed and aesthetically pleasing "poetic" summary of issues Evagrius treats at greater length elsewhere in his teachings. See more specifically Evagrius Pontichus, *Ad Monachos*, trans. Jeremy Driscoll, O.S.B (New York: The Newman Press, 2003).

[57] Wenzel 10.

[58] Petrarch's *Secretum*, or the text in which he is most explicitly concerned with *acedia*, has alternately been called, to wit, *The Soul's Conflict with Passion.* See: *Petrarch's* Secret *or the Soul's Conflict with Passion*, trans. William Draper (London: Norwood editions, 1975).

... the freedom from disturbing passions, obtained through rational control over one's senses, desires, feelings, and memory."[59] It is this very idea that is expressed earlier, in Psalm 118, another greatly influential document to the *acedia* of Evagrius' monk. There, subjects of some early form of the sin are afflicted by "spiritual listlessness[60] and slackened attention which may [have been] caused by weariness from the prolonged assault of temptations (mostly fleshly thoughts) or by plain boredom."[61] Central to both descriptions is the fundamental contrast of cerebral "rationality" and the experience of sensual temptation. In fact, Psalm 118 pivots on the speaker's turn away from "covetousness" and "vanity" through constant dedication to prayer and the contemplation of God's good will and good works.[62] Psalm 90, another of Evagrius' supposed sources, talks of a noonday devil that attacks monks and ascetics when their hearts are weighed down by thoughts of fleshly love, causing their souls to "slumber," their reason to sway from its fixed focus on God, and their bodies to fall into the same sleep their spirit displays, fundamentally leading to death.[63]

Though these more "physical" aspects of *acedia* will figure much more prominently in Petrarch's milieu, up until at least the eighth and ninth centuries, the sin remained more closely tied to its distinctly spiritual origin. Already by Church father John Cassian's not much later analysis, *acedia* moves from the desert into the monastery, leaving behind one (small) set of implications while gaining another. In two key treatises – the *Collationes* and the *De Institutis Coenobiorum* – Cassian writes of *acedia* as a sin caused by a "fever" only *akin* to the attacks of the midday demon alluded to in Psalm 90. Like Evagrius, he talks of the monk's "disgust of the

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[59] Wenzel 13.
[60] Psalm CXVIII.28, as transcribed in *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, Ltd., 1884): "My soul has slumbered for sorrow; strengthen thou me with thy words."
[61] As cited in Wenzel, 8.
[62] Psalm CXVIII.35-36: "Incline my heart to thy testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away mine eyes that I may not behold vanity: quicken thou me in thy way."
[63] Psalm XC.5-7: "Thou shalt not be afraid of terror by night; nor of the arrow flying by day; *nor* of the *evil* thing that walks in darkness; nor of calamity, and the evil spirit at noon-day." See also Wenzel 6-7, 17-18.

cell" and of the physical conditions – heat, bodily weakness, hunger – to affect his state of mind.[64] Unlike his contemporary or near-contemporary, however, he brings a more social dynamic into the equation: Evagrius' monk seeks the solution to his sin in prayer, even if it will potentially lead him again into spiritual torpor. Cassian's *acedic*, however, seeks refuge from his sin *outside* the monastery by employing himself in good deeds. Though like Evagrius', still a sin proper to the solitary man, Cassian's *acedia* is particularly coloured by the teachings and examples of St. Paul who sees manual labour as a viable antidote to the noontide – or, in this case, evening-tide[65] – demon rather than by Saint Anthony who, as a major proponent of religious reflection as a cure for *acedia* more prominently influences Evagrius' works.

Cassian's most useful contribution to the study of *acedia*, however, is his attempt – perhaps the first of its kind – not only to identify and classify it among the eight deadly sins (conforming to Evagrius' original list), but to establish its direct line of descent or progeny among them: in essence, Cassian, like Evagrius, places *acedia* still among the spiritual rather than carnal vices, in fifth position. Rather uniquely, he claims that it springs directly, though remains definitively distinct from *tristitia*, itself born of wrath, and lists a series of fatal flaws it engenders, *otiositas* (laziness),[66] *somnolentia* (somnolence), *importunitas* (self-absorbed relentlessness),[67] *inquietudo* (worry), and *pervagatio* (wandering of the mind)[68] among them.[69]

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[64] Wenzel 19.

[65] Cassian's *acedic* was believed to be disturbed by a "weariness or distress of the heart … [at] about the sixth hour" (Wenzel 19).

[66] As related to "leisure" or "idleness" from the root word *otio* ("De ŏtio" *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature*, ed. M.C. Howatson and Ian Chilvers (Oxford University Press, 1996), *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, McGill University, 6 May 2008 < http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t9.e912>).

[67] *The Pocket Oxford Latin dictionary* defines *importunitas* as a "persistent lack of consideration for others" ("importūnitās *f*" *The Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. James Morwood (Oxford University Press, 1994), *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, McGill University, 6 May 2008 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t131a.e4645>).

[68] From "pervagor": "wander or range through, rove about; pervade, spread widely; extend" ("pervagor *v1 dep*" *The Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. James Morwood (Oxford University Press, 1994), *Oxford Reference Online*,

The implications of each aspect of Cassian's *acedia* are diverse and complex and I will not seek to explain them all here. Interestingly, the multiplicity of the term is perhaps its most salient and only consistent feature in the seemingly endless number of transformations it would undergo before reaching Petrarch.

Its plurality of meaning is further corroborated by the next step in its historical and ecclesiastic evolution. Less than a century after Cassian's classification, Gregory Magnus posits his own and does away entirely with *acedia* (thereby reducing the catalogue to seven) or, by Wenzel's reading, subsumes it in the very *tristitia* Cassiano previously regarded as its own vice.[70] The conflation of these terms, Wenzel argues, was probably due to the various similarities between them: common to both *tristitia* and *acedia* at the time was, above all, fear, the retreat from human company due to a larger frustration with the self and with the self within society, and an anxious impatience about the monk's daily activities of prayer and mediation. More specifically, the *rancor* (resentment or ill will), *pusillanimitas* (timidity or, more literally, smallness of the soul), and *desperatio* (despair) of Cassian's *tristitia,* and the *pervagatio* of his *acedia* all find (or nearly find) their way into Gregory's definition of *tristitia.*[71] The reasons for which Gregory might have made such a move remain up for debate. Historical documentation nevertheless testifies to the fact that up until the seventh century, his and Cassian's catalogues of the deadly vices difficultly but effectively coexisted. By the eighth century, though, Gregory's list – notably devoid of *acedia* – was taken as authoritative, surely an early explanation for the later secularization of this sin.

Oxford University Press, McGill University, 6 May
2008 <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t131a.e7264>).
[69] Wenzel 21, 23.
[70] Wenzel 23-46.
[71] Wenzel 23.

For as long as it was associated with *tristitia* (either as its child or as some other subsumed form of it), *acedia* by and large retained its status as a spiritual vice – that is, one primarily associated with mental rather than sensual faculties. With Saint Thomas and the Scholastics, specifically *acedia* (and not *tristitia*) would regain some of its theological importance as a sin directly attributed to an insufficient love of God or zeal for his good works.[72] Especially in the eleventh century, however, it would come more heavily to be aligned with the "physical phenomena of idleness and somnolence, whereas in the following century spiritual authors laid greater stress on its inner phenomena of mental slackness, lack of fervor, tedium, and the like."[73]

Still, some writers and philosophers of the twelfth century or earlier, commentators of Cassian among them, would conversely insist on its categorization as a "sin of the flesh." The *somnolentia* it engendered, they argued, made it identifiable as most closely linked to the last of the three "natural passions": eating and drinking, sexual appetite (or "man's love of a woman") and sleep, each a natural derivative of its precedent.[74] Those who viewed it as more closely related to *otiositas* (or "laziness") rather than to its more melancholic features would hold a similar opinion. By Petrarch's time, *acedia* had already resurfaced as an important vice independent of the others and, appropriately, was considered a sin exclusive to neither the spirit nor the body: to most 13th and 14th-century readers, writers, and critical thinkers, it was particular both and, as Wenzel suggests, "it contained the aspect of mental aversion against spiritual goods

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[72] See Andrea Ciotti, "accidia e accidiosi" in *Enciclopedia Dantesca* (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1970) 26: "In quanto tale [*acedia*] si riporta al concetto di incontinenza, di cui viene ad essere un'espressione, presupponendo sempre un rapporto diretto, anche se negativo, con la sollecitudine o sollecitazione d'amore e di desiderio verso il bene, allorché si verifica nell'anima una scarsa o insufficiente propensione verso di esso, capace di configurarsi quale atto peccaminoso."

[73] Wenzel 30.

[74] Wenzel 171: In the twelfth century especially, sleep was commonly believed to be caused by lustful actions, themselves the result of excessive intake of food, drink, and participation in general merriment, which left the body tired. This question is also addressed in Pseudo-Aristotle's Problem XXX,I.

as well as that of bodily indolence in performing external religious duties to God and man. … [T]hese two notions – spiritual inappetence and laziness – coexisted as integral elements of the vice, not only during the Scholastic period, but indeed from at least Cassian's *Instituta* on."[75] Centuries later, it would come again to be reduced and unfairly redimensioned into the much more basic and contemporary idea of "sloth." By Cassian's accounts and according to his Egyptian contemporaries and theological sources, though, the *acedic* monk was not merely lazy, embittered, and resigned to his discomfort. Rather, he was simultaneously plagued by *somnolentia* (sleepiness or weariness) and *curiositas* (curiosity or interest), by an instability of the mind and the body (*instabilitas mentis et corporis*) that perpetually left him oscillating between two extremes: action and contemplation, passion and disinterest. His condition is perhaps best captured in St. Paul's presentation of the sin as one of "*anima*, that is, [holding] the intermediate" - and strikingly "modern," by contemporary standards - "position between flesh and spirit."[76]

Far from a straightforward ailment, *acedia*, as has been shown, has been variously explained throughout the centuries and since its earliest appearance as a literary rather than merely religious issue. Rather generally, the *acedia* of the medieval monk could speak to any or all of the following discomforts: his *siccitas* ("[the] dryness of [his] soul"), *tristitia* ("inexplicable sorrow"), *desidia* ("complete paralysis of the will"), *pigritia* ("sloth or laziness")[77] or *taedium vitae* ("disgust with the self")[78]; it could also just as easily denote his general apathy and indifference, his withdrawal from the world, his voluntary isolation from his peers, and his weariness of life and of the human condition. Much more than a simple "torpor of the soul" or

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[75] Wenzel 174.
[76] Wenzel 170.
[77] Kuhn 40.
[78] Cantagrel 31-32: « un dégout de soi-même ».

inability to act, *acedia* represented the *inquietudo*, *timor*, and *pusillanimitas* (anxiety, fear, and weakness of the soul) of the religious man and, later, of the scholar more generally. It was – and still is –, thus, a loaded term used succinctly to convey the variety of spiritual illnesses that may have plagued those affected by it.

Though Cassian calls *acedia* the offspring of *tristitia*,[79] its pedigree can be traced as far back as the melancholy of the Ancients and at least as far forward as the *ennui* characteristic of the modern *fin de siècle*.[80] The link between *acedia* and melancholy has already been drawn by scholars of great note. André Chastel among them has pointed to the close relation of the one to the other arguing that the former seems to be nothing more than another *name* for the latter.[81] Similarly, Laurent Cantagrel has found in the *taedium vitae* of the splenetic monk echoes of the Romantic "depression without a cause" engendered by an excess of black bile crucial to the Ancient understanding of melancholy.[82] Significantly, the keynotes of *acedia* are the very fulcrum of the Galeno-Hippocratic concept of melancholy; both pivot on a series of seemingly irreconcilable dualities, an ambivalent or "bipolar" state theoretically attributable to a chemical – or, rather, "humoural" – imbalance in the body and the brain. Central to both, moreover, are the already above-noted themes of solitude, passion, and excess.

In their book *Saturn and Melancholy,* Klibansky, Saxl, and Panofsky, compiling the theses of philosophers, artists, and writers from Galen to Durer, present melancholy historically and clinically as a mental and physiological "humoural" illness, that is, one rooted in the Ancient theory of the four humours. From as early as the second century A.D., they contend, man was scientifically conceived to be composed of four liquid substances believed to govern his

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[79] Cantagrel 31-32.
[80] See Reinhard Kuhn's *The Demon of Noontide.*
[81] André Chastel, "La tentation de Saint Antoine ou le songe du mélancolique," *Fables, formes, figures* (Paris : Flammarion, 1978) 137-159.
[82] Cantagrel 31-32: "dysthymies sans raison."

temperament and general disposition: blood, yellow bile, black bile, and phlegm. Each of these substances, furthermore, was associated with an element, a season, a stage of life, a set of physical and mental properties, and a ruling planet (hardley surprising given the then widespread interest in and overlap of astrology and medicine). A proper balance of all four was thought to engender the perfectly harmonious or "absolutely healthy" man.[83] An excess in any one, however, was believed to cause severe mental or physical illness. "Melancholy" was the name given to the illness resulting from an excess of black bile or, more commonly, *atra bile*, and though it could indeed affect any person susceptible to such excess, it was more generally associated with the earth and thought proper to the "mature" stage of life[84] and to people born under the sign of ruling Saturn.[85] Physically, it had cold and dry effects on its victims[86]; a brief recapitulation of the *mental* characteristics it gave rise to will further elucidate the link between it and Petrarch's medieval *acedia.*

I will here endeavour to mention only melancholy's most recurrent mental attributes and those which, I think, are most directly related to its medieval progeny. Perhaps most obvious to such a correlation are Hippocrates' and Archigenes' accounts of the melancholic as a being governed by "fear, misanthropy, and depression" and often so afflicted by mental and spiritual

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[83] Klibansky et al 14-15. See also Klibansky 65: like Wenzel, the authors cite Isidore of Seville as one of the main proponents of this theory.

[84] The "mature" stage is the third of four commonly-held stages of life: infancy, adolescence, maturity, and old-age. In Eastern traditions (and more particularly, in Buddhist and Hindu philosophy), it is associated with the "householder" stage – the phase in which men (more pointedly) were expected to have set root. Of particular note, Petrarch is purported to have composed his *Secretum*, among his most "melancholic" texts, between 1343 and 1354, when he would have been in or approaching his forties, and decidedly abandoning the "green" of his youth at Avignon. The opposition between youth and maturity, furthermore, and Petrarch's growing nostalgia for the former is repeatedly expressed throughout his *Canzoniere*.

[85] Indeed, as the author of Problem XXX,I suggests, the duplicitous effects of melancholy could be felt on anyone: "So too with the despondency which occurs in everyday life, for we are often in a state of grieving, but could not say why, while at other times we feel cheerful without apparent reason. To such affections and to those mentioned before we are all subject in some small degree, for a little of the stuff which causes them is mixed in with everybody. But with people in whom this quality goes deep, it determines the character" (Problem XXX,I as quoted in Klibansky et al 25, 26).

[86] Klibansky et al 10.

torment as to finally display suicidal tendencies.[87] In the seventh century, Alcabitius would describe the melancholic as "timid, easily confused, obdurate, fearful, given to anger" and would point to his overwhelming "preference for solitude."[88] This "disjunction from the world … retreat from the world"[89] is a fundamental characteristic of the melancholic and, as has already been shown, to the later *acedic* from the earliest Egyptian monastics to the latest medieval scholars. Essentially, the melancholic, like the *acedic,* is "un être en rupture," "who does not live in harmony with the rhythm of nature and collectivity … In a doctrine that argues for and justifies a preestablished cosmic harmony, the melancholic incarnates a principle of disorder in conformity with the nature of black bile."[90] Throughout their treatise, Klibansky, Saxl, and Panofsky, like Pierangelo Schiera, in his book *Specchi della politica,*[91] draw attention to the melancholic's "deviation from the normal,"[92] or normal abnormality, and to his exclusion from the natural order and proper functioning of society, whether he has voluntarily extracted himself from it, or whether his malady has placed him there *contre son gré.*

The melancholic's "break with" the rest of the world does not end with his misanthropic and fearful nature, however. It is further evidenced by his tendency to be carried away by his passions, and thereby to forget his surroundings and his social responsibilities, falling into

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[87] Klibansky et al 14, 47. Suicide is a theme of central importance, furthermore, both to Stoic philosophers (chief among them Seneca) and to Petrarch himself who discusses it in considerable detail in his *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. See Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, vol. 1-3, trans. Richard M. Gummere (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), and more particularly, IV: "On the Terrors of Death," and XXX: "On Conquering the Conqueror," LXXXII: "On the Natural Fear of Death," for instance. See also Francesco Petrarca, *De remediis utriusque fortunae. Petrarch's remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, vol. 1-5, trans. Conrad H. Rawski (Bloomington: Bloomington and Indianapolis Press, 1991): *Remedies for Adversity* 117, 118, 119: "Fear of Dying," "Suicide," and "Death," vol. 3, 283-304.

[88] Klibansky et al 131.

[89] "disgiunzione dal mondo, … ritrarsi dal mondo," Gianni Celati, *Finzioni occidentali. Fabulazione, comicità e scrittura* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1975) 111.

[90] Cantagrel 48: The melancholic is a disjointed being "qui ne vit pas en harmonie avec le rythme de la nature et de la collectivité … Dans une doctrine que sous-tend et justifie une harmonie cosmique préétablie, le mélancolique incarne un principe de désordre, conformément à la nature de la bile noire."

[91] Pierangelo Schiera, *Specchi della politica. Disciplina, melancolia, socialità nell'Occidente moderno* (Bologna: Il mulino, 1999).

[92] Klibansky et al 31.

physical and spiritual somnolence. The earliest documenters of this inclination refer to it as a "clouding of consciousness," or a temporary loss of reason due to unsound judgment, sometimes resulting in lycanthropy or other descents to animalistic behaviour. In fact, in extreme proportion, it could lead to what Plato in his *Phaedrus* terms "frenzy" or a "moral insanity, clouding and weakening will and reason"[93] owed mostly to lack of self-mastery.[94] Not much later, the Stoics – who would prove to be particularly influential to Petrarch - would come to argue that though madness and wisdom were mutually exclusive categories, the Wise Man could in fact, fall prey to melancholy and, consequently, "lose his head" and lose his virtue.[95] At first glance, Plato's and the Stoics' readings seem most akin to the description of a vile and moody tyrant. Upon later inspection and when taken into consideration with early Peripatetic documents, the melancholic's overly passionate nature and his inability to control his impulses[96] liken him, rather, not only to great and tragic Greek heroes, but also to the rash and reckless lover who, guided by his passions rather than by "reason" or "moderation" becomes afflicted by a love-sickness synonymous, at least in Plato, to "madness".[97]

Not surprisingly, "folly", "melancholy", and "illness" are the terms most commonly used from Antiquity to the Renaissance to describe and define love, be it Platonic, courtly, or

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[93] Klibansky et al 17. See also Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 42 (240d).

[94] See *Phaedrus* 39 (237d-238b): Plato here talks of two ruling "ideas" inherent to all men, that carry him in either of two opposed directions: "the desire of pleasures that is naturally planted in us, and another acquired opinion that aims at the best. These two things in us sometimes are of one mind, but sometimes they engage in factious struggle; and at one time the one, at another time the other, wins mastery. Now then, when opinion leads with reason toward the best and wins mastery, the name of the mastery is *moderation*; but when desire without reason drags us toward pleasures and rules in us, the name *wanton outrage* is applied to the rule." The duplicity of man's internal faculties and the opposition between what Plato terms "moderation" and "wanton outrage" are fundamental to the condition of the melancholic and the *acedic.*

[95] Klibansky et al 43.

[96] See Klibansky et al 34: "The constant high tension of the melancholic's spiritual life, which originated from the body and was therefore independent of the will, made it impossible for him to act reasonably ... Melancholics followed their fancy entirely, were uncontrolled in every respect, and were driven by ungovernable lust."

[97] In *Phaedrus* and in a long discourse on "madness" of various kinds – both bad and good – Plato calls love the fourth "madness" and warns against gratifying "the lover who is of necessity mindless" (*Phaedrus* 43, 241c).

concupiscent. In his book *La malattia d'amore dall'Antichità al Medioevo*, Massimo Ciavolella calls love an "illness of melancholic character"[98] the effects of which are felt both physically and spiritually. His observations that "folly and emotional disturbances in general are caused by an invasion of black bile in the brain" and that "the love-melancholy-folly relationship … presupposes that the body and the mind are intimately linked, and that the affections or passions which strike the one immediately and inevitably reverberate upon the other and viceversa" allow him to substantiate his earlier claim.[99] Central to Ciavolella's reading of love as a melancholic illness – or, perhaps better, as one of the many effects of black bile on the naturally and pre-disposed melancholic – is the conflict, present in this context, too, between reason and the passions – an idea present since Evagrius and the Stoics. Pulled in one direction by the virtue of his mind and in the opposite direction by his "uncontrollable" sexual impulses, the lover collides with the melancholic: both emerge as "fallen" figures who, like the *acedic*, remain unwilling to or uninterested in being healed of their spiritual, physical, and mental illness.[100]

Indeed, "excess" remains a cornerstone of melancholy at least up until the *acedia* of the Middle Ages.[101] Problem XXX,I, a philosophical treatise most commonly attributed to Aristotle, is among the first known documents more explicitly to link melancholy to excess, extremism, and amorous passion rather than solely to poetic genius or social anomaly. The author of the

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[98] "malattia di carattere malinconico," Massimo Ciavolella, *La malattia d'amore dall'Antiquità al Medioevo* (Roma: Bulzoni editore, 1976) 37.

[99] "la follia e i disturbi emotivi in generale sono dunque causati da una invasione di bile nera nel cervello" and, later, "la relazione amore-malinconia-follia, … presuppone che il corpo e la psiche siano intimamente legati, e che le affezioni o passioni che colpiscono l'uno si ripercuotano immediatamente ed inevitabilmente sull'altra e viceversa," Ciavolella 16, 31.

[100] It might be worthwhile here to cross-reference Ciavolella's study with those of Kuhn and Starobinski .To begin, Ciavolella claims that "l'amore è una dolce malattia, l'amante è un ammalato che non vuole guarire dal proprio male" (98). Much in the same way, Starobinski asserts that "la volonté de guérir … manque [au mélancolique]. Pis encore, il est attaché à sa maladie; une étrange perversion lui fait aimer 'l'air grossier, obscur, ténèbreux, puant'" (40). Kuhn similarly calls attention to the voluntary isolation, weariness and apathy of the melancholic that render him incapable of action and completely indifferent as to his own well-being (Kuhn 21).

[101] Reinhard Kuhn makes reference to Saint Jerome's assertion, when speaking of *acedia* that "not only excessive study, but also hunger, isolation, and cold … lead to spiritual torpor" (46). Excess in general, be it pertaining to the physical conditions surrounding the *acedic* or to the mental ones within him, seems central to his discomfort.

Problem does so by way of analogy, comparing the effects of black bile on the melancholic to the effects of wine on the sober man:

> Wine in large quantity manifestly produces in men much the same characteristics which we attribute to the melancholic, and as it is being drunk it fashions various characters, for instance irritable, benevolent, compassionate or reckless ones; whereas honey or milk or water, or anything else of this kind, do not have this effect. One can see that wine makes the most varied characters, by observing how it gradually changes those who drink it[.][102]

Just as wine enhances a man's character to an extreme degree, so too does black bile for the melancholic; just as wine leads the drinker to licentiousness and amorousness, so too does black bile increase the melancholic's sexual appetite; just as wine can have opposite effects on the drinker when heated or cooled, so too does black bile conversely affect the melancholic. In short, what wine does to a man on a temporary basis is, the *Problem* argues, what the melancholic endures his entire life due to his physical constitution.[103]

It is, I think, worth resting a while on the *Problem* and its main premises: indeed, they speak directly not only to the concept of "melancholy" (of which they historically constitute an undeniably large part), but also to the earliest ideas about *acedia.* Deeming melancholy a condition proper to "Greek heroes," the *Problem's* author refers to both Ajax and Bellerophon as figures plagued by it in turn. Interestingly, he calls attention to the fact that of these two, "the one went completely out of his mind," perhaps subject to the kind of "frenzy" Plato addresses in his *Phaedrus*, "while the other sought out desert places for his habitation," much like Evagrius'

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[102] Problem XXX,I, as cited in Klibansky et al 19-20.
[103] Klibansky et al 30.

monk.[104] Also of note is the fact that these heroes suffer different but fundamentally parallel fates: the one, devoid of reason, escapes the normal world and is subsumed by his folly; the other deliberately retreats from society into a voluntary state of solitude. Both, in the end, remain alone.

Later, the author refers to wine's (and melancholy's) enfeebling effect on its subjects, all too comparable to the *somnolentia* and *otiositas* Cassian and other Church fathers attribute to *acedia.*[105] Later still, in his consistent comparison of melancholy to the effect of wine, the author ascertains that "wine makes a man abnormal;"[106] much in the same way, anomaly or exclusion from the "natural" realm of being holds firm both in later descriptions of melancholy and in literary representations of *acedia.* Finally, and toward the end of his statement, the author of the *Problem* writes of the potential for melancholy, even if inherent to heroes and poets, to be contained by mental faculties so that more "rational" melancholics are "less eccentric and in many respects superior to others either in culture or in the arts or in statesmanship."[107] We have already seen how chiefly the Stoics will come to argue for the triumph of reason over the senses in battling the "demon of noontide."

In essence, though, what Aristotle (or pseudo-Aristotle) brings to light in his *Problem* is the fundamentally bipolar nature of the melancholic or, rather, his particular vulnerability to extreme modes of being, rather than to any "middle way." If the black bile within him is hot, he boils with passion and acquires an explosive temper; when instead it is cold, he sinks into

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[104] Problem XXX,I, Klibansky et al. 19: Aristotle (we can assume) quotes Homer's account of Bellerophon's flight into the desert: "And since of all the Gods he was hated, / Verily o'er the Aleian plain / alone he would wander, / Eating his own heart out, / avoiding the pathway of mortals." This passage recalls the condition of the later desert monk who, conversely *not* hated by God, retreats to the solitude of the desert to find and spiritually converse with him there.

[105] Problem XXX,I: "if they drink still more [wine] it makes them frenzied; while very great excess enfeebles them completely and makes them as stupid as those who have been epileptic from childhood or as those who are a prey to excessive melancholy" (Klibansky et al. 20).

[106] Problem XXX,I, Klibansky et al. 21.

[107] Problem XXX,I, Klibansky et al. 25.

depression and despondency, oblivious to his surroundings and even to himself: "Now, if black bile, being cold by nature and not superficially so, is in the stated condition," the *Problem* states, "it can induce paralysis or torpor or depression or anxiety when it prevails in the body; but if it is overheated it produces cheerfulness, bursting into song, and ecstasies and the eruption of sores and the like."[108] Whether the black bile changed its temperature itself or became altered by the humours surrounding it is a point of debate among Ancient philosophers and physicians.[109] All agree, however, that its very fluctuation points to and generates the ambivalence central to the melancholic.

Up until now, very little has been said of Saturn, the planet with which melancholics are associated and by which they were believed to be governed. Yet it is from this very Saturn – mythically and astrologically – that their ambivalence is born. By the astrological accounts of Ptolemy (among others):

> Saturn is said to be dry, but sometimes moist too. He "presides over" the utmost poverty, but also over great wealth (admittedly always coupled with avarice and ill-will towards others), over treachery but also over uprightness, over domiciles but also over long sea journeys and exile. Men born under him are members of "vulgar" trades, slaves, felons, prisoners, and eunuchs, but they are also powerful commanders and silent people with mysterious wisdom and deep thoughts.[110]

Here, Saturn appears to birth and to harbour opposing ideas. Its conflicted nature is still more evident when considering its importance as a mythical figure. More than just a planet, the Saturn

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[108] Problem XXX,I, Klibansky et al. 23.
[109] See Klibansky 52: "According to Aristotle, it was the property of the black bile to manifest both great heat and great cold without altering its material nature; according to Rufus, its property was to originate from the immoderate heating or cooling of other elements of the body."
[110] Klibansky et al 132.

associated with melancholy was tied to the Roman pagan god Saturn and his Greek correlative, Kronos. Though his origins are unclear with respect to other, better-known gods, Saturn-Kronos (after the conflation of the previously independent Roman and Greek gods) is marked by his "internal contradiction or ambivalence."[111] By Klibansky's account, he was the father of Zeus-Jupiter and, more generally, the god of agriculture and the ruler of the prosperous Golden Age before the fall.[112] On the other hand, however, he represented the solitary figure in exile, dethroned by his sons and destined to live alone, in a dark corner far removed from civilization;

> On the one hand he was the father of gods and men, on the other hand the devourer of children, eater of raw flesh, the consumer of all, who "swallowed up all the gods", and extracted human sacrifice from the barbarians; he castrated his father Uranus with the very sickle which, in the hand of his son, repaid measure for measure and made the procreator of all things for ever infertile – a sickle which, prepared by Gaea, was both an instrument of the most horrible outrage and at the same time of harvesting.[113]

As creator and destroyer, father and father-killer, Saturn emerges as a planetary and mythical representation of contradiction the effects of which persist in melancholy's medieval manifestation as *acedia.*

Long before the Middle Ages, Rufus and Hippocrates would attest to melancholy's prevalence not only as a physical discomfort, but as a condition of the soul made manifest through the melancholic's "moods." It would be this spiritual (rather than simply physical)

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[111] Klibansky et al 133.
[112] Though perhaps not applicable here, Saturn's status as the ruler of the Golden Age will come to have at least latent effects on Petrarch, nostalgic about Rome's lost "Golden Age" and anxious to reinstate it, partly through his poetry and partly through his social, political, and ecclesiastic activity.
[113] Klibansky et al 135.

discomfort that would prove to be of greatest interest to medieval writers in Petrarch's time. In the early Middle Ages, Constantinus Africanus writes, of the melancholics:

> We say that their moods constantly fluctuate between irascible excitement and a peaceable frame of mind, recklessness and timidity, between sadness and frivolity, and so on. The condition ... cited appl[ies] to the animal soul; but the activities of the rational soul are strenuous thinking, remembering, studying, investigating, imagining, seeking the meaning of things, and fantasies and judgments, whether apt ... or mere suspicions. And all these conditions – which are partly permanent forces [mental faculties], partly accidental symptoms [passions] – can turn the soul within a short time to melancholy if it immerses itself too deeply in them.[114]

Again here, it is an overindulgence in anything, from love to study, that causes a melancholic state of being. Interestingly, this same passage cites contemplation of God as a *source* of rather than an *antidote* to melancholy, a sentiment that is expressed later still in the Middle Ages. Late in the twelfth century, Hugo de Fouilloi would, as Kuhn does centuries later, relate melancholy to the spleen, calling the latter the seat of the black bile that makes men "irascible, timid, sleepy or sometimes wakeful" and that, contrarily, generates both laughter and sadness.[115] It is in their duplicity, then, that medieval forms of melancholy – *acedia* greatest among them[116] – display their relation to the Saturn that, not surprisingly, presides over this very ailment proper both to weak and cowardly men, and, conversely, to Greek heroes, and literary genii.

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[114] Constantinus Africanus (*Opera*, Vol. I, p. 283), as cited in Klibansky 84.
[115] Hugo de Folieto, in Migne, P.L., Vol. CLXXVI, as cited in Klibansky 108-109.
[116] Kuhn refers to *acedia* as a sin by way of which an ardent belief is muted or reduced to indifference by the weariness and apathy that characterizes it (51). Though by his account, *acedia*, *ennui*, and spleen are not quite synonyms of melancholy, common to the *acedic*, splenetic and melancholic is the tendency to fluctuate between extremes.

Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates would call melancholy the "hero's condition." In the Middle Ages and in its correlative, *acedia*, it would come to be associated, as already shown, with priests, monks and, increasingly during Petrarch's lifetime, scholars. As Vanna Gentili writes, "Like the other capital sins ..., *acedia* too was exalted: its essence, melancholy, for a certain period represented a quality almost indispensable to the erudite and the artist" – its fundamentality to the nature of the melancholic, she notes, was already treated at great length both in Plato's philosophy and in Aristotle's *Problem.*[117] Although the association of Saturn with the great scholar and philosopher would only reach its apex in the Renaissance, already by Petrarch's lifetime and, indeed, in large part thanks to Petrarch's secularization of *acedia*, *writers* came to be viewed as genii alternately afflicted by the frenzy and despondency borne of black bile and characteristic of the melancholic. They were considered, then, direct descendants of Saturn (or, at the very least, its most likely subjects) who, like the great planet and mythic god, could contemporaneously display opposing characteristics and turn on a dime, going from an ecstatic to a deflated mood. Like Saturn, they were majestic beings by way of their art capable of great benevolence but, by dint of their illness resigned to social exclusion and a perpetual state of "difference," even in their *in*difference.

The question, however, remains: why study these attributes in the limited context of Petrarch? After all, he never *explicitly* treats or admits to treating "melancholy" in the works this study will consider; the closest relation of his didactic goals to "melancholy" is only indirectly pronounced once in a 1354 letter he writes to the Grand Prior of the Carthusian Order regarding

[117] Vanna Gentili, *La recita della follia. Funzioni dell'insania nel teatro dell'età di Shakespeare* (Torino: Giulio Einuadi editore, 1978) 7-8: "Come altri peccati capitali ..., anche l'*acedia* era stata esaltata: il suo distillato, la melanconia, rappresentò per un certo periodo una qualità quasi indispensabile del dotto e dell'artista."

the composition of his *De remediis utriusque fortunae.*[118] Nor is his *acedia* the first major literary representation of the sin in Italian literature: several decades before him, Dante had already dedicated an entire circle of both his *Inferno* and his *Purgatorio* to the *accidiosi* he considered to be divested of all spiritual vigor.[119] If already a widespread and commonly examined medieval sin, then, what makes Petrarch's *acedia* so remarkable?

In essence, though the Italian poet's spiritual illness is in many ways akin to the *accidia* and *tristitia* described by the early Church fathers, its rousing of and pointing to a modern consciousness in Petrarch is what renders it worthy of more detailed examination. Indeed, as Kuhn suggests, Petrarch would be among the first to bring *acedia* out of its exclusively religious connotations to make it more applicable and accessible to the members of his increasingly secularized society – his greatest success at doing so is no doubt evidenced by his *De rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, considerably less concerned with theology than his *Secretum.* Though he is more than intimately familiar with the ideas of the desert fathers and though his spiritual condition in many ways closely resembles theirs and that of the figures of whom they write[120], his despondency is *not* that of the desert monk trapped in a vicious circle of contemplation (the excessive contemplation of God leading to melancholy, and the overwhelming toll of melancholy leading back to an overzealous turn to prayer); nor is it that of the later religious man who, in his paralysis, fails to respond to his own call-to-action; nor, finally, is it quite yet that of the

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[118] Francesco Petrarca, *Seniles* xvi, 9, as quoted by Rawski in his Introduction to the Commentary on *Remedies for Prosperity*, vol. 2, xvi-xvii.

[119] See *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* VII: Dante places the *accidiosi* or the "sullen" alongside the *iracondi* or "wrathful" (as already shown, the one sin being a later derivative of the former" in the fifth circle of Hell, immersed (or submersed) in the swampy Stigian. He later dedicates *Purgatorio* XVII and XVIII to other *accidiosi* distinguished from the former only in their potential for redemption. Common to both groups of sinners is a kind of "spiritual slowness" or "lentezza spirituale;" a vice which "non è altro che non amare Iddio e le virtù con quel fervore che si conviene" ("accidia e accidiosi," *Enciclopedia Dantesca* 27).

[120] See Carlo Delcorno's article, « Petrarca e l'agiografia dei 'solitari' » appearing in *Lettere italiane* 57.3 (2005): 367-390: here, Delcorno traces instances of St. Paul's, St. Anthony's, Origene's, and Evagrius' influence on Petrarch and, more specifically, on his *De vita solitaria*, and *De otio religioso,* treatises both dealing with the themes of solitude, religious "boredom," and spiritual contemplation so key to medieval *acedia.*

Renaissance scholar who, inspired by it to write, writes mostly to rid himself of it. It is, rather, a condition so internally felt and engendered by the ambivalence proper to its humoural correspondent that, when externalized, bears witness to a self-conscious duplicity and "internal contradiction" more characteristic of the modern – rather than the medieval - man.

In order properly to link this modern consciousness to its proposed parent, melancholy, it will be necessary to survey each of the latter's key components not only in relation to Petrarch, but in the larger context of European literature from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. That the state of exclusion, disjunction, and social exile central to Petrarch's works is an early indicator of his modernity is hardly surprising: Starobinski links it to Michel de Montaigne's 16th-century melancholy[121]; Cantagrel relates it to the nostalgia of the much later Romantic writers and, especially, to French Romantics like Charles Baudelaire, François- René de Chateaubriand, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau; Kuhn in turn points to its parallel in the *ennui* of twentieth-century writers like Franz Kakfa and Marcel Proust. In Italy, melancholy comes most greatly to influence Marsilio Ficino, who dedicates his *De triplici vita* to exploring its prevalence, symptoms, and cures; it also drastically colours the works of Torquato Tasso who becomes a key proponent of the "melancholy" theme both in Italy and outside it; more recently, it would considerably affect Giacomo Leopardi who, in the 19th-century, is so drawn by it as to not only make it the veritable crux of his *Canti,* but also to dedicate a considerable portion of his life to studying it in his edition of Petrarch's *Rime sparse.* Though it would be impossible here to make a detailed study of their works, common to the above-mentioned artists is the same social inertia and spiritual heaviness most prevalent in Petrarch's *Secretum*, but not exclusively limited to this one text.

But what of Petrarach's other works? What, moreover, of the remaining tenets of *acedia*, melancholy, and *ennui* here examined? They, too, figure into Petrarch's modernity. The theme of

[121] Jean Starobinksi, *Montaigne en mouvement* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982).

excess – excessive love, excessive contemplation, excessive study, excessive infatuation – and its hopeless effects on its subjects are the keynotes of Petrarch's *De remediis utriusque fortunae* and, in their ostensible association with *follia* or the "flight of fancy," more directly intersect with or prefigure the same folly that, centuries later, would in large part characterize the corpus of William Shakespeare's Renaissance plays and, much later still, the Theatre of the Absurd. Likewise, the formal and thematic "binarity" of his *Secretum, De remediis,* and most importantly, *Canzoniere* signal not only a close relationship with Saturn, but also the observable "duplicity" of the mind and of the being to be studied late in the 19th century; A.L Wigan's 1844 medical brief is a case in point.[122] This to say nothing, of course, of the "amorous" issues packed into the concepts of melancholy and *acedia* that undeniably hold a presiding position in Petrarch's works. In short (and perhaps unfairly reductively), Petrarch's *acedia,* child of melancholy, in its focus on solitude, extremism, and personal subjugation to excessive passions, gives rise, in the poet's works, to an increased *personal* sensibility: a greater concentration on the *split* self – even and perhaps *especially* in relation to others, no matter how distant – made explicit in the development of a "progetto dell'io lirico" present in his larger *oeuvre.*

[122] See A.L. Wigan, *A new View of Insanity: the Duality of the Mind Proved by the Structure, Functions, and Diseases of the Brain and by the Phenomena of Mental Derangement, and Shown to be Essential to Moral Responsibility* (U.S.A: Joseph Simon Publisher, 1985).

Chapter II: *Secretum* : Exemplary "melancholic" text *par excellence*

Le maître dit:
... « Écrire nous rapproche de Dieu et de notre prochain. Si vous voulez mieux comprendre votre rôle en ce monde, écrivez.
« Efforcez-vous de mettre votre âme par écrit, même si personne ne vous lit – ou, pis, même si quelqu'un finit par lire ce que vous vouliez garder secret. Le simple fait d'écrire nous aide à organiser notre pensée et à discerner clairement ce qui se trouve autour de nous.

-Paolo Coelho, *Maktub,* Trans. Françoise Marchand-Sauvanargues (Paris: Editions Anne Carrière, 2004) 167.

His *De Otio religioso* and *De vita solitaria* aside, the text which most directly addresses Petrarch's *acedia* in its various implications is his *Secretum.* Though there is great debate among scholars as to the exact years of its composition[123], Petrarch's *Secret* can roughly be placed between 1342 and 1353: years crucial to Petrarch's personal, spiritual, and artistic development. A confessional diary modeled mostly on Saint Augustine's much earlier *Confessions*, Petrarch's *Secretum* is presented as a three-day dialogue between Franciscus and Augustine, not only *set* in the former's beloved Vaucluse residence, but reportedly written there as well, in a period of personal reflection and desired spiritual renewal. It is important to recall that by 1343 (and the year of his daughter's birth), Petrarch would have been only a year away from his fortieth birthday, a major turning point for him and the time by which he hoped, like Saint Augustine had at his thirtieth birthday, to experience a definitive religious conversion.[124] It is likewise useful again to point to 1348 as the year of the Black Plague's most violent ravaging of Petrarch's Italy

[123] See Hans Baron's extensive philological review in *Petrarch's* Secretum: *Its Making and Its Meaning* (Cambridge: The Medieval Academy of America, 1985): Essentially the existing debate centers on whether, as is most commonly held, the *Secretum* was initially drafted in 1342-1343 and considerably retouched (or, by Fenzi's account, rewritten) ten years later after two other previous revisions (in 1347 and 1349 respectively) or whether, as Rico sustains, it was originally drafted in the 1347-1349 phase and consistently added to until 1353, in tandem with Petrarch's ongoing additions to and revisions of his *Canzoniere* and after a noticeable turn away from Church fathers toward the moral philosophy of the Stoics (evidenced by the 1353 letters of his *Familiares* and his later *De remediis utriusque fortunae*, drafted between 1354 and 1366). See also Enrico Fenzi's Introduction to the *Secretum* (Milano: Mursia editore, 1992) 14.
[124] Baron 23.

and northern France (and as the year of Laura's death) and more generally to observe the various circumstances surrounding the *Secretum*'s conception: retired from the activity of the city, slowly approaching old age, and still tormented by fleshly temptations even in the midst of constant reminders of life's transience, from 1342- 1353, Petrarch's work would have been riddled with the "internal struggles, incomplete goals," and "spiritual strivings"[125] with which the poet was then grappling.

Not surprisingly, then, *fluctuationes*, *mutatio vitae*, *instabilitas,* and *pervagatio mentis et corporis*[126] resound, I think, as the most important tenets of Petrarch's originally intentionally "secret" diary not only thematically but also structurally. As previously seen, Petrarch, writing in the fourteenth century, would have had access to and at least a passing familiarity with the major transmutations of *acedia* over the preceding ten centuries. By the time it reached his attention, then, *acedia* would no longer have been regarded a strictly theological issue originating – and ending – with the Church fathers. Rather, it would have already accumulated the plurality of meanings and interpretations that led to its "secularized" reading: indeed, both Wenzel and Tateo refer to the *Secretum* and to the treatment of *acedia* within it as more proper to a modern than to a medieval account, by virtue of Petrarch's break here from the "collectivity" of the Middle Ages and turn toward conscious self-analysis.[127] Certainly, such a psychological focus on the self helps link Petrarch's *acedia* to Ancient *melancholy*, which, as we have seen, is itself often – and

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[125] Baron 33.

[126] Flux, transience of life, and mental and physical "wandering."

[127] In *Dialogo interiore e polemica ideologica nel "Secretum" del Petrarca* (Firenze: Casa editrice F. Le Monnier, 1965), Francesco Tateo, referring to still other Petrarchan scholars, writes: "E, sia il Korting esaltasse la ribellione del poeta al Medioevo agostiniano, sia che il Voigt ponesse in risalto il nuovo significato 'laico' dell'accidia petrarchesca, oppure l'individualismo petrarchesco, che si oppone allo spirito corporativo proprio del Medioevo, la valutazione di quest'opera si inseriva in una prospettiva che faceva del Petrarca il primo umanista, ma di un umanismo rivoluzionario, che rifiutava l'insegnamento morale del Medioevo e faceva della scoperta dei classici uno strumento di lotta contro le autorità d'una cultura fondata su principi mistici e religiosi" (1-2); see also Wenzel 158, and Carol E. Quillen's Preface and Introduction to *The Secret, by Francesco Petrarca* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2003).

especially in the case of Galen and Hippocrates - concerned with mental stability. More telling to the very "mental wandering" it deems proper to its subjects, however, is Petrarch's relative "wandering" among, borrowing from, and amalgamation, in his text, of various existing facets of *acedia.*

Most Petrarchan scholars justly identify *contemptus mundi* – or contempt for the world, a "sterile rebellion toward everything and against everyone"[128] – as the keynote of the *Secretum.* Their claim is hardly deniable: the *Secret* is from its *incipit* littered with Franciscus' laments about the state of the world and, more saliently, about his own inability to find cheer in it. From as early as the proem, he expresses this dissatisfaction speaking with Augustine and Lady Truth, by whom he is accompanied: "We spoke at length about the customs of our time and about the flaws common to all men in such a way that it did not appear so much as though we were formulating an accusation of me directly, as much as one of humankind: imprinted more deeply in my mind, though, remained those things of which I personally was accused."[129] Later, in the second book, he again expresses this sentiment in still more immediately personal terms when speaking of the "hatred" and "contempt regarding the human condition" under the weight of which he "cannot be anything other than profoundly unhappy."[130] This central idea – also a key discursive premise of the *De Otio religioso*[131] - is expanded upon differently, however, in each of

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[128] "une rivolte stérile envers tout et contre tous," Bunge 39.

[129] Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the original Latin are mine, based, in turn, in great part, on Fenzi's Latin-Italian translation and compared to and supported by Carol E. Quillen's English translation. The original Latin reads: "Ubi multa licet adversus seculi nostri mores, deque comunibus mortalium piaculis dicata sint, ut non tam michi quam toti humano generi fieri convitium videretur, ea tamen, quibus ipse notatus sum, memorie altius impressi" (Proem, Fenzi 98).

[130] "Accedit et humane conditionis odium atque contemptus, quibus omnibus oppressus non mestissimum esse non valeo" (Book II, Fenzi 180).

[131] See Luigi Dal Lago's edition of *De Otio religioso* or, *La vita religiosa*, Book I, p. 99: "Aggiungi poi a questi mali generali quelli propri della vita di ciascuno, I dolori, le malattie del corpo e dell'animo, gl'innumerevoli pericoli d'ogni genere. Donde è che tu non possa trarre motivo di paura? ... A questi disagi si aggiungono le infinite tentazioni, le insidie sempre ricorrenti dei demoni e, col volere di Dio onnipotente, gli assalti terribili degli spiriti e le numerose e incessanti lotte che esagitano internamente l'animo ... : colui che tutto questo può 'porsi sotto i piedi' è, a ben ragione, considerato felice dal poeta, di quella felicità, si intende, che può sperarsi in questa valle di lagrime."

the *Secret*'s three following books, a chief exponent of the *acedia* of which Petrarch writes and by which he is affected.

In his study, Wenzel suggests that "the self-analysis of the *Secretum* is carried out when Franciscus realizes that he has made no progress in the pursuit of happiness *because he has loved the supreme good too little* – which, at least in Dante's conception, forms exactly the nature of *acedia*"[132] – an observation quite substantiated by examples from the text: in the first book, Augustine advises Franciscus to consult his conscience and devote himself more astutely to its counsel in order to overcome his discomforts. If Franciscus is still suffering, Augustine claims, it is only because, "[he has] never aspired to salvation in the necessary way, but with less ardor and will than required by your extremely perilous position."[133] Much later, in Book II, Augustine again reiterates this concern when he accuses Franciscus of not having asked for God's help "with enough humility, with enough solemnity. You have always left a small space open to future desire, you have always given a long-term goal to your prayers," he says[134] - a theme he insists upon throughout Book III and especially in his advice to Franciscus to focus on the squalor of the body, the fragility of earthly life, and the joy of a heavenly reunion with the Father rather than on his supposedly (but ultimately falsely) sublimated affection for Laura.[135] In the first book especially, Augustine's argument concerning Franciscus' state of being pivots on the fundamental paralysis of his will to be happy and find delight in meditation on other-worldly blessings – a component of the earliest conceptions of *acedia* and one that indeed persists in the

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[132] Wenzel 161.

[133] "numquam te ad salutem qua decuit aspirasse, sed tepidius remissiusque quam periculorum tantorum consideratio requierebat" (Book I, Fenzi 116). See also Quillen's translation: "you have never longed to attain salvation as you should, but only more half-heartedly and more lazily than your extremely perilous situation warranted" (58).

[134] "At non satis humiliter, non satis sobrie. Semper aliquid loci venturis cupiditatibus riservasti; sempre in longum preces extendisti" (Book II, Fenzi 172).

[135] See Book III: "Rifletti sulla fragilità e sullo squallore del corpo ... Rifletti sulla brevità della vita ... Rifletti sulla fuga del tempo ... Rifletti sulla sicurissima morte e sull'incerte sua ora ... pensa quante cose hai sofferto per lei [Laura] senza alcuna utilità ... E intanto devi battere alle porte del cielo con preghiere devote, e stancare le orecchie del Re celeste con le tue pie suppliche" (Fenzi 255-257).

Scholastics' much later analysis of it.[136] Still, though Wenzel is correct in his assumption, the circumstances surrounding Franciscus' weak spiritual contemplation and the presentation of the reasons for it are quite differently treated from one book to the next, none of which quite propose a Dantesque model of *acedia.*

In the first book, though Petrarch writes of "anguish and terror"[137] and, later, of "torpor," his illness is most likened (though not without problems) to Gregory Magnus' concept of *tristitia*, or, perhaps more accurately, to the Scholastics' (St. Thomas chief among them) view of *acedia* as a necessary byproduct of *tristitia de spirituali bono* or "the aversion against the spiritual good."[138] That is not, of course, to say that "torpor" and "anguish" are not inherent to *tristitia*[139] or that Dante's model of *acedia* would have been radically different from the Scholastic one uncharacteristically here employed by Petrarch – indeed, it would not have been any different, given Dante's well-known affinity for the Angelic Doctor to whose theological authority the *Divine Comedy,* at least, repeatedly appeals. Still the *tristitia* Petrarch exhibits in Book I is not straightforwardly "Scholastic," as difficult as the Scholastic view of *acedia* already is to define.

True that Petrarch contrarily treats divine meditation – a purported "heal-all" – as a source if not of anguish and terror, then of stagnation for him: "my mediations have brought me nothing other than anguish and terror and I am still the same I was before,"[140] he writes; "only to me has the intense meditation of death which, listening to you, should be marvelously fruitful, been of no

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[136] See Bunge's assertion that even by Evagrius' earliest accounts, "L'acédie se présente ... comme une espèce d'impasse dans la vie de l'âme. Le dégout de tout ce qui est, combiné avec le désir diffus de ce qui n'est pas, paralyse les fonctions naturelles de l'âme à tel point qu'aucune autre pensée ne parvient à s'imposer » (66).
[137] "molestia terroresque" (Book I, Fenzi 130); "torpor" (Book I, Fenzi 140).
[138] Wenzel 48.
[139] In fact, as Wenzel more than once shows, *torpor circa praecepta* is a key component of Gregory's *tristitia*, later to influence that of the Scholastics (Wenzel 51).
[140] "quid latentis obstaculi est ut nunc usque nil ista michi cogitatio preter molestias terroresque pepererit, ego autem idem sim adhuc qui fueram prius quodque hi sunt, quibus forte nonquam tale aliquid contigit in vita?" (Book I, Fenzi 130).

profit."[141] True also that throughout Book I and up until its end, Franciscus can take no comfort in Augustine's repeated encouragement and affirmation that happiness is a product of the will, which comes to anyone desirous of it and willing, through contemplation of the grace of God, to reach it. Undeniable, furthermore, that Petrarch's language echoes throughout with ostentatious displays of "sadness":

> A. The words which I would like you to use are these: where you said 'I am not capable of going any further' say, rather, 'I do not want to go any further.'
>
> F. We will never put an end to this discussion, because I will never be able to admit such a thing. I know – and you are my witness – how many times I wanted to but could not, and how many tears I shed uselessly … No one can imagine that which I have suffered, and how [much] I would have liked to rise to higher things, should that have ever been possible.[142]

Still, even in examples such as this latest reverberates the much more "modern" echo of the melancholic who, attached to and comfortable with his illness, does not want to let go of it.[143]

Moreover, the *tristitia* which largely colours the first book of the *Secret* is, though not absent, relatively suppressed in Augustine's description of the dying man – death being a natural consequence of *acedia* and contemptus *mundi,* or of the denial of joy in God and in His creations:

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[141] "cur michi uni cogitatio mortis intensa non profuit, quam miris modis fructuosam dicis" (Book I, Fenzi 132).
[142] "A. Verba vero, quibus uti te velim, hec sunt: ut ubi 'ultra te non posse' dixisti 'ultra te nolle' fatearis.
F. Nunquam erit finis; nunquam enim hoc fatebor. Scio quidem, et tu testis es michi, quotiens volui nec potui; quot lacrimas fudi, nec profuerint … hominam enim scire neminem puto, quid ego passus sim, quantunque voluerim, si licuisset, assurgere" (Book I, Fenzi 112).
[143] See note 37 of Chapter 1. See also early in Book I: Augustine says, "Ma voi insensati – e tu così incarognito nella tua malattia – fate di tutto per strapparvi dal petto questa salutifera radice con la forza di tutte le catene dei piaceri terreni" (Fenzi 103). Later in Book III, Augustine will again state, "A te piace il tuo male, povero disgraziato!" (Book III, Fenzi 209).

> I mean that of all things that inspire fear, death is the first and most dreadful, so much so that the very word death has for a long time seemed loathsome and harsh to our ears. Nonetheless, we should not allow either the syllables of the word or the memory of the thing itself to pass quickly from our minds. Rather, we must spend time thinking about it; we must with keen attention picture one by one the body parts of the dying: While the extremities grow cold, the breast burns and sweats with fever, the abdomen throbs with pain, the vital spirit gets slower and slower with the coming of death; the eyes sunken and swimming, the tearful gaze, the forehead pale and drawn, the hollow cheeks, the blackened teeth, the nostrils shrunken and sharpened, lips foaming, the tongue slow and scaly, the mouth dry, the languid head and gasping breast, the hoarse voice and mournful sigh, the evil smell of the whole body, above all the horror of a face one cannot recognize.[144]

Certainly, the above description is not at odds with anything Petrarch writes about *tristitia* before and after it. Its resemblance to the description Klibansky, Saxl, and Panofsky give of the melancholic man is, however, undeniably uncanny.

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[144] Quillen 63. The original Latin reads: "mortem inter tremenda principatum possidere, usque adeo ut iampridem nomen ipsum mortis auditu tetrum atque asperum videatur. Non tamen vel sillaba hec summis auribus excepta vel rei ipsius recordation compendiosa sufficient; immorari diutius oportet atque acerrima meditatione singular mirentium mebra percurrere; et extremis quidem iam algentibus media torreri et importune sudore diffluere, ilia pulsari, vitalem spiritum mortis vicinitate lentescere. Ad hec defossos natantesque oculos, obtuitum lacrimosum, contractam frontem liventemque, labentas genas, luridos dentes, rigentes atque acutas nares, spumantia labia, torpentem squamosamque lnguam, aridum palatum, fatigatum caput, hanelum pectus, raucum murmur et mesta suspiria, odorem totius corporis molestum, precipueque alienate vultus horrorem" (Book I, Fenzi 126).

By the doctrine of the four humours, the melancholic, in medical terms, was considered "lisping, … bald, … stuttering, and … hirsute."[145] Later physicians and scientists like Archigenes identify "dark skin, puffiness, bad odour, greed coupled with permanent leanness" as the key characteristics of the melancholic.[146] Most salient, however, is 13th-century astrologer Michael Scot's description, in his *Liber introductorius* (and paraphrased by Klibansky), of the "Saturnine" man as "the worst of all men" whose "facial and temperamental peculiarities reflect the vileness of his whole appearance." By Scot's account, "His skin is dark, brown, yellowish, or almost greenish; his eyes are small and deep-set, but keen-sighted and seldom blinking; his voice is weak; his regard is bent on the ground; his beard is scanty; his shoulders are bowed … his mind sluggish; his brain slow of comprehension."[147] This, of course, to say nothing of the fact that most artistic representations of *accidia* in Petrarch's Italy feature a prostrated figure, motionless, tortured by an internal rather than external illness, and very near death-like.[148]

Though "Saturn" and "Melancholy" would become important iconographic subjects in Italian humanist art only much later (around and after 1500), Petrarch's description here already in some way prefigures their later representations both within Italy and more generally throughout Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries. Indeed, his conception of the *acedic* hand-in-hand with his perception of Saturn proper as exemplified in the illustration to the Triumph of Time (in which Petrarch associates the two) would come significantly to influence many "melancholic" movements in European art thenceforth. Remarkably, even when treating *acedia* in a more superficially "customary" light, Petrarch decidedly marks his departure from the very tradition he honours.

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[145] Klibansky et al 15.
[146] Klibansky et al 47.
[147] Klibansky et al 191.
[148] Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio, *I sette vizi capitali. Storia dei peccati nel Medioevo* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 2000) 254.

His "inconsistency" is again felt in the transition from Book I to Book II and in the shifted focus from *tristitia*, to *acedia* proper, here directly addressed for the first time. Though self-admittedly a victim of *acedia*, in the first lines of the *Secret*'s proem, Franciscus draws a keen distinction between his state of being and that which most readers of the Church fathers would associate with *acedia*:[149] "Not long ago, I was absorbed [in prayer] and I thought with dismay, as I often do, how I entered the world and how I should take leave of it. I was not, however, oppressed by sleepiness, as happens to the spiritually weak."[150] Deliberately or not, this assertion would set the tone for the more detailed treatment of *acedia* throughout Book II. There, though Petrarch would call "desperation the worst of all evils"[151] the way Evagrius and Cassian do, the listlessness and general apathy he ponders is more "duplicitous" – or at the very least, "multiplicitous" - than Cassian's *acedia*: indeed, it speaks to a condition of both the body and soul – an idea that would have been much more contemporary to the Italian poet.

At the outset of Book II, Augustine pronounces a telling diagnosis of his pupil: "Many ills besiege you, many mill about you noisily, and you, however, are still ignorant of the quantity and strength of the enemies by whom you are surrounded."[152] After engaging in a lengthy conversation about *superbia* – scholastic or otherwise – wherein Augustine relates Franciscus'

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[149] This is a distinction Petrarch again draws in his *De Otio Religioso*, written almost contemporaneously to the *Secretum.* There, Luigi Dal Lago suggests, Petrarch distinguishes religious *otium* from that of philosophers and literati. See Lugii Dal Lago, introduction, *La vita religiosa* (Padova: Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 2004) 7-15, 10.

[150] The original Latin reads: "Attonito michi quidem et sepissime coitanti qualiter in hanc vitam intrassem, qualiter ve forem egresurus, contigit nuper ut non, sicut egros animos solet, somnus opprimeret, sed anxium atue pervigilem" (Proem, Fenzi 94). The issue of "spiritual weakness" is, perhaps idiosyncratically, much more present and explicitly pronounced in Fenzi's Italian translation which reads: "Non molto tempo fa ero assorto e pensavo con sgomento, come faccio spessissimo, in che modo fossi entrato in questa vita e come ne sarei dovuto uscire. Non ero però oppresso dal sonno, *come succede a chi è spiritualmente debilitato*" (Proem, Fenzi 95, italics mine). Quillen, in her translation, makes no such reference. Instead, the distinction she draws is one between the "dream" state of the "feverish or sleeping person" and the alert reasoning of one who is "wide-awake and" possessed of a "clear head" (Proem, Quillen 45). Common to both translations is the emphasis on *sleep*, on somnolence – a deciding trait of *acedia*, but one by which Franciscus claims not to be affected.

[151] "Ultimum malorum omnium desperatio est" (Book II, Fenzi 142).

[152] "Multa te obsident, multa circumstrepunt, tuque ipse quot adhuc aut quam validis hostibus circumsidearis ignoras" (Book II, Fenzi 142).

state of being to his poetic activity[153] (much in the same way in which melancholy would later be associated with poetic genius), he comments on his disciple's misplaced and misguided love of earthly things. He accuses Franciscus not only of seeking literary glory, but of remaining too attached to the "prison" of his human body which, like his very malady, he is reticent to abandon[154] - themes which Petrarch will later pick up in Book III. But Franciscus is errant from God, according to Augustine, not only in his insistent fixation on earthly things; he further strays from the right path each time he listens to the "flames of lechery" which are so strong that Franciscus often wishes he had been born insensitive to them.[155] It is a discussion, then, of the psychological *and* physical issues surrounding Petrarch's contempt for the "spiritual good" – or *contemptus mundi* – which prompts Augustine to affirm, halfway through the second book, that Franciscus is "prey to a terrible spiritual illness which the moderns call *accidia* and the ancients *aegritudo*."[156]

Franciscus' response is enough immediately to call to readers' mind earlier transcribed accounts of melancholy – medieval or otherwise. "The name alone frightens me," he says[157], and:

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[153] See Book II, Fenzi 146: Augustine states, "Quotiens ego te querentem audivi, quotiens tacitum indignantemque conspexi, quod que carissima cognituque facillima essent animo cogitanti, ea nec lingua nec calamus sufficienter exprimeret." Here Petrarch prefigures the later idea of writing as a "call to action" against melancholy, contradictorily born (or, rather, stillborn) of it.

[154] "Nempe vos carcerem vestrum et nostis et amatis, ah miseri! Et mox vel educendi certe vel extrahendi heretis in eo exornando solitici quem odisse decuerat" (Book II, Fenzi 152). See also Augustine's later similar assertion, in Book III, that "Malo proprio delectaris infelix!" (Book III, Fenzi 208). In both these cases as in the first cited, Franciscus is accused of being too centred on and complacent to his pain to focus his attention on prayer and derive from it the cure to his condition.

[155] "A. Quantis luxurie flammis incenderis?
F. Tantis equidem interdum, ut graviter doleam, quod non insensibilis natus sim. Immobile saxum aliquod esse maluerim, quam tam multis corporis mei motibus turbari" (Book II, Fenzi 170).

[156] "Habet te funesta quedam pestis animi, quam accidiam moderni, veteres egritudinem dixerunt" (Book II, Fenzi 176).

[157] Fear, it is to be recalled, was a key feature in turn to Cassian's *acedia*, Gregory's *tristitia*, and Hippocrates' and Archigenes' ideas about melancholy.

> While in almost all the other ills that trouble me is mixed something sweet, even if falsely so, in this sadness, all is bitter and miserable and horrible and [it leaves] the path to desperation forever open, and everything about it makes that all unhappy souls should be pushed toward death. Furthermore, the other passions [to which I am subject] attack me frequently, but briefly: this plague, however, at times grips me so tenaciously that it torments me in its grasp for whole days and nights, so that for me, then, there is no time of light or life, but all is dark as night and bitter as death. And (the culmination of my miseries) I so feed myself with tears and pain, with a sort of desperate that I am torn from my misery against my will.[158]

Here Franciscus emerges as a melancholic hypochondriac: assaulted (or believing himself to be assaulted) by a slew of illnesses, though he recognizes the nature of his malady, he takes such sick pleasure from it that he fails to cure himself of it. He finds himself among those very "unhappy souls pushed toward death" he identifies – one, like the melancholic, sinking into sleep or uncomfortable contemplation of his pain rather than recurring to active battle or, as Augustine here and in the first book recommends, prayer, against it. Most interesting to me, however, is Franciscus' likening of the condition (though he seems reluctant to admit to it as a sin) that weighs on him to an entire army crushing him: "it is capable of so much. Were I to be challenged by a singular battle, I would certainly stand up to it, but it is an entire army which overwhelms

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[158] "Ipsum morbi nomen horreo … et illud accedit quod omnibus ferme quibus angor, aliuqid, licet falsi, dulcoris immixtum est; in hac autem tristizia et aspera et misera et horrenda omnia, apertaque semper ad desperationem via et quicquid infelices animas urget in interitum. Ad hec, et religuarum passionum ut crebros sic breves et momentaneos experior insultas; hec autem pestis tam tenaciter me arripit interdum, ut integros dies noctesque illigatum torqueat, quod michi tempus non lucis aut vite, sed tartaree noctis et acerbissime mortis instar est. Et (qui supremus miseriarum cumulus dici potest) sic lacrimis et doloribus pascor, atra quadam cum voluptate, ut invitus avellar" (Book II, Fenzi 176-178).

me!"[159] Though the second book purports explicitly to address *acedia* in relation to Petrarch's *contemptus mundi*, Petrarch himself is not categorical in his treatment of it. In fact, he here draws only loose distinctions (if any at all) between the various forms his ailment could have been perceived to assume: "That you should call it *aegritudo* or *accidia* or whatever else you like doesn't matter to me: we agree on its essence," Franciscus says.[160]

The third and closing book of the Secret reveals still another form of Franciscus' *contemptus mundi* and *accidia*, this time treated according to the ideals of Cicero's and Seneca's Stoicism and most akin to the description of melancholy in pseudo-Aristotle's *Problem XXX,I.* Certainly, the stoic opposition of vice and virtue is present in the *Secret* much earlier on: already as soon as the first book, in fact, Augustine remarks on the "passion of the soul" divided into the four stoic affects of joy, hope, fear, and sorrow[161] – the main interlocutors, with Reason, of the *De remediis utriusque fortunae.* Seneca's brand of *turbam vita* philosophy, denouncing the throng of the crowd and recommending retreat to solitary contemplation is also remarkably felt in Book II.[162] In fact, some go so far as to call it the very crux of the *Secret.* Nowhere more than in the third book, however, is "reason's" fundamental disapproval of Franciscus' inner mental vagrancy as sharply felt.

As H.B. Timothy documents in his book *The Tenets of Stoicism, Assembled and Systematized, From the Works of L. Annaeus Seneca*, Stoic moral philosophy was most

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[159] In response to Augustine's question "Dic ergo: quid est quod te adeo contristat? Temporalium ne discursus, an corporis dolor, an aliqua fortune durioris iniuria?" Franciscus answers, "Non unum horum aliquod per se tam valium foret. Si singulari ceramine tentarer, starem utique; nun autem toto subruor exercitu" (Book II, Fenzi 178).

[160] "Hanc sive egritudinem, sive accidiam, sive quid aliud esse diffinis haud magnifacio; ipsa de re convenit" (Book II, Fenzi 180).

[161] Book I, Fenzi 137; see also note 140 to Book I (Fenzi 314) on the Stoic division of the "passions."

[162] See, for instance, Augustine's advice to Franciscus early in Book II: "Si ad naturam tuam te metiris, iampridem divas era; si ad populi plausum, dives esse nunquam poteris, semperque aliud restabit, quod sequens per cupiditatum abrupto rapiaris" (Book II, Fenzi 158). Petrarch would likely have drawn this idea, as Fenzi notes, from Seneca's *Ad Lucilius Epistulae Morales* XVI (Fenzi 328): it is, however, a theme rampant in Seneca's letters to his nephew. See also *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* IV, XXX, LXXXII for major exemplifications of this theme.

concerned with man's harmony with his own nature which, in turn, should imitate Nature at large. The proper, well-controlled, and happy man was a product of natural balance and inner calm achieved through contemplation, study, or persistent efforts at self-improvement. "The happy man is freed from fear as well as from desires because of the gift of reason," Timothy writes.[163] Emotions are checked and excess avoided, he goes on to explain, when the soul, subject to reason rather than to the passions of the mind, is in balance.[164] In short:

> It follows that the passions or emotions which disturb the soul's harmony must be contested with main force, not pinched, but pounded to pieces ... There are diseases of the mind and passions of the mind. The latter are objectionable disturbances of the mind which, occurring often and having been ignored, have brought about disease. The diseases are chronic, hardened vices ... which have begun to be persistent evils of the mind ... Disease of the mind, to put it briefly, is persistent perversion of judgment ... Those who have made progress (in the life of goodness) have outdistanced their diseases, while they still feel the passions, close to perfection though they be.[165]

Though I will not make a detailed study of it here, it is useful at least to allude to the overlap, during Petrarch's lifetime and apparent especially in his works, of Stoic thought and Christian theology. Indeed as Paul Berry points out, St. Paul's letters would have circulated during Seneca's time, and would have greatly inspired him directly or indirectly. In fact, the parallel readings between the New Testament and Seneca's writings are so numerous that the

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[163] H.B. Timothy, *The Tenets of Stoicism, Assembled and Systematized, From the Works of L. Annaeus Seneca* (Amsterdam: Adolf M. Hakkert, 1973) 25.
[164] Timothy 65-66.
[165] Timothy 65.

influence of the one on the other can hardly be overlooked.[166] This, merely to suggest that what Stoics would have viewed as "being as one with Nature," would be interpreted, in Christian theology, as "being as one with God," as knowing the will of God by knowing yourself and by recognizing yourself as God's divine creation. Any disharmony in the union would have disastrous effects, by either account.

Petrarchan scholars have long commented on Petrarch's lack of balance, as felt especially strikingly in the *Secretum.* The "disease of the mind," or the "chronic hardened vice" at work in its third book refers, of course, to Franciscus' fixation on Laura not only as the object of his affection but as a more general means to literary fame. His insistent concentration on her beauty, rather than her soul, Augustine admonishes, rather than bringing Franciscus closer to understanding God's supreme Good, distracts him from it and causes him to despise himself, his world, and everything other than she he has so come to love: "Because it is precisely her, her who you exalt and to whom you claim you owe everything: it is she who ruins you … While all of God's creation should be love for love of the Creator, you instead, seduced by the creature, did not love the Creator as you should have, but admired His artifice, almost as if he had not created anything more beautiful than this woman."[167] Later still, Augustine says:

> Recall how rapidly, from the moment that parasite took hold of your spirit, you began to melt into tears, and how you came to such a point of unhappiness that you fed yourself with a gloomy pleasure for tears and sighs: when your nights brought you no sleep and the name of your loved-one was always on your lips; when everything disgusted

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[166] Paul Berry, *The Encounter Between Seneca and Christianity* (Queenston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2002) 41-42.
[167] "Ista nempe, quam predicas, cui omnia debere te asserii, ista te peremit … Quia cum creatum omne Creatoris amore diligendum sit, tu contra, creature captus illecebris, Creatorem non qua decuit amasti, sed miratus artificem fuisti quasi nichil ex omnibus formosius creasset, cum tamen ultima pulcritudinum sit forma corporea" (Book III, Fenzi 216).

> you and you hated life and wished for death. And [your] sad love of solitude and [your] flight from other men.[168]

In both examples, Augustine points to the kind of "amorous folly"[169] caused by a decided and distinct absence of reason the main role of which, by both Stoic and Christian systems, was to halt the passions and prevent excess. As Augustine warns: "But you see what effects your error would have! It would hurl the soul down into madness, where fear and modesty and that which usually reins in the passions – namely, all reason and perception of truth – will perish."[170]

The consequences of such a fundamental lack in Franciscus are worthy of serious consideration. Most notably, Laura, because thoughts of her are not curtailed by reason, has the same effects on Franciscus as wine does on the sober man or as black bile on the melancholic by pseudo-Aristotle's *Problem XXX,I*:

> And what should I say about the fact that it was she who determined when your happy and sad hours began and ended? When she was present, the sun shone, and night returned when she went away. If she changed her countenance, you changed your mood: you were reduced to rejoice or to sadden depending on [the shifting of her temper], and, in short, everything depended on her fancy… And then, as if it were not enough to have the live image of her before you, you had one painted by a famous artist, that you might forever take her around with you and

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[168] "Cogita nunc ex quo mentem tuam pestis illa corripuit, quam repente, totus in gemitum versus, eo miseriarum pervenisti ut funesta cum voluptate lacrimis ac suspiriis pascersi; cum tibi notes insomnes et pernox in ore dilecte nomen; cum rerum omnium contemptus viteque odium et desiderium mortis; tristis et amor solitudinis atque hominum fuga" (Book III, Fenzi 224-226).

[169] "Dic ergo – quondam prius amoris mentio facta est - : nonne hanc omnium extremam ducis insaniam?"(Book III, Fenzi 202).

[170] Quillen 105. The original Latin reads, "Tibi vero quid allaturus error iste tuus sit, vides: nempe in omnes animum precipitaturus insanias, ubi pudor et metus et, que frenare solet impetus, ratio omnis ac cognitio veritatis exciderint" (Book III, Fenzi 204).

always have an occasion for infinite tears. Is there any greater madness?"[171]

Clearly, Franciscus here lets himself be carried away by an unnatural – or, at the very least, unhealthily passionate – obsession with a misused "earthly" vehicle of divine love and inspiration. Particularly remarkable in this passage, however, is Fenzi's translation of the original Latin using the words "mood" (*umore*), "fancy" (*capriccio*) and "madness" (*pazzia*), each related to concepts of melancholy by several centuries anticipating medieval *acedia*:[172] the first speaks to its nature as a humoural illness, the second to the volatility it causes in its subjects, and the third to the folly with which it is commonly associated.

Petrarch's reference to Bellerophon immediately preceding this passage also seems hardly coincidental: though as Fenzi points out, Bellerophon is a recurring figure in Petrarch's works used mainly as a literary representation of heroic solitude, here he comes to be mentioned much in the same capacity in which the *Problem*'s author makes use of him.[173] Here, excessive and unrestrained love of Laura – and, consequently, of poetic glory, a theme to be treated in still greater depth in the *Canzoniere* – is the direct cause not only of Franciscus' (and Petrarch's) retreat from prayer and shrinking away from good works and human company, but also of his *instabilitas*, a key component of Cassian's *acedia*, as we have seen.

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[171] "Quid quo dilla tibi festos lugubresque dies ichoavit et clausit? Illa adveniente sol illuxit, illaque abeunte nox rediit. Illius mutata frons tibi animum mutavit; letus et mestus pro illius varietate factus es. Denique totus ab illius arbitrio pependisti ... Quid autem insanium quam, non contentum presenti illius vultus effigie, unde hec cunta tibi provenerant, aliam fictam illustris artificis ingenio quesivisse, quam tecum ubique circumferens haberes materiam semper immortalium lacrimum?"(Book III, Fenzi 226).

[172] Fenzi's translation reads, "E che dire del fatto che era lei che stabiliva per te dove cominciassero e finissero le ore liete e le tristi? Quando arrivava, splendeva il sole, e tornava la notte quando se ne andava. Se cambiava espressione ti cambiava *l'umore*: eri ridotto a rallegrarti o a rattristarti a seconda dei suoi mutamenti, e insomma, dipendevi tutto dal suo *capriccio* ... C'è *pazzia* più grande?" (Book III, Fenzi 227, italics mine).

[173] See Book III, Fenzi 227 and note to Book III 132, Fenzi 374.

Indeed, *fluctuationes* pervades Petrarch's *Secret* both thematically and formally, generally in concordance with the kind of "Heraclitean flux" with which Petrarch would have been most familiar and which frequently resurfaces in his major works. As Marcel Françon points out in his article, "Petrarch, Disciple of Heraclitus," Petrarch would have been most interested by Heraclitus' idea that "all things are in motion; the world is a struggle of opposites; antagonism lies at the every heart of reality."[174] In the *Secret*'s third book, this idea is expressed through Petrarch's repeated juxtapositions of life's temporariness with the soul's objective immortality.[175] In the first two books, it is more prominently revealed in Petrarch's shipwreck imagery, "the perpetual agitation of the sea, of the turmoil of the winds, of the generality of war."[176] Franciscus describes himself as being "beaten by a great and furiously agitated sea, countered by wind," and as navigating "his fragile and tremulous little boat" through great "boiling waves."[177] The "*ondeggiamento*"[178] of his body is extended throughout to that of his soul – a noteworthy observation not only due to the commonly held belief that the body was a corporeal extension of the soul, itself a natural extension of the mind,[179] but also since, as Dotti points out, "the soul, as Seneca had written in a lovely metaphor, is our king: as long as it is healthy, everything stays in its place and in proper order, but as soon as it vacillates, everything [falls] into common ruin."[180] Still in the first book, Augustine calls Franciscus' soul "fragile", "invaded by obsessive visions

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[174] Marcel Françon, "Petrarch, Disciple of Heraclitus," *Speculum* 11.2 (April 1936: 265-271) 266.
[175] See, for example, Book III when Augustine affirms that: "Dies nempe fugiunt, corpus defluit, animus non mutatur" (Book III, Fenzi 250).
[176] Françon 266.
[177] "Et ego, in mari magno sevoque ac turbido iactatus, tremulam cimbam fatiscentemque et rimosam ventis obluctantibus per tumidos fluctus ago" (Book I, Fenzi 132-134).

[178] The Italian "ondeggiamento" is difficulty translated as "rolling, rocking, waving, swaying", or "vacillating" ("ondeggiare" *Dizionario Garzanti Linguistica online* (De Agostini Scuola Spa, 2008) 2 March 2008 <http://www.garzantilinguistica.it/interna_eng.html>). "Ondeggiare," then, has a series of connotations not unlike the action which the verb represents or attempts to classify.
[179] See Driscoll's introduction to Evagrius' *Ad Monachos*.
[180] L'animo, aveva anzi scritto Seneca con bella metafora, è il nostro re: fin quando è sano ogni cosa sta al suo posto e in buon ordine, ma appena vacillo, tutto viene trascinato nella comune rovina" (Dotti, *Petrarca civile* 54).

and tormented by various perturbations in constant conflict with each other" which prevent it from "determining which [agitation] to listen to first, which to cultivate, which to turn off, which to crush."[181] As Augustine continues shortly thereafter:

> And you, deprived of all good sense, oscillating in abnormal manner,
> are dragged from here to there, never fully in any place, never whole.
> For this reason, every time your generous soul succeeds in meditating
> on death and on all the reflections that can lead to the truth [about] life,
> and [every time] it with its natural acuteness succeeds in touching the
> bottom [of the matter], then, unable to stay there, repelled as it is by
> the accumulation of its contradictory perturbations, it turns back.[182]

In this passage, Petrarch at once signals the quintessence of his medieval *acedia* and its link to earlier concepts of melancholy. Here, what torments Petrarch is, like traditional Scholastic and earlier accounts of *acedia*, an illness of the soul which, very much like that of its humoural ancestor, generates abnormal fluctuation and hesitation. In the third book, it comes also to be associated with physical flux in Petrarch's lengthy discussion on the value of travel – or physical displacement – to the vigorous improvement of a soul already prepared for change. The second

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[181] "Siquidem fantasmatibus suis obrutus, multisque et variis ac secum sine pace pugnantibus curis animus fragilis oppressus, cui primum occurrat, quam nutriat, quam perimat, quam repellat, esaminare non potest" (Book I, Fenzi 138).

[182] "Quod igitur evenire solet in angusto multa serentibus, ut impediant se sata concursu, idem tibi contingit, ut in animo nimis occupato nil utile radces agat, nichilque fructiferum coalescat; tuque inops consilii modo illuc mira fluctuatione volvaris, nusquam integre, nusquam totus. Hinc est ut quotiens ad hang cogitationem mortis aliasque, per qua siri possit ad vitam, generosus, si sinatur, animus accessit, inque altum naturali discendi acumine, stare ibi non valens, turba curarum variarum pel lente, resiliat. Ex quo fit ut tam salutare propositum nimia mobilitate fatiscat, oriturque illa intestina discordia de qua multa iam diximus, illaque anime sibi irascentis anxietas, dum horret sordes suas ipsa nec diluit, vias tortuosas agnoscit nec deserti, impendensque periculum metuit nec declinat" (Book I, Fenzi 138-140). See also Augustine's later warning in Book III: "Sic igitur quicquid voluptatum celum habet aut tellus et utrobique ad nutum fluentes ac felicissimos tibi fingis eventus. At mille hominum milia spes ista fefellit, innumerabiles animas Orcho demersit; dum enim alterum pedem in terra tenere putant, alterum in celo, neque hic consistere, neque illus ascendere potuerunt. Itaque miserabiliter lapsi sunt, subitoque illos vel in ipso etatis flore, vel in medio rerum apparatu vegetabilis aura destituit. Et hoc tibi quod tam mutlis contigit, contingere posse non cogitas?" (Fenzi 268).

book describes it as a malady proper to both faculties, as the illness of man, "with [his] weak body, [his] troubled soul, assaulted by various illnesses, subject to innumerous passions, deprived of all judgment, oscillating between happiness and sadness, impotent in [matters of] will, incapable of restraining [his] appetites."[183] Here, just under halfway through the second book, is, I think, the passage most central to understanding Petrarch's particular appropriation of *acedia*: neither strictly theological nor strictly humoural, it is a condition applicable to both body and soul, and has equal – and equally disastrous – consequences on each.

Marco Santagata refers to the condition that plagues Franciscus in the *Secretum* as a "fragmentation of the soul" which he seeks to make whole again through spiritual conversion.[184] Franciscus, however, is not alone in his suffering. Struggling alongside him is Petrarch the author himself, whose very amalgamation of so many interpretations of *acedia* and whose multiplicity of sources – mingling the Stoic with the Christian and the Greek – concede the same spiritual illness, "*grave malattia*,"[185] and, as Carlo Calcaterra suggests, modernity, of his protagonist.[186]

The *instabilitas* or *fluctuationes* of Petrarch's (rather than exclusively Franciscus') mind is felt directly in the text (strangely) in Augustine's at times conflicting advice to his pupil. Though he more or less consistently suggests that Franciscus dedicate himself to profound

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[183] "An ignoras ex cuntis animalibus egentissimum esse hominen? ... caduci corporis, animi inquieti, morbis obsessum variis, subiectum passionibus innumeris, consilii inopem, alterna letitia et tristitia fluctuantem, impotentem arbitrii, appetitus cohibere nescium; quid quantum ve sibi expediat, quis cibo potuique modus ignorantem; cui alimenta corporis, ceteris anmalibus in aperto posita, multo labore conquerenda sunt" (Book II, Fenzi 164).

[184] "Il *Secretum* ci ha anche detto che persino l'anima può disintegrarsi in frammenti, tanto è vero che la conversione di Francesco consiste proprio nel raccoglierli, ricostituendo l'unità interiore" (Santagata 108).

[185] See Fenzi's translation: Book III, 263. The original Latin passage reads, "Gravi enim morbo correptus viciniam mortis expavi" (Book III, 262).

[186] "...le sue discordanze e contraddizioni, le sue perplessità e prostrazioni, le sue inquietudini e la sua *acedia* erano almeno segno di un animo malato; altri ... videro in lui un assertore ora esplicito belato dell'angoscioso dubbio moderno, quasi un preannunziatore di Cartesio o di Amleto" (Calcaterra 2).

meditation on death,[187] on the passing of life, and on the bounty of God in order to reconnect with his Creator, in the *Secret*'s third book, he also conversely and simultaneously points to travel and social engagement, to immersion in the crowd and to avoidance of it, as antidotes to Franciscus' condition. While on the one hand he encourages his student to "avoid solitary places" because "among people [he may] be safer,"[188] he on the other hand warns against seeking the favour of the vulgar crowd.[189] Though he insists that Franciscus devote his life to contemplation rather than to the pursuit of fame, he nevertheless encourages him to go forward confidently into the future to new places and in pursuit of new projects.[190] Though he recommends travel as a means of purifying the soul, he specifies that travel can only be useful or productive to a soul already prepared for purification – all seemingly counterintuitive ideas that for this very reason receive lengthy treatment. In short, Augustine, like Franciscus himself, seems to be of two minds even in the advice he gives.

Of no small note, furthermore, is the observation that despite its dialogic form, the interlocutors of the *Secretum* are, essentially, one and the same, the one, St. Augustine, an alter-ego of the other, Franciscus, conceived of the same hand – Petrarch's. Dotti, without discounting Petrarch's still strong penchant toward medieval literary practices, signals this very plurality of beings reassembled in one as a cornerstone of budding modernity.[191] To me, at least, however,

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[187] See Bunge 115-116: at least by Evagrian's teachings, meditation on death is a principal cure to *acedia.*

[188] Book III, Fenzi 243. Augustine here takes up the words of Ovid, "Quisquis amas, loca sola nocent, loca sola caveto. Quo fugis? In populo tutior esse potes."

[189] See Book III, Fenzi 259: Here, while discussing earthly fame, Augustine counsels against trying to aspire to literary glory on earth, since such arbitrary praise can only be granted by the erring population: "Est igitur flatus quidam atque aura volubilis et, quod egrius feras, flatus est hominum plurimorum. Scio cui loquor; nulli usquam odiosiores esse vulgi mores ac gesta perpendi. Vide nun quanta iudiciorum perersitas: quorum enim facta condemnas, eorum sermunculis delectaris." (Fenzi 258).

[190] Book III, Fenzi 241.

[191] "era ... a un tempo Francesco e Agostino. Egli sentiva in sè, parimenti e con pari urgenza, la necessità di non staccarsi troppo dall'ideologia religiosa dominante, ma, al contempo, si rifiutava di rinunciare all'efficacia dell'arte come strumento di rappresentazione del sensibile terreno e dell'immanente storico che egli sentiva" (Dotti, *La Scoperta* 60).

the binarity of Petrarch's *Secretum* is both forward-looking toward modernity and backward-looking toward older concepts of melancholy. Certainly, its language which, "above all else represents the voice of man in dialogue with the earthly and with the transcendent, with the world and its passions and [with] God and the heavens"[192] speaks to the modern condition that situates man between both extremes and gives him the power to aspire to either. Its duplicity, however, and its fundamental inability to reconcile or cohesively to string together contrasting ideas, however, are more reminiscent of Saturn and of the melancholy with which it is associated.

Strangely, in its attempt coherently to weave together elements randomly dispersed in the contemporary, it is not at all – or only difficultly – oriented in the present – the very practice it ultimately recommends: "I will be present to myself as much as I can, and I will collect [and reassemble] the dispersed fragments of my soul and I will live in myself, attentively," Franciscus pronounces at the close of the third book.[193] Yet despite saying so, he fails to do so: "But now, as we are talking, many important things still await me, though mortal. Even if I know, as you said not long ago, that it would be much better for me to apply myself exclusively to this one study and [in that way] to enter onto the straight path of salvation, leaving behind all deviation. But I am not capable of curbing my passion."[194] This, too, is a distinct marker of Franciscus' *acedia* – a condition which Gabriel Bunge metaphorically associates with a "head of Janus, unhappy about the present and full of longing for realities to come [which] looks both to the past and to the

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[192] Il linguaggio del *Secretum* è "un linguaggio, per meglio dire, che prima di ogni altra cosa rappresenta la voce dell'uomo che dialoga con il terreno e con il trascendente, con il mondo e le sue passioni come con Dio e con il cielo" (Dotti, *Petrarca civile* 103).

[193] "Adero michi ipse quantum potero, et sparsa anime fragmenta recolligam, moraborque mecum sedulo" (Book III, Fenzi 282). On this topic (and on the importance of knowing oneself in order properly to know, understand, and adequately love God), see Petrarch's *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia,*, ed. Enrico Fenzi (Milano: Mursia editore, 1999).

[194] "Sane nunc, dum loquimur, multa me magnaque, quamvis adhuc mortalia, negotia expectatnt" (Book III, Fenzi 282).

future."[195] Franciscus' condition is, in short, an unresolved and unfocused state of self-absorption that refuses to settle into calm meditation of the Truth.

Similarly, Petrarch, though coming to the end of his dialogue, does not actually conclude. His act of writing consists of stitching together the otherwise disjointed moments of his thought, in part, perhaps, to cure himself of his own *verbiositas*[196] and in other part, perhaps, to prompt the spiritual conversion he hopes is forthcoming. In either case, his dialogue and its themes remain open to the much larger subsequent treatment they receive in the *De remediis utriusque fortunae.*

[195] "Passion à tête de Janus, mécontente du présente et pleine de convoitise pour les réalités à venir, elle [l'acédie] regarde à la fois en arrière et en avant « (Bunge 133).
[196] Itself an important component of Cassian's *acedia*, it is to be recalled.

Chapter III: *De remediis utriusque fortunae*: Project of autonomous healing for the modern melancholic

Déjà quand la vie vient pour habiter
Ces corps aussi petits qu'inanimés,
Elle est là telle une déesse gardienne
Attroupant les solitudes par centaines ...
Cette mère marie, mère chimère de patrie,
Celle qui viendra nous arracher la vie,
Celle qui, comme l'enfant, nous tend la main
Pour mieux tordre le cou du destin.
Et on pleure, oui on pleure la destinée de l'homme
Sachant combien, même géants, tout petits nous sommes.
Car, tel seul un homme, nous avançons
Vers la même lumière, vers la même frontière,
Toujours elle viendra nous arracher la vie
Comme si chaque bonheur devait être puni.

-Pierre Lapointe, "Tel un seul homme," *Pierre Lapointe* (Quebec, 2004).

Rico's dating of the *Secretum*'s major composition between 1352-1353 most easily facilitates an interpretation of this work as the immediate precursor to the still more Stoic *De remediis utriusque fortunae.*[197] Drafted between 1354 and 1366, this encyclopedic compendium of moral philosophy more thoroughly addresses several of the *Secret*'s open-ended issues, *acedia* only one among them. Interestingly, Petrarch composes this later work – often called his late *magnum opus* – in a sedentary state of tranquility relative to the ongoing wanderings of his youth which, despite age, social status, and paternal responsibility, persist throughout his maturity.[198] In 1353, Petrarch moves to Milan for a period of eight years – an unusually long sojourn during which, as Vinicio Pacca points out, "[Petrarch] effectively had a real opportunity to work calmly, an opportunity which he cultivated: from a strictly literary point of view, the Milanese period can be considered a long reflective pause, a break not only [from city life]." As Pacca continues,

[197] Kenelm Foster, in his book *Petrarch* identifies a "remedial" scope in the *Secret*'s closing book which already signals Petrarch's forthcoming larger Stoic project (Kenelm Foster, *Petrarch, Poet and Humanist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984) 160).

[198] Nicholas Mann defines "a constant restlessness and urge to travel" a "characteristic feature of [Petrarch's] mature years" (Nicholas Mann, *Petrarch* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984) 5).

"Apart from the *De remediis*, Petrarch in these years puts no work of great import in motion; he instead dedicates himself to the organization of those already begun, most of which he completes."[199] It is here, in Milan and only after the trying ten-year composition and revision of the *Secretum*, that Petrarch finally rather consciously enterprises rationally and systematically to scrutinize and put to order his spiritual and psychological torments, insecurities, and concerns.[200]

In a 1354 letter to Jean Birel, Grand Prior of the Carthusian Order, Petrarch states his purpose in writing the *De remediis* (then titled *de Remediis ad utranque Fortunam*):

> I strive with what strength I have to relieve or, if it is granted unto me, to eradicate the afflictions of my mind as well as the minds of those who read it. I had put the pen to the text on *tristitia et miseria* – the kind of sickness that stems from uncertain causes and is viewed by the philosophers as a sickness of the mind. This is done best by searching for the causes of happiness. Actually it is nothing else but inquiring into the dignity of the human condition.[201]

This passage brings up several issues of interest to modern readers of Petrarch's *acedia*. Most obviously, its allusions to *tristitia et miseria* – sadness and misery – not only directly point to the *acedia* treated at length in the *Secretum*, but also make reference to that earlier work's

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[199] "L'insolita durata del soggiorno dimostra che in effetti [Petrarca] ebbe davvero l'opportunità di lavorare con calma, e l'occasione fu colta: dal punto di vista strettamente letterario il periodo milanese si può considerare una lunga pausa di riflessione, una sosta non solo in senso spaziale. A parte il *De remediis*, in questi anni, Petrarca non mise in cantiere nessuna opera di grande impegno; si dedicò invece alla sistemazione di quelle già iniziate, molte delle quali furono portate a termine" (Vinicio Pacca, *Petrarca* (Roma: Edizioni Laterza, 1998) 184).

[200] Mann calls Petrarch's "psychology" "something between curiosity, the quest for the new, and a deep dissatisfaction, an unwillingness to settle down and define himself and his deepest concerns" (Mann 5). The long stay in Milan and the composition of the *De remediis* there allows and encourages Petrarch to sort out these "fragments of his soul" (as Marco Santagata has called them) externally, through writing.

[201] *Seniles* xvi, 9 (1581: 961-963) as quoted and translated by Conrad H. Rawski in his "Introduction to the Commentary" (*Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul*, vol. 2 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) xviii).

overarching theme: the *contemptus mundi*[202] also markedly present in the *De remediis* and that, in the later *Trionfi*, would come to be expressed more specifically as contempt for Petrarch's current age. Of equal interest, however, is the very modernity – the "dignity of the human condition" – Petrarch, in this passage, almost immediately signals.

Even before its completion, Petrarch's encyclopedia is intended to be a "remedial reference book" for a medieval audience with medieval concerns in an age of universal "darkness." Its focus, from the outset of the Preface to its opening book, is on "mankind's affairs and fortunes and their unpredictable changes."[203] Though contemporaneous with the catechetical handbooks, confessional instructions, and handbooks for preachers in circulation since the late 13th century,[204] its scope and objectives would indeed have gone far beyond those more conventional "scholastic *summa* or popular compendium[s] of moral theology and catechesis, with [their] stress on individual choice and responsibility, [their] method of argument by contraries inviting the participation of the reader, and [their] trenchant maxims, examples, stories, and historical vignettes."[205] Of course, a more than avid reader and a precocious collector of classical and theological texts, Petrarch would have been at least familiar with Boethius' *De Consolatione* - a sixth century and therefore much earlier philosophical treatise similarly dealing both with melancholy and with Fortune[206] - and its considerably "medieval" juxtaposition of

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[202] See: Mann 28.
[203] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 1, 1.
[204] Wenzel 75-78: Wenzel points to the increasing popularity of such treatises and of their growing tendency directly to address *acedia.*
[205] Rawski, introduction, vol. 2, xvi.
[206] Already in the second chapter of Book I, Boethius writes of an emotional disturbance that takes hold of his protagonist and which, in its description, closely resembles medieval and later iconographic representations of "melancholy:" (see Casagrande and Vecchio 225-261). "Now prostrate, mental vision dulled, / His neck with chains close bound, / Perforce he trains his downward gaze / Upon the insensate ground," reads the chapter's opening poem (I.2.1-35, Walsh 5). Slightly further ahead, in chapter 5, he makes direct reference to the "welter of disturbed emotions" weighing on his protagonist: "grief, anger, and melancholy" (I.5.11-12, Walsh 15).

conflicting terms.[207] His affinity for Ciceronian and Senecan philosophy, moreover, has already been suggested.[208] Still, Petrarch interacts with and makes use of each of these more or less typically "medieval" conventions in strikingly modern ways in the *De remediis* as in the texts surrounding it.

As Kenelm Foster suggests, "for [Petrarch,] the primary problem [of the *De remediis*], while it had immediate ethical implications, was not in itself ethical but rather anthropological: what is it to be a man? What am I? All moral questions went back in the end to that of self-knowledge."[209] Of course, and expectedly, knowledge of and open conversation with God, in some ways the very fulcrum of medieval thought and the recurrent focus of the *De Consolatione*, are integral features of Petrarch's bipartite compendium.[210] Still, it is Stoic self-righteousness and the exploration of man's role to *himself* and to the world that remain more distinctly central to Petrarch's modern Remedies.

Certainly, in writing such a comprehensive treatise on everyday living, Petrarch hoped, within his lifetime, to reach a large audience with his ideas, and tailored his approach to this end. Not surprisingly, his text was widely received and enjoyed considerable success and popularity at least until the 16th-century, especially outside of Italy. André Chastel has written on its favourable reception in Augsburg in 1517 largely because of the "intrepid spirit of humanism" it exudes and inspired the woodblock illustrators of its German translation *Buch von der Arzenei*

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[207] Françon 270: "With the example of Boethius before them, mediaeval authors were in the habit of juxtaposing contradictory terms; Boethius himself speaks of fortune constant in its inconstancy."

[208] Many attribute the *De remediis'* basic structure to the model of Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations* and its so-called (and rather obviously) "disputative" format – a key difference between the two texts being, of course, the latter's occasional penchant toward genuine "dialectic" in which the former takes no interest. See, for instance, *Tusculan Disputations* I.12-17, trans. A. E. Douglas (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1994). On the "disputative" format, see Margaret Graver, introduction, *Tusculan Disputations 3 and 4* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002) xv-xvii.

[209] Foster 155.

[210] In his *De Consolatione*, Boethius contends, by way of his interlocutor Philosophy, that man's identity is less tied to his definition as a "mortal creature endowed with reason" as it is to his main purpose in life: knowledge of God for eventual reunion with Him (I.10-20, Walsh 17). Petrarch, by contrast, at least in his *De remediis*, privileges the former to the latter.

bedier Gluck des guten un widerwartigen to represent in their work.[211] In its outward applicability to everyday life and in its more rather inward treatment of Petrarch's personal and individual problems, it would have been equally accessible and enjoyable to readers of both historical periods it attempts to absorb:[212] medieval readers seeking solace from the misery of their collapsed world, and increasingly humanist readers more typically concerned with man's role within it.

Indeed, the *acedia* at the heart of the *De remediis* is as much exclusively Petrarch's as it is the Everyman's.[213] One might be skeptical of Petrarch, then, when he writes:

> Believe me, I have tried not to write about what seems most interesting to me, but have endeavoured to set down what seemed to be most useful to you and others, should anyone else ever care to read this. As always in this kind of effort, my end is primarily not fame for the author, but profit for the reader.[214]

In fact, written as it was during a period of mature reflection, it is as much a product of years of social isolation as it is the literary consequence of Petrarch's interaction both with an

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[211] André Chastel, "Pétrarque et son illustrateur devant la peinture," *Etudes d'art médieval offertes à Louis Grodecki* (Editions Ophrys : Paris, 1981, 343- 351) 343.

[212] Rawski refers to the Middle Ages as the period spanning the collapse of the Roman empire to the end of the Trecento. He dates the Renaissance from 1300-1600. At least by his account, then, the century during which Petrarch writes is a period of overlap between the two and one in which medieval concepts would have persisted alongside – or perhaps despite – the emergence of what today is viewed as "humanist" thought. This historical particularity behind Petrarch's work, he (and others) argues, is key to his description and interpretation as a bipartite and internally (and externally) divided poet ("Introduction to the commentary," vol.2, xxiv-xxv).

[213] See Chastel, "Pétrarque et son illustrateur" 344: Dans le monde ressenti comme un règne d'insécurité totale (8), ce catalogue impitoyable des états d'âme' connut vers 1500 un renouveau de succès, comme une sorte de *Nef des Fous* plus relevée, d'une culture plus distinguée, enrichie par les replis de la subtilité de l'auteur, que satisfait tant le dialogue et qui met tour à tour une partie de lui-même dans les aveux et dans les monstrances qu'ils suscitent. » See also Foster 160 : "And even the remaining major work, the *De Remediis*, was a personal utterance for all its appearance of frigid impersonality; for Petrarch's aim here, besides being eminently practical, was to communicate to his contemporaries, in an easily assimilable way, that rational ethic of Stoic derivation on which he could and did claim to speak with exceptional authority, if only because he was exceptionally familiar with the relevant texts."

[214] Preface, *Remedies for Prosperity*, vol. 1, 6.

innumerable host of classical authors, and with theories and conceptions of melancholy, *acedia,* and their variants from Hippocrates, Pseudo-Aristotle, and Evagrius onwards.

Its basic structure resonates with the duplicity of Saturn – to be recalled, the father both of artists and of melancholy: as a whole, the *De remediis* is a bipartite encyclopedia of remedies for Fortune of both kinds: Prosperity and Adversity. Each book is further divided into chapters consisting of dialogues or conversations between Reason and one (or a few) of the four Stoic passions: Hope and Joy in the first book, Sorrow and Fear in the second. Conceptually, Petrarch's work addresses and contains the conflicting elements of melancholy and *acedia*: hope for worldly fame and glory – as treated in the last book of the *Secretum* – and generalized sadness and social paralysis which resound as keynotes of his larger oeuvre.[215] Logistically, it is governed by a marked schism that keeps these sets of elements separate from each other and that more generally points to its author's double-sidedness and fundamental ineffectuality at finding a harmonious balance among them or within himself.

The "double" nature of Petrarch's *De remediis* is most readily signaled by its "muse," the goddess Fortuna. Much like double-headed Janus, by medieval conventions Fortune was viewed as a fickle mistress constant only in her tendency to follow the flights of her fancy wherever they may have led. In fact, Boethius describes her as "that monstrous lady" and speaks of her "fawning friendship with those whom she intends to cheat, until the moment when she unexpectedly abandons them, and leaves them reeling in agony beyond endurance;"[216] a figure who "shows by her mutability that she is inconstant," and is therefore, paradoxically, honest.[217] By her rule, most medieval authors held, man was thrashed about and subjected to any number of

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[215] Petrarch calls these the "famous twin-born passions of the mind ... brought forth at the same time by the two sisters Prosperity and Adversity" (Preface, *Remedies for Prosperity*, vol. 1, 10).
[216] *De Consolatione* II.1.3-4, Walsh 19.
[217] *De Consolatione* II.8.4, Walsh 38.

egregious misfortunes or happy coincidences, "fight[ing] a twofold dual with Fortune, wrought with danger from either side."[218] Of course as Mann points out, in *De remediis* and in general, Petrarch is hesitant to attribute either good or bad fortune exclusively to Fortuna herself or, for that matter, to God.[219] What he draws from her, instead, is the central tenet of his *De remediis* and a major component of his mature thought in general: the "conflicted" state of the world, the tension between and among people and things, and the ongoing opposition of abstract concepts and natural elements. As Françon writes, in *De remediis* Petrarch:

> dwells on the quarrels which disturb households, the antipathy between master and servant, the conflicts which inspire hatred in the hearts of brothers, the discords between parents and offspring. Antagonism is thus everywhere and with it universal strife. Opposition exists not only between different beings or between the diverse elements of things, but also inside the beings or things themselves.[220]

His analysis of "strife" oscillates between an outside and an inside perspective, between the external reasons for the *contemptus mundi* of his *Secretum* and other works, and the internal causes of individual turmoil and personal dissatisfaction.

As much is clear from the *De remediis'* very first page. Petrarch writes of man as "forever beset by fretful cares, which are not merely trivial and useless, but harmful and noisome." These concerns, on the one hand, are generated by external circumstances – the pressures of society and the desire for wealth, riches, and power, longing for art and precious things, relationships with friends, family members, and neighbours - and keep men strictly focused on their worldly experience. "We are racked by the present," Petrarch continues, "and

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[218] Preface, *Remedies for Prosperity*, vol. 1, 4.
[219] Mann 79.
[220] Françon 266.

tormented by the past and the future, so that we seem to fear nothing worse than not to be sufficiently wretched at all times" – precisely the kind of "pleasantly-painful" state of the melancholic.[221] "Zealously we seek out causes for misery and food for sorrow, and make our life (which, properly governed, could be the most happy and gratifying of all things), a wretched and woeful chore – its entrance blind insentience, its progress toil, its exit pain, and all of it, error." Notably, Petrarch calls this condition a "sickness" and identifies one of its causes as "the nature of things." Yet "unless self-love deceives us," he goes on, "we find a greater cause, or, to be frank, the whole cause, within ourselves."[222]

In "Good Health," one of *Prosperity*'s early chapters, Petrarch again refers to this outer-inner dichotomy: "Look how old age confronts you, armed with a thousand different diseases, ready to invade your health, while vice fights your body from the inside – a well-known dual."[223] What follows within the same dialogue, in those to follow and, more especially, recurrently throughout *Remedies for Adversity*, is an insistence on the strength of the mind and the will as primordial not only to the proper functioning of the body, but as an end in itself – the consequence, or perhaps the cause, of virtue.[224] "So it is also with physical health which, in order not to harm him who possesses it, should be combined with nothing else but a good healthy mind. Nothing is worse than a sick mind dwelling in a healthy body," Petrarch writes.[225] Much

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[221] See also *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 93: "Sadness and Misery:" "you lust to dwell upon your ills," Reason chastises Sorrow (Vol. 3, 226).
[222] Preface, *Remedies for Prosperity*, vol. 1, 1.
[223] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 3: "Good Health," vol. 1, 19.
[224] See, for instance, *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 1: "A Deformed Body," vol. 3, 17: "Virtue requires the stature of the mind, not of the body" and *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 2: "Weakness," vol. 3, 19: "The true and foremost strength of man is in his mind. The body is the house of the mind, as it were, the strength of weakness of which does not have any bearing on the guest who stays there but for a few days, unless it falls down." See also, *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 114: "Severe Pain," vol.3, 267: "All is well as long as your mind, the guest within [your] body, does not ache and emerges safe and sound from the shabby hut in which it has to dwell."
[225] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 3: "Good Health," vol.1, 19.

more serious than the "fevers which seethe in the bones and marrow," he contends, "are those which lurk in the recesses of the mind."[226]

For Petrarch, both overzealous appreciation of and overbearing desperation about terrestrial circumstances are internally generated "diseases" produced more by the mind than by the society upon which it reflects. An unstable mind opens itself to the vices which, plaguing it, cause man to forget his "dignity," act irrationally, and come to ruin. As Petrarch writes in *Prosperity*:

> Genuine and lasting power is based on virtue. If you remove the foundation, the taller the building, the greater is the danger. What good does it to glut your home with riches, the fields with cultivating tools, the oceans with squadrons of ships if, while you are doing this, the internal enemies within you besiege your mind and vanquish it? Do you want me to admit that you are powerful? Then conquer the enemies, drive them out of your bosom, defeat wrath, defeat greed, defeat yourself, who are the worst enemy to your reputation and your mind.[227]

In short, what Petrarch seems to at least partially suggest in all of the above examples is, as Cassian sustains and as Casagrande and Vecchio report, that *acedia* and *tristitia* are *internal* disorders generated more by an "anxiety of the heart" than by any external provocation, yet manifested externally and, to a degree, physically.[228]

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[226] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 4: "Health Restored," vol. 1, 20.
[227] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 91: "Power," vol. 1, 243-244.
[228] Casagrande and Vecchio 79-82. See also John Cassian, *The Institutes*, ninth book: The Spirit of Sadness, tenth book: The Spirit of Acedia, trans. Boniface Ramsey, O.P. (New York: The Newman Press, 2000) 209-238.

This theme, elaborated upon late in *Prosperity*, becomes the ostensible fulcrum of *Adversity.* In "Meager Fare," Reason again points to submission to vice as an error of the mind, calling Sorrow's gullet a "convenient pathway permitting each and every vice to invade [his] mind" and subsequently lists them: "stupor of the mind", wrath, cupidity, envy, gluttony, and pride.[229] It is the mind's inability to resist vice, its penchant toward distraction and its tendency to be swayed by the petty concerns of the present that lead man "astray."

It is precisely this mental vagrancy and the binary it seemingly facilitates between vice and virtue which recalls both the internal torpor of the *acedic* and the duplicity of the melancholic. In "Inner Conflict,"[230] Petrarch treats directly the secular characteristics of the *accidioso* only indirectly referred to throughout the *De remediis*. Here, Sorrow is "troubled by a wavering mind," by "conflicting thoughts" and moods, by an inability to choose or to recognize what it truly desires. Reason calls this condition a "war fought between parts of the mind itself," caused by the feverish presence of conflicting moods in the mind; "one of the foremost symptoms of an afflicted mind." Like Franciscus in the earlier *Secretum*, he is "as if tossed by roaring breakers, the ship of [his] life, without expert guidance … lacking a skipper."[231] Whereas, as has been shown, spiritual lassitude and irresponsibility comprise the main components of religious *acedia*, the brand of *acedia* treated here is seemingly more concerned with those later conceptions of it more distinctly influenced by Ancient medicinal forms of melancholy, mental instability, and, to a point, folly.

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[229] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 10: "Meager Fare," vol. 3, 41. See also *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 122: "Hope for Life Eternal, vol.1, 323-324. Here, Petrarch similarly contends, from the opposite point of view, that "he who has one virtue must needs have them all. If this holds true of the moral virtues, what holds for the theological ones? If you have hope, you have at the same time charity and faith; and if any one of these is missing, you do not have hope of any kind, merely ill-advised audaciousness" (vol. 1, 323).

[230] *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 75: "Inner Conflict," vol.3, 170-172.

[231] See also *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 54: "Serious Shipwreck." Petrarch again employs shipwreck imagery – a *leitmotif* in his later works – to convey his protagonists' (and his own) mental and inner turmoil: "You relate the shipwreck at sea, but you say nothing about the shipwreck of the mind, as though there were any wreck more serious or more frequent than this" (Vol. 3, 127).

Of course (and predictably), Petrarch does not confine himself to regarding this vice in any one exclusive light; he on the one hand deals with exile and imprisonment – more universally applicable to ideas of *acedia* from the desert fathers onward.[232] On the other hand, he adheres to a rather Evagrian-Cassian interpretation of *acedia* by later including a discussion on "*Torpor animi*: Lethargy of the Mind" in his systematic treatment, by catalogue, of the seven capital vices, as they do placing it fifth among them.[233] Interestingly, he also treats "*Taedium Vitae*: Weariness," another aspect of Cassian's and Gregory's *acedia,* though in a separate and considerably earlier chapter.[234] His chapter on "Sadness and Misery," furthermore, takes on a rather Augustinian tone in its discussion of man's dejectedness about the human state.[235] Reason here sanctions Sorrow's sadness if it is about his sins, but disapproves of his state of being "dejected because of all the misery in this life." "The bliss of another life" – the afterlife, with God, it is understood – "shall make you happy. Life on this earth, even at its most wretched, never holds as much misery as the life to come holds happiness," Reason responds.[236] Petrarch's readers immediately recognize in her discourse the teachings Augustine repeatedly reiterates to Franciscus throughout the *Secretum.*

Still no matter his consideration or representation of *acedia*, its causes, consequences, and proposed antidotes are at least superficially uniform: a mind distracted from virtue is its cause, a fall into vice, contempt for the world, and penchant towards duplicity and excess, the result of

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[232] See *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 64: "Imprisonment," vol. 3, 143-145, and *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 67: "Exile," vol. 3, 151-156. Petrarch also addresses the more "medical" aspect of *acedia*: the gout of which Galen and Hippocrates speak in their clinical treatises on melancholy. See *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 84: "Gout," vol. 3, 198-200.

[233] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 109: "*Torpor Animi*: Lethargy of the Mind" (Vol. 3, 260-261). It is worthwhile to note that Petrarch's theological "training" colours even his less explicitly religious treatments of *acedia*: in "Leisure and Rest," for instance, sleep, a consequence of medieval *acedia*, is said to "foment lust, fatten the body, weaken the mind, dull our thinking, reduce knowledge, destroy memory, and cause forgetfulness" – all key characteristics of the medieval sin (*Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 21, vol. 1, 62, 63).

[234] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 98: "*Taedium Vitae*: Weariness," vol. 3, 242-243.

[235] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 93: "Sadness and Misery," vol. 3, 223-229.

[236] *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 93: "Sadness and Misery," vol. 3, 223-224.

such distraction, and a call to action in the present, either through public office, writing, or contemplation and prayer the best way to counteract its effects. It is in his presentation of the latter two, however, that Petrarch demonstrates his own mind's instability and restlessness and his personal susceptibility to the vice he aims to cure.

The causes of the modern man's *acedia* – secular or otherwise – have already been demonstrated. Its effects, however, are manifold and only difficultly unpacked. As has previously been suggested, it results in a turn away from virtue which makes it impossible to focus on present action. Simultaneously and contrarily, however, it also inspires overwhelming generalized depression, stagnation, and the incapacity either to recognize universal flux and the futility of terrestrial life, or to think forward to the comforts and rewards enjoyed in the afterlife. As a result of his inner unrest, Sorrow "turn[s] every moment into disaster," Reason observes, "sorrowing about the past, anxious about the present, shaking with fear about the future. You think that whole handfuls of such useless worries are worth your consternation when you are awake, and the nightmares when you are asleep."[237] Present though perhaps latent here is the same duplicity treated in "Inner Conflict:" in both dialogues, Sorrow remains unable to fixate on one path and is rent by conflicting emotions – notably opposite to the stalwart "reason" of the modern man.

Not surprisingly, binary constructions figure prominently in and reveal themselves to be central to Petrarch's treatment of "modern" melancholy: from the first dialogue of "Prosperity," he juxtaposes life and death.[238] Later, in "Hopefulness," he places hope and fear in a necessarily codependent relationship, asserting that "hope does not exist without fear."[239] Interestingly, his treatment of these binaries is never explicitly or exclusively negative – quite the opposite: it is

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[237] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 87: "Nightmares," vol. 3, 203.
[238] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 1: "The Prime of Life," vol. 1, 14.
[239] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 109: "Hopefulness," vol. 1, 295.

occasionally transparently optimistic. "I am worn down by a whole year of drought," Sorrow laments. "A fertile year, then, will be all the more welcome to you. Anything is best grasped by comparing it with its contrary," is Reason's somewhat surprising reply.[240] Nowhere does Reason – or Petrarch –explain the existence of such natural contrast. He is, in one instance, quite happy simply to point them out: serfs are made of kings and kings are made of slaves;[241] "there is hatred in love, war in peace, dissent in agreement;"[242] "only real things can" and perhaps should or must "delight and terrify."[243] He is still more content *rhetorically* to use them to his advantage, perhaps in lieu of adequate justification or explanation of their very existence: "As is the case with diseases of the body, contraries cure also excellently the ailments of the mind," he writes specifically on the "malady" of love;[244] "what cheers the mind often also hurts it," he confirms of hope and fear;[245] "to mix the bitter with the sweet befits both modesty as well as the gout. It is, in fact, a common remedy for any illness," he later contends.[246] As one might expect, Reason in these examples finds ways craftily and convincingly to incorporate the problematic Heraclitean flux at the heart of *De remediis* into her discourse. So similarly does Petrarch, by way of her: though almost imperceptible in a piece of such magnitude and length, no one more than Petrarch himself is more affected by the binarity and melancholy of his quadripartite character.[247]

Undeniably, Joy, Hope, Fear, and Sorrow are each plagued by a host of internal contradictions that shine through from one dialogue to the next. In "Bad Servants," Reason does

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[240] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 58: "A Year of Drought," vol. 3, 135. See also "Being Depressed by the Ways of the World:" "Sobriety is most beautiful amidst drunks. Wherever everybody is good, no one excels" (*Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 89, vol. 3, 208).
[241] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 14: "Liberty," vol. 1 38-40.
[242] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 5.
[243] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 25: "Infamy," vol. 3, 76.
[244] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 69: "Love Affairs," vol. 1, 204. Love as a contradictory illness is a theme best treated in relation to the *Canzoniere.*
[245] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 109: "Hopefulness," vol. 1, 296.
[246] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 84: "Gout," vol. 3, 200.
[247] This character being, of course, a collapsed and reunified version of Joy, Hope, Sorrow, and Fear.

not hesitate to point out to Sorrow that "a while ago [he] envisioned [himself] as being lovingly attended by [his servants] – but [he was] besieged, not only by an army within [his] own household, but also by an army of enemies."[248] Fear is equally inconsistent, wavering as he does between his fear of death and his suicidal tendencies.[249] Still, *Petrarch's* contrariness reigns supreme. His fluctuation and internal dissent is perhaps most greatly revealed in the very remedies Reason recommends against Fortune of both kinds.

Mann points to Reason's contradictory temper and advice from one book to another [250]- an important observation: in *Adversity*, Reason chastises Sorrow for being sad and miserable;[251] in *Prosperity*, she chides Joy for claiming to be happy among "all these evils."[252] Of equal note, however, is her oscillation within each book and, at times, even within individual dialogues. She on the one hand recommends a typically Christian-Stoic approach to Fortune: "Awake from your slumber, it is time; and open your bleary eyes, get used to thinking of eternal things, to love them, to desire them, and, at the same time, to disdain what is transitory. Learn to leave willingly what cannot be yours for long, and dismiss temporal things from your mind before they do leave you," she counsels Joy.[253] Though she here recommends "thought" as a means of detachment from worldly affairs and, subsequently, a step toward virtue, she on the other hand not very much later instead points to physical labour as an equally valid means to this end: "Toil is the material cause of virtue and glory. Who rejects toil, rejects these too."[254] Still within the same book, though, she

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[248] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 29: "Bad Servants," vol. 3, 83-84.
[249] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 117-118, "Fear of Dying" and "Suicide," vol. 3, 283-298.
[250] Mann 80-81.
[251] See *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 93: "Sadness and Misery," vol. 3, 223-229.
[252] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 108: "Happiness," vol. 1, 292.
[253] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 1: "The Prime of Life," vol. 1, 15.
[254] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 21: "Leisure and Rest," vol. 1, 63.

again slightly shifts her stance, recommending solitude rather than friendship[255] and liberty rather than servility, denigrating the very "toil" of which she earlier approved.

On the topic of holding public office, she proclaims, "The day this hostile office reached your doorstep you ceased to live for yourself. Your freedom, peace, and pleasure ended and were replaced by serfdom, toil, busywork, fear, sorrow, torment, and bitter worries."[256] In *Adversity*, she reverts back to her initial position, claiming that "if, however, your time is spent, not in pursuing your own or someone else's business interests, but in honorable affairs of state and the public weal, you do not lose your time, but use [it] in a most praiseworthy manner"[257]- an opinion (for that is all that to which her advice can effectively be reduced) sustained further ahead in her affirmation that "many have advanced themselves by their industry – none by sleeping!"[258] Here and innumerably elsewhere, Reason – and Petrarch standing behind her – proves to be just as if not more fickle than Fortune herself.

Essentially, Reason's advice on how best to be virtuous can be compounded into two key elements: the avoidance of excess (or the temperance of the passions), and a detached look inward and to the present even if through activity rather than meditation – what in the East later becomes known more generally as practicing "mindfulness." Both components constitute a major portion of Petrarch's modernity. Both, furthermore, are explicitly addressed in the Preface to *Adversity.* There Petrarch writes of man as "lord of the earth and ruler of all living creatures, the only one who with the rudder of his reason should be able to control calmly the course of life and its swirling, turbulent seas."[259] Still, despite his potential to reign over beasts and, with his

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[255] This is yet another position she will later relinquish in *Remedies for Adversity*: in "Disloyal Friends," she counsels Sorrow to work on maintaining his greatest friendships rather than focusing on those by whom he feels betrayed or retreating into solitude entirely (Chapter 27, vol. 3, 80-81).
[256] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 47: "Public Office," vol. 1, 151.
[257] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 15: "Loss of Time," vol. 3, 58.
[258] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 56: "Difficulties and Hard Work," vol. 3, 133.
[259] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 10.

rationality, over himself and the frenzy caused by his Passions, he is, as has been shown, "engaged in continuous strife, not only with others, but with himself … Compared to this, all other troubles imposed upon man by Nature or by Fortune seem to be just minor evils."[260]

Of course, and again, as has already been demonstrated, Petrarch does not exclude or deny external causes of strife. No matter their importance or their unavoidable conspicuity, however, he deems them secondary to the condition – universal – of his contemporary (and, as I here suggest, the first modern) man. He writes:

> Disregarding now external contention, of which I just spoke, and which, I wished, were less widespread and less familiar to us all, there is much inward struggle – which we conduct, not against other species, but against our own (as I have mentioned), not against other individuals, but against ourselves. This is constant warfare, not by means of corporeal surface (which is the vilest and lowest part of man), but within the secret recesses of the mind. Concerning the body seething and plagued with contrary humours, you can inquire from those who call themselves *physici*- natural scientists. But for what reason the mind battles against itself with various discordant passions each of us must ask none else but himself, and answer himself. How diverse and fickle are the tendencies of the mind which draw you now this way, now that way! We are never whole, never just one, but at odds with ourselves, self-destructing … - torn between wholly unstable states of mind, wavers without any letup, from its beginning to its very end, the life of man.[261]

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[260] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 10.
[261] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 12.

The binarity of this particular work is evident in its structure, in the contrariness of its four characters and in that of Reason, its protagonist. Though Marco Ariani holds the *De remediis'* "bittersweet mixture of ambivalent goods and ills which only cultivated memory and wisdom succeed in rationalizing" to be infallible markers of the text's quintessential medieval tone,[262] it is precisely in these characteristics that, I think, lie its modernity. Otherwise stated, it is Petrarch's very clearly observable oscillation between opposing positions present both microscopically within the text and in the voice of its characters, and macroscopically as viewed from outside it, that he demonstrates his modern potential to aspire upward and away from *acedia* or downward, toward vice and bestiality. Indeed, Reason often reminds her interlocutors, as she does in "Fear of Dying," that "human nature is constituted of these two, reason and death ... Only a dearth of reason" could constitute or signal a dearth of "humanity," a fall away from the self and from God toward the lower state of less sentient beings.[263]

For all intents and purposes, it is Petrarch's *acedia* and the resentment of the world it rouses within him that inspire him to write, in a creative act that at least latently seeks to emulate God's divine authorship. The text's at times strong theological penchant and Augustinian flavour substantiate such an interpretation. Still, even beyond the contradictions apparent in Reason's discourse and the insistent treatment of binarity throughout the text, Petrarch's writing remains befuddled, inconclusive, and duplicitous in and of itself. Still in the preface to *Adversity*, Petrarch alludes to the strife present even in the very act of writing:

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[262] "Il *De remediis* è un'immane *ars bene moriendi*, una guida alla buona morte costruita su un'implacabile ostentazione dell'effimero, una dolceamara commixtio di beni e mali ambivalenti che solo la memoria culta e la sapienza riescono a razionalizzare. L'inesausta schema contrastivo, la meccanica sequenza dei vizi e delle virtù con gli apposti rimedìa, la percussiva ossessione del sigillo stoico-cristiano apposto da Ratio alle follie, ai deliramenta delle quattro passioni, fanno del *De remediis* l'opera più medievale del Petrarca, nel senso di una proditoria, sistematica valorizzazione della rinuncia e dell'ascesi, anche a discapito di quella virus che, nella guerra contro Fortuna, aveva assunto, nell'*Africa* e nel *De viris* e nei *Rerum*, una funzione squisitamente umanistica" (Ariani, "Francesco Petrarca," 650-651).

[263] *Remedies for Adversity*, chapter 117: "Fear of Dying," vol. 3, 284.

> Think of the troubles encountered by those who compose the texts and those who write them. While due to their concentration on the subject the authors are forced to state many things inadequately, the scribes are kept from grasping what is said, first due to lack of intelligence, or, because of a giddy, wayward mind which always thinks of something else rather than what is at hand.[264]

His own work is shot through with the problems he outlines. Though he on the one hand recognizes the vastness of the topic he explores and aims to provide a necessarily limited approach to it, he on the other hand admits to betraying in practice the brevity he aspires to in theory.

First, he writes, "I could prolong this discourse with thousands of arguments. Yet, if you care to permit, as you did with Book I, that this letter serve as a prologue and be part of this work, I can readily see by how much this preface exceeds the scope of the book and that I must bridle my curiosity and restrain my pen."[265] Later, however, he claims, "I myself have not particularly aimed at brevity, nor at inclusiveness, but have set down in writing topics of practical life in the order in which they presented themselves to me, in hope that I would not vex the reader with inadequate treatment or too much detail."[266] Reading his 600-page treatise, it is difficult to determine which of these positions he ultimately holds – despite the massive length of the overall work, most individual dialogues within it are, as he purports, brief, curt, and pointed. In this respect, too, Petrarch is "neither here nor there," "neither two nor one."[267]

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[264] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 11.
[265] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 12.
[266] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 12.
[267] "due e nessun" (*The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Inferno* XXVI.77).

Another contradiction in Petrarch's writing appears at a much broader level: despite its bipartite structure and alleged internal form, Petrarch's *De remediis* read not so much as the dialogues he intends them to be, but rather as a prolonged and internally problem-ridden monologue spoken by Reason. In fact as Mann and others have pointed out, the interventions of Joy, Hope, Sorrow, and Fear are limited and limiting throughout *De remediis*: they generally consist of no more than variations on one phrase or idea repeated *ad nauseum* at sporadic intervals throughout Reason's speech. In this sense, none of the four passions are veritable interlocutors – their collective voice is never quite heard amidst Reason's ongoing and often superfluous babble. Though they certainly lend a further facet of duplicity to the *De remediis*' overarching structure, they are little more than ornaments to the flights of Reason's fancy – an idea contradictory in and of itself.

Arguably, despite his self-proclaimed intention to draft a contemporary remedy book, Petrarch never truly desires to reach this goal. Or, perhaps more accurately, his own spiritual and mental illness keeps him from doing so. In the preface to *Adversity*, he denies any interest in inclusiveness or conclusiveness: "I know that these are matters about which more or less can be said either way," he writes.[268] Later in "Sadness and Misery," he very explicitly draws on and addresses *aegritudo animi* – "the distress of the mind" – but offers no solution to or remedy for it. All he can say on the matter is:

> With respect to *aegritudo animi* – the distress of the mind, as the philosophers call it – how to get rid of it, and how to restore peace of mind, it is good to know what Cicero observed about the former on the third day of his Tusculan disputations and what Seneca said about the latter in the book that he wrote *de tranquillitate animi* – on tranquility

[268] Preface, *Remedies for Adversity*, vol. 3, 12.

> of mind. Yet, as I make haste to touch upon other matters before coming to the end, I shall not be able to include everything I would like to present here. For the time being, I have bandaged the wound and have pointed out the physicians for the mind, whose help you may seek if my words do not suffice. [269]

What, then, is Petrarch's purpose in conjuring, conceiving, and constructing a remedy-book – indeed intended and supposed to surpass others of its kind and of its period – if not to provide a concrete solution to the "wavering of the mind" the main cause of and inspiration behind it?

How, furthermore, in a book intended to be of use to his contemporaries rather than merely to expose his immense classical learning, can it suffice, only to "bandage the wound" of which he speaks and prescribe the advice of other "physicians" to heal it? What comes through about Petrarch in the *De* remediis, then, is, as Marco Ariani suggests, "una vera e propria psichomachia."[270] Clearly, Petrarch, even in his attempt to espouse reason and aspire upward toward divinity, falls severely short of his goal and, unqualified to fulfill his self-appointed mission, instead remains just as afflicted by his contrasting passions as the characters of his book.

When reading his *Rime sparse*, one might be tempted to attribute Petrarch's seemingly inherent fluctuation to a kind of frenzied love-sickness for Laura. Many, in fact, already have, and with good reason. Throughout *De remediis,* Reason repeatedly writes of love as a "particularly striking example of internal contradiction."[271] Irrespective of its effects on the mind, Reason speaks of love as "an invisible fire, a welcome wound, a savory poison, sweet bitterness, delectable affliction, delightful torment, alluring death."[272] It is impossible not to note the internal

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[269] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 93: "Sadness and Misery," vol. 3, 229.
[270] Ariani, "Francesco Petrarca," 648.
[271] Françon 267.
[272] *Remedies for Prosperity,* chapter 69: "Love Affairs," vol. 1, 197.

contradictions described: love is a "delightful torment" – the kind of illness for which Reason may accuse Sorrow of feeling *voluptas dolendi* or "delight in sorrowing."[273] In "Insomnia," Reason directly relates love to sickness:

> Sorrow: Sickness drives away my sleep.
>
> Reason: Recovery will bring it back.
>
> Sorrow: Love prevents my sleep.
>
> Reason: You have said the same thing twice. Love is a sickness – the greatest of all sicknesses.[274]

Similarly, in "Sexual Incontinence," she calls lust – an ignoble variant of Platonic love, to be sure – a "pestilential disease" "begotten by lethargy" that likens men subject to it to beasts.[275] Much in the same way in which *acedia* engenders the wavering of the mind that in several respects speaks to Petrarch's modernity, it is also the cause behind his excessive desire of Laura and his at times rational but at other times emotional attempts to come to terms with her distance from him - up to and including the ultimate distance caused by her death.

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[273] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 93: "Sadness and Misery," vol. 3, 224.
[274] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 86: "Insomnia," vol. 3, 202.
[275] *Remedies for Adversity,* chapter 110: "Sexual Incontinence," vol. 3, 261-262.

Chapter IV: *De Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*: Melancholy and *la Malattia d'amore*

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire,
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

-Robert Frost, "Fire and Ice," 1920.

Love is the undeniable keynote of Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and perhaps the most complex component – or, more accurately, consequence - of his disseminate melancholy. It is important, I think, here to recall antique and medieval accounts of love as the "hero's illness" engendered by the more general melancholy by which he is afflicted. This is no simple concept. The overwhelming scholarly treatment it has received in recent decades speaks to this fact.

In his book *La "malattia d'amore" dall'Antichità al Medioevo*, Massimo Ciavolella attempts concisely to recapitulate the major theories on the "illness of love" from the fifth century AD to the end of the Middle Ages. For the purpose of this study, at least, Ciavolella's analysis can be reduced – though perhaps unfairly – to the following key ideas: that *aegritudo amoris*[276] is a physical, spiritual, and mental condition that finds its roots in the theories of the humours (as treated by Galen, Hippocrates, and later Arab scientists)[277]; that Love is an illness of the "passions" and of the senses thereby inherently opposed to the Reason so insistently

[276] "the bitterness of love" – it is, I think, important to note the use of the word *aegritudo* when speaking of love in the context of melancholy: one might here recall the appearance of *aegritudo animis* among the facets of Cassian's *acedia* and Gregory's *tristitia.*
[277] Ciavolella 15.

propounded in *De remediis*[278]; that Love is, contradictorily, both a destructive and a regenerative force that in either case leads to man's almost total egotistical retreat into the self and away from both the beloved and society at large – the kind of "social exile" proper to the melancholic or to the *accidioso* of the *Secretum*.

These are precisely the issues at the heart of the major songs and sonnets of Petrarch's songbook. The importance of Love to the poet's literary development, identity, and lasting fame is evidenced by the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*'s noteworthy evolution. Unlike the *Secretum* and the *De remediis* each attributable to certain "periods" – even if disputed – of Petrarch's productivity, the *Canzoniere* is the poet's singular work of a lifetime. Begun in 1327, the year of Laura's first "apparition" at the church of Santa Chiara in Avignon, Petrarch's *Rime* would undergo numerous transformations, revisions, and editions before reaching what is today considered its final state as preserved in the 3195 manuscript at the Vatican Library. In fact, it would remain a work in progress, subject to constant reordering and restructuring up until July 18, 1374 – just one day prior to Petrarch's death.[279] Its composition, then, spans a period of 47 of the most important years of Petrarch's literary life.

During these 47 years, Laura, whether real or imagined, is the main impetus behind Petrarch's at least vulgar works.[280] She appears to be the major input to the literary "machine" of cause and effect, the output of which, however, is not principally Laura or even praise of her but, rather, the poet's autobiographical testament to his intensely personalized experience of his love for her, however complicated it may be. Otherwise stated, Laura is necessarily the external "object" of Petrarch's internal and subjective musings.

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[278] This idea is particularly central to the Church Fathers' interpretation of Love (Ciavolella 32).

[279] Ernest Hatch Wilkins has made several by now canonical contributions to Petrarchan studies and, more particularly, to the philological study and development of the *Canzoniere*. Among them is his article "The Evolution of the *Canzoniere* of Petrarch" first appearing in *PMLA*, vol. 63, no. 2 (1948): 412-455. There, he identifies the last phase of Petrarch's transcription of the *Canzoniere* as the period from 1373 to July 18, 1374 (447).

[280] See also Petrarch's *Trionfi*.

What Laura-object inspires in Petrarch-subject, on the one hand, is, to be sure, a veritable "love sickness," a "dolorosa sorte" – a painful curse – destructive in its insistence, immune to the distancing effects of flight, and irremediable.[281] It is, on the one hand, akin to the kind of humoural illness of which Ciavolella writes. In song 264, Petrarch claims his soul to be taken hostage by a "bitter thought" that "crushes with desire, yet feeds its hope; / On glorious, life-giving fame's account / Alone, it feels not when [he] freez[es] or blaz[es], / Or if [he is] wan and thin; / And if [he kills] it, stronger it's reborn."[282] In sonnet 216, he sings of a "tristo humor" – literally, a "sad (or melancholic) humour" – which "consumes" his eyes, causes him to cry both day and night, and, significantly, reduces him to the state of an animal.[283]

On the other hand, Petrarch's is an illness the description of which in several ways coincides with and corresponds to that caused by the noontide demon which, to recall, associated with somnolence and heaviness of the soul, was thought simultaneously to engender lethargy and restlessness, apathy and a call to action. In sonnet 81, Petrarch makes reference to an "enemy" – a "demon," as reads Dotti's note[284], elsewhere in the *Canzoniere* called or associated with Love. Petrarch writes:

> I am so tired under the ancient burden
>
> Of my faults and bad habits
>
> That I strongly fear to faint upon the way,

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[281] *RVF* 71: "Ahi dolorosa sorte, / lo star mi struggle, e 'l fuggir non m'aita. / Ma se maggior paura / non m'afrenasse, via corta et spedita / trarrebbe a fin questa aspra pena et dura; / et la colpa è di tal che non à cura" (40-45).

[282] *RVF* 264.55-63, trans. Wyatt Cook. The original Italian reads: "Da l'altra parte un pensier dolce et agro, / con faticosa et dilectevol salma / sedendosi entro l'alma, / preme 'l cor di desio, di speme il pasce; / che sol per fama gloriosa et alma / non sente quand'io agghiaccio, o quand'io flagro, / s'i' son pallido o magro; / et s'io l'occido più forte rinasce."

[283] "Tutto 'l dì piango; et poi la notte, quando / prendon riposo i miseri mortali, / trovami in pianto et raddoppiarsi i mali: / così spendo 'l mio tempo lacrimando. / In tristo humor vo li occhi consumando, / e 'l cor in doglia; et son fra li animali" (*RVF* 216.1-6).

[284] See note to *RVF* 81.4: "ch'i temo forte di mancar tra via, / e di cader in man del mio nemico." Dotti calls the "nemico" of which Petrarch writes "il demonio" (see: Francesco Petrarca, *Canzoniere*, ed. Ugo Dotti (Roma, Donzelli editore, 1996)).

And to fall into the hands of my enemy.[285]

Soon a great friend[286] came to liberate me

With the epitome of grace and the most ineffable courtesy:

Then flew so far from my sight,

That I strive in vain again to see him.[287]

Here recapitulated are the main tenets of the Church Fathers' concept of *acedia*: the weariness of the soul, its vulnerability to overwhelming desolation, the call to contemplation of God's good works, and the fundamental inability to consider them, all caused by the Love – a "demon" – in Petrarch's heart.

Petrarch again at least latently makes reference to the *acedia* of Evagrius and the Desert Fathers in sonnet 234. There, the "little room" or, in more medieval terms, "cell" that once provided refuge from daily storms, becomes the source of Petrarch-subject's nightly tears. The little bed which once brought him comfort, now bathed by the tears Love-Laura[288] inspires within him, seems cruel to him. Desperate and unable to find solace in his own thoughts and rest, he flees from himself, taking refuge in the "vulgar crowd"[289] for (paralyzing) fear of finding himself alone.[290] Here as in so many other niches of the *Canzoniere*, Petrarch finds himself in a double-bind, both troubled and moved by his surroundings and driven to opposite extremes of reaction.

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[285] Or, as Anthony Mortimer translates, underscoring still more heavily the "demon's" agency and Petrarch's subjectivity: "and fall a captive to my enemy" (see: Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, Selected Poems, trans. Anthony Mortimer (London, Penguin Books, 2002) 41).

[286] i.e., Jesus, by Dotti's note.

[287] "Io son sì stanco sotto 'l fascio antico / de le mie colpe et de l'usanza ria / ch'i temo forte di mancar tra via, / et di cader in man del mio nemico. / Ben evenne a dilivrarmi un grande amico / per somma et ineffabil cortesia; / poi volò fuor de la veduta mia, / sì ch'a mirarlo indarno m'affatico" (*RVF* 81. 1-8).

[288] Love and Laura are as commonly conflated throughout the *Canzoniere*, as Dotti points out in his commentary, as Laura and the "laurel" are.

[289] The contempt of the vulgar crowd is a theme explicitly and elaborately addressed in several dialogues of both *Remedies for Prosperity* and *Remedies for Adversity*.

[290] "O cameretta che già fosti un porto / a le gravi tempeste mie diurne, / fonte se' or di lagrime notturne, / che 'l dì celate per vergogna porto. / O letticiuol che requie eri et conforto / in tanti affanni, di che dogliose urne / ti bagna Amor, con quelle mani ebrune, / solo ver' me crudeli a sì gran torto! / Né pur il mio secreto e 'l mio riposo / fuggo,

This duplicity is the very basis of the *Canzoniere* – its most easily ascertainable and overtly explicit characteristic. Of course, as Petrarchan scholars have repeatedly pointed out, though its binarity or, perhaps more accurately, its variety is the *Canzoniere*'s most novel feature, the *topoi* and themes it alternately juxtaposes and quilts together are still fundamentally grounded in centuries of earlier verse. "Present in the *RVF* are, in fact, the various styles promulgated by medieval and dantesque rhetoric" writes Maurizio Vitale in his linguistic analysis of the *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta.*[291]

Though a thorough case will not be made of it here, Laura-object is herself a contradictory compendium of the objects of past poetic genres: she alternately finds her parallel in women of the courtly love tradition expressed by the Provencal troubadours[292] and in the *donne amate* of the *dolce stilnovo* stemming from Guinicelli but made more famous by Dante's *Vita Nuova*[293]. Examples of the internal contradiction she rouses within Petrarch-subject are various and innumerable. In "Di pensier in pensier, di monte in monte," Petrarch writes of a love that drives him both to laughter and to tears, a sentiment that both frightens and reassures him.[294] In sonnet 132, he writes of love as a "viva morte" (a living death), a "dilectoso male" (a delectable evil) which, even against his will, has such contrasting effects on him that he is left in

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ma più me stesso e 'l mio pensero, / che, seguendol, talor levommi a volo; / e 'l vulgo a me nemico et odioso / (chi 'l pensò mai?) per mio rifugio chero: / tal paura ò di ritrovarmi solo" (*RVF* 234).

[291] "Nei RVF sono infatti presenti i vari stili teorizzati dalla retorica medievale e dantesca. Intanto, lo stile *dolce* della più parte della poesia; poi lo stile *comico* dei duri sonetti" (Vitale 15).

[292] Arnaut Daniel is, of course, the most famous of the Provencal troubadours and a key source of inspiration for Petrarch when composing the *Canzoniere.* For examples of some conceits on which Petrarch chiefly draws, see Daniel's "L'aura amara," "Amors e jois e liocs e tems," "Autet e bas entrels prims fuoills," and "Er vei vermeils, vertz, blaus, blancs, groucs," as translated by Ezra Pound and later compiled in a critical edition by Charlotte Ward (*Pound's Translations of Arnaut Daniel: A Variorum Edition with Commentary from Unpublished Letters*, ed. Charlotte Ward (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991)).

[293] Calcaterra 15-16. See Dante Alighieri, *Vita nuova*, trans. Dino S. Cervini and Edward Vasta (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

[294] *RVF* 129: " et come Amor l'envita, / or ride, or piange, or temo, or s'assecura" (7-8).

a state of ambiguous desire, "shiver[ing] in the middle of summer, burning in the winter."[295] Sonnet 134 reads as a veritable song of opposites, each verse featuring at least one pair of mutually contradictory elements: peace and war, fear and hope[296], fire and ice[297]. Here, Petrarch-subject "see[s] without eyes, and [has] no tongue [but] screams,"[298] holding death and life in equal contempt.[299] This same ambivalence is again taken up in the *volta* of sonnet 173 where Petrarch describes himself or, more accurately, his soul, as being "through these two opposite and mixed extremes, / With longing frozen first and then aflame, / ... between wretchedness and bliss."[300] Here, it is Laura-"petrosa"[301], the spurnful woman of the courtly love tradition, who drives Petrarch to desperation; it is the Laura-*stilnovista*,[302] the "sweet angel" the very sight and sound of whom leads to instant communion with the divine, who moves him to aspire to greater spiritual heights.

Readers of Petrarch's *De remediis* – as discussed, a heavy-handed treatise on moral philosophy – may be surprised to find very little (if indeed any) evidence of Reason reigning over

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[295] It is worthwhile, I think, here to transcribe the entire sonnet: "S'amor non è, che dunque è quel ch'io sento? / Ma s'egli è amor, perdio che cosa et quale? / Se bona, onde l'effecto aspro mortale? / Se ria, onde sì dolce tormento? / S'a mia voglia ardo, onde 'l pianto e lamento? / S'a mal mio grido, il lamentar che vale? / O viva morta, o dilectoso male, / come puoi tanto in me, s'io nol consento? / Et s'io 'l consento, a gran torto mi doglio. / Fra sì contrari vènti in frale barca / mi trovo in alto mar senza governo, / sì lieve di saver, d'error sì carca / ch'i medesimo non so quel ch'io mi voglio, / e tremo a mezza state, ardendo il verno." (*RVF* 132).

[296] A necessary binary also discussed in *De remediis utriusque fortunae*. See also *RVF* 252.1-3: "In dubbio di mio stato, or piango or canto, / et temo et spero; et in sospiri e 'n rime / sfogo il mio incarco".

[297] See also *RVF* 52.7-8: "tal che mi fece, or quand'egli arde 'l cielo, / tutto tremar d'un amoroso gielo" and *RVF* 202 1-2: "D'un bel chiaro polito et vivo ghiaccio / move la fiamma che m'incende et strugge."

[298] "Pace non trovo, et non ò da far guerra; / e temo, et spero; et ardo, et son un ghiaccio; / et volo sopra 'l cielo, e giaccio in terra; / et nulla stringo, et tutto 'l mondo abbraccio. / Tal m'à in pregion, che non m'apre né serra, / né per suo mi ritien né scoglie il laccio; / et non m'ancide Amore, et non mi sferra, / né mi vuol vivo, né mi trae d'impaccio. / Veggio senz'occhi, et non ò lingua et grido; / et bramo di perir, et cheggio aita; / et ò in odio me stesso, et amo altrui. / Pascomi di dolor, piangendo rido; / egualmente mi spiace morte et vita: / in questo stato son, donna, per voi." (*RVF* 134).

[299] See also *RVF* 36.8, "mezzo rimango, lasso, et mezzo il varco," and *RVF* 23.89, "mezzo tutto quel dì tra vivo et morto."

[300] *RVF* 173.9-11, trans. James Wyatt Cook (New York: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995) 227. The original Italian reads: "Per questi extremi duo contrary et misti, / or con voglie gelate, or con accese / stassi così fra misera et felice." See also *RVF* 110: Here, the vision of Laura brings Petrarch "salute" or health, despite the pain which his love of her causes him.

[301] See, for instance, *RVF* 44, 45, 49, 60, 174.

[302] See, for instance, *RVF* 13, 61, 72, 90, 94; the description of Laura is more akin to Dante's depiction of Beatrice in the entire second part – *In morte* – of the *Canzoniere*.

Passion in the duplicitous and contradictory poems of the *Canzoniere.* In fact, for all intents and purposes, Reason here stands in a necessarily antagonistic position to the very passions – or the all-encompassing and more abstract "Passion" – governing the collection. The theory of the "passions" dates back centuries, enjoys a rich history, and still today remains a matter of intellectual debate. *Storia delle passioni*, an anthology of essays on the passions compiled and edited by Silvia Vegetti Finzi, discusses the passions in both synchronic and diachronic fashions, not only relaying the history of their evolution and its more classical literary treatment, but also speaking to their abstract significance and philosophical relevance to contemporary art.

In his essay "Esistenza e passione,"[303] Sergio Moravia speaks of passion, historically and conceptually, as both a physical and emotional phenomenon[304] realised only in the essential encounter with the "other," which makes of it simultaneously the subjective experience of some human being, and its subsequent "objective" expression to a third party through Art or Logos. "In a certain sense," writes Moravia, "passion is an incessant coming-and-going between the "I" and the "Other," between subjectivity and objectivity, between finitude and its apparent opposite."[305] As something that both animates and deconstructs,[306] that is both strengthening and weakening, passive and active, and that both condones listlessness and inspires social (or other) engagement,[307] it is forcedly contradictory to the integrity of strait-laced Reason.

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[303] "Existence and Passion" – S. Moravia, "Esistenza e passione," *Storia della passioni*, ed. Silvia Vegetti Finzi (Roma: Laterza, 1995) 3-38.
[304] It is, he writes, "anzitutto un *sentimento* variamente intenso, tenace, profondo" (Moravia 19).
[305] "In un certo senso la passione è un incessante andirivieni: tra l'Io e l'altro, tra la soggettività e l'oggettività, tra la finitudine e il suo apparente contrario" (Moravia 38).
[306] "La passione, se da un lato anima e vivifica, dall'altro scardina e decostruisce" (Moravia 22).
[307] "Cortocircuito di contrari, la passione è insieme *passività* e *attività*: nella passione 'ci si lascia andare', ci si consegna a qualcosa che si sente assolutamente sovrastante e irresistibile. Ma nella passione, anche, si risponde positivamente a una Chiamata: vi si risponde con una mobilitazione generale delle nostre energie" (Moravia 23).

At least classically, it was considered an illness of the soul, treated as such most notably, of course, by Plato,[308] and again associated with the theory of the humours: though thought proper to the "choleric" it was nevertheless believed to be conditioned by an excess of black rather than yellow bile. Important to a reading of the melancholic, it was also thought to render its subject "'double and multiple' … to be brief, outside himself"[309] and outside of the society to which he theoretically belongs. Still within Finzi's collection, Mariateresa Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri calls *love* the "passione assoluta" – or the absolute variant among Passion's several manifestations – and traces its occurrence and significance in theological, historical, and literary texts from Plato onwards. Most salient to an analysis of Petrarch is her interpretation of Saint Augustine's concept of amorous passion, itself based on that of Saint Paul's, as a "sentiment which takes hold of us, … an impurity of the spirit far from the 'sacred way of love' of which Saint Paul speaks. … Passion is born, then, of a perverse or ill-oriented will, [and is] denoted by negativity, darkness, formlessness and, above all, by a fundamental lack of judgment or moderation."[310] This lack of moderation is felt carnally, at the level of instinctual and corporeal desires. For Petrarch (perhaps more so than for his contemporaries), it is the very antithesis to the Reason that sets man apart from beasts and other creatures in the larger apparatus to which he belongs.

Not surprisingly, the opposition between Love-Passion and Reason runs rampant throughout the *Canzoniere.* In sonnet 6, Petrarch calls his desire (*desio*) "folle" – crazy, frenzied -

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[308] According to Ciavolella, Paul of Eginete also considered love "una malattia di carattere mentale, una passione dell'anima occasionata da uno stato di violenta emozione della ragione" (52).

[309] "doppio e molteplice' … insomma fuori di sè" (Mario Vegetti, "Passioni antiche: L'io collerico," *Storia delle passioni*, 39-73, 44).

[310] "Cosa è la passione dunque per Agostino? 'E' un sentimento che ci prende, è una impurità dello spirito lontano dalla 'via sovrana dell'amore' di cui parla Paolo'. … La passione nasce dunque da una volontà perversa, ossia mal orientata, segnata dalla negatività, dalle tenebre, dall'informe e soprattutto dalla mancanza di misura" (see Mariateresa Fumagalli Beonio Brocchieri, "L'amore passione assoluta," *Storia delle passioni*, 75-100, 78: here Brocchieri makes reference, within her quote, to Saint Paul: 1 Corinthians 12, 31).

and "traviato" – off-path, because out of the line of reason.[311] In sonnet 211, Petrarch very self-consciously recognizes April 6, 1327 – the date he first lays eyes on Laura – as the definitive moment in which he lets himself fall subject to the impulse of the passions:

> Will spurs me forth, Love guides me and directs,
> My pleasure pulls me, Custom drives me on,
> Hope flatters and revives me, stretches forth
> Her right hand to my heart, indeed worn out.
> That poor wretch seizes it, and takes no note
> Of our unseeing and unfaithful guide.
> My senses dominate, my reason's dead:
> From one misled desire another springs.
> Sweet words and Virtue, Honor, noble deeds,
> And beauty in fair branches have set me
> Where, bird-limed, gently my heart's been ensnared.
> In thirteen hundred twenty-seven, just at
> The first hour – April sixth the day – into
> The labyrinth I stepped; I see no gate.[312]

His privileging of his worldly appetite is clear from the outset of the sonnet: "Desire" perhaps more than just "will," "pushes me forward, Love shows me the way, / Pleasure drags me forth,

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[311] See Dotti, commentary to *RVF* 6.1.

[312] Such reads Wyatt Cook's translation of *RVF* 211. The original Italian reads: "Voglia mi sprona, Amor mi guida et scorge, /Piacer mi tira, Usanza mi trasporta, /Speranza mi lusinga et riconforta / et la man destra al cor già stanco porge; / e 'l misero la prende, et non s'accorge / di nostra cieca et disleale scorta: / regnano i sensi, et la ragion è morta; / de l'un vago desio l'altro risorge. / Vertute, Honor, Bellezza, atto gentile, / dolci parole ai be' rami m'àn giunto / ove soavemente il cor s'invesca. / Mille trecento ventisette, a punto / su l'ora prima, il dì sesto d'aprile, / nel labirinto intrai, né veggio ond'esca."

and I am moved by Custom" he writes, "the senses reign, and reason is dead." The vision of Laura has induced him to enter an amorous labyrinth from which he sees no way out.[313]

In fact, it is in the vision of Laura – both in Petrarch-subject's vision of her and in her vision of him – that the necessary link between Love, the passions, reason, melancholy, *acedia*, and modernity can be drawn. By Ciavolella's account, love is a *dolce malattia*,[314] a sweet illness of the passions, which finds entrance through the eyes and is then disseminated to the heart and to the body by means of the senses.[315] According to Arab philosopher Avicenna, love is an "absurd *thought*, melancholic in nature, born of the constant contemplation of the beauty, features, gests, or habits of a given person of the opposite sex."[316]

The love-passion by which Petrarch is afflicted is precisely of this kind. The objective "eye" – by now almost always, and indeed, here, too, associated with the poetic "I" – both Laura's and Petrarch's - finds its way into almost every poem of the *Canzoniere* and entirely pervades its atmosphere. In sonnet 140, Love lives and reigns in the poet's *thought*, but holds its throne in his *heart*.[317] Though it refuses, after a point, to make itself manifest externally on the poet's face, it persists in its internal torment.[318] This same condition is expressed much earlier in the collection, albeit in "Era il giorno ch'al sol si scoloraro," a sonnet believed to have been written still later in Petrarch's life (and, in fact, after Laura's death).[319] Here, Petrarch-subject is "taken", unbeknownst to himself, by the "be' occhi" – beautiful eyes – of his desired object.

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[313] Translation mine.
[314] Ciavolella 98.
[315] "Questa passione entra attraverso gli occhi e viene poi portata al cuore tramite gli altri sensi" (Ciavolella 99).
[316] "Avicenna definisce l'amore come un pensiero assurdo di natura malinconico, che nasce a causa del continuo pensare e ripensare alla bellezza, alle fattezze, ai gesti, o ai costumi di una data persona di sesso opposto" (Ciavolella 59), italics mine.
[317] "Amor, che nel pensier mio vive et regna / e 'l suo seggio maggior nel mio cor tene," (*RVF* 140.1-2).
[318] "Onde Amor spaventoso fugge al core, / lasciando ogni sua impresa, et piange, et trema; / ivi s'asconde, et non appar più fore. / Che poss'io far, temendo il mio signore, / se non star seco infin a l'ora extrema?" (*RVF* 140.9-13).
[319] Dotti, following Wilkins' studies, dates sonnet 140 between 1345 and 1347, during one of Petrarch's several "solitary phases" at Vaucluse. Sonnet 3 he dates April 6, 1349 – precisely one year following Laura's death to the Black Plague.

Unaware of the tremendous pain and exhaustion they would cause him, he indulges his senses and permits himself to watch, to look, and to go on his way unsuspecting of any discomfort.[320] Tellingly, "Trovommi Amor del tutto disarmato," he writes, "et aperta la via per gli occhi al core" ("Love found me unarmed / and opened the way to [my] heart through [my] eyes").[321]

This is to say nothing, of course, of the "sguardo" of the *donna cortese*, the glance that, in accordance with the duplicity of love as a passion, simultaneously gives and takes away.[322] Sonnet 39, to cite only one example, gives a succinct representation of such a concept: "I so fear the assault from the beautiful eyes / in which Love and my death reside, / that I flee from them like a child from the whipping rod," writes Petrarch.[323] Here again, the pain or, more pointedly, the fear he experiences derives directly from the eyes of the object he beholds and admires. In them are contained two conflicting forces: Love – or, more provocatively, life – and death; it is contemplation of their beauty that reduces the poet to the state of a child, unable effectively to express himself, and eager to take flight.[324]

Sonnet 94 provides another strikingly pronounced occurrence of the theme:

> When through my eyes into my inmost heart
> There comes that ruling image, all else thence
> Departs, and so those powers the soul bestows
> Desert the limbs, as if they were fixed weights;
> And then from that first miracle, sometimes

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[320] "i' fui preso, et non me ne guardai, / chè i be' vostr'occhi, donna, mi legaro. / Tempo non mi parea da far riparo / contra colpi d'Amor: però m'andai / secur, senza sospetto; onde i miei guai / nel comune dolor s'incominciaro" (*RVF* 3.3-8).
[321] *RVF* 3.9-10.
[322] See, for instance, *RFV* 9, 11.
[323] "Io temo sì de' begli occhi l'assalto / ne' quali Amore et la mia morte alberga, / ch'i' fuggo lor come fanciul la verga" (*RVF* 39.1-3).
[324] The reduction of the poet to a state of "ineptitude" will be discussed in greater detail further ahead in the larger context of Petrarch's self-conscious attempt, through the act of writing, to construct an autobiographical chronicle of his love-experiences, real or imagined.

The next is born, because the banished power,
In fleeing from itself, comes to a place
That takes revenge, and makes its exile blithe.
Thus in two faces one dead hue appears
Because the strength that proved they were alive
In neither one remains where once it was.
And this I was recalling on that day
When I observed two lovers' faces change
And grow to look as mine does usually.[325]

Packed into fourteen of the *Canzoniere*'s most compelling verses are, I think, all of the themes central to a melancholic reading of Petrarch-subject's love.[326] The first two verses speak directly to Love-Laura's entrance to Petrarch's heart through his eyes and to its (or her) capacity to obliterate any and all "distractions" external to the couple's shared gaze. So markedly stricken by this unexpected encounter, the lover – Petrarch-subject – is here drained of all his life forces which, leaving him, find joyful refuge in the desired – Laura-object. Divested of his strength, he assumes the pallid and frail air of the melancholic lover. Meanwhile, in the desired, the lover and the beloved merge into one single being; their vital spirits become indistinguishable from each other.

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[325] *RVF* 94, trans. Wyatt Cook, 141. The original Italian reads: "Quando giugne agli occhi al cuor profondo / L'imagin donna, ogni altra indi si parte, / et le vertù che l'anima comparte / lascian le membra, quasi immobil pondo. / Et del primo miracolo il secondo / nasce talor, che la scacciata parte / da se stessa fuggendo arriva in parte / che fa vendetta e 'l suo exilio giocondo. / Quinci in duo volti un color morto appare, / perché 'l vigor che vivi gli mostrava / da nessun lato e più là dove stava. / E di questo in quel dì mi ricordava, / ch'i vidi duo amanti trasformare, / e far quel io mi soglio in vista fare."

[326] It is important, I think, to note, moreover, sonnet 94's strong borrowing from the literary tradition of the Provencal poets and troubadours (see Dotti, vol. I,, 284).

Here as in almost every poem in some way dealing with the eyes (both of the beholder and of the beheld) is the necessary meeting of the One – or the I – with the Other.[327] Petrarch's love is born of his physical perception (and, later, mental conception) of Laura. At least superficially, it appears to be validated exclusively by her existence and by her ability to reciprocate his gaze with her own. Of no small note, however, is the fact that throughout the *Rime*, Laura and her gaze remain external to Petrarch: try as he might, he ultimately fails to internalize her or properly to understand and interpret her. Laura speaks with her eyes, with her face, with her assumed virtue, but she has no voice. In sonnet 123, she is diminished to – or exalted as – an "angelica vista," an angelic *look* who with downcast eyes speaks unpronounced and unvoiced words: "Chinava a terra il bel guardo gentile, / et tacendo dicea, come a me parve: Chi m'allontana il mio fedele amico?"[328] Though Petrarch in several instances converses with Love or Pain in the *Canzoniere*, he never once directly dialogues with Laura. Instead, she remains the external object of his *voyeurism*, and inspires him only detachedly and from a safe distance.[329]

Essentially, Laura first isolates Petrarch within himself and away from society. In such a state, he comes to prefigure the social recluse of Romantic literary melancholy. Love governs him to such a degree that he is reduced to less than half of his original state,[330] and goes about his

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[327] For Augustinian and Hegelian interpretations of "Otherness" and of the essential codependence and coexistence of "self" and "other" for the understanding of either, see L. Vander Kerken, S.J., *Loneliness and Love*, Translated with a foreward by J. Donceed, S.J. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1967).

[328] *RVF* 123.12-14.

[329] See, for instance, *RVF* 100: here Petrarch thinks back on his observation of Laura in several of her usual and solitary states and on the emotions they rouse within him; each party remains distinctly detached from the other. While the first two quatrains describe Laura, the sestet beginning with the volta at verse 9 concentrates more exclusively on Petrarch.

[330] See note to *RVF* 79.7, Dotti 252.

business from day to day so concealed from society, literally so "closed off"[331] from the world that no one even notices his discomfort:

> Love, with whom I never share my thoughts,
> Under whose yoke I hardly ever breathe,
> So rules me that I'm less than half myself
> Since my eyes turn so often toward my bane.
> Thus I go weakening from day to day
> So privately that [only] I alone can see.[332]

His social isolation is made still more explicit in sonnet 169. Here, Petrarch writes of being "Pien d'un vago pensier," full of passionate thought (implicitly about Laura), that keeps him far from the others, or, more literally, sets him "off the path"[333] of his neighbours, and leaves him to navigate the world alone.[334] Outcast from the public sphere, at least in Avignon, Petrarch remains in the grips of Love who holds him hostage, in chains.[335] Even when freed from the sight of Laura, however, he finds himself contemplating her beauty. In his distant solitude at Vaucluse, just like the melancholic hesitant or perhaps unable to shake his malady, Petrarch-subject looks to the past and declares that former state in which he remained shackled in Love's prison to be more enjoyable to his countryside liberty.[336]

Laura – or, rather, Petrarch's love of her – does more than cut him off from society; it makes him a stranger even to himself. This idea is expressed several times throughout the

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[331] "closed off" here refers specifically to the word "chiusamente" (*RVF* 79.10).
[332] *RVF* 79.5-10, trans. Wyatt Cook, 129. The original Italian reads: "Amor, con cui pensier mai non amezzo, / sotto 'l giogo già mai non respiro, / tal mi governa, ch'I non son già mezzo, / per gli occhi ch'al mio mal sì spesso giro. / Così mancando vo di giorno in giorno, / sì chiusamente, ch'i sol me ne accorgo."
[333] This translation makes specific reference to the original Italian "desvia."
[334] "Pien d'un vago pensier che me desvia / da tutti gli altri, e fammi al mondo ir solo" (*RVF* 169.1-2).
[335] See *RVF* 89 and Dotti's note to verse 1: "Fuggendo la pregione ove Amor m'ebbe / molt'anni a far di me quel ch'a lui parve, / donne mie, lungo fora a ricontarve" (1-3).
[336] "Oimè, il giogo e le catene e i ceppi / eran più dolci che l'andare sciolto" (*RVF* 89.10-11).

Canzoniere in a typical division of body and soul and the still more common *topoi* of the soul of the lover leaving his body and finding itself in the "Other:" "Love, with those flattering promises of his, / To my old prison brought me back once more, / And gave the keys to her, my enemy, / Who keeps me yet in exile from myself."[337] Here, Laura holds the key to the prison where Petrarch finds himself extracted not only from his immediate surroundings, but stripped of his very essence – a condition he feels still more acutely and at a rather physical level much earlier in the *Canzoniere*. In sonnet 15, he writes of the great burden he feels carrying around the dead weight of his empty body. "How can these limbs live far from the spirit which animates them?" he asks of Love. "Don't you remember that this is the privilege of lovers, loosened from all human characteristics?"[338] Love asks in turn. The implications are clear: Petrarch-subject suffers from a love-sickness that gives rise to the exile and alienation felt by and proper to the medieval *accidioso* and the modern melancholic. Accompanied only by Love, with whom he forever debates, Petrarch-object, "Alone in thought with lagging paces slow, / … wander[s] measuring the barren fields"[339] neither acting nor reacting to his surroundings, if not to take flight from them.

In many ways, Laura, paradoxically, is the virile counterpart to Petrarch-object's blatant weakness. In her presence, he, at least as subject of his poetry, fails to speak, fails to act or constructively to interact with her in any way. In his paralysis at the sight of her and at the conflicting emotions it rouses within him, he partakes in literary traditions both already preexisting and forthcoming: he at once resembles both the tragic "hero" susceptible to an

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[337] "Amor con sue promesse lusingando / mi ricondusse a la prigione antica, / et die' le chiavi a quella mia nemica / ch'anchor me di me stesso tene in bando" *RVF* 76.1-4, trans. Wyatt Cook, 127.

[338] "Talor m'assale in mezzo a' tristi pianti / un dubbio: come posson queste membra / da lo spirito lor viver lontane? / Ma rispondemi Amor: Non ti rimembra / che questo è il privilegio degli amanti, / sciolti da tutte qualitati humane?" (*RVF* 15.9-14).

[339] *RVF* 35.1-2, trans. Wyatt Cook. The original Italian reads, "Solo et pensoso i più deserti campi / vo misurando a passi tardi et lenti."

overcharge of black bile and its resulting melancholy, and the much later Romantic figure who, as Jean Starobinski suggests, becomes so overtaken by passion and desire that, prone to recklessness, he fails to take ownership of his own actions.[340]

Importantly, the "emasculation" both Petrarch and the characters about which Starobinski writes experience derives yet again from the eyes –the *look,* the gaze – of the beloved, and has an ostensibly paralyzing effect on their *artistic* as well as social endeavours – on both their tongues and their hands. Petrarch preliminarily explores this idea in sonnet 169. Here, Petrarch-subject is arrested at the sight of Laura and at first completely unable to approach her. When he finally decides to make his love-discomfort known to her, however, he still remains unable to formulate the necessary words to do so:

> So wicked and so sweet I see her pass
> That my soul quakes to lift itself in flight,
> Such is the troop of armed sighs she conducts,
> This beauteous foe of Love's, and mine as well …
> Then I gird up my soul; yet when I have
> Resolved almost to tell her of my ill,
> So much have I to say, I dare not start.[341]

Trembling and afraid, Petrarch-subject remains mute and passive before his imposing muse. The linguistic and expressive stalemate observable here is still more present in the following sonnet assumed to have been written as the natural extension of the previous.[342] There, Laura's eyes

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[340] "Chez Racine, la passion et le désir commandent tout. Une étrange faiblesse, un aveuglement fatal empêchant les héros de dominer pleinement leurs actes » (Jean Starobinski, *L'œil vivant* (Paris : Gallimard, 1961)19).
[341] "veggiola passer sì dolce et ria / che l'alma trema per levarsi a volo, / tal d'armati sospir' conduce stuolo / questa bella d'Amor nemica, et mia … / allor raccolgo l'alma, et poi ch'i aggio / di scoprirle il mio mal preso consiglio, / tanto gli ò a dir, che 'ncominciar non oso," (*RVF* 169.5-8, 12-14, trans. Wyatt Cook, 225).
[342] See Dotti's commentary to *RVF* 170, 495.

weaken Petrarch-subject's thoughts – "Fanno poi gli occhi suoi mio penser vano."[343] His every fortune, every curse, his every blessing, every evil, his life and his death in *Laura's* very *hands*,[344] Petrarch-subject "could never form a word / understood by any other than [him]self."[345] His tongue is bound, its customarily animating force gone,[346] and he is left unable effectively to communicate his confusion.

Though Petrarch-subject is seemingly expressively stillborn and unable to move his tongue, it is in the act of writing, the act of moving his *hand* that Petrarch-poet again here transcribes his assumedly personal experience to paper intentionally for a broad readership. Though Laura herself remains mute and her gaze symbolic, Petrarch, like the later Romantics, transforms *his* "regard" into "parole": his cognitive and conceptual experience becomes literary[347] and, at least in the *Canzoniere*, takes the concrete shape of an evolved and sustained "progetto dell'io lirico." Otherwise stated, in the act of writing, Petrarch's gaze turns inward, even if the resulting literary product is directed to a large audience. As Carlo Calcaterra suggests, "the 'I,' for Petrarch, was an inspiration no less essential than Laura."[348] Since Petrarch's "real life was entirely within himself" and his experience of it an intensely personal internalization of his social surroundings and private circumstances,[349] his *Canzoniere* is a bipartite and self-reflexive *text*[350] – and infinite and unclassifiable network of overlapping signifiers brought into

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[343] *RVF* 170.5.
[344] "perch'ogni mia fortuna, ogni mia sorte, / mio ben, mio male, et mia vita, et mia morte, / quei che solo il po' far, l'à posto in mano" (*RVF* 170.6-8).
[345] "Ond'io non potè' mai formar parola / ch'altro che da me stesso fosse intesa" (*RVF* 170.9-10).
[346] "Et veggi' or ben che caritate accesa / lega la lingua altrui, gli spirti invola: / chi po' dir com'egli arde, è 'n picciol foco" (*RVF* 170.13-14).
[347] For the importance of this idea to the later Romantic poets, see Starobinki, *L'oeil vivant* p. 12. Here, discussing *Racine*, Starobinski writes, "le regard veut devenir parole, il consent à perdre la faculté de percevoir immédiatement, pour acqurérir le don de fixer plus durablement ce qui le fuit. »
[348] "l'io fu nel Petrarca ispirazione non meno essenziale che Laura" (Calcaterra 19).

[349] "la sua vera vita fu tutta al di dentro di sé" (De Sanctis 294).
[350] "Text" here is to be read in a Barthesian sense as expounded in "From Work to Text," *Image-Music-Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 155-64.

signification by both surrounding texts and their readers - necessarily and unavoidably focused on *himself* as subject rather than on Laura as object.[351]

Petrarch's modernity, therefore, lies not only in the duplicitous form, structure, and content of the *Canzoniere*, but in the emphasis on the self occurring in the very passage from "sguardo" to "logos" – from Laura's gaze to Petrarch's word. That Petrarch's is an "egotistical" collection is clear from its opening sonnet. Here, Petrarch, calling on "you that hear in scattered rhymes the sound / of sighs on which [he] used to feed [his] heart" directly addresses his readership and calls to their attention not the cause of his discomfort, but its very existence. *He* is at the center of his literary project. As much is clear by the insistent repetition of his presence which he weaves into verse 11 of the sonnet: "di me medesmo meco mi vergogno,"[352] writes Petrarch. As Anthony Mortimer translates, "and in myself my self I put to shame."[353] In both the original Italian and its translated English, Petrarch's tri-fold repetition of "myself", "my", "I" leaves no doubt as to the focus of the sonnet and, in turn, of his songbook as a whole. In fact, Laura, the purported inspiration behind the *Canzoniere* is nowhere explicitly mentioned in these fourteen verses which, as an introduction to the others, objectively set the tone for what is to follow.

Petrarch's centrality to his own work is strongly felt again in song 23 which reads rather like a story narrated in the first person than as a poem. In the first fourteen verses here, Petrarch frames the rest of the canzone, as if providing its preamble:

I'll sing how once I lived in liberty

While in my dwelling place Love was disdained.

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[351] See Stefano Agosti, *Gli occhi le chiome. Per una lettura psicoanalitica del* Canzoniere *di Petrarca* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1993) for the conflation, doubling, and overlap of subject and object in the *RVF*.
[352] *RVF* 1.11.
[353] Mortimer 3.

Next I shall tell how scorn vexed Love too sorely;
Recount, in turn, what chance befell and why,
How I was made a warning to the world.
Although elsewhere my torture
Cruel is penned – indeed it's wearied now
A thousand quills – in almost every vale
The sound of my grave sighs reverberates
And testifies my life is full of pain.[354]

Of course, it is well-known by this point that Laura is the unspecified cause behind Petrarch's love-sickness and melancholy. What he chooses to emphasise at a poetic and extra-narrative level, however, is his act of writing about it rather than any particular attribute of his beloved. In fact, later in this now universally-recognised poem of "transformations," Petrarch assumes the shape of the laurel, the tree associated, of course, with Laura (in the typical Laura-lauro dichotomy) but also, and more pointedly, with poetic achievement. In so doing, he clearly privileges his detached quest for poetic fame to any of Laura's supposed virtues or, at the very least, transposes himself onto her – in all her splendour – in such a way as to inextricably link her to his undertakings: Laura in some way loses any inherent grandeur and becomes significant only in her association with the laurel, with the poetry she inspires. Though she loses nothing of her effect on the poet, in absolute terms, her agency is nevertheless necessarily and inevitably authored by Petrarch and, consequently, in some way diminished.

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[354] "canterò com'io vissi in libertade, / mentre Amor nel mio albergo a sdegno s'ebbe. / Poi seguirò sì come a lui ne 'ncrebbe / troppo altamente, e che di ciò m'avenne, /di ch'io son facto a molta gente esempio: / benché 'l mio duro scempio /sia scripto altrove, sì che mille penne / ne son già stanche, et quasi in ogni valle / rimbombi il suon de' miei gravi sospiri, / ch'acquistan fede a la penosa vita," (*RVF* 23.5-14, trans. Wyatt Cook, 47).

Throughout the *Canzoniere*, in fact, Laura's main purpose to Petrarch-poet is to underline the very poetic accomplishment he claims to lack. The most explicit conflation of Laura-object and Laura-lauro (or the Laura of Petrarch's poetic inspiration and motivation) occurs in sonnet 5. Here, the thought of Laura simultaneously inspires Petrarch to write, gives him the strength to do so, and reminds him of his unarguable inferiority in attaining this end. Most interesting about this sonnet, however, is the fragmented but still very conspicuous appearance – twice – of LAU-RE-(TA), a variant of "Laura-lauro" in the main body of the composition.[355] By inserting her name into his description of the effect she produces (which he would again do repeatedly and most saliently in "Erano i capei d'oro a l'aura sparsi"[356]), he subjugates her to his poetry and frames her exclusively in the context of his personal experience.[357]

Petrarch takes a similar stance in sonnet 20. There, though Petrarch-subject often parts his lips to speak – "Più volte già per dir le labbra apersi"[358] – thoughts of Laura, remembrances of their first encounters, mute him. "Several times I began writing verses: / but the pen and the hand and the intellect / were defeated by [my] very first attempt," writes Petrarch.[359] The irony present in both cases is glaringly obvious: though Petrarch-subject humiliates himself before his beloved, Petrarch-poet rises above her. The literary consequence of her inspiration is a hermetically-sealed account of his very poetic trials and achievements.

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[355] *RVF* 5: "Quando io movo i sospiri a chiamar voi, / e 'l nome che nel cor mi scrisse Amore, / LAUdando s'incomincia udir di fore / il suon de' primi dolci accenti suoi. / Vostro stato REal, che 'ncontro poi, / raddoppia a l'alta impresa il mio valore; / ma: TAci, grida il fin, ché farle honore / è d'altri homeri soma che da' tuoi. / Così LAUdare et REverire insegna / la voce stessa, pur ch'altri vi chiami, / o d'ogni reverenza et d'onor degna: / se non che forse Apollo si disdegna / ch'a parlar de' suoi sempre verdi rami / lingua mortal presumptuosa vegna."

[356] *RVF* 90.

[357] For more on the effects of Laura's very name on Petrarch (though more explicitly in the context of the *Trionfi*), see Maria Cecilia Bertolani's *Il corpo glorioso* p. 131: "Francesco è dunque prigioniero sia della bellezza del nome che di quella del corpo: entrambi esercitano sul poeta lo stesso fascino dolorosa, sostanziati come sono di splendore e caducità."

[358] *RVF* 20.9.

[359] *RVF* 20.12-14: "Più volte incominciai di scriver versi: / ma la penna et la mano et l'intellecto / rimaser vinti nel primier assalto."

As Marco Ariani suggests, there is a necessary distinction to be drawn between the act of writing and the written word. Petrarch's *word* itself is a pastiche of medieval and earlier *topoi*. The *act* of writing is a "self-conscious operation,"[360] an ironic reflection on his incapacity to produce language in Laura's presence by doing just that away from her, and by doing it in new and groundbreaking ways.[361]

Despite his love-sickness, or perhaps, better, *because* of it, Petrarch never tires of talking about Laura, about her face, her hair, her "begli occhi."[362] His voice calls out her name day and night and his feet – both corporeal and, more importantly, poetic – though tired of chasing her shadow, continue still. From thence comes the ink, the sheets he covers with verses in her honour, albeit centered on his internalized experience of her.[363] To compound the various elements discussed in a more succinct fashion, Petrarch's *Canzoniere* reads as a self-centered, self-conscious, and therefore modern collection of poems describing the subjective experience of a poet who, afflicted by Love, an illness of the passions caused by or in some way linked to melancholy, unavoidably retreats into himself and only in the act of writing attempts to relieve his suffering.

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[360] Marco Ariani, introduzione, *Trionfi* (Milano: Mursia editore, 1998) 23-24.
[361] Ariani "Francesco Petrarca" 694.
[362] *RVF* 74.5-6.
[363] "omai la lingua e 'l suono dì et notte chiamando il vostro nome; / et che' pie' miei non sono ficcati et lassi / a seguir l'orme vostre in ogni parte / perdendo inutilmente tanti passi; / et onde vien l'enchiostro, onde le carte / ch'i'vo empiendo di voi" (*RVF* 74.7-13).

Conlcusion

For Petrarch, in fact, *writing* is both a therapeutic outlet for *acedia* (fathered by "classic" melancholy) – under its various representations – and the artistic manifestation of its very existence. As seen much earlier, by the time Petrarch begins writing in the early 14th century, *acedia* as both a concept and a theological vice had already undergone several transformations and assumed numerous versions, some existing contemporaneously, both religious and secular. Each variant with which he came into contact not only receives extensive treatment in the works here previously discussed, but runs as the *filo conduttore* – latent or otherwise – through his *oeuvre* as a whole. In the *Secretum*, Petrarch's *acedia* is signaled, for the most part, in his combination and juxtaposition of several views of *acedia, tristitia,* and *contemptus mundi* rather than in the very variations employed themselves. In the *De remediis*, it is revealed in his "constant inconstancy" and in his paradoxical oscillation, within an already duplicitous form, from one idea to another. In the *Canzoniere*, it takes the shape of love-sickness so deeply felt that its effects on its subject are nothing short of catastrophic.

Especially in this last respect, Petrarch's malady seems most akin to the "hero's condition" present first in pseudo-Aristotle's *Problem XXX,I* and treated critically by Klibansky, Saxl, Panofsky, and Ciavolella. In the way in which he aims to rid himself of it – that is, by writing - it speaks to a much more modern position and prefigures some of the most important works on melancholy in the tradition of the European Renaissance. In Florence, 1489, Marsilio Ficino relegates melancholy almost exclusively to the sphere of the intellectual. Essentially an astrological and medical treatise on healthy living, Ficino's *De triplici vita* speaks at length to the presence and importance of black bile in and to the scholar or the genius. The learned man, the student of philosophy, Ficino contends, is particularly susceptible to overabundant invasions of

phlegm and black bile[364] the effects of which, fittingly, tend to be extreme in either respect: extreme fear, sadness, and despondence, or extreme excitability, stimulation, and madness.[365]

Like Petrarch, both "subject" and "poet," Ficino's later 15th-century melancholic "fights both with the order of the universe and especially with himself, while he is disturbed and distracted by contrary motions at the same time."[366] He perpetually finds himself between a rock and a hard place, like Odysseus navigating between Scylla and Charybdis,[367] with no clear path of resistance to either. Perhaps most strikingly, however, like Petrarch's illness, that of Ficino's intellectual is essentially hermetic in nature or, at the very least, self-involved and helplessly cyclical. Ficino writes:

> Therefore black bile continually incites the soul both to collect itself together into one and to dwell on itself and to contemplate itself. And being analogous to the world's center, it forces the investigation to the center of individual subjects, and it carries one to the contemplation of whatever is highest, since indeed, it is most congruent with Saturn, the highest of planets. Contemplation itself, in its turn, by a continual recollection and compression, as it were, brings on a nature similar to black bile. [368]

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[364] Marsilio Ficino, *De triplici vita*, ed. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark (New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989) I.IV.40.

[365] *De triplici vita* I.V.30-66. Ficino's treatment of the "heating" and "cooling" of black bile here closely – and purposely – resembles pseudo-Aristotle's in *Problem XXX,I.*

[366] "hic absque dubio cum ordini universi tum sibi ipsi repugnant, dum contrariis simul motiobus perturbatur atque distrahitur" (*De triplici vita* I.VII.68-70).

[367] The reference to Scylla and Charybdis runs throughout the first book of the *De triplici vita*. The mythical metaphor, employed largely in the same way, also occurs frequently in the *Canzoniere*: see, for instance, *RVF*189.

[368] "Igitur atra bilis animum, ut se et colligat in unum et sistat in uno contempleturque, assidue provocat. Atque ipsa mundi centro similis ad centrum rerum singularum cogit investigandum, evehitque ad altissima quaeque comprehendenda, quandoquidem cum Saturno maxime congruit altissimo planetarum. Contemplatio quoque ipsa vicissim assidua quadam collectione et quasi compressione naturam atrae bili persimilem contrahit" (*De triplici vita* I.IV.15-21).

Being afflicted by black bile leads the scholar to contemplation in social reclusion. Excessive contemplation engenders still more melancholy. It is only through rigorous mental and physical "training" that Ficino's genius can find his way out of this airtight catch-22.

Not so much later, these very themes or modulations thereof begin to emerge in important texts outside of Italy as well. In France, between 1580 and 1589, Michel de Montaigne writes and publishes his *Essais* of which "De la solitude," ("On solitude") "De l'inconstance de nos actions" ("On the inconsistency of our actions") and "Du repentir" ("On repentance") speak most comparably to the condition of Petrarch's *accidioso* and Ficino's intellectual. Their proximity to Petrarch more saliently is made especially clear in the first of the above mentioned three essays and is likely at least in part due to the sources common to both the French and the Italian writer. "De la solitude" resonates throughout with strong – and strongly noted – references to and borrowings from Stoic philosophy and, still more pointedly, Senecan thought.[369] Much in the same way in which St. Augustine in the *Secretum* urges Franciscus to find solace from his *tristitia* in contemplation and prayer, De Montaigne, advocating a self-fulfilled (and therefore necessarily "wise") existence, warns his readers that "ambition is the humour most contrary to retreat" – "la plus contraire humeur à la retraicte c'est l'ambition."[370]

Yet Augustine, as has been shown, is himself inconsistent in his counsel to his pupil – a condition inherent to even saintly men and one upon which De Montaigne elaborates in "De l'inconstance de nos actions." There, he speaks of a supple variation and contradiction observable in each of us and due to our "double" constitution: we are made of two souls, of two powers, the one moving us toward the "good," the other toward evil. He writes, to this effect, « Cette

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[369] See *Trois essais de Montaigne (I.39 – II.1 – III.2)* expliqués par Georges Gougenheim et Pierre-Maxime Schuhl, Professeurs à la Sorbonne (Paris, Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1959) notes on and comments to I.39, « De la solitude. »

[370] *Essais* I.XXXIX, "De la solitude," XXI.5.

variation et la contradiction qui se void en nous, si souple, a faict que aucuns nous songent deux ames, d'autres deux puissances qui nous accompagnent et agitent, chacune à sa mode, vers le bien l'une, l'autre vers le mal, une si brusque diversité ne se pouvant bien assortir à un sujet simple. »[371] It is impossible not to notice the similarity of De Montaigne's position here to the one Petrarch holds in his *De remediis*, a compendium based precisely on the plurality, if not on the strict duplicity, of the human constitution. In "Du repentir," De Montaigne seemingly more directly addresses the last Petrarchan keynote here examined: the self-consciousness proper to modernity. "Si le monde se plaint de quoy je parle trop de moy, je me plains de quoy il ne pense seulement pas à soy" -- "If the world complains that I speak too much of myself, I complain that it thinks not at all about itself," he writes.[372] Here De Montaigne defends his apparent "self-interest" attributing it to the rightful duties of the modern writer.

In England, in 1621, Robert Burton picks up where Ficino leaves off (in no way dismissing or neglecting De Montaigne along the way, however) in his *Anatomy of Melancholy.* In fact, in the passage subtitled "Love of Learning, or Overmuch Study. With a Digression of the Misery of Schollers and Why the Muses are Melancholy," he makes direct reference to Ficino writing, "Marsilius Ficinus ... puts melancholy amongst one of those five principal plagues of students, 'tis a common maul unto them all, and almost in some measure an inseparable companion."[373] In Burton come together in a still more literary fashion all of the elements of Ficino's and Petrarch's earlier melancholy: its medicinal heritage, its contrariness, its propensity to lead to self-consciousness. Like the *De remediis*, the *Anatomy of Melancholy* reads intentionally as a remedy-book against the scholar's illness, written for Burton's contemporaries

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[371] *Essais* II.I, "De l'inconstance de nos actions," XI.1-6.
[372] *Essais* III.II, "Du repentir," III.5-7. Alterntely, see the translation Jules Brody provides in his article « 'Du repentir' (III:2): A Philological Reading," *Yale French Studies* (64: 1983, 238-272) 246: "If the world complains that I speak too much of myself, I complain that it does not even think of itself."
[373] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 1, ed. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicolas K. Kiessling, and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989) 302.

and without any particular concern for brevity. In fact, Burton's introduction, "Democritus Junior to the reader,"[374] bears a striking resemblance to earlier quoted portions of the preface to *Remedies for Adversity*. Burton writes:

> 'tis not my study or my intent to compose neatly, which an orator requires, but to express myself readily and plainly as it happens. So that as a river runs sometimes precipitate and swift, then dull and slow; now direct, then *per ambages* ... ; now deep, then shallow, now muddy, then clear; now broad, then narrow; doth my style flow: now serious, then light, now comical, then satirical; now more elaborate, then remiss, as the present subject required, or as that time I was affected.[375]

Like Petrarch not only in the *De remediis* but also in the *Secretum*, Burton writes "of melancholy, by being busy to avoid melancholy. There is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no better cure than business."[376] It is in the expression of the diagnosis of his illness that he finds his therapy. Like Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, Burton's project, despite its interdisciplinary nature and its applicability to a broad spectrum of human behaviour, is fundamentally self-centered and self-oriented.

Petrarch's influence on later melancholic discourses is clear even when considering only the Renaissance works mentioned above. Its prevalence and importance to the study of the theme at large undeniably extends well into the European Romantic period and, to an extent, continues to be felt all the way into the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What brings Petrarch into the twentieth century - and Ficino, De Montaigne, and Burton along with him - is, I think,

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[374] In this very segment, Burton writes of Democritus as a "little wearish old man, very melancholy by nature, averse from company in his latter days, and much given to solitariness" ("Democritus to the Reader," *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 1, 2) and associates himself with this ancient philosopher.
[375] "Democritus to the Reader," *The Anatomy of Melancholy,* vol. 1, 20.
[376] "Democritus to the Reader," *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. 1, 6.

the preoccupation with folly and narcissism that further links the three. In Petrarch proper, the concern with "madness" is fundamentally manifested in the opposition of Reason and Worldliness, whether in the context of spirituality, quotidian secular traditions, or love. In Ficino and in Burton, it takes shape out of the discussion concerning the overheating of black bile in the melancholic (and in the scholar, in tow). It receives latent treatment in De Montaigne's "De la solitude" at the heart of which is the Reason of the wise man, to which folly is naturally opposed.

That "folly" as a mental illness would have been an appealing concept for Petrarch to consider when composing his major works is more than plausible, and not only because of its previous and popular philosophical treatment by Plato, Aristotle, and the Peripatetics (among others). Michel Foucault writes of the historical emergence, toward the end of the Middle Ages, of mental institutions and other hospitals or facilities for the "mad," or mentally ill not only (though predominantly) in France, but in Europe at large.[377] It would not be until the early twentieth century, however, that mental "instability" would take precedence over spiritual disaffect and physical malady as the key component of melancholy.

In his 1915 *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, Sigmund Freud calls melancholy a "pathological illness" "mentally characterized by a profoundly painful depression, a loss of interest in the outside world, the loss of the ability to love, the inhibition of any kind of performance and a reduction in the sense of self, expressed in self-recrimination and self-directed insults, intensifying into the delusory expectation of punishment."[378] Though not identical either to Petrarch's *tristitia*, *contemptus mundi*, or love-sickness, Freud's melancholy in several ways speaks to a similar human tendency. The "impoverishment of the ego" resulting from or contingent to melancholy of which Freud writes is only superficially true for Petrarch, and only

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[377] Michel Foucault, *Folie et déraison : Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique* (Paris : Librairie Plon, 1961).
[378] Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Books, 2005) 201-218, 204.

more evident in the *Canzoniere* where Petrarch-subject prostrates himself before Laura-object.[379] Still, Freud's melancholy displays similar symptoms to Petrarch's *acedia*: "The image of this – predominantly moral – sense of inferiority is complemented by sleeplessness, rejection of food, and an overcoming of the drive – most curious from the psychological point of view – which compels everything that lives to cling to life."[380] The need Freud's melancholic patient feels to express himself insistently and shamelessly[381] in another way links him to fourteenth-century Petrarch and his – veritably the first – consistent "progetto dell'io," consistent only in its persistent focus on the development of the personal and poetic self, no matter how contrary that development may appear to be.

In many ways, Freud's work on melancholy, no matter how distant from Petrarch, can provide a useful key for reading the Italian poet's work in a modern rather than strictly medieval light. Indeed, it can help to substantiate Giorgio Santangelo's assessment, based on post-Crocian criticism, of Petrarch as the "first modern man … [in that he is] the first patient" or victim "of an illness that, through Romanticism, reaches the *fin de siècle* and, eventually, speaks to our contemporary age." [382] Through a more generally psychoanalytic reading of Petrarch, in fact, one may eventually come to view him not only as the first "modern" poet, but as the first "modern*ist*"

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[379] In comparing melancholy to mourning, Freud writes, "There is one other aspect of melancholia that is absent from mourning, an extraordinary reduction in self-esteem, a great impoverishment of the ego. In mourning, the world has become poor and empty, in melancholia it is the ego that has become so" (205-206).

[380] Freud 206.

[381] "Finally, we must be struck by the fact that the melancholic does not behave just as someone contrite with remorse and self-reproach would normally do. The shame before others that characterizes the latter state is missing, or at least not conspicuously present. In the melancholic one might almost stress the opposite trait of an insistent talkativeness, taking satisfaction from self-exposure" (Freud 207).

[382] "la critica postcrociana che è venuta sempre più rivedendo le posizioni idealistiche e, nel particolare territorio petrarchesco, significante della revisione che si viene oggi operando nei riguardi della tradizionale definizione del Petrarca come 'primo poeta moderno', la quale, come'è noto, si è riferita alla condizione di disperazione e di malinconia, accompagnata al senso del disfacimento e della caducità delle cose umane al senso, cioè, dalla vanità del tutto rivelata dal De Sanctis al Croce, dal Calcaterra al Bosco, come la sostanza psicologica che costituisce le dolente umanità del *Canzoniere*. Prima uomo moderno, dunque, il Petrarca, come primo infermo di una malattia che, attraverso il Romanticismo, arriva fino al Decadentismo e ai nostri giorni" (Giorgio Santangelo, *Il petrarchismo del Bembo e di altri poeti del '500* (Roma: Istituto editoriale cultura europea, 1962) 9).

poet whose *acedia*, though far from the desperation and loss of orientation felt by English poets and French existentialists at the turn of the century and especially after each successive world war, still signals something of their irony, their bittersweet nostalgia. How close is Petrarch's *acedia* to Hamlet's folly, to Jaques' or to Tasso's melancholy in the Renaissance? How comparable is it to Rousseau's or to Leopardi's nostalgia in the Romantic/ Enlightened period? How much of its duplicity and inherent contradiction is directly relatable to Pirandello's *umorismo* or to the unexpected and sometimes jolting opposition of ecstasy and squalor in Pier Paolo Pasolini's works, both cinematic and literary? Of course, these questions are too large to be answered in the present study. They will, I hope, however, provide avenues for further research both my own and perhaps, as well, that of others.

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